Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Stefano DELLA BELLA (Florence 1610 - Florence 1664)

A Man on a Horse in a Landscape

Pen and brown ink.
Laid down on a late 18th century or 19th century mount.
Numbered 8 on the reverse of the mount.
139 x 190 mm. (5 1/2 x 7 1/2 in.)

This lively sketch is typical of Stefano della Bella's interest in everyday rural life, and his keen observation of the world around him. The drawing is likely to date from relatively early in the artist's career, when he was working in Florence and Rome before his move to Paris in 1639. At this time he seems to have often worked outdoors, filling several sketchbooks with lively scenes of people, buildings and festivities, all drawn on the spot and used as a stock of images and motifs for his etchings and more finished drawings.

A closely comparable pen and ink drawing of a horseman at a fountain, probably drawn in Rome, is in the collection of the Louvre, and was later used for an etching from the series Diverses figures et griffonnemens of c.1646. Among other drawings of similar subjects by Della Bella is a sheet in the Czartorsyki collection at the National Museum in Krakow, which is in turn related to one of a series of etchings of peasant subjects first published around 1641, and a drawing of a peasant seated on a mule in the Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica in Rome. Two related subjects among Della Bella's etchings can also be found in the series of Diversi capricci of c.1647.

Provenance:

From an album of miscellaneous, mostly Bolognese drawings, assembled by a certain Mr. Yeates in Italy in 1823 (according to an inscription on the first page of the album)
Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's Olympia, 11 December 2002, part of lot 22
John Tilford, Atlanta.

Artist description:

A gifted draughtsman and designer, Stefano della Bella was born into a family of artists. Apprenticed to a goldsmith, he later entered the workshop of the painter Giovanni Battista Vanni, and also received training in etching from Remigio Cantagallina. He came to be particularly influenced by the work of Jacques Callot, although it is unlikely that the two artists ever actually met. Della Bella's first prints date

to around 1627, and he eventually succeeded Callot as Medici court designer and printmaker, his commissions including etchings of public festivals, tournaments and banquets hosted by the Medici in Florence. Under the patronage of the Medici, Della Bella was sent in 1633 to Rome, where he made drawings after antique and Renaissance masters, landscapes and scenes of everyday life.

In 1639 he accompanied the Medici ambassador to the Parisian court of Louis XIII, and remained in France for ten years. Della Bella established a flourishing career in Paris, publishing numerous prints and obtaining significant commissions from Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, as well as other members of the court and the aristocracy. Indeed, the majority of his prints date from this fertile Parisian period, and include scenes of life at the French court. After his return to Florence in 1650, Della Bella continued to enjoy Medici patronage. Over the next few years he produced drawings of the gardens of the Medici villa at Pratolino, the port of Livorno and the Villa Medici in Rome, and also became the drawing master to the future Duke, Cosimo III. He was also active as a designer of costumes for the various pageants, masquerades and ballets of the Medici court. After suffering a stroke in 1661, Della Bella appears to have worked very little before his death three years later.

Only a handful of paintings by Della Bella survive to this day, and it is as a graphic artist that he is best known. A hugely talented and prolific printmaker and draughtsman, he produced works of considerable energy and inventiveness, with an oeuvre numbering over a thousand etchings, and many times more drawings and studies. Significant groups of drawings by Della Bella are today in several public collections, with around six hundred sheets in both the Uffizi and the Louvre, and approximately 150 drawings apiece in the Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica in Rome and the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle.