



Amico ASPERTINI (Bologna c.1475 - Bologna 1552)

A Group of Men Fighting

Pen and brown ink, over an underdrawing in black chalk, on brown prepared paper, made up at the corners.

Inscribed Del cavalier Liberi(?) and, in a different hand, Pietro paulo(?) libro(?) on the verso.

Further inscribed Baccio Bandinelli on the verso.

276 x 427 mm. (10 7/8 x 16 3/4 in.)

Amico Aspertini's numerous drawings after the antique were usually taken not from statues, but from ancient sarcophagi or reliefs, and this previously unknown drawing may have been inspired by, or derived from, such a classical source. Indeed, an interest in this type of subject matter was characteristic of the artist. As one scholar has noted, 'By his very selection of thematic material Amico's vehement spirit asserts its natural affinity for battle scenes or other violent actions, as well as for sensual elements of Bacchic imagery...It is the primitive aspect of human life in antiquity that speaks to Amico more strongly than its rationalism, through raging conflicts with Amazons, centaurs, barbarians and wild animals, or through evocations of untamed satyrs, Pans and marine creatures.'

Marzia Faietti has confirmed the attribution of the present sheet to Aspertini, which may be tentatively dated to about the same time as the British Museum albums; that is, between 1531 and 1537. Many of the drawings in one of the London albums, known as 'London I' and bearing the date 1535, show similar groups of nude men fighting or engaged in such activities as hunting. In style, technique and handling the present sheet may be compared with several other drawings by the artist, such as a Battle of the Centaurs and Satyrs in the Uffizi in Florence, which is likewise on brown prepared paper and of similar dimensions to the present sheet. The nude figure types in this drawing are particularly characteristic of Aspertini and can be seen in such studies as an Adam and Eve formerly in the C. R. Rudolf collection in London and a drawing of Two Nude Figures and Part of a Third in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa.

Literature:

Paris, Nicolas Schwed, Dessins anciens et du XIXème siècle, November 2022, no.1.

Artist description:

'An eccentric man of extravagant brain, whose figures, executed by him throughout all Italy, but particularly in Bologna, where he spent most of his time, are equally eccentric and even mad, if one may

say so.' This was Giorgio Vasari's description of the work of Amico Aspertini, a statement that reflects something of this Bolognese artist's imaginative, often fantastic style. Relatively little is known of his early career or training, however. Born into a family of artists that included his father Giovanni Antonio and elder brother Guido, Aspertini is thought to have completed his apprenticeship in the studio of Francesco Francia. He was in Rome in 1496, accompanying his father, who had been commissioned to paint organ shutters for St. Peter's. Aspertini's Roman sojourn instilled in him a lifelong fascination with the forms of classical antiquity. This is best seen in an early sketchbook of drawings after Roman ruins, known as the Codex Wolfegg and now in Baden-Württemberg, which is datable to 1503 at the latest, as well as in two later sketchbooks or albums of antique motifs in the British Museum, compiled in the 1530s.

In his enthusiastic appreciation of the Antique, Aspertini was also influenced by the Bolognese painter and antiquarian Jacopo Ripanda. Vasari notes that Aspertini travelled extensively around Italy, making drawings after the work of earlier artists, though not always with discrimination ('he went through all Italy drawing and copying every work of painting or relief, whether good or bad, on which account he became something of an adept in invention'). Vasari also describes Aspertini as ambidextrous: 'He used to paint with both hands at the same time, holding in one the brush with the bright colour, and in the other that with the dark.' In Bologna, Aspertini gained the patronage of the Bentivoglio family, for whom he painted frescoes in the Oratorio di Santa Cecilia, working alongside Francia and Lorenzo Costa. His interest in all' antica motifs often found expression in his work, particularly in decorative fresco projects and the monochrome reliefs which decorated the facades of several houses in Bologna, as noted by the Bolognese biographer Cesare Malvasia. Aspertini became one of the leading artists in Bologna, receiving important commissions for paintings in such major churches as San Petronio, San Giacomo Maggiore and San Michele in Bosco. He also decorated several palace facades in the city and was an accomplished portrait painter.