Agostino CARRACCI (Bologna 1557 - Parma 1602)

Studies of the Heads of Two Bearded Men [recto]; Studies of Five Heads [verso]
Pen and brown ink.

Inscribed *Bartolomeo Bandinelli* / *1493 - 1560* on the old backing board.

76 x 178 mm. (3 x 7 in.)

A particular characteristic of Agostino Carracci's oeuvre of drawings are sheets of various studies drawn in pen and ink on a single page. As Rudolf Wittkower has noted of the artist, in his catalogue of the Carracci drawings in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, '*His unflagging efforts [as a draughtsman] are reflected in his sheets of studies, of which there are more at Windsor than in all other collections taken together. In spite of the medley of sketches on these sheets, they often show howtenaciously Agostino worked on the development of one idea, nowthe stance of a figure, nowthe minutiae of the pose of a foot. Although hardly any of these sheets were drawn with an explicitly didactic purpose…Agostino himself abstracted from such studies the fundamentals of draughtsmanship which later found wide circulation in the engravings after his drawings, often republished…No other artist combines on one sheet, as Agostino does, odd jottings and caprices with studies that reveal his insatiable craving to clarify the same problem again and again. The sheets of studies also go to showthe variety of idioms at Agostino's disposal ranging from naive simplifications and idle doodles to precise classicizing outline drawings and subtly graded, almost finicky modulations of form…The artist filled his sheet, usually a fairly small one, with ideas for compositions, sketches of figures, studies of heads, etc., ranging from meticulously drawn details to caricatures, caprices and doodles. The sheets are often covered with an incoherent mass of sketches and studies; the artist turned his sheet in different directions, and later sketches were sometimes drawn over the earlier ones. This was Agostino's characteristic method of 'taking notes', and there must have been hundreds, possibly even thousands, of such drawings…The dating of these drawings is difficult; with a fewexceptions they appear to belong to the 1590's and the majority form a fairly coherent group of about 1595*.'

Some of the heads on the verso of the present sheet can be related to Agostino's particular interest in caricature. While both Annibale and Agostino Carracci produced caricature studies, those of the latter are perhaps easier to identify today. A signed and dated sheet of studies of caricatures by Agostino, formerly in the collection of Paul Oppé and now in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts in Birmingham, provides a basis for attributions of this type of drawing to the elder Carracci. As Wittkower writes of such drawings, '*The assembling on one sheet of many heterogeneous heads derives from the tradition of physiognomical studies coming down from Leonardo. But instead of the latter's scientific excursions into the field of physiognomical freaks, the heads here, partly no more than witty doodles,*

showthe primitive technique and the reduction to bare essentials, on which the comic effect of modern caricature depends.'

The attribution of this drawing to Agostino Carracci is due to Paul Joannides and has also recently been confirmed by Babette Bohn. Among stylistically comparable drawings by Agostino is a sheet of studies of a standing Hercules and two herms, which was on the art market in 1992 and 1999.

Artist description:

Arguably the least well known of the three Carracci, Agostino Carracci has long been overshadowed by his more famous younger brother Annibale and cousin Ludovico. As a painter, Agostino Carracci studied with Prospero Fontana and Bartolomeo Passarotti, and was also trained as an engraver in the studio of Domenico Tibaldi, producing his first engravings in the early 1580's. Agostino worked alongside Annibale and Ludovico on the frescoed friezes of the Palazzo Fava in Bologna, completed in 1584. By now firmly established as a successful printmaker, Agostino also received a handful of commissions for church altarpieces. Following a stay to Venice, he again collaborated with his brother and cousin, this time on the decoration of the Palazzo Magnani in Bologna around 1590. In the mid 1590's he joined Annibale in Rome, where the latter was engaged on the decoration of the galleria of the Palazzo Farnese. While the bulk of the decorative scheme of the Farnese Gallery was the work of Annibale, Agostino was responsible for the design and execution of two prominent frescoes on the long walls of the room; the Cephalus and Aurora and the so-called Galatea. After an argument with his brother, however, Agostino left Rome in 1599 for Parma. There he was commissioned by Duke Ranuccio Farnese to paint frescoes for the Palazzo del Giardino, but died before the project was completed.