

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Cesare MARIANI (Rome 1826 - Rome 1901)**

## **Studies of a Reclining Female Nude**

Black chalk, heightened with white chalk, on deep blue paper.

Signed Cesare Mariani at the lower right centre.

328 x 435 mm. (12 7/8 x 17 1/8 in.)

The present sheet, perhaps a study for a figure in an allegorical painting or fresco, provides a fine example of Cesare Mariani's gifts as a draughtsman. As has been noted of this large drawing, 'These Rubensian academic studies of a reclining female nude display a baroque lushness and an attention to light which Mariani derived from his teacher, [Tomasso] Minardi. Mariani has studied the model from three different angles, adding a detailed study of her feet and, at the left of the sheet, a partial outline of her hands. The several areas of pentimenti suggest that the artist quickly sketched the poses and then reworked the contours in a more complete manner. Mariani concentrated on the more highly finished figure of the model at the bottom of the page.'

Mariani seems to have favoured blue paper for his studies from life. A stylistically comparable sheet of studies of hands and feet, also drawn on blue paper, was in a private Florentine collection and appeared at auction in Italy in 2014. The present sheet has also been likened, in stylistic terms, to three similarly large-scale drawings of allegorical female figures, datable to around 1885 and perhaps intended for the decoration of a theatre, which are part of a group of 244 drawings, oil sketches and paintings by Mariani acquired by the Museo di Roma in 1966. Also comparable are two studies in black chalk, one of the sole of a right foot and the other of a left arm, that were exhibited at a gallery in Rome in 2001.

This drawing once belonged to Giovanni Piancastelli (1845-1926), a painter and engraver who served as the curator of the Borghese collection in Rome and assembled an important private collection of drawings. Piancastelli included the present sheet in an album that he put together, containing over 280 drawings by numerous artists working in Italy in the late 18th and 19th centuries, a few of which bear dedications to the collector. In 1901 Piancastelli sold some 3,600 drawings from his collection, mainly of ornament and stage designs, to the nascent Cooper-Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration in New York. Three years later, in 1904, the rest of Piancastelli's collection, amounting to around 8,600 drawings, was purchased by the American collectors Edward and Mary Brandegee. After the death of

Edward Brandegee in 1938, his wife sold most of the drawings to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum.

The remainder of the Piancastelli collection – including the bound album of drawings in which the present sheet was included – was sold on the American art market in the second half of the 1940s. The album then found its way into the collection of a Maltese priest, the Revd. Francis Agius (1891-1958), who had arrived in America in the 1920s and served as a parish priest at a Catholic church in Inwood, Long Island. The album remained with his heirs until 1976, when it was broken up and the drawings dispersed.

### **Exhibitions**

New York, Shepherd Gallery, Italian 19th Century Drawings & Watercolors. An Album: Camuccini & Minardi To Mancini & Balla, 1976, no.101; Washington, National Gallery of Art, and elsewhere, Italian Drawings 1780-1890, 1980-1981, no.67 (lent by John Richardson).

### **Literature:**

Roberta J. M. Olson, Italian 19th Century Drawings & Watercolors. An Album: Camuccini & Minardi To Mancini & Balla, exhibition catalogue, New York, 1976, unpaginated, no.101, pl.34; Gemma di Domenico Cortese and Liliana Barroero, Mostra delle opere del pittore Cesare Mariani (1826-1901) conservate nel Museo di Roma, exhibition catalogue, Rome, 1977, p.61, under no.219; Roberta J. M. Olson, Italian Drawings 1780-1890, exhibition catalogue, Washington and elsewhere, 1980-1981, pp.168-169, no.67.

### **Artist description:**

The Roman painter Cesare Mariani was a pupil of Giovanni Silvagni at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, and completed his training with an apprenticeship in the studio of Tommaso Minardi. He started working as an independent artist around 1850, and the following year one of his paintings was shown at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. Although he began his career as a painter of genre scenes, with which he achieved some success, Mariani soon established a particular reputation as a fresco painter, often working on a large scale in churches, palaces and public buildings. Between 1857 and 1860 he painted frescoes for the newly-rebuilt church of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome, followed by a huge fresco cycle in another restored Roman church, Santa Maria in Monticelli, where he decorated the choir, vault and presbytery.

In the 1860s Mariani painted frescoes in the Roman churches of San Lucia dei Gonfalonari, Santa Maria in Aquiro and San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, where he completed the decorations begun by his friend Cesare Fracassini, as well as in the church of the Madonna della Stella, near Montefalco. He also worked as a frescante in the Palazzo Sangermano in Arpino and the Castello at Rocca di Lanciano. Mariani's activity as a painter of religious works continued throughout the 1870s and 1880s; a period when he was, for all intents and purposes, the official painter of Papal Rome and the Vatican. He provided paintings and frescoes for numerous churches in Rome, Lazio, Abruzzo and the Marches, where between 1884 and 1891 he completed a vast decorative cycle for the Duomo at Ascoli Piceno. Some of his work was sent even further afield, with an altarpiece and several paintings commissioned for the cathedral in Santiago in Chile.

Although best known as a painter of religious subjects, Mariani also worked on a number of secular decorative schemes, notably painting allegorical subjects and portraits for the walls and ceiling of the Sala della Maggioranza of the Ministry of Finance in Rome, completed in 1879, and the Royal apartments of the Palazzo Quirinale. Of the Ministry of Finance frescoes, one contemporary English

account noted that 'When it is remembered how few are the living painters capable of using the supremely difficult medium of fresco for their works, we look with increased interest on this remarkable series of paintings, the productions of a thoughtful, enthusiastic, and able artist, whose mind is saturated with the great traditions of Italian art, and whose hand can execute his conceptions with rare power and skill. Had Cesare Mariani been a native of Munich, Paris, or London, instead of a civis Romanus, his name would probably be well known in Europe...The whole work, indeed, has been painted con amore, with the devotion, patience, and enthusiasm of a thorough artist.'

Mariani received numerous honours during his career, including being named a Knight of Saint Gregory the Great by Pope Pius IX in 1870, and, the following year, a Knight of the Order of the Crown of Italy. He trained numerous students, and rose to become principe of the Roman Accademia di San Luca between 1888 and 1890. (He also served as a drawing master to the Prince of Naples, the future King Victor Emmanuel III of Savoy.) One of his last significant projects was the fresco decoration of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Teramo, in the Abruzzo region, for which he also seems to have provided architectural drawings for the reconstruction of the church. From the middle of the 1890s onwards, however, he worked very little, and produced almost nothing in the few years before his death in 1901.