

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Salvator ROSA (Arenella 1615 - Rome 1673)**

**Mercury Bearing a Cornucopia: Design for a Frontispiece for Francisco Serra, *Synonymorum apparatus*, 1654**

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

Inscribed (by Rymsdyk) Rymsdyk's [crossed out] Museum at the lower right.

Laid down on an 18th century (Richardson) mount, inscribed Salvator Rosa. at the bottom.

Further inscribed Born Naples 1615, Died [a]t Rome 1[6]73 and He was a Disciple of Don. Falconi. on the bottom of the mount.

Inscribed with the shelfmarks P 120. / Zn. 10. / K. on the reverse of the mount.

201 x 136 mm. (7 7/8 x 5 3/8 in.) [sheet]

This large drawing by Salvator Rosa, depicting Mercury as the Roman god of eloquence, is a design for the frontispiece to Francisco Serra's *Synonymorum apparatus*, a dictionary of Latin synonyms published in Venice in 1654 and reprinted in 1672. Engraved by the French printmaker François de Poilly (1622-1673), the frontispiece is captioned 'Salva Rosa inv.' and 'F. Poilly sculp.'

The *Synonymorum apparatus* bore a dedication to Cardinal Carlo Barberini, and the engraved frontispiece includes three bees – the Barberini family emblem - below the feet of Mercury, although these are not found in this preparatory drawing.

Rosa may have been inspired by a somewhat similar figure of Mercury that appears in the frontispiece to the 17th century German Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher's *Obeliscus Pamphilus*, published in Rome in 1650/3. (Indeed, the artist is known to have met Kircher in Rome.) The imagery of both the present sheet and the related print anticipates that of Rosa's painting of an *Allegory of Fortune* of 1659, in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, in which the female figure also bears a cornucopia. In stylistic terms, the present sheet may be compared with a number of Rosa's preparatory studies for his celebrated *Figurine* series of etchings of soldiers, peasants and other figures, datable to c.1656-1657.

The English portrait painter, author and connoisseur Jonathan Richardson Senior (1667-1745), whose collector's mark is found at the lower right corner of the sheet, owned a remarkable collection of nearly five thousand drawings. Richardson's extensive collection, comprised mainly of Italian works of the 16th and 17th centuries, was assembled over a period of about fifty years, and was organized by school and date. The drawings were further classified with a complex system of shelfmarks, such as those found on the reverse of the mount of this drawing.

The present sheet also bears the inscription applied to drawings belonging to the 18th century Dutch-born painter and engraver Jan van Rymsdyk (1719-1790), who lived and worked in England, mainly as a medical illustrator, from around 1750 until his death. Van Rymsdyk (sometimes Riemsdyk or Rijmsdijk) organized his small but choice collection of drawings – mainly by Italian and Netherlandish artists – on similar lines to that of Richardson, and indeed acquired several drawings formerly owned by him. Rymsdyk purchased his drawings, which included several sheets by Rembrandt, on a modest budget, although, as Frits Lugt has noted, 'He seems to have had an important collection of drawings; the inscription 'Rymsdyk's Museum' ... is often found on beautiful sheets.'

The largest surviving group of drawings from Rymsdyk's collection, amounting to eleven sheets, is today in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, while seven more are in the British Museum in London and five are in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Other drawings with a Rymsdyk provenance are in the collections of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh, the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, The Courtauld Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Nasjonalgaleriet in Oslo, the Louvre and the Fondation Custodia in Paris, the Albertina in Vienna, and elsewhere.

### **Exhibitions**

New York, Pandora Old Masters, An Exhibition of Old Master Drawings & Oil Sketches, 2000, no.11;  
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection, 2009, no.116.

### **Literature:**

Caterina Volpi, *Salvator Rosa (1615-1673) "pittore famoso"*, Rome, 2014, pp.138-139, fig.115.

### **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.