Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Giovanni (Nino) Costa (Rome 1826 - Rome 1903)

Study of a Tree, with a Young Boy

Watercolour, over traces of an underdrawing in pencil.
399 x 275 mm. (15 3/4 x 10 7/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, DC.

Many of Nino Costa's earliest extant drawings are studies of trees and plants, and he seems to have drawn from nature from a young age. As he once described his approach to landscape painting to the painter Giovanni Fattori, whose work was profoundly influenced by that of Costa: 'First do a bozzetto di impressione from nature as rapidly as possible; then do studies of details from nature. Finally, sketch out the picture [abbozzare il quadro], remaining attached to the conception of the bozzetto, never taking your eyes off that eternal bozzetto.'

A closely related drawing of a tree, of comparable dimensions and sharing the same provenance as the present sheet, was recently acquired by the Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington, Delaware. A similar pencil drawing of a tree trunk, an early work datable to before 1860, was in a private collection in 1972.

Provenance:

By descent in the family of the artist until c.2005
Paolo Antonacci, Rome
Nicolaas Teeuwisse, Berlin
W/S Fine Art, London.

Artist description:

Giovanni (known as 'Nino') Costa was born in Rome in 1826, the fourteenth of sixteen children. Trained as an artist, he was also a committed patriot and served with the Roman Legion against the Austrians in Northern Italy in 1848, joining the army of Giuseppe Garibaldi the following year in the unsuccessful defence of Rome against the French. For much of the next decade, Costa lived mostly in small towns and villages in the Roman Campagna, and devoted himself to landscape painting. While he was a particular influence on the Macchiaioli painters in Florence in the 1850's and 1860's, his influence on English artists working in Italy was, if anything, even more profound. Costa was, in fact, to become a significant artistic link between the two countries.

It was in the Roman Campagna in the early 1850's that Costa met the English painters Charles Coleman, George Heming Mason and Frederic Leighton, with whom he was to become especially close. He also later became friendly with other English artists, including George Howard, Walter Crane, William Blake Richmond and Edward Burne-Jones. Costa's studio on the Via Margutta in Rome was to become a meeting place for English painters visiting the city, and he was largely responsible for promoting the work of the Pre-Raphaelite painters in Italy. His work was acquired by a circle of English artists, collectors and connoisseurs, notably Leighton, the Revd. Stopford Brooke and, in particular, Howard, who was to become the 9th Earl of Carlisle. Costa made several trips to England, and exhibited at the Royal Academy in London from 1869 onwards, while in later years was invited to show his paintings at the Grosvenor Gallery and the New Gallery. He was the head of an informal group of English landscape painters working in Italy - including Richmond, Howard and Matthew Ridley Corbet - who called themselves 'The Etruscans', and who found inspiration in sketching trips into the Campagna, guided and encouraged by Costa. In 1882 a large exhibition of Costa's paintings was held at the Fine Art Society in London, achieving considerable success. By the time of his death Costa was, after Antonio Canova, arguably the most famous modern Italian artist known in England.