

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



16th Century FLORENTINE SCHOOL

Two Studies of a Horse's Head

Brush and brown wash, extensively heightened with white, on blue paper, laid down on an 18th century English mount.

Inscribed *Giorgio Vasari* at the lower right.

196 x 237 mm. (7 3/4 x 9 3/8 in.)

Traditionally attributed to Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), this fine sheet may be grouped among a small group of drawings of horse's heads by Florentine draughtsmen of the Cinquecento. The present sheet may be likened in particular to a drawing by Vasari of the heads of six horses, executed in black chalk on faded blue paper, which was at one time in the collection of the 17th century Florentine art historian and biographer Filippo Baldinucci and is today in the Louvre. Similar Florentine drawings of the heads of horses of the same period include a black chalk study on the verso of a drawing attributed to Giovanni Battista Naldini (1535-1591) in the Louvre, and as part of a sheet of studies attributed to Vasari or Jacopo Zucchi (1541-1590) in the British Museum. Other drawings of horses of this type are in the Uffizi in Florence and the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich.

As Rick Scorza has pointed out, many Florentine artists of the 16th century '*dedicated time and effort to studying horses, notably the members of Vasari's studio in preparation for the battle scenes commissioned for the walls and ceilings of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. The attribution of these drawings has seldom proved straightforward, which surely demonstrates the difficulties presented in particular by such studies. Moreover, many of these drawings have been described in the past as studies from life. Though at first sight this appears to be correct, most of them are, in fact, derived from ancient sculptures. Such a misreading is hardly surprising, because in most instances the artists in question introduced lifelike details into their studies, for example elegant flowing manes and tails. They also occasionally enlivened the horses' facial expressions. By reinterpreting stylized passages typical of classical sculpture more realistically, they literally revived their models... Capturing the frozen moment of a horse in movement presents an enormous artistic challenge; in this respect, the dependence of artists on horse sculptures should not come as a surprise.*'

As Scorza has pointed out, such studies of horse's heads as the present sheet are likely to have been based on antique or Early Renaissance sculptures, such as the monumental bronze head of a horse by Donatello (c.1386-1466), known as the *Protome* or *Carafa Head*, in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples. A fragment of a never-completed equestrian monument intended for the Castel Nuovo in Naples, the Carafa head of a horse was sculpted by Donatello in his studio in Florence between 1456 and 1457. In 1471, a few years after Donatello's death, the bronze head was sent as a diplomatic gift by Lorenzo de' Medici the Magnificent to Diomedes Carafa, advisor to the King of Naples. Vasari is known to have seen Donatello's bronze horse on his visit to Naples in 1544-1545. Like Donatello and Vasari, the author of the present sheet may also have been inspired by an ancient Greek bronze head of a horse, datable to the 3rd century BC, that is recorded in the garden and courtyard of the Palazzo Medici in Florence in the 15th century and is today in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Florence.

Exhibitions

Paris, Didier Imbert Fine Art, *20 ans de Passion: Alain Delon*, 1990, no.6 (as Giorgio Vasari).