

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



## 18th Century FRENCH SCHOOL

### The Interior of a Theatre

Black chalk, with framing lines in black chalk.

Inscribed *Tu es né pour estre / heureux.* on the verso.

Further inscribed G de St. Aubin at the lower left of the old mount, and G. de SAINT-AUBIN / 1724-1780 on a cartouche pasted onto the old mount.

93 x 100 mm. (3 5/8 x 3 7/8 in.)

This charming little drawing of the interior of a circular theatre has long borne an attribution to the 18th century French draughtsman Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780). The drawing may depict the interior of one of the dancing halls known as 'Vauxhalls' - after the Vauxhall pleasure gardens in London - which were popular in Paris in the second half of the 18th century. Indeed, between 1764 and 1789 at least ten pleasure gardens and theatres known as 'Vauxhalls' or 'Wauxhalls' opened in Paris, while others were established in Bordeaux, Lille, Marseille and Strasbourg. As one modern scholar has noted, 'Wauxhalls such as Ranelegh (1774), Cirque Royale (1775) and the Panthéon (1784) saw large bodies of financial speculators invest literally millions of livres in entertainment complexes that combined gardens, cafés, boutiques and salons, usually clustered around a massive central ballroom.' Several of these Parisian theatres were designed by the architects Nicolas Lenoir, known as Lenoir le Romain, or Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières.

The traditional attribution of this drawing to Gabriel de Saint-Aubin is certainly not without merit on the grounds of both style and subject. A somewhat comparable small drawing of the interior of a circular 'Vauxhall' theatre by Saint-Aubin is in the collection of the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, while the architecture of the theatre here depicted is akin to that in a black chalk drawing, by the same artist, of one of the largest and best known Parisian 'Vauxhalls', the Colisée on the Champs-Élysées, which is today in the Prat Collection in Paris. Indeed, Saint-Aubin produced a significant number of watercolours and chalk studies of the interior of the Colisée, which opened in 1771, including drawings in the Wallace Collection in London, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Louvre in Paris, and the Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam. As Christophe Leribault has noted of Saint-Aubin, 'In fact, his drawings

are our main iconographic source for the Colisée, abundantly described in the press and the memoirs of the period but otherwise scarcely represented.'

The present sheet, which is inscribed 'Tu es né pour estre heureux' ('You were born to be happy') in an old hand on the verso, once belonged to the Parisian auctioneer and collector Maurice Delestre (1848-1931), and was later acquired by his grandson, the expert Gaston Delestre (1913-1969).