

Martin DROLLING (Oberhergheim 1752 - Paris 1817)

The Artist's Son Michel-Martin Reading, with Two Studies of His Left Hand

Red chalk and pencil on laid paper.

227 x 160 mm. (9 x 6 1/4 in.)

Datable to c.1800, this is a portrait of the artist's son, Michel-Martin Drolling, who was also to become a painter. The drawing is a preparatory study for a small painting, in a French private collection, of a young boy reading in a chair set in front of an open window, with a view of the Place Vendôme in Paris beyond. A closely related, slightly more finished drawing in red chalk, showing the reading boy seated and facing to the left, is in the collection of the Musée de la Ville de Strasbourg.

Martin Drolling produced several painted and drawn portraits of his son, and Michel-Martin also posed for a number of his father's genre paintings. He is, for example, depicted in a painting of a young boy holding a violin and leaning out of a window, signed and dated 1800, in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. He also seems to have been the model for the sleeping boy in Drolling's painting Le Petit Dormeur, signed and dated 1795, which appeared at auction in London in 1995.

A large portrait drawing by Martin Drolling of his wife Louise-Élisabeth Belot and their son Michel-Martin, drawn in black chalk on vellum, is in the collection of the Musée Magnin in Dijon, which also houses a later painted portrait of the artist's daughter Louise, executed c.1805-1810. An earlier red chalk drawing by Martin Drolling of a younger Michel-Martin, seated in an interior and accompanied by his little sister Louise, is currently on the German art market.

The subject of this drawing, Michel-Martin Drölling (1786-1851), studied with his father and completed his training in the studio of Jacques-Louis David. He won the Prix de Rome in 1810 with a painting of The Wrath of Achilles, and spent the next six years as a pensionnaire at the Academie de France in Rome. The younger Drolling exhibited regularly at the Salons between 1817 and 1850. Much of his early career was taken up with portraiture and with small-scale pictures such as the Orpheus and Eurydice, which won a gold medal at the Salon of 1819. Admitted into the Académie in 1833, Michel-Martin Drolling received several important decorative public commissions, including paintings for Notre Dame de Lorette and the Conciergerie in Paris and the cathedral of Saint-André in Bordeaux. In 1850, near the end of his career, he completed a series of paintings of the life of Saint Paul for the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris.

Literature:

London, Elliott Fine Art, *Diverse Beauty: Portraits 1800-1950*, exhibition catalogue, n.d. (2021), pp.6-11, no.1.

Artist description:

Born in Alsace, Martin Drolling was a specialist in portraiture and genre painting, and as a youth studied the example of Dutch 17th century painters. (As one scholar has noted of the artist, 'His neat and careful style is directly inherited from the Dutch genre scenes, as are his portraits.') Drolling exhibited at the Salons from 1793 onwards, and several of his interiors and genre pictures were reproduced as prints. He was occasionally employed by the portrait painter Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun to paint objects in her portraits, and through her met Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Drolling's genre scenes are often likened to those of his contemporary Louis-Léopold Boilly, and indeed the two artists 'are the best examples of that intimate, bourgeois art which appeared quite early in total contrast to the historical and neo-classical school of David and his pupils.' Between 1802 and 1813 he worked as a designer and decorator at the Sèvres porcelain factory, yet he remained impoverished for much of his life.