

ANTONIO ZUCCHI

1726–1795

THE REMAINS OF AN ANCIENT BUILDING

Pen, ink and wash with touches of white heightening

16 ¾ x 22 ½ inches; 420 x 571 mm

Signed and dated bottom right: 'Ant. Zucchi 1794'



Collections: Walker's Galleries Ltd.;

W A Brandt (1902-1978), acquired from the above on 24th May 1961;

By descent to 2025

Exhibition: London, Walker's Gallery, 118 New Bond Street, 57th Annual Exhibition of Early English Water-Colours, 1961, cat. no.145

This unusually grand drawing was made by Antonio Zucchi in the last year of his life. Preserved in spectacular condition, this drawing was made in Rome, where Zucchi had settled in 1782 in the former studio of Anton Raphael Mengs on via Sistina with his wife Angelica Kauffman. Zucchi had begun his career in the international artistic circles in Rome, where he worked with the architects Robert and James Adam and their French drawing master, Charles-Louis Clérisseau. Clérisseau had been a pupil of the ruin-scape painter, Giovanni Paolo Pannini and had been a pensionnaire at the French Academy in Rome, although he had fallen out with its director, Charles-Joseph Natoire. The Adam brothers and Clérisseau were amongst the most innovative neo-classical designers of the mid-eighteenth century, through them Zucchi acquired a fascination with ruins; in his most successful compositions, such as this sheet, Zucchi recast antique fragments into innovative new compositions which point to the modern application of the classical past.

Zucchi was born in Venice, but trained largely in Rome. Once in the orbit of the Adam brothers and Clérisseau, Zucchi became an important member of their circle and he is frequently credited with adding the figures to Clérisseau's gouache ruinscapes. These highly imaginative capriccios were a sort-after commodity across Europe; Catherine the Great owned a large number. Zucchi travelled to Britain to work in the Adam practice in London in 1766. There he was largely responsible for painting the fantastical ruinscapes which decorate

many of Robert Adam's interiors. In 1781 he married the painter Angelica Kauffman and shortly afterwards they returned to Italy. In Rome he managed her burgeoning business, handling many of the commissions from visiting European, predominantly British aristocrats. At the same time he continued to produce finished drawings of ruincapes such as this example, which is signed and dated 1794.

This boldly conceived composition is partly indebted to the work Zucchi completed with Clérisseau, but shows another artistic influence, namely the prints of Giovanni Battista Piranesi. The ambitious scenographic view shows the interior of a vaulted space lined with antique sculptural fragments. The overall concept owes something to Piranesi's dramatic views of the interior arcades of the so-called Villa of Maesenas at Tivoli which he published in a series of etchings in 1764. Piranesi showed the long arcades of the ancient Sanctuary of Hercules at Tivoli, then erroneously identified as the villa of Virgil's great patron, as half ruined and enveloped in vegetation. Like Piranesi, Zucchi has invested his ruins with a Romantic vitality. The grand, vaulted space is slowly succumbing to vegetation and each of the antiquities is shown as a fragment. The arrangement of the space, with bays for sculpture and reliefs set into the walls recalls the neo-classical interiors of Adam and other contemporaries, particularly modern spaces designed to show ancient art, such as Villa Albani or the Museo Pio Clementino. As such, Zucchi's drawings point to the modernity of the fragment and the ruin in contemporary European architecture and design. Preserved in excellent condition, this late design underscores Zucchi's importance in the neo-classical circles of Adam, Clérisseau and Piranesi.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi
The so-called Villa of Maecenas at Tivoli
Etching
c. 1764

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. David Keppel, 1960