

Francesco FURINI (Florence 1603 - Florence 1646)

Sheet of Studies of Lot and his Daughters [recto]; Further Studies of Lot and his Daughters [verso]

Red chalk.

Inlaid on an old (18th or 19th century) mount, inscribed *CORRÈGE* in pencil and numbered *No4* in black ink.

269 x 201 mm. (10 1/2 x 7 7/8 in.)

As one scholar has recently written, '*An artist deeply embedded in the Florentine tradition, Furini obsessively created preparatory drawings for his works. A vast number of surviving sketches and drawings indicate his meticulous effort to discover ideal arrangements for his figures.*' This double-sided sheet presents various studies for the composition of a painting of the Biblical subject of Lot and his daughters. Furini produced at least two autograph paintings of the subject of *Lot and his Daughters*, each different in composition; one canvas painted for the Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici and today in the Museo del Prado in Madrid, and the other commissioned in 1645 by Duke Jacopo Salviati for the Villa Salviati near Florence and now in the collection of the Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze. (A third version of the subject is mentioned by Filippo Baldinucci as having been ordered from Furini by the Marchese Francesco Ridolfi, but no longer survives, unless it can be identified with a large canvas of *The Wife of Lot Turned into a Pillar of Salt* in the Fondazione Horne in Florence). Although no preparatory drawings by Furini that can be definitively related to either extant version of *Lot and his Daughters* have thus far been identified, the present sheet may contain the artist's initial ideas for the composition of one or both paintings.

The pose of the seated female nude seen from the back and stretching out her arm, at the lower right of the recto of this sheet, is found in Furini's painting of *The Three Graces* in the collection of the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, which is datable to the early 1630s. A similar figure is also seen in what is arguably Furini's masterpiece as an easel painter, the *Hylas and the Nymphs* of c.1632-1633 commissioned by the banker Agnolo Galli and now in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. A preparatory drawing by Furini for the same nude figure is in the Louvre. The same pose is repeated in the reverse orientation at the upper left centre of the present sheet and is also found in a red chalk study of a single female nude in the Uffizi, which has been attributed to both Furini and his pupil Vincenzo Manozzi8. As has been pointed out, '*the repeated depiction of back views of nude women within Furini's paintings suggest the erotic implication of such views.*'

As Catherine Monbeig Goguel has noted, '*Furini shares with all of the artists who trained directly or through their own master at the school of [Ludovico] Cigoli (Cristofano Allori, [Giovanni] Bilivert, [Sigismondo] Coccapani, [Andrea] Commodi) the practice of multiple studies, accumulated on the same sheet. This way of working allows for the rapid juxtaposition of various arrangements of the same subject or subjects of a different nature, mixing the sacred and the mythological, but involving the same compositional canon. The ability to arrange figures dynamically, a gift for layout, the subtlety of corrections and revisions are all characteristics of these study sheets.*' A number of comparable drawings containing red chalk studies of different compositions by Furini are in the Uffizi.

Both sides of the old mount on which the present sheet is inlaid are stamped with an as-yet unidentified collector's mark - a coat of arms with a shield surmounted by a crown, all within a double oval - that has been found on a handful of Italian drawings.

Artist description:

Born into a family of artists, Francesco Furini was a student of his father, the portrait painter Filippo Furini (known as 'Pippo Sciamerone'). A precocious artist, the younger Furini also worked in the Florentine studios of Domenico Passignano, Giovanni Bilivert, Cristofano Allori and, in later years, Matteo Rosselli. By the end of 1619 he was in Rome, where within a few years he was assisting Giovanni da San Giovanni on a fresco of a Chariot of Night for the Palazzo Pallavicino-Rospigliosi and paintings for the church of the Quattro Santi Coronati. Furini's first known autonomous work is an altarpiece of The Crucifixion with Saints Mary Magdalene, Bartholomew and John the Baptist, signed and dated 1623, for a church in the Umbrian town of Todi. The following year he returned to Florence to embark on his independent career, while a brief visit to Venice in 1629 led to a lightening of his palette.

Furini developed a distinctive style, characterized by a vaporous, sfumato handling of paint and a dreamy quality that is readily evident in paintings of such subjects as The Death of Adonis and Cephalus and Aurora. He was particularly admired for his sensual depictions of languid female nudes and, according to the 17th century Florentine biographer Filippo Baldinucci, the artist incurred significant debts by his insistence on employing only the most beautiful, and expensive, female models, as well as his use of such costly pigments as ultramarine. One of Furini's important patrons was Prince Don Lorenzo de' Medici, an avid collector of paintings and drawings at whose Villa La Petraia, outside Florence, the artist worked and often stayed, while other Florentine patrons included Jacopo Salviati, Alessandro del Nero and Agnolo Galli. In 1629 Furini spent a period of six months in Venice, where he had been commissioned to paint a Thetis as a pendant to a Europa by Guido Reni. A few years later he joined the priesthood, moving to a parish church in the Mugello region in northern Tuscany and foreswearing female nudes and profane subjects in favour of religious pictures and altarpieces. By the end of the decade, however, Furini had renounced his vows, and in 1639 was commissioned by the Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici to complete the fresco decoration of the Sala degli Argenti of the Palazzo Pitti, left unfinished by Giovanni da San Giovanni. Unveiled in 1642, the large frescoes in the Sala degli Argenti were to be Furini's crowning achievement as a mural painter. Among the artist's disciples were Vincenzo Manozzi and Simone Pignoni, whose paintings are sometimes confused with

his.

Drawings by Francesco Furini are very rare outside of the large group of some seventy studies in the collection of the Uffizi in Florence, which had been acquired by Filippo Baldinucci for Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici. As has been noted by one modern scholar, 'drawings were for Furini the most demanding and important phase in the creation of a work of art. From letters…we have Furini's own description of his dependence on life drawings from the nude model.' Indeed, perhaps the artist's best-known drawings are studies of female nudes, invariably drawn from the posed model in red chalk, although he also worked occasionally in pen and ink. Outside of the Uffizi, individual drawings by Furini are to be found in the collections of the Harvard University Art Museums in Cambridge (MA), the Museum Kunst Palast in Düsseldorf, the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Ashmolean Museum and Christ Church Picture Gallery in Oxford, the Louvre in Paris, and elsewhere.