Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Claude-Louis Chatelet (Paris (?) 1750 - Paris 1795)

Mountain Landscape with a Waterfall

Pen and brush and black ink and grey wash, heightened with touches of white, on blue paper.

Double framing lines in brown ink.

Inscribed vallée(?) in brown ink at the lower left. 218 x 285 mm.

(8 1/2 x 11 1/4 in.)

The present sheet may have been executed during Claude-Louis Chatelet's travels around Switzerland in 1780 and 1781, in preparation for Laborde and Zurlauben's Tableaux topographiques, pittoresques, physiques, historiques, moraux, politiques, littéraires de la Suisse. Waterfalls appear in many of Châtelet's drawing as well as in several of his rare paintings of views in Switzerland, France and Italy.

A stylistically comparable drawing of the waterfalls on the Rhine at Schaffhausen, in Switzerland near the German border, and drawn on the same deep blue paper, was formerly in the collection of John Gaines in Kentucky, and was sold at auction in 2001. Another drawing from this group is The Cascade at Tivoli in the Horvitz Collection in Boston, which is in the same distinctive technique, as are three further studies of mountain views by Châtelet, on identical blue paper, in the same collection, and a Mountain Landscape with a Waterfall, recently sold at auction in New York. Another landscape drawing of this type is in the collection of the Harvard Art Museums in Cambridge, Massachusetts, while a further example is in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Also stylistically comparable, though much larger in scale, are two drawings of waterfalls by Châtelet; one in the Louvre and the other, depicting the Reichenbach falls in Switzerland, sold at auction in New York in 2000.

Provenance:

Anonymous sale, New York, Christie's, 22 January 2004, part of lot 212
Private collection.

Literature:

New York, Wildenstein, The Arts of France from François Ier to Napoléon Ier: A Centennial Celebration of Wildenstein's Presence in New York, exhibition catalogue, 2005-2006, p.294, note 8, under no.124.

Artist description:

Very little is known of the birth and artistic training of Claude-Louis Chatelet. He is not recorded as a student at the Académie Royale, and the known facts of his career are few. Active primarily as a topographical draughtsman and book illustrator, he seems to have completed only a handful of paintings, among them views of Versailles and one or two seascapes. It is rather for his landscape drawings in watercolour or gouache that Chatelet is best known. Like his contemporaries Louis-Gabriel Moreau and Louis Belanger, Chatelet often depicted the parks and gardens around Paris, such as Bellevue, the Petit Trianon at Versailles and the Folie Saint-James at Neuilly. In 1776 and again between 1780 and 1781 he traveled throughout Switzerland, producing several drawings for Jean-Benjamin de La Borde and Baron Beat Fidel de Zurlauben's massive publishing project, the Tableaux topographiques, pittoresques, physiques, historiques, moraux, politiques, littéraires de la Suisse.

Chatelet's most important commission, however, came soon after his return from Switzerland, when he was asked to supply landscape illustrations for the Abbé de Saint-Non's Voyage pittoresque, ou description historique des royaumes de Naples, et de Sicile, published in five volumes between 1781 and 1786. Chatelet undertook a trip to southern Italy, in the company of Louis-Jean Desprez and Dominique-Vivant Denon, to prepare drawings for the project. He was, along with Desprez, responsible for the largest number of the illustrations later engraved for the book, to which Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Hubert Robert, Jean-Pierre Houel and Saint-Non himself also contributed. Actively involved in radical politics, Chatelet was a fervent Revolutionary and a member of the Jacobin Tribunal. After the fall of Robespierre in 1794, he was imprisoned and sent to the guillotine on the 7th of May the following year.