

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Gerrit BATTEM (Rotterdam 1636 - Rotterdam 1684)

A Scene of Combat Before a Sacrificial Altar

Pen and black ink and white gouache, on brown prepared paper, en grisaille. Laid down.
Signed Battem at the upper right.
146 x 252 mm. (5 3/4 x 9 7/8 in.)

Although best known for his gouache landscapes, Gerrit Battem also produced a small number of Biblical or mythological scenes in monochrome, such as the present example, which have been dated to the second half of the 1650s. Around fifteen examples of these grisailles are known today, including three drawings of The Lamentation, The Entombment and Christ and the Woman of Samaria in the British Museum, and two drawings of Christ Falls Under the Weight of the Cross and The Adoration of the Magi in the Louvre. Also part of this group are two gouache compositions of The Crucifixion; one in the Fondation Custodia (Frits Lugt Collection) in Paris and the other in the Cleveland Museum of Art, as well as an Adoration of the Shepherds formerly in the collections of Saam and Lily Nijstad and Dorothy Braude Edinburg and now in the Art Institute of Chicago.

All of these works, which 'show the gouache technique to perfection, especially in the handling of dramatic lighting', to quote one scholar, reflect the influence of the German painter Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610), probably filtered through the reproductive prints of his Dutch follower Hendrick Goudt (c.1583-1648), while some of the compositions also reflect Battem's study of prints by Rembrandt and other artists. Although most depict scenes from the New Testament, they are of different sizes and formats, and are unlikely to have been conceived as a series. Instead, finished and signed grisaille drawings such as the present sheet, like many of the artist's better-known gouache landscapes, may well have been intended as autonomous works of art in their own right.

This Scene of Combat Before a Sacrificial Altar is one of the rare grisailles by Battem not to depict a Biblical scene. A drawing of a similar technique and an analogous subject, depicting A Woman Being Murdered by a Soldier in a Temple, appeared at auction in New York in 2012.

Provenance:

A partial, unidentified collector's mark stamped in red ink at the lower left.