

THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD COSWAY (1742 - 1821)

Adam and Eve with the infants Cain and Abel in a landscape

Circa: circa 1790-1800

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Pen and ink

105mm high (drawing only); sheet 290x220 mm (mounted but unframed)

Set in the artist's mount

Following their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were made to live a life of tending the land and had two sons, Cain and Abel. Though a less common subject than the expulsion or the Original Sin amongst old master painters, it can be seen that this drawing is taken from an original composition by Lorenzo de' Ferrari (1680-1744), now in private hands. Many of Cosway's drawings are not original and are copies, as in this example. He has exercised some creative licence, still, by moving Adam to the background of the scene (with a bull and an unknown figure), and making the entire landscape more 'modern' and pastoral. For example, there is a house in the background, as well as a watermill. Eve is depicted spinning with a distaff, and beside her, the two infants Cain and Abel play with- and are possibly killing- a goat. Their position is likely to be a reference to the later murder of Abel by Cain, motivated by God's Favouring Abel's offering of a Goat over Cain's produce.

This is the drawing which was copied by Maria Cosway, the wife of the artist, in her 'Imitations in chalk from drawings by R.Cosway RA', published in 1800. Few of the original drawings from her engravings exist, and therefore, this example is an exciting addition to the oeuvre and story of both artists. Both the original drawing and the engraving are ambitious projects, typical of the works being done by both artists around the turn of the nineteenth century.

As well as drawings, Richard Cosway was well known for his miniature portraits, and depicted many of the most important people in the high circles of Georgian society. Many of these he socialised with in

his Pall Mall house, and his extravagance in these social gatherings led to him being known as 'The Macaroni Miniature Painter' by some. His wife, Maria, was born in Florence and enjoyed an equally successful career as an engraver and painter in oils. She spent the end of her life in Italy, establishing the Fondazione Maria Cosway, and many of the original drawings by both artists remain there, in the 'Lodi Albums', today.