

[9]

JOSÉ DEL CASTILLO (MADRID, 1737-1793)

Deucalion and Pyrrha

BLACK CHALK AND CHARCOAL WITH TOUCHES OF WHITE LEAD ON YELLOWISH-BROWN LAID PAPER

266 x 310 MM

SIGNED: "CASTILLO" AT THE LOWER RIGHT CORNER

PROVENANCE: PRIVATE COLLECTION, ENGLAND

José del Castillo was born in Madrid in 1737. He began his training at the age of just ten in the drawing classes of the Preparatory Section of the San Fernando Academy in Madrid, directed by José Romeo. Castillo was soon noticed for his abilities and in 1751 he received a grant to study in Rome with Corrado Giaquinto (1703-1766), returning to Spain in 1753. Having returned to Madrid the young Castillo continued his studies in drawing and in December 1758 he was awarded a further grant from the Academy to travel to Rome, where he remained until 1764. This is the period of the "Italian Sketchbooks" (1761-1762, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado), in which Castillo reveals himself as one of the finest draughtsmen of the day.

Having completed his training, Castillo applied for work at Court and was employed at the Royal Santa Barbara Tapestry Manufactory where he joined the team of painters led by Giaquinto that was producing designs for the decoration of the royal palace at El Pardo. Castillo worked alongside Andrés de la Calleja, Guillermo L'Anglois, Antonio González Velázquez and Francisco de Goya, among others. For the Manufactory, he executed notably important works including cartoons for the hangings in the King's bedroom in the royal palace in Madrid (1770-1773), the new tapestries for the Prince's Chamber at El Escorial in 1773,

and those for the Cabinet of the Princess at both El Pardo and El Escorial (1775-1776).

Alongside his work as a tapestry designer, Castillo undertook other projects such as the restoration of the frescoes by Luca Giordano in the Casón del Buen Retiro, Madrid, and the illustration, of Ibarra's edition of *Don Quixote* (published by the Real Academia de la Lengua). In the late 1780s Castillo experienced serious financial difficulties. Despite having been made an Academician in 1785, he was not appointed Royal Painter. Nonetheless, in 1787 the Count of Floridablanca commissioned from the artist the ceiling paintings of his Madrid residence. Castillo died in poverty on 5 October 1793¹.

The composition of the present drawing, executed in black chalk with touches of white lead, exactly repeats the painting of *Deucalion and Pyrrha* by Luca Giordano (Patrimonio Nacional, inv. no. 10022576) painted around 1697 for the Chamber of Charles II at the royal palace of Aranjuez². Castillo must have copied it when it was still in the palace, as according to the inventory of the palace undertaken in 1794 in relation to the Will of Charles III, the canvas was hanging at that date in the corridor between the Pieza del Cubierto and the Antechamber³. Castillo's use of designs and models by Giordano is well known. Under the supervision of Corrado Giaquinto he had drawn copies of works by



Luca Giordano, *Deucalion and Pyrrha*, c. 1697.
Patrimonio Nacional
(inv. no. 10022576)

Giordano to be used as tapestry designs for the decoration of the new royal palace in Madrid⁴. In addition, he had worked on the restoration of Giordano's frescoes in the Casón del Buen Retiro from 1777 onwards⁵.

With regard to the iconography of the present scene, Deucalion and Pyrrha were considered to be the founders of the new generation of human beings following the classical Flood. In this scene, recounted by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (Book I), having survived the flood brought about by the gods as a punishment of the human race, Deucalion and Pyrrha made their way to the temple of Themis in order to find out how to redeem mankind. Moved by their actions, the goddess made the following pronouncement: "Depart from my temple, veil your heads, loosen the girdles of your garments and throw behind you the bones of your great

mother." Deucalion interpreted these words as meaning the stones to be found in the earth, after which they "went down the hillside, veiled their heads, loosened their tunics, and threw the stones behind them, as they had been bidden [...] The stones began to lose their hardness and rigidity, and after a little, grew soft. [...] and in a brief space of time, thanks to the divine will of the gods, the stones thrown from male hands took the appearance of men, while from those the woman threw, women were recreated"⁶. The present drawing reproduces both passages: on the right we see Deucalion and Pyrrha walking towards the steps of the temple of Themis, whose glowing form appears in the background behind the gates. On the left, the couple obey the Oracle and throw the stones behind them, from which the new generation of man starts to emerge.

1 For a complete biography with an extensive bibliography, see *Enciclopedia* (2006), vol. II, pp. 680-683.
2 On Giordano's decorations for Aranjuez, see Jordán de Urríes (2004), pp. 60-73.
3 Fernández Miranda (1989), vol. II, p. 48, no. 436: "Three feet and 6 fingers wide, and two feet and 14 fingers high: a scene from a Fable with

a figure of a seated man, sceptre in hand and blue clothes, and another overthrown and seen from behind, with a perfume burner. Jordan [...] 1,000."

4 On this subject, see Frutos Sastre (2006), pp. 57-73.

5 See Úbeda de los Cobos (2008).

6 Ovid (1982), pp. 37-40.

