

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Eugène Emmanuel VIOLLET-LE-DUC (Paris 1814 - Lausanne 1879)

View near Handeck, Switzerland

Watercolour heightened with gouache, on blue paper. Inscribed and dated au dessus / d' Handeck / 19 juin 75 at the lower right. Stamped with the Viollet-le-Duc studio stamp (Lugt 2494a) in red ink at the upper right. 274 x 378 mm. (10 3/4 x 14 7/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK.

Dated the 19th of June 1875, this watercolour depicts a view near the Swiss alpine village of Handeck (or Handegg). Viollet-le-Duc had a lifelong interest in the mountains and glaciers of the French and Swiss Alps. Beginning in 1868, and in particular between 1871 and 1876, he spent many weeks climbing and hiking on the Mont Blanc massif. As has been noted of the artist, 'mountaineering counted among his greatest pleasures, a form of physical and mental exercise that grew compulsive by the late 1870s. Above all, he took refuge in the mountains to liberate himself from the claustrophobic Parisian scene.'¹ Viollet-le-Duc's studies of alpine topography and geology culminated in the publication in 1876 of his magisterial book, *Le massif de Mont Blanc*. He was also a highly accomplished painter of mountain scenes and produced numerous drawings and watercolours of alpine subjects. Between 1874 and 1878, while he was engaged on the restoration of the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Lausanne, Viollet-le-Duc designed and built a villa nearby, called *La Vedette*, with a studio whose walls he decorated with a vast painted panorama of the Alps. In his book *Histoire d'un dessinateur*, published in 1879, he devoted an entire chapter to a description of a sketching tour in the Alps, with a detailed description of rock formations, ice and snow.

Among comparable late watercolours of mountain or alpine subjects by Viollet-le-Duc is a view of The Chamonix Valley with the Aiguilles Rouges Massif, dated 1877, sold at auction in France in 2015.

Provenance:

Private collection.

Artist description:

An architect and restorer of medieval buildings, as well as a painter, watercolourist and illustrator, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc is best known for his reconstruction and renovation of Gothic buildings and churches throughout France. Although he decided at an early age to become an architect, he chose not to follow the usual path of studying at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, preferring instead to apprentice with the architects Jean-Jacques-Marie Huvé and François-René Leclère. He also travelled extensively around France, visiting the Auvergne, Provence, Normandy, the Pyrénées and Languedoc, as well as spending several months in Italy. He taught at the Ecole de Dessin in Paris, and between 1837 and 1844 contributed some 250 illustrations for Baron Taylor, Charles Nodier and Alphonse de Cailleux's monumental *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*, published in twenty-four volumes between 1820 and 1878.

In 1838 Viollet-le-Duc began working for the Conseil des Bâtiments Civils, which supervised work on buildings belonging to the State, and in particular the restoration of national monuments. Through the intervention of Prosper Mérimée at the Commission des Monuments Historiques, he was commissioned to take charge of the restoration of the Romanesque abbey of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine at Vézelay in 1840. This was the first of several major renovation projects that Viollet-le-Duc was closely involved in, among the most significant being the restoration of Sainte-Chapelle and Notre-Dame in Paris, the abbey of Saint-Denis and the cathedrals of Amiens, Reims and Clermont-Ferrand, as well as the walls of Carcassonne and Avignon.

Viollet-le-Duc's close study of Gothic architecture led to an interest in stained glass production, and between 1840 and 1847 he provided designs for stained glass windows for the Sèvres porcelain factory, while also designing liturgical objects and furnishings in a Gothic Revival style for many of the churches where he worked. He was perhaps equally as important as a theorist, and his writings had a significant impact on the understanding and appreciation of medieval architecture, and were an influence on the 19th century practice of architectural restoration. Much of his subsequent fame also rests on his seminal *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e au XV^e siècle*, published in ten volumes between 1854 and 1868 and a highly influential work among such later architects as Antoni Gaudí and Victor Horta.

Other important studies authored by Viollet-le-Duc include a comprehensive study of medieval and Renaissance furniture, jewellery, armour, clothing, musical instruments and interior decoration in France, published between 1858 and 1875 as the *Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français de l'époque carolingienne à la renaissance*, and the two-volume *Entretiens sur l'architecture*, which appeared between 1863 and 1872. An outstanding draughtsman, Viollet-le-Duc's remarkable watercolours of buildings and interiors are some of the most beautiful examples of architectural draughtsmanship of the 19th century.

During the Second Empire Viollet-le-Duc worked extensively for the Emperor Napoleon III, decorating the interior of Notre-Dame for the baptism of the Prince Imperial in 1856 and designing a monument to Napoleon I in his birthplace of Ajaccio in Corsica, completed in 1865, as well as restoring the château of Pierrefonds in the Oise. He also designed a number of private homes in Paris, as well as several châteaux and three churches. The architect lived through the Siege of Paris - which he recorded in several drawings - during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871, and the defeat of France and the events of the Paris Commune affected him greatly. An outstanding draughtsman, Viollet-le-Duc's remarkable watercolours of buildings and interiors are some of the most beautiful examples of architectural draughtsmanship of the 19th century.