Alexandre Calame (1810 - 1864)

View of Bordighera

Black chalk, brush and gray wash, heightened with white gouache, on dark blue paper.
Inscribed and dated Bordighera 27.7.58 and numbered 26 at the lower right.
149 x 215 mm. (5 7/8 x 8 1/2 in.)

This drawing is part of a now-dismembered sketchbook used by Calame in July and August of 1858, the contents of which have been partially reconstructed by Valentina Anker in her recent catalogue of the artist's drawings. The drawings from this sketchbook, all on sheets of blue paper, are devoted to views and sites along the Italian and French Riviera, from Bordighera on the northwest coast of Italy westwards along the corniche to Menton, Villefranche and the island of Saint-Honorat, near Cannes. Unique among Calame's sketchbooks in being devoted solely to coastal views, with the vibrant blue of the paper used to depict sea and sky, the drawings bear numbers up to 35, although only nineteen sheets are known today. Twelve of the drawings depict views in or near the Italian coastal town of Bordighera, a resort popular with English visitors and famous for its many palm trees. To judge from the dates inscribed on these drawings, Calame seems to have spent most of the month of July 1858 in the town. The present sheet - noted by Valentina Anker as 'cette vision est sereine et pleine de vivacité' – is a particularly fine example of Calame's draughtsmanship, and was one of four drawings from the sketchbook drawn on the same day, the 27th of July, 1858.

Despite the fact that a large number of drawings and watercolours are noted both in Calame's studio order book and in the catalogue of his 1865 studio sale, his drawings seem to have been difficult to find on the market. Indeed, as the artist noted in a letter to a dealer written in 1851, he did not have many drawings left in his studio and had determined not to part with any of them. The present sheet was among the drawings that Calame retained in his studio until his death, and remained in the possession of his descendants for many years afterward.

Provenance:

The artist's wife, Amélie Müntz Berger, Geneva
By descent to the artist's son, Arthur Calame, Geneva, by 1907
Marguerite Buscarlet-Calame, Geneva, in 1919
Louis Buscarlet, Geneva, by 1924
Daniel Buscarelet, Geneva, in 1942
Private collection, Switzerland
August Laube, Zurich, in 2008.

Literature:

Valentina Anker, Alexandre Calame (1810-1864) dessins: Catalogue raisonné, Berne, 2000, p.366 and p.370, no.F9.

Artist description:

Among the most celebrated Swiss landscape painters of the 19th century, Alexander Calame made a

particular speciality of Alpine mountain scenes. Despite losing his right eye as a child, he was determined to make a career as an artist, and studied with the landscapist François Diday between 1829 and 1832. From 1828 he began producing vues pittoresques suisses in gouache, intended for sale, which allowed him a measure of financial independence. He first came to the attention of French collectors and connoisseurs at the Salon of 1839, where he exhibited a view entitled A Thunderstorm in Handeck, set in the Bernese Oberland. The painting was a great success in Paris, and was purchased by public subscription by the city of Geneva for the Musée Rath. At the Salon two years later a View of the Valley of Ansasca was purchased by Louis-Philippe, and Calame's success was assured.

Although he worked mainly in Switzerland, Calame also travelled through Germany, the Netherlands, France and Italy. His paintings, worked up from oil sketches and drawings made sur le motif, were in great demand, and were purchased by collectors throughout Europe, and particularly in Russia. Calame was also an important teacher, and a large number of Swiss artists of the succeeding generation received their training in his studio in Geneva, while in 1854 he published a number of landscape drawings in lithographic form as Leçons de dessin appliqué au paysage. In 1865, the year after the artist's death, the contents of Calame's studio, numbering around five hundred works, were dispersed at auction in Paris.