

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Antoine VOLLON (Lyon 1833 - Paris 1900)

Portrait of a Man, probably a Self-Portrait

Black chalk, charcoal and coloured chalks on buff paper.

A study of a dress in pencil on the verso.

Signed and inscribed (by the artist's son) Je soussigné, certifie, que ce dessin / portrait de mon père par lui-même / est bien de lui. / Alexis Vollon on the old backing board.

236 x 210 mm. (8 7/8 x 8 1/4 in.)

Antoine Vollon seems to have preferred this three-quarter pose, with part of his face in deep shadow, in the handful of self-portraits by the artist that have survived. These include paintings of c.1860 in a private collection and of c.1870 in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, as well as a self-portrait in old age in 1889. The jaunty tilt of the hat in this drawing may also be a reference to the artist's usual appearance. As has been noted of Vollon, 'before leaving Lyon he had been cautioned that once in Paris, he should try to behave like everyone else and not wear his soft cap over one ear. He claimed never to have obeyed this advice. Indeed, in an early Rembrandtesque self portrait, Vollon, then newly arrived in Paris, portrayed himself, palette in hand, wearing his cap to one side.'

Carol Tabler has kindly confirmed the attribution of the present sheet, but is of the opinion that, despite the attestation of the artist's son Alexis on the old backing board, this drawing is not, in fact, a self-portrait. She has suggested instead that it may be a portrait of Vollon's close friend and fellow artist Joseph Soumy (1831-1863), whom he met in Paris soon after his arrival there from Lyon in June 1859. Certainly the two artists looked quite similar, to judge from a self-portrait drawing by Soumy. (It should perhaps also be noted that Alexis Vollon was born two years after the death of Soumy, and would not have known him.) An early supporter of Vollon's work, Joseph Soumy joined the artists Hippolyte Flandrin and Charles-François Daubigny in signing a letter recommending that Vollon be granted a commission from the State. He also introduced Vollon to the painter and sculptor Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, another close friend who painted a portrait of Vollon in 1873. Suffering from a degenerative eye disease, Soumy committed suicide in 1863, and Vollon is known to have painted a commemorative portrait of his friend, exhibited as 'Portrait de M. S.' at the Salon des Refusés of that year.

Joseph Soumy painted a portrait of Vollon, in which he appears unbearded; the painting was recorded

in the possession of the sitter's son, the artist Alexis Vollon, in 1910.

The present sheet formerly belonged to the Swiss art historian François Daulte (1924-1998).

Provenance:

Galerie Raphaël Gerard, Paris
François Daulte, Lausanne
Acquired from him by a private collector.

Exhibitions

Possibly Paris, Galerie Raphaël Gerard, Exposition Antoine Vollon, 1937, no.23 or 23 (both 'Portrait de lui-même').

Artist description:

Antoine Vollon enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in his native Lyon in 1851, studying printmaking and winning a silver medal for engraving the following year. By 1859 he had settled in Paris, where he became a disciple of Théodule Ribot, François Bonvin and other painters of the Realist circle. Self-taught as a painter, Vollon first exhibited at the Salon of 1864, having been included in the so-called Salon des Refusés the previous year, alongside Edouard Manet, Henri Fantin-Latour and James McNeill Whistler. He soon came to achieve a considerable measure of success as a painter of landscapes, interior scenes and, in particular, still life subjects. In this latter field his works were evocative of the still life paintings of Jean-Baptiste Chardin, as well as certain Dutch 17th century painters and, among his contemporaries, Manet.

Vollon was particularly admired for the painterly effects and technical mastery of his canvases. His contributions to the annual Salons were widely praised by critics, and several paintings were purchased by the State. In 1879 Edmond Renoir, brother of the Impressionist painter, organized an exhibition of Vollon's work at the offices of the magazine La Vie Moderne; this was to be in fact the artist's only retrospective exhibition in his lifetime. Despite the success he achieved in his career, culminating in his election to the Institut de France in 1894, Vollon was almost completely forgotten after his death. A posthumous exhibition of his work at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, planned shortly after his death, was never held. His son, Alexis Vollon (1865-1943), was also an artist.