

Stefano DELLA BELLA (Florence 1610 - Florence 1664)

Three Drawings on One Mount: a. Five Seated Peasants at Rest b. Figures with a Horse-Drawn Cart c. Peasants and Horses

Each pen and brown ink, laid down on an old mount inscribed *Stephanus Della Bella* on the reverse.

Further inscribed *Stefano della Bella fn* at the bottom of the album page on which these three drawings were formerly mounted.

a. 66 x 138 mm. (2 5/8 x 5 3/8 in.)

b. 76 x 124 mm. (3 x 4 7/8 in.)

c. 70 x 140 mm. (2 3/4 x 5 1/2 in.)

These lively sketches are typical of Stefano della Bella's interest in everyday rural life, and his keen observation of the world around him. The artist seems to have often worked outdoors, filling several sketchbooks with lively scenes of people, buildings and festivities, all drawn on the spot and used as a stock of images and motifs for his etchings and more finished drawings.

These three drawings, laid down on one mount, can be dated to the artist's French period, and may be likened to a number of his drawings and prints of the 1640s. The drawing of *Figures with a Horse-Drawn Cart*, for example, finds parallels in a slightly larger drawing of a similar subject in the Louvre, which has in turn been related to an engraving of a *Map and View of the Town of Arras*, dated 1641.

Artist description:

A gifted draughtsman and designer, Stefano della Bella was born into a family of artists. Apprenticed to a goldsmith, he later entered the workshop of the painter Giovanni Battista Vanni, and also received training in etching from Remigio Cantagallina. He came to be particularly influenced by the work of Jacques Callot, although it is unlikely that the two artists ever actually met. Della Bella's first prints date to around 1627, and he eventually succeeded Callot as Medici court designer and printmaker, his commissions including etchings of public festivals, tournaments and banquets hosted by the Medici in Florence. Under the patronage of the Medici, Della Bella was sent in 1633 to Rome, where he made drawings after antique and Renaissance masters, landscapes and scenes of everyday life.

In 1639 he accompanied the Medici ambassador to the Parisian court of Louis XIII, and remained in France for ten years. Della Bella established a flourishing career in Paris, publishing numerous prints and obtaining significant commissions from Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, as well as other members of the court and the aristocracy. Indeed, the majority of his prints date from this fertile Parisian period, and include scenes of life at the French court. After his return to Florence in 1650, Della Bella continued to enjoy Medici patronage. Over the next few years he produced drawings of the gardens of the Medici villa at Pratolino, the port of Livorno and the Villa Medici in Rome, and also became the drawing master to the future Duke, Cosimo III. He was also active as a designer of costumes for the various pageants, masquerades and ballets of the Medici court. After suffering a stroke in 1661, Della Bella appears to have worked very little before his death three years later.

Only a handful of paintings by Della Bella survive to this day, and it is as a graphic artist that he is best known. A hugely talented and prolific printmaker and draughtsman, he produced works of considerable energy and inventiveness, with an oeuvre numbering over a thousand etchings, and many times more drawings and studies. Significant groups of drawings by Della Bella are today in several public collections, with around six hundred sheets in both the Uffizi and the Louvre, and approximately 150 drawings apiece in the Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica in Rome and the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle.