

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Francesco de' Rossi, called SALVIATI (Florence 1510 - Rome 1563)

A Male Nude Looking Upwards

Pen, brush and brown ink and brown wash, heightened with white, over a black chalk underdrawing, on light yellowish-brown paper.

Inscribed di Fr co. Salviati in a 16th century hand on the verso.

Inscribed Nachlass des [?] Königs Johann, Michel Angelo and Nachlass König Johann and numbered 94 on the verso.

265 x 206 mm. (10 3/8 x 8 1/8 in.)

As Giorgio Vasari noted admiringly of Francesco Salviati, 'He gave great beauty and grace to every kind of head, and he understood the nude as well as any other painter of his time.' Salviati's treatment of the male nude form in the present sheet displays the influence of Michelangelo, whose work he studied in Rome. The artist seems to have been inspired by the bold figural style of Michelangelo's late frescoes in the Vatican; the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel and the Crucifixion of Saint Peter and Conversion of St. Paul in the Pauline Chapel. As has been noted of this particular drawing, 'The thrown-back head and parted lips and the unnaturally contorted pose – almost a classically Mannerist figura serpentinata – convey an intensity of movement and emotion... In style, the sheet reflects the artist's renewed stay in Rome from 1548 and a new monumentality and solidity of form that he derived from Michelangelo.'

Drawn with the tip of the brush, the present sheet may be grouped with a series of highly finished drawings by Salviati, all similar in style and technique, of single figures seen against bare backgrounds. These drawings have generally been dated to the 1550s, after the artist's return to Rome after some

time in Florence. These highly pictorial works may be counted among Salviati's most appealing drawings, and underscore the virtuosity of his draughtsmanship. While it has been suggested that they may have been intended as designs for chiaroscuro woodcuts, it is more likely that they were produced as autonomous works of art for sale or presentation to collectors or patrons.

This powerful study of a male nude - which appears to be directly inspired by the pose of the right hand figure in the famous ancient sculptural group of *Laocoön and his Sons* - may be compared in particular with several examples from this group of drawings by Salviati, all on yellowish-brown paper. These include *A Draped Woman Holding a Tablet* in the British Museum and *a Reclining Female Figure* in the Louvre, as well as *a Running Soldier, Seen from Behind* also in the Louvre and *a Draped Male Figure Carrying an Urn*, formerly in the collection of Jean de Beistegui and now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Marseille.

Other drawings by Salviati in the same chiaroscuro brush technique are in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon, the British Museum in London, the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, the Louvre in Paris, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, and elsewhere. Alessandro Nova has pointed out of Salviati's drawings of this distinctive type that, 'It is unlikely that [they]...were drawn with a specific composition in mind; rather, such drawings were probably kept in the artist's workshop as ready-made models for immediate use in case of urgent and demanding mural commissions.' As Nicholas Turner has further noted, 'Salviati was a virtuoso draughtsman of great originality, and to display his dexterity he seems to have chosen drawings largely carried out in brush and wash with only a few lines of the pen, on tinted paper... Drawing with the brush requires great presence of mind, since it is almost impossible to correct an area of wash once it has been applied. These works seem, therefore, to have been drawn almost as exercises in their own right and are the sort of drawing that may well have been made for presentation to the artist's friends or patrons.'

Like many of these finished figure drawings, the present sheet cannot be related to any painting or fresco by Salviati. The subject is also something of a mystery, although the landscape setting has led to the suggestion that the drawing may be intended to represent Adam in the Garden of Eden, looking upwards at God the Father or the angel sent to banish him from Paradise. While Salviati painted a handful of scenes from the Creation and Fall of Man, in the Roman churches of Santa Maria del Popolo and San Salvatore in Lauro, in the first half of the 1550s, this particular figure does not appear in either work. The male nude in the present sheet is, nevertheless, close in type to the figure of Adam in Salviati's paintings of scenes from Genesis in the Chigi Chapel of Santa Maria del Popolo. Furthermore, this kind of twisting figure is found throughout Salviati's painted oeuvre. It may be noted, for example, that a male nude in a very similar pose, albeit with his head lowered, appears in the background to the left of the seated Pope in the fresco of *The History of Pope Paul III Farnese* in the Sala dei Fasti Farnesiani of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, on which Salviati worked in the early 1550s.

The inscription on the verso of this drawing suggests that it was once in the collection of John (Johann), King of Saxony (1801-1873), when it was thought to be a work by Michelangelo. Despite being preceded in the line of succession by his father and two older brothers, John became King of Saxony on the death of his brother Frederick Augustus in 1853.

Exhibitions

New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, *Mannerism and Modernism: The Kasper Collection of Drawings and Photographs*, 2011, no.18.

Literature:

London, Katrin Bellinger, Master Drawings 1985-2005, 2005, pp.28-29, no.11; Jordan Bear et al, Mannerism and Modernism: The Kasper Collection of Drawings and Photographs, exhibition catalogue, New York, 2011, pp.68-69, no.18 (entry by Rhoda Eitel-Porter), and also illustrated on p.24.

Artist description:

Francesco de' Rossi studied for two years with Andrea del Sarto in Florence before settling in Rome in 1531 and entering the service of Cardinal Giovanni Salviati, from whom he took his name. His major work of this Roman period was a Visitation painted in 1538 for the Oratory of San Giovanni Decollato.

He was back in Florence by 1539, working on the decorations to celebrate the marriage of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici to Eleanor of Toledo. A trip to Venice between 1539 and 1541, where he painted two ceiling paintings for the Palazzo Grimani, was followed by a period spent in Rome serving as painter to Pierluigi Farnese. Back in Florence in 1543, he received his most important commission to date; the decoration of the Sala dell'Udienza in the Palazzo Vecchio for Cosimo I. The frescoes of the Sala, the Duke's audience chamber, were painted by Salviati between 1543 and 1545 and established his reputation as a mural painter of the first rank. Its success led to further important commissions, and over the next several years in Rome he was engaged on the decoration of the Palazzo Farnese, the Palazzo della Cancelleria and, between 1549 and 1550, the Cappella della Pietà in the church of Santa Maria dell'Anima. Salviati's last great decorative project was a fresco cycle of scenes from the story of David for the sala grande of the Palazzo Ricci-Sacchetti, commissioned by Cardinal Giovanni Ricci and begun in 1553. Apart from a short stay in Milan in 1554 and a brief trip to France in 1556-1557, the artist remained in Rome for the rest of his career.

Salviati was one of the most gifted draughtsmen of his generation, and was greatly admired as such by early biographers and contemporaries. Giorgio Vasari owned a number of his drawings, while the 16th century playwright and art critic Raffaello Borghini, writing not long after Salviati's death, stated that his 'drawings were held in very great esteem.' Working in a variety of media and employing different techniques, Salviati made drawings not only as preparatory studies for painted works, but also as designs for prints, tapestries, book illustrations, majolica and other decorative arts. He also produced a number of drawn copies after works by other artists – including Raphael, Polidoro da Caravaggio and, in particular, Michelangelo – not only as a young student but throughout his career. Vasari, who knew Salviati well, notes that on his death the artist left his drawings to his pupil Annibale Lippi. Just over three hundred drawings by Salviati are known today, the largest groups of which are in the Uffizi in Florence and the Louvre in Paris.