



PROANTIC
LE PLUS BEAU CATALOGUE D'ANTIQUITES

Circle Of Cornelis Van Poelenburch (1594/95-1667) - Scene From Ovid: Actéon

12 000 EUR



Period : 17th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Paper

Width : 49 cm

Height : 39 cm

Description

Brush and brown and dark grey ink with sepia washes and white bodycolour, 200 x 260 mm. This accomplished drawing represents the renowned scene from Ovid's Metamorphoses in which the young prince Actaeon stumbles upon the goddess Diana bathing; in revenge at the sight of her divine nudity, Diana transforms Actaeon into a stag who is then devoured by his own hunting dogs. In our drawing, Actaeon - in the middle distance to the far right, his arms outstretched in amazement - has begun his transformation, antlers rising from his head; Diana wears her attribute of a crescent moon. As witnessed in Titian's versions, the subject justified the representation of the female nude: here the viewer's eye moves from the left foreground showing two semi-clothed young women,

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purposely described in opposite views, to the frontally displayed Diana in the centre of the pool. Three attendants attempt to hide her nakedness. Our work is preceded by a red-chalk drawing in the Albertina, Vienna (inv. no. 8411) securely attributed to the Dutch artist Cornelius van Poelenburch who worked in Rome and Utrecht. The precedence of the Albertina drawing is seen in the description of details such as Diana's quiver of arrows on the rocks to the left. In contrast to our drawing, the Albertina work shows the foreground figures and pool only, the sheet trimmed to 137 mm in height. Poelenbruch is here providing the figurative composition to a work whose landscape was likely to be provided by another artist. The drawing is a pendant to Poelenburch's *Venus and Cupid* of equal media and scale, and similarly bereft of landscape (Albertina, inv.no. 8410). The artist's intended painting of *Diana and Actaeon* is untraced (its collaborative nature may have mitigated against an attribution to Poelenburch); however, the artist himself or a collaborator recorded the entire composition with landscape in a brush and brown ink drawing in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (inv.no. 899 Z) (the drawing is not listed by Chong [1987]). Poelenburch's printmaker collaborator, Jan de Bisschop (1628-71), similarly reproduced the composition in brush and dark brown ink (drawing sold at Christies in 2023), its quality of handling with strong contrasts of light and dark surpassing the Städel drawing. On grounds of style and artistic intent, our drawing would not appear to be by either Poelenburch or de Bisschop - the mix of media, for example, is not seen in Chong's catalogue. The kinship of these four drawn versions of *Diana and Actaeon* is demonstrated by their like scale (reflecting those of the painted landscapes on copper and panel on which Poelenburch's reputation rested). Our drawing, in contrast, demonstrates a distinct artistic mind in which the subject is transformed into one lit by dusky moonlight, the artist exploiting the ink medium to convey the pool

reflections and light falling over the figures. A middle tone is provided by the sepia wash with form described in thicker dark brown and black colour; white is deftly applied for highlights. Artistic independence is further demonstrated in the landscape: whereas in the background of Poelenburch's Städel drawing is faithfully reproduced in de Bisschop's version; in our drawing the landscape is invented afresh and with greater detail, witnessed especially in the tallest tree to the left and the light over the sloping ground to the right, drawing the eye to the space between Diana and Actaeon. It is a sign of the quality of our drawing that it belonged to the art historian and connoisseur Archibald G. B. Russell (1879-1955) whose Tudor Rose collector's stamp is placed to the lower right of the sheet (Lugt 2770a). The stamp is prominently displayed in a drawn portrait formerly attributed to Lorenzo Lotto and now in the Courtauld Gallery. Russell was a scholar of works on paper, publishing on William Blake and Guercino. He sold our drawing during his lifetime as by Poelenburch at Sotheby & Co. in 1923. The Sotheby's catalogue describes the work as signed but this must be a misreading of the collector's mark through the glazing of the frame. Chong briefly mentions the drawing sold in 1928, describing it as a copy of Poelenburch's *Albertina Diana and Actaeon*. Our drawing is a work of the highest quality, displaying considerable artistic inventiveness, surely deriving from the hand of a Dutch or Flemish landscape artist, and perhaps intended to be replicated in print. Poelenburch's compositions were frequently favoured subjects for prints. Given the tenebrist transcription represented by our drawing, it is interesting to note the mezzotint by Wallerant Vaillant (1623-77), *St Christopher carrying the Christ child through a river in moonlight* after Cornelis van Poelenburgh via an intermediary drawing by Jan de Bisschop (British Museum, inv.no. 1874,0808.2118). Regardless of destination, our drawing is a completed drawing in its own right (rather than simply a record of a

painting), a response to a burgeoning taste for landscape in sepia. The artistic calibre of our drawing is matched by its fine state of conservation, demonstrated by the unpasted verso which in transmitted light reveals chain lines and a watermark. Literature: Sotheby & Co., Catalogue of Valuable Drawings by Old Masters, sale 22 May 1928, no. 129 (Cornelius van Poelenburch), p. 45; A. Chong, 'The Drawings of Cornelis van Poelenburch' in Master Drawings, 25, 1987, no. 127, p. 51 (= Albertina, inv. no. 8411); Christies Auction, Old Master and British Drawings and Watercolours, 4 July 2023, no. 56 (= Jan de Bisschop after Poelenburch, online catalogue; lot description by A. Kishor); Wimbledon Auctions, online sale 31 March 2025, no. 165 (= present drawing as 'Old Master: a sepia wash drawing, Diane and Actaeon'). Links: <https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/#/query/ac4d7735-dc62-487a-9edd-eb336d3848f8> <https://www.christies.com/lot/jan-de-bisschop-amsterdam-1628-1671-the-hague-6437385/?inObjectID=6437385&lid=1> <https://gallerycollections.courtauld.ac.uk/object-d-1978-pg-90> <https://www.marquesdecollections.fr/FtDetail/2dba39c2-35d0-c643-a803-a3a54c5fd63a> <https://sammlung.staedelmuseum.de/en/work/diana-and-actaeon-3> https://archive.org/details/valuabledrawings00soth_0/mode/2up?view=theater Brush and brown and dark grey ink with sepia washes and white bodycolour, 200 x 260 mm. Dimensions sheet: 200 x 260mm

Framed dimensions: 390 x 480mm