Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Giovanni Andrea PODESTA (Genoa 1608 - Genoa or Rome 1674)

Landscape with a Bacchanal of Putti and a Goat

Pen and brown ink, with framing lines in brown ink at the top and bottom edges.
217 x 273 mm. (8 1/2 x 10 3/4 in.)

Almost all of Giovanni Andrea Podestà's prints, as well as his few surviving drawings, depict landscapes filled with frolicking putti, inspired by the bacchanals of both Titian and Poussin. Stylistically comparable drawings by Podestà of bacchanals are in the Louvre, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes and the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh. A pen drawing of a related subject, with putti playing with a goat, is at Chatsworth, while similar putti or amorini are also found in many of Podestà's etchings, some of which are derived from the paintings of Titian. In respect of this particular interest in putti, Podestà's work is paralleled in that of some of his contemporaries in Rome, including not only Poussin, but also François Duquesnoy and Pietro Testa, to whom the present sheet was once attributed.

As is evident in the present sheet, Podestà's work can often be of considerable charm, a feature sometimes lacking in the work of his more illustrious contemporaries. As one scholar has noted, 'Although Podestà was neither a great designer nor a great draughtsman, his amusing conceits display the lighter side of the often sober classical devotees in Rome in the 1630s and 1640s.'

Provenance:

Sir Anthony Blunt, London
By inheritance to John Gaskin, London
His posthumous sale, Christie's, London, 18 April 1989, lot 75.

Exhibitions

London, Courtauld Institute Galleries, The Sir Anthony Blunt Collection, 1964, no.13 (where it is noted that an old attribution to Pietro Testa was on the mount).

Literature:

Patrick Ramade, ed., Disegno: Les dessins italiens du Musée de Rennes, exhibition catalogue, Modena and Rennes, 1990, p.178, under no.83 (entry by Mary Newcome).

Artist description:

Relatively little is known of the early life and career of the Genoese artist Giovanni Andrea Podestà. He is thought to have trained in the studio of Giambattista Paggi in Genoa, sometime before 1627, where among his fellow pupils was Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione. He also studied with Domenico Fiasella and Giovanni Andrea de Ferrari, but very little is known of his activity in Genoa before he settled in Rome around 1636. Although he noted his Genoese origins when he signed his etchings, Podestà seems to have spent most of his career in Rome, becoming a member of the Accademia di San Luca in 1650. He is recorded as making drawings after the antique statues and reliefs in the Giustiniani collection in Rome, some of which were later engraved for the Galleria Giustiniana del Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani, published in two volumes in 1636.

Podestà worked mainly as a printmaker, and etchings by him may be dated between 1636 and 1661. His first dated print, an etching after Titian done in 1636, is dedicated to the eminent scholar, antiquary, collector and patron Cassiano dal Pozzo. Indeed Podestà, like Castiglione, may be included among a group of artists working in Rome, including Nicolas Poussin and Pietro Testa, nurtured and promoted by dal Pozzo. Podestà is also noted as one of the people responsible for compiling the inventory of Cardinal Mazarin's collection of paintings, following his death in 1661. Although Podestà is best known as a printmaker, a handful of paintings of bacchanals with putti, considered in the past to be the work of Poussin or Testa, have also been tentatively attributed to him; these are today mainly to be found in French collections.

Almost all of Podestà's etchings, as well as his few surviving drawings, depict landscapes filled with frolicking putti, inspired by the bacchanals of both Titian and Poussin. Only a handful of drawings by Podestà - described by one scholar as 'rapid, fresh and immediate sketches of putti which the Genovese artist used repeatedly both in his paintings and in his etchings' – are known.