Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Jean-Michel Moreau Le Jeune (1741 - 1814)

A Design for a Chapter Heading, with a Bust of Athena and Emblems of the Arts and Sciences

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over traces of a pencil underdrawing.
Signed and dated J. M. Moreau , Le J.ne 1812. at the lower right.
125 x 199 mm. (4 7/8 x 7 7/8 in.)

The present sheet was once in the collection of the 19th century art historian Marie-Joseph-François Mahérault (1795-1879), who compiled the first catalogue raisonné of Moreau's work. Mahérault's collection of drawings, dispersed at auction the year after his death, included nearly three hundred sheets by Moreau le jeune.

Provenance:

Marie-Joseph-François Mahérault, Paris
His posthumous sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 27-29 May 1880, lot 207 ('Buste de Minerve au milieu de ses attributs, 1812. - Frontispice. Dessin au bistre. Haut., 12 cent. 1/2; larg., 20 cent.'), sold for 155 francs.

Literature:

M.-J.-F. Mahérault, L'oeuvre de Moreau le Jeune: Catalogue raisonné et descriptif, Paris, 1880, p.500, no.569 ('Buste de Minerve au milieu de ses attributs, 1812. Dessin au bistre oblong. (Collection Mahérault).'

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, wth whom he worked on theatre decorations in Russis 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 ilustrator, 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.