

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Dirck BARENDSZ (Amsterdam 1534 - Amsterdam 1592)

Christ is Stripped of His Garments

Brown, black, grey and white oil on paper, with framing lines in brown ink, varnished and laid down.

Signed Theodorus in brown oil paint at the lower right.

Numbered 21. and inscribed *Jesus est depouillé de ses habits* on the old mount.

254 x 205 mm. (10 x 8 1/8 in.)

The present sheet is part of an important group of forty monochrome sketches in oil by Dirck Barendsz., illustrating scenes from the life of Christ, from the entry into Jerusalem to the Ascension. Many of the drawings are signed with some variant of Barendsz.'s name, such as 'Theo.' or 'Theodorus B.'. Sometime in the 18th century, a French collector seems to have pasted the sketches into an album, numbering them and adding captions in French. The entire group was seen on two occasions by the 18th century amateur and collector Pierre-Jean Mariette, the second time in Paris in 1759, when he noted that 'ces desseins sont faits en maître; ils sont touchés avec une finesse et un esprit', although he mistakenly believed the drawings to be the work of the Antwerp engraver Johannes (Jan) Sadeler I (1550-1600), who had made engravings of a few of them.

This series of oil sketches by Barendsz. was last recorded as a complete set when they were offered to the Louvre in 1851, after which they disappeared for over a hundred and twenty years. It was not until the middle of the 1970s that individual examples began appearing on the Paris art market. In 1978 a handful of these small paintings on paper were first published by Jacques Foucart and Pierre Rosenberg, who noted that 'The whole series has such an expressive quality, [and] such vivid and fresh originality...covering a refined chromatic scale – a range of tones from blacks, browns, maroons, yellows and golds executed with the brush with a swift and nervous touch.'

Some twenty-seven sheets from this numbered series of scenes from the Passion are known today, almost all of which have reappeared in France over the last two decades of the 20th century. They are now divided among the collections of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille, the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, the British Museum in London, the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, the Musée du Louvre and the Fondation Custodia in Paris, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen, the Musée du Grand-Siècle in Saint-Cloud, the Musée Lambinet in Versailles and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., as well as in several private collections.

As the scholar Joaneath Spicer has written of this group of grisaille drawings by Barendsz., 'These chiaroscuro compositions are painted in oil in shades of rich brown, with cream and pale yellow highlights applied in light, quick, short strokes. Even allowing for the darkening of the pigments or varnish over time, a surprising number of scenes from this Passion series are represented as taking place at night or in semi-darkness, yet they are very evocatively rendered.' Engravings by Jan Sadeler after five of the drawings are known, and it is possible that, despite their freedom of execution, the entire set was intended to be translated into prints. However, as Martin Royalton-Kisch has noted, 'Barendsz. has sacrificed none of his breadth of style in anticipation of the linear effects of the engraver's burin...they make no stylistic concessions whatever towards engravers' drawings. Indeed it says much for Jan Sadeler's skill that he was able to translate these painterly sketches into line.'

Given the relative scarcity of works by Barendsz., the dating of this series of monochrome studies has been a matter of some debate, with opinions ranging from the 1560s to the 1580s. Oil sketches on paper of this type are very rare in Netherlandish art of the 16th century, and the only other examples known are a few works by the artists Joachim Beuckelaer (c.1533-1575), executed in the mid-1560s, and Anthonie Blocklandt van Montfoort (1533/34-1583), which were done around 1575. Although Barendsz. may have adopted the practice during his time in Venice in the late 1550s and early 1560s, it should be noted that the production of oil sketches on paper only became popular among Venetian artists of the succeeding generation, notably Palma Giovane and Domenico Tintoretto.

These grisaille studies, with their freedom of handling and dramatic effects of light, provide valuable evidence of the artistic talents of Dirck Barendsz., by whom few other works are known. They show the particular influence of his time in Venice; as has been noted, 'Barendsz's Passion scenes with their flickering, indefinable lighting that gives the setting the stifling nature of a nightmare, are not really conceivable without the example of the late Titian or Tintoretto.' Furthermore, as Spicer has pointed out, 'this is one of the most striking and original series, in terms of both its content and its style, by a sixteenth-century Dutch artist.'

Exhibitions

New York, Colnaghi, Old Master Drawings, 1987, no.11; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection, 2009, no.121.

Literature:

Felice Stampfle, *Netherlandish Drawings of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries and Flemish*

Drawings of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, 1991, p.17, under no.28; Karel G. Boon, *The Netherlandish and German Drawings of the XVth and XVIth Centuries of the Frits Lugt Collection*, Paris, 1992, Vol.I, p.13, under no.3, note 7; Clifford S. Ackley, 'The Intuitive Eye: Drawings and Paintings from the Collection of Horace Wood Brock', in Horace Wood Brock, Martin P. Levy and Clifford S. Ackley, *Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection*, exhibition catalogue, Boston, 2009, p.99 and p.157, no.121, illustrated p.121.

Artist description:

Dirck Barendsz., sometimes known as Theodorus Bernardus, left Amsterdam for Italy in 1555, at the age of about twenty-one. He spent several years in Venice, where, according to his biographer Karel van Mander, he worked as an assistant in the studio of Titian, and he may also have spent some time in Rome. Almost nothing survives of Barendsz.'s work in Italy, however, although a monumental wall painting of *The Last Judgement* on the internal facade of the Imperial abbey church at Farfa in central Italy, unsigned but prominently dated 1561, has recently been convincingly attributed to him. Barendsz. was back in Amsterdam by 1562, the date of his earliest known work; a group portrait of the civic guard of Amsterdam which is now in the Rijksmuseum. He worked in Amsterdam for the remainder of his career, and van Mander praises his role in introducing the new and modern Italian style ('*de rechte manier van Italien*') into the Netherlands. Certainly, the particular influence of Venetian 16th century painting is evident in much of Barendsz.'s mature work. Very few paintings by the artist survive today, however, of which the most important is a triptych of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* of c.1565, now in the Stedelijk Museum in Gouda. That the artist must have received other major commissions is shown by the existence of a large drawing of *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, which must be a study for a now-lost altarpiece. Apart from a handful of painted portraits, Barendsz.'s surviving oeuvre consists of oil sketches, drawings and engravings made after his designs.