

Giovanni Battista NALDINI (Fiesole 1535 - Florence 1591)

A River God with a Lion [recto]; A Standing Sibyl with Two Putti, after Polidoro da Caravaggio [verso]

Red chalk.

The verso in red chalk.

Numbered *3376* in red chalk on the verso.

222 x 310 mm. (8 3/4 x 12 1/4 in.)

This superb drawing represents the river god of the Arno, accompanied by the lion that was the heraldic symbol of Florence. It was common practice in the 16th century to illustrate the Arno as a river god with an attendant lion, as can be seen in several frescoes in the various rooms of the Palazzo Vecchio executed by Vasari and his assistants.

The Naldini scholar Virginia Graziani has dated the present sheet to the middle or late 1560s, after the artist's trip to Rome and at the start of his independent career in Florence. A related and closely comparable red chalk drawing of a river god and lion – essentially the same composition seen from a slightly different angle – appears on the recto of a double-sided drawing by Naldini formerly in the collection of Ian Woodner and with Colnaghi in 1994, which is today in a private collection. As Rick Scorza has noted of the ex-Woodner drawing, the other side of which is a copy in black chalk after a figure from Michelangelo's Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel, in terms equally applicable to the present sheet, '*drawing directly from observation, Naldini produced a faithful but also dynamic copy of Michelangelo's* Last Judgement*. Obviously, in the act of copying, an artist suppresses his own creativity. Turning Naldini's sheet over, however, we see howthe creative side of his personality literally explodes in his representation of the River Arno. This drawing clearly demonstrates [Vincenzo] Borghini's opinion that only by recognizing 'Michelangelo's drawing, relief, grace and liveliness' can one trace 'the strength, the grace, the dexterity, the ease, the gentleness, the sound, the nerve, the spirit of that man*'.

Other stylistically comparable drawings by Naldini include a red chalk copy after Michelangelo's sculpture of Victory, on the verso of a double-sided sheet formerly in the collection of Pierre de Charmant in Geneva and sold at auction in 2002, and a study of a male nude leaning forward in the

Uffizi. Also somewhat comparable is a study of a crouching male nude, likewise in the Uffizi, while a similar study of a lion is found in a red chalk drawing of a lion attacking a horse, after Giambologna, which appeared at auction in New York in 1999.

The drawing of a standing draped figure holding a book and supported by two putti, on the verso of the present sheet, is an early work by Naldini, done during his stay in Rome in 1560-1561, when he made numerous copies of the work of earlier artists. As has kindly been pointed out by Virginia Graziani and Lorenzo D'Amici, the verso drawing is in fact a copy of a figure of a sibyl from a lost monochrome fresco by Polidoro da Caravaggio and Maturino da Firenze painted on the façade of the church of San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome. The now-lost façade decoration of San Pietro in Vincoli, which depicted scenes from the life of Saint Peter accompanied by prophets and sibyls, is known only through a handful of later drawn copies by anonymous artists. Two such copy drawings, one in Biblioteca Comunale in Siena and the other in the Uffizi in Florence, show the same standing sibyl, holding up a book and flanked by two putti. Naldini is known to have produced a number of copies of works by Polidoro and Maturino. Graziani has further likened the verso, in stylistic terms, to other early Roman-period drawings by Naldini, in the British Museum and the Uffizi.

The first recorded owner of this drawing was the 19th century Florentine nobleman and collector Count Raffaello Ettore Lamponi Leopardi, whose collection of paintings and drawings was dispersed at auction in Milan in 1902.

Artist description:

A pupil and assistant of Jacopo Pontormo, Giambattista Naldini inherited his master's drawings after his death, according to the 17th century biographer Filippo Baldinucci, although opposition from Pontormo's heirs meant that he never actually received them. Naldini is recorded in Rome between 1560 and 1561, when he produced a sketchbook containing drawings of views of the city and copies of ancient sculptures, now divided among several museum collections. Soon after his return to Florence he became a founder member of the Accademia del Disegno and was employed as one of the artists assisting Vasari on the decoration of the Salone dei Cinquecento and the Studiolo of Francesco I in the Palazzo Vecchio. In 1571 Naldini took over a commission for an altarpiece for the church of Santa Maria del Carmine, originally given to Maso da San Friano, after the death of the latter, and this was followed some years later by two further paintings in the same church; unfortunately, all three works were destroyed in a fire in 1771. During the 1570s Naldini painted four altarpieces for Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce as part of Vasari's renovation of these two Florentine churches, while in 1578 he completed a frescoed Pietà for the tomb of Michelangelo in Santa Croce, commissioned several years earlier. In the late 1570s he returned to Rome, where he worked with Giovanni Balducci on the fresco decoration of the Altoviti chapel in the church of Santa Trinità dei Monti. The two artists also worked together in the cathedral of Volterra, where in 1590 Naldini painted an altarpiece of The Presentation of the Virgin. Naldini's influence on later generations of Florentine artists was expressed through the work of such pupils as Giovanni Balducci, Domenico Passignano and Francesco Curradi.

In his seminal survey of Florentine drawing, first published in 1903, the art historian Bernard Berenson wrote that 'drawings by Naldini are numerous, and so full of spirit, so pictorial, so lively in execution that an hour spent looking over his albums at the Uffizi must count among the pleasures of the student of Cinquecento Florentine draughtsmanship.' Like many of his Florentine contemporaries, Naldini was a committed draughtsman, whose paintings were developed with figure studies (often using studio assistants, or garzoni) and compositional drawings leading to finished modelli. In his drawings, Naldini was steeped in the Pontormismo of his master, as Baldinucci notes: '[Naldini] disegnò bravamente, ed alquanto in sul gusto del suo gran maestro Jacopo da Pontormo, ma con un tocco più replicato, con matita sputata, e in sull'appiccature fortemente aggravata'. Naldini's drawings also reflect his study of the work of Pontormo's own teacher, Andrea del Sarto. As the scholar Annamaria Petrioli Tofani has further noted of the artist, 'drawing formed the bedrock of Naldini's figurative expression. He seems to have applied himself to this discipline with determination throughout his career, leaving an immense

corpus of drawings…Naldini executed copies of works by the masters as well as drawings from live models, studies of individual figures and details thereof, and projects of entire compositions. This corpus, perhaps to an even greater extent than his pictorial output, has enabled us to chart his stylistic choices and the complex network of influences that combined to produce an expressive vocabulary that is assured, formally correct and often vividly brilliant.'