

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



18th Century SOUTH GERMAN SCHOOL, PROBABLY J.S. HILDT

A Design for a Rococo Table Fountain with a Triton, a Dolphin and a Sea-Horse

Pen, brush and grey ink and grey wash, over traces of an underdrawing in black chalk.

577 x 402 mm. (22 3/4 x 15 7/8 in.)

Watermark: A crown above a fleur-de-lys within a cartouche above the letters *VDL* (for Van der Ley);
c.1733 [Churchill no.405].

Probably produced by an artist working in Augsburg, this very large drawing appears to be a design for an elaborate table fountain, although whether such an object could realistically have been produced in metalwork is perhaps debatable. As one scholar and curator has described the present sheet, *'In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, aristocratic circles required generous helpings of fantasy and luxury to lend dignity and status to daily living and to special occasions. A mid-eighteenth-century design for a fantastical Rococo vessel spouting liquid (water, wine?) from several apertures and ornamented with marine motifs (a triton, a fish, a sea horse) gives some idea of the richness of fantasy required to satisfy aristocratic appetites. This "table fountain", undoubtedly intended to be fabricated in precious metals, has been associated with southern German designers and craftsmen in Augsburg.'*

As has also been suggested, however, *'This exuberant ornamental drawing may well have been a design for stucco decoration as clearly no such three-dimensional object could have existed. The*

form of the vessel brings to mind the designs of F. X. Haberman, engraved by Ioh. Georg Hertel in Augsburg around 1750. The extravagant form of this fountain is akin to the numerous rocaille designs produced by the Augsburg engraver and sculptor Franz Xaver Habermann (1721-1796) and reproduced in prints by Johann Georg Hertel and Martin Engelbrecht. Trained as a sculptor in wood, Habermann was a gifted designer of carved furniture, altars and pulpits, while his drawings were also translated into metalwork and ornament. As Valerie Hunter has observed, *'Augsburg was the most important market for gold and silver in Germany in the eighteenth century. The influence of numerous pattern books loosely reflecting French taste were widely copied and sold here, resulting in a rapid spread of new designs. Habermann published over 500 prints covering a wide range of designs for decorative objects. He was also influential through his position as professor of drawing at the newly-founded School of Design in Augsburg, a post he held from 1781 until his death.'*

Many of Habermann's designs were engraved and published in works such as *Ornaments rocailles: motifs divers, éléments, entourages, cartouches, ornements pour angles de plafonds, dans le style rocaille, inventés and dessinés par François Xavier Habermann*, which appeared in c.1750. As Hunter also points out, *'These prints show a boisterous Rococo design that could have been successfully adapted to suit a number of materials.'*

We are grateful to Peter Fuhring for recently identifying the present sheet as a work by the little-known 18th century German ornamental printmaker and designer J. S. Hildt, who was active in Augsburg between 1740 and 1760. A group of eight drawings by the artist, some of which are dated 1742 or 1743, are in the collection of the Kunstbibliothek in Berlin. Some of Hildt's designs for ewers and vases were engraved by Jeremias Wachsmuth for the publisher Martin Engelbrecht in the second half of the 1750s, and a number of anonymous drawings that are based on Hildt's designs are known, such as two in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. As has been noted by one recent scholar, *'Hildt's vases and ewers, almost entirely made up of shell-like forms, are remarkably early and original Rococo inventions.'*

Exhibitions

New York, Armin B. Allen, Inc. and Hobhouse Ltd., *An Exhibition of Ornamental Drawings 1520-1920*, 1986, no.58; Stanford, Stanford University, Cantor Center for Visual Arts, *Classic Taste: Drawings and Decorative Arts from the Collection of Horace Brock*, 2000; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, *Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection*, 2009, no.88.

Literature:

New York, Armin B. Allen, Inc. and Hobhouse Ltd., *An Exhibition of Ornamental Drawings 1520-1920*, exhibition catalogue, 1986, unpaginated, no.58, illustrated as frontispiece; Gail S. Davidson, 'Ornament of Bizarre Imagination. Rococo Prints and Drawings from Cooper-Hewitt's Léon Decloux Collection', in Sarah D. Coffin et al, *Rococo: The Continuing Curve, 1730-2008*, exhibition catalogue, New York, 2008, p.70, fig.44 (as Circle of Franz Xaver Habermann, c.1750); Clifford S. Ackley, 'The Intuitive Eye: Drawings and Paintings from the Collection of Horace Wood Brock', in Horace Wood Brock, Martin P. Levy and Clifford S. Ackley, *Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection*, exhibition catalogue, Boston, 2009, p.92, no.88, illustrated p.93.