

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



School of RAPHAEL (Urbino 1483 - Rome 1520)

Twenty-Two Putti at Play Among Trees

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, extensively heightened with white, on buff paper.

Laid down on a 17th or 18th century mount.

Inscribed *S fino* in brown ink at the lower centre.

Inscribed *R: U:* in brown ink and, in a different shade of brown ink, *from vol. 2nd no. 24* in the lower margin of the mount.

268 x 387 mm. (11 1/4 x 15 1/4 in.)

Three of the putti in this early 16th century drawing – the seated figure at the lower left centre seen from behind and looking over his shoulder, as well as the pair of sleeping and seated putti at the base of a tree towards the right of the composition – are also found in a drawing of putti at play by Tommaso Vincidor in the Louvre. Similarly, the flying putto at the upper centre of the present sheet recurs in a comparable drawing by Vincidor of frolicking putti in the British Museum. (Of similar technique to the present sheet, both the Louvre and British Museum drawings were first attributed to Vincidor by John Gere and Philip Pouncey in 1962.) The putto climbing a tree at the upper right of the present composition is likewise found, albeit in reverse, in a Vincidor drawing today in the Albertina in Vienna.

The Bolognese artist Tommaso di Andrea Vincidor (1493-1536) spent much of his later career in the Netherlands. He is known to have collaborated with Raphael as early as 1517, working with him in the Logge of the Vatican, and after the master's death settled in Flanders. By 1521 he was in Brussels working on the cartoons for a series of twenty tapestries of *Giouchi dei putti*, or *Children's Games*, commissioned by Pope Leo X and intended for the lower part of the walls of the Sala di Costantino in the Vatican, for which the painted decoration was completed by Giulio Romano and Gianfrancesco Penni.

A stylistic comparison may also be made with a pair of drawings of winged putti at play in the Louvre, both of which are studies for a pair of oval paintings on the vault of the garden loggia of the Palazzo Madama in Rome. (The decoration of the loggia, commissioned from Raphael by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici in 1519, was executed, shortly after the master's death, by artists from his studio between 1520

and 1523.) The two Louvre drawings have been variously attributed by scholars to Giulio Romano (c.1499-1546) or Gianfrancesco Penni (c.1496-c.1528), as well as to Baldassare Peruzzi (1481-1536) and Giovanni da Udine (1487-1561), all of whom worked at the Palazzo Madama after Raphael's death in 1520. Two further drawings of groups of putti, one in the Uffizi in Florence and the other formerly in the Richard Schindler collection in New York, appear to be by the same hand as the Louvre drawings and may likewise be related to the Palazzo Madama decorations.

As Angelamaria Aceto has pointed out, the themes and motifs of the present sheet were popular in tapestry designs of the period, such as the aforementioned set of twenty tapestries designed by Vincidor and woven between 1521 and 1524 for the Sala di Costantino in the Vatican, or Giulio Romano's *Li puttini* or *Giochi di putti* tapestries made for Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga in the 1540s. An interesting comparison may be made with a drawing by Giulio Romano for one such tapestry, depicting *Putti Playing among Fruit Trees and Vine Trellises*, in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

These images of cupids and putti at play find their original literary source and inspiration in a text by the ancient Greek writer Philostratus the Elder, taken from his *Eikones* (or *Imagines*). This series of essays describing a gallery of mythological paintings includes a passage with a detailed description of a painting of the 'Erotes'; a group of winged figures of children or Cupids playing, wrestling, gathering apples and hunting in a forested setting.