

TIMOTEO VITI or TIMOTEO DELLA VITE
(Urbino 1469-1523)

Study of a female nude, seen from behind, facing right

Pen and brown ink
28.2 x 12cm

Provenance:

Timoteo Viti (1469-1523), then by descent to the Antaldi family, Urbino (L. 2246), ink inscription on the front lower left 'R. V.', then by descent to Marchese Antaldi, Pesaro;
Sale Christie's London, July 6, 2004, lot 5 (as *attributed to*);
Private collection, France.

We are grateful to Paul Joannides for having confirmed the attribution to Timoteo Viti after examining the work. He noticed that our drawing shows the influence of Raphael and that it was probably executed in 1511-12 when the artist was working with the Master and had become familiar with his studies of female nudes. Our study was certainly designed to take place in a narrative scene.

This charming sheet thus seems to be closely linked to the Umbrian tradition around 1510 seen through the Raphaelesque prism. According to Vasari, Timoteo Viti first trained as a goldsmith. He then left to study in Bologna, where his interest turned to painting, then returned to Urbino, enjoying considerable success there after the death of Raphael's father, Giovanni Santi.

Executed in pen and ink, the sheet is presented here as a work by Timoteo della Vite because of close similarities with his drawings dating from the end of the 15th century, while the name of Raphael, to whom the drawing was donated in the past, as it was inventoried by the Antaldi family, appears in the lower left inscription ("*R.[aphael] V[rbinas]*"). Comparisons include Viti's sketch of the Miracle of the Demonic Cow, pen and brown ink, 26.5 x 40.9 cm, inv. n.1458, Albertina, Vienna; in which the male nude on the left of the composition undeniably echoes our study of women; as well as the *Study for a Crucifixion*, circa 1504-1509, pen and brown ink, 31.9 x 21.1 cm, Inv. MTC 5051, provenance: Comte Etienne-Marie de Saint Genys (1856-1915); Saint-Genys bequest to the City of Angers, February 1917, Angers Museum (opposite). It was to Viti that Philip Pouncey rendered this striking variation on the theme of the Crucifixion in 1977-1978, which dates from the period when the artist collaborated with Genga. The style of our sketch is close to the male nudes at the foot of the Thief's cross on the left, in which we find the systematic use of small parallel hatching to suggest shadows. Other analogies with the artist's style can also be found in two studies of nudes located at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris: *Standing male nude*, black chalk, 34,3 x 14,2 cm, N° 433 and *Study of a female nude, standing, seen from behind*, and *Study of a man seen in profile*, black chalk, 32,4 x 19 cm, N° 432.

This drawing was owned by Timoteo Viti, who worked with Raphael, and survived him by three years. Probably after the death of the artist Viti assembled a large number of drawings by Raphael. These drawings were marked in the 17th Century by a descendent of Viti, often inaccurately, with the initials of the artists, R.V. for Raphael (Lugt L.2246), GGV for Girolamo Genga and TVV for Timoteo Viti, the last V standing for Urbino where from the three artists originated. The Viti collection contained a number of drawings by Viti copying drawings by Raphael. The Marquis Antaldi descended from the painter Timoteo della Vite, Raphael's master, friend, and later imitator. Timoteo della Vite thus obtained or inherited the most important group of Raphael's studio drawings, perhaps the finest ever brought together in a private collection. He probably got them when the master died. These drawings, or at least most of them, remained for a long time in the possession of the heirs of Timoteo Viti, the Antaldi family in Urbino. The collection was already fragmented in the 16th Century when Timoteo's son sold some drawings to Vasari, but most of the drawings were dispersed in 1714, when Crozat bought a portion of the collection, and in 1828

when the rest was sold to Samuel Woodburn. The Viti collection contained a number of drawings by Viti copying drawings by Raphael. The initials of Raphael were stamped to the drawings long after Timoteo, probably in the 17th century, by a member of the Antaldi family, who was certainly not a great connoisseur, for the mark was too liberally used and relies on a number of drawings by students, imitators and copyists such as Timoteo himself. This stamp does not therefore give the guarantee of authenticity of the said attributions that we have often wanted to recognize, it is a testimony of age and an indication of provenance. Drawings have often been disputed between the two artists in the past.

Trained in the late 1490s in the Bolognese workshop of Francesco Francia, Viti was greatly influenced by the stylized ornamental manner of Giovanni Santi, Urbino's leading painter during his youth. Viti and Raphael, son of Giovanni Santi, worked together in 1508-10 on the fresco decoration of the Chigi Chapel in S. Maria della Pace, Rome. It has been suggested that he is depicted (like the ancient Greek painter Protogenes) in *The School of Athens*, Raphael's most famous work, standing next to Raphael's self-portrait, although Vasari does not mention this identification. Raphael's mature style influenced him for a time afterwards, as can be seen in the large altarpiece depicting *Noli me Tangere* and in our study as well.

He played a dominant role in the Urbino art scene for nearly three decades. A skillful draughtsman and painter, Viti was a vector in the diffusion of the artistic vocabulary of the manner of Perugino and Francia in the regions of central Italy.