Gaetano GANDOLFI (San Matteo della Decima 1734 - Bologna 1802)

An Allegory of Fortune

Black chalk, with stumping, on buff paper.

417 x 302 mm. (16 3/8 x 11 7/8 in.)

In the last few years of his career, Gaetano Gandolfi produced a number of large, highly finished black chalk drawings of religious, classical and mythological subjects. These are all of approximately the same size and are often dated on the verso with dates between the late 1790s to 1802, the year of the artist's death. The present sheet is a fine and characteristic example of this group of late drawings which, although occasionally related to small easel pictures, may well have been intended as independent works in their own right. Indeed, no painting related to this allegorical drawing is known. The subject of the present sheet, which is relatively uncommon in 18th century Italian art, is the blindfolded Fortuna, Roman goddess of luck and fate, spinning the wheel of Fortune (*Rota Fortunae*), symbolic of the capricious nature of destiny. She holds a cornucopia, from which she showers gifts indiscriminately on humankind, and balances on a globe, indicative of the fickleness of worldly success.

The Gandolfi scholar Donatella Biagi Maino has kindly confirmed the authenticity of this drawing and has dated it to the very end of the 18th century. She further likens this finished drawing to one of *Time Unveiling Truth* by Gaetano Gandolfi in the collection of the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky. Among other stylistically comparable drawings by the artist are a *Venus and Adonis*, dated 1799, in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna, and an equally finished drawing of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, signed and dated 1802, in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C..

This drawing was formerly in the collection of paintings and drawings assembled by the noted Swiss painter and illustrator Émile François Chambon (1905-1993), much of which was dispersed after his death. Chambon also collected African and Oceanic art, which he bequeathed to the Musée d'Ethnographie in Geneva.

Artist description:

Aside from trips to Venice in 1760 and Paris and London in 1788, Gaetano Gandolfi seems to have worked almost exclusively in his native Bologna, where he established a prosperous career. As a student at the Accademia Clementina he won two medals for sculpture and four medals for his drawings. A brief period of study in Venice in 1760 was of great importance, and is reflected in the vigorous brushwork and rich colours of his paintings. Gandolfi received numerous commissions for altarpieces for churches throughout Emilia and elsewhere, and also worked extensively as a fresco painter. One of his first important decorative projects was a ceiling fresco of the Four Elements, painted for the Palazzo Odorici in Bologna in collaboration with the quadraturista Serafino Barozzi. This was followed by work in several other Bolognese palaces, including the Palazzo Guidotti, the Palazzo Centurione and the Palazzo Montanari. In 1776 Gandolfi painted a massive canvas of The Marriage at Cana for the refectory of the Lateran convent of San Salvatore, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna. Another prominent commission was for the decoration of the cupola of the church of Santa Maria della Vita, painted between 1776 and 1779 with frescoes of The Virgin in Glory and The Sacrifice of Manoah. In the later years of his career Gandolfi also produced easel pictures of historical and mythological subjects, while a six-month stay in London and Paris in 1787 added a Neoclassical tinge to his oeuvre. Throughout his life he remained actively involved in the affairs of the Accademia Clementina, where he taught a class in life drawing. He was a gifted draughtsman, and his drawings were highly prized by contemporary collectors.