Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Aureliano Milani (Bologna 1675 - Bologna 1749)

The Abduction of Helen

Black chalk, with stumping, with grey ink and grey wash, laid down on an 18th century English mount.

Signed(?) lo Aureliano Milani F. at the lower right.

Inscribed (by Barnard) J:B No 865. / 19 1/2 by 11 1/4. / of Bologna, was a Disciple of Pasinelli born 1675 on the reverse of the mount.

Further inscribed W. R. Hubbard. / 1892. and 4. Cockspur St. on the reverse of the mount.

A clipping from a late 19th or early 20th century English auction catalogue pasted onto the reverse of the mount.

291 x 496 mm. (11 1/2 x 19 1/2 in.) [sheet]

The delicate handling of stumped black chalk in the present sheet is a typical feature of Aureliano Milani's draughtsmanship, and may be likened to that in a number of large, finished compositional drawings by the artist which exist both as studies for easel pictures as well as independent works in their own right. Such drawings by Milani include a Samson Defeating the Philistines in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, The Harpies Disrupt the Meal of Aeneas and the Trojans in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna, and An Old Man Tormented by Demons and Attended by an Angel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; all are stylistically comparable to the present sheet. Also somewhat comparable is a large drawing of The Bearing of the Cross in the Louvre, which is a preparatory study for an enormous etching by the artist, executed in 1725, and a drawing of The Stoning of Saint Stephen, formerly in the Horvitz collection.

No related painting of this subject by Milani is known, nor is one mentioned in the list of the artist's works included in Luigi Crespi's biography. It is likely, therefore, that the drawing was executed as an autonomous work of art, destined for sale to a collector. This is also suggested by the full signature 'lo Aureliano Milani F' at the lower right corner of the sheet. An almost identical signature ('lo Aureliano Milani F. 1726') is found on a drawing of The Assumption of the Virgin in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Provenance:

John Barnard, London (Lugt 1419), on his mount and with his initials J:B in brown ink at the lower right corner of the mount

Probably his sale, London, Greenwood's, 16-24 February 1787

W. R. Hubbard, Glasgow(?), in 1892
Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's Olympia, 20 April 2004, lot 18
Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd., London
Private collection, California.

Literature:

Angelo Mazza, 'Gli artisti di palazzo Fava. Collezionismo e mecenatismo artistico a Bologna alle fine del Seicento', in Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte, No.27, 2004, p.355, note 102.

Artist description:

Trained in Bologna by a succession of minor painters, Aureliano Milani received his true artistic education from his close study of the Carracci. Gianpietro Zanotti, in his biography of the artist, noted that the young Milani made drawn copies after the works of the Carracci ('a disegnare le opere de' suddetti Carracci'), and in particular the frescoes of the Palazzo Fava in Bologna. Milani's first datable work is an Annunciation in the convent church of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna, painted in 1705. Relatively few paintings survive from Milani's early years as an independent artist in Bologna, however, of which the most important is an altarpiece of Saint Jerome and the Blessed Ghisilieri in the church of Santa Maria della Vita, painted around 1718. The following year Milani settled in Rome, where he was to work for the remainder of his career. He painted altarpieces for such churches as Santi Giovanni e Paolo and San Bartolomeo dei Bergamaschi and also undertook several important decorative projects, notably a fresco cycle of the Labours of Hercules for the vault of the gallery of the Palazzo Doria Pamphili, painted in 1732. He also painted a number of genre subjects, typified by a Market Scene in a Roman Square now in the Museo Civico in Pesaro.

Milani's drawings were highly praised by his biographers, both of whom noted that he had a better contemporary reputation as a draughtsman than as a painter. Zanotti admired the artist's animated figures ('uomini nudi, muscolosi, e terribili') and diversity of subject matter, while Luigi Crespi noted of Milani that 'He made many drawings, and in truth his drawings are equal to those of any great master, for their character, for their immediacy, for their magnificence, and for the ease of execution, with which they are touched, heightened and shadowed'.