

BERTEL THORVALDSEN

1770 – COPENHAGEN – 1844

Chiron Teaching Achilles to Shoot with the Bow, after 1810

Black crayon heightened with white on brownish paper. Signed: A [Alberto] Thorvaldsen Fecit.
On the original mount.
370 x 430 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Germany (until 1996) – Private collection, North Germany

LITERATURE: Dirk Luckow and Dörte Zbikowski, *Die Kopenhagener Schule. Meisterwerke Dänischer und Deutscher Malerei von 1770 bis 1850*, exhib. cat., Kunsthalle Kiel 2005, p. 34, repr.

EXHIBITION: Dirk Luckow and Dörte Zbikowski, *Die Kopenhagener Schule. Meisterwerke Dänischer und Deutscher Malerei von 1770 bis 1850*, Kunsthalle Kiel 2005, p. 34, repr.

Bertel Thorvaldsen was widely considered the greatest sculptor in Europe after the death of Antonio Canova. He was admitted to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen at the early age of eleven in recognition of his unusual talent for drawing. In 1793 he won the major gold medal and the Academy's travelling scholarship which enabled him to leave for Italy. He arrived in Rome on 8 March 1797 and henceforth regarded the day of his arrival as his 'Roman birthday', celebrating it throughout his life. He remained in Rome until 1838, returning only briefly to Denmark in 1819-20. During his early years in Rome, Thorvaldsen established a close friendship with the artists Asmus Jacob Carstens and Joseph Anton Koch, with whom he shared lodgings in via Sistina 141 from 1800 to 1803. He emerged as one of the greatest sculptors of the period, an outstanding representative of the neoclassical style and a central figure within the artistic community in Rome. The subjects of his sculptures were mostly taken from Greek mythology. He also produced a large body of portrait sculpture, initially medallions and increasingly, portrait busts. After his return to Denmark in 1838 he donated his own works and his collections to his native city, laying the foundations for the future Thorvaldsen Museum. His body was laid to rest in the courtyard of the Museum on its completion in 1848.

Thorvaldsen's earliest drawings of *Chiron Teaching Achilles to Shoot with the Bow* clearly date before 1810 since they bear the signature *B. Thorvaldsen*. In 1810, he altered his signature to *A. [Alberto] Thorvaldsen*¹ – the signature that the present drawing carries. A fairly large group of finished drawings and sketches on the theme are held in the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen. The last of these drawings served as the model for an engraving by Johannes Riepenhausen (1788-1860) (Fig. 1) executed in 1831. Thorvaldsen was hailed as the 'patriarch of the bas-relief' during his lifetime. In the 1820s, he worked on a number of classically themed reliefs (Fig. 2).² Although he may have planned to execute a relief depicting the present motif, the project remained unrealised.³ Thorvaldsen's biographer J. M. Thiele notes that although Thorvaldsen's interest in themes related to Chiron's education of Achilles was reflected in a number of drawings from 1797 onwards, it became noticeably stronger in 1804.⁴

Thorvaldsen showed little respect for his own drawings – he would often draw on the verso of a sheet or simply throw it away, treating unwanted modelling clay in the same way. Nevertheless, a sheet of pencil studies dating from 1804-5 showing a small, rapidly sketched first idea for the present composition has survived [Fig. 3]. Another important exception is the present, meticulously executed and highly finished drawing. It belongs to a group of large-format sheets that Thorvaldsen set aside as elegantly mounted gifts for close friends and patrons.

We are grateful to Eva Henschen from the Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen, for her valuable assistance in cataloguing this drawing.



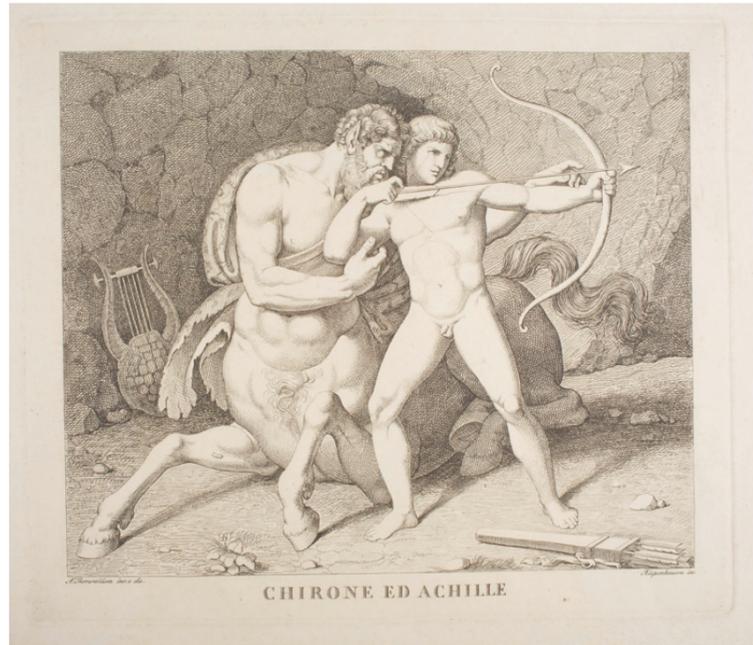


Fig. 1: Johannes Riepenhausen (1788-1860), *Chiron Teaching Achilles to Shoot with the Bow*, (1831), etching after Thorvaldsen, 214 x 239 mm. Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen (inv. E89)



Fig. 2: *Cupid Received by Anacreon*, white marble, 52.5 x 68.0 cm. Commissioned in 1823 by Count Franz Erwein von Schönborn-Wiesentheid and executed in 1824. Formerly Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin, restituted in 2003. Swiss private collection. The relief was sold at Sotheby's London on 4 July 2018, auction sale *Treasures*, lot 26, repr.



Fig. 3: *Chiron Teaching Achilles to Shoot with the Bow - Chiron Teaching Achilles to Play the Lyre - Achilles and Penthesilea - Caricature Portrait of Martin von Rohden (?) - Caricature Portrait of Napoleon*, 1804-5, pencil, 536 x 425 mm (sheet). Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen (inv. C536v)

¹ Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen (for a selection, see inv. C780, C513r and C563.72v).

² Jørgen Birkedal Hartmann, *Antike Motive bei Thorvaldsen - Studien Zur Antikenrezeption des Klassizismus*, Tübingen 1979, p. 59, pl. XIV, 3.

³ Helmuth Sichtermann, 'Zur Achill und Chiron-Gruppe', in *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts*, 64/1957, pp. 98-110. - Wolfram Martini, 'Lehrer und Schüler', in *Opus Nobile, Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Ulf Jantzen*, Wiesbaden, 1969, pp. 105-8.

⁴ J. M. Thiele, *Thorvaldsen's Leben nach den eigenhändigen Aufzeichnungen, nachgelassenen Papieren und dem Briefwechsel des Künstlers*, 1852-6.

⁵ 1804-5, pencil on light brown paper, 536 x 425 mm. Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen (inv. C524v).