Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Eugène-Louis LAMI (Paris 1800 - Paris 1890)

The Horse L'Eclatant in a Stable

Watercolour, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

Signed and dated EUGÈNE LAMI. / 1839. in red gouache at the lower left.

Inscribed Le cadre / seulement and Aquarelle de Lamy / (se trouvait au cheau de Savignat / chez Mme Hippolyte Carnot / rapportée en 1920 à la mort / de M. Adolphe Carnot son fils / chez Mme Henri Perret Carnot / à Beaune on the backing board.

380 x 456 mm. (15 x 18 in.)

This large watercolour is closely related to an earlier lithograph - after a drawing by Eugène Lami - by his friend Paul Delaroche, which bears the caption 'L'Eclatant, Etalon du haras royal du Pin' and was published in 18231. (Located in the département of the Orne in southern Normandy, the Haras National du Pin is the oldest of the French national stud farms.) As the Delaroche scholar Stephen Bann has noted of the print, 'in 1823, Delaroche published a lithograph after a drawing by Eugène Lami at the press of Villain, also used by Carle Vernet. Titled L'Eclatant – A Stallion at the Royal Stud du Pin, it closely recalls similar works by Carle Vernet and Géricault, even to the virtuosity with which the gris pommelé (dappled grey) coat of the stallion is rendered. Lami was himself a practised lithographer by this stage, and Delaroche most certainly did not fill in for his technical deficiencies. On the contrary, it seems likely that Delaroche was being instructed by his friend in a technique with whose finer points he was unfamiliar. At any rate L'Eclatant appears to have been the last print that Delaroche published for profit.' The present sheet can also be associated with an oil painting by Lami of the same horse, inscribed by the artist 'L'Eclatant', which was sold at auction in Paris in 2013.

The horse depicted in this watercolour, as well as the related painting and lithograph, may perhaps be identified as 'L'Eclatant I', a horse belonging to the Emperor Napoleon. During his imperial reign of a decade, between 1804 and 1814, Napoleon had around a hundred horses for his personal use, some of which died under him in various battles. Described as a 'Norman gelding, silvery wine-grey', 'L'Eclatant I' was retired from service in 1814.

Among stylistically comparable drawings in watercolour and gouache by Lami are a similar study of a horse in a stable, signed and dated 1824, which was sold at auction in London in 1998, and another of a horse in a landscape that appeared at auction in Paris in 2003.

The first recorded owner of this watercolour, according to the inscription on the backing board, was Mme. Hippolyte Carnot (1816-1897), who lived at the Château de Savignat in Chabanais, in the département of Charente. However, she may perhaps have inherited the work from her father, François Dupont de Savignat (1769-1846), who served as inspecteur general des haras. The watercolour later passed to her son, the chemist and mining engineer Adolphe Carnot (1813-1920), and thence to his daughter, Marguerite Carnot, Mme. Henri Perret (1867-1957).

Literature:

Possibly Paul-André Lemoisne, L'oeuvre d'Eugène Lami (1800-1890), Paris, 1914, p.226, no.995 ('Étude de cheval gris pommelé à l'écurie. Dess. aquarellé. – No 90 de la vente du 12 mars 1851.').

Artist description:

After spending some time in the studio of Horace Vernet, Eugène Lami entered the studio of Antoine-Jean Gros at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1817, remaining there for three years. Among his fellow pupils were Paul Delaroche and Richard Parkes Bonington, both of whom were to have an influence on his work. He also became friendly with Théodore Gericault, with whom he shared an abiding interest in equestrian themes. Although he painted military subjects in the early part of his career, as well as numerous studies of military costumes, Lami was to make his reputation as a watercolourist and a master in the depiction of elegant society. He made his debut at the Salon in 1824, with a painting of an episode from a recent French military campaign, and the same year was awarded a medal by Charles X. He spent much of the 1830s at work on thirteen large battle scenes for the Galerie des Batailles at the Château of Versailles. Lami's appointment in 1832 as court painter to Louis-Philippe at Versailles gave him the opportunity to draw many scenes of formal and informal court life, as well as painting highly finished watercolours depicting the important events of the July Monarchy. He was also appointed as drawing master to the King's son, the Duc de Nemours.

Lami made his first visit to London in 1826, in the company of Camille Rocqueplan, and returned to England between 1848 and 1852, when he followed Louis-Philippe into exile. While in England he continued to produce watercolour scenes of the fashionable society of London and the court of Queen Victoria, and sent a constant stream of work back to Paris to be exhibited at the Salons. (Lami was himself something of a stylish character, and as Charles Baudelaire noted of him, he was 'the poet of dandyism, almost English in his love of things aristocratic.')

Among his other significant patrons were Prince Anatole Demidoff, who described the artist as 'one of my good friends and one of the most distinguished French painters of our times', and Baron James de Rothschild, for whom Lami acted as an artistic advisor, planning and supervising the decoration of the Rothschild chateaux at Boulogne and Ferrières. He was a gifted illustrator and lithographer, and in 1879 was one of the founding members of the Société des Aquarellistes Français. Lami continued to work prolifically until his death in 1890, a few weeks shy of his ninety-first birthday. Significant groups of his drawings and watercolours are today in the collections of the Musée Condé in Chantilly, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Louvre and in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle.