

**Paul Gavarni (1804 - 1866)**

**A Man Looking Through a Window at Three Giants**

Pen and brown ink and watercolour, heightened with gouache, over traces of an underdrawing in pencil.
Signed Gavarni at the lower right.
234 x 164 mm. (9 1/4 x 6 1/2 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, D.C.

This drawing illustrates a scene from Jonathan Swift's novel Gulliver's Travels. Gavarni produced sixteen illustrations for a French edition of the book, published in Paris as Les Voyages de Gulliver in 1862, as he had for Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe the previous year. Although the book illustrations were not highly regarded by the Goncourts, who described them as insipid, the quality of the original preparatory watercolours themselves was beyond reproach. As Paul-Andre Lemoisne noted, 'the engravings…have lost a great part of the delicacy and charm of Gavarni's watercolours.'

In their account of the artist's life and work, published after his death, the Goncourts recalled: 'We can still remember the almost thankful voice with which he told us, the day when he brought to us the two first watercolours of illustrations of Gulliver, and he saw us so delighted at their clarity, limpidity and "blondness": - "You think so?...Well! It really heartens me, my friends, what you tell me…". There was, in those words, almost a touch of surprise to be still so admired.'

The scene depicted in this drawing is set in the land of Brobdingnag, populated by colossal giants, which Gulliver discovers following his stay on Lilliput. Captured by a farmer and exhibited for money as a curiosity, he comes to the attention of the Brobdingnagian Queen and is taken to the capital city of Lorbulgrud. Gulliver becomes the favourite of the Queen and travels everywhere in a small wooden box made for him, 'with Sash-windows, a Door, and two Closets, like a London bedchamber', containing a

bed, two chairs and tables and a cabinet. As Gulliver later recalls, 'One Day the Governess ordered our Coachman to stop at several shops, where the Beggars watching their Opportunity, crowded to the sides of the Coach, and gave me the most horrible Spectacles that ever an English Eye beheld.'

A stylistically and thematically related watercolour drawing by Gavarni of Gulliver and the Scholars of Lorbulgrud is in the collection of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore.

**Exhibitions**

VNorman, Oklahoma, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, Vernet to Villon: Nineteenth-Century French Master Drawings from the National Gallery of Art, 2012, no.16.

**Literature:**

Victor Koshkin-Youritzin and Margaret Morgan Grasselli, Vernet to Villon: Nineteenth-Century French Master Drawings from the National Gallery of Art, exhibition catalogue, Norman, OK, 2012, pp.40-41, no.16.

**Artist description:**

Paul Gavarni was largely self-taught as an artist, having begun his career as a civil servant. In 1829 he submitted a watercolour to the Salon, and when the work – a view of the village of Gavarnie in the Pyrenées – was accepted and mistakenly exhibited under the name 'Gavarni', he decided to adopt the name for himself. He began working for such popular Parisian magazines as Le Charivari, La Mode, La Caricature and Silhouette, providing them with fashion illustrations and satirical drawings. He also produced illustrations for a short-lived publication of his own, entitled Le Journal des gens du monde. By the 1830's he had become a popular member of elegant society, his prints of Parisian life earning him a well-deserved reputation.

Gavarni spent several years in London in the late 1840's, and there contributed to the Illustrated London News, but the later years of his life were spent in relative seclusion in Auteuil. Among his most devoted admirers were the Goncourt brothers, who published a book on the artist in 1873, as well as Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, while Edgar Degas owned some two thousand lithographs by Gavarni. Nevertheless, the artist's reputation has declined since his death and, as one scholar has aptly noted, 'Nowadays Gavarni is not perhaps as well known as he should be. This is partly because he produced few oil paintings, though he did work in watercolour, and partly because his art possesses neither the quality nor the profundity of his contemporary Honoré Daumier. Gavarni's prolific output probably tells against him…Those who persevere and examine more than a token selection of his work will find much to delight them.'