

Giovanni Battista TIEPOLO (Venice 1696 - Madrid 1770)

The Flight into Egypt

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

Inscribed No 550 – Collection Alexandre Doucet and J.B Tiepolo / Gravé par G. Domenico Tiepolo / avec la mention J. B. Tiepolo inv. / sous le titre La Fuga in Egitto. / Vente Orloff on the old backing board.

425 x 300 mm. (16 3/4 x 11 3/4 in.)

This splendid large sheet was once part of an album containing what has been described by the early 20th century scholar Tancred Borenius as 'the incomparable series of Tiepolo drawings which belonged to the late Prince Alexis Orloff, and was dispersed at a memorable sale in Paris, on April 29 and 30, 1920.' The album contained ninety-six pen and wash drawings by Giambattista Tiepolo, mostly datable to the mid-1730s, of which many were finished presentation drawings, such as the present sheet. The earlier history of the album before it entered the Orloff (or Orlov) collection remains a mystery. As another early scholar of Tiepolo drawings, Detlev von Hadeln, has written, 'It does not seem difficult for other Venetian contemporaries of Tiepolo to collect in one album a hundred and more of his drawings. Quite unique was that which when divided up constituted the collection of Prince Alexei Orloff. In this case a connoisseur had been able to search out the choicest of the choice; unless we can suppose that the commissions of a Maecenas were in question, to whom we owe the creation of the brilliant variations on the theme of the Annunciation and of the Flight into Egypt.' This album of Tiepolo drawings eventually came into the possession of Prince Alexis Nikolaevich Orlov, born in 1867, who may have inherited it from the Russian writer and politician Grigory Vladimirovich Orlov (1777-1826),

who had spent much of his life in Europe.

As Borenius further noted, ‘No less than seven drawings in the Orloff album dealt with the flight into Egypt…Curiously enough, no picture by Tiepolo is known of this subject, though evidently it attracted him greatly.’4 Among the drawings of this particular subject from the Orlov album - of which five are vertical in orientation and two are horizontal – almost all are today in museum collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and both the Pierpont Morgan Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Another drawing of The Flight into Egypt - comparable to the present sheet in medium, technique and scale, although not from the Orlov album - was formerly in the Bernasconi collection and is now in the Eskenazi Museum of Art at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

The Tiepolo scholar George Knox has pointed out that ‘Two of the series of The Flight into Egypt… attracted the attention of the young Domenico Tiepolo, for he made etchings after them, presumably some ten years later, which in turn foreshadow his own independent designs on the same theme.’ The present sheet is one of those drawings which was copied in an etching by the younger Tiepolo, sometime around 1750. The same motif of Saint Joseph with his face partially obscured by his cloak caught in the wind, seen in this drawing, is found in a horizontal etching by Domenico Tiepolo of an original composition of The Flight into Egypt of c.1753.

The present sheet belonged to the art dealers Hanns Schaeffer (1886-1967) and Kate Born Schaeffer (1898-2000), who established the Schaeffer Galleries in Berlin in 1925. In 1933 the Schaeffers moved permanently to New York, where another branch of their gallery was established. This drawing of The Flight into Egypt was acquired at auction in Paris shortly before Hanns Schaeffer’s death in 1967, and was lent by his wife to the groundbreaking exhibition of Tiepolo drawings held at the Fogg Art Museum in 1970. The drawing was later gifted by Kate Schaeffer to her daughter, Cornelia Schaeffer Bessie (1929-2020), as a Christmas present in 1984.

Exhibitions

Cambridge (MA), Fogg Art Museum, Tiepolo: A Bicentenary Exhibition 1770-1970, 1970, no.14.

Literature:

Detlev Freiherr von Hadeln, Handzeichnungen von G. B. Tiepolo, Florence and Munich, 1927, Vol.I, p.28, pl.69

Detlev Baron von Hadeln, The Drawings of G. B. Tiepolo, Paris, 1928, Vol.I, p.26, pl.69 (where dated before 1752)

George Knox, The Orloff Album of Tiepolo Drawings, The Burlington Magazine, June 1961, pp.273 and 275, no.24

George Knox, Tiepolo: A Bicentenary Exhibition 1770-1970, exhibition catalogue, Cambridge (MA), 1970, no.14 (where dated c.1735)

Marjorie B. Cohn, ‘A Note on Media and Methods’, in Knox, ibid., 1970, pp.218-220, fig.3

Aldo Rizzi, The etchings of the Tiepolos: Complete Edition, London, 1971, p.158, under no.65, fig. XXXVI

Adelheid M. Gealt, Giambattista and Domenico Tiepolo: Master Drawings from the Anthony J. Moravec Collection, exhibition catalogue, Bloomington, 2016-2017, p.105, note 25.

Artist description:

The leading painter in Venice for much of his career, Giambattista Tiepolo was also undoubtedly one of the finest Italian draughtsmen of the 18th century. That his drawings were greatly admired in his lifetime is confirmed by contemporary accounts; indeed, as early as 1732 the writer Vincenzo da Canal remarked that 'engravers and copyists are eager to copy his works, to glean his inventions and extraordinary ideas; his drawings are already so highly esteemed that books of them are sent to the most distant countries'. From the late 1730's until his departure for Spain in 1762, Tiepolo enjoyed his most productive period as a draughtsman, creating a large number of vibrant pen and wash studies that are among the archetypal drawings of the Venetian Settecento. As one recent scholar has commented, 'From the start of his career [Tiepolo] had enjoyed drawing as an additional means of expression, with equally original results. He did not draw simply to make an immediate note of his ideas, nor to make an initial sketch for a painting or to study details; he drew to give the freest, most complete expression to his genius. His drawings can be considered as an autonomous artistic genre; they constitute an enormous part of his work, giving expression to a quite extraordinary excursion of the imagination; in this respect, Tiepolo's graphic work can be compared only with that of Rembrandt.'

Tiepolo's drawings include compositional studies for paintings and prints, drawings of heads, figure studies for large-scale decorations, landscapes and caricatures, as well as several series of drawings on such themes as the Holy Family. Many of these drawings were bound into albums by theme or subject, and retained by the artist in his studio as a stock of motifs and ideas for use in his own work, or that of his sons and assistants.