Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Jacob Adriaensz. BACKER (Harlingen 1608 - Amsterdam 1651)

A Young Boy in a Plumed Cap

Black chalk, with traces of red chalk, and framing lines in brown ink.
Signed Backer. at the lower right.
168 x 182 mm. (6 5/8 x 7 1/8 in.)

This charming drawing is a preparatory study for the pointing child at the extreme left of Jacob Backer's Family Portrait with Christ Blessing the Children, a painting datable to c.1633-1634. This large canvas was unknown before its first appearance at auction in London in 1974, and is today in a private collection.

The present sheet is drawn with a vivacity and a freedom in the application of the chalk that is stylistically indebted to Rembrandt's chalk drawings of the same period, namely the early 1630s. Drawings executed in black chalk alone are rare in Backer's oeuvre, but this drawing may be compared in particular to a signed and dated Self-Portrait in black chalk by Backer of 1638, in the Albertina in Vienna. A black chalk study of A Man in a Turban, in the Boijmans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, may also be likened to the present sheet.

Provenance:

Probably by descent to the artists's brother, Tjerk Adriaensz. Backer, Amsterdam
Iohan Quirijn van Regteren Altena, Amsterdam (his posthumous sale stamp [Lugt 4617] stamped on the backing sheet)
Thence by descent.

Literature:

Werner Sumowski, Drawings of the Rembrandt School, Vol.I, New York, 1979, pp.20-21, no.3 (where dated to the mid-1630s), and also pp.46-47, under nos.16x and 17x, p.52, under no.19x and p.54, under no.20x; Werner Sumowksi, Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler, Landau/Pfalz, 1983, Vol.I, p.203, under no.72; Peter van den Brink, 'Uitmuntend Schilder in het Groot: De schilder en tekenaar Jacob Adriansz. Backer', in Peter van den Brink and Jaap van der Veen, Jacob Backer (1608/9-1651), exhibition catalogue, Amsterdam and Aachen, 2008-2009, p.77, fig.89.

Artist description:

Among the most successful portrait painters working in Amsterdam in the 1630s and 1640s, Jacob Backer studied in Leeuwarden in the atelier of Lambert Jacobsz., where among his fellow pupils was the younger Govert Flinck. In 1632 Backer settled in Amsterdam, and his earliest painting is dated to that year. It was in Amsterdam that he came under the influence of Rembrandt, although he may never have actually studied with him. Apart from portraits, Backer's oeuvre as a painter includes allegorical and mythological scenes, portraits and group portraits, and religious subjects. Paintings of children were also a particular speciality of Backer's studio. The artist died relatively young, in his early forties, and after his death a commemorative medal was struck in his honour.

Around eighty drawings by Backer have survived to this day, many of which are studies in black and white chalk of single figures, both nude and clothed, drawn on blue paper. Relatively few of Backer's drawings are dated or datable, so placing his work as a draughtsman in some sort of chronological order is something of a challenge. Backer's drawings remained popular with collectors long after his death. In his biography of the artist, the late 17th century Dutch painter and writer Arnold Houbraken wrote: 'I had almost forgotten to mention (and this would have damaged his fame by omission) his excellent manner of drawing...One can almost see from the zeal of paper art lovers when his drawings come up for sale just what regard they have for them.'