

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



FLORENTINE SCHOOL (17th Century -)

A Seated Male Nude Holding a Bowl

Red chalk, with touches of white heightening, on buff paper, laid down.

Squared for transfer in black chalk.

550 x 411 mm. (21 5/8 x 16 1/4 in.) [sheet]

The author of this large and refined drawing of a male nude has proved difficult to determine. It would appear to be the work of a Florentine artist of the 17th century, and the fact that it is squared for transfer would suggest that it was intended to prepare a figure in a larger painted composition, most likely a depiction of Saint John the Baptist in the Desert or, possibly, a Bacchus.

An attribution to Baldassare Franceschini, known as Il Volterrano (1611-1690), the leading fresco painter in Florence in the latter half of the 17th century, has been suggested. Indeed, the drawing may perhaps be a first idea for the seated figure of Bacchus in Volterrano's large easel painting of Bacchus with Attendant Putti of 1673-1675, formerly in the Torrigiani collection in Florence and sold at auction in New York in 2005. The position of the legs and the upraised arm of Bacchus in the Torrigiani painting is close, albeit in reverse, to the figure in the present sheet.

One of the finest draughtsmen of the Florentine Seicento, Volterrano produced a number of similar red chalk studies of male nudes. These include a drawing of a seated nude sold at auction in 2011, which is a first idea for the figure of Sleep in the artist's fresco of Vigilance and Sleep of c.1641-1642 in the Villa Medicea at Castello, and a drawing of a standing male nude in the Uffizi, which is a study for a figure in a fresco in the Villa della Petraia near Florence, painted between 1636 and 1646. Likewise, two red chalk studies of male nudes, sold as part of a large group of drawings by Volterrano at auction in 1980, are similar to the present sheet; a study of a nude youth embracing a column, preparatory for another figure in a fresco at the Villa della Petraia, and a study of a dancing youth, on the verso of a drawing related to Volterrano's cupola fresco in Santissima Annunziata in Florence, executed between 1681 and 1683.

The handling of the red chalk in this drawing is, however, a little more precise than is usually the case

with Volterrano's drawings, and alternative attributions to other Florentine draughtsmen of the Seicento may be considered. One possibility is Vincenzo Dandini (1609-1675), the brother of the better-known Cesare Dandini. Mentioned only briefly by the 17th century biographer and art historian Filippo Baldinucci, Vincenzo Dandini painted works for several Florentine churches, notably Ognissanti. He produced a number of similar studies of posed nude models in red chalk, only some of which may be related to finished works by the artist; examples are in the collections of the Louvre, the Uffizi and the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica in Rome.

Another Florentine artist who seems to have made refined academic nude studies of this type is Mario Balassi (1604-1667), who was active in Florence and Rome, but by whom only a small number of paintings and a handful of drawings are known. A somewhat similar handling of red chalk is found in a study of a sleeping male nude by Balassi in the Louvre.