

Giuseppe Bernardino BISON (Palmanova 1762 - Milan 1844)

Two Elegantly Dressed Ladies Holding Flowers

Pen and brown ink and wash, with touches of red, yellow and green wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

Numbered 10.x and inscribed N(?)14 - Par Tomas Lawrence on the verso.

241 x 194 mm. (9 1/2 x 7 5/8 in.)

Although similar elegant figures appear in several of Giuseppe Bernardino Bison's genre paintings and gouaches, this fine and fresh drawing was, like many of his drawings, in all likelihood executed as an autonomous work of art. Indeed, it is an unusually highly finished and coloured example of the artist's spirited draughtsmanship.

Among stylistically comparable works in watercolour by Bison is a study of the head of a woman in a private collection, and a drawing of a woman seated on a rock, sold at auction in London in 1981. Also similar are watercolour drawings of Four Peasants in Conversation in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan and The Family of the Fisherman in a private collection.

Exhibitions

New York and London, Colnaghi, Master Drawings, 1998, no.35.

Literature:

Adriano Cera, ed., Disegni, acquarelli, tempere di artisti italiani dal 1770 ca. al 1830 ca., Bologna, 2002, Vol.I, unpaginated, Bison no.28.

Artist description:

One of the last exponents of the 18th century Venetian vedute tradition, Giuseppe Bernardino Bison was born in the province of Friuli in northeastern Italy and received his artistic training in the studio of Anton Maria Zanetti in Venice, while also winning a prize at the Accademia di Belle Arti for his drawings from the nude. In 1787 he worked on the decoration of the Palazzo Bottoni in Ferrara, followed by work in Padua as a set designer. The early part of Bison's career was spent as an itinerant painter of decorative frescoes at several villas and palaces around the Veneto, as well as a ceiling fresco in a church in Volpago di Montello, near Treviso. Between 1798 and 1800 he collaborated with the architect Giananntonio Selva on the decoration of the Palazzo Dolfin Manin on the Grand Canal in Venice.

In the early 1800s Bison settled in Trieste, where among his most important works were the decoration of the Palazzo Carciotti with scenes from the Iliad, painted in monochromatic tempera between 1803 and 1804, and the ceiling of the Palazzo della Borsa Vecchia, completed in 1805. He also produced set designs and decorations, now lost, for theatres at Vipacco and Gorizia. In 1831, at the age of sixty-nine, Bison moved to Milan, where he was active for the remainder of his career. There he was particularly active as a scenographer, painting stage designs for the Teatro alla Scala and other theatres. Although his career lasted well into the 19th century, his style continued to retain something of the flavour of the Settecento. In 1842 an exhibition of around a hundred of Bison's works was held in Rome. The artist died two years later, in relative penury despite his earlier successes.

Bison was an accomplished and prolific draughtsman, with an oeuvre of charming genre studies and landscapes in pen and ink wash or gouache. His earliest works show the influence of Giambattista Tiepolo and Francesco Guardi, while his later drawings tend towards Neoclassicism. His drawings encompass a wide and varied range of subjects, from religious narratives to genre scenes, capricci, and stage and ornament designs. Few of Bison's many drawings, however, were done as preparatory studies for paintings, and he seems to have produced a large number of his drawings as independent works of art for sale; this is certainly true of his pastoral landscapes in gouache. Significant groups of drawings by Bison are today in the collections of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, the Musei Civici in Trieste and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York.