

**Giovanni Battista TIEPOLO (Venice 1696 - Madrid 1770)**

**A Sheet of Studies of Three Heads of Satyrs and the Head of Bacchus**

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

Two small made up areas at the right centre and right centre edge.

229 x 135 mm. (9 x 5 1/4 in.)

A splendid example of Giambattista's Tiepolo's facility as a draughtsman, this lively sheet of sketches may be related to a group of similar teste di fantasia drawn in pen and wash, generally dated to the 1740's and 1750's. More specifically, the drawing is likely to be contemporary with the series of etchings by the artist known as the Scherzi di fantasia, in which similar satyr's heads appear. While the dating of the twenty-three Scherzi etchings has remained problematic, with opinions ranging from the mid-1730's to the late 1750's, they appear to have been produced over a period of at least a decade. The present sheet may be associated with a number of other drawings by Tiepolo of similar subjects. A pair of drawings with similar studies of the heads of satyrs, women and masks – both signed 'Tiepolo fecit' – is in the collection of the Musée Atger in Montpellier. Two further drawings by Tiepolo in the Museo Civico di Storia ed Arte in Trieste, a study of masks and the heads of satyrs and a drawing of the heads of a Punchinello and a bearded old man, are also comparable. A drawing of the head of a satyr and Medusa was sold at auction in 1996, while a similar sheet of studies of fantastical or grotesque heads in grey ink and wash is in a private collection in New York. Similar masks also appear individually in other drawings by Giambattista Tiepolo, such as a study of ceiling figures in Trieste and a drawing which was on the London art market in 1963. Drawings such as this sheet of studies seem to

have served as a repertoire of motifs to be used in paintings or prints by the artist or his studio. Indeed, drawings of this type may have been studied by Tiepolo's son Domenico, who etched a frieze of similar studies of satyrs' heads, as well as by Tiepolo's friend and patron Francesco Algarotti, who also produced a number of etchings of similar subjects.

**Artist description:**

The leading painter in Venice for much of his career, Giambattista Tiepolo was also undoubtedly one of the finest Italian draughtsmen of the 18th century. That his drawings were greatly admired in his lifetime is confirmed by contemporary accounts; indeed, as early as 1732 the writer Vincenzo da Canal remarked that 'engravers and copyists are eager to copy his works, to glean his inventions and extraordinary ideas; his drawings are already so highly esteemed that books of them are sent to the most distant countries'. From the late 1730's until his departure for Spain in 1762, Tiepolo enjoyed his most productive period as a draughtsman, creating a large number of vibrant pen and wash studies that are among the archetypal drawings of the Venetian Settecento. As one recent scholar has commented, 'From the start of his career [Tiepolo] had enjoyed drawing as an additional means of expression, with equally original results. He did not draw simply to make an immediate note of his ideas, nor to make an initial sketch for a painting or to study details; he drew to give the freest, most complete expression to his genius. His drawings can be considered as an autonomous artistic genre; they constitute an enormous part of his work, giving expression to a quite extraordinary excursion of the imagination; in this respect, Tiepolo's graphic work can be compared only with that of Rembrandt.'

Tiepolo's drawings include compositional studies for paintings and prints, drawings of heads, figure studies for large-scale decorations, landscapes and caricatures, as well as several series of drawings on such themes as the Holy Family. Many of these drawings were bound into albums by theme or subject, and retained by the artist in his studio as a stock of motifs and ideas for use in his own work, or that of his sons and assistants.