

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Jacob Jordaens
(Antwerp 1593 – 1678)

The Triumph of Minerva

Red and black chalks, watercolour and opaque watercolour, over charcoal on a sheet composed of three subsidiary sheets. Inscribed '68' on the upper left corner and marked with the collector stamp of Sir Joshua Reynolds (L. 2364) below on the right (recto). Later inscription "13 Dutch" at the centre and some scattered pencil marks (verso). The drawing was originally backed with another sheet, now removed, inscribed with the following numbers 'N. 200', 'N. 36', 'N 88'. Unidentified watermark at the centre.

380 x 600 mm (15 x 23 5/8 in.)

Provenance

Sir Joshua Reynolds (London, 1723–1792) (L. 2364);
Acquired in 1959 at the Ryaux Gallery, Paris;
Collection of Prof. and Mrs. R.-A. d'Hulst, Belgium;
By descent to the previous owner, Belgium.

Exhibited

Tentoonstelling Jacob Jordaens, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerp, 27 July - 15 October 15 1905, no. 113.

Drawings by Jacob Jordaens, Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 7 October–3 December 1960, cat. no. 119.

Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Antwerp–Rotterdam, 1966–67, cat. no. 119 (repr.)
Jacob Jordaens Drawings and Grafick, Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp, May–October 1978, cat. no. 70.

Een Schilderij Centraal. De slapende Mars van Hendrick ter Brugghen, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, 26 January–16 March 1980.

Jacob Jordaens, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, 27 March – 27 June 1993, cat. no. B62, pp. 96-97.

Literature

R.-A. d'Hulst. "Further Drawings by Jacob Jordaens." *Master Drawings* 1, no. 3, 1963, pp. 21, 22, pl. 11.

R.-A. d'Hulst, *Jordaens Drawings*, London: Phaidon, 1974, pp. 409–410, no. A339.

R.-A. d'Hulst, *Jacob Jordaens*, London: Sotheby Publication, 1982, p. 251, no. 219 (in colour).



This large-format and intricately worked composition depicts Minerva, goddess of wisdom, enthroned at the centre with the palm of victory and the Medusa shield, while being crowned by Chronos (Time). To the right, Mercury, the god of commerce, and Hercules, the latter accompanied by his lion-skin and club, appear near Bellona nursing an infant, while a putto breaks a bow as a symbolic gesture of ignorance's defeat. Mars, the helmeted god of war, sits vanquished in the foreground with his weaponry scattered around him, and an elderly man, crowned with a civic wreath, presents Minerva with an apple. A dynamic crowd of men, women, and children offers tribute from the left, as Fame hovers above blowing a double trumpet: periods of peace bring about prosperity and well-being.¹ Minerva, whom both Homer and Ovid call "fighter for peace" (*Paci-fera*), has vanquished Mars, the god of war, thus safeguarding prosperity and good fortune. The sheet is an allegory of peace and originated shortly after peace was signed in 1648, through the "Treaty of Münster"; the successful conclusion of the negotiations was seen as a milestone *en route* to a lasting European peace. The man with the crown of city walls indeed probably personifies the City of Antwerp.² No related final painting is known, but Jordaens may have used the composition for one of the eleven paintings, of which only two survive, that he executed around 1665 for the ceiling of the Guild of St. Luke, temple of the arts in Antwerp. Indeed, if trade remains unprotected from conflict, the arts are unable to thrive.

Dated stylistically to circa 1655–1660, this sheet is generally understood as a preparatory design for a larger, now-lost work. Its vigorous chalk outlines and watercolour accents remain characteristic of Jacob Jordaens's mature graphic practice, in which he seamlessly combined painterly energy with a sophisticated command of allegorical detail. The looser technique visible in the present drawing, typical of his later works, makes the dating to the years around 1655 particularly likely. Comparison with the dated drawings *Christ on the Cross* (Hermitage, Saint Petersburg, Fig. 1), *The Manufacture and Adoration of Idols* (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, Fig. 2), and *Allegory of Truth* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Grenoble, Fig. 3), all made in 1658, further confirms this dating.

¹ See R.-A. d'Hulst, *Jordaens Drawings*, 1974, p. 410

² R.-A. d'Hulst, *Jacob Jordaens*, 1993, p. 96.



Fig. 1. Jacob Jordaens, *Christ on the Cross*, 1658. Red and black chalks, ink (?) and charcoal on laid paper. Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum.



Fig. 2. Jacob Jordaens, *The Manufacture and Adoration of Idols*, 1658. Red and black chalks, ink, watercolour and charcoal on laid paper. Paris. Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts.



Fig. 3. Jacob Jordaens, *Allegory of Truth*, 1658. Red and black chalks, ink, watercolour and charcoal on laid paper. Grenoble, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

A related yet smaller version, differing slightly in composition, is held by the Morgan Library & Museum in New York (Fig. 4); a further copy, ascribed to Jordaens's studio and preserved in the Stedelijk Prentenkabinet, Antwerp, indicates that the original design extended more fully on all sides but was subsequently trimmed (Fig. 5). Specifically, D'Hulst has clarified the relationship between these drawings, showing that the Antwerp sheet is fully derivative of our version.³ Since they agree in all details and are executed in the same medium - black and red chalk, lightly touched with watercolor - there can be no doubt about this. Both drawings originally coincided in size, though the present sheet (made of three sheets glued together) has been cropped, accounting for its smaller dimensions (380 x 600 mm) compared to the Antwerp drawing (405 x 690 mm). Comparison reveals that our drawing originally included another standing figure, now reduced to a hand holding a bag at the extreme left, that the figure of Mercury and the tree against which he leans were once complete, and that the foreground was slightly deeper at the lower edge.

³ See R.-A. d'Hulst, "Further Drawings by Jacob Jordaens", pp. 21-22.



Fig. 4. Jacob Jordaens, *Allegory of Victory*, ca. 1660-1665. Red and black chalks, watercolour and opaque watercolour, over charcoal on laid paper. New York, Morgan Library.



Fig. 5. Studio of Jacob Jordaens, *Allegory of Victory*. Red and black chalks and watercolour. Stedelijk Prentenkabinet, Antwerp.

Watercolor and decorative design were central to Jordaens's career. Shortly after completing his apprenticeship with Adam van Noort, he enrolled in 1615 in the register of the Antwerp St. Luke's Guild as a *waterschilder*, or watercolour painter. In 1634, he worked under Rubens's supervision on ephemeral decorations welcoming Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand to Antwerp, and again in 1636 contributed to the embellishment of Philip IV of Spain's hunting lodge. Upon Rubens's death in 1640, Jordaens emerged as Antwerp's leading painter, producing a remarkable range of public, private, and ecclesiastical commissions, and numerous designs for tapestries. Within the broader context of Flemish draughtsmanship, Jordaens was part of a generation extending Rubens's and Van Dyck's painterly modes of expression in works on

paper. Presently, around 450 drawings are attributed to him, though the process of distinguishing Jordaens's hand from that of Rubens remains a matter of ongoing scholarly debate. In keeping with prevailing Flemish practices, Jordaens often expanded, reworked, and trimmed preparatory drafts to develop compositional ideas or enlarge an existing sheet.⁴ Rubens's *trois crayons* technique (black, red, and white chalk) influenced many of his contemporaries; early in his career, Jordaens relied principally on black chalk but later employed *trois crayons* in life studies as well.⁵

Despite its composite assembly and subsequent trimming, *The Triumph of Minerva* retains a striking sense of unity and rhythmic movement. Jordaens's handling of chalk and wash imbues the figures with tangible volume and dramatic impetus, reflecting his Baroque sensibility and his own prolific output in both painting and large-scale decorative projects. Tellingly, Sir Joshua Reynolds's collector's mark at lower right underscores this composition's early recognition as a noteworthy statement of Jordaens's inventive draughtsmanship - a characteristic fusion of monumental design, lively allegorical invention, and technical virtuosity in watercolour and chalk. More recently, the work became part of the collection of Professor d'Hulst, foremost authority on the artist with his extensive publishing on Jordaens's life and work - his volume *Jordaens Drawings* (1974) remains to this date a cornerstone of the scholarship on the artist, offering critical insights into Jordaens's methods and the evolution of his stylistic and thematic concerns.

⁴ See d'Hulst et al., *Jacob Jordaens. 1593–1678*, Antwerp, 1993, p. 309

⁵ Victoria Sancho Lobis, *Rubens, Rembrandt, and Drawing in the Golden Age*, Yale University Press, 2019, pp. 116–117