Stephen Ongpin Fine Art

Stefano DELLA BELLA (Florence 1610 - Florence 1664)

A Procession of Horsemen and Carriages Crossing a Bridge

Pen and brown ink on vellum.

182 x 360 mm. (7 1/8 x 14 1/8 in.)

The present sheet may be included among a small group of genre scenes, drawn in pen and ink on vellum, dating from the early part of Della Bella's career in Florence. As Stefano Rinaldi has noted, '*Iconographically, Stefano's most notable early compositions do not…belong to the field of landscape but rather to that of genre. In those works, the young artist portrayed the leisure and social life of the Florentine aristocratic beau monde, with a sense of detail and an amused bonhomie almost certainly inspired by Callot.*' Comparable drawings on vellum include an oval *Country Dance* in the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica in Rome and a *Halt of the Hunt* in the Louvre in Paris, as well as A Gentleman and his *Huntsman in a Landscape* in the Uffizi in Florence and a *Battle Scene* in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle. Somewhat more elaborate in design and conception is a drawing on vellum of the forecourt of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, dated 1630, which is also at Windsor Castle.

The first known owner of this drawing was the Swedish physician and surgeon Dr. Einar Perman (1893-1976), who assembled an interesting and varied collection of drawings, with a particular emphasis on landscapes.

Exhibitions

London, Colnaghi, Exhibition of Old Master and English Drawings, 1971, no.20.

Artist description:

A gifted draughtsman and designer, Stefano della Bella was born into a family of artists. Apprenticed to a goldsmith, he later entered the workshop of the painter Giovanni Battista Vanni, and also received training in etching from Remigio Cantagallina. He came to be particularly influenced by the work of Jacques Callot, although it is unlikely that the two artists ever actually met. Della Bella's first prints date to around 1627, and he eventually succeeded Callot as Medici court designer and printmaker, his commissions including etchings of public festivals, tournaments and banquets hosted by the Medici in Florence. Under the patronage of the Medici, Della Bella was sent in 1633 to Rome, where he made drawings after antique and Renaissance masters, landscapes and scenes of everyday life.

In 1639 he accompanied the Medici ambassador to the Parisian court of Louis XIII, and remained in France for ten years. Della Bella established a flourishing career in Paris, publishing numerous prints

and obtaining significant commissions from Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, as well as other members of the court and the aristocracy. Indeed, the majority of his prints date from this fertile Parisian period, and include scenes of life at the French court. After his return to Florence in 1650, Della Bella continued to enjoy Medici patronage. Over the next few years he produced drawings of the gardens of the Medici villa at Pratolino, the port of Livorno and the Villa Medici in Rome, and also became the drawing master to the future Duke, Cosimo III. He was also active as a designer of costumes for the various pageants, masquerades and ballets of the Medici court. After suffering a stroke in 1661, Della Bella appears to have worked very little before his death three years later.

Only a handful of paintings by Della Bella survive to this day, and it is as a graphic artist that he is best known. A hugely talented and prolific printmaker and draughtsman, he produced works of considerable energy and inventiveness, with an oeuvre numbering over a thousand etchings, and many times more drawings and studies. Significant groups of drawings by Della Bella are today in several public collections, with around six hundred sheets in both the Uffizi and the Louvre, and approximately 150 drawings apiece in the Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica in Rome and the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle.