

Salvator ROSA (Arenella 1615 - Rome 1673)

Four Men Moving a Boulder, with Two Onlookers

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, with touches of black chalk.

Numbered N33 on the verso and numbered 931 on the reverse of the old mount.

140 x 110 mm. (5 1/2 x 4 3/8 in.)

This drawing has been dated by the Rosa scholar Michael Mahoney to c.1645, when the artist was working in Florence, and is part of a group of drawings of this period characterized by a combination of wiry pen and ink hatching and a bold use of brown wash. Among stylistically comparable drawings of the same approximate date are The Philosophers Heraclitus and Democritus by a Globe in the Teyler Museum in Haarlem and A Philosopher(?) Sitting Beneath a Tree in the Princeton University Art Museum in New Jersey, as well as a study of a partially nude bearded man sitting beneath trees in the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica in Rome. Also comparable in style and technique, although somewhat earlier in date, is a study of Two Men Pulling a Rope in the Louvre.

It is interesting to note that the present sheet has figured in the private collections of four different artists. The first known owner of the drawing was the English portrait painter Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), an obsessive and passionate collector who assembled probably the single greatest collection of Old Master drawings ever seen in England. The drawing later passed into the collection of Charles Fairfax Murray (1849-1919), a Victorian painter closely associated with the Pre-Raphaelites who collected Old Master and British drawings. The third owner of the present sheet was the artist, illustrator and printmaker Victor Winthrop Newman (b.1860), who may have bought the drawing at auction in New York in 1924. At the auction of Newman's collection six years later, the present sheet was acquired by Ernest Clifford Peixotto (1869-1940), an American mural painter and illustrator who studied at the Académie Julien in Paris before joining the staff of Scribner's Magazine, although he lived in France for

most of his life, at Fontainebleau. While he began his career as an illustrator, Peixotto worked mainly as a mural painter from 1911 onwards.

Exhibitions

New York, Mia N. Weiner, Old Master Drawings, November 1990, no.27.

Literature:

Ottilie G. Boetzkes, Salvator Rosa: Seventeenth-Century Italian Painter, Poet, and Patriot, New York, 1960, p.188, no.92; Michael Mahoney, The Drawings of Salvator Rosa, New York and London, 1977, Vol.I, p.298, no.24.20; Vol.II, fig.24.20 (as whereabouts unknown); New York, Mia N. Weiner, Old Master Drawings, exhibition catalogue, 1990, unpaginated, no.27 (illustrated in colour on the cover).

Artist description:

A painter, draughtsman and printmaker, as well as an accomplished actor, musician and poet, Salvator Rosa studied in Naples with his brother-in-law Francesco Fracanzano, as well as probably with Jusepe de Ribera and Aniello Falcone, before making two trips to Rome in the second half of the 1630s. The following decade found him working in Florence, where among his patrons was Giovanni Carlo de' Medici. It was in Florence that Rosa developed an interest in historical and mythological subjects, as well as in themes of witchcraft and the occult. An eccentric personality, he moved in literary and intellectual circles, which in turn inspired his idiosyncratic artistic vision. Returning to Rome in 1649, Rosa continued to paint unusual, often fantastical or macabre subjects alongside the paintings of battle scenes and wild landscapes with which he had first made a name for himself. In the late 1660s his compositions became darker and more oppressive. A gifted and prolific printmaker, Rosa produced over one hundred etchings, almost all of which were published and widely distributed in his lifetime.

Rosa was a remarkable draughtsman, and his spirited, exuberant drawings were highly praised by connoisseurs even in his own day. The bulk of the nine hundred or so surviving drawings by the artist are figure studies, usually in his preferred medium of pen and ink, and often enlivened with touches of wash. Many of the drawings from the early part of his career are signed, and these may have been sold to collectors or presented as gifts to friends or patrons. However, almost no signed drawings dating from after 1649 exist, and it has been suggested that, after his return to Rome, Rosa chose to keep most of his drawings for himself, and not part with them.