



ABRAHAM BLOEMAERT

(Gorinchem, c. 1565 - Utrecht, 1651)

Study of a boy's head

black chalk

285 x 350 mm

Provenance:

Collection Koen Muller, Eksaarde, Belgium

Abraham Bloemaert's working method was heavily contingent upon the use of figure and drapery studies, drawn from life models. Sheets contain various images of the same models, drawn from different angles or shown in alternative poses. These sketches were threefold in their purpose: demonstrating Bloemaert's skill to collectors and students; informing later painted compositions; and for use as the basis for prints, such as this example.

The present sheet is a preparatory drawing for an engraving made by Bloemaert's son Frederick (c. 1614-1690) in 1650 [fig. 1]. The pentimenti around the figure's profile clearly indicates its experimental creation. It forms part of a series of 120 pattern prints called the "Het Tekenboek", which was used as an instructional book on drawing for students. It is one of the earliest examples of such a book and was highly popular in the latter half of the 16th century, leading to a run of reprints. Most of Frederick's original prints are numbered in the lower left corner and the print to which this drawing relates is numbered 39. Number 35 also likely depicts this same model, in the upper centre, demonstrating Bloemaert's practice of studying the same subject from a different perspective in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the figure's anatomy and its idiosyncrasies [fig. 2].

The quality of Bloemaert's draughtsmanship was greatly admired during his lifetime and his drawings were much sought after by collectors. François Boucher (1703-1770) was known to greatly admire Bloemaert's drawings and made various copies after his designs, including those of the Het Tekenboek. Another substantial group of Bloemaert's studies was in the collection of André Giroux

(1801-1879) during the 19th century, prior to its dispersal in Paris in 1904. These too were designed as models for students to copy and have become revered as exemplars of a 16th century master's great skill.