

Giovanni BOLDINI (Ferrara 1842 - Paris 1931)

Study of Bernini's and Girardon's Equestrian Statue of Louis XIV / Marcus Curtius at Versailles

Pencil, with stumping, on ruled paper from a notebook.

Inscribed and dedicated *8 mars - 9 juin 1963 - musée jacquemart andré* / *de l'album no.16, si souvent feuilleté,* / *ce dessin de Boldini au Comte Doria* / *avec la reconnaissante amitié de* / *Milli Boldini* on the verso.

174 x 222 mm. (6 7/8 x 8 3/4 in.)

This spirited drawing depicts the monumental equestrian statue of Louis XIV at Versailles, designed and partially sculpted by Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). Commissioned from Bernini during his visit to Paris in 1665, the marble statue, over four metres in height, was only completed in Rome some twelve years later, around 1677. It was still in Bernini's studio at the time of his death in 1680, and was only shipped to France in 1684, arriving in Paris the following year. The King was apparently so unhappy with the work, however, that he wished to have it destroyed, but was eventually dissuaded from doing so. Instead the statue was recarved in 1688 by the French sculptor François Girardon (1628-1715) and modified to depict the Roman hero Marcus Curtius, before being placed in the gardens of the royal palace of Versailles. The original appearance of the statue is only recorded in Bernini's terracotta model for the project, executed around 1669-1670, in the Galleria Borghese in Rome.

A chalk sketch by Boldini of the equestrian statue situated in the park at Versailles, seen from a different angle and from farther away, is in the collection of the Museo Boldini in Ferrara. Another, larger drawing by the artist after the same statue, executed in pen and ink with brown and blue wash, appeared at auction in Paris in 2018.

Boldini produced a handful of drawings of other sculptures by Bernini, notably a watercolour copy of the sculptor's 1652 Bust of Francesco I d'Este, Duke of Modena, which was recently acquired by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.. Boldini also owned a plaster cast of a bust of a Medici cardinal which he believed to be by Bernini and which figures in several paintings, drawings and watercolours of the interior of his Parisian studio in the 1890s.

The present sheet was used to illustrate the invitation to the opening of the Exposition Boldini at the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris in 1963. On the occasion of this important retrospective exhibition of Boldini's work, this drawing was presented by the artist's widow, Emilia Cardona Boldini (1899-1977), to the director of the Musée Jacquemart-André, Comte Arnauld Doria (1890-1977).

Exhibitions

Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, *Boldini*, 1963 (ex-catalogue, but reproduced actual size on the front of the invitation to the opening of the exhibition).

Artist description:

The son of a minor painter and restorer in Ferrara, Giovanni Boldini arrived in 1864 in Florence, where he enrolled in the Accademia di Belle Arti. He first exhibited his work in Florence in 1867, and in the same year visited the Exposition Universelle in Paris. From the earliest years of his career he displayed a remarkable talent as a portrait painter. During a trip to London in 1870 he obtained several portrait commissions, and by October 1871 he had settled in Paris, taking a studio on the Place Pigalle, and making his public debut at the Salon de Mars in 1874. Boldini's bold, fluid style of painting was to prove immensely popular in Paris.

In the late 1870s and early 1880s he produced genre paintings of elegantly dressed women portrayed in lavish interiors - subjects made popular by Alfred Stevens and James Tissot - and these works found a ready market in England and America through the efforts of the Parisian art dealer Adolphe Goupil. By the time he moved to a new studio in 1885, however, he had begun to paint society portraits, and soon developed a formidable reputation for his dazzling, elegant depictions of the fashionable women of Paris, painted with a virtuoso technique of bold, fluid brushstrokes. Within a few years Boldini had risen to a position of prominence in Parisian art circles. He befriended other society portrait painters such as Paul-César Helleu, John Singer Sargent and James A. McNeill Whistler, and became a close friend of Edgar Degas, who is said to have once told the artist, "Vous êtes un monstre de talent!".

By the turn of the century Boldini had become the most sought-after portrait painter in Paris, achieving such success that his reputation rivalled that of his friend Sargent in London. His fame reached as far as America, from where he received several portrait commissions, stimulated by an exhibition of his work held at Boussod, Valadon and Co. in New York in 1897.

Boldini was a gifted and somewhat compulsive draughtsman, and filled many sketchbooks with drawings. (He would also use whatever paper came to hand, and there are examples of quick sketches drawn on menu covers, receipts, ledger paper, postcards, hotel stationery, pages torn from auction catalogues, and so forth.) His drawings, characterized by a restless energy and a spirited technique wholly in keeping with the bravura brushwork of his oil paintings, range from quick sketches of figures, landscapes, buildings and objects to more elaborate studies of these same motifs. As Richard Kendall has recently written, 'Evident in almost all of [Boldini's drawings] is a vivid engagement with the pleasures of looking and with the nervous exuberance of the drawing process, irrespective of the chosen subject…Some of these drawings would have taken only minutes or even seconds to complete, while others are the work of hours of concentrated labor…This engagement was vividly physical and sensuous, as his hand erupted in wild flourishes of pencil, pen and ink, crayon, and charcoal, or opted for extreme delicacy as the situation demanded.' The largest surviving group of drawings by Boldini, bequeathed by the artist's widow, is today in the collection of the Museo Boldini in Ferrara.