The painting depicts two nude female figures. On the left, a figure stands in profile, facing right, with her head slightly bowed. On the right, another figure is seated or crouching, also facing right, with her head turned towards the viewer. The background is composed of dark, textured brushstrokes in shades of blue, green, and brown. The overall style is characteristic of 19th-century academic painting, with a focus on anatomical detail and dramatic lighting.

A group of sketches from life,
attributed to William Etty RA
(1787-1849), in the collection of the
Courtauld Gallery.

Alice Limb (PgDip Conservation of Easel Paintings) and
Zoë Zaneteas (MA Art History).

A group of sketches from life, attributed to William Etty RA (1787-1849), in the collection of the Courtauld Gallery.

This report was produced as part of the Painting Pairs project and is a collaboration between Zoë Zaneteas (MA Art History) and Alice Limb (PgDip Conservation of Easel Paintings).¹

Aims of the Project

This project focusses on a group of seven sketches on board, three of which are double sided, which form part of the Courtauld Gallery collection. We began this project with three overarching aims: firstly, to contextualize the attributed artist, William Etty, within the artistic, moral and social circumstances of his time and revisit existing scholarship; secondly, to examine the works from a technical and stylistic perspective in order to establish if their attribution is justified and, if not, whether an alternative attribution might be proposed; finally, to treat one of the works (CIA2583), including decisions on whether the retention of material relating to the work's early physical history was justified and if this material further informs our knowledge of Etty's practice.

It must be noted that Etty was a prolific artist during the forty years he was active, and that a vast amount of artistic and archival material (both critical and personal) relates to him. This study will

¹ Special thanks must go to: the staff of the Courtauld Gallery (especially Dr Karen Serres, Kate Edmondson and Graeme Barraclough), the staff of the Department of Conservation and Technology (especially Clare Richardson, Dr Pia Gotschaller and Professor Aviva Burnstock), Dr Beatrice Bertram of York City Art Gallery, Jevon Thistlewood and Morwenna Blewett of the Ashmolean Museum, and the staff of the Royal Academy Library, Archives and Stores (especially Helen Valentine, Annette Wickham, Mark Pomeroy, and Daniel Bowman). Their help and advice has been invaluable.

address various other Etty paintings in British collections to provide context and to serve as points of reference and comparison.

An Introduction to the Artist and Works

Early Life

William Etty was born in York on 10 March 1787, the seventh child of Matthew and Ester Etty. His father was a successful miller and baker, famous locally for his gingerbread. Accounts of Etty's first artistic endeavours invariably relate to his using chalk to draw on the floor of his father's bakery as a young child, or on the pavements of York when sent out to deliver baked goods.² At the age of eleven, Etty was apprenticed to a printer in Hull, where he began a seven-year period of indentureship. While he made numerous references in later writings to his dislike of the job and its arduous nature,³ through it Etty would have been exposed to a vast quantity of visual culture and imagery, important for one who would later make his living as an artist. During the Hull years crystallised his desire to become a painter, and upon leaving servitude in 1805, he moved to London with hopes of entering the Royal Academy.⁴

Development of Etty's Practice: The Royal Academy and Grand Tours

As an artist, Etty was undoubtedly a product of his time, albeit a rather unusual one. Not only is the artistic milieu of the Royal Academy, with its rigorous training and European influences, profoundly manifested within his technique, but so too are the social dictates and anxieties of early nineteenth century England. As a painter of the nude, his critical and public reception, as well as his own idiosyncratic practice, often betrayed its context of Victorian morality.

Etty's oeuvre, and especially our own study, calls for addressing the practice of working from life. The vast majority of his extant works were produced in either the Royal Academy Life School or

² Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Etty R.A.* (2 vols, London, 1855) vol.1 p 16.

³ "[Etty] counted the years, weeks, days, and even hours" until the end of his apprenticeship. Etty, quoted in Gilchrist, *Life of William Etty*, vol.1, p. 28.

⁴ Gilchrist, *Life of William Etty*, vol.1, pp. 16, 28, 30-1.

in St. Martin's Lane (a private venture, set up and run by artists independently of the Royal Academy). The life school was a training venue, a place for artists to hone their skill at painting the nude body. Etty, his contemporaries, and the generation preceding them had all trained in the Royal Academy system, in which 'probationers' in receipt of a letter of recommendation were selected based on the merit of one drawing — in Etty's case, a drawing of a cast of the Capitoline *Cupid and Psyche*⁵ — before being admitted to the inaptly-named 'School of Life'. Here, they drew from the Academy's cast collection before being deemed competent enough to graduate to the 'Life School', where they then drew each evening from live models, posed in classically-inspired tableaux in the nude or near-nude.⁶ To become an Associate Academician, recognition of an individual's artistic talent resulted in a proposal which was then voted on by the Academy's existing members. Full Academician status was reached through a similar system, but also mandated the completion of a work done to pre-specified requirements, usually a history painting or similar, which would then be gifted to the Academy.

The Royal Academy reflected historical forces both at home and abroad, and as such, was an abstracted sociological model for analyzing cultural activity.⁷ The creation of an English national school saw a shift from the monopolistic structure of the French Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, a pluralistic apparatus controlled by a professional body, to a field of competition whose corresponding absence of a studio system was to be representative of British character.⁸ Entering the Royal Academy Schools on 15 January 1807, Etty's formation as an artist was shaped by three Academicians in particular: John Opie, Henry Fuseli, and Thomas Lawrence.⁹ Under their influence, Etty contributed to the evolution of the English school and the extent to which it would avow or disavow European conventions. The identification of a specifically English academic nude stemmed from this broader debate and was concerned with how best to address nudity within the framework of

⁵ Gilchrist, *Life of William Etty*, vol.1, p. 34.

⁶ Etty would paint in the drawing class.

⁷ Martin Myrone, "William Etty: 'A Child of the Royal Academy,'" in *Living with the Royal Academy* (Farnham, 2013) p. 172.

⁸ Myrone, "William Etty: 'A Child of the Royal Academy,'" pp. 173-4.

⁹ Etty would copy Lawrence in his studio for a year in addition to his studies at the Royal Academy. Gilchrist, *Life of William Etty*, vol.1, pp. 37-8.

Victorian morality. Tensions inherent in its representation were partially negotiated through a process of appropriation, in which stylistic exemplars from the past were adapted to meet contemporary expectations, eventually condensing into an Anglo-Venetian style that would remain popular until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ Indeed, Etty was greatly inspired by the Venetian Masters on the two Grand Tours he undertook in 1816 and 1822. He referred to Venice as “the hope and idol of [his] professional life,”¹¹ and set out to “domesticate”¹² the Venetian nude for the English audience, grafting the “beauties of the Italian onto the stamina of the English School.”¹³ The goal was to achieve the Masters’ colouristic sensuousness while still adhering to the Victorian requirement that a depicted nude body must evince a clear moral purpose. In pursuit of this stylistic marriage and despite his well-documented frustrations in finding a proper cup of tea, Etty extended his time abroad to attend the life school at the Venetian Academy of Fine Art.

This is unsurprising as Etty’s working practice back home was intimately associated with the rhythms and dictates of the Royal Academy Life School. Sitting for two hours each evening, Etty would complete a full life sketch within three sessions.¹⁴ His habitual attendance, which outlasted his student and Associate RA days by almost twenty years, attracted consternation from his fellow Academicians, who found it unprofessional and unnecessary.¹⁵ A contemporary sarcastically observed: “The history of English art does not offer another example of such persistent scholarship.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, Etty declared that he would rather give up his status as an Academician than cease his devotion to the Life School.¹⁷ This untiring dedication to the study of the academic nude presents an interpretive problem that has thus far been inadequately addressed in most existing Etty scholarship. On one hand, citing Etty’s lifelong bachelorhood and known idiosyncratic personality, it has been proposed that the reason for his continued attendance at the Life School was an obsession with sex,

¹⁰ Alison Smith, “The Nude in Nineteenth-Century Britain: ‘The English Nude,’” in *Exposed: The Victorian Nude* (London, 2001), p. 16.

¹¹ Gilchrist, *Life of William Etty*, vol.1, p. 156.

¹² Smith, “The Nude in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” p. 16.

¹³ Anon., “William Etty, Esq., R.A.,” *Arnold’s Magazine of the Fine Arts*, 3:4, (February, 1834), p. 289.

¹⁴ Martin Postle, “From Academy to School,” in *The Artist’s Model From Etty to Spencer*, ed. by Martin Postle and William Vaughan (London, 1999), p. 20.

¹⁵ Brian J. Bailey, *William Etty’s Nudes* (Pulloxhill, 1974) p. 25.

¹⁶ Philip Gilbert Hamerton, “Etty — 1875,” in *Portfolio Papers* (London, 1889), p. 48.

¹⁷ Bailey, *William Etty’s Nudes*, p. 25.

with some even suggesting he carried on an incestuous relationship with his niece with whom he lived.¹⁸ However, it is well-established that Etty was incredibly shy and awkward, and combined with his use of a limited pool of models kept on retainer by the Royal Academy,¹⁹ it is unlikely that he would have been comfortable having a naked figure in his personal studio. This has given rise to what we feel to be an equally unconvincing hypothesis: that his dedication to the nude was an attempt to substitute art for sex.²⁰ While Etty occasionally lamented being alone, it does not explain his devotion to the nude, which was above all a technical exercise in honing his craft.

Others still have offered the interpretation that Etty's perpetual studentship was due to a chip on his shoulder deriving from his lower-class social background. Art historian Martin Myrone has employed Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the 'arriviste' to explain over-investment in the academic world by one who was once an outsider.²¹ While it is true that upon entering the Royal Academy Schools, 42% of Etty's immediate peers were already embedded within the art world in some way and were thus potentially intimidating to him,²² Myrone insists that we consider this critically. He moves to point out that some of Etty's contemporaries that did not share his background manifested similar formal effects in their nudes, while those with similar experiences have not always done. Finding all three of these hypotheses insufficient, we would like to posit an alternative explanation, that Etty's perceived obsession with the academic nude is actually an authentic struggle to use the human form as a vehicle through which to contribute to the development of a specifically English school of painting. The aforementioned appropriation of the Venetian tradition was that of Titian and Veronese, some of whose greatest technical achievements manifest themselves in the flesh of the nude figure. We

¹⁸ Though this has since been rejected as ungrounded speculation. Always write full sentences please! Leonard Robinson, *William Etty: The Life and Art* (Jefferson, 2006) p. 459.

¹⁹ Well-documented in his various correspondence. Dito Once he found a model he liked, he would also recommend them to his colleagues at the Royal Academy. For multiple examples, see Robinson, *William Etty: The Life and Art*, p. 341.

²⁰ Bailey, *William Etty's Nudes*, p. 24.

²¹ "The clearest manifestation of the cult alienation of old-style autodidacts is their readiness to offer proof of their culture even when it is not asked for, betraying their exclusion by their eagerness to prove their membership" as quoted in Myrone, "William Etty: 'A Child of the Royal Academy,'" p. 178.

²² Myrone, "William Etty: 'A Child of the Royal Academy,'" p. 179.

therefore believe that Etty's continual honing of his skill and dedication to the subject of the nude were incidental outcomes of his craft, not a result of his own peculiar relationship to sex.

“Mere Dirty Flesh” - Contemporary Criticisms and Later Scholarship: A Reappraisal of Etty

Of course, in the context of puritanical Victorian morality, Etty had to follow strict guidelines in painting his nudes. The establishment allowed the depiction of nudity only if disguised as a mythological or literary subject, often serving as a moral exemplar in some way. In light of this, Etty began to acquire a reputation for using these themes as a pretext for nudity, though it seems he was unconscious of the fact that what he found beautiful was scandalous to others.²³ His transgression lay in following rules of the Academy too closely; he failed because his figures looked like real people rather than characters from myth or history. While he bowed to the convention of not depicting pubic hair,²⁴ Etty was otherwise too concerned with the truth of his studies to lose it in the midst of the idealism propriety required. In England, the idealisation of the nude placed in a bucolic setting purified and made it palatable; without consistency between the ennobled figure and its environment, as *The Times* commented in 1822, “Mr. Etty’s canvas is mere dirty flesh.”²⁵ Yet, by his always privileging the nude figure, placing it at the center of every composition and finishing it to a degree far exceeding that of the background, Etty’s works often manifested an imbalanced treatment of the painted surface. His method of painting the figures before the background added to this compositional disjunction. His nudes seem visibly grafted into the pictures, “quoted,” as *The Times* called them in 1835.²⁶

This incongruity in his history paintings was a significant reason for Etty’s lack of real commercial success, and giving voice to Victorian morality’s preoccupation with sex and avowed

²³ Etty maintained that there was nothing indecent in his pictures, “only in the vile notions people may bring with them, for which they are to be pitied.” Bailey, *William Etty’s Nudes*, p. 23.

²⁴ Bailey, *William Etty’s Nudes*, pp. 37-8.

²⁵ “Lord Gwydyr,” *The Times*, 29 January 1822, p. 3.

²⁶ Anon., *The Times*, 23 May 1835. Quoted in Myrone, “William Etty: ‘A Child of the Royal Academy,’” p. 178.

concern for the uneducated audience,²⁷ the same newspaper propagated Etty's perceived lack of moral edification on many occasions.²⁸ It was not that he lacked imagination, however, but rather that he was a staunch realist being forced into a false idealism. Etty's insistence on what Rembrandt called the 'beauty of truth' drew attention to the hypocrisy of the fine line between 'nude' and 'naked' in Victorian society.

The Courtauld Sketches: Provenance, Shared Physical Histories and their Relationship to the Established Oeuvre

A group of sketches entered the Courtauld Gallery collection in 1954, as a bequest from Miss Helen W. Henderson, an art critic originally from Philadelphia who spent large parts of the early 20th century in London and Paris. Quite how and when Henderson came to acquire the group is unknown, although her interest in Impressionist painting is well documented in her writing and bequests.²⁹

The whereabouts of the sketches prior to 1954 are also unknown, although several works are documented in the sale catalogue of Etty's studio contents, which took place in April 1850, organized by Christie's, London. There were over nine hundred lots in the sale, many of which were works in oil on board. While almost forty of these entries could in fact be any of the seven works of the Courtauld set, three entries in particular are clearly identifiable as works within this group, due to the greater specificity of description employed.³⁰

²⁷ Smith, "The Nude in Nineteenth-Century Britain," p. 12.

²⁸ "He mistakes the use of nudity in painting and presents in the most gross and literal manner the unhappy models of the Royal Academy for their exquisite idealities in which Titian and other Masters who have chosen similar subjects revelled." *The Times*, 23 May 1835, reviewing Etty's contribution to the 1835 Royal Academy Exhibition. Quoted in Bailey, *William Etty's Nudes*, p. 20.

²⁹ It is possible that this interest, as well as her presence in locales also frequented by Samuel Courtauld may have brought her into contact with his circle and hence led to the donation.

³⁰ Lot 319: "A Man Lying Down on a White Drapery" [realized 5 pounds 7 shillings] National Art Library Archives, GC/SAL, Christie, Manson & Woods sales catalogue: Works of William Etty. 1850 May 6-14, p. 17. [now Courtauld Gallery No. P.1954.XX.116, *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee*].

Lot 779: "Reclining man asleep, holding a staff" [realized 1 pound 11 shillings] National Art Library Archives, GC/SAL, Christie, Manson & Woods sales catalogue: Works of William Etty. 1850 May 6-14, p. 37. [now Courtauld Gallery No. P.1954.XX.113, *Reclining Male Nude, Raised Right Knee*].

Lot 214: "A Man, seated – a Female, in chalk, on the reverse" [realized 2 pounds 2 shillings] National Art Library Archives, GC/SAL, Christie, Manson & Woods sales catalogue: Works of William Etty. 1850 May 6-14, p. 12. [now Courtauld Gallery No. P.1954.XX.114, *Seated Male Nude, Frontal View (recto)* and *Seated Female Nude (verso)*].

The considerable effort made by Etty's family to monetise his estate after his death in 1849 culminated in this sale and upset Etty's contemporaries at the Royal Academy. In a letter back to the RA on April 20, 1850, Academician William Powell Frith recounts from York that the family was selling everything from the oil cloth Etty stood on to paint to "boards with a few un-meaning dabs of paint" and that "they seem determined to turn every miserable scrap that bears the [imprint] of the great man's hand into hard cash."³¹ Alexander Gilchrist, Etty's biographer, noted that the fate of many of the works will never be known and that the family had employed other artists to attempt to raise the level of finish on some of them in an effort to increase their value.³² Works examined in the collections of York City Art Gallery, the Ashmolean Museum, and the Tate have certainly been altered after Etty's death, either in early instances of re-painting or during conservation treatments in the 20th century (e.g. applications of thick varnish and extensive retouching). From this perspective, the works in the Courtauld Gallery group are rare for their relatively untouched status: the majority of these works either remain unvarnished or retain artist-applied varnishes, strictly limited to the figure and its immediate surroundings.



Figure 2 - Photomicrograph detail of *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee*, showing paper stuck to surface.

In addition to their original varnish layers, the works also bear traces of their time in Etty's studio. Accretions of paint from other paintings, drips of varnish and oily marks left on the surfaces (presumably due to handling by Etty or his assistants) are common across the group, while abrasions of the support, particularly at the edges and

³¹ : "Many of the Studies have fallen into hands still less scrupulous and intelligent: have been painted over by inferior men, and hopelessly ruined; a sacrilege unhappily, beyond the reach of law. " Royal Academy of Arts Archives, 236/44/1, letter from W.P. Frith, London, to T. Miller, 16 June 1853.

³² Gilchrist, *Life of William Etty*, vol. 2, p. 309.

corners, are universal — though the extent of damage varies, depending on the material composition and inherent strength of the board. Two of the sketches — *Reclining Male Nude, Raised Right Knee* and *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee* — show small scraps of white paper attached to their surface, perhaps from them having been stacked for storage or inserted into a portfolio for transit.³³ Examination under magnification revealed that there are imprints of individual paper fibers on the surface of these two works, impressed into the paint and varnish and related to the crushing of higher areas of impasto.³⁴

This shared physical history may be explained by two possible documentary sources: firstly, the assertion that at Etty's death, "heaps" of life sketches on board remained in his studio (numbering 800 or 900, potentially interleaved with papers).³⁵ The second source suggests that the application of the paper — and hence the crushing of

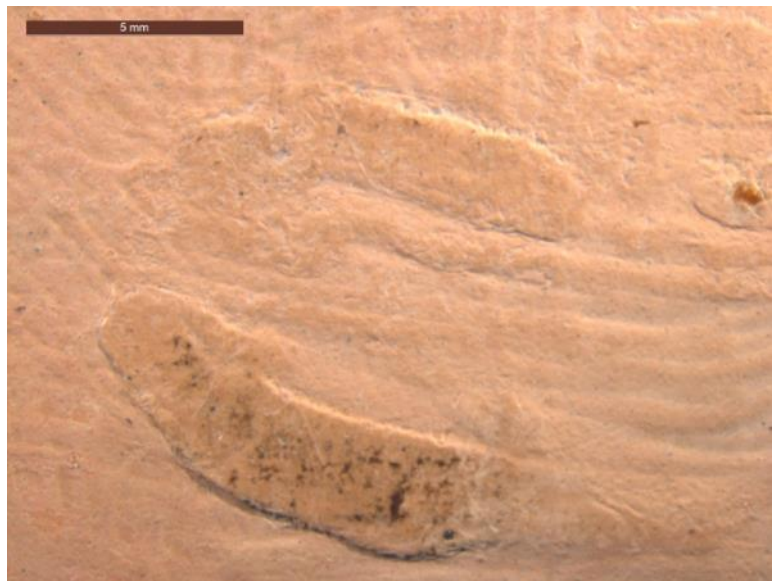


Figure 3 - Photomicrograph detail of *Reclining Male Nude, Raised Right Knee*, showing crushing of impasto and impressions of paper fibres.

the impasto — occurred almost immediately after the completion of the works within the Life School. Etty is described by one contemporary as on his way home from the Life School in Somerset House to his Buckingham Street home, temporarily incapacitated by his asthma, clutching both a lamppost (for support) and the portfolio containing his evenings' work.³⁶ To insert a freshly painted sketch into such a casing would have required an intermediate layer, both to protect the interior of the portfolio and the work itself from the transfer of wet paint. The impressions of the paper fibers as well as the

³³ See Figure 1.

³⁴ See Figures 2 and 3.

³⁵ J. H. Anderson quoted in Denis Farr, *William Etty* (1958), p. 108.

³⁶ Bailey, *William Etty's Nudes*, p. 29.

thoroughly squashed nature of the impasto suggest that the paper was applied to both works soon after completion.

This hypothesis is further supported by an uneven surface pattern in *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee* that might stem from the paper having cockled upon contact with the wet paint surface. An uneven transfer of black text resembling newsprint had also taken place upon this contact. The print is confined to the area of the artist-applied varnish layer on the figure and its perimeter and is likely oil-based ink, common for newsprint of the 19th century. The distribution and depth of microscopic impressions of the paper fibres implies that the transfer – certainly on *Male Nude Lying*

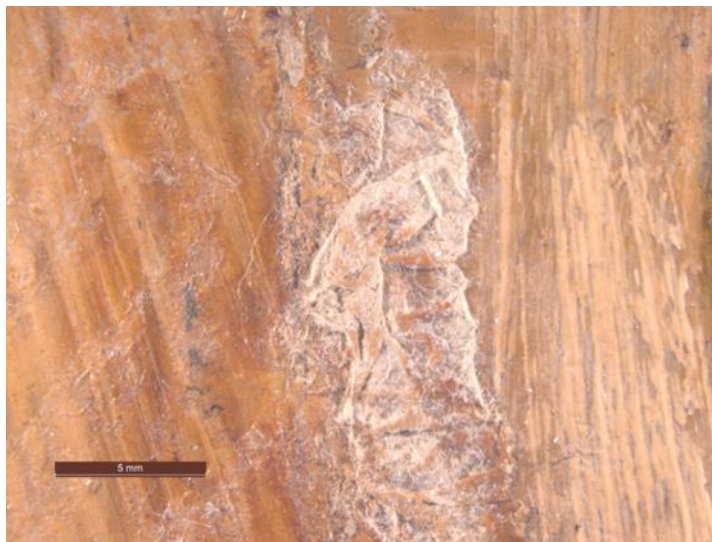


Figure 4 - Photomicrograph detail of *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee*, showing paper within the folds of crushed impasto.

Down, Raised Left Knee – took place very soon after completion of the work, perhaps even while Etty wrapped and transported it home.

Close examination of the surface of *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee* has also revealed two areas in which the paper fibers have become trapped within the folds of the

impastoed paint: in effect, the paint has

the appearance of swallowing the fibers.³⁷ This lends further weight to the idea of the paper wrinkling on contact with the paint surface.

Multiple aspects of the Courtauld group's stylistic and technical features strongly relate to similar works by Etty in other British public collections. We believe most of these works were painted in the environs of the Royal Academy Life School, as evidenced by the similar tonal appearance of the flesh – likely due to consistent lighting conditions within the school – and due to the colors of the backdrops employed, with red and green being Etty's favored options. The attributes of background

³⁷ See Figure 4.

color and flesh lighting are typical of works known to have been painted in the RA Life School, and these features are also present in five works within our set.

Etty's materials were well documented not only by contemporary artists, but also in the ledgers of the artist's colormen. There is a clear match between the pigments he is known to have bought and the materials identified in the Courtauld set: a fairly standard 19th c. palette comprised of iron earth pigments, vermillion, red lakes, lead white and copper greens.³⁸ Descriptions of his tendency to use a simple mixture of pigments to obtain a purity of hue, are borne out in the cross-sections taken,³⁹ while white bloom on the surfaces of several works (both in the Courtauld and York collections) suggests the presence of lead saccharum – an additive specifically mentioned in Etty's Roberson account.⁴⁰

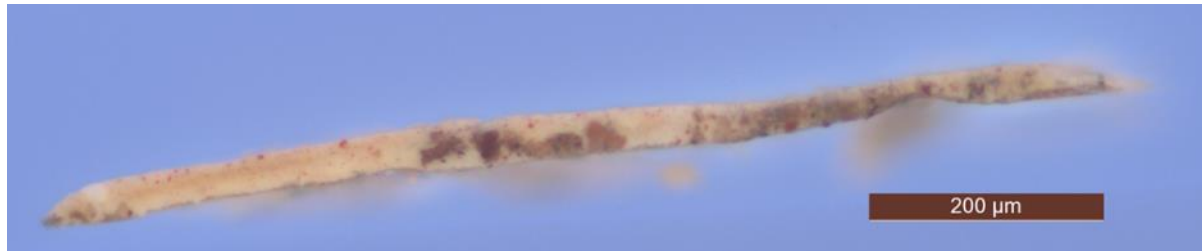


Figure 5 - Cross Section Samples taken from arm of *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee*, showing two layers of paint – top comprised of lead white and red lakes, bottom comprised of lead white and iron oxide earth pigments. Top image in normal light; bottom in UV.



Etty's technique is also discussed within in his own notebooks — cited by Gilchrist but now sadly lost.⁴¹ His habitual process — which has been corroborated by close examination of the

³⁸ Roberson Archive, HKI-MS-799-1993-46. Analysis of the Courtauld sketches using X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF – a non-invasive technique to identify inorganic elements) indicated the presence of lead white and lead acetate, iron oxide pigments including umbers and vermillion. Red lakes were identified visually in cross sections from *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee*.

³⁹ See Figure 5.

⁴⁰ Roberson Archive, HKI-MS-799-1993-46. White bloom is present in *Study for a Figure Composition – Two Female Nudes, Reclining Male Nude, Raised Right Knee* and *Two Full-Length Standing Female Nudes, Turned to the Right*.

⁴¹ Gilchrist, *Life of William Etty*, vol. 1, pp. 52-58.

Courtauld group and of works at York City Art Gallery, Tate, and the Ashmolean – appears to have formed early in his career, although Gilchrist makes much of Etty's discovery of glazing techniques relatively late into his artistic education.⁴² However, Etty's standard three-sitting technique, consisting of drawing the figure in a dark fluid medium, placing the areas of highlight to give a conception of the figure's volumetric form, and then working into the mid-tones and shadows, completing or indicating the background last, is visible across five Courtauld works: the partially-finished right-hand figure on the verso of *Three Standing Female Nudes/Two Standing Female Nudes* shows early stages of his practice,⁴³ while the completed nudes of the set show the final outcome of this process. This technique remained consistent across the various types of works Etty produced: his large-scale *Sleeping Nymph and Satyrs* (painted 1828 as his Diploma work) also shows evidence of dark outlining, as well as Etty's established practice of painting the background only after the completion of the figures. In the *Reclining Male Nude, Raised Right Knee*, the brushstrokes also follow the contours of the body, and indeed brushstrokes of the red background can even be seen over the flesh.⁴⁴

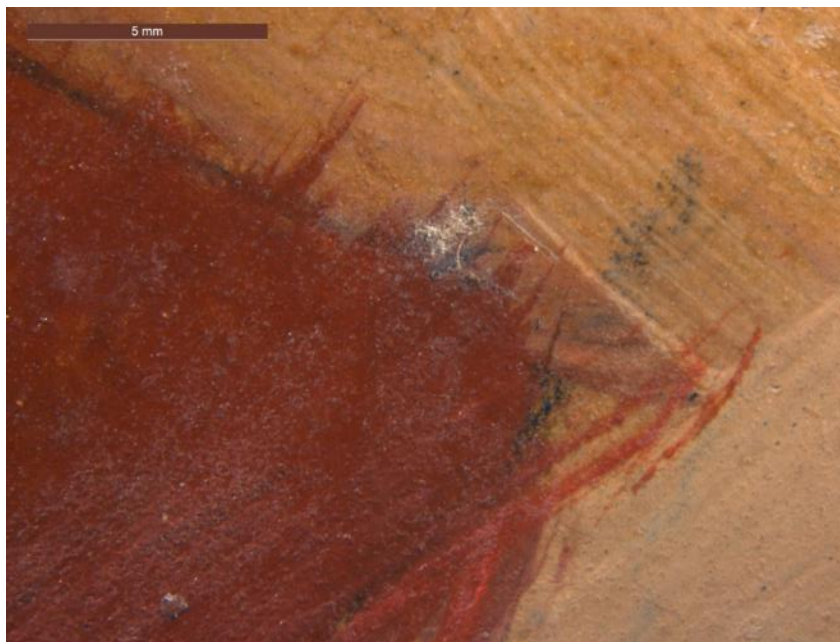


Figure 6 - Photomicrograph detail of *Reclining Male Nude, Raised Right Knee*, showing red brushstroke of background colour applied over the flesh.

Several of the works of our set also indicate the rather rare use of watercolour to provide an alternative mid-tone, applied at an early stage (before the application of highlights in oil).⁴⁵ Interestingly, a black 'X', painted in watercolor on the verso of works is a feature

⁴² Gilchrist, pp. 57-8.

⁴³ See Figure 6.

⁴⁴ See Figure 7.

⁴⁵ Conservator Clare Richardson identified watercolour layers in Etty's *Mars, Venus and Attendant* and *Hylas and the Water Nymphs*. Personal communication with the authors, January 2019.

of four works of the Courtauld group as well as of works in York City Art Gallery, albeit so far unexplained.⁴⁶

Similarities in technique aside, the subjects of the Courtauld sketches are also featured in many other publicly owned Etty works, and it is even possible to trace developments in pose and compositional themes across works in both the Courtauld sketches and other collections. A particularly clear example of this pertains to the recto of the Courtauld's *Seated Male Nude, Head Resting Against Hand, Left Foot Resting on Block/Study for a Figure Composition – Two Female Nudes*. Not only is the pose of the seated male nude related thematically to York City Art Gallery's *Male Nude Crouching*,⁴⁷ the Courtauld figure's proper right leg has also served as a direct model for the equivalent limb in Etty's portrait of *Guardsman Higgins* (now in the National Army Museum).⁴⁸ Comparison of the anatomical features and proportions of both figures lead to the suggestion that it is in fact Guardsman Higgins sitting for both the *Seated Male Nude, Head Resting Against Hand, Left Foot Resting on Block* and the eponymous portrait.

Given the general practice of Life School Visitors of posing the models in postures that echo classical sculpture, it is unsurprising that this use of classical prototypes occurs repeatedly across Etty's life sketches, notably at York. The pose for York's *Male Nude Crouching* and the Courtauld's *Seated Male Nude, Head Resting Against Hand, Left Foot Resting on Block* are developments of the classical prototype of the so-called "thinker" pose, which was to reach its apogee later in the 19th century in Auguste Rodin's sculpture of the same name. In addition, the Courtauld's *Two Full-Length Standing Female Nudes, Turned Towards the Right* have long been recognized as variations on the pose of the Hellenistic marble sculpture of Venus de Medici.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ For instance, *Male Nude with Dagger* (YORAG: 1244), cross appears on verso. Other instances appear within this collection.

⁴⁷ *Male Nude Crouching*, YORAG 95.

⁴⁸ *Guardsman Higgins*, NAM. 2003-02-335.

⁴⁹ Postle, "From Academy to School," p. 9.

The Reattribution of *Standing Male Nude, Raised Right Arm, Right Foot Resting on Blocks/Study for a Figure Composition* and *Seated Male Nude, Frontal View/Seated Female Nude*

Standing Male Nude, Raised Right Arm, Right Foot Resting on Blocks/Study for a Figure Composition

Doubts about the stylistic and technical congruity of this work with the rest of the set were voiced early on, primarily due to the recto's differing appearance. In addition, the continuous saturation of the paint layers makes *Standing Male Nude, Raised Right Arm, Right Foot Resting on Blocks* stand apart from the rest of the sketches, although as discussed above, it is not unusual to find a complete varnish layer (applied in the course of later conservation treatment) on works from other collections. This layer, whilst successfully saturating the darker colors, further differs from the localised varnish present on other works because it does not fluoresce under ultraviolet illumination, while like the others fluoresce orange, which suggests the presence of a copal-based varnish or shellac. The saturation is therefore more likely the result of selective oiling out, possibly with linseed oil.

The higher degree of saturation of this work emphasises the overall darker tonality of the composition. Both background and figure are significantly darker than other works by Etty. While we believe the other works in the Courtauld group to have been painted in the Royal Academy Life School, the tonality of the figure's flesh tones as well as the red and green colors used in the background are characteristic features of other Etty sketches painted in Somerset House. Although Etty did frequent other life drawing classes – notably the St. Martin's Lane life school – and it is possible that *Standing Male Nude, Raised Right Arm, Right Foot Resting on Blocks* could have been painted there, the darker, less colourful setting is another point of difference to separate the work from the main group.

The support likewise which drew attention for its deviation from the norm within the group. While no two boards within the Courtauld set are exactly alike, the paintings with a secure attribution are all executed on thicker boards of higher quality and are as a result in better condition. The thinner, poorer quality of this support is not unknown within Etty's *œuvre*, but here raises doubts about the financial standing of the artist of this particular work.

Stylistically as well as tonally, *Standing Male Nude, Raised Right Arm, Right Foot Resting on Blocks* conveys an aesthetic sensibility that would be highly unusual within Etty's body of work. The conception of the figure's volumetric form, particularly in the proper left side of the chest, is unusual in seeming to be built from a series of different shapes of shadow, placed next to each other, rather than through Etty's standard practice of working in half tones to build a more rounded conception of the body and its planes. In addition, the clumsy foreshortening of the raised leg, as well as the hesitant and ultimately unsuccessful allowance of negative space for the proper right foot (which somewhat resembles an aquatic flipper rather than the extremity of a human limb) are inconsistent with the work of an artist praised for his handling of the human body and the tonality of his flesh. The clear delineation of the figure's genitals is highly unlikely to have been done by Etty, given his sensitivity

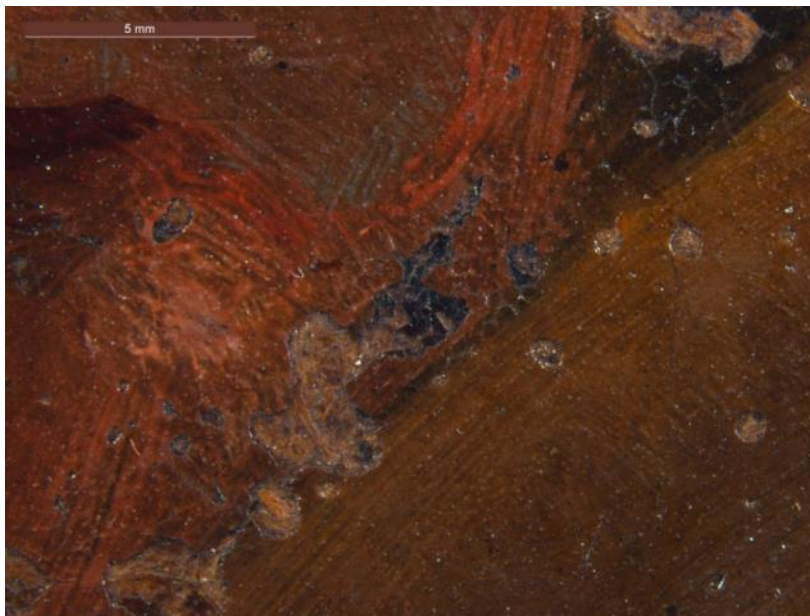


Figure 7 - Photomicrograph detail from face of *Standing Male Nude, Raised Right Arm, Right Foot Resting on Blocks*, showing losses to uppermost layer of flesh revealing dark paint of background below.

to his hostile critics. The face of the *Standing Male Nude* is also rather harshly painted, lacking Etty's usual smooth blending of half tones to create a softer human form. In addition, the background was painted prior to the figure, inverting the practice that Etty followed so assiduously in both his life sketches and large-scale works. Evidence

for this can be seen not only in the reserve left for the raised foot, but also in losses in the face.

Examination under the microscope showed areas of loss to the flesh paint, revealing the dark paint of the background below.⁵⁰ The strange mythological composition on the verso is equally atypical for the artist, who tended to use well-known classical or contemporary artistic or literary types as source material for his narrative works:⁵¹ it is a mixture of Christian and Greek allegory of a descent into hell and possible ascent to heaven with kings, children and figures bearing shields beneath a rainbow, God sheltering the faithful, and a triad of female figures (two of whom bear the attributes of Vesta and Justice, with a third who remains unidentifiable). In sum, we therefore propose to reattribute this work to an unknown artist working in the circle of Etty.

Seated Male Nude, Frontal View/Seated Female Nude

The second work to be reattributed is also double-sided and executed on a very similar low-quality board. In the studio sale in 1850, it fetched a considerably lower price, probably because it was noted already then it differed from other works by Etty in the same sale, notably its highly detailed face. However, this work is also different from the *Standing Male Nude* and likely not by the same hand.

While the brushwork in the chest is more akin to that of a securely-attributed Etty life sketch, the uncertainty of relationship between figure and background as well as the layer structure of the painting vary from Etty's practice. While chromatically congruent with the life school setting, here the background was again painted prior to the figure. Examination of paint cross-sections told a mixed



Figure 8 - Cross Section sample taken from shadow in flesh of *Seated Male Nude, Frontal View*, showing 5 layers of paint and multiple shifts in colour: light to grey; grey to dark brown; dark brown to cream and finally cream to red.

⁵⁰ See Figure 8.

⁵¹ Examples are Etty's *Candaules, King of Lydia, Shews his Wife by Stealth to Gyges, One of his Ministers, as She Goes to Bed* (1830), *Musidora: The Bather 'At the Doubtful Breeze Alarmed'* (1846) or even his diploma work *Sleeping Nymph and Satyrs* (1828).

story. While a sample from the flesh showed a similar decisiveness regarding the placement of the highlights to samples from *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee*, a sample taken from a shadow of the flesh of *Seated Male Nude, Frontal View* consists of a build-up of five separate layers. These indicate multiple changes of heart from pale grey to dark brown, to cream before settling on the final reddish shade seen at the surface.⁵² Analysis of this sample using SEM-EDX⁵³ indicated the presence of barium sulphate, a cheap extender uncharacteristic of Etty's palette.⁵⁴ This combination of technical and stylistic evidence leads us to believe that the work is unlikely to be by Etty (and certainly not by him once he became an established artist), but that it was likely the work of a student within the Life School.

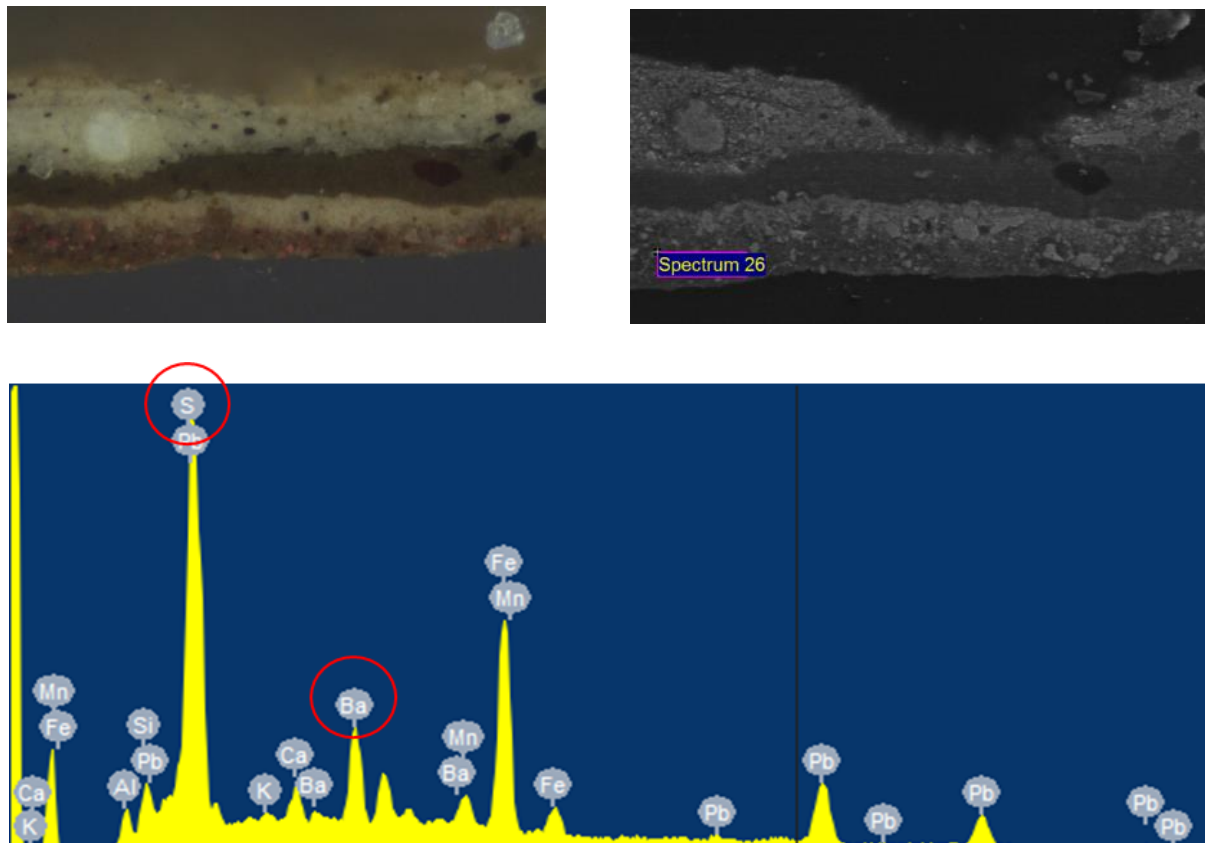


Figure 9 - Clockwise from top left: Detail of photomicrograph showing multi-layer structure; back-scattered electron image of same area; SEM-EDX spectrum of area, showing peaks for Barium and Sulphur, indicative of Barium Sulphate.

⁵² See Figure 9.

⁵³ Scanning Electron Microscopy – Energy Dispersive X-Radiography: an analytical technique allowing spatially resolved inorganic elemental analysis.

Appendix: Photographs of the Courtauld Sketches

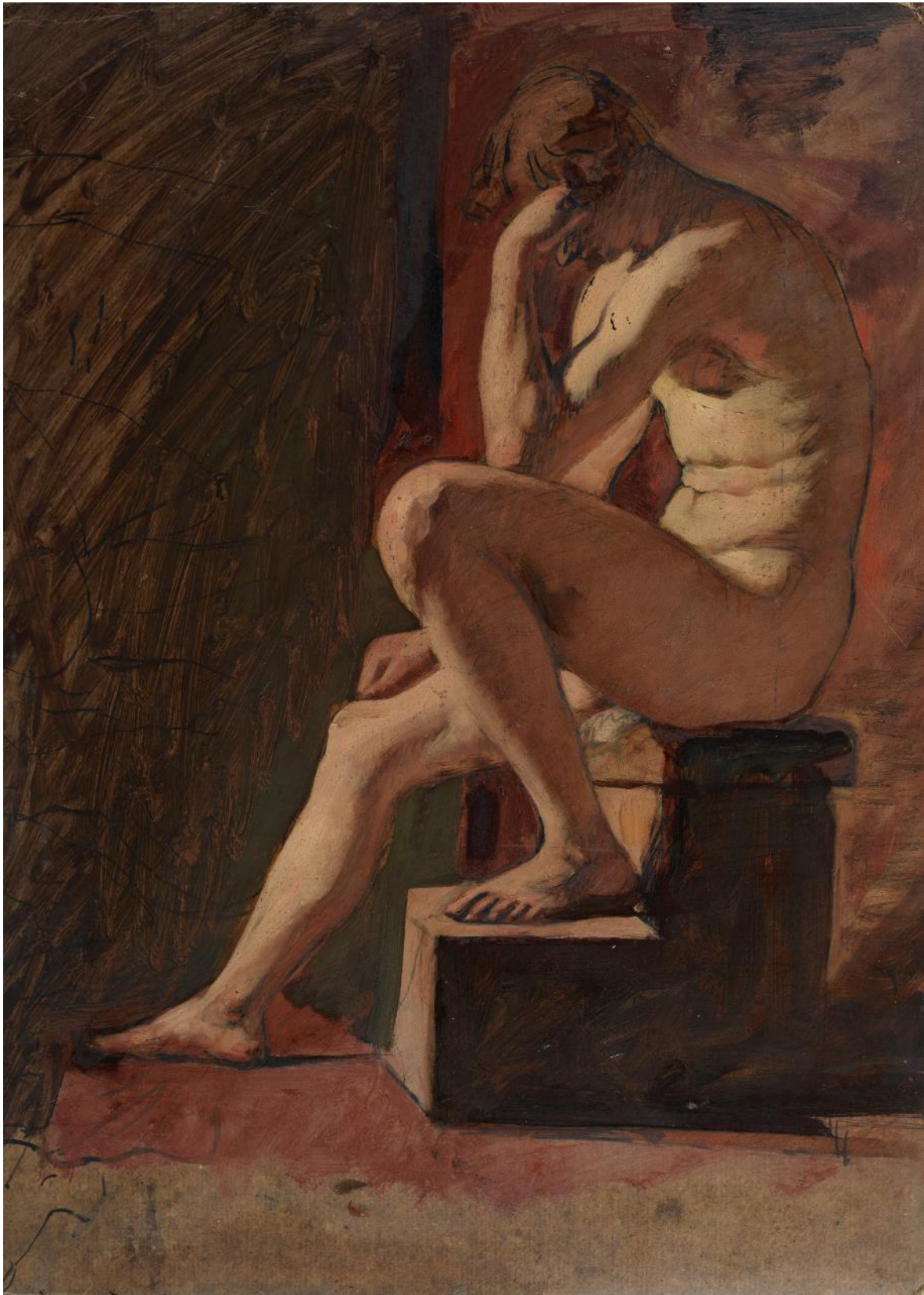


Plate 10 – W. Etty, *Seated Male Nude, Head Resting Against Hand, Left Foot Resting on Block*, oil on millboard, 68.4 x 49.7cm, P.1954.XX.112 (recto).

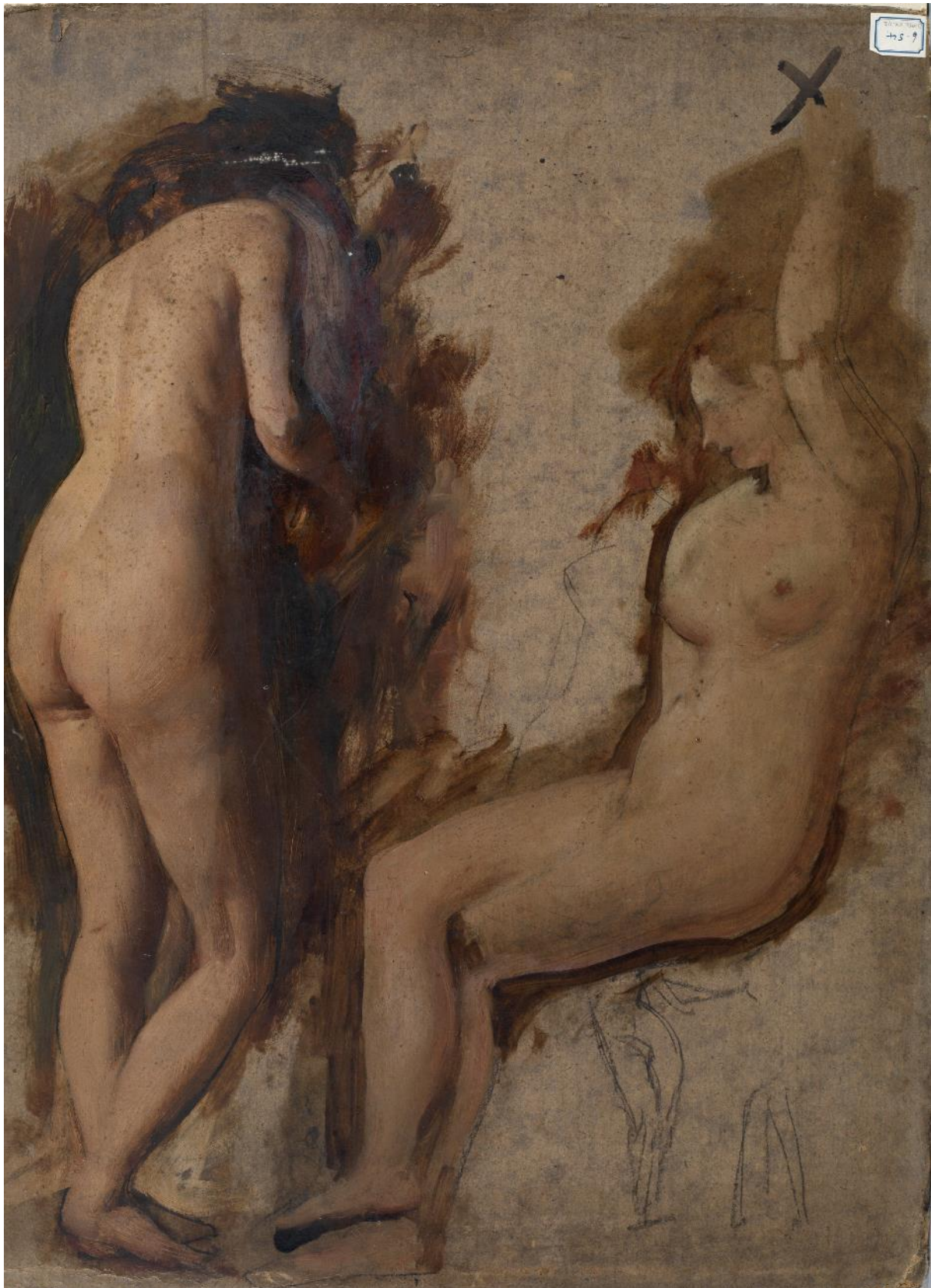


Plate 11 – W. Etty, *Study for a Figure Composition – Two Female Nudes*, oil, watercolour and pencil on millboard, 68.4 x 49.7cm, P.1954.XX.112 (verso).

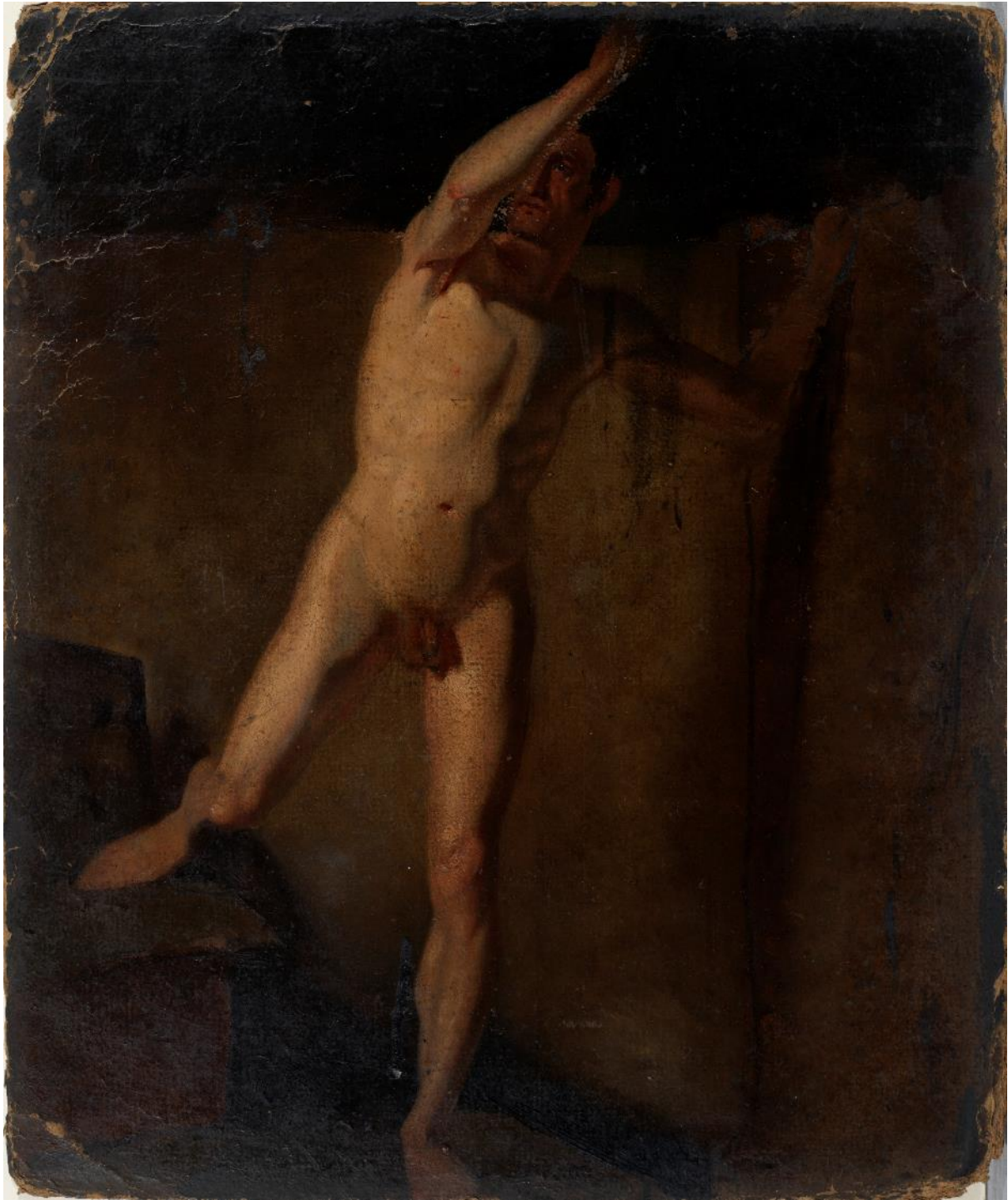


Plate 12 – Circle of W. Etty, *Standing Male Nude, Raised Right Arm, Right Foot Resting on Blocks*, oil on millboard, 56.4 x 47.1 cm, P.1954.XX.113 (recto).



Plate 4 – Circle of W. Etty, *Study for a Figure Composition*, oil on millboard, 56.4 x 47.1cm, P.1954.XX.113 (verso).

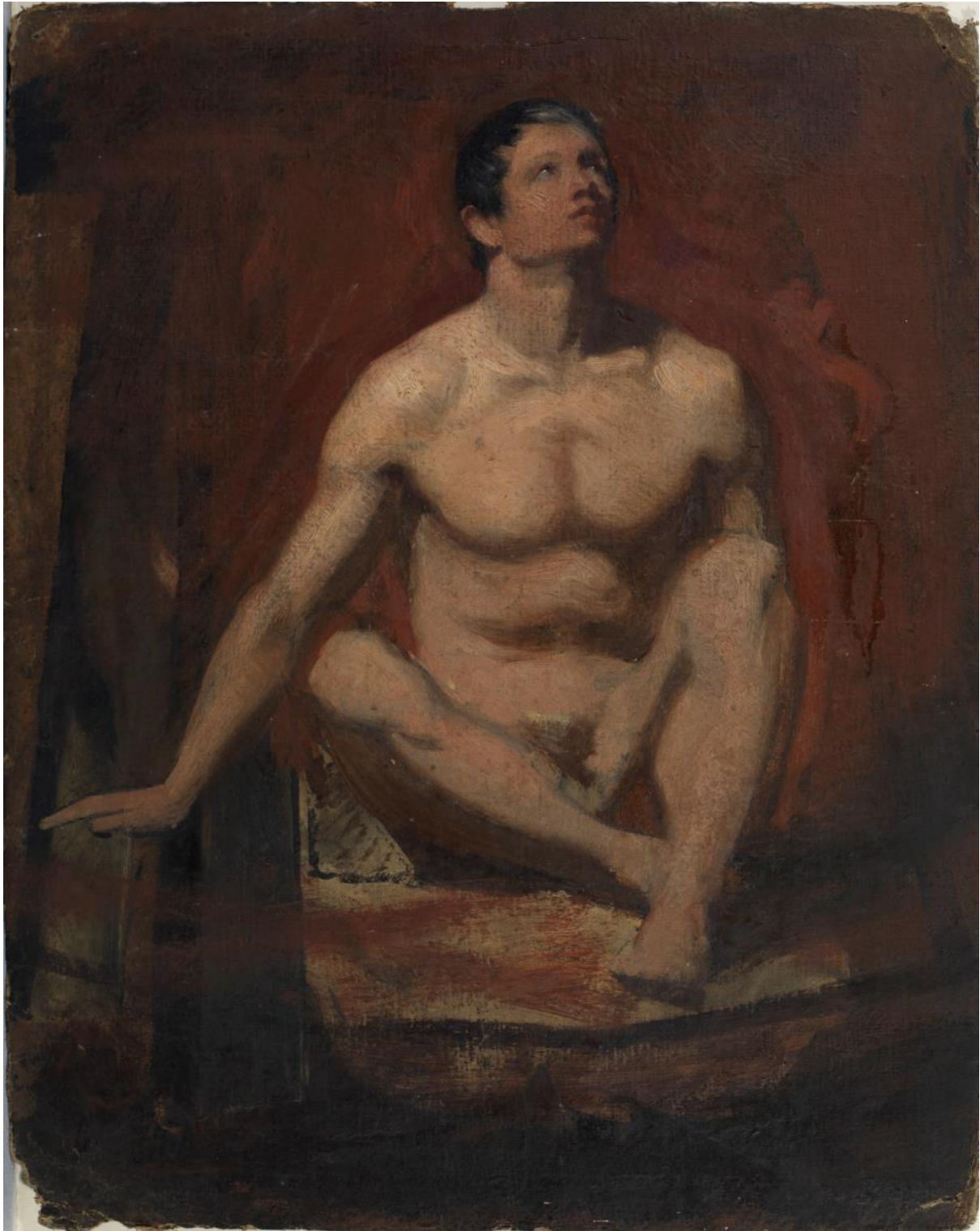


Plate 5 – Circle of W. Etty, *Seated Male Nude, Frontal View*, oil on millboard, 51.9 x 41.9cm, P.1954.XX.114 (recto).

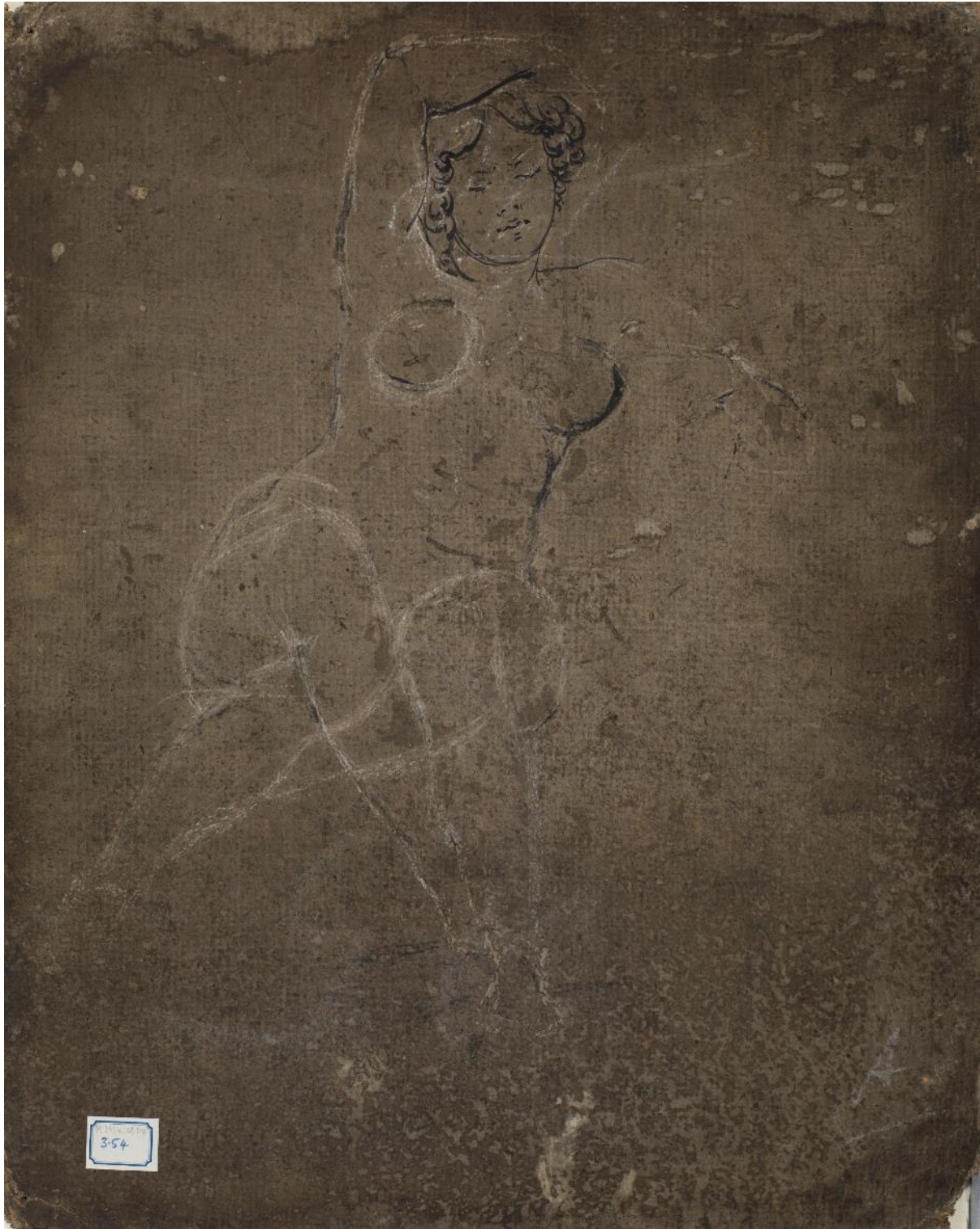


Plate 6 – Circle of W. Etty, *Seated Female Nude*, white and black chalk/charcoal on millboard, 51.9 x 41.9cm, P.1954.XX.114 (verso).

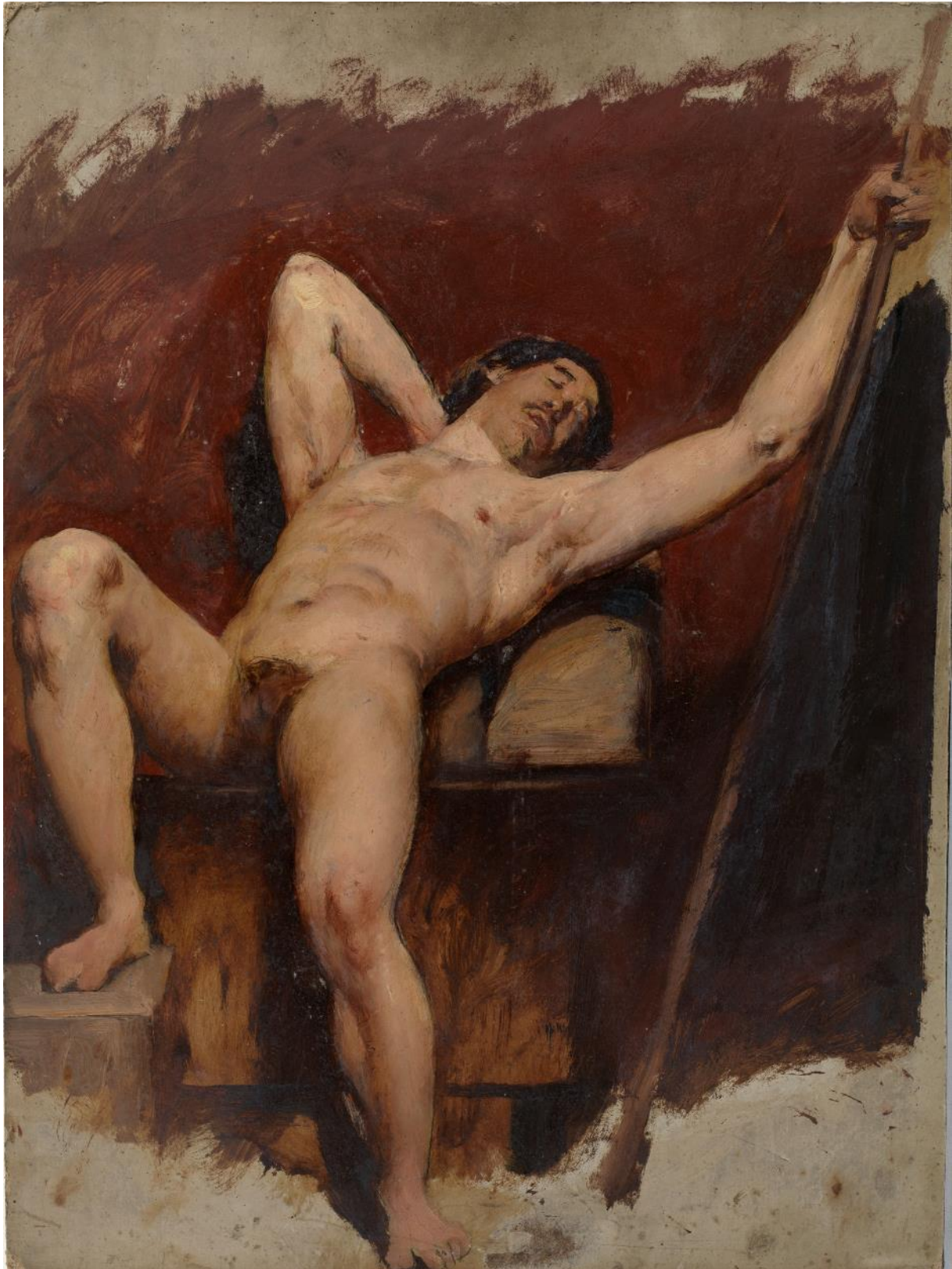


Plate 7 – W. Etty, *Reclining Male Nude, Raised Right Knee*, oil on millboard, 66.2 x 49.6 cm, P.1954.XX.115.



Plate 8 – W. Etty, *Male Nude Lying Down, Raised Left Knee*, oil and watercolour on millboard, 61.9 x 48.9cm, P.1954.XX.116.



Plate 9 – W. Etty, *Three Standing Female Nudes*, oil on millboard, 54.0 x 44.2 cm, P.1954.XX.117 (recto).

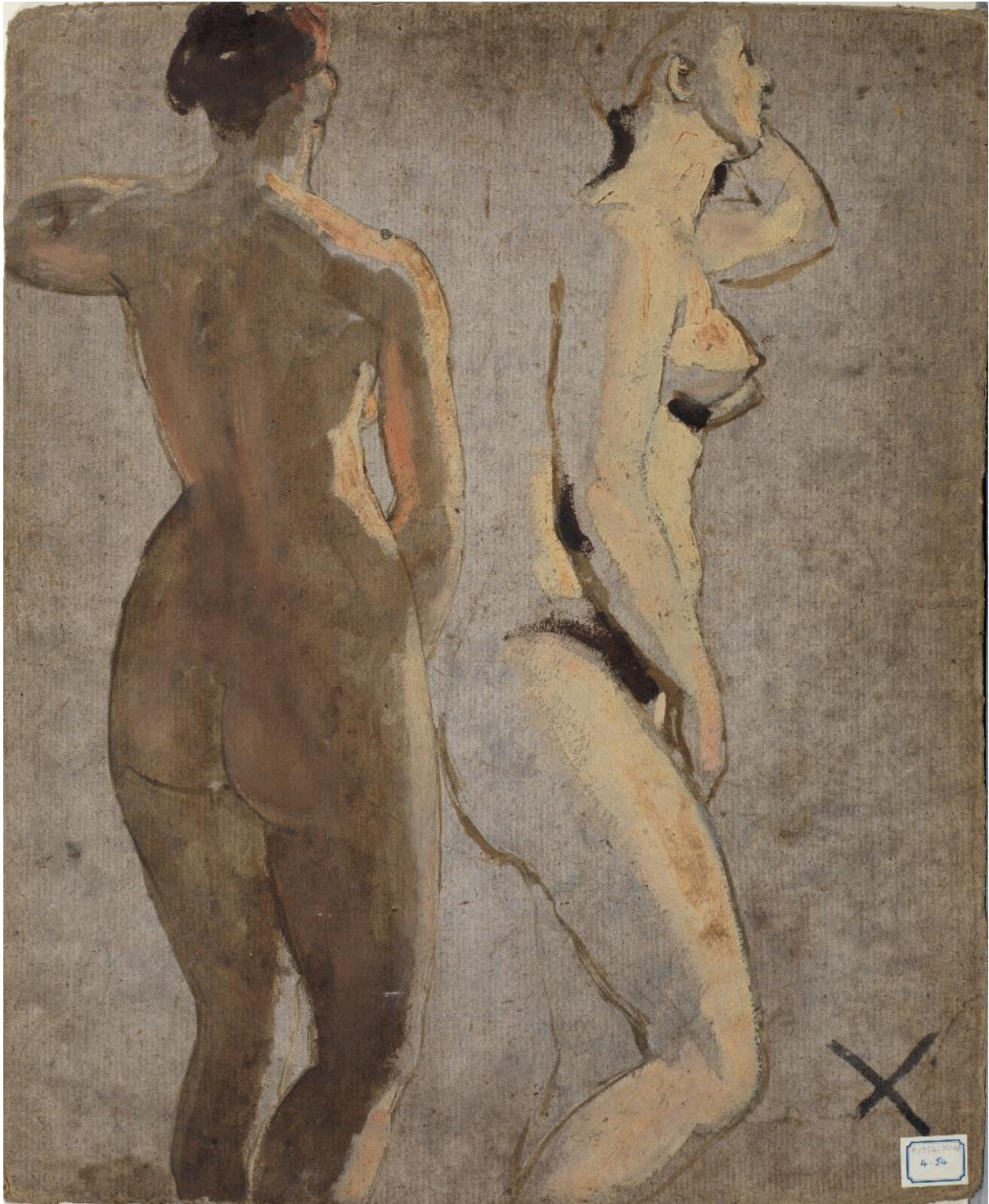


Plate 10 – W. Etty, *Two Standing Female Nudes*, oil and watercolour on millboard, 54.0 x 44.2cm, P.1954.XX.117 (verso).

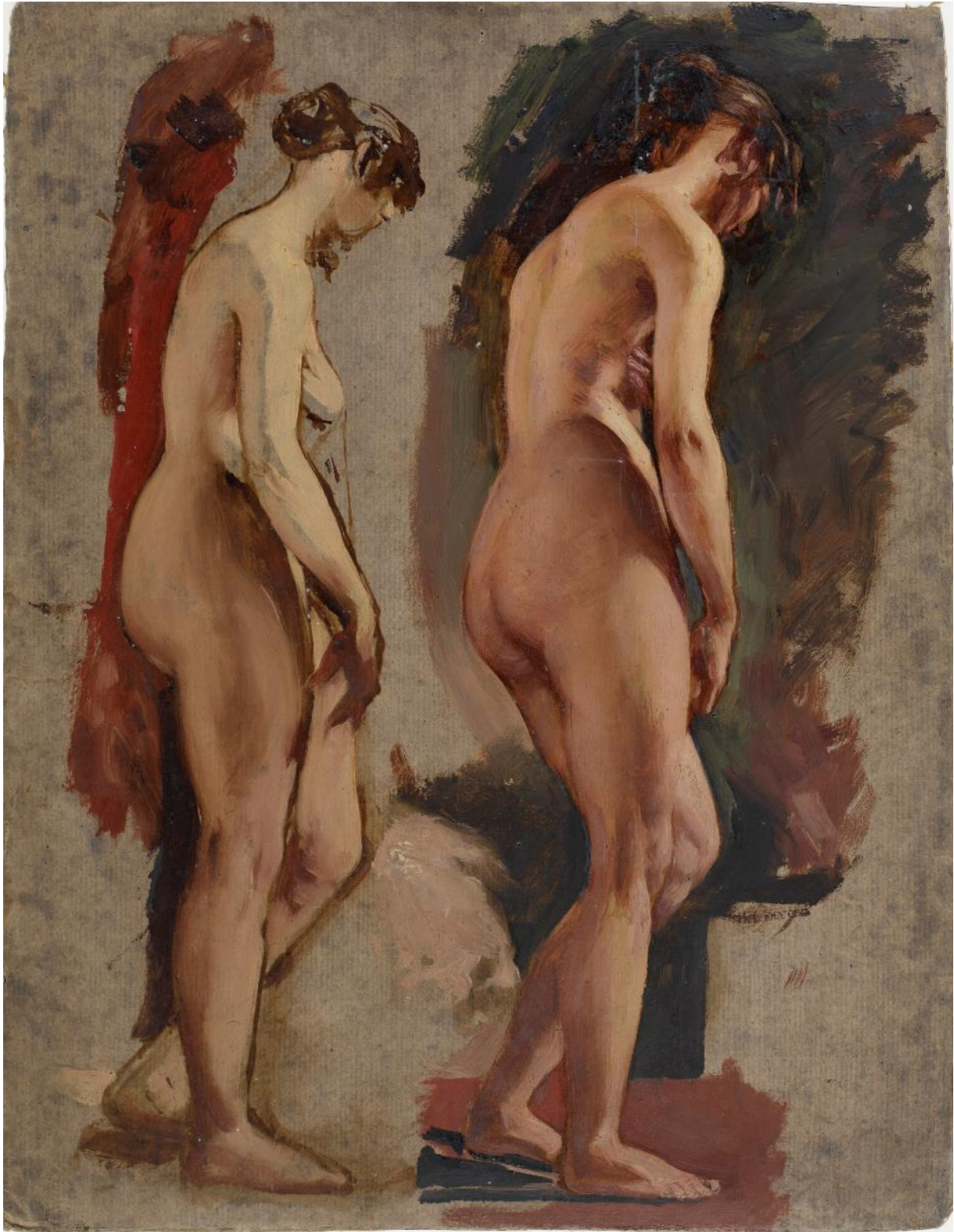


Plate 11 – W. Etty, *Two Full-length Standing Female Nudes, Turned to the Right*. Oil on millboard, 63.9 x 48.7cm, P.1954.XX.118.

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