

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Jacopo Carucci Pontorno (Pontorme 1494 - Florence 1557)

Two Studies of a Standing Male Nude, One Arm Raised

Black chalk.

Numbered 20 in black chalk at the lower right.

256 x 169 mm. (10 1/8 x 6 5/8 in.)

This drawing was first presented with an attribution to Pontorno by Janet Cox-Rearick in a supplement to her catalogue raisonné of the artist's drawings in a 1994 symposium paper, published in 1996. The attribution to Pontorno was subsequently confirmed by Dr. Cox-Rearick on first-hand inspection of the drawing in 1998. This drawing - which depicts a male nude studied from the side with, at the right, a subsidiary sketch, more rapidly drawn, of the same figure seen frontally - may on stylistic grounds be dated to the first years of the 1520's.

Janet Cox-Rearick has compared the present sheet stylistically with three black chalk drawings by Pontorno of the early 1520's, all of which are in the Uffizi. The first of these is a sheet of studies of male nudes - one related to the lunette fresco of Vertumnus and Pomona painted by Pontorno at Poggio a Caiano - in which one of the nudes is posed in a very similar manner to the main figure in the present sheet, with his right arm raised over his head. Closely related to the present sheet, the elongated male nudes of the Uffizi drawing appear to have been intended for the Poggio a Caiano fresco but, as Cox-Rearick has pointed out, 'both the expressive intensity and the assertive plasticity of these youths proved unsuitable to Pontorno's final conception of the lunette', and they were replaced by smaller and less dramatically posed putti in the final composition.

Another black chalk drawing in the Uffizi, a study of a horse and rider that is one of several drawings related to a lost or unexecuted composition of The Israelites in the Desert, is also stylistically very close

to the drawing here exhibited, as is a sheet of studies for a Lamentation composition, also in the Uffizi, which can be related to the decoration of the Certosa at Galluzzo, painted by Pontormo between 1523 and 1525.

It is interesting to note that, as Janet Cox-Rearick was the first to point out, the figure in this drawing by Pontormo may have been the inspiration for the similarly posed male nude holding a camel by a bridle in Rosso Fiorentino's contemporaneous painting of Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well. Painted in Florence around 1523-1524, before the artist's move to Rome in the spring of 1524, Rosso's Rebecca and Eliezer is now lost but its composition is known through a painted copy in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo in Pisa.

Cox-Rearick has suggested that Rosso may have derived the pose of the male nude leading a camel from Pontormo's drawing, which is much more spontaneous in appearance and is likely to be the artist's own invention. Referring to the present sheet, she has noted that, 'I have quoted a few instances, referring to Bandinelli, Bronzino and Salviati, in which these artists made reciprocal use of one another's drawings. It is therefore not far-fetched to suggest that Rosso may have used this nude study by his friend Pontormo as a model for the camel driver in Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well.' The striding male nude in Rosso's painting, probably adapted from the present sheet by Pontormo, was to be influential on later Florentine artists, as can be seen in a drawn copy of the same figure by Francesco Salviati, today in the collection of the Albertina in Vienna.

A new and fascinating addition to the corpus of drawings by Pontormo, the present sheet adds to our knowledge of the artist's activity in the early 1520's, and provides a further example of the boundless energy and creativity of this remarkable 16th century draughtsman. As Janet Cox-Rearick has perceptively written, 'Pontormo's drawings have an independent stylistic identity and development, a specifically graphic language of their own that extends significantly, and in often unpredictable directions, our understanding of his total artistic achievement.'

Provenance:

Jacques Petithory, Paris, in 1981
Private collection, California
Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's, 1 July 1991, lot 131 (as Cherubino Alberti)
Stephen Ongpin Fine Art, London
Private collection, USA.

Exhibitions

Frankfurt, Städel Museum, Maniera: Pontormo, Bronzino and Medici Florence, 2016, no.20.

Literature:

Janet Cox-Rearick, 'Aggiunte al corpus dei disegni del Pontormo: 1981-1994', in Roberto P. Ciardi and Antonio Natali, ed., Pontormo e Rosso: Atti del convegno di Empoli e Volterra, Venice, 1996, pp.64-65 and p.202, fig.43; Catherine Monbeig Goguel, ed., Francesco Salviati o la Bella Maniera, exhibition catalogue, Rome, 1998, p.92, under no.5 (entry by Paul Joannides); David McTavish, 'Nature and Art in the Early Drawings of Francesco Salviati', Master Drawings, Autumn 2010, p.313, note 64; Richard Green, 'Master Drawings' [exhibition review], The Burlington Magazine, September 2012, p.649; Bastian Eclercy, ed., Maniera: Pontormo, Bronzino and Medici Florence, exhibition catalogue, Frankfurt, 2016, pp.78-81, no.20 (entry by Bastian Eclercy), where dated c.1517.

Artist description:

Named Pontormo after his birthplace, Jacopo Carucci arrived in Florence around 1507. His early

training with Leonardo da Vinci was followed by brief periods in the studios of Mariotto Albertinelli and Piero di Cosimo. Of more lasting importance, however, was a longer period of apprenticeship with Andrea del Sarto. Pontormo was already working as an independent artist by 1515, when he was engaged on the decorations celebrating the entry of the Medici Pope Leo X into Florence. His first major work was an altarpiece of the Madonna and Child with Saints, commissioned in 1518 for the Pucci chapel in San Michele Visdomini in Florence. With this painting Pontormo established a new, more expressive and idiosyncratic pictorial language, with strongly lit, agitated figures. Around 1520, he worked alongside Del Sarto and Franciabigio at the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano, where he painted a lunette fresco of Vertumnus and Pomona.

Escaping an outbreak of the plague in 1522, Pontormo retired to the Certosa del Galluzzo, outside Florence, where he painted a cycle of scenes from the Passion in the monastery cloister. Completed in 1524, these frescoes provide further evidence of the painter's eccentric vision, with his distinctive figures placed within a compressed pictorial space. Soon after returning to Florence, Pontormo painted what is arguably the masterpiece of his early maturity; the Entombment altarpiece of around 1526-28 in the Capponi chapel of the church of Santa Felicità. Following the death of Andrea del Sarto in 1530 Pontormo assumed his position as the leading painter in Florence. His later years were spent working for the Medici, decorating their villas at Careggi and Castello and producing a number of portraits and tapestry cartoons. In the last decade of his life he worked on the decoration of the choir of the Medici church of San Lorenzo, completed after Pontormo's death in 1556 by his pupil and assistant Agnolo Bronzino.

A supremely inventive draughtsman, Pontormo worked almost exclusively in chalk. He used both red and black chalk in the early years of his career, although the latter becomes predominant in the 1530's and is used almost exclusively after 1545. In very general terms, the artist seems to have used black chalk for the purposes of experimentation and invention when developing his compositional ideas, and either black or red chalk for more refined figure studies.

Most of Pontormo's drawings are studies of single figures, often nude, and many appear to be preparatory studies for paintings, although this is by no means always self-evident. As Cox-Rearick has written, 'a large number of Pontormo's preparatory drawings are actually independent sketches of a most private and spontaneous sort, quite unlimited by a preconceived scheme leading in a predictable and direct line to the final painted solution.' Although Pontormo was a fairly prolific draughtsman (Vasari mentions 'molti disegni, cartoni, e modelli di terra bellissimi' left in his studio after his death), his drawings remain quite scarce outside the Uffizi, which houses the vast majority of his drawn oeuvre. Indeed, relatively few drawings by this seminal Mannerist artist are today to be found in public collections outside Italy.