

COLNAGHI



French School
*Studies after the colossal statue of Mars Ultor
(Pyrrhus)*
18th century

COLNAGHI

FRENCH SCHOOL

The Pillars of Upper and Lower Egypt, Karnak

18th century

Unidentified collection marks 'CD' in an oval and 'HH' with a crown in an oval.

Black and white chalk on paper

57 x 42.3 cm;

22 1/2 x 16 5/8 in.

Provenance

Private collection, France.

COLNAGHI



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

BRUSSELS

COLNAGHI

This large sheet assembled, around a dominant central motif, a sequence of studies made after one of the most admired antiquities of Rome: the colossal marble figure long known as “Pyrrhus” and now identified as Mars Ultor from the Forum of Nerva, now in the Capitoline Museum (fig. 1). At the centre, the draughtsman has recorded the statue’s elaborately worked muscle cuirass, its breastplate ornamented with a gorgoneion mask and a pair of confronted winged griffins flanking a foliate candelabrum, set above the deep fringe of decorated lappets, or pteryges. Around this principal study are arranged the figure’s subsidiary elements and a group of related antique ornaments: the crested helmet and bearded head of the warrior, his richly embossed military boot, a shield in decorated relief, sandalled feet, an ornamental ewer, a lion-headed furniture support and a fluted candelabrum, each rendered with the same meticulous attention to sculptural detail, in black chalk heightened with white on a toned ground.

The model for the central study is among the most celebrated cuirassed statues to survive from antiquity. The colossal figure depicts Mars Ultor, the god worshipped in the temple that dominated the Forum of Augustus. The identification with Pyrrhus (319/318 – 272 B.C.), the famous King of Epirus, prevailed until the eighteenth century and was based on the presence of elephants in the decoration of the fringes of the armour. The statue was discovered in the sixteenth century in the Forum of Nerva, passed through several patrician houses, and was acquired by Pope Clement XII in 1736, where it was taken to Capitoline Hill four years later. Stylistically, the colossus is dated to the late Trajanic or early Hadrianic period, after an Augustan original which itself drew upon a late-Classical model of the fourth century B.C. The gorgoneion and pendant griffins that flank a thymiaterion on the cuirass convey the statue’s avenging character. The title’s retention of the older name “Pyrrhus” is consistent with an eighteenth-century date, before the Mars Ultor identification had become established.

The statue had been a touchstone for artists since the Renaissance. It was drawn by Maarten van Heemskerck (1498 – 1574) during his stay in Rome in the 1530s, when it still stood as a headless and armless torso in the courtyard of the Casa Galli. It was only later completed with a helmeted head and decorated buskins, upon which it was identified as Pyrrhus. By the eighteenth century, drawing after the antique remained central to academic training, and richly ornamented works of this kind supplied painters, sculptors, and decorative designers with a repertoire of motifs. For French artists working in Rome, not least the *pensionnaires* of the Académie de France, study sheets such as these were both an exercise and a working resource. The assured handling of the black chalk, reinforced with white heightening on a prepared ground, perfectly captures the style of French draughtsmanship of the eighteenth century.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 1: *Colossal statue of Mars*, end of 1st century A.D., from the Forum Transitorium in Rome, Capitoline Museums, inv. scu 58

LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

BRUSSELS