

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Francesco (called Parmigianino) mazzola (Parma 1503 - Casalmaggiore 1540)

A Sheet of Studies of Four Heads of Bearded Men and Three Studies of Pendant Jewels [recto]; Studies of a Putto, the Head of a Woman and the Head of a Child(?) seen from Above [verso]

Pen and grey ink and grey wash, with touches of red chalk.

The verso in pen and brown ink.

Inscribed RAf, overwritten with GR, at the lower right.

Inscribed by the artist parma and e rsu on the verso.

Numbered 123 at the lower right.

Inscribed di Giulio Romano. at the bottom of the old backing sheet, and numbered 228. on the old mount.

127 x 86 mm. (5 x 3 3/8 in.)

A relatively recent addition to the corpus of drawings by Parmigianino, this interesting double-sided sheet has remained little known to scholars since its only exhibition in Amsterdam in 1970. The attribution of the sheet has been confirmed by David Ekserdjian, who dates the drawing to Parmigianino's Roman period; between 1524 and 1527. He further notes that it may be compared stylistically with the verso of a drawing in the British Museum, which includes a very similar study of the head of a bearded man in profile.

In his recently published monograph on Parmigianino, Ekserdjian singles out the present drawing for attention, in particular for the light it sheds on the artist's interest in jewellery designs. As he writes of this drawing, 'Although it was correctly published and exhibited at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam under Parmigianino's name as recently as 1970, and even reproduced on the cover of the exhibition catalogue, its attribution to him was inexplicably not accepted by Popham, and it has not previously

been discussed in the specialist literature on the artist. It shows four heads of elderly bearded men - a frontal pair and a profile pair – which suggest it must date from Parmigianino's Roman period, but its importance in the present context [of drawings by the artist related to the decorative arts] only becomes clear when it is turned through 90 degrees, at which point the presence of three delicate studies of jewels is apparent. Proceeding from left to right, the first one is a very simple arabesque frame, conceivably a design for a ring whose centre is unadorned and was perhaps simply meant to contain a precious stone. The second piece, by contrast, is a pendant jewel hanging from a small circular ring.

Within its upright oval format, it appears to show a standing figure against a dark ground, and is surrounded by scrolls at the top, and foliate decoration extending at least part of the way down its sides. The third jewel is another pendant, although here the upper ring seems to be attached to the top of the frame, whose outer element is a 'rope' surround. The jewel itself is another upright oval, this time decorated with an extremely schematic representation of the head and shoulders of a woman in profile. At the bottom of the jewel is a further attachment ring, from which there hangs what may be meant to be a pearl. It is hard to be certain whether these are copies of cameos or intaglios, or designs for them, or indeed whether such designs would have been made to be given over to a goldsmith, or to be turned into painted jewels by Parmigianino himself. In any event, these highly unusual additions to the artist's exceptionally large corpus of drawings should serve as a double reminder: not only of the fact that his work is full of surprises, but also of the affectionate frequency with which jewels appear in his paintings once one starts to look for them.'

The verso of the present sheet, only recently revealed when the drawing was lifted from its old mount, contains pen and ink studies of a putto and two schematic sketches of heads; one of a woman with what may be a helmet or headdress and the other apparently a child, seen from above. Stylistically comparable studies of putti may be found in such drawings by Parmigianino as a design for a funerary monument in the British Museum, while the putto itself is of a type that appears throughout the artist's painted oeuvre; similar putti appear, for example, in the decoration of the Camerino of the Rocca Sanvitale at Fontanellato. Also evident on the verso of the present sheet is an example of the Parmigianino's distinctive and rather elegant handwriting.

Provenance:

Possibly Pierre Crozat, Paris (with his number 123 at the lower right?)

Possibly his sale, Paris, P.-J. Mariette, 10 April-13 May 1741

Sir Joshua Reynolds, London (Lugt 2364)

Probably his posthumous sales, London, A. C. de Poggi, 26 May 1794 onwards or London, H. Phillips, 5-26 March 1798

Iohan Quirijn van Regteren Altena, Amsterdam

Thence by descent.

Exhibitions

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Italiaanse Tekeningen uit een Amsterdamse Particuliere Verzameling, 1970, no.27.

Literature:

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Italiaanse Tekeningen uit een Amsterdamse Particuliere Verzameling, exhibition catalogue, 1970, p.15, no.27 (illustrated on the cover); David Ekserdjian, 'The Drawings and Prints of Parmigianino', in David Franklin, *The Art of Parmigianino*, exhibition catalogue, Ottawa and New York, 2003-2004, p.43 and p.49, note 52; David Ekserdjian, *Parmigianino*, New Haven and London, 2006, pp.254-255, fig.284 (recto only); Achim Gnann, *Parmigianino: Die Zeichnungen*, Petersberg, 2007, Vol.I, p.394, no.286, Vol.II, p.254, no.286 (recto only); Donatella Cingottini and Mario Di Giampaolo, 'Il Parmigianino: nuovi disegni ed un bozzetto', *Commentari d'Arte*, 2007, reprinted in Cristiana Garofalo, ed., *Mario Di Giampaolo: Scritti sul disegno italiano 1971-2008*, Florence, 2010, pp.139-140, figs.2-3.

Artist description:

Giorgio Vasari praises Parmigianino as, literally, a born draughtsman ('fusse nato, si puo dire, con i penelli in mano'), and his appreciation of the artist's drawings was shared by collectors and connoisseurs well into the 17th and 18th centuries. (The 18th century English collector Jonathan Richardson Senior, in his *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, published in 1725, noted that 'There is a Spirit, and Fire, a Freedom, and Delicacy in the Drawings of Giulio Romano, Polydoro, Parmeggiano, Battista Franco, &c. which are not to be seen in their Paintings.') One of the most prolific draughtsmen of the Cinquecento, Parmigianino produced everything from quick sketches to figural and compositional studies, as well as landscapes, portrait studies and finished presentation drawings. Furthermore, as A. E. Popham observed, Parmigianino 'obviously delighted in the immediate effects which his pen or chalk could produce on the paper...He loved to experiment in every sort of technique, pen and ink and wash, both on plain and coloured paper, with or without white heightening, red chalk, black chalk, water colour, metal-point on prepared surfaces. This variety of techniques is a measure of the graphic tendency of his mind, of his extreme interest in the mechanics of drawing...He was a natural, as well as indefatigable, draughtsman.'

Almost a thousand drawings by Parmigianino survive today, many of which were copied or engraved. The elegant, graceful style expressed in his drawings and designs for prints and chiaroscuro woodcuts was to prove extremely influential on a later generation of artists, including Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli and Jacopo Bertoia in Parma, Andrea Schiavone in Venice, and Nicolò dell'Abate and Francesco Primaticcio in Bologna and, later, Fontainebleau.