

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



BERNDT DAMS AND ANDREW ZEGA

The Entrance Facade of the Château de Bagatelle

Watercolour.

313 x 532 mm. (12 3/8 x 21 in.) [sight]

The Château de Bagatelle, in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, was a small neoclassical château built in 1777 by the architect François-Joseph Bélanger for the Comte d'Artois, the brother of Louis XVI. Marie-Antoinette, the Comte's sister-in-law, famously wagered 100,000 livres that the new château could not be completed within nine weeks. The Comte won the bet, with the house completed in only sixty-four days by a team of nine hundred workers, at the cost of three million livres. The interior of the château, also designed by Bélanger, included six landscape paintings commissioned from Hubert Robert, while the extensive gardens - incorporating numerous architectural follies, including a Chinese Bridge, an Egyptian Obelisk, a Chinese Tent and a Philosopher's Pavilion, all since destroyed - were laid out by Bélanger in collaboration with the Scottish gardener Thomas Blaikie. Bagatelle survived the Revolution largely intact, and in 1835 was purchased by Lord Hertford to house his collection, today the nucleus of the Wallace Collection in London. Now owned by the city of Paris, the château remains in the park today, albeit considerably altered, and this watercolour drawing records the original appearance of the entrance façade.

The present sheet is one of a series of some fifty watercolours, by the architectural historians and illustrators Berndt Dams and Andrew Zega, of significant examples of garden architecture in France in the century and a half before the Revolution. As the late Charles Ryskamp has noted of these works, 'The paintings are brilliant and original. The author/artists, American and German, have captured the French genius of these buildings through the medium of watercolor, which enables the rendition of various building materials and surfaces with remarkable versatility and sensitivity. The illustrations overcome the special problems of recreating the appearance of each building. The paintings are abstractions of the elevations of the main facades of each building; yet they are also informative of the architectural peculiarities of the entire structure. The resulting illustrations both document the architectural past and are modern works of art in their own right.'

Provenance:

Didier Aaron, Inc. New York and Galerie de Bayser, Paris, in 1994-1995.

Exhibitions

New York, Didier Aaron Inc., Lost Splendor, January 1994; Paris, Galerie de Bayser, La folie de bâtir, October 1995.

Literature:

Berndt H. Dams and Andrew Zega, *Pleasure Pavillions and Follies, In the Gardens of the Ancien Régime*, Paris and New York, 1995, illustrated p.116.

Artist description:

The architectural historians and illustrators Bernd Dams and Andrew Zega have collaborated on a series of remarkable watercolours depicting significant examples of architecture, garden architecture and ornament in France in the century and a half before the Revolution. As the late Charles Ryskamp has noted of these works, 'The paintings are brilliant and original. The author/artists, American and German, have captured the French genius of these buildings through the medium of watercolor, which enables the rendition of various building materials and surfaces with remarkable versatility and sensitivity. The illustrations overcome the special problems of recreating the appearance of each building. The paintings are abstractions of the elevations of the main facades of each building; yet they are also informative of the architectural peculiarities of the entire structure. The resulting illustrations both document the architectural past and are modern works of art in their own right.'

A German architect and architectural historian whose doctoral thesis was on the Château of Marly, Dams met Zega, an American artist and writer, in the early 1990s, when both were employed at the architectural firm of Robert A. M. Stern in New York. The two began collaborating on detailed and historically accurate watercolours of buildings and ornament, with an emphasis on French architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries, notably the Palace of Versailles. Many of the buildings depicted no longer exist, and their splendid watercolours are thus based on contemporary accounts, descriptions and illustrations. Dams and Zega have written and illustrated four books: *Pleasure Pavillions and Follies*, published in 1995, *Garden Vases* (2000), *Palaces of the Sun King: Versailles, Trianon, Marly* (2002) and *Chinoiserie* (2006). Watercolours by Dams and Zega are today in the collections of The New-York Historical Society and the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in New York, the Princeton University Art Museum, and the Musée de l'Île de France at the Château de Sceaux. Works by the artists are also in numerous private collections, including those of Brooke Astor, Robert Denning, Hubert de Givenchy, Oscar de la Renta and Jayne Wrightsman.