

JACOPO NEGRETTI CALLED PALMA IL GIOVANE

(Venice, 1548 - Venice, 1628)

Mars and Venus

pen and brown ink over black chalk, blackened on the verso for transfer

118 x 99 mm

Provenance:

Count Moritz von Fries (1777-1826), Vienna [L 2903]

with Baskett & Day, London

where acquired by the present owner in December 1980

This small but energetic drawing is a *prima idea* for Palma Giovane's painting, Mars and Venus, in the National Gallery, London. The drawing's sketchy framing lines record Palma's deliberation over the orientation of the composition, which in the present drawing is vertical, although horizontal in the painting's ultimate arrangement. Both drawing and painting are composed along insistent diagonals in a mannerist figurative arrangement. Light strikes Venus from the left of the drawing, illuminating her thigh and bathing her back in shade. The goddess' pose remains largely unchanged between the drawing and painting, although those of Mars and Cupid are entirely reconfigured. The roles of Venus, as the active seducer, and Mars, as the seduced, are altered between the painting and the drawing, offering an alternative moment in the myth told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (IV, 171-189). Ovid's account focuses on Venus' infidelity towards her husband Vulcan who catches her in adultery with Mars. This is understood as an allegory of Love's conquest of Strength. Here, Mars seems to chance across Venus, whereas in the painting, Venus' role appears more active.

A second drawing, on page 112 of the Palma album in the British Museum, London, which is described by Stefania Mason Rinaldi as an "antefatto" to the painting possibly relates to the same commission.