

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Giovanni Battista TIEPOLO (Venice 1696 - Madrid 1770)

A Caricature of a Short Man seen from Behind, Wearing a Large Hat

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk. The corners of the sheet cut.

Inscribed Coll. Count Sacchetto di Padova / Coll. Count Valmarana, Vicenza / Coll. Paul Wallraf, London in pencil at the bottom of the album page on which this drawing was mounted.

141 x 88 mm. (5 1/2 x 3 1/2 in.)

Giambattista Tiepolo's caricature drawings have generally been dated to his last Venetian period, between his return from Germany in 1753 and his departure for Spain in 1762. As has been noted by one recent scholar, 'By the time Giambattista turned to caricature, he was in his fifties and well established, with two grown sons following in his creative footsteps...These drawings expressed his lighter side, describing, in an economical yet convincing manner, the quirkiest and funnier aspects of the men who crossed his path day by day. Over time, Giambattista produced a fascinating sampling of society, from noblemen, priests, and senators, to merchants, dockworkers, cooks, and artisans...Caught unawares, these men were reduced to their essentials, summarized most effectively through swift and insightful strokes of the pen...[They are] a brilliant blend of observation, memory, and distillation.'

In many of these caricatures the subject is seen from behind; indeed, this is a particular characteristic of caricature drawings by both Giambattista and Domenico Tiepolo. As another scholar has recently written of this type of lively caricature, 'Tiepolo did not represent specific people but rendered generalized types that must have been immediately recognizable to contemporaries. Their gestures are minimal, the details of their clothes are understated, and indications of setting are scant. Here, even their faces are not shown, yet enough is communicated by their physiques, shoulders, stances, and

costumes to distinguish types.'

Several of Giambattista Tiepolo's caricature drawings were later reused by his son Domenico in his own drawn compositions of the 1790s, notably in the series of finished drawings known as the 'Scenes from Contemporary Life'. Indeed, an almost identical figure, albeit dressed as a woman, appears as an onlooker in Domenico's drawing of The Donkey Stable, signed and dated 1791, in the Muzeum Narodowe in Szczecin, Poland.

Provenance:

Probably the Conti Sacchetto, Padua
The Conti Valmarana, Vicenza; Paul Wallraf, Paris and London
Galerie Pardo, Paris
Purchased from them in 1972 by Eileen and Herbert C. Bernard, New York.

Artist description:

The leading painter in Venice for much of his career, Giambattista Tiepolo was also undoubtedly one of the finest Italian draughtsmen of the 18th century. That his drawings were greatly admired in his lifetime is confirmed by contemporary accounts; indeed, as early as 1732 the writer Vincenzo da Canal remarked that 'engravers and copyists are eager to copy his works, to glean his inventions and extraordinary ideas; his drawings are already so highly esteemed that books of them are sent to the most distant countries'. From the late 1730's until his departure for Spain in 1762, Tiepolo enjoyed his most productive period as a draughtsman, creating a large number of vibrant pen and wash studies that are among the archetypal drawings of the Venetian Settecento. As one recent scholar has commented, 'From the start of his career [Tiepolo] had enjoyed drawing as an additional means of expression, with equally original results. He did not draw simply to make an immediate note of his ideas, nor to make an initial sketch for a painting or to study details; he drew to give the freest, most complete expression to his genius. His drawings can be considered as an autonomous artistic genre; they constitute an enormous part of his work, giving expression to a quite extraordinary excursion of the imagination; in this respect, Tiepolo's graphic work can be compared only with that of Rembrandt.'

Tiepolo's drawings include compositional studies for paintings and prints, drawings of heads, figure studies for large-scale decorations, landscapes and caricatures, as well as several series of drawings on such themes as the Holy Family. Many of these drawings were bound into albums by theme or subject, and retained by the artist in his studio as a stock of motifs and ideas for use in his own work, or that of his sons and assistants.