

Giuseppe CADES (Rome 1750 - Rome 1799)

Sheet of Studies of Reclining Male Nudes

Pen and brown ink, with framing lines in brown ink.

Laid down on an early 19th century mount.

Inscribed School of Michael Angelo and Rugby School Art Museum / e dono Matt: H: Bloxam on the mount.

310 x 218 mm. (12 1/4 x 8 1/2 in.)

Giuseppe Cades maintained a lifelong interest in the works of Michelangelo, and made a handful of freely drawn copies of works by the master. (As the scholar Anthony Clark has noted, 'Cades is known to have been interested in Michelangelo from the mid-sixties and to have done drawings in his style.') An early drawing by the artist, datable to the 1770s, this sheet of studies of male nudes is inspired by similar figures in the work of Michelangelo, in particular his tomb sculptures in the Medici Chapel in the church of San Lorenzo in Florence and the so-called Ignudi on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The present sheet may be likened to a drawing by Cades of various studies after figures in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes, in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, while a stylistic comparison may also be made with a sheet of studies of Achilles(?) and other figures, formerly in the collection of Roberto Franchi in Bologna.

The attribution of this drawing to Cades has recently been confirmed by Maria Teresa Carracciolo, on the basis of a digital image.

Artist description:

Giuseppe Cades enjoyed a highly successful, albeit relatively brief, career as one of the leading history painters and decorators in Rome in the last quarter of the 18th century. The son of a French tailor who had settled in Rome, he was a pupil of Domenico Corvi at the Accademia di San Luca. Cades was a precocious student with a particular talent for draughtsmanship, and some of his earliest drawings are dated 1762 and 1763, when he was barely a teenager. A few years later, at the age of sixteen, he won the first prize in a drawing competition at the Accademia di San Luca with a very large red chalk drawing of Tobit Curing His Father's Blindness. Part of his artistic training was to make drawn copies after Renaissance masters, a practice he continued in his maturity. Expelled from Corvi's studio in 1766 because of his stubborn and independent nature, Cades abandoned formal academic training and gravitated toward the community of French, Scandinavian and German artists then working in Rome - centred around the painters Johan Tobias Sergel and Johann Heinrich (Henry) Fuseli - whose work was to have a strong influence on his own. As the Cades scholar Maria Teresa Caracciolo has noted, 'It was among these northern artists, outside the academic climate and even at odds with it, that Cades as a young man seems to have become aware of the possibilities open to him through challenging the classical rules and reverting to the Mannerist form, but in a daring and modern way, where quality and intensity of expression were concerned.'

During the first decade of his independent career, between 1770 and 1780, much of Cades's work took the form of large, highly finished drawings of classical subjects, which he produced as autonomous works of art for sale to collectors. As Caracciolo has pointed out, 'These drawings demonstrate the new way in which the artist looked at ancient history, conveying it with a theatrical pathos tinged with irony.' However, the artist soon established a successful career as a painter, earning his first official commission in 1774 with an altarpiece for a church in Piedmont, while his first significant work in Rome was an altarpiece of The Ecstasy of Saint Joseph of Cupertino in the church of Santi Apostoli, painted in 1777. Cades's later religious works included numerous altarpieces commissioned for churches in Rome and elsewhere in Italy, particularly in the late 1780s and 1790s; among the most important of these were five large paintings for the monastery of San Francesco in Fabriano, painted between 1787 and 1790. Cades was also in great demand as a decorative history painter, and among his important public commissions was the decoration of the Sala di Musica of the Palazzo Senatorio in 1779, executed in collaboration with the architect Giacomo Quarenghi. He worked in several Roman palaces, notably the Villa Borghese, the Palazzo Altieri and the Palazzo Ruspoli, as well as at the Palazzo Chigi in Ariccia.

Giuseppe Cades was among the most gifted and distinctive artists of the period; as Caracciolo has noted, 'His paintings and drawings, which could vary in style from the baroque to the neoclassical, often appear to be fifty years ahead of their time in their quality of historical revivalism.' He served a term as director of the Accademia del Nudo, the drawing academy in Rome founded in 1754. Among his patrons were the Empress Catherine the Great of Russia, and the royal courts of Spain and Portugal. Although he enjoyed a highly successful career, his membership in the Roman Accademia di San Luca was continually blocked by his former teacher Corvi, and it was not until 1786 that he was admitted into the institution. The last decade of his career was much occupied with his participation in the activities of the Accademia. Cades died, still at the height of his powers, at the relatively young age of forty-nine, and is buried in the basilica of Sant'Andrea della Fratte.

Important groups of drawings by Cades are today in the collections of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon (which owns an album of 126 drawings by the artist that once belonged to the Portuguese painter Domingos António de Sequeira), the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, the Szépmüvészeti Múzeum in Budapest, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.