Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Alfredo BARUFFI (Bologna 1873 - Bologna 1948)

Silvia Cacciatrice: An Illustration for Torquato Tasso's Aminta

Pen and black ink, with a framing line in black ink.

Signed and dated A. BARUFFI. 904 at the lower right.

Titled SILVIA . CACCIATRICE below the image, and inscribed TASSO . AMINTA = TESTATA. ATTO. IV. at the bottom centre.

87 x 144 mm. (3 3/8 x 5 5/8 in.) [image]

206 x 162 mm. (8 1/8 x 6 3/8 in.) [sheet]

The present sheet was intended for an illustrated edition of Torquato Tasso's 16th century playAminta, for which Baruffi produced forty-nine drawings for illustrations, titles and initials. The book was, however, never in fact printed or published, although several of Baruffi's drawings for Aminta were reproduced in the magazine Emporium in 1904. This drawing, which was to serve as the header for Act IV of the play, depicts the beautiful Sylvia, one of the nymphs of the goddess Diana, who rejects the fervent love of the Arcadian shepherd Aminta in favour of hunting.

As the Italian art critic Vittorio Pica opined, in one of the first articles on Baruffi in English, 'My own personal preference, I confess, is for his illustrations of Dante's Vita Nuova, and of Tasso's Aminta, in which the figures accord well with the landscapes, imagination reconciles itself with reality, lights and shadow blend harmoniously together, and the whole presents a delightfully decorative effect.'

Exhibitions

Rome, Galleria dell'Emporio Floreale, Un grafico del Liberty Italiano, 1977, no.62; Bologna, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Il Liberty a Bologna e nell'Emilia Romagna, 1977, no.AG 139.

Literature:

Antonio Storelli, Un grafico del Liberty italiano (Alfredo Baruffi), exhibition catalogue, Rome, 1977, no.62 [catalogue untraced]; Emilio Contini et al, Il Liberty a Bologna e nell'Emilia Romagna, exhibition catalogue, Bologna, 1977, p.119, no.AG 139 (not illustrated).

Artist description:

Although the Bolognese graphic artist Alfredo Baruffi was entirely self-taught as an artist, while maintaining a professional career as a bookkeeper at the Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna, he practiced as an artist in his spare time. Sometimes using the pseudonym 'Barfredo da Bologna', Baruffi, in the words on one scholar, 'in a few years, working alternately at oils, watercolours, tempera and Indian-ink…[he] had produced, with extraordinary facility of invention, a most varied amount of work both in pure and applied art.' He kept a small studio in the Palazzo Bentivoglio in Bologna, working mainly at night, after office hours. Some of his first works as an illustrator were for the Bolognese humorous magazines Italia ride and Bologna che dorme.

As early as 1901, one Italian art critic, writing for an English audience, had opined that, 'A notable revival of the art of pen-drawing is to be recorded in Bologna, where several young artists, conspicuous among them being Majani and Alfredo Baruffi (Barfredo), are doing excellent work. The drawings by the last-named artist…have a delicate, symbolical character, and show uncommon ability and refinement.' Despite lacking formal artistic training, Baruffi was familiar with the work of artists and illustrators outside Italy, informed by his study of such foreign artistic journals as The Studio and Jugend.

In 1902 Baruffi was commissioned to provide illustrations for an edition of Dante's Divinia Commedia, followed two years later by thirty-five drawings for Dante's Vita Nuova and forty-nine for Tasso's Aminta, although these were never published. Baruffi received further commissions for book illustrations, for which the artist came to be best known. He also illustrated covers for the Italian art magazines Emporium and Novissima, and designed bookplates, posters, diplomas, and calendars. In 1902 Baruffi showed some designs for bookplates at the Esposizione Internazionale di Arte Decorativa in Turin, and three years later exhibited more of his designs at the Venice Biennale.

In an early essay on Baruffi's drawings, published in 1906, the critic Vittorio Pica wrote that 'Alfredo Baruffi, whose conceptions are delicate and fanciful, while his execution is both graceful and judicious, has a distinct personality of his own…his artistic activity, in its best sense, has hitherto only found vent at a few exhibitions, and his less characteristic work only has been published in the comic journals and other ephemeral literature of his native town…I will draw my reader's attention to the work of Baruffi's later years, during which what we may justly regard as his three great gifts have been strengthened and developed: these are poetic insight, symbolic vision, and a special sense of aptness to book illustration…Now that Baruffi has attained such a high degree of excellence in the ornamentation of books, it is to be hoped that he will not be diverted from the right path into other less suitable fields, such as for instance that of caricature, or of poster…'