


**GUSTAVE COURBET (Ornans 1819 - La-Tour-de-Peliz 1877)**

**Study of a Seated Man Asleep Against a Table**

Black chalk, with touches of white heightening, on blue-grey paper, backed.
Signed wth initials GC. at the lower left.
Inscribed Vente F. Courbet (frere du peintre) / 21 Décembre 1882 on the verso, backed
244 x 226 m. (9 5/8 x 8 7/8 in.)

Apart from three small sketchbooks in the Louvre, Courbet's oeuvre as a draughtsman consists of a few dozen individual drawings – portraits and self-portraits, figure or genre studies, and some landscapes – drawn in charcoal, black chalk, or pencil, or a combination of these. As Marget Stuffman has noted, 'In his approach to drawing, Courbet was not alone in his day in preferring the more suggestive effects of charcoal and crayon over the precisely descriptive quality of pencil...Having worked as a lithographer in his early years in Besançon, Courbet as draftsman was able to deploy the structural characteristics and the opportunities the medium offered for coherent pictorial effects thanks to his confident handling of tonal values, dense layering, and emphasis on light patches in dark areas.'

While Courbet's drawings of the late 1840s were mostly large-scale portraits of friends, family and himself, the following decade saw the artist treat genre subjects as well. Of his genre drawings of this period, one recent scholar has noted, 'Courbet's drawing exemplifies a new tendency, more legitimately Realist, to show figures in their context and in the way a casual visitor or passerby (flaneur) might have observed them. Coupled with this is a tendency to place the model farther from the picture plane, thus increasing the impression of casually observing a human being rather than closely examining a specimen.'

The act of sleeping or resting is something of a leitmotif that runs through Courbet's oeuvre over his entire career. It occurs in several paintings and individual drawings, as well as in a number of pages of the sketchbooks in the Louvre. As has been noted of the artist, 'Courbet's fascination with scenes of sleeping and the postures that accompany dreaming is evident in many of his works...From the outset, Courbet portrayed people sleeping or taking afternoon naps, and we find them, too, drowsing over a book...'

In the present sheet, it is also interesting to note the possible influence on Courbet of Goya's famous

etching The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters from the Los Caprichos series of 1797-1799, in which a very similarly posed figure appears, albeit in reverse.

**Provenance:**

Sale ('Vente Courbet et ses élèves'), Paris, 21 December 1882 (according to the inscription on the verso)
A. F. collection
Anonymous sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 11 March 1987, lot 58
Private collection.

**Artist description:**

Born in Franche-Comté, Gustave Courbet began his career as a lithographer before turning his hand to painting at the end of the 1830s. While his earliest works were portraits and self-portraits, his modern reputation rests on the Realist paintings of peasants and workers that he painted in the late 1840s and early 1850s; works such as The Stone-breakers and A Burial at Ornans which have a strong political emphasis, and which caused a sensation when exhibited at the Salon of 1851. The massive canvas The Painter's Studio, completed in 1855, was painted for the Exposition Universelle of 1855 but rejected by the jury; in response Courbet exhibited the painting and some forty others in his own private Pavillon du Réalisme close to the grounds of the Exposition. The later 1850s and the first half of the 1860s found Courbet working in a less overtly Realist vein, with his output dominated by landscape paintings, as well as still-life paintings and hunting scenes. Later in the 1860s, however, he returned to more radical subjects, in a handful of paintings that are characterized by a focus on social issues. Briefly imprisoned after the Commune of 1871, in which he was closely involved, Courbet spent the rest of his life in exile in Switzerland.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Courbet was not a prolific draughtsman. (In his 1978 catalogue raisonné of Courbet's work, Robert Fernier lists just over sixty drawings by the artist, and relatively few sheets have been added to the corpus since then.) He seems to have drawn only occasionally, and indeed has been described as being somewhat averse to drawing; it is thought that his rejection of academic principles may also have led him to ignore the traditional emphasis placed on preparatory drawing, in favour of working directly in colour on the canvas. Nevertheless, he sometimes chose to exhibit selected drawings alongside his paintings at the Salons, and between 1845 and 1855 produced a number of large and highly-finished drawings, fully signed and dated, in charcoal and chalk.