Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Eugène ISABEY (Paris 1803 - Montévrain 1886)

A Ship in a Storm

Black and red chalk, with pen and brown ink and scratching-out.
Signed and dated Isabey 1829(?) in scratching-out at the lower right.
196 x 268 mm. (7 3/4 x 10 1/2 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE VEREIN DER FREUNDE UND FÖRDERER DER KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN ZU WEIMAR, WEIMAR.

Provenance:

An unidentified collector's mark stamped in red at the lower left.

Artist description:

The son of the miniaturist Jean-Baptiste Isabey, Louis-Gabriel-Eugène Isabey embarked on a career as a landscape painter. In 1823 he produced some lithographs for his father's Voyage en Italie par J.B. Isabey en 1822, and the following year spent some time painting at Le Havre. He made his debut at the Salon of 1824, exhibiting a number of seascapes and winning a first-class medal in the category of genre and marine painting. It was at about this time that he met Eugène Delacroix and Richard Parkes Bonington, both of whom were to prove influential on the young artist. From Bonington, Isabey adopted the practice of drawing his watercolours on a light or white ground, instead of the dark ground commonly used in France at the time. The three artists traveled together to England in 1825, where Isabey was able to study the work of Turner and the English watercolourists.

On his return to France he settled in Normandy, where he made countless sketches and paintings of the coastal scenery. He also befriended another young artist, Paul Huet, who shared his penchant for working en plein-air. Like Huet, Isabey exhibited a number of views of Normandy at the Salon of 1827, with some success. Two years later he contributed illustrations to the Voyage pittoresque et romantiques de l'ancienne France, published by Charles Nodier, Alphonse de Cailleux and Isadore Taylor in 26 volumes between 1820 and 1863. As a painter, he made a speciality of marine views, and in 1833 his painting of a Harbour at Low Tide was purchased by the State. In later years Isabey received several official commissions and produced a number of grandiose history pictures, typified by the Return of the Ashes of Napoleon at Versailles. He never lost his interest in the watercolour medium, however, and was a founder member of the Société des Aquarellistes Français, established in 1879. Isabey's work also provides a link between the Romantic tradition and that of the pre-Impressionists; he may have come into contact with Eugène Boudin as early as 1844, while on a visit to Holland in 1846 he met Johan Barthold Jongkind, who later became his student in Paris; among Isabey's other pupils were

Eugène Ciceri, Adolphe Hervier and Félix Ziem.

Throughout his career, Isabey made numerous sketches in both oil and watercolour of seascapes and coastal views. While some of these sketches may have been later used as the basis for finished paintings, the artist seems to have regarded them as autonomous works; a view at odds with that of some contemporary writers. In his review of the Salon of 1844, for example, the reactionary critic Thoré-Burger noted that 'M. Eugène Isabey is another of these improvisers who have no time to work at a picture…A sketch may often have more style and vigour than a finished painting. But these spontaneous studies should only be motifs destined to undergo a stricter and more thorough elaboration…M. Isabey is more successful in his small unpretentious marine pictures.' Notwithstanding such criticism, Isabey's landscape sketches and watercolours remained in great demand throughout his career, with one such example selling in 1882 for the huge sum of 4,400 francs.