



PROANTIC
LE PLUS BEAU CATALOGUE D'ANTIQUITES

Putti Attributed To Jean-antoine Watteau (valenciennes 1684 - 1721 Nogent-sur-marne)

18 000 EUR



Signature : Attribué à WATTEAU

Period : 18th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Paper

Length : 21

Width : 29

Description

ATTRIBUTED TO JEAN-ANTOINE
WATTEAU
(Valenciennes 1684 - 1721 Nogent-sur-Marne)
Study of Putti after Rubens (recto)
Study of Figures after Rubens (verso -
counterproof)

Black and red chalk heightened with white (three
crayons) on the recto

Black chalk and garlic juice, used for transfer, on
the verso

21 x 29.2 cm

Provenance:

Private collection, France

Dealer

Objets Choisis

Old master paintings and drawings

Mobile : 06 84 43 91 81

229 Rue Saint-Honoré

Paris 75001

Associated works:

Peter Paul Rubens, *The Virgin and Child*

Surrounded by the Holy Innocents, circa 1618, oil on panel (later transferred to canvas), 138 x 100 cm, formerly in the collection of Louis XIV, INV 1763, Louvre Museum.

Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Putti after Rubens*, oil on canvas, 24.5 x 33.4 cm, sold at Galleria, June 22, 1962, lot 40.

This study of Putti draws inspiration from *The Virgin and Child Surrounded by the Holy Innocents* by Rubens, acquired in 1671 by Louis XIV from a certain Monsieur de la Feuille and now preserved at the Louvre Museum.

The slightly erroneous title *Virgin with Angels*, used from 1793, likely originates from an engraving of the painting captioned "*Ave Domina Angelorum*," an anonymous print published in Paris by François Langlois (1588-1647), known as Ciartres, sometimes attributed to Claude Vignon (1593-1670). This attribution, disputed by Pacht Bassani, might still be admissible (Mariette mentioned it, see Merle du Bourg). However, the figures depicted are indeed the Holy Innocents, the newborns of Bethlehem massacred by King Herod in his attempt to eliminate the infant Jesus (Gospel of Matthew, II, 16). This correct identification was used in 1751 (catalog of the King's Cabinet at the Palais du Luxembourg, no. 61) and reiterated in several Louvre catalogs (1799-1801, 1816, 1823, etc.). Unlike angels, the Holy Innocents are depicted here without wings and some hold palm leaves, signifying their status as martyr saints. This subject, unique in Rubens' oeuvre, reflects the influence of Italian art from the 16th century (Titian, Pordenone) and is dated around 1618.

This sheet is likely a preparatory study for the oil on canvas depicting *Putti after Rubens* (24.5 x 33.4 cm), sold at the Galleria sale in 1962 (lot 40) and again at the Versailles Hôtel des Chevaux Légers on March 10, 1968 (lot 47).

Discovered in the Parisian art market in 1962, this painting is closely linked to our Study of Putti. Watteau copied Rubens' putti by isolating small groups for study rather than reproducing Rubens' complex compositions in their entirety. By focusing on specific areas of the paintings, Watteau highlighted figures imbued with finely observed human emotions, as found in Rubens' works. Here, Watteau emphasizes the Putti.

Watteau had privileged access to the royal collection through Claude III Audran, curator of the Palais du Luxembourg. It is likely that Watteau began copying Rubens' works early in his training in Audran's studio. However, most of Watteau's extant copies display such mastery and virtuosity that they probably date to the end of his career.

Watteau did not wait for his association with Crozat to begin copying drawings, nor his stay at the Luxembourg Palace to examine their paintings. While working for Gillot, he had free access to print shops on Rue Saint-Jacques, and Pierre and Jean Mariette owned the most well-known engravings of Rubens. Some studies after Rubens remain within the master's tradition while incorporating Watteau's subtle style and coloration. These transpositions already hint at his personal lyricism.

This Study of Putti is executed in the three-crayon technique, closely associated with Watteau. It reveals a delicate application of chalks, with fine hatching and confident contours. Studies after the masters particularly highlight the artistic directions Watteau was exploring.

In this study, which owes much to Rubens' memory, certain execution methods are strikingly similar, particularly in the way eyes are drawn: the eyelids are precisely delineated. Watteau's approach differs slightly in the oil on canvas derived from this study, showcasing a more meticulous and refined execution. These Putti

exhibit Watteau's mastery of color through the three-crayon technique, blending Rubenesque warm and cool tones with heightened delicacy and spirituality.

The verso, featuring a study of figures after Rubens, is a counterproof created using a rare, predominantly Northern European technique. This method involves placing a sheet over a painting and delicately transferring it with a mixture of garlic juice and black chalk.

Unpublished, this drawing attributed to Watteau represents a significant rediscovery.