

Marco RICCI (Belluno 1676 - Venice 1730)

Caricature of a Man in a Tall Hat

Pen and brown ink, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk.
161 x 110 mm. (6 3/8 x 4 3/8 in.)

Among the artists working in Venice, only a handful produced caricature drawings in pen and ink, notably Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and Anton Maria Zanetti. Like Tiepolo, Marco Ricci may have been inspired by the caricature pen drawings of such 17th century artists as Annibale Carracci, Pier Francesco Mola and Guercino. The attribution of this drawing to Ricci was first proposed by Janos Scholz. Although not itself related to a print, the present sheet is likely to date from the last years of Marco Ricci's career, when he produced most of his printed work. The figure depicted in this drawing is in turn found at the centre of a larger drawn composition of brigands in a landscape, formerly in the Miotti collection, which was on the art market in Italy in 1986.

Among stylistically comparable figure drawings by the artist are a study of Three Men Resting near a Pyramid in the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge, MA and a drawing of Pilgrims Resting in the Princeton University Art Museum; the latter was reproduced as a print by Ricci. Also of the same type is a signed pen drawing of Peasants Before a Portable Shrine in the British Museum, which was also a study for an etching, while of closer dimensions to the present sheet is a pen drawing of A Slovenian Soldier in the Museo Correr in Venice.

Provenance:

Private collection, Verona, in 1971
Annamaria Edelstein, London, in 1989
Artemis Fine Arts, London, in 2003
Purchased from them by Maida and George Abrams, Boston.

Exhibitions

Paris, Galerie Heim, Le dessin venetien au XVIII siècle, 1971-1972, no.23;Milan, Stanza del Borgo, Fogli di Antichi Maestri: Collezione di disegni dal XVI al XX secolo, 1986, no.24; New York, William Beadleston, Inc. and Memphis, The Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Affinities: Works on Paper from the 16th-20th Centuries, 1989, no.43.

Literature:

Alessandro Bettagno, Le dessin vénitien au XVIIIe siècle, exhibition catalogue, Paris, 1971-1972, p.31, no.23, pl.23.

Artist description:

Marco Ricci received his artistic training in the studio of his uncle Sebastiano Ricci, with whom he often later collaborated. A landscape painter first and foremost, he completed the landscape backgrounds in Sebastiano's canvases, and is also known to have assisted other artists, including the Genoese painter Alessandro Magnasco. Marco Ricci worked initially in Venice, although he fled the city in the late 1690s after killing a gondolier in a tavern brawl, apparently by breaking a jug over his head. He returned to Venice in the early years of the 18th century, and later worked in Florence and Rome. He also developed a reputation as a theatrical painter, working in this field in Venice and London. In the autumn of 1708, at the invitation of the British ambassador in Venice, Charles Montagu, 4th Earl (later Duke) of Manchester, Ricci made the first of two trips to England. He worked alongside Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini on the decoration of Burlington House in London, Kimbolton Castle in Cambridgeshire and Castle Howard in Yorkshire, and also designed scenery for the Italian Opera at the King's Theatre, Haymarket. He left England in 1710 but returned for a second time with Sebastiano in 1712, remaining there until 1716 before returning to settle in Venice. Together with his uncle and several other prominent artists, Ricci was commissioned by the entrepreneur Owen McSwiny to paint a series of allegorical tombs dedicated to prominent English noblemen; his Monument to the Duke of Devonshire was completed in 1725. In many of his paintings, gouaches and drawings can be seen the particular influence of the Dutch and Flemish landscape tradition of the previous century. Furthermore, as one recent scholar has noted, 'Evidently Ricci was prepared to try his hand at different styles and techniques. He was receptive to varying landscape styles, agreeable to collaborative efforts, willing to produce different types of imagery, and capable of painting pastorals or storms, delapidated ruins or busy little towns, in either oils or tempera.' Perhaps encouraged by the connoisseur and publisher Anton Maria Zanetti, Ricci took up printmaking around 1723. Some thirty-three etchings by him are known, twenty of which were included in the series Varia Marci Ricci Pictoris Praestantissimi Experimenta, published by Carlo Orsolini in Venice in 1730, the year of the artist's death.

As a draughtsman, Marco Ricci is best known for his landscapes drawn in pen and ink, as well as for the distinctive gouache landscapes that he had begun to produce by the time of his second visit to England in 1712, and which appear to have been his invention. Two large collections of Ricci's drawings were formed in his lifetime; that of Zanetti, who owned 141 drawings by the artist mounted into an album, now dispersed, as well as a large number of gouache landscapes, and that of Consul Joseph Smith, whose collection of 146 drawings, 32 gouaches and 136 caricatures by Ricci is today in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle.