

Emile-Jean-Horace VERNET (Paris 1789 - Paris 1863)

Portrait of General Jean Rabusson, Baron d'Empire

Black chalk, stumped, with touches of red and white chalk.
Signed with initials H.V. at the lower right.
Inscribed Maréchal-de-Camp du cadre d'activité d' Etat-major Général – M. Le Baron Rabusson at the lower left edge, and M. Le Baron Rabusson, Maréchal de Camp – (Général de Brigade) / (sous Louis-Philippe) on the verso.
Further inscribed Portrait du général Rabusson / Dessiné par Horace Vernet on a label attached to the backing board, and Maréchal-de-Camp du cadre d'activité d'Etat-major-général, / M. Le Baron Rabusson, / chevalier de St. Louis, Commandeur de la Legion d'Hr. / 1832 / Dessin Original d'Horace Vernet. / (1789+1863) on another label attached to the backing board.
343 x 285 mm. (13 1/2 x 11 1/4 in.) [sheet]
259 x 207 mm. (10 1/4 x 8 1/8 in.) [image]

The sitter of this fine portrait drawing, Baron Jean Rabusson (1774-1848), was related by marriage to the artist, having in 1810 married Nicole-Catherine-Henriette Pujol, the sister of Horace Vernet's wife, Louise. Rabusson enlisted in the army in 1793, was appointed a 'chef d'escadron' in 1811 and a colonel in 1815, and had risen to the rank of divisional commandant by 1830. He was created a Baron d'Empire in 1813.

Rabusson earns a brief anecdotal mention in an account of life at the court of Napoleon as recorded in the memoirs of Georgette Ducrest, a lady in the retinue of the Empress Josephine. In her 'Mémoires sur l'impératrice Joséphine, ses contemporains, la cour de Navarre et de Malmaison', first published in 1828, Ducrest writes that 'M. Rabusson, the brother-in-law of Horace Vernet, owed, it is said, to a happy instance of presence of mind, the advancement which he obtained in the army. He held the rank of second lieutenant, in what particular corps I do not know. During a review the Emperor let his hat fall near M. Rabusson, who immediately picked it up. "Thank you, captain," said Napoleon, not having observed the rank of the officer to whom he addressed himself. "In what regiment, Sire?" inquired Rabusson. "Oh!...in my guard," replied the Emperor, smiling at his own mistake and the coolness of his

interlocutor. He asked his name, and learned that he was a brave officer, who by several gallant actions had merited the cross. From that time the Emperor kept an eye upon him, gave him opportunities of honourably distinguishing himself, and successively conferred upon him various rewards.'

Vernet is known to have painted a portrait of Rabusson; the painting was still in the possession of the sitter's descendants in 1972. A watercolour portrait of Rabusson by Paul Delaroche is also recorded.

Artist description:

The grandson of the landscape and marine painter Claude-Joseph Vernet and the engraver Jean-Michel Moreau, and the son of the military and history painter Carle Vernet, Horace Vernet was actually born in the Louvre, where his father had a studio and lodgings. He studied with his father, from whom he was to inherit a lifelong interest in equestrian subjects, and later entered the studio of François-André Vincent. Horace assisted his father on the latter's battle paintings before making his Salon debut in 1812 with a military painting of his own, which led to a commission from Jérôme Bonaparte, King of Westphalia and brother of Napoleon.

A committed Bonapartist, Horace Vernet was to paint numerous scenes of the military victories of the Empire, many commissioned by the Duc d'Orléans, later King Louis-Philippe. (Indeed, Vernet was to earn a total of some 350,000 francs from commissions from Louis-Philippe over his career.) Such was his close association with the Empire that in 1822 two of his Napoleonic paintings were rejected by the Salon, on the grounds that they depicted subjects associated with the previous regime. (Vernet withdrew all of his paintings from the Salon that year and instead exhibited them privately in his studio, with great success.) He was, however, able to enjoy the patronage of Charles X, who in 1828 appointed Vernet director of the Académie de France in Rome, where he remained until 1834.

On his return to Paris he was appointed a professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, a post he retained throughout the remainder of his career. In 1837 he travelled to Algeria as an artist with the French army, the first of several trips to North Africa to record the military campaigns of the Louis-Philippe. In 1839, he visited Egypt and Palestine in the company of his nephew Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet, making some of the first daguerreotypes of the sights of Alexandria, Cairo and Jerusalem. Competent at a variety of styles, Vernet is best known today for his many large-scale, grandiose battle scenes and military subjects, although he also produced genre, Biblical and historical scenes. He was influenced by the work of Théodore Géricault and other artists of the Romantic movement and in 1855 was one of four artists - alongside Ingres, Delacroix and Gabriel-Alexandre Decamps - honoured with retrospective exhibitions of their work at the Exposition Universelle that year.