

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Amable-Paul COUTAN (Paris 1792 - Paris 1837)

A Portrait of Charlotte-Madeleine Taurel as a Baby, in the Gardens of the Villa Medici in Rome

Pencil on paper.

Signed and dated Coutan / Rome / 1821 at the lower right.

194 x 279 mm. (7 5/8 x 11 in.)

Like his paintings, drawings by Amable-Paul Coutan are very rare. Among the handful that are known are two watercolour drawings of Italian peasant genre scenes, drawn in Rome and dated 1821 and 1822, in the collection of the Musée Vivenel in Compiègne.

The young sitter of this portrait drawing, Charlotte-Madeleine Taurel, was born in Rome in 1820, and was named after her godmother, the wife of the painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. She is depicted here in the grounds of the Villa Medici, the French Academy in Rome, accompanied by the family dog Trim, with the cupola of Saint Peter's in the distance. Charlotte-Madeleine's parents were the French engraver André-Benoit Taurel and Henriette Thévenin, the adopted daughter of the director of the Académie de France in Rome, Charles Thévenin. The couple were married in June 1819 and Charlotte-Madeleine was born in the Villa Medici in October of the following year. The Taurel family remained in Rome until 1823, when they returned to France. They eventually settled in Amsterdam in 1828, and remained good friends with Ingres and his wife throughout their lives.

Sadly, Charlotte-Madeleine Taurel suffered from both physical and mental illness, and traces of this are evident in Ingres's well-known, later portrait drawing of her at the age of about five, clinging to a sheep, which is today in the Louvre. In June 1829 Charlotte and her brother Charles-Edouard were taken by their mother to Paris, where they stayed with Ingres and his wife. Charlotte was entrusted to the care of Les Dames du Sacré-Coeur for medical treatment, but died soon afterwards. Her funeral was held in Montparnasse in February 1830.

The present sheet was engraved by the sitter's brother, Charles-Edouard Taurel, for his 'L'Album T', published in a limited edition of 125 copies in 1885. 'L'Album T' was intended as a souvenir of the wedding album presented to Taurel's parents at the time of their marriage in Rome in 1819. The original drawings in the wedding album, by Ingres and other artists, had been dispersed in 1859, and the Album T contained engravings after some of the more important drawings from the album. The final engraving in the book, by Charles-Edouard Taurel, reproduces the present drawing by Amable-Paul Coutan, and serves as a moving testament to the engraver's elder sister, who died at the age of nine.

Provenance:

The sitter's parents, André-Benoit Taurel and Henriette Thévenin-Taurel, Rome, Paris and Amsterdam

Probably by descent to the sitter's brother, Charles-Edouard Taurel, until c.1859.

Literature:

Charles-Edouard Taurel, *L'Album T.*, Amsterdam and The Hague, 1885, p.49; Hans Naef, 'Ingres und die Familien Thévenin und Taurel', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 1965, p.137; Rome, Villa Medici, *Ingres in Italia*, exhibition catalogue, 1968, p.86, under no.60 (incorrectly as by 'Joseph-Amable Coutan'); Hans Naef, *Die Bildniszeichnungen von J.-A.-D. Ingres*, Bern, Vol.II, 1978, p.215.

Artist description:

Little is known about Amable-Paul Coutan today, and his brief career and early death has meant that only a handful of works by him survive. A pupil of Antoine-Jean, Baron Gros, he enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1813. Two early paintings of classical subjects – a 'Philemon and Baucis' of 1818 and a 'Themistocles' of 1819 - are today in the museum in Bourges. Coutan won the Prix de Rome in 1820 with a painting of 'Achilles Awarding Nestor the Prize for Wisdom', now in the collection of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Probably dating from his stay in Rome is a view of Pompeii, today in the Musée Magnin in Dijon.

Coutan exhibited at the Salons of 1824, 1827, 1834 and 1836. In 1826 he painted a Christ Carrying the Cross for the church of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs in Paris, still in situ. He also participated in the decoration of the Parisian church of Notre-Dame de Lorette in 1833, painting two works including a 'Visitation', and completed an allegorical painting for a room in the Palais de Luxembourg. He also produced a number of elegant portraits. Coutan's final painting, 'The Oath of Louis-Philippe', intended for the Chambre des Députés, was left incomplete at his death in 1837, and was eventually finished by Joseph-Désiré Court.