

George Romney



Study for 'The Temptation of Christ'

Reference: 11193

Dimensions:

Height: 14 cm / 5½ in

Width: 19.70 cm / 7¾ in

Graphite, with a collector's mark l.r.

14 x 19.7 cm; 5 1/2 x 7 3/4 inches

Provenance: Xavier Haas, c.1937; Professor Anne Crookshank until 2017

Infernal ghosts, and hellish furies, round/Environ'd thee; some howl'd; some yell'd, some shriek'd/Some bent at thee
their fiery darts, while thou/Sat'st unappall'd in calm and sinless peace.

John Milton, Paradise Regained, Book 4

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

This small but highly detailed drawing was done in late 1794 or early 1795, when Romney began to work on the subject of 'The Temptation of Christ', producing intense pencil sketches for a project that he barely began to realise in oils. The poet William Hayley's son Thomas claims credit for having suggested this theme to Romney, which was inspired by a passage in Milton's *Paradise Regained* [Book 4, lines 422-5].

Christ can be seen seated at the bottom right of this strong drawing, with the fiends of Satan whirling around his head. There are other studies of this subject in the collection of the Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven (see Alex Kidson, *George Romney 1734-1802*, London 2002, p. 228).

John Romney claimed that his father's projected canvas measured about 16 by 12 feet, which would have been by far the largest painting he ever conceived, and that it was 'equal in original conception and wild fancy to any thing ever produced by any artist..had he finished [it] it would have ranked him with Michel Angelo' (see Romney, Rev. John, *Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney..*, London 1830, p. 245). The rolled canvas upon which there was a nearly finished head of Christ and the beginning of Satan's head was sent to Christie's in April 1807 for the studio sale, was never unrolled due to its size, and subsequently disappeared.

Xavier Haas was a Parisian dealer of the Galerie Haas et Gross, who formed the greatest collection of Romney drawings after the break-up of the artist's studio.

Anne Crookshank (1927-2016) was Emeritus Professor of art history at Trinity College, Dublin and played a major role in the development of the study of Irish art.