

Théodore GERICAULT (Rouen 1791 - Paris 1824)

Study of a Lion at Rest

Pen and brown ink and grey wash, with touches of red wash and pencil.

Laid down.

99 x 117 mm. (3 7/8 x 4 5/8 in.)

Gericault seems to have been interested in lions from early in his career, as his student sketchbooks include copies after Rubens's paintings of lion hunts. He was also fascinated by the subject of a horse being attacked by a lion, a theme he would have known from prints after George Stubbs's paintings of lions and horses in combat which he knew and copied even before his stay in England in 1820-1821. As the Gericault scholar Lorenz Eitner has written of the artist, 'He shared his fascinated admiration for beasts of prey with other French artists of his generation, notably with Delacroix and Barye. The struggle between animals, or between men and animals, is a theme which runs through all his work. It clearly was something more to him than a picturesque spectacle; the untamed animal seems to have embodied for him the very force and fatality of nature.'

This small but powerful drawing of a lion by Gericault, almost certainly drawn from life, probably dates from the artist's stay in London in 1820 and 1821. Inspired by the works of Stubbs, Edwin Landseer and James Ward, Gericault made several drawings after wild animals in the London Zoo, with a particular emphasis on lions. Most of his surviving studies of lions seem to have been trimmed from larger sheets, and it has been suggested that many of them may have once been part of a sketchbook used by the artist during his English period.

Among stylistically comparable watercolour studies of lions by Gericault are a drawing of a Lion and Lioness in the Louvre and a Study of a Lion in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon. Seated lions, depicted in profile to the left, are also found in drawings executed in pen alone, such as a drawing in the Musée Bonnat-Helleu in Bayonne and a sheet of studies in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, while a similar head of a lion in profile occurs in a black chalk drawing of the heads of two lions in the Musée Bonnat-Helleu. A small pencil sketch of the head of a seated lion facing left, in a private collection, is close to the present sheet in composition.

As Lorenz Eitner has noted, 'Géricault's life studies of lions, tigers and leopards are numerous and difficult to date. On grounds of style, the many rapid pencil sketches and the occasional, more elaborately worked up wash and watercolour drawings would seem to fit best into the English years, or

the period immediately after…These splendidly realistic pencil sketches, finished with broad washes of watercolour, exemplify – as impressively as any of his human subjects of the time – his powers of physiognomic observation.'

The first owner of this drawing was the painter Louise Marie Becq de Fouquières (1824-1891), the youngest sister of the painter Alfred De Dreux, a disciple of Gericault. In 1847, following the death of her elder sister Elise the previous year, Louise married Elise's widowed husband, Aimé Napoléon Victor Becq de Fouquières. Louise Becq de Fouquières studied with the painter Isidore Pils and exhibited her work at the Salons between 1857 and 1884. Among her closest friends was Gericault's natural son, Georges-Hippolyte Gericault (1818-1882), with whom she maintained an extensive correspondence, and from whom she may have acquired this drawing. The present sheet was lent by her to an exhibition at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1884, when it was one of four small drawings framed together. These drawings were eventually inherited by her grandson, André de Fouquières (1875-1959).

Provenance:

Possibly the artist's illegitimate son, Georges-Hippolyte Gericault, Paris
Louise Marie Becq de Fouquières, Paris
By descent to her grandson, André de Fouquières, Paris
Georges Renand, Paris
Thence by descent until 1988
Renand sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 15 March 1988, lot 25
Private collection.

Exhibitions

Paris, Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Dessins de l'ecole moderne, 1884, part of nos.318 or 320 (four drawings in one frame, lent by Mme. Becq de Fouquières); Paris, Hôtel Jean Charpentier, Exposition d'oeuvres de Géricault, 1924, part of no.211.

Literature:

Germain Bazin, Théodore Géricault: Étude critique, documents et catalogue raisonné, Vol.VII; Regard social et politique: Le séjour anglais et les heures de souffrance, Paris, 1997, p.31 and p.144, no.2330.

Artist description:

When Théodore Gericault died in January 1824, at the age of thirty-three, he was best known as the painter of The Raft of the Medusa, which had caused a sensation when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1819. The public at large knew little or nothing of his work as a draughtsman, however, so when the contents of his studio – containing some 220 paintings and several hundred drawings and sketchbooks - were sold at auction in November 1824, the works on paper were a revelation, and were eagerly acquired by collectors. Several important collections of drawings and watercolours by Gericault were formed in France in the 19th century – by Alfred Armand, Louis Bro, Philippe de Chennevières, Alexandre Colin, L. J. A. Coutan, Horace His de la Salle and François Marcille, among others - and works by the artist have remained popular with collectors and connoisseurs ever since.