

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Denis-Marie-Auguste RAFFET (Paris 1804 - Genoa 1860)

A Seated Gypsy Woman, Seen from Behind

Red, blue and black chalk, with touches of green chalk.

Inscribed 10-30 avril 1841- and further inscribed and dated Femme tsigane, de dos / accroupie - / Etude pour la pl.44 de Voyage en / Russie. Habitations de tsiganes dans / la montagne. 18 aout 1837. at the bottom of the sheet, below the figure.

Stamped with the Raffet vente stamp (Lugt 2126) at the lower right.

308 x 198 mm. (12 1/8 x 7 3/4 in.)

In 1837 Auguste Raffet travelled with Prince Anatole Demidoff on an expedition to southern Russia and the Crimea. The party left Paris on the 14th of June 1837, travelling overland through Hungary, Walachia, Moldavia and Bessarabia to Odessa and on to the Crimea. Prevented from returning overland by an outbreak of the plague in Odessa, the group set sail from Constantinople, arriving in Marseille on the 24th of November 1837. The illustrations Raffet made on the journey were used to illustrate Demidoff's account of the expedition, the *Voyage dans la Russie méridionale et la Crimée par la Hongrie, la Valachie et la Moldavie et retour par Constantinople*, dedicated to Czar Nicolas I and published in six volumes between 1840 and 1848. (An English edition appeared in 1853.)

The present sheet was drawn by Raffet on his travels with Demidoff in 1837, and is a study for the woman seated on a rug in the foreground of one of the plates illustrating the *Voyage dans le Russie*. As the artist has noted in an inscription at the bottom of the sheet, as well as on the lithograph for which it is a study, this drawing was made on the 18th of August 1837, when the Demidoff party visited a gypsy village in the mountains near the former Tatar capital city of Baghtcheh-Saraï (modern day Bakhchysaray in the Ukraine), northeast of Sebastopol in the Crimea. Demidoff described the village and its inhabitants in the *Voyage dans la Russie*; 'Imagine the most extraordinary assembly of half-clad

savages, living in caves instead of houses, - filthy dens, hollowed out by the hand of nature, or the grudging labour of sloth, in the sides of the large rocks which surround the valley. A numerous tribe of gipsies found these abodes ready-made, and accommodated themselves, with their natural indolence, to this troglodyte existence. Such is the chosen capital of this miserable race, and here do they delight to spread their squalor beneath the sun....and yet, even here, one is astonished to find occasionally a physiognomy, though certainly in a great minority, presenting the type of Asiatic beauty; fine young women, walking in their scanty rags with the dignity of stage queens...But these beautiful remains of a race now degraded are daily vanishing; and the traveller who passes through this valley bears away with him little more than a feeling of disgust at so much degradation.' Earlier in the journey, Demidoff had written of such women: 'The young Tsigan girls are remarkable for a peculiar kind of beauty, which still exhibits the characteristics of the race from which these wandering tribes are asserted by some authors to have descended; the supple and lithe figures, and delicate hands and feet of the women on the borders of the Ganges, reappear among them.'

The present sheet bears the sale stamp of the artist's son, Auguste Raffet, who served as curator of prints at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The younger Raffet donated a large group of his father's works – numbering more than 3,800 drawings and prints - to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris between 1869 and 1891.

Provenance:

By descent to the artist's son, Auguste Raffet, Paris
His sale ('Succession Auguste Raffet fils'), Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 16 March 1911, part of lot 94 ('Femme tzigane de dos (640) – Femmes tatars au Baïdar, 2 variantes de la lithographie (no 648). Trois dessins (le 1er rehaussé de pastel'), sold for 62 francs.

Artist description:

Auguste Raffet displayed a talent for drawing at an early age, and began his artistic career, at the age of eighteen, as a porcelain painter. He worked in the studio of the lithographer Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet between 1824 and 1829, and began producing his own lithographs, of Napoleonic subjects and battle scenes, in 1825. After completing his artistic training with the painter Antoine-Jean Gros, Raffet embarked on a successful career as a lithographer and illustrator. Among his patrons was Prince Anatole Demidov (1813-1870), with whom he enjoyed a lifelong friendship. In 1837 Raffet travelled with Demidov on an expedition to southern Russia and the Crimea. The party left Paris on the 14th of June 1837, travelling overland through Hungary, Walachia, Moldavia and Bessarabia to Odessa and on to the Crimea. Prevented from returning overland by an outbreak of the plague in Odessa, the group set sail from Constantinople, arriving in Marseille on the 24th of November 1837. The illustrations Raffet made on the journey were used to illustrate Demidoff's account of the expedition, the *Voyage dans la Russie méridionale et la Crimée par la Hongrie, la Valachie et la Moldavie et retour par Constantinople*, dedicated to Czar Nicolas I and published in six volumes between 1840 and 1848. (An English edition appeared in 1853.) Raffet remained friendly with Demidov long after the journey, and in later years the two travelled together to Spain, Austria, Scotland and elsewhere. Raffet received numerous commissions from Demidov and acted as his artistic advisor; he was also a frequent guest at the Prince's home, the Villa San Donato outside Florence. Raffet died in Genoa, on his way from Paris to Florence, in February 1860.

A large group of Raffet's works – numbering more than 3,800 drawings and prints – was donated by the artist's son, Auguste Raffet (c.1840-1910) to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris between 1869 and 1891. The younger Raffet also served as curator of prints at the Bibliothèque Nationale.