

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Giovanni Domenico TIEPOLO (Venice 1727 - Venice 1804)

A Standing Lion

Pen and grey ink and grey wash, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk, with framing lines in grey ink.

Signed Dom.o Tiepolo f. at the lower right.
217 x 152 mm. (8 1/2 x 6 in.)

This drawing is one of a group of studies of various animals and birds that have been dated to the latter part of Domenico Tiepolo's career, after his return from Spain in 1770, and perhaps as late as the 1790s. James Byam Shaw has associated these drawings with the fresco decoration of the Tiepolo family villa at Zianigo, near Padua; most of the frescoes in the rooms of this small country house were detached in 1907 and are now in the Ca' Rezzonico in Venice. Remnants of several frescoes depicting various animals in landscape settings remain in situ in the villa, however, and some of Domenico's animal drawings correspond exactly to these. Many drawings of animals by Domenico Tiepolo incorporate a ledge or dado at the bottom, and Byam Shaw suggested that they may have been intended for a frieze running around the upper walls of one or more of the rooms in the villa at Zianigo.

Byam Shaw further noted of these drawings of animals that 'if most of these drawings belong to the latter part of Domenico Tiepolo's career, it is also evident that his interest in drawing animals goes back a good deal further in date...twenty, thirty, even forty years earlier perhaps; and that he collected from one source or another, at that time, certain animal patterns that he kept by him, as he kept other models, for the rest of his life. From one source or another: for the truth is that relatively few of these animals, certainly not the more exotic ones, were observed from life.'

Unlike dogs or horses, lions are relatively rare in Domenico Tiepolo's paintings and drawings. The most significant example is a monochrome fresco depicting a pride of lions in a landscape, which was part of the decoration of the Villa Tiepolo at Zianigo. This sopraporta, or overdoor, fresco survives at the villa,

albeit in a very ruined state.

An almost identical standing lion appears in Domenico's drawing of The Holy Family with the Bending Palm in the collection of the Eskenazi Museum of Art in Bloomington, Indiana, part of the so-called 'Large Biblical Series'; a group of large and highly finished drawings executed by the artist over the same period as the animal studies. The same lion also appears in a drawing of Spectators Before a Cage of Lions in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, part of another series of drawings by Domenico known as the 'Scenes of Contemporary Life', executed around 1791.

Two drawings of reclining lions by Domenico Tiepolo from the same series of animal studies, one of which is specifically related to one of the lions in the overdoor fresco at Zianigo, were at one time in the collection of Paul Wallraf. A handful of other drawings of this type and size, each showing a single lion on a pedestal, are known; a study of a Standing Lion, Looking to the Left was formerly in the collection of Benno Geiger in Venice, while a drawing of A Seated Lion appeared at auction in 1987.

Among the very few other drawings with lions by Giandomenico Tiepolo is a drawing of Men Watching a Pride of Lions in the Courtauld Institute Galleries in London and a Lion, Lioness and Cubs in the Art Institute of Chicago, while a Hercules and the Nemean Lion was formerly in the Italic Brass collection.

Provenance:

Gustav Nebehay, Vienna, in 1927
Anonymous sale, Stuttgart, Stuttgarter Kunstkabinett, 24 November 1953, lot 924 (bt. Colnaghi)
P. & D. Colnaghi, London
Sold to Tomás Harris, London, on 24 September 1954
Sir Valentine Abdy, Paris, in 1961
Clifford Duits, London, in 1963
Francis A. Drey, London, in c.1971
Private collection.

Exhibitions

Vienna, Kunsthandlung Gustav Nebehay, Die Zeichnung I: Italienische Handzeichnungen des XVIII. Jahrhunderts, Vienna, n.d. [1927?], unnumbered (priced at £18); London, P. & D. Colnaghi, Exhibition of Old Master Drawings, 1954, no.20 (priced at £40).

Literature:

Adelheid M. Gealt and George Knox, ed., Giandomenico Tiepolo: Scene di vita quotidiana a Venezia e nella terraferma, Venice, 2005, p.126, under no.33.

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.'