

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



André-Jean LE BRUN (Paris 1757 - Vilnius 1811)

An Allegory of the Arts Vanquishing Time, Surmounted by a Medallion Portrait of King Stanislaw August of Poland as Patron of the Arts

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

454 x 642 mm. (17 7/8 x 25 1/4 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO.

In superb, fresh condition, this large sheet may be dated to André Le Brun's maturity, and more specifically to his second period in Poland, after 1780. The emphasis on the portrait medallion of King Stanislaw August Poniatowski at the top of the composition would suggest that this drawing was likely to have been intended as a design for a Royal commission. As has been noted by one scholar of the present sheet, 'Rendered in passages of fluid golden wash and deft, suggestive strokes of the pen, the drawing – a project for an allegorical relief sculpture to adorn one of the royal residences – shows the king's profile portrait in an oval frame being elevated by Fame, supported from below by the Arts, and overcoming the toppled figure of Time, with his scythe and hourglass. The radiant glow of thin transparent washes brushed over reflective white paper contributes significantly to the sense of triumphant affirmation evident in the design.' The portrait of Stanislaw August at the top of the sheet is closely based on similar oval bust-length relief portraits of the King sculpted by Le Brun, such as one example in the Muzeum Narodowe in Warsaw.

Jolanta Talbierska has suggested that this large sheet may have been a design for a never-executed bas-relief for a room in one of the Royal palaces in Warsaw, perhaps for the Senatorial Antechamber in the Great Apartment of the Royal Castle. The decorative scheme of this room has been described by one scholar: 'In this interior the King wished to express the truth that the power and wisdom of the nation, the deep belief and the observing of the principles of justice by society were the work of both the monarchs and statesmen, priests, scholars and artists.' The eventual decoration of the Senatorial Antechamber, executed between 1781 and 1786, was dominated by two large allegorical sculptures by Le Brun, one representing Chronos-Saturn and the other Fame or Eternity.

A somewhat similar sculptural ensemble designed by Le Brun, showing a portrait medallion of King

Stanislaw August flanked by standing, winged allegorical figures of Peace and Justice, is found in an overdoor relief in the Great Hall of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, executed between 1777 and 1780.

The present sheet is one of four equally large pen and wash drawings by André Le Brun which once belonged to the noted 19th century collector of prints and drawings Baron Adalbert von Lanna (1836-1909) of Prague. The other three drawings by Le Brun from the von Lanna collection depicted Venus at the Forge of Vulcan, The Resurrection of Lazarus and A Sacrifice of Vestal Virgins, all of which appeared alongside the present sheet at auction in Paris in 2007. Other stylistically comparable drawings by Le Brun include a Martyrdom of Seven Brothers in the Schlossmuseum in Weimar, a pair of allegorical compositions of women in antique garb flanking portrait busts in the Louvre, and a Minerva Patronizing the Arts and Sciences in the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg.

Exhibitions

New York, W. M. Brady & Co., Old Master Drawings and Oil Sketches, 2008, no.24; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection, 2009, no.140.

Literature:

New York, W. M. Brady & Co., Old Master Drawings and Oil Sketches, 2008, unpaginated, no.24; Clifford S. Ackley, 'Master drawings from the collection of Horace Wood Brock', *The Magazine Antiques*, February 2009, pp.58-59, illustrated p.58, fig.10; Clifford S. Ackley, 'The Intuitive Eye: Drawings and Paintings from the Collection of Horace Wood Brock', in 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.89 and p.158, illustrated p.137 and as frontispiece on p.4; Katarzyna Mikocka-Rachubowa, André Le Brun: "pierwszy rzeźbiarz" króla Stanisława Augusta, Warsaw, 2010, pp.446-447, no.94; Louis-Antoine Prat, *Le dessin français au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 2017, p.289.

Artist description:

A student of the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, André Le Brun won the Prix de Rome for sculpture in 1756. He arrived in Rome in 1759 and, after his period as a pensionnaire at the Académie de France had ended, chose to remain in Italy. He achieved some success there, sculpting marble portrait busts of Pope Clement XIII and Cardinal Giuseppe Maria Ferroni, as well as a statue of Judith for the Roman church of San Marcello al Corso. Le Brun was never, in fact, to return to his native France. At the recommendation of his teacher Pigalle and the noted Parisian salonnière Mme. Geoffrin, Le Brun left Rome to enter the service of Stanislaw August Poniatowski, King of Poland. He arrived in Warsaw in 1768 and spent several years working at the Royal Palace. Between 1775 and 1779 he was back in Rome, still working for the King of Poland and continuing his study of antique sculpture.

On his return to Warsaw, Le Brun was appointed First Sculptor to the King and head of the royal sculpture workshop. He provided sculptural decorations for the Royal Castle in Warsaw – most of which were lost in the destruction of the Castle during the Second World War, although it was later rebuilt - and other royal residences. In 1797 he accompanied Stanislaw August on his exile to Russia, and while in Saint Petersburg produced a number of sculpted portrait busts. Le Brun only left Russia in 1805, when he was appointed a professor at the University in Vilnius, a position he retained until his death there six years later.

Most of Le Brun's extant corpus of drawings is in the museums of Warsaw, Cracow, Saint Petersburg and Budapest, and only a handful of sheets are to be found in collections in Western Europe and America. His drawings may be divided into two types; figure studies generally executed in red chalk

and more complex compositions drawn in pen or brush with brown ink and a golden-brown wash, of which the present sheet is a particularly fine example. As a Russian scholar has noted of the artist's compositional drawings of this type, 'The originality of his pen and brush drawings permits us to place Le Brun among the outstanding French draughtsmen of the last three decades of the eighteenth century.'