Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Gabriel-Auguste ANCELET (Paris 1829 - Paris 1895)

Grain Mills at Pompeii

Watercolour, over an underdrawing in pencil.
Signed and dated 1853 / A. Ancelet at the lower left.
217 x 276 mm. (8 1/2 x 10 7/8 in.)

The present sheet was executed while Ancelet was living in Rome as a pensionnaire at the Académie de France, having won the Prix de Rome for architecture in 1851. It depicts a group of grain mills outside a bakery at Pompeii. As one modern scholar has described the scene, 'A yard paved with basalt slabs contains four grain mills in a row, each constructed in the standard format of two components of lava: a hollow hourglass-shaped element (the catillus) fitted over a conical element (the meta) which was set on a pedestal with a raised lip around the edge. Drawn by a donkey, the catillus rotated around the meta, and grain poured into the upper cavity passed into the lower part, where it was ground into flour by the friction between the two elements, emerging at the bottom to be collected in the surrounding trough. To the right of the mills, against the bakery wall, was a series of masonry supports for wooden benches on which assistants kneaded the dough, and to the left was a domed oven with an arched opening giving access to the floor on which the fire was lit and the bread was baked.'

Other views of Pompeii by Ancelet, also dated 1853, appeared on the art markets in France in 2004 and in Germany in 2005. The artist is also known to have produced drawings reconstructing the interior decorations of some of the houses of Pompeii.

Provenance:

Schlichte Bergen, Amsterdam.

Artist description:

Gabriel-Auguste Ancelet enrolled at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1845, at the age of sixteen, studying there under the architect Victor Baltard. Ancelet's particular interest in architecture is reflected in the several elaborate designs he produced for ideal projects and monuments while a student, and in 1851 he won the Grand Prix de Rome in the category of architecture with a design for a hospice in the Alps. Ancelet arrived in Rome in 1852, and travelled extensively around Italy, drawing the recently excavated sites along the Via Appia and Pompeii, as well as venturing further afield, to Tuscany, Venice and

Sicily. He also visited Smyrna, Constantinople and Athens, producing numerous drawings of archaeological sights and buildings. Elaborate drawings of the Arch of Septimus Severus and the restoration of the Via Appia were sent to Paris for the Salon of 1856.

On his return to France the following year Ancelet was appointed Inspecteur aux Travaux des Archives et de la Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal and, in 1858, architect of the Imperial château of Pau and the villa at Biarritz. He also was entrusted with the restoration of the château of Arteaga, near Bilbao, for the Empress Eugénie. In 1864 Ancelet was named as architect at Compiègne, and was commissioned by Napoleon III to design a theatre on the grounds of the château. His most significant architectural project, construction of the theatre at Compiègne was completed in 1870, shortly before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war and the end of the Second Empire. After the war, Ancelet settled in Paris, where he was appointed architect to the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, and in this capacity restored several buildings and monuments in Paris, notably the Porte Saint-Denis. He was named professor of architectural and ornament drawing at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1873, and was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1892.