

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Ferdinand BOL (Dordrecht 1616 - Amsterdam 1680)

The Departure of the Young Tobias

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, with framing lines in brown ink.

Inscribed I b f in red chalk on the verso.

200 x 303 mm. (7 7/8 x 11 7/8 in.)

Werner Sumowski dated the present sheet to the second half of the 1640s, and compared it stylistically with Ferdinand Bol's drawings of Abraham Bowing Before the Lord and an Angel in the Victoria and Albert Museum and Abraham and the Angels in the Boijmans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. As Felice Staempfle has noted of Ferdinand Bol's drawings, the composition of his history subjects often 'adheres to a formula...with bold, highly abstract forms on the outer edges of the sheet, often drawn in reed pen, and more carefully rendered and detailed figures at the center, executed with a thinner pen.' Bol treated episodes from the book of Tobit in a handful of finished compositional drawings, of which this is one of the finest.

In his seminal 1957 study of the drawings of Ferdinand Bol, Wilhelm Valentiner compared the present sheet in particular with a drawing of The Departure of the Prodigal Son, formerly in the Julius Weitzner collection in New York. As Valentiner points out, with reference to both the present sheet and the Weitzner drawing, 'The young Tobias can be compared in pose to the prodigal son, while the expression of the woman comes as near to Rembrandt as only Bol could achieve. Characteristic of him are the angel and the two women in the doorway; the background with the restless curves in the left corner and the many divergent hatchings to the right and also the baroque forms of the building itself, with the shadows washed in bistre, recall the treatment of the drawing of The Prodigal Son. Both drawings belong to the best we know of Bol.'

The present sheet belonged to the German scholar Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner (1880-1958), a noted art historian and curator who served as the director of the North Carolina Museum of Art from 1955 until his death. This drawing was one of several works which he bequeathed to the museum.

Provenance:

With Edward Speelman, London
Wilhelm R. Valentiner, Detroit and Raleigh, North Carolina
Bequeathed by him to the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, in 1963
Their sale, New York, Sotheby's, 27 January 1999, lot 69
Spink-Leger, London

Exhibitions

Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum, Old Master Drawings, 1950-1951 [on loan]; Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, Rembrandt and his Pupils, 1956, no.9 (as The Departure of the Prodigal Son, lent by Valentiner).

Literature:

'Old Master Drawings', Wadsworth Atheneum Bulletin, November 1950, p.2; W. R. Valentiner, 'Notes on Old and Modern Drawings: Drawings by Bol', The Art Quarterly, 1957, pp.59, illustrated p.62, fig.17; 'Accessions of American and Canadian Museums January – March 1963', The Art Quarterly, Summer 1963, p.275, illustrated p.258; North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin. Biennial Report Issue, 1963-1965, p.80, illustrated p.56, fig.15; Charlotte Vestal Brown, A Catalogue of Drawings and Watercolors: North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Raleigh, 1969, p.6, no.9; Thérèse [Teréz] Gerszi, 'Études sur les dessins des élèves de Rembrandt', Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts, 1971, pp.104 and 106; Gianni Carlo Sciolla, 'Disegni rembrandtiani a Torino', Critica d'Arte, November-December 1972, p.64; Wolfgang Wegner, Kataloge der Staatlichen Graphischen Sammlung München: Die Niederländischen Handzeichnungen des 15.-18. Jahrhunderts, Munich, 1973, Vol.I, p.178, under no.1217; D.M. Tsurutani, The Etchings of Ferdinand Bol, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Oberlin College, 1974, p.3; Hanne Weskott, Die Darstellung der Tobiasgeschichte in der bildenden Kunst West-Europas, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Berlin, 1974, p.103; Werner Sumowski, Drawings of the Rembrandt School, Vol.I, New York, 1979, pp.554-555, no.265X (where dated to the second half of the 1640s), also p.524, under no.250x and pp.558-560, under nos.267x and 268x; Oliver Tostmann, Paper Color Line: European Master Drawings from the Wadsworth Atheneum, exhibition catalogue, Hartford, 2025, p.70, under no.12.

Artist description:

Ferdinand Bol was trained in his native Dordrecht, probably in the studio of Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp, before moving to Amsterdam around 1636 and entering the workshop of Rembrandt. He remained in the Rembrandt studio until 1640, when he began working as an independent painter; it is from this year that his first dated painting is known. Like his master, Bol painted Biblical, mythological and allegorical subjects, as well as undertaking portrait commissions, and his style remained close to that of Rembrandt throughout the 1640s. He became a citizen of Amsterdam in 1652, at the same time as Govert Flinck. The 1650s and 1660s found the artist engaged on a number of significant commissions for public works, such as the decoration of the Amsterdam City Hall and the Admiralty, as well as painting large group portraits of members of various guilds. Following his second marriage to a wealthy widow in 1669, however, Bol seems to have largely given up painting. Slightly less than two hundred paintings by the artist are known, as well as a handful of etchings.

As a draughtsman, Bol was both gifted and prolific, with a manner at times so close to Rembrandt, particularly in the 1630s and early 1640s, that the drawings of the two artists have long been confused. (As Wilhelm Valentiner has written, Bol 'is perhaps the most brilliant of all the followers of the master...He was also an excellent and fertile draughtsman, and here also the dividing line between his works and Rembrandt's originals is a difficult problem.') Both artists often treated the same subjects in their drawings, and Bol was not averse to taking a compositional idea or motif of Rembrandt's and making significant changes to create a wholly new image of his own. As Valentiner also noted of Bol, 'He is one of the finest draughtsmen among the Rembrandt pupils. This applies, however, only to the time when he was with the master or worked under his influence. His style in drawing changed in later years; the clarity of the pen lines disappears and an over-all soft sepia wash takes its place...The forties are the most successful period of Bol in his Rembrandtesque epoch.'

Bol's oeuvre as draughtsman includes composition studies for paintings and etchings, studies for portraits, figure studies and the occasional landscape. In 1979, Werner Sumowski was the first scholar to assemble a coherent group of about thirty-five drawings that could be securely attributed to Bol, to

which another forty-odd drawings may be added, by virtue of their close stylistic relationship to the works of this core group.