

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Piero Buonacorsi, PERINO DEL VAGA (Florence 1501 - Rome 1547)

A Female Nude with Putti

Red chalk.

A sketch of a standing putto in red chalk on the verso.

152 x 81 mm. (6 x 3 1/4 in.)

This lively red chalk study by Perino del Vaga, with its swirling contours, suggests the artist's search for a rhythmic composition before defining either narrative or anatomy with precision. The scholar Catherine Monbeig Goguel has aptly described Perino's '*ability to make even the slightest stroke vibrate, whatever the purpose of the drawing or the material used*' as one of his most striking qualities as a draughtsman.

The style and subject of this spirited drawing would suggest that it dates from the final phase of Perino del Vaga's career, when he was working on his last major fresco cycle; the extensive decoration of the papal apartments of the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, executed between June 1545 and his death in October 1547. In particular this drawing may be related to the frescoes illustrating the story of Psyche in

a room in the Castel Sant'Angelo known as the Sala di Psiche, for which the final payment to the artist was made in May 1546. A somewhat comparable figure of a crouching female nude, albeit without the attendant putti seen in the present sheet, appears at the right of a fresco of *Psyche Discovering Cupid and Cupid Fleeing* in the Sala di Psiche.

A late pen and ink drawing by Perino in the British Museum, identified as *Psyche Tormented by the Servants of Venus*, repeats many of the characteristics of the nude in this drawing, and shows the artist working in an equally spontaneous and animated manner. Like the present sheet, the British Museum drawing, which depicts similar crouching female nudes, is only tangentially related to the Sala di Psiche frescoes, but must be of the same approximate date and may have served a similar purpose, when the artist was working out ideas for the fresco decoration of the room.

If the present sheet was not intended to be used for a narrative scene, its narrow upright format, as well as the rough vertical lines drawn at the left and right edges of the sheet, suggest it may perhaps have been used to prepare a figure in a niche flanking a larger narrative composition, such as is found, for example, on the walls of the Sala Paolina of the Castel Sant'Angelo, painted in 1547. Certainly, the composition of twisting, animated figures set within a confined space would be appropriate to such a purpose. While the small study of an isolated putto on the verso of the present sheet was perhaps drawn to finalize the pose of one of the putti on the recto, it may be noted that similar putti also appear throughout the frescoes by Perino and his studio in the Castel Sant'Angelo, as for example in the Sala del Perseo. Indeed, a similarly posed putto is found on both sides of a pen and wash drawing by Perino del Vaga in the British Museum, which can be related to the frieze decorations in the Sala del Perseo.

It has been suggested that Perino may have taken the complicated and sinuous pose of the female nude in this drawing from an antique Hellenistic bronze sculpture of *Venus Binding her Sandal*, known through several later sculpted copies as well as a drawing by the 16th century Dutch artist Maarten van Heemskerck, showing the statuette from three different angles, in a sketchbook of c.1532-1536 now in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin. It may also be noted that the pose of this sensual figure is close to that of a satyress at the edge of a very large engraving of a *Bacchanal* by Marcantonio Raimondi of c.1510-1520, which records a relief sculpture on an ancient Roman sarcophagus that was at that time in the garden of the church of San Marco in Rome. Just over half a metre in length, Marcantonio's erotic engraving is known in two versions, one in the same direction as the sculpted Bacchic relief and the other in reverse. The same satyress was copied or adapted by other artists, notably Giovanni da Udine and Amico Aspertini, and was also reproduced as an etching by the German printmaker Jacob Binck around 1530.

Exhibitions

New York, Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd. at Adam Williams Fine Art Ltd., *Master Drawings and Paintings*, 2009, no.2.

Artist description:

Perino del Vaga's career can be divided into three main periods, each lasting about nine or ten years: his training and early independent career in Rome until the sack of the city in 1527, followed by a period spent in Genoa at the court of Andrea Doria between 1528 and 1537, and a final stay in Rome - working mainly for Pope Paul III - from around 1538 until his death in 1547. He began his career as an assistant to Raphael on the decoration of the Vatican logge in 1518, and with Giovanni da Udine he decorated the Sala dei Pontefici in the Vatican in 1521. In 1522 he was working in Florence, but had returned to Rome by 1524, when he worked on the fresco decoration of the Cappella Pucci in the

church of the Trinità dei Monti, as well as a cycle of frescoes for the Palazzo Baldassini and paintings for San Marcello al Corso and Santa Maria sopra Minerva.

Following the Sack of Rome in 1527 Perino settled in Genoa, where he was employed by Prince Andrea Doria on the extensive decoration of the Palazzo Doria on the outskirts of the city - a project which occupied the artist for several years - and also received several commissions for religious and secular paintings. Although Perino stayed less than ten years in Genoa, his influence on the local school of painters was significant. He is also documented in Pisa in 1534, working in the Duomo. Perino returned in the late 1530's to Rome, where he gained the patronage of the Farnese Pope Paul III. Perino worked extensively on the decoration of the various rooms of the Castel Sant'Angelo and the Sala Regia of the Vatican.

Characterized by considerable inventiveness, range and skill, Perino del Vaga's drawings mark him as one of the most gifted draughtsmen of the 16th century in Italy. Giorgio Vasari rated him very highly ('the best and most finished draughtsman that there was among all who were drawing in Rome'), and noted that he drew constantly. His drawings range from sheets of rapid sketches to elaborate and highly finished figure and composition studies. The majority of Perino's surviving drawings are studies in pen and ink; a medium the artist seems to have preferred by virtue of its fluidity and expressiveness. His drawings often serve as the only record of large-scale damaged or destroyed commissions, and relatively few examples can be related to surviving works. Vasari notes that 'Perino left many designs at his death, some by his hand and some by others...All these designs, with other things, were sold by his heirs; and in our book are many drawings done by him with the pen, which are very beautiful.' Many of Perino's drawings were sold by his daughter after his death to the art dealer Jacopo Strada in 1556. These included copies after other artists and, according to another contemporary writer, drawings of an 'endless number of funerary reliefs, statues, and grotesques copied from classical works.'