HERMANN WEYER

(Coburg, 1596 - after 1621)

The three Marys

signed with the artist's monogram, lower left

pen and black ink, yellow, grey and pink washes, heightened with white, underdrawing in black chalk

315 x 380 mm

Provenance:

Peter Vischer (1751-1823), Basel [L.2115]

Private collection, Saint Tropez

This depiction of The Three Marys, the women who discovered Christ's empty sepulchre after the Resurrection, was drawn by the enigmatic German artist Hermann Weyer as an independent work of art. Although the New Testament gospels agree that a group of women came to the sepulchre on Easter morning carrying spices to anoint Christ's body, the identities of these women are not agreed upon. All four gospels cite the presence of Mary Magdalene, but Mark (Mark 16:1-8) alone cites that of the two additional Marys: Mary of Clopas and Mary Salome. Here, Weyer has theatrically staged the three women in the centre of a mountainous landscape, with the sepulchre, hinted at to the left of the scene, and the city of Jerusalem, shown in the background to the right. The billowing draperies and elongated limbs of the three figures indicate that the drawing was made following Weyer's transformative journey to the Netherlands in approximately 1616, after which point his drawing style became increasingly mannered.

The drawing is almost identical in scale, technique, and finish with a group of drawings at the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. These highly finished drawings, produced for the collector's market, depict biblical scenes set within extensive landscapes, and demonstrate Weyer's masterly manipulation of tonal range. Unlike many of Weyer's drawings, which are double-sided and smaller in scale, these drawings are large, folded vertically in the centre, and are perhaps indicative of Weyer's use of sketchbooks. Weyer's drawing style has evoked formal comparison with the chiaroscuro woodcut, for its dynamic exploration of light and dark drawing media, and for Weyer's partiality for yellow washes. Weyer is not known to have produced woodcuts however, and he seems to have painted very little, if at all. Instead, he is known primarily through his graphic work, most of which is monogrammed and dated. This has led scholars to suggest that Weyer may have operated exclusively as a draughtsman. In this

regard Weyer is a significant figure in the history of drawing as perhaps the earliest known artist to have earned a living principally by selling his drawings.

Acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York