

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Nicolas LAGNEAU (Active in the first half of the 17th century - )**

## **Portrait of a Man Wearing a Hat**

Black and red chalk, with touches of white heightening.

Made up at the corners and laid down on an old mount, with framing lines in black ink.

Inscribed Daniel Dumoustier. at the lower left margin of the mount.

Further inscribed Catalogue Paulme No.51 on the old backing board.

208 x 151 mm. (8 1/8 x 6 in.)

One scholar's description of a comparable portrait drawing in red and black chalk by Nicolas Lagneau, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Angers, is equally applicable to the present sheet: 'This drawing is an excellent example of Lagneau's strength as a portraitist, in which the delicacy of the modelling and artistry of the handling are subordinate to the penetrating observation of character. It demonstrates that Lagneau was capable of more than those depictions of the poor that often seem to verge on caricature.'

Margaret Morgan Grasselli has described Lagneau as 'clearly a highly individual draftsman who had a uniquely personal approach to portraiture', and goes on to note, of a similar drawing by the artist, 'a combination of boldness and sensitivity in the application of the chalk...the tactile quality of the flesh, the skillful handling of three-dimensional form, the sensitive delineation of the features – especially the eyes – and the remarkably rich and painterly use of color mark Lagneau as a draftsman of considerable ability. His likenesses may not have the courtly elegance of a François Quesnel, and many of his subjects may appear to be overly comical and caricaturish, but closer study reveals both the skill and the emphatic spirit with which the artist drew every one of his sitters.'

An inscription on the old backing board of this drawing notes that it was in the collection of the eminent expert and auctioneer Marius Paulme (1863-1928), who assembled a highly significant collection of mainly 18th century French drawings that was dispersed at auction after his death. This drawing does not, however, appear in the catalogue of the sale of his collection in Paris in 1929, and was likely acquired by Georges Dormeuil before then.

The eminent collector Georges Dormeuil (1856-1939) began assembling paintings, drawings and works of art around 1890, and was active at many of the major auctions held in Paris between 1895 and 1922. Dormeuil's collection of paintings and drawings displayed a particular focus on works of the 18th century, and included several works by artists such as Boucher, Cochin, Fragonard, Greuze, Huet, Leprince, Perronneau, Robert, Saint-Aubin and Watteau, among many others. He also collected drawings by a handful of French artists of the 17th century, notably Dumonstier and Lagneau. In 1934 he presented several important objets d'art to the Louvre, as well as three drawings by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin to the Musée Carnavalet in Paris.

### **Artist description:**

Very little is known about the French draughtsman Nicolas Lagneau (or Lanneau), an artist to whom a distinctive series of chalk drawings of portraits and fantastical or caricature-like heads have long been attributed. The years of the artist's birth and death remain a mystery, and almost nothing is known of his background and training as an artist. A handful of drawings by Lagneau bear dates in the 1620s, and it is generally believed that the artist worked in Paris in the first half of the 17th century. The 1666 estate inventory of the obscure painter Jean Leblond notes the presence in his collection of some drawings by Lagneau, while in his *Le livre des peintres et des graveurs*, published in 1672, the print collector and translator Michel de Marolles, known as the Abbé de Marolles, noted the existence of a certain 'Lanneau', some of whose drawings he also owned. In 1677 Marolles sold an album of more than seventy portrait drawings by this artist to King Louis XIV; these are today in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Lagneau's drawings can be seen as part of a tradition of portraiture beginning in the 16th century with Jean Clouet and continuing through the work of such artists as François Quesnel, Daniel Dumoustier (to whom this drawing was once attributed) and Robert Nanteuil, and on well into the 18th century. As has recently been noted of his drawings, 'Lagneau renders facial features as objectively as possible – whether in profile or full face – on a neutral ground. The sheets are generally large. The artist uses black and red chalks and watercolor...In many of Lagneau's sheets, the sculptural character – enhanced with the matte colors of pastels – is manifest.' It is possible that some of Lagneau's more caricature-like drawings may have been made from his imagination, rather than from a posed model. Also evident in his oeuvre is an interest in grotesque or unusual physiognomies.