

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Giuseppe Bernardino BISON (Palmanova 1762 - Milan 1844)

Architectural Capriccio [recto]; Two Mourning Figures at a Tomb [verso]

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, with touches of green and yellow wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

The verso in pen and brown ink and brown wash, with touches of blue and yellow wash.

154 x 271 mm. (6 x 10 3/4 in.)

Like many of Bison's drawings, this is unrelated to any known painting or fresco by the artist, and may have been executed as an autonomous work of art, although it may also have been intended for one of the artist's decorative fresco cycles, most of which are now lost. Classical architecture, pyramids, monuments and equestrian statues appear frequently in Bison's work, and drawings such as this underscore the artist's acceptance, late in his career, into the Accademia in Venice as a 'pittore di bella immaginativa e speritosa esecuzione'.

Comparable to the present sheet is a drawing of an architectural capriccio in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, as well as another in an album of Bison drawings in the Fondazione Scaramangà di Altomonte in Trieste. Also similar is a drawing of An Architectural Fantasy with a Sarcophagus, formerly in the Wunder collection, which appeared at auction in London in 1976.

Artist description:

One of the last and most delightful exponents of the 18th century vedute tradition, Giuseppe Bernardino Bison received his artistic training in the studio of Anton Maria Zanetti in Venice. The early part of his career was spent working as a decorative fresco painter at villas and palaces around the Veneto. Around 1800 he settled in Trieste, where among his more important works were the decoration of the Palazzo Carciotti, painted around 1805, and the Palazzo della Vecchia Borsa, completed three years later. In 1831 Bison moved to Milan, where he worked for the remainder of his career, and where he was particularly active as a scenographer, producing stage designs for the Teatro alla Scala and other theatres. He painted a large number of views of Venice, often inspired by engravings after Canaletto's paintings, as well as numerous small landscapes in both oil and tempera, intended for sale to collectors. Although his career lasted well into the 19th century, his style invariably retains something of the flavour of the previous century; indeed, his work has been aptly described by one recent scholar as 'a last late flowering of the Venetian Settecento'.

Bison was an accomplished and prolific draughtsman, with an oeuvre of charming genre studies and landscapes in pen and ink wash or gouache. His earliest works show the influence of Giambattista Tiepolo and Francesco Guardi, while his later drawings tend towards Neoclassicism. His drawings encompass a wide and varied range of subjects, from religious narratives to genre scenes, capricci, and stage and ornament designs. Few of Bison's many drawings, however, were done as preparatory studies for paintings, and he seems to have produced a large number of his drawings as independent works of art for sale; this is certainly true of his pastoral landscapes in gouache. Significant groups of drawings by Bison are today in the collections of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, the Musei Civici in Trieste and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York.