

# COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

## MASTER DRAWINGS

Jacob Jordaens  
(Antwerp 1593 – 1678)

### *A Rostrum of Musicians in a Loggia*

Watercolour, gouache, red chalk, pen and brown ink and brown wash. Laid down.  
38.5 x 28.2 cm. (15 ¼ x 11 in.)

#### **Provenance**

Mrs. Lasserre (Dax, France; 1904);  
Maurice Delacre (Ghent, 1862-1938);  
Vente Geoffrey & Bequet, Saintes, 20 April 2008;  
Where acquired by Jean Luc Baroni;  
Private Collection, UK.

Literature: R.A.d'Hulst, *Jordaens Drawings*, Brussels 1974, I: no. A 199; ill. III: fig.214.

Exhibited:

*Tentoonstelling Jacob Jordaens* (Antwerp, Musée de Beaux-Arts, 1905), no. 126.



This beautiful and highly important sheet by Jacob Jordaens belongs to a series of drawings intended as preliminary studies for the tapestry series *Scenes from Country Life*, interpreted by scholarship as Jordaens' ultimate harnessing of the watercolour medium, and placed amongst his best graphic work.<sup>1</sup>

Employing an almost vertiginous *sottainsù* shortening, the Flemish artist depicts a company of performing musicians. From its warm colours to its lively characters, everything about this drawing beams festivity. We see a monkey and a dog (symbols of lasciviousness and affection, respectively) playing on the ledge below the balcony, with parrots, traditionally a symbol of marital purity and love, watching over the scene. By throwing a tapestry over the balustrade of the loggia, Jordaens creates a playful meta-material depiction in the planned final work—a tapestry within a tapestry. This device is repeated in *Gentleman Playing the Lute and a Lady with a Feather*, a tapestry woven by Conrad van der Bruggen around 1635 and belonging to the *Country Life* series (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup>

A further comparative study for Jordaens' motif for depicting musical companies set within balustrades is *A Maid Carrying a Dish, in a Loggia* in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon (Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> Not as highly finished as the present sheet, and generally sketchier in execution, the Besançon drawing shares similarities in the inclusion of the parrot and in the compositional device of the tapestry draped over the balcony. The architectonics, however, are not as distorted as in the present sheet, suggesting that the present work was designed to be viewed from a certain height. In this exploration of powerful spatial illusionism and ornamental richness, we can see Jordaens looking towards the work Paolo Veronese – especially his frescoes at Villa Barbaro (Fig.3).



Fig. 1. Conrad van der Bruggen, after a design by Jacob Jordaens, *Gentleman Playing the Lute and a Lady with a Feather*. Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Fig. 2. Jacob Jordaens, *A Maid Carrying a Dish, in a Loggia*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon.

<sup>1</sup> Kristi Nelson, "Jordaens' Drawings for Tapestry", *Master Drawings* 23/24, no. 2 (1985/1986): 217.

<sup>2</sup> R.A. d'Hulst, *Jordaens Drawings*, Brussels, 1974, 4 vols. I: 302-3, cat. no. A219. III. III: no. 234.

<sup>3</sup> D'Hulst 1974, I:262-63, cat. no. A175. III III:185-86.





Fig. 3. Paolo Caliari, called Veronese, detail of fresco decorations at Villa Barbaro a Maser.

As no painted *modelli* survive for the *Country Life* tapestry designs and as the preparatory sketches are so complete, it is probable the cartoons were executed directly from the drawings themselves. Some sketches were probably made for the tapestry series but rejected, whilst others were intended as independent compositions. Comprising rustic subjects and originally designed to be hung in pairs, each scene was intentionally unified by the repetition of decorative emblems so that, when viewed together, the tapestries would personify the fertility and productivity of country life. The aforementioned architectonic border acts as a large stage through which one can view the central motif.

Watercolour and decorative arts design were of central importance throughout Jordaens' career: just after finishing an apprenticeship with the painter Adam van Noort, in 1615 Jordaens enrolled in the register of the St Luke's Guild as a *waterschilder*, or painter in watercolour. In 1634, he worked under the guidance of Rubens on the temporary decorations to celebrate the arrival of Cardinal Infante Ferdinand to Antwerp, and again in 1636 decorating the hunting lodge of Philip IV of Spain.

After the death of Rubens in 1640, Jordaens became the leading painter in Antwerp, producing numerous paintings for public, private, and ecclesiastical patrons, as well as many designs for tapestries. Though R.-A. d'Hulst originally dated the designs to around 1645, it is now thought they belong to the mid 1630s, when Jordaens moved away from mythological and religious scenes and produced a number of allegory and genre subjects. This is confirmed by the presence of the architectural borders in Jordaens' tapestries, which derive from those of Rubens' series for the *Victory of the Eucharist over Idolatry* and the *Life of Achilles* (dating from the mid-1620s and mid-1630s, respectively, Figs 4,5).

Unlike Rubens, who preferred to work out his first ideas for tapestry in oil on panel, Jordaens was more traditional in his approach, given his origins as a watercolour painter. At the time of his training, paintings in watercolour on canvas or paper were often used as a cheaper form of wall covering instead of tapestries and Spanish gilded leather (which often costed more than the finest paintings). It seems likely that Jordaens may have executed works of this type, though none survive today. Jordaens' method for working out the

genesis of a tapestry design was by executing preparatory drawings, generally sketched in black chalk or pen and brown ink. By the mid-1630s, the artist had also begun to prepare more elaborate *modelli*, incorporating red, black and white chalk, with watercolour and bodycolour. These highly finished drawings could then be submitted to patrons for approval. It is also likely that some of these drawings were created as independent works of art.



Left: Fig. 4, Peter Paul Rubens, modello for *The Victory of the Eucharist over Idolatry*, about 1622-25, , oil on panel, Museo del Prado.

Right: Fig. 5, Peter Paul Rubens, modello for *Achilles Recognized Among the Daughters of Lycomedes* (from the *Life of Achilles* series). ca. 1630-1635, Museo del Prado.