

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Giuseppe Bernardino BISON (Palmanova 1762 - Milan 1844)

A Capriccio Landscape with Classical Buildings

Pen and brown ink, with brown, green and grey washes, over a black chalk underdrawing, with framing lines in pencil.

A sketch of a female (mythological?) figure in brown ink, over an underdrawing in black chalk, on the verso.

Signed Bison at the lower right.

127 x 154 mm. (5 x 6 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE CROCKER ART MUSEUM, SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA.

As a draughtsman, Bison's preferred medium was pen and ink, applied in a fluid manner and usually combined with rich tonal washes, of which this drawing is a particularly fine example. Like many of Bison's drawings, the present sheet is unrelated to any known painting or fresco by the artist, and may have been executed as an autonomous work of art.

Classical architecture, pyramids, monuments and equestrian statues appear frequently in Bison's drawings. Similar motifs appear, for example, in a number of drawings in the collection of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, part of a large group of studies by the artist in that collection. Also comparable to the present sheet is a drawing of an architectural capriccio in the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, as well as another in an album of Bison drawings in the Fondazione Scaramangà di Altomonte in Trieste.

The spirited sketch of a woman on the verso of the present sheet is also typical of the artist's drawn oeuvre, and may be compared with such drawings as another sheet in the Castello Sforzesco.

Provenance:

An unidentified collector's mark very faintly stamped in red ink at the lower right
Anonymous sale, New York, Sotheby's, 14 January 1989, lot 346
P. & D. Colnaghi, London, in 1989.

Literature:

William Breazeale et al., *A Pioneering Collection: Master Drawings from the Crocker Art Museum*, exhibition catalogue, Sacramento and Poughkeepsie, 2010-2011, pp.52-54, no.14.

Artist description:

One of the last and most delightful exponents of the 18th century vedute tradition, Giuseppe Bernardino Bison received his artistic training in the studio of Anton Maria Zanetti in Venice. The early part of his career was spent working as a decorative fresco painter at villas and palaces around the Veneto. Around 1800 he settled in Trieste, where among his more important works were the decoration of the Palazzo Carciotti, painted around 1805, and the Palazzo della Vecchia Borsa, completed three years later. In 1831 Bison moved to Milan, where he worked for the remainder of his career, and where he was particularly active as a scenographer, producing stage designs for the Teatro alla Scala and other theatres. He painted a large number of views of Venice, often inspired by engravings after Canaletto's paintings, as well as numerous small landscapes in both oil and tempera, intended for sale to collectors. Although his career lasted well into the 19th century, his style invariably retains something of the flavour of the previous century; indeed, his work has been aptly described by one recent scholar as 'a last late flowering of the Venetian Settecento'.

Bison was an accomplished and prolific draughtsman, with an oeuvre of charming genre studies and landscapes in pen and ink wash or gouache. His earliest works show the influence of Giambattista Tiepolo and Francesco Guardi, while his later drawings tend towards Neoclassicism. His drawings encompass a wide and varied range of subjects, from religious narratives to genre scenes, capricci, and stage and ornament designs. Few of Bison's many drawings, however, were done as preparatory studies for paintings, and he seems to have produced a large number of his drawings as independent works of art for sale; this is certainly true of his pastoral landscapes in gouache. Significant groups of drawings by Bison are today in the collections of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, the Musei Civici in Trieste and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York.