

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



c.1800 FRENCH SCHOOL

A Dam on a Mountain Stream

Gouache and watercolour, over an underdrawing in black chalk.

181 x 261 mm. (7 1/8 x 10 1/4 in.)

This spirited landscape drawing in gouache and watercolour has proved difficult to attribute to a particular artist, a process made more challenging by the fact that it is unfinished. There were a number of artists producing plein-air sketches of this type around the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, whose works prefigure the widespread interest in plein-air sketching among artists in the later 19th century. The use of gouache had become popular with landscape artists in France in the second half of the 18th century, as the medium was less transparent and therefore more pictorial. As the artist and writer Claude-Henri Watelet noted, in an entry in Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, published in 1757, 'Gouache is very suitable for painting landscapes from nature...this manner is quick and expeditious, it has a sheen...' Although such sketches as this were often intended primarily as exercises, they were sometimes worked up into more finished painted compositions.

The present sheet had been tentatively attributed to the painter, draughtsman, printmaker and writer Jean-Pierre Laurent Houël (1735-1813), and a stylistic comparison may be made with a pair of rustic landscapes in watercolour and gouache by the artist in the Musée Grobet-Labadie in Marseille. Houël studied in his native Rouen with Jean-Baptiste Descamps and in Paris with Francesco Casanova, and also received training as an engraver with Jacques-Philippe Le Bas. He was in Italy between 1769 and 1772, and returned there in 1776, when he travelled to Naples, Sicily and Malta and made numerous drawings of the sites he visited. Admitted into the Académie Royale in 1774, Houël exhibited at the Paris Salons between 1775 and 1807.