

Gustave DORÉ (Strasbourg 1832 - Paris 1883)

Exotic Tropical Birds in a Landscape
Watercolour and pencil.

A study of the same subject, in pencil and light brown wash, on the verso.

Stamped with the Doré atelier stamp (Lugt 681a) at the lower right.

Signed(?) Gustave Doré on the verso.

409 x 203 mm. (16 1/8 x 8 in.)

Datable to the early 1880s, near the end of the artist's career, this drawing can be related to group of five very large watercolours of birds by Doré which were in 1911 in the collection of the English sculptor, illustrator and African explorer Herbert Ward (1863-1919), who had been part of Sir Henry Morton Stanley's expeditions in Africa between 1887 and 1889. The five watercolours by Doré, each well over a metre and a half in height, were sold at auction in London in 1968. The recto of the present sheet is a study for a tropical bird which appears in two large watercolours from this group, of Macaws and Other

Exotic Birds and Cockatoos and Other Exotic Birds, while the verso is a compositional study for another watercolour, depicting Parrots and Other Exotic Birds, from the same group.

The posthumous vente Doré studio sale of April 1885 included four watercolours and one painting of tropical birds, while the retrospective exhibition of the artist's works on paper, held in Paris earlier the same year, included two watercolours of parrots lent from private collections. A watercolour of parrots by Doré is in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg, while a small painting of a parrot was in a private collection in 1932.

A somewhat similar arrangement of many exotic birds on branches, although not specifically related to the present sheet, is found in Doré's illustration entitled '"Regarde bien ces oiseaux, dit-elle: Je te donnerai celui que tu aimeras le mieux."' for Emile de Girardin's Contes d'une vieille fille à ses neveux, published in 1856.

Artist description:

Arguably the most widely-known French artist of the 19th century, Gustave Doré was immensely prolific as a draughtsman, printmaker, watercolourist and illustrator. Born in Alsace, he was a precocious artist, and drew from a very early age. He produced his first lithograph at the age of eleven and his first album of lithographs, Les Travaux d'Hercule, appeared four years later. It was also at the age of fifteen that Doré settled in Paris, having gained employment as a cartoonist for the newly-founded Journal pour Rire, while at the same time continuing his studies at the Lycée Charlemagne. He made his debut at the Paris Salon of 1848, where he exhibited two drawings, and two years later showed his first painting. He also began producing albums of his lithographs. By the middle of the 1850s Doré was working extensively as an illustrator, producing highly inventive and original wood engravings to accompany editions of such novels as François Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel and Honoré de Balzacs Contes drolatiques, as well as his La Légende de juif errant, which appeared in 1856. His fame as an illustrator was well established by 1860, and later projects found him producing illustrations for editions of works by Dante, Cervantes, Perrault, La Fontaine, Chateaubriand, Milton and Tennyson, as well as the Bible. He also continued to produce illustrations for such magazines as the Journal amusant.

Despite his renown as a book illustrator, which brought him considerable wealth, Doré always wanted to be recognized as a painter. Although he was a regular exhibitor at the Salons, his paintings never achieved much critical success, at least in France. (He received an honourable mention for a battle scene in 1857, while in 1865 one of his paintings was purchased by the State.) In England, however, where he began to establish close ties in the 1860s, his work as a painter was much more highly regarded, and among the collectors of his work was Queen Victoria. Several of the artist's large Biblical paintings were exhibited in London, mainly at the Doré Gallery on New Bond Street, which opened in 1868 and was devoted to his work. (The Doré Gallery continued to show the artist's work to the paying public in London until 1892, long after his death.) In 1872 he published the illustrated London: A Pilgrimage, in collaboration with the journalist William Blanchard Jerrold, based on some 250 drawings made while exploring the sprawling city between 1869 and 1870. Doré served in the National Guard during the Franco-Prussian War and the Siege of Paris, and produced a number of works with patriotic themes. An accomplished watercolourist, Doré began working extensively in the medium from 1873, following a visit to Scotland, and exhibited several works at the Société d'Aquarellistes Français in 1879, 1880 and 1882. He was also active as a sculptor, most notably with a statue of the writer Alexandre Dumas, completed in 1881, but it is for his accomplishments as a book artist - with an oeuvre of nearly ten thousand illustrations - that he remains best known and most admired today.