

Denys CALVAERT (Antwerp 1540 - Bologna 1619)

Danaë

Red chalk, heightened with white and squared for transfer in red chalk, with framing lines in red chalk.

Laid down on an 18th century English mount, inscribed *A. Carracci* at the bottom.

159 x 139 mm. (6 1/4 x 5 1/2 in.)

The present sheet is closely related, albeit in reverse, to one of Denys Calvaert's rare paintings of a secular or mythological subject; a Danaë of c.1616, painted for Jacob Arnold, Captain of the garrison of Papal Swiss Guards in Bologna and today in the collection of the Ferens Art Gallery in Kingston upon Hull. It was a common practice for Calvaert to reverse the composition and figures in his paintings when preparing them. Indeed, this drawing is also similar to another, somewhat larger version of the subject, now in the Pinacoteca in Lucca, which is signed and dated 1614, and is also in reverse to the drawing. A third autograph painting of Danaë, signed by Calvaert, appeared at auction in London in 1967, while a fourth version was acquired by the Historisches Museum Uri in Altdorf, Switzerland, in 2002.

As Nicole Dacos has written of the Danaë paintings by Calvaert, 'Of the [different] versions, the Lucca picture was probably the first to be painted; even so, there are numerous compositional differences among the works. The Danaë group represents Calvaert's late style. It was conceived only a few years before his death in 1619, at a time when the international mannerist movement had all but died.' More recently, however, the Bolognese art historian Michele Danieli has dated the Danaë in Hull somewhat earlier, to the beginning of the 17th century.

As Danieli has pointed out, in the early years of the 17th century Calvaert began to produce cabinet pictures with secular erotic themes, dominated by large female nudes and typified by the four Danaë paintings, that are very different from the mainly religious works he had painted up to that point. (Indeed,

before 1600 female nudes are hardly to be found in Calvaert's oeuvre.) Around a dozen of these paintings by Calvaert are known, several of which occur in more than one version, including not only the Danäe pictures but also paintings of The Death of Cleopatra, Diana at her Toilet and The Death of Lucretia. Danieli has suggested that Calvaert may have been inspired to paint these works by his knowledge of similar works commissioned by the Emperor Rudolf II in Prague from such artists as Bartholomeus Spranger and Joseph Heintz the Elder. While there is no evidence that Calvaert had any direct contact with Rudolf or any of the artists at his court, he certainly knew the Nuremberg merchant Paulus Praun, who lived in Bologna from the end of the 16th century until his death in 1616. Praun acted as agent for Rudolf II in acquiring works by Italian artists, and was friendly with Calvaert, owning several of his secular works, including a Danäe of 1613. Praun's collection also included a large group of engravings by Rudolfine artists, and it is likely through these prints that Calvaert gained inspiration for some of these late paintings.

The present sheet has been dated by the Calvaert drawings scholar Michele Danieli to around 1600. A related grisaille drawing of Danaë, executed in oil on paper, was formerly in the collection of Pierre de Charmant in Geneva and appeared at auction in Paris in 2002.

The first known owner of the present sheet was the 17th century portrait painter Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680), whose renowned collection of nearly ten thousand drawings, the largest ever seen in England up to that time, was dispersed at auction in 1688 and 1694. More recently, the drawing belonged to the art historian Michael Jaffé (1923-1997), who served as director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge between 1973 and 1990.

Artist description:

Born in Antwerp, Denys Calvaert was one of the few Flemish artists of the period who worked for most of his career in Italy, where he was known as 'Dionisio fiammingo'. After an apprenticeship in the studio of the landscape painter Cerstiaen van Queckborne in Antwerp, Calvaert settled in Bologna sometime around 1561 or 1562, and there completed his artistic training with the painters Prospero Fontana and Lorenzo Sabatini, whose studio he joined in 1568 as an assistant. Calvaert's earliest known signed and dated painting is an Allegory of Vigilance of 1568, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna. Both Fontana and Sabatini were sometime collaborators with Giorgio Vasari, and in 1573 Calvaert accompanied Sabatini to Rome, where they worked together on the extensive fresco decoration of the Sala Regia in the Vatican for Pope Gregory XIII, which had been begun by Vasari. Although this was probably Calvaert's only visit to Rome, the exposure to Tuscan and Roman Mannerism relatively early in his career was to have a profound effect on his later work. While in Rome, he is also known to have made numerous drawings after the paintings and frescoes of Raphael and Michelangelo, as well as copies of Roman antiquities.

Interestingly, Calvaert chose to return to Bologna in 1575 rather than try and establish himself in the larger and more competitive artistic environment of Rome. In Bologna he soon established his own academy, eventually counting among his pupils Guido Reni, Domenichino and Francesco Albani, all of whom later transferred to the Carracci's rival Accademia degli Incamminati, founded a few years later. In 1581 Calvaert received the commission for one of his most celebrated works, a large altarpiece of The Miracle of Saint Gregory for the Bolognese church of San Gregorio. He continued to run a large and busy studio in Bologna, receiving numerous commissions for religious pictures for local churches and smaller devotional works for private patrons. Alongside the Carracci, Calvaert was one of the leading painters in the city in the last quarter of the 16th century, at the height of the Counter Reformation. As one modern scholar has noted of the artist, 'Throughout his career he remained faithful to the mannerist style of painting, producing works that are characterized by a barely perceptible Northern realism. Calvaert distinguished himself as a draftsman and painter of the highest quality.' Despite spending almost all of his career in Italy, Calvaert remained proud of his Netherlandish heritage, and often added

the word ‘Fiammingho’ (‘Flemish’) or Antwerp, his city of birth, to his signature on his paintings. He also developed a market among collectors in the Netherlands for his small-scale paintings, often executed on copper.

Denys Calvaert was a prolific and talented draughtsman, and the emphasis he placed on drawing in his large workshop was to be a profound influence on a number of the succeeding generation of artists in Bologna. Malvasia writes that the artist was particularly admired for his drawings in red chalk, in which he was much infuenced by the example of Correggio; this is especially noticeable in his studies dating from around the turn of the century. Many of Calvaert’s drawings are either signed and dated, or can be connected with surviving paintings. Some of his finished drawings appear to have been produced as independent works for sale, while several were also reproduced as prints. The artist was greatly admired as a draughtsman in his lifetime, and many of his drawings were later acquired by such prominnet collectors as the Cardinals Luigi d’Este and Leopoldo de’ Medici; the latter eventually acquired almost forty drawings by Calvaert, which are today in the Uffizi in Florence.