

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Joseph van Aken
(Antwerp 1699 - 1749 London)

A statue of Venus

Black chalk with touches of white chalk on blue paper.

Watermark: Strasbourg Lily

42 x 22.9 cm; 16 9/16 x 9 in.

Provenance

The artist's stamp (L. 2516);

European private collection.



Joseph van Aken was born and studied in Antwerp, but moved to London with his brothers Arnold and Alexander in around 1720 where he would spend the rest of his life. Here he became primarily known for his exceptional skill as a drapery painter which led to his nickname 'van Aken the tailor'.¹ He collaborated with portrait artists such as Thomas Hudson and Allan Ramsay for whom he painted fabric in their pictures. Besides this, Van Aken made conversation pieces and genre paintings, some of the works from the latter category display the artist's interest in the Antique. One such picture, sold at auction in 1926, shows a market scene in the foreground with in the background a Roman temple and a Roman sculpture.²

The present drawing too shows the artist's fascination with the Antique, and it appears to depict the Roman Goddess Venus. The depiction of the goddess in this pose and attire is known as the Venus Genetrix type (fig. 1) and the many Roman versions of this sculpture are thought to be based on a now-lost Greek prototype. While no other drawings by Van Aken after Roman sculptures are known, a large group of drawings on blue paper, also executed in black and white chalk, are in the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Many of these drawings bear the artist's stamp 'VH' as is the case with the present drawing. The loose use of the black chalk, in combination with touches of white chalk, is particularly close to a drawing showing Three-Quarter Length of a Man in Armour, Head Turned Right, his Left Hand on his Hip.³



Fig. 1. Anonymous, 2nd century A.D., *Statue of Venus Genetrix*, marble, 97.7 × 30.5 × 31.7 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

¹ E. Bénézit et al., *Dictionary of artists*, Volume 4, A-Bedeschini, Paris, 2006, p. 200.

² R. Charpentier; [auction house unknown], Brussels, 20 December 1926, lot 26 (as Pieter Angellis) [record from the RKD, The Hague].

³ National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; inv. D 256.