

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Jean-Michel CELS (The Hague 1819 - Brussels 1894)

Fallen Tree Trunks on a Forest Floor

Oil on paper.

Made up at the upper right corner.

Signed, dated and inscribed Etude d'après na[ture] JM Cels 1840 – environs de Bruxelles on the verso.

192 x 362 mm. (7 5/8 x 14 1/4 in.)

The present sheet is part of a group of drawings and oil sketches by Jean-Michel Cels that appeared on the art market in London in 1997. The artist's inscription on the verso notes that this sketch was painted in 1840 on the outskirts of Brussels. In painting works such as this, Cels may well have been aware of the pioneering plein-air painter Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes's statement that artists should make oil sketches of trees, to study the bark and the form of the tree closely.

Two oil sketches by Jean-Michel Cels, executed in oils on paper and sharing the same provenance as the present sheet, are in the collection of the National Gallery in London; one depicts a study of clouds and the other a study of trees in a ravine. Another oil sketch study of clouds and sky by Cels is in the Thaw Collection at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, while a further example was in the collection of the late Charles Ryskamp, New York.

Provenance:

Private collection, Belgium, c.1950
Anonymous sale, London, Christie's, 16 April 1997, part of lot 311
Kate de Rothschild, London.

Literature:

Sarah Herring, National Gallery Catalogues: The Nineteenth Century French Paintings. Volume 1: The Barbizon School, London, 2019, p.68, note 3, under NG 6578.

Artist description:

The 19th century Belgian artist Jean-Michel Cels remains little known today. He was the son and pupil of

the Neoclassical painter Cornelis Cels, director of the Académie de Tournai, and also studied with the landscape painter Pierre Jean Hellemans. The younger Cels must have learned the practice of making plein-air oil sketches from his father, who is known to have made such studies during the seven years he spent living and working in Italy early in his career.