Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Jean-Baptiste-Camille COROT (Paris 1796 - Ville d'Avray 1875)

The Forum with the Temple of Venus and Roma

Pencil.
Inscribed temple de Venus & de Rome and Rome – Xbre 1825 at the lower right centre.
Stamped with the vente stamp (Lugt 460a) at the lower right.
171 x 348 mm. (6 3/4 x 13 5/8 in.)

Towards the end of 1825, at the age of twenty-nine, Camille Corot left Paris for Italy. He arrived in Rome in November or at the very beginning of December, and soon began making drawings and oil sketches of views in the city and the surrounding countryside. He remained in Italy for three years, producing around 220 drawings and 150 landscape paintings and oil sketches. Many of the drawings are precisely dated and with the views identified, and from these it is possible to gain a clear idea of his travels in Italy. While he was to return to Italy twice more, in 1834 and 1843, this first Italian period was to remain of fundamental importance for the rest of his career. The works produced during these early years in Italy remained personal and private exercises; indeed, none of Corot's Italian paintings or drawings seem to have left his studio during his lifetime.

This fine pencil study, dated December 1825, is one of the earliest of Corot's Roman drawings. The drawing depicts a view of the Forum with the apse of the Temple of Venus and Roma at the left, the church of San Francesco Romana and its bell tower to the left of centre, the tower of the Palazzo Senatorio in the distance and part of the Basilica of Constantine at the right. Undoubtedly one of the first drawings produced by Corot in Italy, the present sheet would appear to be one of only two known Roman drawings by the artist which are dated 1825. The other, today in the Louvre, is a view of the Arch of Constantine with, in the background, another, more distant view of the Temple of Venus and Roma and the church and tower of San Francesco Romana.

Both the present sheet and the Louvre drawing are part of a series of oil sketches and pencil drawings, produced soon after his arrival in Rome, in which Corot began to systematically study the more picturesque monuments and sights of the ancient city. As one recent scholar has written, 'During his first year in Rome Corot also made separate studies – in oil and in pencil – of some of the most important ruins on or around the Forum, as a part of his education as a painter of historical landscape. [He] accumulated a series of precise outline drawings, in which he recorded the ancient monuments in their topographical setting with accurate outlines and detail…In these pencil sketches done from the motif, Corot skillfully arranged the architectural masses to enhance their distinctive formal traits.'

Situated at the eastern end of the Forum, near the Colosseum, the Temple of Venus and Roma was the largest temple in Ancient Rome. Designed by the Emperor Hadrian, it was begun in AD 121 and completed twenty years later. Largely destroyed by an earthquake in the 9th century, part of the temple was integrated into the 10th century church of Santa Maria Nova, renamed San Francesca Romana in the 16th century, following after an extensive program of rebuilding and renovation. Apart from the present drawing and its counterpart in the Louvre, Corot also depicted some of the same buildings in a number of paintings and oil sketches.

Corot's use of a sharp lead pencil for this drawing is typical of his Italian drawings, 'in which force of execution vies with accuracy of observation', as they have been described. The present sheet is unrelated to any known painting by Corot, and would appear to have been made independently of the many small-scale paintings and oil sketches, which are themselves often on paper, that he produced during this first Italian period. Nevertheless, other such pencil drawings of Roman views may be identified as preparatory studies for paintings, and are of particular significance in the development of Corot's compositions.

The majority of the extant drawings from Corot's first trip to Italy are today in the Louvre, which holds around 135 sheets from this period. Of the Italian drawings by Corot which are not today in the Louvre, several were reproduced in facsimile in a large volume compiled by the artist's close friend and collaborator, the painter and lithographer Charles Desavary, and published in 1873, shortly before the master's death. The present sheet was selected as one of this small but choice group of around sixty drawings, dating from all periods of Corot's career, which were reproduced in facsimile in Desavary's Album.

The attribution of the present sheet to Corot has been confirmed by Martin Dieterle. The drawing will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Corot's drawings.

Provenance:

The vente Corot, Paris, Hôtel Drouot [Boussaton, Baubigny], 26 May 1875 onwards, probably as part of lots 507-513
Georges Viau, Paris
Paul Cassirer, Amsterdam
Franz Koenigs, Haarlem
By descent to Mr. and Mrs. van der Waals-Koenigs, Heemstede, by 1964
Thence by descent in the Koenigs family until 2001
Koenigs sale, New York, Sotheby's, 23 January 2001, lot 43
Lucien Solanet, Paris.

Exhibitions

Amsterdam, Paul Cassirer & Co., Fransche Meesters uit de XIXe eeuw: Teekeningen, Aquarellen, Pastels, July-August 1938, no.30; Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, Teekeningen van Fransche Meesters 1800-1900, 1946, no.28; Paris, Institut Néerlandais and Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Le dessin français dans les collections hollandaises, 1964, no.147; Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Camille Corot: Natur und Traum, 2012-2013, no.33.

Literature:

Ch. Desavary, Album de fac-similies, d'apres les dessins de C. Corot, Arras, 1873, Ve série, no.8; Alfred Robaut, L'oeuvre de Corot: Catalogue raisonné et illustré, Vol.IV, Paris, 1905, p.10, no.2473 (not illustrated); Paris, Institut Néerlandais, Le dessin français de Claude a Cézanne dans les collections hollandaises, exhibition catalogue, 1964, Vol.I, p.124, no.147, Vol.II, pl.122; Peter Johnston Galassi, Corot in Italy, 1825-1828, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1986, pp.439 and 455; Josine M. Eikelenboom Smits, The Architectural Landscapes of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Stanford University, California, 1991, Vol.I, pp.107-108, Vol.II, fig.76.; Peter Galassi, Corot in Italy. Open-Air Painting and the Classical-Landscape Tradition, New Haven and London, 1991, p.131; Dorit Schäfer, '>>Man darf in keiner Sache unentschieden bleiben.<< Corots Zeichnungen in Italien von 1825 bis 1828', in Dorit Schäfer, ed., Camille Corot: Natur und Traum, exhibition catalogue, Karlsruhe, 2012-2013, p.82, illustrated p.86.

Artist description:

Although Camille Corot's drawings received relatively little critical attention in his lifetime, the artist laid great store by them, once noting that 'Le dessin est la confidence de l'artiste' ('Drawing is the artist's intimate side') and claiming that he drew every evening. He is also known to have said that 'To my mind the two things of most importance are to make a concentrated study of the drawing and the values.'1 Around a thousand drawings by Corot are known today, ranging from rapid working sketches to large, atmospheric landscape drawings. While many more drawings must have been lost, a large number were preserved by the Corot scholars Alfred Robaut and Etienne Moreau-Nélaton and are today in the Louvre.

As Peter Galassi has noted, 'The range and versatility of Corot's drawings is a sign of their function. For Corot the drawing was never an end in itself; it was part of a continuous process of experiment and revision. This was true even when a series of drawings did not lead to the implied climax of an oil study.' Corot's early drawings are characterized by a spare, precise linearity, restrained landscape compositions and the use of a fine pen or a sharp lead pencil. (As the artist later recalled, 'In those days I had wonderful pencils! They never broke; they were more likely to tear the paper.') Around 1850, however, Corot began to prefer charcoal and chalk for his drawings, creating greater tonal effects in his landscape studies, which are darker and more atmospheric.