

Giuseppe Bernardino BISON (Palmanova 1762 - Milan 1844)

Three Figures in a Moonlit Landscape

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over a black chalk underdrawing.

Signed(?) with a monogram B on the verso.

Further inscribed 'acheté salle de ventes Fievez à Bruxelles 1919 / signature F. Goya / Goya y Lucientès (François) 1746-1828'. on the verso.

Further inscribed 'contrebandiers dans le montagne' on the verso.

217 x 294 mm. (8 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.)

As a draughtsman, Giuseppe Bernardino Bison's preferred medium was pen and ink, usually combined with rich tonal washes, of which this drawing is a particularly fine example. In its bold and spirited use of brown washes to depict the night sky, the present sheet may be compared with such drawings as A Goddess on her Chariot in an Italian private collection.

Moonlit scenes are, nevertheless, somewhat unusual in Bison's drawn oeuvre. Another such example is a Landscape with Monumental Sculptures in a Park in the Cleveland Museum of Art, which has been tentatively related to Bison's set designs for a production of Mozart's Don Giovanni at the Teatro Nuovo in Milan in 1842.

Stylistically comparable drawings may be found among a large group of pen and ink sketches by Bison, mainly dating from his time in Trieste during the first quarter of the 19th century, in the collection of the Fondazione Giuseppe Scaramangà di Altomonte in Trieste.

Exhibitions

New York and London, Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd., Master Drawings and Oil Sketches, 2004, no.47.

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.