

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Jean-Michel MOREAU (Paris 1741 - Paris 1814)

Two Cavaliers in Combat

Pen and black ink and grey wash, over a pencil underdrawing.

Laid down.

Signed and dated JMoreau /Lejeune / a paris le 19 may 1767 at the lower right.

125 x 199 mm. (4 7/8 x 8 in.)

The present sheet depicts a martial subject that is rare among Moreau the Younger's corpus of drawings. A youthful work by the artist, the drawing is signed and fully dated the 19th of May 1767, and must have been intended as an autonomous work of art for sale.

A stylistically comparable sheet, although much larger and more highly finished, is an undated drawing of *An Outing in a Wood* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Also somewhat similar in technique and handling is a drawing of *The Joys of Motherhood* that appeared on the German art market in 2021.

This drawing bears the mark of the Swiss collector Paul Fatio (1874-1960), who lived in Rome and Naples for several years and owned important groups of drawings by Gaspare and Luigi Vanvitelli and the Bibiena family. He was the brother of Edmond Fatio, who collected mainly decorative and architectural drawings.

Artist description:

Known as Moreau le jeune to avoid confusion with his older brother, the landscape painter Louis Moreau, Jean-Michel Moreau is regarded as one of the greatest French illustrators of the 18th century. He studied with the painter Louis-Joseph Le Lorrain, with whom he worked on theatre decorations in Russia between 1758 and 1760. He soon abandoned any intention of becoming a painter, however, in favour of establishing a career as a draughtsman and engraver, and to this end studied with the printmaker Jacques-Phillipe Le Bas. In 1770 he succeeded Charles-Nicolas Cochin as dessinateur des menus-plaisirs, in which role he was tasked with recording the official events and ceremonies of the French court.

At the same time, Moreau established his reputation as a book illustrator, notably with his illustrations for

Jean-Benjamin de La Borde's *Chansons* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Oeuvres*, as well as editions of works by Molière, Voltaire and others. His success continued into the 1780's, and he was received as a full member of the Académie Royale in 1789. Following the French Revolution – of which he was a supporter – he continued to work as an illustrator, notably with a series of 113 plates for a *Nouveau Testament*, published in five volumes between 1793 and 1798. Much of his work over the last twenty years of his career was executed on behalf of the bibliophile and publisher Antoine-Augustin Renouard, and Moreau continued to earn a modest living from his illustrations. At the very end of his life, however, a cancerous growth on his right arm left him unable to draw.