

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Aignan-Thomas DESFRICHES (Orléans 1715 - Orléans 1800)

A View of the Pont-Royal in Orléans, with the Construction of a Pier in the Foreground

Black chalk.

Laid down onto a mount, with double framing lines in brown ink.

168 x 337 mm. (6 3/4 x 13 1/4 in.)

In the 1750s Desfriches made a number of drawings of the construction of a new bridge over the river Loire at Orléans. The work on the bridge - first known as the Pont Royal, later as the Pont National and today known as the Pont George V - was supervised by the engineer Robert Soyer (1717-1782), ingénieur des ponts et chaussées and a close friend of the artist.

As Desfriches's great-grandson and biographer Paul Ratouis de Limay, a previous owner of this drawing, noted, 'the ingénieur des ponts et chaussées Soyer was charged with the construction of the Pont d'Orleans...he is celebrated and Desfriches soon counts him among his best friends...Wishing to please his new friend, Desfriches drew, between 1750 and 1760, several Views of the Construction of the Pont d'Orleans, animated by a host of little characters, which reveal a remarkable suppleness and a precision in the use of chalk.'

Another, larger drawing by Desfriches of the construction of the bridge at Orléans, which shared the same provenance as the present sheet until 1963, is today in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans. A number of other drawings of the construction of the bridge are in private collections.

The present sheet has remained with Desfriches's descendants until recently, having belonged to the artist's daughter, Félicité-Perpétue Desfriches (1745-1834), the wife of Jean Cadet de Limay. It then passed to Marie-Clotilde Cadet de Limay, who married Alexis Ratouis, and thence to their sons, Henri Ratouis de Limay (1863-1951) and Paul Ratouis de Limay (1881-1963).

Provenance:

The artist, Aignan-Thomas Desfriches, Orléans

His wife, née Marie Madeleine Bufferau

By descent to their daughter, Félicité-Perpétue Desfriches, wife of Jean Cadet de Limay

By descent to their granddaughter, Marie-Clotilde Cadet de Limay, wife of Alexis Ratouis

Their sons, Henri Ratouis de Limay and Paul Ratouis de Limay

By descent to Mme. Paul Ratouis de Limay, Neuilly-sur-Seine

Thence by descent until 2016.

Exhibitions

Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans, Exposition A.-T. Desfriches (1715-1800), 1965-1966,

Literature:

André Jarry, 'Essai de catalogue de l'oeuvre peint, dessiné et gravé de Desfriches' in Paul Ratouis de Limay, *Un amateur Orléanais au XVIIIe siècle: Aignan-Thomas Desfriches (1715-1800). Sa vie, son oeuvre, ses collections, sa correspondance*, Paris, 1907, p.189; Mehdi Korchane et al, *Le Trait et l'Ombre: Dessins français du musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans*, exhibition catalogue, Sceaux, 2022, p.202, under nos.79-80, fig.2.

Artist description:

Aignan-Thomas Desfriches studied in his native Orléans before moving in 1733 to Paris, where he completed his artistic training in the studios of first Nicolas Bertin and later Charles-Joseph Natoire. He became the director of the drawing academy established under the patronage of the duc de Rohan-Chabot, but returned to Orléans at the end of the 1730s to take over his father's spice importing business. He worked in Orléans for the remainder of his career, and founded the *Ecole de Peinture, de Sculpture et d'Architecture d'Orléans* in 1786. Active primarily as a landscape painter and draughtsman, Desfriches was strongly influenced by the Dutch masters of the 17th century. He first visited the Netherlands in 1753, and began collecting Dutch paintings and drawings soon afterwards, buying many works on a second trip in 1766. Indeed, he was particularly active as a collector, and by 1778 the inventory of his collection listed a total of 114 paintings and sculptures, as well as between two and three hundred drawings. A portion of his collection was given by his widow to the *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in Orléans in 1824.

As a draughtsman, Desfriches produced charming landscapes of the countryside around Orléans and the valley of the river Loire and its tributaries, peopled by acutely observed peasants and travellers. Prominent among a large number of topographical drawings is a vast panorama of the city of Orléans, now in the collection of the *Musée des Beaux-Arts* there. In the latter part of his career, Desfriches adopted the practice of drawing on a coated grey-blue paper he had invented, known as *papier-tablette*, producing landscape drawings of marvellous precision and delicacy. These small drawings, often mounted on wooden snuffboxes, were regularly presented by the artist to particular friends.