

Jean-Baptiste-Camille COROT (Paris 1796 - Ville d'Avray 1875)

Italianate Landscape

Pen and brown ink.

Laid down.

197 x 160 mm. (7 3/4 x 6 1/4 in.)

A late drawing by Corot, this spirited pen and ink sketch can probably be dated to the decade of the 1850s, by comparison with other drawings of the same period. It is unlikely to be a topographically accurate view, however, and instead appears to have been inspired by landscapes the artist would have seen in Italy. While the cupola in the distance is reminiscent of that of the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, it also recalls Bernini's church of Santa Maria Assunta in the town of Ariccia, in the Alban Hills southeast of Rome. Corot had visited Ariccia in 1826 and again on his third and final trip to Italy in 1843, dome of the church seems to have remained part of his visual repertoire of Italianate motifs for the rest of his life. As Michael Pantazzi has noted, 'It would be difficult to claim that Corot's last voyage to Italy had an effect on his style, though in the subjects of his paintings he returned to memories of Lake Nemi and, obsessively, to a view he drew of the dome of the church at Ariccia, perched above a cliff. The Italianate views invented later were almost always based on sketches of other sites visited in earlier times.'

The present sheet can also be related to a small group of atmospheric, freely-executed drawings of Italianate landscapes by Corot, datable to the period between the early 1850s and the early 1870s, in which a similar domed building is prominent in the far distance. Closely comparable in stylistic terms are two pen and ink landscape sketches in the Louvre, which holds the largest collection of drawings by the artist in a public collection. One of these landscapes in pen is drawn on the reverse of an invitation to a memorial service for Corot's mother dated 27 February 1852, the first anniversary of her death,

while the other is part of a small sketchbook. Also similar in composition and effect is a charcoal drawing in the same sketchbook, and another pencil sketch in the Louvre, as well as a charcoal drawing of The Great Birch: Souvenir of Ariccia of c.1871-1872 in the collection of the Princeton University Art Museum. The drawing can also be related to a small group of etchings by Corot known as Memories of Italy, in which a building in the distance is viewed through a repoussoir element of trees in the foreground.

Included in the posthumous sale of the contents of Corot's studio in 1875, the present sheet soon entered the collection of the French aristocrat Comte Armand Doria (1824-1896), who owned almost eighty paintings and numerous drawings by the artist, including twenty-two works purchased at the 1875 sale. As one scholar has noted, Doria 'had been interested in Corot for a long time, [and] accumulated a large number of paintings. His taste was quite specific, with a preference for the artist's most direct impressions; yet he saw Corot's oeuvre very much as a whole and admired both his early and late work.' This drawing later passed to his grandson, the art historian Comte Arnauld Doria (1890-1977).

Exhibitions

Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, L'Italia vista dai pittori Francesi del XVIII e XIX secolo, 1961, no.100 ('Monumento con cupola', lent by Arnauld Doria); Turin, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, L'Italia vista dai pittori francesi, 1961, no.93 (lent by Arnauld Doria).

Artist description:

Although Camille Corot's drawings received relatively little critical attention in his lifetime, the artist laid great store by them, once noting that 'Le dessin est la confidence de l'artiste' ('Drawing is the artist's intimate side') and claiming that he drew every evening. He is also known to have said that 'To my mind the two things of most importance are to make a concentrated study of the drawing and the values.'1 Around a thousand drawings by Corot are known today, ranging from rapid working sketches to large, atmospheric landscape drawings. While many more drawings must have been lost, a large number were preserved by the Corot scholars Alfred Robaut and Etienne Moreau-Nélaton and are today in the Louvre.

As Peter Galassi has noted, 'The range and versatility of Corot's drawings is a sign of their function. For Corot the drawing was never an end in itself; it was part of a continuous process of experiment and revision. This was true even when a series of drawings did not lead to the implied climax of an oil study.' Corot's early drawings are characterized by a spare, precise linearity, restrained landscape compositions and the use of a fine pen or a sharp lead pencil. (As the artist later recalled, 'In those days I had wonderful pencils! They never broke; they were more likely to tear the paper.') Around 1850, however, Corot began to prefer charcoal and chalk for his drawings, creating greater tonal effects in his landscape studies, which are darker and more atmospheric.