

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Alexandre-Evariste FRAGONARD (Grasse 1780 - Paris 1850)

A Centurion Begging for Protection from Marc Antony during a Seditious Revolt

Pen and black ink, with brush and grey and black wash, over traces of an underdrawing in pencil, with framing lines in black ink. Laid down. Signed fragonard-fils invenit at the lower left. Inscribed DU TEMS DES GUERRES DE ROME DES SOLDATS / DANS UNES SEDITION PRIRENT UN CENTURION ILS VOULOIENT LE MASSACRER IL SE JETTA / AUX PIED D'ANTOINE QUI LE PROTGEA ET REPRIMA LA FUREUR DES REVOLTE. at the lower centre. 204 x 481 mm. (8 1/4 x 18 7/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE HARVARD ART MUSEUMS, CAMBRIDGE, MA.

Given its pronounced Neoclassical flavour, the present sheet is likely to date from the first part of the artist's career. Evariste Fragonard was fond of such long, frieze-like compositions in his drawings, which seem to have been intended to replicate sculpted bas-reliefs. As Jacques Foucart has noted of the artist, 'in his work neo-classical features are combined with a taste for moving pictorial effects and beams of light, inherited from his father as well as from northern painters...His Neo-Classicism was all the more pronounced by the fact that Alexandre-Evariste was also a sculptor and designed many ornamental patterns for Sèvres.' Among comparable scenes from ancient history, treated in the manner of an antique relief, is a drawing of Two Women and a Youth Before a Seated Philosopher in the Louvre, as well as a very large exhibition drawing of The Infant Pyrrhus at the Feet of Glaucias, signed and dated 1814 and also in the Louvre.

Fragonard also produced a number of similar frieze-like drawings for subjects taken from more recent history, such as his designs for several bas-reliefs depicting Napoleonic victories, drawn around 1810 and intended to decorate the Palais Bourbon, now the home of the Assemblée Nationale, but never executed. Stylistically comparable drawings are also found in many of Fragonard's brilliant designs for the Sèvres porcelain factory, typified by seventeen drawings of Napoleonic subjects, drawn in 1832, as well as designs for five narrative reliefs, executed in 1810-1811, for the decoration of a porcelain column dedicated to Napoleon's Polish campaigns and manufactured at Sèvres.

Provenance:

Anonymous sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 12 June 1992, lot 58
Anonymous sale, London, Sotheby's, 26 February 1998, lot 577
W. M. Brady & Co., New York, in 1999
Private collection, USA.

Exhibitions

Artist description:

The son of the painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Evariste Fragonard studied with his father before entering the studio of Jacques-Louis David at an early age. A precocious student, he made his Salon debut in 1793 at the age of only thirteen, exhibiting a drawing of Timoleon Sacrificing his Brother. A few months later he won two second prize medals at the great concours held in the Year II of the Republic. He continued to show regularly at the Salon until 1842, exhibiting drawings, scenes from Napoleonic history and, from around 1820 onwards, troubadour paintings. In 1810 he received a commission to paint a series of grisailles for the Palais Bourbon, and later won several further official commissions, including a series of historical subjects for the museum at Versailles and ceiling paintings for the Louvre. Equally adept at large-scale history scenes and intimate cabinet pictures, Fragonard was in great demand throughout his later career. He painted works for several Parisian churches, including a Martyrdom of Saint James for Saint-Jacques-du-Haut-Pas and an Assumption of the Virgin for Saint-Geneviève, as well as a Flight into Egypt for Strasbourg Cathedral.

Fragonard was also active as a sculptor and, like his father, produced designs for lithographs and book illustrations, notably Baron Taylor's *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*, for which he designed some 160 illustrations for the volumes devoted to the Auvergne, Franche-Comté, Languedoc and Haute-Normandie. Between 1806 and 1839 he also created numerous decorative designs for Sèvres porcelain, which accounts for some of his finest drawings. His son Théophile was also a painter, mainly of romantic genre subjects. Important groups of drawings by Evariste Fragonard are today in the collections of the Louvre, the Manufacture de Sèvres and the Musée Fragonard in Grasse, while other significant examples are in the Musée Magnin in Dijon, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Orléans and elsewhere.