

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

French School, late 18th Century

Studies of Roman fragments after the Antique

Charcoal on paper

22 × 21 cm; 8 11/16 × 8 11/16 in.

Provenance

French private collection.



Executed in charcoal with unusual delicacy, this sheet records a group of antique sculptural fragments arranged as if on shelves within a studio, academy or antiquarian collection. At upper left is a truncated Hellenistic torso of Apollo on a Corinthian capital, his head turned and the hair bound in symmetrical threads; beside it stands a relief of a draped Silenus, shown in frontal contrapposto and raising a cup. To the right is Hermaphrodite in classical drapery, one arm raised. Below are further fragments: a small draped statuette of Mercury and two male herms with full beards and vigorously modelled hair supporting the shelf above.

The draughtsman has avoided hard outlines where the marble surface is most exposed to light, allowing the paper itself to function as the whiteness of stone. The surrounding areas are darkened through close horizontal strokes, so that the fragments appear to emerge from the shaded space behind them.

Although the specific prototypes cannot be securely identified from the sheet, the drawing reflects the disciplined encounter with the antique that underpinned neoclassical training. The emphasis on broken bodies, busts and architectural fragments also evokes the period's archaeological imagination. The sheet may be situated within the same culture of academic study that informed the Italian sketchbooks of David's pupils, for whom the sustained copying of antique sculpture, reliefs and fragments formed an essential part of artistic training.