

LE CLAIRE

KUNST SEIT 1982



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FRIEDRICH HEINRICH FÜGER

1751 Heilbronn - Vienna 1818

A Cure for Nympholepsy

Pen and black ink with grey wash and white heightening, on light-blue paper; c.1801.
456 x 346 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Vienna – Olivier Aaron, Paris – Private collection, France

The classical aesthetic defined the Vienna Academy under the aegis of Friedrich Heinrich Füger towards the end of the eighteenth century. He was the outstanding neoclassicist artist and at the peak of his artistic powers. In the early 1780s, affluent Viennese patrons had funded a bursary for him to study in Rome. Here he came into contact with Jacques Louis David and François Peyron. In the spirit of the age, their aim was to protect the moral seriousness of art and at the same time to effect an artistic renewal.

The present striking drawing was executed on blue paper with a smooth surface subtly reflecting the light. It is a preparatory work for an engraving by Friedrich John, one of Füger's pupils. The engraving was published in Christoph Martin Wieland's four-volume novel titled *Aristipp und einige seiner Zeitgenossen*. The novel appeared in 1801-2.¹

Four illustrations were planned as frontispieces for the four volumes. Each illustration was to contain no more than three figures. The publisher Georg J. Göschen commissioned Füger to execute the preparatory drawings based on subjects proposed by Wieland.² Göschen knew Füger's work through his friendship with the Hamburg collector Lorenz Meyer. Füger had met Meyer during his sojourn in Rome. Füger had only recently completed work on a group of twenty-two drawings for Klopstock's *Messiah*.³ The group was to represent a turning point in his career.⁴ Both the *Messiah* drawings and the

¹ Georg J. Göschen took charge of the complete edition in 1794. See Stephan Georg Füssel, *Georg J. Göschen – Ein Verleger der Spätaufklärung und der deutschen Klassik*, Berlin 1996, no. 2349.

² Füger executed the first drawing titled *Lais and Socrates* in November 1800 (I, letter 25; Füssel, op. cit., no. 2405, p.234, plate I) – He executed the second drawing titled *Lais taking Aristipp by Surprise* in March 1801 (II, letter 39; Füssel, op. cit., no. 2415, p.325); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 2010.276 [Fig. 2] – The third drawing titled *A Cure for Nympholepsy* was completed in July 1801 (III, letter 9, plate II; Füssel, op. cit., no. 2504, p.337) – The fourth drawing titled *Cleone with her Children* was completed by early 1802 after a number of delays (IV, letter 13, Füssel, op. cit., no. 2553, plate III, p.344).

³ Albertina, Vienna. See Robert Keil, *Heinrich Friedrich Füger – Nur wenigen ist es vergönnt das Licht der Wahrheit zu sehen*, Vienna 2000, pp.98f., nos. 423-446. The engravings after these drawings were also executed by Friedrich John.

⁴ Zsuzsa Gonda, *Nineteenth-Century German, Austrian, and Hungarian Drawings from Budapest*, exhib. cat., Alexandria, Virginia 1994, p.44.

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Aristipp drawings were executed in the same technique and on blue paper with identical watermarks and identical dimensions.

Wieland found a congenial partner in Füger. Füger was able to interpret Wieland's ideas with deep insight, as the remarkable set of drawings testifies. The writer Johann Gottfried Seume (1763-1810) notes: *The great artist confesses with his usual amiable frankness that some of his most magnificent compositions have been taken from Father Wieland's 'Aristipp'*.⁵



Fig. 1: Friedrich John (1769-1843),
A Cure for Nympholepsy, engraving, c.1801.



Fig. 2: *Lais Taking Aristipp by Surprise*, c.1801
463 x 350 mm
Pen and black ink with grey wash, heightened with white gouache, on blue paper
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Inv. no. 2010.276

⁵ *Mit seiner lebenswürdigen Offenheit gesteht der große Künstler, dass er einige seiner herrlichsten Kompositionen aus Vater Wielands „Aristipp“.*