

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Alexandre HESSE (Paris 1806 - Paris 1879)

The Head of a Bearded Old Man, Looking Down to the Right

Black, red and white chalk on buff paper.

An unidentified paraphe in black chalk at the lower left.

294 x 219 mm. (11 1/2 x 8 5/8 in.)

This fine sheet is a study for the turbaned head of a bearded man standing at the left of Alexandre Hesse's large painting of *The Feast in the House of Simon the Pharisee*, in the choir of the church of Saint-Julien in Chevry-en-Sereine, near Nemours. Signed and dated 1863, the painting is one of four mural scenes from the life of Christ commissioned in May 1861 by Mme. Amélie Brisson, owner of the château at Chevry-en-Sereine and a longstanding patron of the artist. Also included in the commission for the decoration of the church, for which the artist received 20,000 francs, were nine paintings of standing saints and a design for a stained-glass window.

A number of other preparatory studies for *The Feast in the House of Simon the Pharisee* are among the large group of drawings by the artist left to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris at his death in 1879. Studies for the figure of the Magdalene and for the feet and hands of Christ were on the art market in Paris in 1979, while a large-scale compositional study for the entire painting, rapidly drawn on papier calque, is also in the collection of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Another preparatory study for the head of the same bearded man, also without a turban, was on the art market in Paris in 1979.

Artist description:

The son and nephew of artists, Alexandre Hesse entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1821. In 1830 he

made his first visit to Italy, and his experiences in Venice inspired his painting of *The Funeral of Titian*, exhibited at his Salon debut in 1833, where it won a first-class medal. He returned to Italy in the same year, again visiting Venice, where he made several copies after the work of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese; artists who were to be a particular influence on his own work. In 1836 he received a State commission for a painting of *The Body of Henry V Brought Back to the Louvre after his Assassination*, intended for the *Galerie d'Apollon* of the Louvre and today at Versailles, as are two further paintings from French history, commissioned for the *Salle des Croisades*.

Hesse lived and worked in Rome between 1842 and 1847, and on his return devoted much of his later career to providing paintings for chapels in Parisian churches, including Saint-Séverin, Saint-Sulpice and Saint-Gervais. He also worked at provincial churches and decorated the ceiling of the *Palais de la Bourse* in Lyon between 1868 and 1870. Hesse continued to exhibit at the Salons until 1861, and in 1867 was nominated to succeed Ingres at the *Institut de France*. His last significant commission, for the decoration of a chapel in the Parisian church of Saint-Germain-des-Près, was left unfinished at his death.