SPHINX FINE ART



Stefano della Bella (Florence 1610 - Florence 1664)

A Peasant Walking Through a Landscape

pen and ink on paper 17.1 x 22.5 cm (6¾ x 8⅞ in) **Engraved:** Stefano della Bella, *Suite de Douze Paysages,* no. 11 (Pierre Mariette, 1641).

In this vigorously executed drawing, Stefano della Bella depicts a peasant trudging slowly through the Italian countryside. His long shadow indicates that it is the end of the day, and he walks home with a basket slung over his shoulder. Beyond him two other figures, and a heavily laden horse, are also undertaking the weary journey.

Della Bella used this drawing as the basis for an etching from the series *Suite de douze paysages*.[1] This series of twelve landscapes were probably published in 1641, but the drawings on which they were based, including our work, were likely executed in the previous decade. During that time della Bella was working in Florence and Rome, before moving to Paris in 1639.[2] He seemed to have spent much of this early period of his career outdoors, filling sketchbooks with depictions of the landscape and people, which he then referred to in his etchings throughout the rest of his life. The engravings that make up *Suite de douze paysages* are a mixture of pure landscape views and depictions of peasants.[3] In the latter della Bella imbues the figures with an unusual degree of monumentality, in the manner of the present work. In addition to our drawing, only two other sketches relating to *Suite de douze paysages* have been recorded, one in the Royal Collection and one sold at auction in 2005.[4]

Della Bella was born in Florence, the son of a sculptor. He initially trained under a goldsmith, but ‘showed such striking ability as a draughtsman that he was sent to a painter’s studio instead’.[5] Perhaps the most significant influence on his was the work of Jacques Callot, and in addition to assiduously copying Callot’s prints, della Bella was also instructed in etching by Remigio Cantagallini, Callot’s former teacher.

It is clear from his sketch books that, from an early age della Bella favoured sketching outdoors, rather than spending time in studios. He initially worked in Florence for the Medici family, before moving to Rome in 1633. However, commitments in his home town meant that he regularly travelled back and forth between the two cities, giving him further opportunity to sketch the Italian landscape and its people.

In 1639 he accompanied the Medici ambassador to Paris, and remained in France for ten years. During his Parisian decade his popularity and productivity soared, in part thanks to the notable French print publishers, and their clients. When he was eventually forced to leave France and return to Florence, due to political tensions, he continued to send his plates to Paris for publication. He was a prolific draughtsman and etcher, and covered a remarkable variety of subjects, with the present work being a good example of his study of peasant rural life.

[1] De Vesme, A., *Stefano Della Bella: Catalogue Raisonné,* with introduction and additions by Phyllis Dearborn Massar (Collectors Edition, New York, 1971), vol.ii, cat.no. 779.

[2] For the dating of the series, see Weigert, R-A., 'Stefano della Bella et trois de ses éditeurs Parisiens: Les deux Pierre Mariette et François Langlois dit Ciartres', in *Études d'art publiées par le Musée des beaux-arts d'Alger,* (vol.5, 1950), pp. 71-84.

[3] De Vesme, cat. nos. 769-780.

[4] Royal Collection, inv. no. 904619, & Christie's, London, 5 July 2005, lot 67.

[5] Massar, P. D., 'Presenting Stefano della Bella' in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (vol. xxvii, no. 3, Nov 1968), pp.159-160.