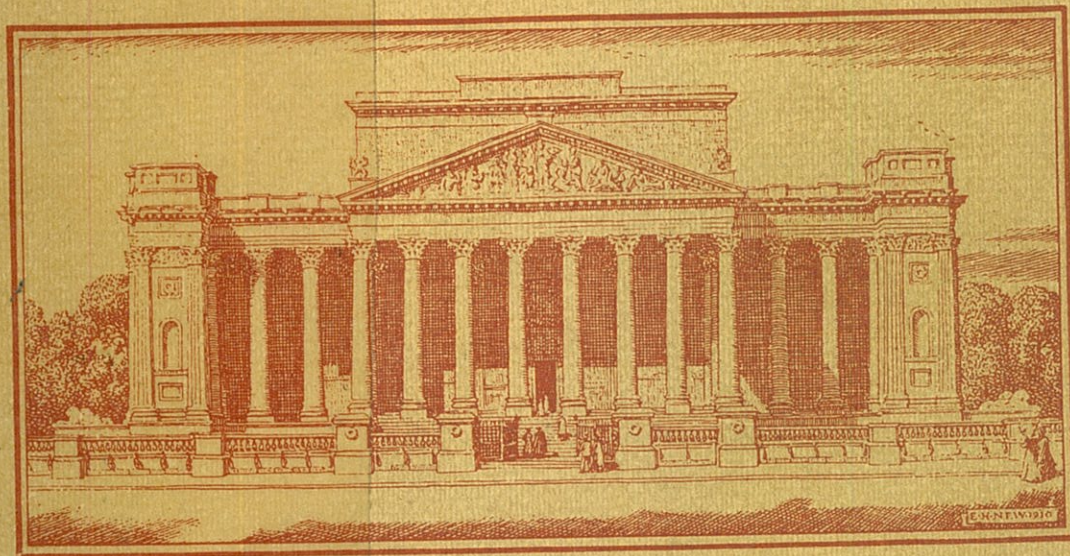


FIRST SOTHEBY FITZWILLIAM EXHIBITION

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF
A CONNOISSEUR
PHILIP POUNCEY



Italian Old Master Drawings

FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM CAMBRIDGE

1985



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JULIEN STOCK
&
DAVID SCRASE



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Acknowledgements

This exhibition of sixty-two Italian drawings is merely a selection from the thousand and more discoveries that Philip Pouncey has made over many years of study. It is a particular pleasure to acknowledge our indebtedness to him for his help in the selection of this exhibition, as well as his contribution to the catalogue. We would like to thank John Gere for the intense interest he has taken in this project and for an introduction that no one else could have written. He also very kindly read the catalogue entries and improved them in a number of ways. Michael Jaffé has from the start favoured the plan of holding such an exhibition at the Fitzwilliam and taken an active part in securing loans.

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Last, but not least, Myril Pouncey deserves our deepest gratitude; for she is the "backroom lady" who is always happy to help and give information on her husband's researches, about which she is better informed than anyone.

Julien Stock, London, August 1985
David Scrase, Cambridge, August 1985

Foreword

This exhibition is designed to salute the extraordinary feats of Philip Pouncey over half a century devoted largely to the *connaissance* of Italian drawings. The idea of such fittingly international tribute to his gifts emerged in June last year at the conference in Zurich of the International Advisory Committee of Keepers of Public Collections of Graphic Art; and that idea, particularly welcome in the Fitzwilliam, is convincingly attributable to Roseline Bacou in conversation with Anna Maria Petrioli Tofani, John Rowlands and David Scrase.

Philip began his professional career in 1931 as an honorary attaché at the Fitzwilliam for two years after graduating at Queens'. He has been since 1973 the Museum's Honorary Keeper of Italian Drawings. His attachment was at first to paintings, at Cambridge being occupied principally with cataloguing the Fitzwilliam's collections for Sydney Cockerell; and then in London he worked as an Assistant Keeper at the National Gallery 1934-45. After the second world war he transferred to the British Museum's Department of Prints & Drawings, beginning as an Assistant Keeper (1945-54) and becoming eventually Deputy Keeper from 1954 until his resignation in 1966. He has never resigned his passionate interest in drawings or in paintings or in their vital connections. Throughout his public employments and later in his service at Sotheby's he has enjoyed in every nation's galleries and drawing-cabinets and in innumerable private collections not only an awesome reputation but also the pleasurable cult of looking.

After the British Museum, it is the Louvre which he – and Myril beside him – has come to know best. Happily the signal which he received from the Louvre, from Roseline Bacou (writing on 13th December, 1954), is fittest of all: «Votre attribution à Lotto est magnifique. Je n'ai rencontré à Florence que des personnes convaincues; quant à Berenson il m'a dit que vous étiez le meilleur connaisseur qu'il ait jamais rencontré. Qu'en dites vous?».

From the ranks of the *convaincus* there is nothing to be said beyond that, except to thank all the lenders, the Louvre and the British Museum magnificent among them, for their gratifying response to our request that they should send so many splendid treasures. We thank also Sotheby's, where Philip Pouncey FBA is now a Consultant, and particularly his colleague in their Old Master Drawings department, Julien Stock, for appropriately handsome support of this endeavour. Julien Stock and David Scrase, my own colleague here, have been jointly responsible having had invaluable advice from John Gere, who also has contributed the excellent introduction, for bringing the choice of loans and the cataloguing of them to Pouncey standards. Philip as always has been generous of his help.

Michael Jaffé
Director
Cambridge, August 1985

Introduction

Before the emergence of "art history" as an academic discipline towards the end of the last century, connoisseurs of drawings were always collectors and their study of drawings an extension of the collecting passion. To say this is in no way to disparage the achievement of the great collector-connoisseurs of the past. Jabach, Crozat and Mariette in France and in England the Richardsons, Barnard, Ottley, Esdaile and Robinson, along with many others, established, without the aid of photography, teams of graduate students, Witt Libraries, seminars and other modern amenities now taken for granted, a tradition of connoisseurship and a basis of knowledge that are still valid today; and it was one of them, Sir Charles Robinson, who in 1870 broke new ground by being the first to publish a scientific and methodical study of an artist's drawings considered as essential elements in the reconstruction and assessment of his work as a whole. This revolutionary innovation seemed to call for an apology. "The author being himself an amateur of ancient drawings", Robinson wrote in the preface of his classic *Critical Account of the Drawings of Michel Angelo and Raffaello in the University Galleries, Oxford*, "felt on his guard lest his own special predilection should lead him to over-estimate the relative importance of such works... [but] the paramount excellence of these luminaries of art appears to him such as to justify the most ample and minute critical illustration, and he cannot but think that, as in literature Dante and Shakespeare have justly merited and received the homage of innumerable critics and commentators, a similar devotion is the proper meed of Michel Angelo and Raffaello".

It would, indeed, be impossible now to maintain that the expression of human genius and human talent in the pictorial and plastic arts is any less deserving of study and criticism than their expression in the written word. Before a writer's work can be properly assessed it is essential to determine as exactly as possible what he actually wrote; and as a literary scholar's first duty must be the establishment of a sound text, so the work of an artist must be correctly reconstructed before any valid critical generalization can be attempted. Such a reconstruction can be arrived at only by the application of connoisseurship, which is to the history of art as textual criticism is to the history of literature. Connoisseurship, in the technical sense of identifying the authors of works of art, is not exactly a science, in the sense of being a rational system of inference from verifiable data; nor is it exactly an art. It stands somewhere between the two, and it calls for a particular combination of qualities of mind, some more scientific than artistic and others more artistic than scientific: a visual memory for compositions and details of compositions, exhaustive knowledge of the school or period in question, awareness of all the possible answers, a sense

of artistic quality, a capacity for assessing evidence, and a power of empathy with the creative processes of each individual artist and a positive conception of him as an individual artistic personality.

Philip Pouncey, in honour of whose seventy-fifth birthday this exhibition has been organised, possesses all these qualities. He has an international reputation as an outstanding connoisseur of Italian art – not only of drawings but also of paintings – from the early Renaissance to the late Baroque. His almost life-long absorption in the subject dates from his schooldays, when as a boy of sixteen he came across a copy of Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *History of Painting in Italy* in the school library at Marlborough. That great pioneering work, published in the 1860's, is concerned above all with putting the material in order – in other words, with problems of authorship and attribution – and this has always been Mr. Pouncey's approach to the subject. After taking his degree at Cambridge he worked for a time as a volunteer in the Fitzwilliam Museum, and was persuaded by the then Director, Sir Sydney Cockerell, to apply for a vacant Assistant-Keepership at the National Gallery. At the beginning of the last war his duties involved the supervision of the pictures that had been removed for safety to the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth along with the drawings from the British Museum Printroom and the Royal Library at Windsor. These were in the care of A.E. Popham of the British Museum. Popham, who had taken the opportunity of starting work on the catalogues of the XIV and XV-Century Italian drawings in the British Museum and of the XV and XVI-century Italian drawings at Windsor, used to discuss problems of attribution over this very wide range with two eminent scholars in the Italian field, Frederick Antal and Johannes Wilde, who happened at that time to be in Aberystwyth. Mr. Pouncey took part in these discussions, and soon came to realise that drawings, surviving as they have in far greater numbers than paintings and being at the same time relatively little studied, offered much more scope for the exercise of his particular skill. After the war he accordingly transferred to the British Museum and continued, now on an official basis, to collaborate with Popham on the first volume of the Italian catalogue. An inexperienced novice who had joined the Department as an Assistant Keeper at about the same time, and who had been assigned the task of helping to revise the text of the catalogue for the printer and see it through the press, remembers the experience as perhaps the most valuable part of his entire education. Quite apart from the close scrutiny and discussion of the drawings themselves, he learnt whatever he knows of clarity, accuracy, concision and exactness of expression, attention to shades of meaning, the distinction between hypothesis and fact and the relevant and irrelevant, and the "expression of assent and dissent in graduated terms". Mr. Pouncey is a scholar, in the sense in which that much-abused word is expressive of a particular quality of mind, and he is one of those for whom, as A.E. Housman put it, accuracy is not a virtue but a duty. Walter Headlam is said to have read

through the whole body of extant Greek literature, "including the Rhetoricians and the dictionary-makers", in preparation for his edition of Herodas. Mr. Pouncey's knowledge of the whole field of Italian art is no less extensive and profound. The experiment was once made of testing him against the obscurest names chosen at random from Thieme-Becker; in no instance did he fail to give the artist's origin, approximate date and principal works, and like a kindly shepherd who cherishes the weaklings of his flock he could almost always add some favourable comment. The long and masterly review of the third edition of Berenson's *Drawings of the Florentine Painters* which he published in *Master Drawings* in 1964 was a *tour de force* in its own way comparable with the legendary achievement of another Cambridge polymath, C.K. Ogden, said to have been the only man in the world capable of reviewing the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

The connoisseurship of Italian drawings is based almost entirely on internal, stylistic evidence. Though frequently inscribed with names of artists, drawings are hardly ever signed. Inscriptions must always be taken into account and their value as evidence assessed, but as often as not they record nothing more than the over-ingenious or optimistic opinions of collectors. There is more than one way of arriving at an attribution. Sometimes a connection with a documented or signed painting can be established, and here a sense of quality is required to distinguish between a preparatory study and a copy by some later hand. The drawings of an artist with a strongly marked and consistent style can usually be recognised by their accidental characteristics, or "handwriting" – to use the German expression; and here too only a sense of quality, combined with awareness of every alternative possibility, will distinguish between the hand of an influential master (Rembrandt is an obvious example) and his deceptively close followers and imitators. All too often it is necessary to have recourse to the laborious and uninspired method of a succession of sighting shots, first to determine the date and school and then gradually to narrow down the possibilities until they can be tested individually. But the most intellectually satisfying method is by the recognition – sometimes instantaneous, sometimes suddenly apparent only after prolonged contemplation – of the individual artistic personality that underlies the drawing. It may be asked, how does an artistic personality reveal itself? In addition to the Morellian criteria presented by such secondary physical features as the form of hands or ears, there are individual patterns of composition and grouping into which the draughtsman falls unconsciously and which are as unmistakable as a writer's choice of words and the cadence of his sentences; and above all there is the psychology of the artist as expressed in nuances of facial expression.

A classic example of the last type of attribution is that of the study of a crouching nude man by Bastianino (no. 7 in this exhibition), which had lain unnoticed for more than two hundred years among the anonymous sheets at Christ Church. No drawings from the hand of this obscure

Ferrarese imitator of Michelangelo were known when Mr. Pouncey remarked that "if Bastianino had made drawings, this is exactly the kind of drawing that one would have expected from him". The suggestion was triumphantly confirmed by the discovery in a painting by Bastianino of the figure for which the drawing undoubtedly served as a study. Mr. Pouncey is fond of quoting Berenson's aphorism that "the style of a work of art is also a document", and that style is for him the ultimate criterion is demonstrated by his obstinate and well-justified insistence, in the face of apparently conclusive external evidence, that no. 41 in the present exhibition and the stylistically inseparable drawing in the Albertina are by Perino del Vaga and not Jacopino del Conte.

It is one thing to make a satisfactory attribution, but quite another to explain it satisfactorily; sometimes as hard to put one's reasons into words as for a tea-taster to justify his preferences. The dry and laconic A.E. Popham, for example, was often reduced to murmured half-sentences and even gestures. Mr. Pouncey is far from eschewing gesture – unforgettable, even after thirty years, was his way of demonstrating the "Correggiosity" of no. 19 in the present exhibition by throwing himself into the pose of the St. Sebastian in the drawing – but his announcement of another discovery (no. 31 in the exhibition) betrays a command of fluent and articulate eloquence capable of capturing in words the subtlest nuance of a draughtsman's style. This must increase our regret that he has not devoted more time to writing. Apart from the three British Museum catalogues of which he was joint author and a number of cogently expressed and factual reviews and short articles, the tangible monument of his most remarkable life-work consists of nothing more than innumerable brief annotations on the mounts of drawings in most of the European and North American collections. Once a discovery is made, he is usually content to record it and then to pass on to the next problem; but a correct attribution is like the tip of an iceberg – the visible culmination of a complex intellectual and intuitive process; and if he himself has shrunk from the labour of writing up his conclusions, countless acknowledgments in prefaces and the footnotes to learned articles reveal how lavish he has always been in information and advice to his fellow-students. As Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "to be wholly devoted to some intellectual exercise is to have succeeded in life, and perhaps only in law and the higher mathematics may this devotion be maintained, suffice to itself without reaction, and find continual rewards without excitement". It would not be difficult to think of other examples of such intellectual exercises, and among them the study and connoisseurship of drawings. The rewards are certainly continual, though no one who has been present when Mr. Pouncey has made an attribution would say that the occasion is unaccompanied by excitement.

J.A. Gere
London, August 1985



Carafesino da Regio