

Abraham BLOEMAERT (1564 - 1651)

Studies of the Heads of an Old Man and a Young Boy [recto]; Study of Drapery [verso]

Red chalk, heightened with touches of white, on buff paper.
Traces of framing lines in brown ink.
Numbered 59 at the upper right, and numbered 61 on the verso.
162 x 161 mm. (6 3/8 x 6 3/8 in.)

The head of an elderly man on the recto of this sheet is closely related to a drawing in the so-called Cambridge Album, in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, which represents Bloemaert's studies for the Tekenboek. The model appears to be the same as that used by the artist for three drawings of Saint Luke the Evangelist of 1629, and is also found in the background of a painting of The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist of c.1630, in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig. The study on the verso of this sheet be compared stylistically with a number of similar studies of drapery by Bloemaert, such as a drawing in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

This double-sided drawing was almost certainly part of a large group of 136 studies - mostly figure studies, and almost all drawn in red chalk - that were at one time in the collection of the French landscape painter André Giroux (1801-1879).

Provenance:

Probably André Giroux, Paris
Probably the posthumous vente Giroux, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 18-19 April 1904, as part of lot 175 ('Etudes de personnages, de paysages et d'animaux. Cent trente-six dessins, la plupart exécutés à la sanguine, un certain nombre avec d'autres croquis au verso')
Adolphe(?) Verdé-Delisle
Thence by descent in the Verdé-Delisle family until 2012.

Literature:

Jaap Bolten, 'Abraham Bloemaert and the concept of reality', Delineavit et Sculpsit, May 2017, p.50, fig.4; Jaap Bolten, 'The Drawings of Abraham Bloemaert: A Supplement', Master Drawings, Winter

2017, p.67, no.A22* and A48*, fig.199, p.87, A48*, fig.273.

Artist description:

Abraham Bloemaert received his artistic training in Utrecht and Paris but, unlike many of his contemporaries, never travelled to Italy. Indeed, apart from two years in Amsterdam in the early 1590s, he worked in Utrecht from 1583 until his death, at the end of one of the longest careers of any Dutch artist of his era. Almost nothing is known of his work before 1590, however, and it is only after his brief stay in Amsterdam that he began to establish a reputation as an artist of note. Together with Cornelis van Haarlem and Joachim Wtewael, Bloemaert came to be one of the last major exponents of the Northern Mannerist tradition. Among his most important religious works are the altarpieces of God with Christ and the Virgin of 1615 in the Sint Janskerk in 's-Hertogenbosch and an Adoration of the Magi painted in 1624 for the Jesuit church in Brussels and now in Grenoble. Bloemaert enjoyed a very long and productive career of some sixty years, resulting in an oeuvre of around two hundred extant paintings, including landscapes, religious scenes, history subjects and genre scenes. He was a founding member of the painter's guild of Saint Luke in Utrecht in 1611, and established a drawing school in Utrecht not long afterwards. As a teacher, Bloemaert's influence was considerable, with artists such as Jan Both, Cornelis van Poelenburgh, Gerrit van Honthorst, Hendrick Terbrugghen and Jan Baptist Weenix all spending time in his studio.

Bloemaert was a gifted and prolific draughtsman, praised as such by his biographer Karel van Mander, who noted that the artist 'has a clever way of drawing with a pen, and, by adding small amounts of watercolour, he produces unusual effects'. He produced numerous studies for paintings and engravings - some six hundred prints after his designs are known - as well as several landscape drawings and many sheets of studies of heads, hands and arms. Some of the latter were reproduced as engravings by his son Frederik and published in the 1650s as the Konstryk Tekenboek, a sort of model-book for students. The Tekenboek proved very popular and was reprinted several times, serving to perpetuate Bloemaert's influence on later generations of artists. (Indeed, the 18th century French artist François Boucher published a series of etchings after Bloemaert's figure studies, known as the Livre d'etude d'après les desseins originaux de Blomart, which appeared in Paris in 1735.) The bulk of Bloemaert's enormous corpus of drawings, numbering around 1,700 sheets, appear to have been retained by his descendants for over fifty years, and it is not until the first half of the 18th century that they began to be sold and dispersed.