

Jean-Baptiste OUDRY (Paris 1686 - Beauvais 1755)

Belphegor, A Tale by Machiavelli: Matheo Before the King of Naples

Brush and black ink and grey wash, heightened with white, within a simulated mount drawn in blue and grey wash with pen and brown ink, on blue paper.

Signed and dated JB. Oudry / 1734 at the lower left.

Inscribed 135. tom.2 on the verso.

239 x 187 mm. (9 3/8 x 7 3/8 in.) [image]

309 x 255 mm. (12 1/8 x 10 in.) [with fictive mount]

ACQUIRED BY THE MARIE DE CHATEAU-THIERRY, FRANCE.

This final drawing of the Belphegor story sees the charlatan Matheo attempting to drive out the demon Belphegor from the possessed body of the daughter of the King of Naples. As Hal Opperman describes the scene, 'By now Matheo has gained notoriety for his success as an exorcist of evil spirits. The king summons him and offers bags of money to drive out the demon from his daughter. Matheo, knowing that his powers are no longer effective without the complicity of Belphegor, tries to beg off, but the king gives him no way out: free his daughter from possession, or face the gibbet. Matheo makes a show of calling out the demon, but fails. As the king orders him seized and led off to his fate, Matheo requests a drumbeat accompaniment. The drum resounds, Belphegor's spirit is terrified. Matheo recounts to the demon that Honnesta has found him, and the drumming is the sound of her arrival to claim him back. Filled with apprehension at the prospect, Belphegor flees the body of the young woman and returns directly to his infinitely preferable existence in Hell. In his fourth drawing, Oudry effectively captures the crux of the resolution of the tale.'

The original 275 drawings by Oudry for the Fablesof La Fontaine, together with a later frontispiece, were bound together in two albums of dark blue calf, which remained intact and passed through several notable private collections - successively those of Jean Jacques de Bure (1765-1853), Comte Adolphe-Narcisse Thibaudeau (1795-1856), Félix Solar (1811-1870), Baron Isidore Taylor (1789-1879), Émile Pereire (1800-1875), Louis Roederer (1846-1880), Léon Olry-Roederer (d.1932), Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach (1876-1952) and Raphael Esmerian (1903-1976) - until they were sold at auction in 1973. One of the volumes, containing illustrations from Books I to VI of theFables, was eventually acquired by the British Rail Pension Fund and was sold again at auction in 19965. The second volume, illustrating episodes from Books VII to XII, was broken up in 1973 and the drawings it contained, including these three sheets, were dispersed. Several of the drawings from this second album are now in public collections, including the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Ackland Art Museum in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the Art Institute of Chicago, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Morgan Library and Museum in New York, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, the Musée du Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., among others.

Exhibitions

New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, Fables from Aesop to Thurber, 1965 (as part of an album); New York, Paris and London, Kate de Rothschild and Didier Aaron at Didier Aaron, Inc., Master Drawings, 1993, part of no.15; Stanford University, Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Classic Taste: Drawings and Decorative Arts from the Collection of Horace Brock, March-May, 2000; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection, 2009, no.106.

Literature:

Louis Gougenot, 'Jean-Baptiste Oudry', Mémoires inédits sur les artistes français, 1854, Vol.II, pp.379-380; Baron Roger Portalis, Les dessinateurs d'illustrations au dix-huitième siècle, Paris, 1877, Vol.II, pp.483-489; JeanLocquin, 'Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre de Jean-Baptiste Oudry, peintre du roi (1686–1755)', Archives de l'art français, 1912, pp.152-173, nos.933-1209 (this drawing p.173, no.1208); Marquis de Girardin, 'L'édition des fables dite d'Oudry de La Fontaine', Bulletin du bibliophile et du bibliothécaire, 1913, pp.330-332; Roger Gaucheron, 'La preparation et le lancement d'un livre de luxe au XVIIIesiècle. Les Fables de La Fontaine, dites d'Oudry', Arts et métiers graphiques, December 1927, pp.77-82; Hal N. Opperman, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Ph.D dissertation, University of Chicago, 1972 (pub. New York and London, 1977), Vol.II, p.710, no.D494; Horace Wood Brock, Martin P. Levy and Clifford S. Ackley, Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection, exhibition catalogue, Boston, 2009, p.156, no.106, illustrated p.109.

Artist description:

'Jean-Baptiste Oudry is one of the most prolific artists – and without question the most versatile – of the French eighteenth century. Once established he was also one of the most successful of his time.' Such is the Oudry scholar Hal Opperman's succinct description of the artist, who enjoyed a successful career of more than forty years. A pupil of Michel Serre and Nicolas de Largillière, Oudry took classes in drawing at both the Académie Royale and at the Académie de Saint-Luc of the Parisian painter's guild, where he also later taught. The early part of his career found the artist painting mainly still life subjects and portraits. Admitted into the Académie Royale in 1719, by the following decade Oudry had come close to supplanting Alexandre-François Desportes as the leading painter of animals and hunting scenes. He began receiving significant royal commissions for paintings of hunts, and in 1725 was granted lodgings in the Tuileries palace. (The following year, at the request of Louis XV, he exhibited twenty-six of his paintings - the entire contents of his studio – in the Grands Appartements at Versailles.) It was also in 1726 that Oudry was engaged as a designer at the Royal tapestry works at Beauvais, where his masterpiece was the series of huge painted cartoons for the Chasses royales de Louis XV tapestries, eventually woven at the Gobelins, for which he was paid some 52,000 livres over a twelve-

year period. In 1734 he was named director of the Beauvais factory, where he in turn soon employed the young François Boucher as a designer. The last fifteen years of his career saw Oudry paint numerous easel pictures of hunting scenes, dogs, game pieces and still life subjects, many of which were shown at the Salons. In 1743 he was appointed a professor at the Académie, where he had taught since 1739, although he does not seem to have been an inspirational teacher, and his only real pupil of any note was his son, Jacques-Charles Oudry. Apart from the King, Oudry counted among his most significant patrons the Swedish ambassador, Count Carl Gustaf Tessin, and the Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.

Oudry was a prodigious draughtsman, and drawings were an integral part of his artistic practice. Although the 18th century art historian Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville wrote of him that 'His finished drawings are all in black chalk, highlighted with white using the brush [and] his studies are also in black chalk, highlighted with white chalk', and while it is certainly true that black and white chalks were his favoured medium as a draughtsman, Oudry worked also in pastel, red chalk, brown ink and sepia wash. While the Oudry scholar Hal Opperman catalogued around a thousand drawings by the artist, many of these were only known through descriptions in old auction catalogues. While Oudry parted with some drawings in his lifetime, the vast majority of his output as a draughtsman – mainly studies of animals and birds, highly finished landscapes and book illustrations, carefully organized into albums - remained in his studio until his death.