

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Karl Wilhelm DE HAMILTON (Brussels 1668 - Augsburg 1754)

A Crossbill on a Branch

Watercolour on vellum.

Numbered 195 on the backing board.

200 x 176 mm. (7 7/8 x 7 in.)

Among Karl Wilhelm de Hamilton's most famous works is a painting, known in several versions, entitled *The Parliament of Birds*, which incorporates between sixty and seventy different species of birds, including a similar crossbill at the centre of the composition of one such variant.

A member of the finch family, the crossbill (*Loxia*) is characterized by mandibles with crossed tips (hence its English name) and is usually found in higher latitudes in the northern hemisphere. The unusual shape of their bills allows the birds to extract seeds from their preferred food of conifer cones. The bird depicted here is an adult male crossbill, which tend to be red or orange in colour, while females are usually green or yellow.

Provenance:

The Dillée family, Paris

By descent to Guillaume Dillée, Paris.

Artist description:

The son and pupil of the Scottish still life painter James de Hamilton (c.1640-1720), who settled and worked in Brussels, Karl (or Carl) Wilhelm de Hamilton was one of a large family of artists active in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. His brothers Ferdinand Phillipp (c.1664-1750) and Johann Georg (1672-1737) were both active in Vienna, while Karl Wilhelm worked mainly in Germany, first in Baden-Baden and later in Augsburg, where he served as court painter to Bishop Alexander Sigismund von der Pfalz-Neuburg. Karl Wilhelm specialized in 'forest-floor' still life landscapes and, in particular, bird subjects. Among his most famous works are several different versions of a landscape known as *The*

Parliament of Birds, based on a poem by Geoffrey Chaucer written around 1380. Paintings by Karl Wilhelm de Hamilton are in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon, the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon, the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, and elsewhere.