Study of the Mona Lisa

Frederic Lord Leighton, P.R.A.

Sold



REF: 3073

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Description

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Frederic, Lord Leighton, P.R.A. (1830-1896)
Study of the Mona Lisa

Signed with monogram and inscribed upper right: L. da Vinci/1856
Pencil
24.2 by 19 cm., 9 ½ by 7 ½ in.

Provenance:
With Jeremy Maas, London, circa 1970;
Anonymous sale, Sotheby's Belgravia, 25th March 1980, lot 27;
With Owen Edgar Gallery, London, circa 1990;
Anonymous sale, Christie's, 19th June 2014, lot 74, where bought by the present owner

Literature:
Christopher Newall, The Art of Lord Leighton, 1990, p.25, ill.

The present drawing dates from Leighton's stay in Paris where he was based in a studio at 21 Rue Pigalle. He was there intermittently from 1855 until his permanent return to London in 1858. Leighton began to copy Old Master paintings in Italy in the 1850s when he was collecting material for his first major work Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna (bought by Queen Victoria and now National Gallery). Drawings by him after Signorelli, Carpaccio, Pollaiolo, Rossellino, Giotto, Raphael and others are in Leighton House Museum (for a full list, see A Victorian Master Drawings by Frederic, Lord Leighton, 2006, pp. 113 and 115).

There are a number of recorded drawings by Leighton after works in the Louvre, all dated 1856. These include Anne of Cleeves after Holbein and Portrait of a young Man after Raphael (Christie's, 1st March 1983, lot 111), Erasmus after Holbein (Leighton House, London) and Portrait of a Young Man after Franciabiagio (Christie's, 27th July 1982, lot 32).
Many of them are signed and dated as Leighton evidently considered them finished works of art in their own right.

The influence of Ingres's highly finished portrait drawings is evident in this work. Leighton visited Ingres's studio when living in Paris (see Mrs Russell Barrington, The Life, Letters and Works of Frederic Leighton, 1906, p.245) and he also would have seen the exhibition of his work at the Exposition Universale in 1856. In 1867 he bought an Ingres pencil drawing `Odalisque and Slave' now in Harvard Art Museums.

Although Michelangelo is a more obvious influence in the contorted posture of some of Leighton's paintings, he also thought highly of Leonardo. This is especially evident in `A Roman lady' also known as `La Nanna' which dates from 1859 and is now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. While he was painting it his friend Giovanni Costa recalls that Leighton `had then Lionardo da Vinci in his mind' (`Notes on Lord Leighton', Cornhill Magazine, March 1897, p.376) although the influence of Venetian sixteenth century art is also apparent.

The second half of the nineteenth century heralded a revival of interest in artists of the High Renaissance, especially Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael. Allen Staley writes in the introduction to the catalogue for his exhibition Victorian High Renaissance held at Manchester City Art Gallery and Minneapolis Institute of Art that: `The Victorian era saw a renaissance of the Renaissance. The impetus did not come entirely from England, but, for a variety of reasons, it came more from England than from anywhere else' (Allen Staley, Victorian High Renaissance, 1978, p.18). In Leighton's case this is partly due to his early artistic training i...

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