

## GIOVANNI AMBROGIO FIGINO

(Milan 1553 - 1608)

### *Study after Farnese Hercules*

Black chalk on blue-grey prepared paper  
33 x 23 cm

#### **Provenance:**

Tajan, Drouot Paris, 23 November 2001, lot 11 (as *Giovanni Battista di Matteo Naldini*);  
Private collection, Paris.



We are grateful to Mrs. Elizabeth Pilliod, Ph.D. The University of Michigan, for suggesting, on basis of photographs, the authorship of this drawing to Giovanni Ambrogio Figino.

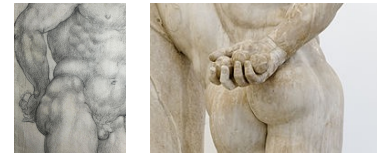
The Lombard artist Ambrogio Figino, student of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, was a prolific and well known draughtsman. The Eternal City where Michelangelo's art sits, in addition to his studies of ancient art, is decisive for his training, as is evident in his paintings. This prolific designer from Milan explored the human body by observing the living model as well as the great masters of the Renaissance (Michelangelo, Raphael) or Antiquity. If he often multiplied the sketches on the same page, in an almost obsessive way, he could also devote himself meticulously to the study of a figure, thus favoring the technique of black chalk. He thus took immense care in drawing this nude whose classical ideal of form and purity of modeling, executed after the ancient sculpture of *Farnese Hercules*, lead us to believe that it was not preparatory to a painting.

The present study is after the *Farnese Hercules*, an ancient statue of Hercules, probably an enlarged copy made in the early third century AD and signed by Glykon, who is otherwise unknown; the name is Greek but he may have worked in Rome. Like many other Ancient Roman sculptures it is a copy or version of a much older Greek original that was well known, in this case a bronze by Lysippos. The



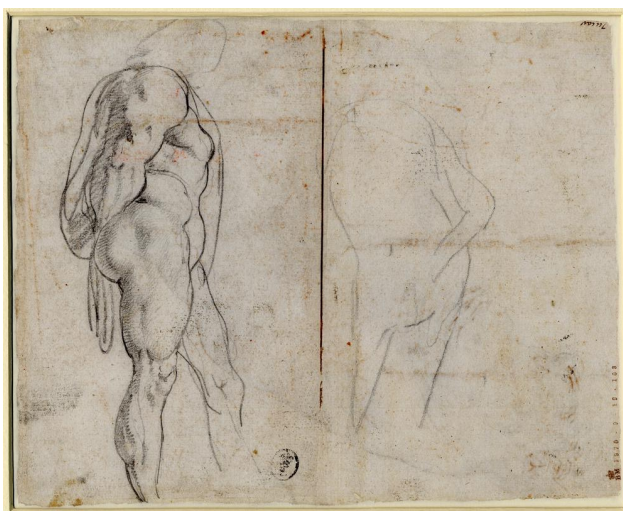
*Farnese Hercules* is a massive marble statue, following a lost original that was cast in bronze through a method called lost wax casting. It depicts a muscular, yet weary, Hercules leaning on his club, which has the skin of the Nemean lion draped over it. In myths about Heracles, killing the lion was his first task. He has just performed one of the last of The Twelve Labours, which is suggested by the apples of the Hesperides he holds behind his back.

Hercules is depicted in a moment of rest, leaning on his gnarled club, which is draped in the skin of the Nemean lion. Our study depicts Hercules holding the golden apples stolen from the Hesperides, hiding them behind his back, in his right hand.



The rediscovered statue quickly made its way into the collection of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, grandson of Pope Paul III. Alessandro Farnese was well placed to form one of the greatest collections of classical sculpture that had been assembled since antiquity. It stood for generations in its own room at Palazzo Farnese, Rome, where the statue was surrounded by frescoed depictions of the hero's mythical feats that were created by Annibale Carracci and his studio, executed in the 1590s. The Farnese statue was moved to Naples in 1787 with most of the Farnese Collection and is now displayed in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale there.

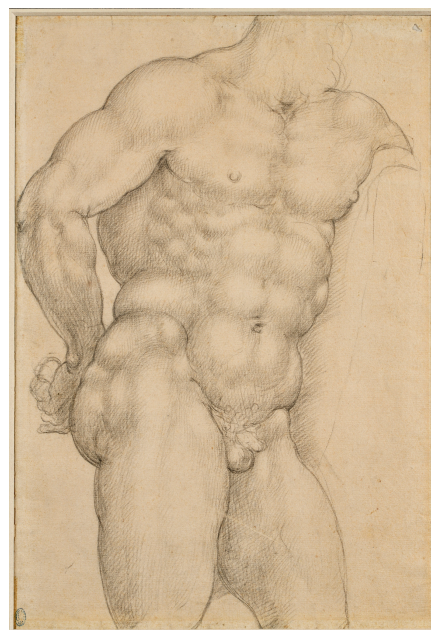
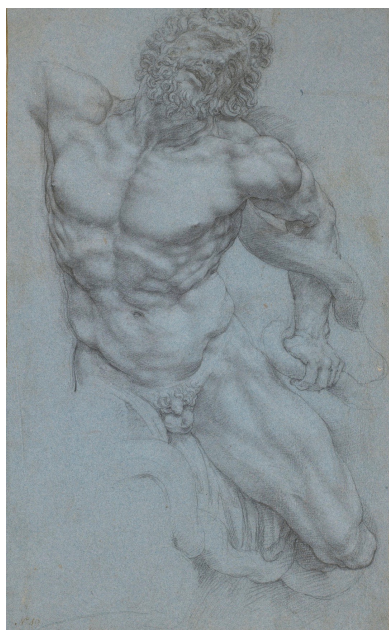
Many engravings and woodcuts spread the fame of the *Farnese's Hercules*. By 1562 the find was already included in the set of engravings for *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae* ("Mirror of Rome's Magnificence") and connoisseurs, artists, and tourists gaped at the original, which stood in the courtyard of the Palazzo Farnese, protected under the arcade. In 1590–91, during his trip to Rome, Hendrik Goltzius sketched the statue in the palazzo courtyard. Later (in 1591) Goltzius recorded the less-common rear view, in a bravura engraving, which emphasizes the already exaggerated muscular form with swelling and tapering lines that flow over the contours. The young Rubens made quick sketches of the planes and massing of the statue of Hercules: *Two sketches of the Farnese Hercules in profile to right* (verso), black chalk, 22,1 x 26,8 cm, Registration number 1970,0919.103, British Museum London. The verso depicts two rapidly outlined studies of the Farnese Hercules, that Rubens would subsequently develop into a more finished red chalk drawing also in the British Museum (see below).



Rubens has based this figure of Hercules on his studies of the famous antique statue found in Rome in 1540 and known as the Farnese Hercules: *Hercules; standing turned to right, looking over his right shoulder, his left arm on his hip and his right arm on a club, two putti holding a laurel wreath above his head*, red chalk with some black chalk, 47,4 x 32 cm, Registration number 1900,0824.138, British Museum London. Rubens had opportunity to study the Farnese Hercules while in Rome at the start of the seventeenth century.

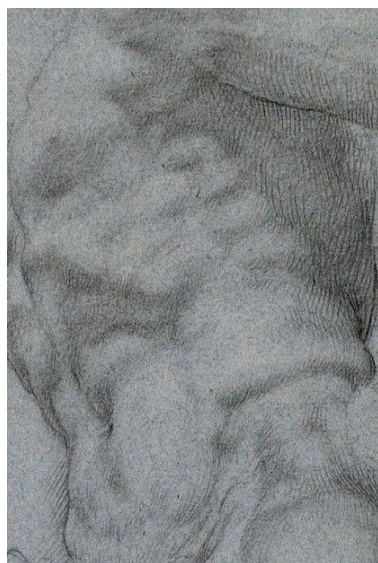


It is not known exactly when Figino went to Rome. Other studies after antiques, and also after works of Michelangelo and Raphael, have survived, as testimony to the interests and serious training of the young artist in Rome. Figino made several drawings after the Laocoön; the most complete, in which he studied almost the entire sculpture, are at Windsor Castle: *The Priest Laocoon*, circa 1587-8, black chalk on blue paper, 42,0 x 25,3 cm, RCIN 906920, Provenance: bequeathed by the artist to Ercole Bianchi in 1608; in the collection of Consul Joseph Smith by 1755; purchased by George III in 1762. Recorded in « *Inventory A* », p. 117: « 110 Mostly sketches after the Old Masters Raphael, Michel Angelo &c ».



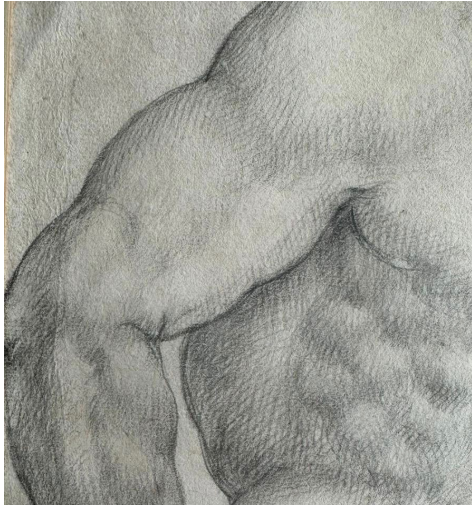
This is the largest drawing in the Windsor album - filling the whole sheet. Figino shows almost the full figure of Laocöon from the front, arranged diagonally – creating the impression that the figure is about to burst the borders of the sheet.

*The Priest Laocöon*, circa 1587-8, black chalk on blue paper, 41,2 x 24,5 cm, RCIN 906921



We find in the drawing of the Windsor collection as in our drawing these flexible hatchings which cross slightly. They are characteristic of Figino's draughtsmanship in his sheets inspired by ancient sculptures.





Classical sculpture clearly had a strong impact on Figino before inspiring these Northern artists. The sculpture was admired from the start for its exaggerated musculature. Furthermore, stylistic similarities can be noted between this sheet and other male nude studies as in the *Studies of an antique statue of Victory and the back of a nude torso*, c.1587-8, red chalk, RCIN 906914, Royal Collection Trust, Windsor.





The female figure of Victory is depicted striding forward and raising her right arm. Much larger in proportion is the drawing of a male torso seen from behind that is juxtaposed to her. The emphasis in these two drawings is different: the drapery of the female nude was clearly the focus of this exercise, whereas the modelling of the back musculature is the main focus of the male nude. By juxtaposing a female and male figure Figino suggests a comparative purpose as in RCIN 906905.

It is likely that Figino was studying these unidentified sculptures during his trip to Rome in 1587–8.

This way of modeling the body in the light, the firm volumes being very delicately indicated by the subtle play of parallel and cross hatching with black chalk in our drawing and with red chalk in the Windsor sheet, are characteristic of Figino.

Driven by sculptural vigor and, at the same time, by the sharp refinement of clear and precise black chalk handling, Figino reaches the heights of the most classical mannerist art. The general treatment of the chiaroscuro as the treatment of the torso musculature are especially characteristic here and can be seen on many sheets of the Windsor Royal.

Last examples after Michelangelo, in the Royal Collection Trust, *A right arm*, circa 1587-8, black chalk on blue paper heightened with white chalk, 27,2 x 19,0 cm, RCIN 9068, Windsor collection.

This drawing has been thought to copy the right arm of St Blaise above the figure of St Catherine, holding a pair of iron combs in the fresco. The contour of the arm has been corrected several times, indicating the final outline in thickly applied black chalk. The musculature is heightened with white chalk, whereas the fingers and the shading of the areas around the arm were just indicated by quick strong lines.



The combination of smooth modelling and heavily muscled proportions emphasizes the sculptural quality of the figure in Michelangelo's fresco and suggest that Figino drew directly from the original rather than copying from reproductive prints. The structures of the arm are extremely faithful to the original that it is likely that he executed this study in situ.

*The study of a right arm and a part of a breast after Minos in Michelangelo's Last Judgement*, circa 1587-8, black chalk on blue paper, heightened with white chalk, 28,0 x 20,5 cm, RCIN 906897, Windsor collection, inscribed in pen at lower left: « No26 » and lower right « Figino », fits well with the handling in our drawing.



In those both sheets, Figino focussed on capturing the muscular structures. In the drawing of the Royal Collection, the rest of the chest and the snake that curls around his body right under his breast have only been roughly outlined.

The strong contours of Hercules' anatomy is also found in the other nude studies after Michelangelo and antiques. There are in fact undeniable stylistic similarities with other drawings that are clearly by Figino and leave no doubt about the authorship of this drawing. Black chalk with various densities is characteristic of Figino's highly mannered drawing style.

Others, closer to the present drawing in that they are also separate studies of the heads, are in the album of drawings by Figino in the Gallerie dell' Accademia, Venice (see for instance below).



An important representative of the Lombard school of painting, Figino had been taught by Gian Paolo Lomazzo. Best known as a draftsman, he was also a skilled portrait painter. Among the few portraits that can be traced back to Figino, the *portrait of Field Marshal Lucio Foppa* is one of the best known.

Our drawing probably dates from Figino's roman period, circa 1587-1588. The modeling of the Farnese Hercules is soft and synthetic. This study vividly proves that he was sensitive to Michelangelo's lesson. It further reveals his talent of a skillful draughtsman.

