

Antoine-Jean DUCLOS (Paris 1742 - Paris 1795)

Figures Seated at a Table in an Interior

Pen and black ink and grey wash, with framing lines in black ink. Laid down.
Signed and dated A.J. Duclos inv. et del. 1770 in the lower left margin.
175 x 101 mm. (6 7/8 x 4 in.) [sheet]

Carole Blumenfeld has pointed out that this drawing illustrates a scene from the opera Lucile by the Belgian composer André Grétry, based on a story by Jean François Marmontel. The drawing served as a preparatory study for one of a series of six etchings illustrating scenes from the opera, drawn by Duclos and engraved by him and four other printmakers, which was published by François-Nicolas Martinet in Paris in 1770-17712. (This was in turn part of a series of 126 etchings illustrating scenes from popular opéras-comiques of the day, published by Martinet between 1762 and 1772.) The etching after the present sheet, signed by the printmaker Jean Baptiste(?) Patas, is captioned 'Ils s'asseyent autour d'une table ou l'on sert le dejeuner.'

Another small drawing by Duclos of the same date, illustrating a scene from Michel-Jean Sedaine's play Le Déserteur and also used for an etching published by Martinet, was formerly in the Goncourt's own collection and is today in a private collection in New York. Two similar genre drawings by Duclos, also dated 1770, appeared at auction in London in 1975.

The present sheet was once in the collection of Comte Henri Greffulhe (1848-1932) and his wife, the

Comtesse Elisabeth Greffulhe (1860-1952), queen of Parisian society and the inspiration for Marcel Proust's Duchesse de Guermantes.

Provenance:

Comte Henri de Greffulhe, Paris and Bois-Boudran
By descent to the Comtesse Greffulhe and the Duc and Duchesse de Gramont
Their sale ('A Selected Portion of the Renowned Collection of Pictures and Drawings formed by the Comte Greffulhe'), London, Sotheby's, 22 July 1937, lot 16 (bt. Colnaghi for £30)
P. & D. Colnaghi, London
Sold by them to Frost and Reed, London, on 19 January 1938 for £25.

Literature:

E. Bénézit, Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs; English ed. (Benezit: Dictionary of Artists), Paris, 2006, Vol.4, p.1256.

Artist description:

Antoine-Jean Duclos was a pupil of the draughtsman and engraver Augustin de Saint-Aubin, whose drawings he often reproduced as prints. Adept at the art of engraving and etching on a small scale, Duclos is perhaps best known as a book illustrator, his first efforts in this field coming around 1765. Alongside Charles-Nicolas Cochin and Hubert François Gravelot, he provided illustrations and vignettes for the Almanach iconologique, published between 1774 and 1781, and also contributed illustrations for such works as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Oeuvres and Choiseul-Gouffier's Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce. Much of his work was in the form of engravings after drawings by other artists, notably Cochin, Gravelot, Charles Eisen, Clément-Pierre Marillier and Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard. Duclos is recorded as exhibiting at the Salon just once, in 1795.

Drawings by Duclos - 'quelques dessins à la facture petite et gentillette', in the words of Edmond de Goncourt – are rare. In their Les graveurs du dix-huitième siècle, published between 1880 and 1882, Roger Portalis and Henri Béraldi noted that 'Duclos était en outré un excellent dessinateur, dont la manière rappelait celle de Gravelot; nous avons vu de lui un certain nombre de dessins, qu'il a généralement gravés lui-même, pour des pièces de théâtre.'