

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Jean-Baptiste Marie PIERRE (Paris 1714 - Paris 1789)

Naiads and Dolphins

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk, heightened with touches of white, on buff paper.

Framing lines in brown ink.

Faintly and indistinctly inscribed (f. Boucher?) in red chalk at the lower right.

237 x 321 mm. (9 3/8 x 12 5/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, DC.

Sea nymphs or naiads appear in a handful of mythological pictures by Pierre, such as two versions of Venus on the Waves; one dated 1746 and on the art market in 1990, and the other, painted c.1763-1765, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Arras, as well as a painting of The Rape of Europa of 1750, in the Dallas Museum of Art.

This drawing may be compared both stylistically and thematically with a larger and more highly finished drawing by Pierre of Cybele Prevents Turnus from Setting Fire to the Trojan Fleet by Transforming their Ships into Sea Goddesses, a subject taken from Virgil's Aeneid, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Indeed, this may perhaps be an early idea for the sea nymphs in the larger composition in the Metropolitan Museum, with which it shares a similar treatment of the nude female figures and dolphins.

Provenance:

Anonymous sale, Neuilly, Hôtel des Ventes de Neuilly, 12 June 2001, lot 10
Private collection, New York.

Literature:

Nicolas Lesur and Olivier Aaron, Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre 1714-1789: Premier peintre du roi, Paris, 2009, p.446, no.D.395 (where dated c.1762-1765).

Artist description:

Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre enjoyed a highly successful career as a painter of easel pictures, church altarpieces and large-scale decorative schemes, mostly executed between the 1740's and the 1760's.

He won the Grand Prix de Rome in 1734 with a painting of Samson and Delilah, now lost, and studied at the Académie de France in Rome between 1735 and 1740. Pierre made his debut at the Salon the following year, and was reçu at the Académie Royale in 1742, followed two years later by his appointment as a professor there. In 1752 he was named premier peintre to the Duc d'Orléans, for whom he produced ceiling paintings for the Palais Royal in Paris. Pierre painted numerous works for Parisian churches, including altarpieces for Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Saint-Louis du Louvre, Saint-Sulpice and Saint-Roch, where he also painted the cupola of the church, as well as the cathedral of Saint-Louis in Versailles. He also provided mural and ceiling decorations for the chateaux of Fontainebleau, Versailles and Saint-Cloud. In 1770, Pierre was named premier peintre du roi, succeeding François Boucher, and director of the Académie Royale. The 1770's and 1780's found the artist mainly engaged on administrative tasks, with a corresponding decline in his painted output.