

André DERAIN (1880 - 1954)

Costume Designs for a Musketeer and a Woman [recto]; Still Life with a Plate of Fish on a Table [verso]

Pen and brown ink and brown wash on light brown paper.
The verso in pencil.
Numbered 672 and inscribed C=34/4 in pencil on the verso.
270 x 417 mm. (10 5/8 x 16 3/8 in.)

This drawing can be dated to the late 1940's, and the recto can be related to Derain's work for the stage. Derain had begun to design for the theatre in 1919, when he was commissioned by Serge Diaghilev to design the costumes, sets and stage curtains for the ballet La Boutique fantastique, which was first performed in London in June of that year. In the last decade of his career Derain designed sets for several opera and ballet productions, including the ballet Mam'zelle Angot, staged in London in 1947, and Mozart's Il Seraglio and Rossini's The Barber of Seville, performed in Aix-en-Provence in 1951 and 1952, respectively. In all, Derain created costumes and sets for thirteen ballets, two stage plays and two operas, while also providing designs for a number of unrealized projects. He worked for the Ballets Russes, the Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo, Georges Balanchine's Les Ballets 1933 and the Sadler's Wells Ballet, and collaborated with the choreographers Michel Fokine, Léonid Massine and Serge Lifar.

As one modern scholar has written of Derain, 'He was a born man of the theatre, gifted with an ability of rendering his designs lyrical and comprehensible...Such works...contain no trace of the heaviness and seriousness sometimes found in many of his paintings. It is as if his need to transpose his sentiments into another medium acted as a liberating force, and his designs...spirited, witty, modern and utterly charming, accorded perfectly with the mood of the moment.' Derain himself, writing in 1938, noted that 'J'aime la vie et j'aime le théâtre parce que c'est la vie, une autre vie.' A large number of costume and set designs by Derain are in the collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet in Paris.

The still life composition on the verso is close to that of such paintings of the second half of the 1940's as the Still Life with Fish and Pitcher in the Musée d'Art Moderne in Troyes.

Provenance:

The studio of the artist, with the atelier stamp (Lugt 668a) stamped at the lower right.

Artist description:

André Derain remains best known today for his avant-garde work as a painter between 1900 and 1914, and in particular for his significant contribution to the short-lived movement known as Fauvism. Having abandoned his studies as an engineer in 1898, Derain's early career was dominated by the influence of two older painters whom he met around 1900; Maurice de Vlaminck, with whom he was to share a studio in Chatou, and Henri Matisse. Through Matisse, Derain met the dealer Ambroise Vollard, who purchased the contents of his studio in February 1905. Later that year he exhibited with Matisse, Vlaminck, Albert Marquet, Raoul Dufy, Georges Rouault and others at the Salon d'Automne; it was at this exhibition that this group of artists were famously dubbed fauves, or wild beasts, by the critic Louis Vauxcelles.

Derain visited London for the first time in 1905 and again in 1906, painting several views of the city for Vollard that were perhaps intended to build on the success of Claude Monet's Thames paintings, which the dealer had exhibited the previous year. Derain continued to paint in a Fauve manner in 1906 and 1907, signing a contract with the dealer D. H. Kahnweiler and becoming friendly with Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. At the beginning of 1908, however, he burned much of his recent work, which he seemed to regard as experimental and unsuccessful, and adopted a manner of painting closer to the example of Paul Cézanne. Landscapes and still life compositions continued to dominate his output, and he took part in the Salon des Indépendants in Paris between 1907 and 1910, as well as in exhibitions at galleries in London and Germany. While he remained close friends with Picasso and Braque, Derain seems never to have taken to Cubism.

After the First World War, during which he served in the French army and was unable to paint, Derain's style became more restrained and classical, with the influence of the landscape painter Camille Corot prevalent. He also began working as a stage and costume designer, and his designs for the Ballets Russes production of La Boutique Fantastique in London in 1919 proved immensely successful. Apart from landscapes and still life subjects, Derain in the 1920s painted a number of nudes and portraits. Exhibitions of his paintings were held in France, England, Germany, Sweden, Belgium and America, while his new dealer, Paul Guillaume, was successful in selling his work, particularly in America.

The 1930's found the artist painting a number of large-scale figurative works, often on mythological themes, redolent of the influence of Auguste Renoir and Aristide Maillol. Derain was also active as a sculptor, book illustrator and printmaker, and indeed his chief work of the Second World War years was a series of almost four hundred colour woodcuts for a lavish edition of Rabelais' Pantagruel, published in 1943. In the last years of his career Derain worked mainly for the stage, designing sets for several opera and ballet productions, while also continuing to produce numerous book illustrations.

As a draughtsman, Derain worked in a range of media and techniques; in pen and ink, red chalk, pencil, charcoal, gouache and watercolour. By the 1920s his drawings were being published in articles and exhibition catalogues, and were much admired by critics and connoisseurs. Many were sold as works of art in their own right, and some were also reproduced as lithographs.