

# TRINITY FINE ART LTD

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1.  
RICHARD COSWAY R.A.  
(Oakford 1742- London 1821)

## **Christ on the Cross**

Circa 1800

Graphite on paper  
Later inscribed in graphite: *R. Cosway*

385 x 250 mm

## PROVENANCE

David Lavender, London  
Private collection, U.K.

## LITERATURE

Gerald Barnett, *Richard and Maria Cosway: a biography*, Tiverton, 1995, fig. 7  
TFA 8113



2.  
RICHARD COSWAY R.A.  
(Oakford 1742- London 1821)

**Christ carrying the Cross and Saint Veronica offering the Sudarium**

Circa 1805-1810

Graphite on paper, pasted on paper with mount lines in wash, Cosway's original mount

159 x 206 mm

PROVENANCE  
David Lavander collection  
Private collection, U.K.

TFA 8042



3.  
RICHARD COSWAY R.A.  
(Oakford 1742- London 1821)

**Christ carrying the Cross with Two Soldiers tormenting**

Circa 1805-1810

Graphite on paper, pasted on paper with mount lines in wash and embossed gilt strip,  
Cosway's original mount

113 x 180 mm

**PROVENANCE**

David Lavander collection  
Private collection, U.K.

TFA 8041



4.  
RICHARD COSWAY R.A.  
(Oakford 1742- London 1821)

**Supper at Emmaus**

Pen, brown ink, brown and grey wash over graphite, inscribed 68 in graphite lower left

Circa 1810

113 x 192 mm.

PROVENANCE  
David Lavender, London  
Private collection, U.K.

TFA 8120



5.  
RICHARD COSWAY R.A.  
(Oakford 1742- London 1821)

**Charity**

Graphite

Circa 1810-15

230 x 140 mm

PROVENANCE

Maria Cosway, Lodi  
Christie's, London, 1 June 1896, lot 163 or 185  
Commander Gerald Barnett

LITERATURE

G. Barnett, *Richard and Maria Cosway, a Biography*, 1995, illus. pl. 3.

TFA 7026

## **FIVE DRAWINGS BY RICHARD COSWAY RA (Oakford 1742 – London 1821)**

### RELATED LITERATURE

Frederick B Daniell, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Engraved Works of Richard Cosway R.A.*, London 1890

George C Williamson, *Richard Cosway R.A. and his Wife and Pupil: Miniaturists of the Eighteenth Century*, London 1897

George C Williamson, *Richard Cosway R.A.*, London 1905

Stephen Lloyd (ed.), *Richard and Maria Cosway: Regency Artists of Taste and Fashion*, exh cat., Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (and National Portrait Gallery, London) 1995

Tino Gipponi (ed.), *Maria e Richard Cosway*, Turin, 1998

Stephen Lloyd, 'The Cosway Inventory of 1820: listing unpaid commissions and the contents of 20 Stratford Place, Oxford Street, London', *Walpole Society*, LXVI, 2004, pp.163-217

Stephen Lloyd, *Richard Cosway*, London 2005

*We wish to thank Stephen Lloyd for preparing the following entry for these five drawings.*

As well as being a famous portrait miniaturist and a versatile oil painter, Richard Cosway was a prolific and an accomplished draughtsman, whose drawing styles were much influenced by a profound study of his extensive collections of Old Master paintings, drawings and prints.

Cosway was well-known to his contemporaries for his eccentricity and spiritual activities, which included faith-healing, prophesy and magic as well as Freemasonry, Judaism and Swedenborgianism. However, notwithstanding his patent esoteric interests, an examination of the extensive list of books in Cosway's library at 20 Stratford Place, off Oxford Street in London, reveals that he was a profound student of the Bible, both the New and Old Testaments, and a collector of many rare tracts and pamphlets relating to theology and divinity published in Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Likewise, among the seven hundred drawings by Cosway surviving in the Fondazione Cosway at Lodi, the majority are sketches for religious subjects, predominantly studies of angels, the Madonna and Child and the lives of the Saints, in addition to scenes from the life and Passion of Christ. Many of these sketches were made after 1800 and during the last two decades of the artist's life.

Cosway made these religious drawings for his own private contemplation within a framework of conventional Catholic treatments depicting Christian iconography, based on compositions devised and adapted from works by artists working within the Renaissance and Baroque traditions of northern and southern Europe. Surviving lists of Cosway's collection of Old Master drawings reveals that he avidly acquired works by sixteenth-century artists who were active across Italy and by seventeenth-century artists in the Low Countries, such as Rubens, Van Dyck and Rembrandt.

In his intensely worked study of *Christ on the Cross (no. 1)*, which can probably be dated to circa 1800 on stylistic grounds, Cosway utilises the hatched graphite strokes

to emphasise the perfection of Christ's body even in his moments of extreme agony. The composition and posture of Christ are adapted from Rubens's rich iconography based around this subject. Rubens was Cosway's favourite artist and he acquired a substantial group of paintings, drawings and prints by the Flemish master. Cosway owned an oil on panel by Rubens from circa 1620 depicting "The Three Crosses" (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam), which he displayed in his drawing room on the first floor of his residence at Stratford Place.

Cosway painted three altarpieces for display in churches in his native county of Devon. In 1784, he had exhibited at the Royal Academy (no.38), the large canvas of *The Angel delivering St Peter from Prison* (St Peter's Church, Tiverton). That year the artist wrote a letter to the clergy, gentry and inhabitants of Tiverton, offering the painting as a gift. It was duly accepted by the churchwarden and hung as an altarpiece over the high altar in the town's main parish church.

Two further drawings (**nos. 2-3**), which can be dated circa 1805-1810, focus on the scene of Christ carrying the Cross. They relate to the second of the three altarpieces sent to Devon, despatched from London in 1806 - as a gift by the artist - to the parish church in the village of Bampton, which is a few miles north of the town of Tiverton, and close to the hamlet of Oakford where Cosway had been born. This modestly scaled canvas represents *Christ carrying the Cross with St Veronica offering the Sudarium* (still *in situ*, though much damaged). In the finished drawing that records this composition, Cosway places emphasis in the centre on Christ's head that is weighed down by the Cross, while being tormented by grotesque Roman soldiers. The yearning figure of St Veronica is shown about to wipe the face of Christ with a cloth, upon which the features of the Saviour will be miraculously preserved. In the related, more quickly worked drawing, Cosway focuses his attention on the figure of Christ carrying the Cross, while being attacked by two ugly Roman soldiers, who are shown whipping and mocking the Saviour. These drawings would have been intended for preservation by the artist among his portfolios of drawings in his studio at Stratford Place and for occasional personal contemplation.

Between 1806 and 1808, Cosway completed a larger canvas, showing *The Supper at Emmaus* with a self-portrait included in the guise of innkeeper (see *Richard and Maria Cosway, op. cit.*, p.128, no. 176). An expressive sketch (**no. 4**) is one of three drawings which relate to the altarpiece, which was commissioned in 1806 from the artist by William, 3rd Viscount Courtenay, later 9th Earl of Devon, for the parish church by the family estate of Powderham near Exeter in Devon. The cultured and extravagant Courtenay, who as a boy was involved in a homosexual scandal with William Beckford during the early 1780s, was one of Cosway's most important patrons. Cosway produced some of his most ambitious oil portraits and many miniatures for Lord Courtenay, representing many of his sisters, their husbands and close family friends. An invoice presented by Maria Cosway to Lord Courtenay on 26 August 1819 lists twenty-eight completed works painted by Richard Cosway between 1790 and 1812, totalling £1,602. 8s (*Courtenay MSS*, Powderham Castle). The final item, which is undated, charges £200 for 'The Altar-piece in Powderham Church representing Christ & his Disciples at Emaus'. The bill was shortly settled in full by Lord Courtenay from exile in Paris.

In another document at Powderham Castle, titled 'Extracts from and Copies of Letters from Lord Courtenay to Mr. Cosway as the the Altar Piece and his account', further light is shed on the troubled history of this commission. In a letter from Powderham Castle, dated 4th May 1806, Lord Courtenay wrote to the artist that he was having his stonemasons prepare the site in the church for the imminent delivery of the altarpiece and stated 'how proud I shall be of having a painting of my Countrymans performance as an everlasting Memorial of his fine talent in that Art'. However, there had been a delay as in a letter of 24th November 1806, Courtenay requests of Cosway 'how goes on the Altar Piece'.

Nearly two years later there were problems over the shape of the frame, as in a letter from artist to patron dated 5th September 1808 Courtenay noted, 'I am happy to say that the Altar can be made to hold your Picture perfectly well and in my opinion the whole thing will have a better effect as the stage of your picture is much better than the frame is being at present rather too square. You may therefore send it down as soon as you like and may depend on having an account from me of the appearance it makes'. Finally, the painting arrived at Powderham, as relayed in an undated letter Lord Courtenay to the artist, probably written in later 1808 or early 1809: 'You cannot imagine my grief at the state in which the Altar Piece is arrived. The figure of Christ is totally destroyed on one side besides three small nail holes on the niche. The only comfort is that you are in the land of the living and I am sure will restore it for me. I have therefore packed it up and trust from your skill and kindness it will be returned to me again in its former state of Beauty'.

Among the three related drawings, the most finished compositional study is that drawn in graphite and watercolour in the Yale Center for British Art at New Haven (Gift of Mr and Mrs Stuart Feld; B1978.24.2; *Richard and Maria Cosway*, exh. cat., 1995, no. 176). As in the other two more fluid preparatory studies here the artist shows the scene with Christ in the centre of the composition, seated at a table with the two disciples on either side seen in profile. The artist has omitted his self-portrait as the innkeeper, which he included in the painting. In the collection of drawings by Richard Cosway, still preserved at the Fondazione Cosway in Lodi, is an atmospherically rendered study of the three protagonists in the scene, drawn quite roughly in graphite and wash (c.1805-1810; 165 x 212 mm; Lodi no. 6.17). The Lodi drawing is more closely related to the present sheet than to the more finished composition in New Haven, both in terms of looser execution and the expressive reaction of the disciples to the moment of revelation when the risen Christ breaks the bread.

Among Richard Cosway's extensive oeuvre of drawings that are either portraits or sketches and studies of 'fancy' subjects, a particularly impressive group are those works delineated in graphite during the last two decades of his life after 1800. These sheets are mainly of religious subjects, mostly showing scenes from the life and Passion of Christ. However, in his practice as a draughtsman, Cosway continued to contemplate scenes from classical antiquity and mythology: the study of *Charity* (no. 5) is a typical and finely described example. A comparison might be drawn with the detailed study of the allegorical subject representing *Love Chaining Time*, dated 1812, in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (no. DBB 45; *Richard and Maria Cosway*, *op. cit.*, p.128, no 168).

One can imagine that it was these sensitively executed drawings in graphite from the last two decades of Richard Cosway's life that would have made such an impression on the connoisseurs who saw them in Paris and Italy during the early 1820s, when Maria Cosway made great efforts to exhibit them to sympathetic continental audiences. She described this response in a letter from the bibliophile Francis Douce, dated 25 November 1822 (Douce MSS, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford): 'they have been very much admired to a degree of Astonishment; they all say that they never saw so beautiful & new a Style, all Coreggio's, Parmigiano's grace with MichaelAngiolo's knowledge'.

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