

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Mosé BIANCHI (Monza 1840 - Monza 1904)

Studies of Women [recto], Two Studies of a Woman Holding a Laurel Wreath [verso]

Pen and brown ink, with touches of watercolour, over an underdrawing in black chalk, on laid paper.

The verso in black chalk, and pen and brown ink.

Numbered 61.18 on the recto, and 23 on the verso.

Inscribed with a signature of a Bernasconi heir, dated 1977, on the verso.

535 x 386 mm. (21 1/8 x 15 1/4 in.)

Both sides of this large drawing are related to the decoration of the Villa Giovanelli in Lonigo, where Mosè Bianchi was commissioned in 1877 to paint a series of frescoes for the ground floor rooms. A family of bankers and merchants, the Giovanelli were well known as collectors and connoisseurs, and their employment of Bianchi served to enhance the artist's reputation, and led to further fresco commissions. Much of the effect of these ceiling frescoes, painted with a mastery of foreshortening and perspective in three rooms of the villa, has today been lost as a result of poor restoration and conservation. Bianchi produced several preparatory studies for the Villa Giovanelli frescoes, in the form of oil sketches, drawings, watercolours and even plaster models, and it is only through the surviving studies for the frescoes that a sense of their Tiepolesque 'freschezza' can be appreciated.

The main figure on the recto of this large sheet would appear to be a first idea for the figure of Florain the fresco of the same subject in the sala della musica of the Villa Giovanelli. The pose of the figure is, however, somewhat closer to a preparatory oil sketch for the fresco, in an Italian private collection, than

to the final work. A large oil sketch for the full composition was once in the Bernasconi collection and is today in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan, while an oil sketch for the figure of Flora alone, also from the Bernasconi collection, appeared on the art market in London in 1994.

The verso of the present sheet contains two studies for an allegorical female figure holding a laurel wreath in Bianchi's fresco of Glory and History in the sala degli arazzi of the Villa Giovanelli, for which a large preparatory painting is in the Museo Godi Valmarana in Lugo Vicentino. A chalk study for the entire figure, also from the Bernasconi collection, was on the art market in New York in 1987.

This double-sided sheet was once part of a large group of paintings and drawings by Mosè Bianchi purchased from the artist by the brothers Juan (d.1920) and Felix Bernasconi (d.1914). The Bernasconi brothers were prominent Milanese industrialists who formed an impressive collection of works by contemporary Italian painters of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Exhibitions

New York, Borghi & Co., Mosè Bianchi, 1987, no.45; New York and London, Colnaghi, Master Drawings, 1995, no.49.

Artist description:

A native of Monza, Mosé Bianchi received his artistic training at the Accademia di Brera in Milan. Even in his earliest works - academic history subjects and altarpieces - the lightness of touch and fluidity of handling for which he would be known is readily evident. In 1866 he went to Venice, where he was strongly affected by the work of Giambattista Tiepolo. The following year he was in Paris, where he met the art dealer Goupil, who did much to spread the artist's reputation outside Italy. In 1877 Bianchi completed his first significant decorative project, the fresco decoration of the Villa Giovanelli at Lonigo, near Vicenza. A family of bankers and merchants, the Giovanelli were well known as collectors and connoisseurs, and their employment of Bianchi enhanced the artist's reputation and led to further fresco commissions. Much of the effect of these ceiling frescoes, painted in three rooms of the villa, has today been lost as a result of poor restoration and conservation. It is only through the surviving preparatory studies and oil sketches for these frescoes that some sense of their Tiepolesque freschezza can be appreciated. Bianchi continued to develop his distinctive, painterly style in his views of Venice of the 1880's and of Milan in the following decade. His oeuvre also includes many scenes of rural life, notably around Gignese on Lake Maggiore, and several superb portraits.