

**Workshop of MICHELANGELO, possibly PIERO D'ARGENTA**

(Argenta active circa 1497-1530)

***Studies of Michelangelo's Galli statue, from the front and behind back, and partial views***  
(recto)

**Study after a lost drawing by Michelangelo for the *Ignudo* above the *Eritrean Sibyl* in the Sistine Chapel** (verso)

Circa 1510-1520

Pen and brown ink

19,1 x 13 cm

**Provenance:**

Christie's, Paris, 21 March 2002, lot 122A (as « Florentine school, early 16th century »);

Private collection, France

**Bibliography:**

Paul Joannides 2003, pp. 579-80, fig. 34 and 37 (as an « *unidentified collaborator of Michelangelo* », 1510-20);

Nicholas Turner, *in And there was light*, 2010, pp. 218-219

Carmen C. Bambach, *Michelangelo Divine Draftsman & Designer*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, reproduced fig. 118.



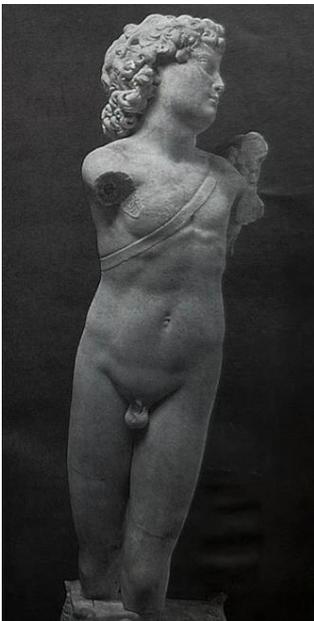
We are grateful to Paul Joannides for suggesting, on basis of photographs, the attribution to Piero d'Argenta on grounds of his proximity to the master.

The main study and the three lateral sketches on the recto of this sheet depict four different shots of a marble statue (now without arms and legs) which in 1996 was attributed to the young Michelangelo by Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt (Weil-Garris Brandt 1996; 1997): Michelangelo Buonarroti (Caprese 1475-1564 Rome), *Cupid*, circa 1490, marble, H. 37 cm, accession number L.2009.40, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The fragmentary sculpture had been identified a few years earlier by James David Draper (1992, pp. 171-172), curator of the Metropolitan's sculpture department, above a fountain in the foyer of the Payne Whitney residence, at 972 Fifth Avenue in New York.

Like Cupid, he has a quiver but there is no sign he ever had Cupid's traditional wings. The statue is first recorded in 1556 at the house of Jacopo Galli in Rome, where the work is identified as Apollo. Galli is known, however, to have owned a Cupid sculpted by the young Michelangelo. So it is significant that by 1650, when the figure occupied a garden niche at the Villa Borghese, Rome, he had been retitled Cupid. By 1902 the sculpture was gravely damaged. Nonetheless the dealer Stefano Bardini recognized it as Michelangelo's work when he offered it at auction in London, but this attribution was soon forgotten or discounted. It was later purchased by the architect Stanford White and installed on a fountain at the Fifth Avenue mansion of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, today the office of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York, where only recently it was recognized as Michelangelo's lost Cupid. In November 2009, the statue was loaned by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the French Republic, for a period of ten years, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The attribution to the young Michelangelo, fifteen or sixteen years old, is accepted by most scholars, including Draper, while others have reservations (after having depicted as the central work of the *Giovinezza di Michelangelo* exhibition in Palazzo Vecchio in Florence in 1999, was subsequently presented at the Louvre as a late sixteenth-century work).



Paul Joannides rediscovered in 2003 this early drawing that depicts the Galli statue from the front and behind, as well as to other partial views. The present sheet restores a complete picture of today's fragment sculpture exactly as it was described in the Galli residence in Rome by Plisse Aldrovandi in 1556: « a full-length nude Apollo with his quiver and arrows to one side, and a vase at his feet ». This sheet provides further proof of the attribution of the statue to Michelangelo, since, as first observed by Paul Joannides, on the verso is a copy of another subject by Michelangelo, the *Ignudo* which appears immediately above. the *Sibyl of Eritrea* frescoed in the Sistine Chapel.

Paul Joannides points out that while the recto is a copy after a model for the statue (a 3D form around which the draughtsman moved), the verso is a copy of a lost pen drawing by Michelangelo (a flat image) which the draughtsman tried to reproduce; so, one would expect the styles to be different; as Biagio Pupini did copying the same lost drawing.

Considering the differences with the painted version and the existence of a further copy in pen and ink of the same subject present on the reverse of a double-sided sheet attributed to Pupini Biagio in the Louvre in Paris (INV 748 verso, Copy after a lost drawing by Michelangelo for the *Ignudo above the Erythraean Sibyl* and for a *figure in the Sacrifice of Noah*, circa 1520 (?), pen and brown ink on yellow-prepared paper, 21,2 x 16,8 cm, Collections : Jabach, Everhard - Cabinet du Roi), Paul Joannides (2003) concluded that in both cases the prototype was a preparatory pen study by Michelangelo, now lost.



Although he has not advanced any specific attribution for this sheet in 2003, Paul Joannides has speculated that the author was someone from Michelangelo's close circle, perhaps an assistant, who would have had easy access to his works, both sculptural (*Cupid* for the recto) and graphic (the *Ignudo* for the verso), some years before 1520.

Even prior to the drawing's rediscovery, the mutilated figure could have been attributed securely to Michelangelo and identified as the Galli statue, because, its formal similarities with youthful works by the sculptor are beyond persuasive.

According to Paul Joannides, showing the Cupid studied assiduously from different angles, they throw light on Michelangelo's aims in his figure, in which scholars have recognized a debt to Bertoldo's bronze *Orpheus*. In 1497, at the time the Cupid was carved, Michelangelo's free-standing marble figures aspired to the lightness and structural freedom of bronze. The unusually elongated proportions of the Cupid further reveal Michelangelo's interest in an unexpected aspect of the Antique: very similar figure types are found in certain classes of Hellenistic statuettes both in bronze and terra-cotta.

In Nicholas Turner's opinion, the style of the drawings on both sides reveals the hand of the most famous engraver of the Italian Renaissance, Marcantonio Raimondi, active from 1510-1511 in Rome, but for Paul Joannides, the author of this drawing can only be a close collaborator, which Raimondi was not. Piero d'Argenta, first student then assistant of the Master, fulfills this condition.

Born in Argenta (near Ferrara), Piero probably trained in Ferrara or Bologna, where he met Michelangelo (1494-1495) whose pupil he became (1498). He followed his master to Rome (1496-1501, 1508). He had access to Michelangelo's sculpted and graphic works, as well as the right to follow him to his patron's house. He may have seen the statue, which at the time was thought to be kept in the collection of the heirs of Michelangelo's patron, the wealthy banker Jacopo Galli (who died in 1505).

Piero d'Argenta's corpus is still in its infancy and is the fruit of the work of Paul Joannides.

The Studies of Michelangelo's Galli statue show a comparable stylistic *maniere* with the *Three standing male nudes* after Michelangelo attributed to Piero d'Argenta by Paul Joannides: pen and brown ink, 23 x 32,3 cm, Collections : Baldinucci, Filippo, INV 846, Louvre Museum Paris. H. Thode<sup>1</sup> who confirmed the ancient attribution of the sheet to Michelangelo, linked it to the artist's wax cast, kept in Florence (Casa Buonarroti, n° 521), undoubtedly a « *modello* » for a sculpted work: the marble David? The lost bronze David? Where maybe a Hercules? But Paul Joannides<sup>2</sup> recognized the hand of a young artist gravitating around Michelangelo, undoubtedly his associate Piero d'Argenta.



<sup>1</sup> H. Thode, « *Michelangelo kritische untersuchungen über seine werke* », vol. I, Berlin, 1908, p. 80 and vol. III, Berlin, 1913, no. 506

<sup>2</sup> Paul Joannides, « *Louvre Museum, Musée d'Orsay, Department of Graphic Arts, General Inventory of Italian Drawings, VI: Michelangelo, student and copyists* », Paris, 2003, n° 45

Additional supporting evidence in favor of Piero d'Argenta's authorship of the *Studies of Michelangelo's Galli statue* is found in comparison with the double-sided drawing depicting a *Satyr tied to a tree* after the figure of Haman by Michelangelo (Recto) and a *Study of a nude woman, back view* (Verso) attributed to Piero d'Argenta by Paul Joannides<sup>3</sup>: pen and brown ink on beige paper, 37,8 x 20,9 cm, circa 1500, Collections : Montarcy, Laurent Texier de - Cabinet du Roi, INV 701, Louvre Museum Paris.



<sup>3</sup> P. Joannides, 'Musée du Louvre, Musée d'Orsay, Département des Arts graphiques, Inventaire général des dessins italiens', VI : 'Michel-Ange, élèves et copistes', Paris 2003, pp. 189-190, n° 46



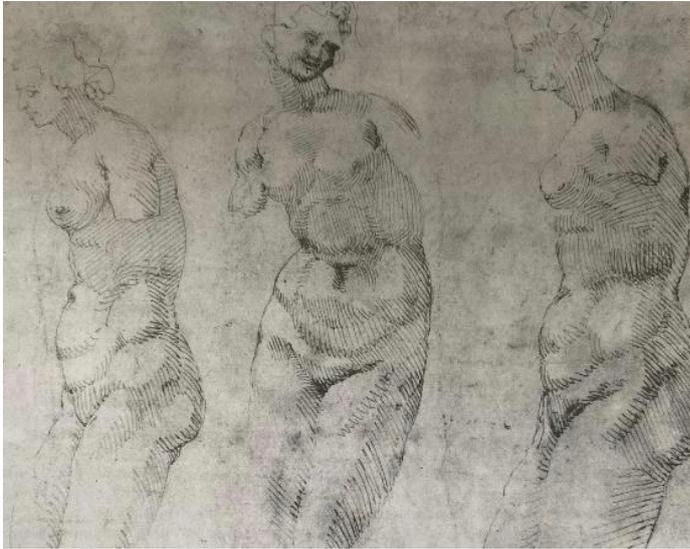
According to Paul Joannides, the figure of the woman (Verso) is based on a lost drawing by the master: we find a similar body in a drawing in Chantilly (Musée Condé, inv. 35 [29]) and in a study on the back of a sheet in Rennes (Museum of Fine Arts, inv. 794-I-2913).

The Verso fits with the *Hercules and the Nemean Lion* attributed to Piero d'Argenta by Paul Joannides<sup>4</sup>: pen and brown ink, black chalk on beige paper, 31,6 x 22,6 cm, paraphs of Cl. Delamotte (L. 478) and J.-R. de Cotte (L. 1963), Collection: Cabinet du Roi - INV 687 - Louvre Museum Paris.

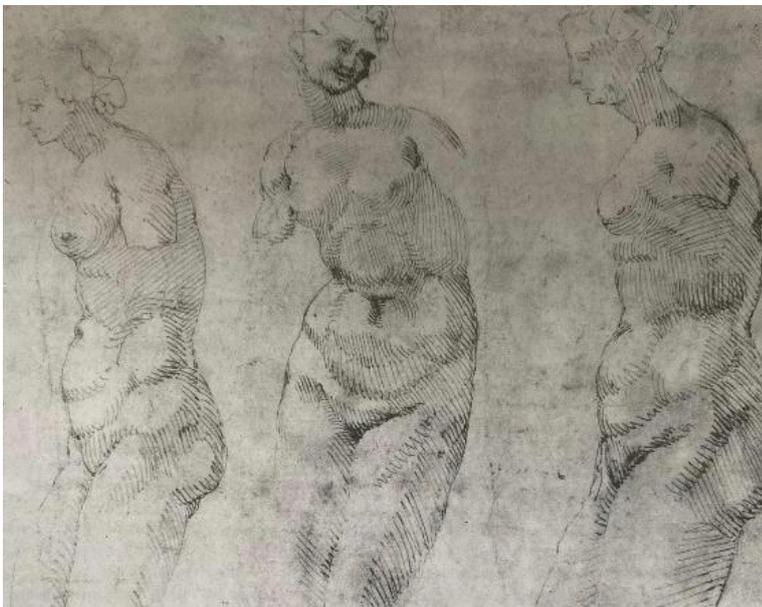


<sup>4</sup> P. Joannides, 'Musée du Louvre, Musée d'Orsay, Département des Arts graphiques, Inventaire général des dessins italiens', VI : 'Michel-Ange, élèves et copistes', Paris 2003, n° 44

Last example, a double-sided drawing in the Ashmolean Museum: *Three Studies of an Antique Statue* (Recto) attributed to Piero d'Argenta, pen and ink; and *A Male Nude* (Verso) attributed to an unidentified Late Sixteenth-Century Florentine artist, red chalk, 20,1 x 24 cm, 1846.133; R.3; PII 412<sup>5</sup>



This sheet is made up of two sheets of laid paper laminated together. The recto depicting *Three Studies of an Antique Statue* shows close similarities with the *partial views* on our recto, especially in the hatching.



In both drawings, hatching conforms to that of a right-handed artist. The additional studies on the recto show the hand of its author, Piero's own style more than the main study of Cupid where the assistant copies his master. They are crucial to our understanding of our drawing.

This last example belongs to the group of pen drawings (see above) made by an artist working close to Michelangelo, which must date from late in the fifteenth or early in the sixteenth century: this artist was Michelangelo's friend and assistant Piero d'Argenta who also seems to be the most

<sup>5</sup> Paul Joannides, *The Drawings of Michelangelo and his Followers in the Ashmolean Museum*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 281-285

likely candidate for the authorship of the present recto. He copied precisely the master's graphic style, and copied drawings from phases of Michelangelo's work prior to that of the New Sacristy. According to Paul Joannides, « we know from correspondance that Piero d'Argenta, named from his home town near Ferrara, was with Michelangelo from at least 1498; he remained friendly with the master and wrote warmly to him as late as 1530 ».

The author of this drawing is Michelangelo's assistant, at the origin of several other pen drawings which testify to an intimate knowledge of the master's work and produced shortly after 1500. In Paul Joannides's opinion, "the drawings of Michelangelo's students are perfect imitations of lost drawings. They extend the work of the master but "in his absence" and, thus, contribute to our knowledge of the work as it was once existed. »<sup>6</sup>

To end with, this drawing by Michelangelo attests to the closeness of the two artists and the influence of style and composition of the master on his assistant: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Male nude (Mercury-Apollo) and study of a man carrying a burden* (recto), circa 1503-1505, pen and brown ink, retouched in grey ink, INV 688, Louvre Museum Paris.



This sheet by the workshop of Michelangelo, possibly Piero d'Argenta, is the striking witness on the recto of a sculpture by the master, now fragmentary, and on the verso of a lost drawing by Michelangelo, while revealing the creative process of the greatest master of the Renaissance and the talent of his closest collaborator.

<sup>6</sup> Françoise Viatte, *Paul Joannides un connaisseur à l'oeuvre*