

Bartolomeo PASSAROTTI (Bologna 1529 - Bologna 1592)

Studies of Male Nudes

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

Inscribed *mihelange* on the verso.

Further inscribed *Buonaroti (Michel Angelo)* on the former mount.

220 x 145 mm. (8 5/8 x 5 3/4 in.)

An interesting aspect of Bartolomeo Passarotti's drawn oeuvre are his boldly drawn nude and anatomical studies, in which the influence of the pen drawings of the Florentine sculptors Michelangelo and Baccio Bandinelli, with their strong crosshatching to denote musculature, is evident. The present sheet is a particularly fine and fresh example of the artist's drawings of this type. As Paul Joannides has pointed out, '*Whereas Passarotti seems not to have been intimate with Michelangelo or with those who possessed his drawings, he probably had direct access to drawings by Bandinelli: the two artist's pen drawings have often been confused. Passarotti became a virtuoso in pen, a skill further developed by his work as an engraver, but there is often a stiffness and excessive systemization in his handling…Passarotti seems never to have been interested in the textures of the body, although he produced a number of anatomical drawings. There are very few surviving studies in chalk, a medium invariably employed by artists who wished to capture the movement of light on skin and of muscles below it.*'

The 16th century Florentine playwright, poet and art critic Raffaello Borghini noted that Passarotti compiled a now-lost album of his anatomical drawings, which were intended both as exercises and as studies for paintings. As Borghini wrote, '*He has made a book of anatomies, of bones and flesh, in which he wants to showhowone must learn the art of drawing in order to master it, and we can be sure that it will be a beautiful thing; because he draws very well.*' Passarotti's abiding interest in anatomy is also seen in a fascinating self-portrait drawing now in the University Library in Warsaw, datable to the 1580s, which depicts the artist in the act of lecturing on anatomy, with three studies of skeletal, ecorché and posed studies of the male nude arrayed behind him.

Stylistically comparable drawings by Passarotti, with vigorous strokes of pen and ink hatching used to delineate the muscles of the body, include a drawing of a male torso in the Galleria dell' Accademia in Venice, a study of two standing putti and another of *Two Studies of Male Nudes*, both in the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf, and a drawing of a male torso that appeared at auction in 1978. Similar nudes are also found in a drawing of *Studies for The Adoration of the Magi* at Christ Church in Oxford, which contains preparatory studies for a altarpiece of *The Adoration of the Magi* painted in the 1560s for the church of San Pietro and now in the Palazzo Arcivescovile in Bologna. An analogous treatment of nude musculature is likewise found in a pen and ink drawing of a naked soldier seen from behind, in a private collection in Rome, and a drawing of several male nudes in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, as well as a double-sided sheet of studies formerly in the Baer collection and now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Like many of Passarotti's drawings, this powerful study of male nudes was once thought to be by Michelangelo. As Joannides has noted, '*In the eighteenth century, before large numbers of genuine Michelangelo drawings came onto the market, sheets by Passarotti were routinely given to Michelangelo, and protoromantic Michelangelism was based less on the master's own work than on that of relatively distant followers like Passarotti.*'

A slighly larger copy or variant of this drawing, at one time in the August Grahl collection in Dresden in the 19th century, was on the art market in Germany in c.1927, with an attribution to Baccio Bandinelli. A pen and ink drawing attributed to Passarotti, today in the Louvre, reproduces, in reverse, the male nude seen from behind at the lower left of the present sheet.

This drawing bears the mark of the 19th century French collector Louis de Gassi, about whom almost nothing is known. De Gassi's small but choice collection of 127 Italian, French and Nothern drawings was sold at auction in Paris in 1858, and a number of drawings bearing his recently identified collector's mark are today in the Louvre and the British Museum.

The present sheet later belonged to the French poet Joë Bousquet (1897-1950). In 1918, during the First World War, the young Bousquet was wounded in battle and thereafter paralyzed from the waist down. Despite being largely bedridden for the rest of his life, surrounded by a collection of books and paintings, he was highly productive as a writer and poet.

Literature:

Roberta Serra, *Musée du Louvre: Département des arts graphiques. Inventaire général des dessins italiens XII: Dessins bolonais du XVIe siècle*, Paris, 2022, p.273, under no.329.

Artist description:

Thought to be a student of the architect Jacopo Vignola, Bartolomeo Passarotti (or Passerotti) spent his early years in Rome, arriving there around 1551. There he worked with the painter Taddeo Zuccaro, with whom he also shared a home. Indeed, among his earliest known works are a series of etchings reproducing drawings by Taddeo, as well as further prints after the work of other artists that the young Passarotti would have seen in Rome in the early 1550s. However, no securely datable paintings and hardly any drawings by the artist survive from this formative Roman period. His first documented paintings – notably the high altar of the Bolognese church of San Giacomo Maggiore - date from the middle of the 1560s, when he was already in his mid-thirties, and several years after his return to Bologna from Rome. Passarotti worked mainly as a portrait painter and soon established a reputation as the pre-eminent artist in this field in Bologna. Twice summoned to Rome to paint the portraits of Popes Pius V and Gregory XIII, he counted other members of the papal court among his sitters. In Bologna, Passarotti joined the local guild, the Compagnia delle Quattro Arti, and was awarded several important public commissions, including the altarpieces for the churches of San Petronio and San Giacomo Maggiore. By the 1570s he was recognized as the leading painter in Bologna, although he never seems to have worked in fresco. He also painted a number of kitchen or genre scenes which, like some of his religious pictures, are often signed with his symbol of a passero, or sparrow. As a printmaker, Passarotti produced a handful of etchings, mostly after the work of other artists; this was probably in keeping with his own interests as a collector of paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures. Instrumental in the establishment of an artist's guild in Bologna, Passarotti supervised a large and active studio, and his students included not only his four children, but also Agostino Carracci, who studied with him in the 1570s.

In his lifetime, Passarotti was particularly admired for his drawings, many of which were done as finished, independent works. His bold draughtsmanship was praised by such connoisseurs as the 17th century art historian Carlo Cesare Malvasia ('la sua penna...fu delle più brave che mai si vedesse...che di qualche disegno di Passarotti non andasse vago e curioso'), and his biographers note that his drawings were highly regarded by his contemporaries as well as by later collectors. The 16th century priest and writer Ignazio Danti, whose portrait was painted by the artist, described Passarotti as 'one of the most splendid luminaries that the art of Drawing had ever known, for in the handling of his pen he surpassed not only the artists of his own age, but everyone who has come down to us in recent memory. [He is] among those who deserve eternal praise, since it is impossible to attain such excellence without much studying and many a sleepless night.' As a draughtsman, Passarotti produced compositional and figure studies for his paintings, anatomical studies and drawings of animals; all executed with bravura penmanship. He also drew a series of elaborate and highly finished portraits and studies of heads, in thick, dark strokes of pen and ink, that were probably intended to be sold to collectors as works of art in their own right.