

GAETANO Gandolfi (Bologna 1734 - Bologna 1802)

The Head of a Young Woman
Pen and brown ink.

145 x 103 mm. (5 3/4 x 4 in.)

This superb study may be included among a number of elaborate pen and ink drawings of studies of heads - mainly of young women, but also depicting boys, old men and children, often with several heads on one sheet – that are among Gaetano Gandolfi's most appealing works. As James Byam Shaw has noted, 'these groups of heads, closely juxtaposed, evidently had a great vogue in Bologna and elsewhere in North Italy', and had earlier been seen in the work of such artists as Donato Creti. These beautiful, highly finished drawings by Gandolfi – some of which were signed - were probably made as autonomous works of art for sale to collectors. At the same time, however, the precise nature of the artist's penwork made them particularly suitable for reproduction as prints, and indeed several of Gandolfi's drawings of this sort were engraved in the 1780s by his pupil Luigi Tadolini. Gaetano was already producing finished capricci drawings of this type by the 1770s, and he continued to do so until at least the late 1790s.

A fine example of the artist's draughtsmanship, the present sheet is a preparatory study, in reverse and of identical size, for one of Gaetano Gandolfi's few etchings, depicting The Head of a Woman in Profile to the Right. The small etching, one of Gaetano's rare forays into the medium, has been dated to the late 1770s or 1780s. (The etching also appears along with six other prints by Gandolfi, two of them signed, in a single large sheet; examples are in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna and in a private collection.) As Donatella Biagi Maino has noted of the present sheet, 'This drawing, both for its preparatory character but especially for the superb quality of draughtsmanship and invention…should

be considered an important addition to the catalogue of drawings by Gandolfi.'

A nearly identical head of a young woman reappears on a drawing by Gaetano of eight different studies of heads, which was on the art market recently in Germany. Similar female heads may also be found throughout the artist's painted oeuvre, such as a Portrait of a Young Woman in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna and a painting of the Head of a Young Girl, signed and dated 'G. Gandolfi 1763', in a Bolognese private collection. It has been suggested that some of these heads may be portraits of the artist's young wife Giovanna Spisani, whom he married in 1763, and who posed for a number of paintings by her husband.

This drawing is sold with an impression of the etching for which it is a preparatory study.

Provenance:

Savelli Dipinti Antichi, Bologna, in 1996.

Exhibitions

Bologna, Savelli Dipinti Antichi, *"Idea Prima": Disegni e modelli preparatori, pittura di tocco dal 500 al 700*, 1996.

Literature:

Donatella Biagi Maino et al, *"Idea Prima": Disegni e modelli preparatori, pittura di tocco dal '500 al '700*, exhibition catalogue, Bologna, 1996, pp.112-115; Fausto Gozzi, *Ubaldo, Gaetano e Mauro Gandolfi: le incisioni*, exhibition catalogue, San Matteo della Decima, 2002, under no.10 ('*uno straordinario disegno a penna*'); Hamburg, Dr. Moeller & Cie., *Meisterzeichnungen / Master Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, 2009, unpaginated, under no.1, fig.1; Hamburg, Dr. Moeller & Cie., *Portraits: Vom 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert*, 2020, unpaginated, fig.1.

Artist description:

Aside from trips to Venice in 1760 and Paris and London in 1788, Gaetano Gandolfi seems to have worked almost exclusively in his native Bologna, where he established a prosperous career. As a student at the Accademia Clementina he won two medals for sculpture and four medals for his drawings. A brief period of study in Venice in 1760 was of great importance, and is reflected in the vigorous brushwork and rich colours of his paintings. Gandolfi received numerous commissions for altarpieces for churches throughout Emilia and elsewhere, and also worked extensively as a fresco painter. One of his first important decorative projects was a ceiling fresco of the Four Elements, painted for the Palazzo Odorici in Bologna in collaboration with the quadraturista Serafino Barozzi. This was followed by work in several other Bolognese palaces, including the Palazzo Guidotti, the Palazzo Centurione and the Palazzo Montanari. In 1776 Gandolfi painted a massive canvas of The Marriage at Cana for the refectory of the Lateran convent of San Salvatore, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna. Another prominent commission was for the decoration of the cupola of the church of Santa Maria della Vita, painted between 1776 and 1779 with frescoes of The Virgin in Glory and The Sacrifice of Manoah. In the later years of his career Gandolfi also produced easel pictures of historical and mythological subjects, while a six-month stay in London and Paris in 1787 added a Neoclassical tinge to his oeuvre. Throughout his life he remained actively involved in the affairs of the Accademia Clementina, where he taught a class in life drawing. He was a gifted draughtsman, and his drawings were highly prized by contemporary collectors.