Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Antoine-Charles-Horace VERNET (Bordeaux 1758 - Paris 1836)

A Mameluke Mounting his Horse

Black chalk.
Signed and dedicated à Madame Jacob / Carle Vernet at the lower left.
345 x 371 mm. (13 5/8 x 14 5/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO, TORONTO.

Carle Vernet produced a number of drawings and watercolours of Mameluke warriors, many of which were reproduced as lithographs or engravings by other artists. This large sheet is a preparatory study for one of these prints; a lithograph entitled Mameluck en Vedette, part of a series of six lithographs of Mameluke subjects designed by Vernet and published by François Seraphin Delpech. (An impression of the print is in the collection of the British Museum.) Popular with collectors and connoisseurs, these large and finished works date from the first decade of the 19th century, and were inspired by Napoleon's campaigns against Mameluke tribesmen in his conquest of Egypt. For artists such as Vernet, as for the French public at large, the Mameluke and his magnificent Arabian steed stood as a symbol of the fierce exotic warrior; the proud horseman of the desert.

Provenance:

Given by the artist to a Mme. Jacob
Private collection, France.

Artist description:

The third son of the landscape painter Claude-Joseph Vernet, Antoine-Charles-Horace (known as Carle) Vernet was born into an artistic dynasty that was later to include his son Horace. A winner of the Prix de Rome in 1782, he spent only a few months in Italy between 1782 and 1783 before having to return to France for reasons that remain unclear. He was, however, to use motifs drawn from his Roman experiences throughout his later career. While perhaps best known today for his engravings and lithographs, Carle Vernet was, in his lifetime, an important and successful painter. In 1799 he exhibited

a number of drawings of Napoleon's Italian campaigns, and in the succeeding years produced several paintings of military subjects, climaxing in the massive canvas of The Battle of Marengo, now at Versailles.

Later in his career he turned his attention to equestrian subjects, particularly scenes of hunting and racing, and worked almost exclusively in this genre from around 1820 onwards. He devoted a considerable amount of time to making careful studies of different breeds and types of horses. As the critic Charles Blanc noted of Vernet, 'He is the first artist who does not draw inspiration from Van der Meulen or Wouwermans but returns to the stud farm or riding school: he renders the horse's lively gaits, its expression while waiting, its grace, and its coquetry.' Similarly, a more recent scholar has written of Vernet that 'To his French contemporaries, his brittle, swan-necked horses seemed strikingly natural, because he drew them with the knowledge of the experienced horseman rather than according to the monstrous, Academic formula.' The artist's lifelong interest in equestrian subjects was passed on to his pupil Théodore Géricault, who undertook his earliest artistic training in Vernet's studio between 1808 and 1810.

An accomplished and energetic draughtsman, Carle Vernet seems almost to have preferred drawing to painting, and is best known today for his works on paper. He also made a speciality of costume studies, often bordering on caricature, which captured the fashionable manners of the day. (A series of his figure studies of elegant Parisian types, issued as prints in 1797 as Incroyables et merveilleuses, achieved considerable success and established his reputation.) One of the first artists to take up the practice of lithography, Vernet produced several drawings intended for reproduction in the technique. Among his prints are equine subjects and genre scenes, notably a series of a hundred colour aquatints of street vendors and hawkers, entitled Cris de Paris, which first appeared in 1816.