



Giacinto Massola, Christian Family Under Nero, Before Execution



450 EUR

Signature : ÉCOLE NÉOCLASSIQUE ITALIENNE, VERS 1830

Period : 19th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Paper

Length : 20,5 cm

Height : 18 cm

Description

**GIACINTO MASSOLA CHRISTIAN FAMILY UNDER NERO, BEFORE EXECUTION**

GIACINTO MASSOLA Sarzana

1820 - 1865 Genova Pen and ink with grey wash

on paper 18 × 20.5 cm / 7.1 × 8.1 in With frame:

45.5 × 48 cm / 17.9 × 18.9 in Wooden frame from

the 1930s, beige museum-style mount Among the

nineteenth-century artistic treatments of the

persecution of early Christians, this drawing

occupies a position of exceptional historical and

artistic significance. It belongs to a formative

moment when artists began to reinterpret

antiquity not as myth or heroic legend, but as

lived human history, shaped by private suffering,

moral conflict, and intimate tragedy. The subject

would later gain wide public resonance through

Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis*, which

Dealer

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transformed early Christian martyrdom into a monumental historical drama. Yet this drawing clearly precedes that literary revival. It belongs to an earlier phase, when the ancient world was first being re-examined through scenes of psychological tension, emotional restraint, and moral gravity rather than spectacle or narrative excess. The composition presents a Christian family awaiting execution under Nero. The figures are not conceived as symbolic martyrs or allegorical emblems of faith, but as fragile human beings bound together by fear, tenderness, and silent dignity. The drama unfolds through gesture and posture, not action, creating a restrained yet deeply affecting image of suspended catastrophe. Particularly significant is the existence of a second, closely related drawing by the same hand, identical in composition but differing in a decisive detail: in that version, the mother does not hold a cross. This alteration profoundly transforms the meaning of the scene. By removing the explicit religious symbol, the artist shifts the image away from confessional specificity and towards a universal meditation on suffering, loss, and moral endurance -- a tragedy no longer confined to a single historical or religious narrative. Recent research allows the authorship of this drawing to be confidently associated with Giacinto Massola, one of the most intellectually refined Italian painters of the mid-nineteenth century. Trained at the Accademia Ligustica in Genoa, Massola developed a sustained interest in religious, Dantean, and historical subjects. His formation combined academic discipline with a growing sensitivity to Romantic themes, a synthesis that would later define his mature work. For artists of northern Italy in the period of the Risorgimento, engagement with themes drawn from a shared, pan-Italian historical memory held particular importance. In this cultural context, the subject of early Christianity -- as a foundational moment of moral identity, collective suffering, and spiritual resistance -- acquired a symbolic value that

transcended religion alone. Seen in this light, Christian Family under Nero is not only an early artistic exploration of Christian persecution, but also a work embedded in the broader intellectual and cultural construction of Italian historical consciousness in the nineteenth century.