

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Salvator ROSA (Arenella 1615 - Rome 1673)

A Group of Seven Figures, including a Child Beggar

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

121 x 196 mm. (4 3/4 x 7 3/4 in.)

As the Rosa scholar Michael Mahoney has noted, 'From the beginning, the subjects of Rosa's drawings were principally genre figures captured in everyday, non-heroic activities and attitudes.' The present sheet depicts a group of figures, some of them Oriental types, of the sort that would have been used as staffage to enliven the foreground of Rosa's large-scale landscape paintings. Among stylistically and thematically comparable drawings is a study of four men in a landscape, formerly in the Mariette collection and today in the Louvre.

The earliest known owner of this drawing was the Provençal nobleman Jean-Baptiste-Florentin-Gabriel de Meyran, Marquis de Lagoy (1764-1829), who assembled a fine collection of drawings that numbered some three thousand sheets by nearly nine hundred artists. Roughly a third of the collection was made up of Italian drawings, including several works by Raphael and Michelangelo, now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

The present sheet also bears the collector's mark of the Viennese banker Count Moritz von Fries (1777-1826), who is known to have purchased drawings from the Marquis de Lagoy in 1810. Von Fries assembled a substantial collection of around 100,000 prints and drawings, but financial difficulties forced him to sell much of this collection from 1820 onwards. While his extensive collection of prints was sold in a series of five auctions in Amsterdam and Vienna in 1824 and 1828, the drawings were given to one of his creditors, a certain W. Mellish of London, and were soon dispersed. Some 150 of the drawings were acquired by Sir Thomas Lawrence, and others eventually entered the collection of the Albertina in Vienna.

The present sheet was later part of the large and varied collection of Italian, French, Netherlandish and Spanish drawings, numbering around 1,200 sheets, assembled by the dental surgeon C. R. Rudolf (c.1884-1974) in London from the early 1930s until his death in 1975.

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.