

Francesco MAFFEI (Vicenza 1605 - Padua 1660)

A Draped Female Figure [recto]; Two Studies of Falling Male Nudes [verso]

Pen and brown ink and two shades of brown wash.

The verso in pen and grey ink and grey wash.

Inscribed Lattantio and Gambara at the top left and top right, and, in a different hand (Resta?), bresciano and scol.o di / Giulio / Campi at the top left and top right.

Further inscribed (by Resta) era tra li donatimi dal S. Pier Antonio della Penna Cavalier / Servitissimo Perugino at the bottom of the sheet.

Numbered l.107 at the bottom of the sheet. 271 x 159 mm. (10 5/8 x 6 1/4 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE ECOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS, PARIS.

Neither side of this drawing may be definitively related to any surviving painting or fresco by Francesco Maffei. Nevertheless, the female figure on the recto of the sheet is of a type that appears in a number of

works by the artist, such as the very large painting of The Glorification of Giovanni Cavalli of 1646 in the church of La Rotonda in Rovigo or the equally grand Glorification of the Podestà Alvise Foscarini painted in 1655 for the Palazzo del Podestà in Vicenza and today in the Museo Civico there. Perhaps the closest comparisons, however, are a series of mythological and allegorical female figures frescoed by Maffei between 1647 and 1648 for the Sala dell'Odeo of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza. The frescoes, which are today in a poor state of preservation, share a theatricality of both costume and gesture with the figure in the present sheet.

Also very close in pose and type to the female figure on present sheet is the figure of Hagar in a painting by Francesco Maffei of Hagar and the Angel of c.1657, recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Likewise similar is the figure of Hagar, facing to the left, in another, smaller painting of the same subject by Maffei, which appeared at auction in London in 1997.

While the studies of falling male nudes on the verso of the sheet also cannot be linked with any surviving work by Maffei, closely comparable muscular male figures appear in the artist's massive canvas of The Fall of the Rebel Angels, painted in 1656 for the church of San Michele in Vicenza and today in the Seminario Arcivescovile in the town of Venegono Inferiore in Lombardy. Indeed, the figures on the verso of this drawing may well be tentatively regarded as preliminary studies for the 1656 canvas, although similar nudes are also found among the drowning soldiers in Maffei's canvas of The Passage of the Red Sea in the Vicentine convent of Santa Lucia, also datable to the 1650s. Stylistic comparisons may be made in particular with a group of drawings of similar male nudes by the artist, which are today in the collections of the Louvre, the Albertina in Vienna and the Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica in Rome, as well as a double-sided sheet formerly in the collection of Edmund Pillsbury and sold at auction in 2005 and 2009. All four drawings were once attributed to Jacopo Tintoretto, and have been dated to the early part of Maffei's career, before about 1640. Another stylistically related drawing by Maffei was acquired by the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 2002.

Provenance:

Pietro Antonio della Penna, Perugia
Given by him to Padre Sebastiano Resta, Rome (Lugt 2992a)
Presented by Resta, as part of an album of drawings, to Monsignor Giovanni Matteo Marchetti, Arezzo, in 1698
By descent to his nephew, Cavaliere Orazio Marchetti da Pistoia
Sold in 1710 with the Resta collection of drawings, probably through John Talman, to John, Lord Somers, London (Lugt 2981), with the Resta-Somers number l.107 at the lower right
Probably his sale, London, Peter Motteaux, 16 May 1717
Pierre-Jean Mariette, Paris (Lugt 1852)
Probably his sale, Paris, Hôtel d'Aligre, 15 November 1775- 30 January 1776, part of lot 421, sold for 15 livers
Count Moritz von Fries, Vienna (Lugt 2903)
Probably W. Mellish, London
Galerie de Bayser, Paris, in 1991
Jak Katalan, New York
His sale, London, Sotheby's, 10 July 2002, lot 35
Private collection, France.

Exhibitions

Poughkeepsie, NY, Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, and elsewhere, The Katalan Collection of Italian Drawings, 1995-1996, no.46.

Literature:

Anon., Father Resta's Remarks on the Drawings, British Library MS Lansdowne 802, undated, p.218 (as Lattanzio Gambara); Anon., An Alphabetical Catalogue of the Painters in the Collection, with the Drawings of each respective Master, referring to the several Books in which they are placed, British Library MS Lansdowne 803, undated, p.30v (as Lattanzio Gambara); Babette Bohn et al., The Katalan Collection of Italian Drawings, exhibition catalogue, Poughkeepsie and elsewhere, 1995, pp.108-111, no.46 (entry by W. Roger Rearick), where dated to c.1647; Genevieve Warwick, The Arts of Collecting: Padre Sebastiano Resta and the Market for Drawings in Early Modern Europe, Cambridge, 2000, p.198, note 17 (as Lattanzio Gambara); Suzanne Folds McCullagh, ed., Capturing the Sublime: Italian Drawings of the Renaissance and Baroque, exhibition catalogue, Chicago, 2012, p.171, under no.95; Bert W. Meijer, Il disegno veneziano 1580-1650: Ricostruzioni storico-artistiche, Calenzano, 2017, pp.229-230, no.14; Pierre Rosenberg, Les dessins de la collection Mariette: Écoles italienne et espagnole, Paris, 2019, Vol.II, p.648, no.I1080; Emmanuelle Brugerolles, ed., Le partage d'une passion pour le dessin 2, Paris, 2022, pp.22-25, no.3.

Artist description:

Relatively little is known of the life of Francesco Maffei, who received his artistic training in his native city of Vicenza. He was a pupil of Alessandro Maganza, whose work is often confused with his. To the early Mannerist influence of Maganza and such 16th century Venetian artists as Paolo Veronese and Jacopo Tintoretto was added, following a trip to Venice around 1638, that of such Baroque masters as Johann Liss, Bernardo Strozzi and Domenico Fetti. Maffei worked mainly on the mainland, however; in Vicenza, Rovigo, Brescia and Padua, where he spent his final years. He produced a large number of altarpieces and paintings of Biblical subjects, as well as allegorical compositions, and by the 1640's had developed into what one modern scholar has called 'possibly the most brilliant individual to mark seventeenth-century Venetian painting'.

Only around thirty drawings by Francesco Maffei are known today, almost all of which are in pen and ink. As a draughtsman, his work has at times been confused with that of his teacher Maganza, and drawings by him have also been attributed to both Jacopo and Domenico Tintoretto and to Palma Giovane. Many of his drawings reflect something of what has been described as 'Maffei's loose, fantastic, bizarre, and often thrilling painting manner'. His drawings seem to have been highly regarded by his contemporaries, and are in fact known to have been collected in his lifetime.