

**Jan van der Straet STRADANUS (Bruges 1523 - Florence 1604)**

**Men Hunting Bulls with Falcons**

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, extensively heightened with white, on buff paper.

197 x 291 mm. (7 3/4 x 11 1/2 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE COOPER-HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM, NEW YORK.

The theme of hunting is one that Stradanus treated in his work throughout his career, beginning with the set of tapestries for the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano, executed in the late 1560s and 1570s. These were much admired, and the tapestries were to become among his most famous works. As Giorgio Vasari wrote of Stradanus, in the 1568 edition of his Lives, 'for twenty rooms in the Palace of Poggio a Caiano, for which the tapestries are even now being woven, he has made after the inventions of the Duke cartoons of hunting of every kind of animal, and the methods of fowling and fishing, with the strangest and most beautiful inventions in the world; in which variety of animals, birds, fishes, landscapes, and vestments, with huntsmen on foot and on horseback, fowlers in various habits, and nude fishermen, he has shown and still shows that he is a truly able man, and that he has learned well the Italian manner.'

At around the same time that he was working on the Poggio a Caiano tapestries, Stradanus began developing the theme of hunting in a much more varied series of drawings for prints, which he continued to develop and refine for the remainder of his career. (Indeed, Stradanus produced drawings of hunt subjects well into the first years of the 17th century, when he was in his eighties.) Many of his drawings of hunting scenes were translated into engravings by members of the Galle family, the foremost print publishers in Antwerp. As Manfred Sellink has noted of these drawings, 'In style and technique Stradanus combines northern European and Italian influences - betraying both his Netherlandish roots and his professional career in Florence. Rather than emphasizing the linear qualities of his compositions, as most designers of prints tend to do, Stradanus concentrated on the pictorial qualities - using brush and wash to model the composition and all the figures. He was able to do so as he could trust the expertise of the Galle workshop - leading printmakers and publishers in Europe - to translate his designs into engravings of the highest quality.' Nearly a quarter of Stradanus's total output of prints was made up of hunting subjects.

Between 1578 and 1580 the Antwerp engraver and publisher Philips Galle published a set of forty-four prints of hunting subjects after Stradanus's drawings, which were later supplemented by a further sixty

scenes. All of these designs by Stradanus were eventually combined and issued by Galle with the title Venationes ferarum, avium, piscium, pugnae bestiorum: & mutuae Bestiarum (The Hunts of Wild Animals, Birds and Fish, the Fights with Beasts and of the Beasts Among Themselves), a series of 104 prints illustrating myriad forms of hunting and fishing. Issued over a period of several years between 1596 and 1599, the Venationes series of engravings proved to be immensely popular and were reprinted several times in Antwerp and Amsterdam throughout the 17th century.

The present composition does not, however, appear in the final publication, and it has been suggested that the design may have among those been rejected by Galle and therefore never engraved. (This would also explain why this drawing, unlike most other designs by Stradanus for the Venationes, is not indented for transfer.) Several other drawings of hunting scenes by Stradanus are also not reproduced in the Venationes, and it is likely that the artist in fact produced more designs than were needed; a testament to his lifelong fascination with the theme of hunting. Indeed, as Sellink has pointed out, 'Late drawings of hunts from the years 1602-03 - when Stradanus was eighty years old - attest to his intrinsic interest in this subject and his continuing desire to rework and expand this remarkable series.' The existence of an elaborate design by Stradanus for a frontispiece with animals, dated 1599, in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, would suggest that the artist may well have been planning another series of prints of hunting subjects before his death in 1605.

A small, rapidly sketched preparatory study by Stradanus for this composition appears on the lower half of a drawing of two bull hunts in the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York; one of a large group of small-scale compositional sketches by the artist in the museum's collection.

A similar bull to that seen in the centre of the present sheet is found in a pen and ink drawing by Stradanus of A Combat Between a Bull, A Lion, a Horse and Three Dogs in an Arena, signed and dated 1580, in the Uffizi, which is a preparatory study for one of the prints from the Venationes series. The same bull also appears in a signed pen and wash drawing of A Combat Between a Bull, Two Wolves, A Lion and a Bear in an Arena in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. A handful of other illustrations of bull hunts appear in the Venationes prints; two with hunters on horseback armed with lances, and another with dogs, while the series also includes three depictions of various hunts of other creatures with falcons.

Stylistically comparable drawings of hunting scenes by Stradanus are in the collections of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the Uffizi in Florence, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Louvre in Paris, the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, and elsewhere, as well as in a number of private collections.

**Artist description:**

A pupil of Peter Aertsen in Antwerp, Jan van der Straet became an independent master there in the early 1540’s. Soon afterwards he travelled to Italy, and by 1545 had settled in Florence, where he worked for most of the remainder of his career. (Between 1550 and 1553 he worked in Rome, assisting Francesco Salviati on the decorations of the Vatican Belvedere.) Known in Italy as Giovanni Stradano, he joined the group of artists working on the extensive decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio under the supervision of Giorgio Vasari, whose principal assistant and collaborator he became. More than perhaps any other artist save Vasari, Stradanus’s work dominated the decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio, and as well as contributing a large part of the fresco decoration of the apartments of Eleanora of Toledo and designing a number of tapestries, he also provided two paintings for the Studiolo of Francesco I de’ Medici. He painted several altarpieces for Florentine churches remodelled by Vasari, notably at Santa Maria Novella, Santo Spirito and Santa Croce, where in 1564 he also contributed to the decoration of the tomb of Michelangelo.

Stradanus worked for the Medici throughout his career, creating over 130 cartoons for the Arazzeria Medicea, the tapestry factory founded by Duke Cosimo de’ Medici in 1557. Among his most important tapestry commissions were a series of hunting scenes for the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano,

executed in 1567. Following a visit to Antwerp around 1578, Stradanus began to design engravings, eventually producing a large number of drawings destined to be translated into prints. Many of his designs for prints were sent to Antwerp to be engraved, notably by the Galle family of printmakers and publishers. As one scholar has noted, 'It is as print designer and draftsman that he excelled...Hundreds of his designs – all engraved, published, and distributed throughout Europe by printmakers in Antwerp - attest to Stradanus's particular strength: his inventiveness in subject, composition, and disposition, all particularly well suited for the scale and scope of works on paper.' Significant groups of drawings by Stradanus are today in the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York (around 150 sheets, mainly designs for book illustrations) and the Uffizi, as well as the collection of the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, which contains a number of tapestry designs.