

Nicolas DELOBEL (Paris 1693 - Paris 1763)

A View of the Tiber Island and the Pons Cestius, with the Church of San Bartolomeo all'Isola, Rome

Pen and brown ink and brown and grey wash, over an underdrawing in black chalk, extensively heightened with white, on blue paper.

Inscribed, dated and signed faite le 30 Septembre1729(5or 7?) / vue de la pointe del['ile?]d'/ que[?] pont[?] delobel(?) at the lower left.

241 x 391 mm. (9 1/2 x 15v 3/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE FONDATION CUSTODIA, PARIS.

Indistinctly signed by the artist and dated 1729 (although the date can also be read as 1725 or 1727), the present sheet is among the earliest views of Rome by a pensionnaire at the Académie de France. The drawing depicts the small boat-shaped island in middle of the Tiber river, dominated by the 17th century church of San Bartolomeo all'Isola, seen from downstream. In the centre is the 12th century bell tower of the church and, just to the right, the fortified Torre Caetani, dating from the 10th century. At the left of the composition is the Pons Cestius, the ancient stone bridge linking the Tiber Island to Trastevere in the western part of the city; the bridge was reconstructed and widened in the late 19th century. The large tower in the foreground at the upper right of the composition, which no longer exists today, sat above an old water mill on the right bank of the Tiber.

Nicolas Delobel also made a drawing of the opposite view, looking downstream from the southern end of the Tiber Island towards the Temple of Hercules Victor and the campanile of the church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin. Dated 1728 and inscribed 'Vüe dedans le cloîstre de St. Barthelemy', the drawing is today in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. A stylistically similar drawing on blue paper depicting houses on the banks of the Tiber opposite the church of San Bartolomeo all'Isola, which appeared at auction in 2010 with an attribution to Etienne Jeaurat, may also in fact be by Delobel. (The present sheet was, until recently, similarly incorrectly attributed to Jeaurat.)

Other Italianate landscape drawings by Delobel include a View of the Domus Augustiana on the Palatine, Rome, dated 1724, formerly in the collection of Pierre-Jean Mariette and today in the Louvre, an undated View of the Ruins of the Ancient Baths in Rome in the Horvitz Collection in Boston, and a View of Houses and Temples on a Hill in Rome, formerly in the collections of John Barnard and Denys Sutton and sold at auction in New York in 2005. A drawing in watercolour and gouache of The Falls at Tivoli, formerly in the Paul Oppé collection, was recently sold at auction in London and is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Although only a handful of landscape drawings by Nicolas Delobel, some of which are dated between 1725 and 1728, are known today, he must have produced a significant number of such works. This is further evidenced in the fact that a group of around thirty-four drawings by Delobel of views in Rome, Tivoli and Caprarola were in the collection of the 18th century sculptor Philippe Cayeux and were dispersed at auction in Paris in 1769.

The present sheet was once part of the remarkable collection of over 3,600 French drawings, dating from the 16th to the 19th centuries, assembled by the art historian Charles-Philippe, Marquis de Chennevières-Pointel (1820-1899), who served as a curator at the Louvre between 1846 and 1870, and later as director of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

Exhibitions

London, Katrin Bellinger Kunsthandel at Harari and Johns, Meisterzeichnungen / Master Drawings 1500-1900, 1990, no.34 (as Etienne Jeaurat); New York, Flavia Ormond Fine Arts at Adelson Galleries, Master Drawings 1550-1890, 2001, no.15; Paris, Fondation Custodia, Un oeil passionné: Douze ans d'acquisitions de Ger Luitjen, 2024, no.35.

Literature:

Louis-Antoine Prat and Laurence Lhinares, La collection Chennevières: Quatre siècles de dessins français, Paris, 2007, pp.608-609, no.336 (as Etienne Jeaurat, location unknown); Louis-Antoine Prat, Le dessin français au XVIIIe siècle, Paris, 2017, p.400 (incorrectly as Etienne Jeaurat); Ger Luitjen, Mary Morton and Jane Munro, True to Nature: Open-air Painting in Europe 1780-1870, exhibition catalogue, Washington and elsewhere, 2020-2021, pp.205-206, fig.89; Stijn Alsteens et al, Un oeil passionné: Douze ans d'acquisitions de Ger Luitjen, exhibition catalogue, Paris, 2024, pp.120-121, no.35.

Artist description:

A history painter, portraitist and genre painter, Nicolas Delobel was a pupil of Louis de Boullongne, and won the second prize in the Prix de Rome competition in 1717. In 1723 he was selected, alongside Charles-Joseph Natoire and Edme Bouchardon, to be a pensionnaire at the Académie de France in Rome, then under the direction of Nicolas Vlueghels, who was to be a particular influence on the young artist. Among his fellow pupils were François Boucher and Etienne Jeaurat, as well as Bouchardon and Natoire. While in Rome, Delobel produced copies after Italian masters and a group of splendid landscape drawings of views of Rome and the surrounding countryside, probably inspired by Vlueghels, who once described himself, in a letter sent from Rome, as 'amoureux des belles veües de ce pays'. Vlueghels made landscape studies and sketches en plein-air and encouraged his pupils to do the same; indeed, both Natoire and Jeaurat produced similar landscape drawings while studying in Rome.

Delobel returned to France in 1730 and was agrée at the Académie Royale two years later, becoming a full Academician in 1734. He exhibited at the Salons between 1737 and 1753, making his debut with a sketch for a Royal commission; an allegorical painting of The Reunion of Lorraine and France. Named a peintre ordinaire du roi, he also worked at Versailles. Only a handful of paintings by Delobel

are known today, however. Many of the works sent by him to the annual Salons have been lost, as has the painting of Hercules Between Virtue and Vice which served as the artist's morceau de réception to the Académie in 1734. An altarpiece of The Marriage of Saint Cecilia is in the Parisian church of Saint-Eustache, while other paintings of religious subjects are in churches in Beauvais, Dammartin-en-Goële and Montreuil. Mythological and allegorical paintings by Delobel are today in the Musée Malraux in Le Havre and the Musée Lorrain in Nancy, as well as the Pavillon de Aurore in the Parc de Sceaux.