

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Giovanni Domenico TIEPOLO (Venice 1727 - Venice 1804)**

## **God the Father in Glory**

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, backed.

Signed Domo. Tiepolo at the lower right.

Extensively inscribed in German Am 7.II.1931 bei Hollstein und Puppel, Berlin, (No. 690 ??? / auf Rat von Dr. Rosenberg vom Berliner Kupferstichkabinett / 8.11.31 / Dr.[?] on the verso.

287 x 200 mm. (11 3/8 x 7 7/8 in.)

The present sheet may be included among a large series of drawings by Domenico Tiepolo on the theme of God the Father in clouds, supported by angels and cherubs. The artist drew several such series of drawings - depicting both religious and secular subjects – characterized by variations on a single theme. As James Byam Shaw has noted of such drawings, 'Sometimes the theme itself derives from some great work of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, sometimes it is apparently Domenico's own. In either case, he takes an evident pride and pleasure in ringing the changes, devising new pictorial patterns, new relationships of figure to figure, while the essential material remains the same: and all within a limited scope – for, as always in Domenico's work, whether painting or drawing, there is little attempt at composition in depth; it is on one plane, in two dimensions, whether the scene is on terra ferma or in the clouds.'

Writing in 1961, Byam Shaw noted that he knew more than sixty drawings by Domenico on the theme of God the Father, but that there must have been many more. Many of the drawings are numbered - the highest known number being 140 - and they exist in both vertical and horizontal formats. The largest extant group, numbering fourteen, is today in the collection of the Museo Correr in Venice, while others are in museum and private collections in Europe and America. It has also been noted that Domenico appears to have drawn inspiration for these drawings from the figure of the Almighty in the upper part of Giambattista Tiepolo's large altarpiece of Saint Thecla Freeing Este from the Plague, painted for the

Duomo in Este and installed in the church in December 1759.

The first recorded owner of this drawing was the eminent curator and connoisseur Paul J. Sachs (1878-1965). Sachs began collecting prints and drawings while a student at Harvard University, from where he graduated in 1900. After several years working in the family investment firm of Goldman Sachs, he was appointed assistant curator at Harvard's William Hayes Fogg Art Museum in 1915, having spent the summer of the previous year travelling around Italy, and became associate director of the museum in 1923. The present sheet is recorded in the Fogg files as having been loaned by Sachs to the museum in 1919, possibly for exhibition. Having then been returned to him, the drawing was subsequently 'given away', as a note in Sachs's hand on the back of a photograph of the drawing records.

### **Provenance:**

Paul J. Sachs, Cambridge, MA., by 1919

Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA., in 1919 (on loan from Sachs)

A. Köster, Leipzig

His posthumous sale, Leipzig, C. G. Boerner, 13 November 1924, lot 471

Anonymous sale, Berlin, Hollstein & Puppel, 6-7 November 1931, lot 690 ('Gottvater auf Wolken, zu seinen Füßen Drei Cherubim-Köpfe')

Private collection, Germany.

### **Artist description:**

Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo is assumed to have begun his career in the family studio by copying his father's drawings, although he also created his own drawings as designs for etchings, a practice which occupied much of his time in the 1740s and 1750s. His first independent drawings for paintings are those related to a series of fourteen paintings of the Stations of the Cross for the Venetian church of San Polo, completed when he was just twenty. Between 1750 and 1770, Domenico worked closely with his father as an assistant, notably in Würzburg, at the Villa Valmarana in Vicenza and the Villa Pisani at Strà, and in Madrid. From the late 1740s he also began to be entrusted with his own independent commissions, and the drawings for these display a manner somewhat different from that of his father, with a particular interest in lighthearted genre motifs.

Soon after Giambattista Tiepolo's sudden death in Madrid in 1770, Domenico returned to his native Venice, where he enjoyed much success as a decorative painter. He continued to expound the grand manner of history painting established by his father - the 'Tiepolo style', as it were – and by 1780 his reputation was such that he was named president of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice. Within a few years, however, he seems to have largely abandoned painting. In his sixties and living effectively in retirement at the Tiepolo family villa at Zianigo, on the Venetian mainland, he produced a large number of pen and wash drawings that are a testament to his inexhaustible gift for compositional invention.

For much of the last twenty years of his career, Domenico Tiepolo seems to have painted only occasionally, and instead worked primarily as a draughtsman, producing a large number of pen and wash drawings that may collectively be regarded as perhaps his finest artistic legacy. These drawings were, for the most part, executed as a series of several dozen or more themed drawings, many of which were numbered. Among these are several series of drawings of religious and mythological subjects, as well as a varied group of genre scenes, numbering around a hundred sheets, generally referred to as the so-called 'Scenes of Contemporary Life', and a celebrated series of 104 drawings entitled the *Divertimenti per li ragazzi*, illustrating scenes from the life of Punchinello, a popular character from the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

Domenico's highly finished late drawings, almost all of which were signed, were undoubtedly intended as fully realized, autonomous works of art. While it is certainly possible that they were produced as works of art to be offered for sale to collectors, almost none of the drawings appear to have been

dispersed in Domenico's lifetime. The fact, too, that many of the drawings are numbered, possibly by the artist himself, and that most remained together in groups for many years after his death, would also suggest that they were retained in his studio throughout his life, as indeed he also kept numerous albums of drawings by his father. It is most likely, therefore, that these late drawings by Domenico were done simply for his own pleasure. Nevertheless, they have consistently enjoyed immense popularity since the artist's death, and continue to entice collectors today. As Catherine Whistler has noted, 'Domenico's spirited and inventive independent sheets have long been appreciated, particularly by French and American collectors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; his quirky sense of humor, acutely observant eye, and zestful approach to his subjects lend his drawings a peculiarly modern appeal.'

As Michael Levey has also noted of the artist, 'Domenico Tiepolo's drawings provide us with the more private side of him, but they also serve to represent his career at all stages. He drew continually: sometimes very closely in the manner of his father; at the opposite remove, in the late Punchinello drawings for example, his manner and matter could never be mistaken for anyone else's...The key to Domenico is in drawings: he began as a draughtsman and, one is tempted to say, all his paintings betray the draughtsman.'