

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Giovanni Andrea PODESTA (Genoa 1608 - Genoa or Rome 1674)

Studies of Putti and Children, Heads and a Woman [recto]; Studies of Putti and a Woman [verso]

Pen and brown ink, with framing lines in brown ink.

The verso in pen and brown ink.

Faintly inscribed Sc. Flamande (partially erased) at the lower right, and further signed or inscribed di(?) Podesta in Greek letters on the verso.

Inscribed (by Calvière) Andrea, Podesta. Genovese. Maitre de P.otesta. and dated 1620 on the mount.

Numbered 83. on the old mount.

Further inscribed notate.(?), over another, illegible inscription in pencil, on the mount.

215 x 162 mm. (8 1/2 x 6 3/8 in.) [sheet]

As one scholar has written, 'A study of Giovanni Andrea Podestà's entire artistic production, including paintings, drawings and etchings, reveals a consistent personality that developed along a single path. The subjects that he preferred and repeated, albeit with variations, were Bacchanals, children at play, and allegories relating to childlike representations... The compositions of Giovanni Andrea Podestà are filled with figures, but their structure is not particularly complex. The overall impression is of a certain joie de vivre, although on further analysis one sees that the movement is only apparently unrestrained. The individual gestures of the figures are carefully described.'

Stylistically comparable sheets of studies of putti are in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes and a double-sided sheet in the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh, while similarities are also found

in a more finished drawing of a Bacchanal in the Louvre. Similar putti or amorini are also found in most of Podestà's etchings.

In respect of this particular interest in putti, Podestà's work is paralleled in that of some of his contemporaries in Rome, including not only Poussin and Testa, but also the sculptor François Duquesnoy. Readily evident in this double-sided sheet, Podestà's work can often be of considerable charm, a feature sometimes lacking in the work of his more illustrious contemporaries. As one scholar has noted, 'Although Podestà was neither a great designer nor a great draughtsman, his amusing conceits display the lighter side of the often sober classical devotees in Rome in the 1630s and 1640s.'

The present sheet has a provenance dating back to the 18th century, and was already identified as a work by Andrea Podestà when in the collection of its first recorded owner, Charles-François de Calvière, Marquis de Vézénobres (1693-1777). A friend and contemporary of such 18th century collectors and connoisseurs as Pierre Crozat, the Comte de Caylus and Pierre-Jean Mariette, Calvière acquired drawings previously owned by these prominent amateurs, including several sheets at the Crozat sale in 1741 and the Mariette sale in 1775. He assembled the bulk of his collection of mainly Italian drawings between 1720 and 1760, although he continued to acquire drawings until his death. That he was an avid collector is seen in a letter he wrote to his friend and heir Esprit Calvet; 'I have bought a small package in Paris which contains drawings of the greatest masters; this is my real passion.' Almost all of Calvière's collection, including nearly five hundred drawings, was dispersed at auction in Paris in May 1779, two years after his death. A handful of drawings from the 1779 Calvière sale, including sheets by Baccio Bandinelli, Anton Domenico Gabbiani, Perino del Vaga, Antonio Tempesta and Francesco Vanni, are today in the Louvre.

This sheet of studies was one of twenty-four drawings from the Calvière collection acquired by the Provençal nobleman Jean-Baptiste-Florentin-Gabriel de Meyran, the Marquis de Lagoy (1764-1829), probably from Charles-François de Calvière's grandson, Charles-Alexis. Lagoy's collection of drawings numbered some three thousand sheets by nearly nine hundred artists. Roughly a third of the collection was made up of Italian drawings, including several works each by Raphael and Michelangelo, now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

This drawing also bears the collector's mark of the Viennese banker Count Moritz von Fries (1777-1826), who is known to have purchased drawings from the Marquis de Lagoy in 1810. Von Fries assembled a very fine collection of around 100,000 prints and drawings, but financial difficulties forced him to sell much of this collection from 1820 onwards. While his extensive collection of prints was sold in a series of five auctions in Amsterdam and Vienna in 1824 and 1828, the drawings were given to one of his creditors, a certain W. Mellish of London, and were soon dispersed. Some 150 of the drawings were acquired by the collector Sir Thomas Lawrence, and others eventually entered the collection of the Albertina in Vienna.

The present sheet was also in the collection of Sir Otto John Beit, 1st Baronet, KCMG, FRS (1865-1930), a German-born British financier, art collector and philanthropist, and remained in the possession of his descendants until recently.

Literature:

Alberto Craievich, ed., *Una passione discreta: La collezione Paolo Galli*, exhibition catalogue, Venice, 2024-2025, pp.102-105, no.III.4 (entry by Lauro Magnani).

Artist description:

Relatively little is known of the early life and career of the Genoese artist Giovanni Andrea Podestà. He is thought to have trained in the studio of Giambattista Paggi in Genoa, sometime before 1627, where among his fellow pupils was Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione. He also studied with Domenico Fiasella and Giovanni Andrea de Ferrari, but very little is known of his activity in Genoa before he settled in Rome around 1636. Although he noted his Genoese origins when he signed his etchings, Podestà seems to have spent most of his career in Rome, becoming a member of the Accademia di San Luca in 1650. He is recorded as making drawings after the antique statues and reliefs in the Giustiniani collection in Rome, some of which were later engraved for the Galleria Giustiniana del Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani, published in two volumes in 1636.

Podestà worked mainly as a printmaker, and etchings by him may be dated between 1636 and 1661. His first dated print, an etching after Titian done in 1636, is dedicated to the eminent scholar, antiquary, collector and patron Cassiano dal Pozzo. Indeed Podestà, like Castiglione, may be included among a group of artists working in Rome, including Nicolas Poussin and Pietro Testa, nurtured and promoted by dal Pozzo. Podestà is also noted as one of the people responsible for compiling the inventory of Cardinal Mazarin's collection of paintings, following his death in 1661. Although Podestà is best known as a printmaker, a handful of paintings of bacchanals with putti, considered in the past to be the work of Poussin or Testa, have also been tentatively attributed to him; these are today mainly to be found in French collections.

Almost all of Podestà's etchings, as well as his few surviving drawings, depict landscapes filled with frolicking putti, inspired by the bacchanals of both Titian and Poussin. Only a handful of drawings by Podestà - described by one scholar as 'rapid, fresh and immediate sketches of putti which the Genovese artist used repeatedly both in his paintings and in his etchings' – are known.