Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Gerhard Wilhelm VON REUTERN (Rösthof 1794 - Frankfurt 1865)

Portraits of the 'Platzburschen' Wilhelm Völcker and Ludwig Dörr

Pen and brown ink.

Signed and inscribed W. d 1ten Februar at the lower left and W den 30sten J. at the lower right.

Inscribed Platzburschen at the bottom centre, and Wilhelm Völcker / Don Juan and Ludwig Dörr below each figure.

188 x 193 mm. (7 3/8 x 7 5/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES.

The present sheet is part of a group of half-length portrait drawings in pen and ink – often dated and inscribed with the names and professions of the sitters - executed by Reutern in the village of Willingshausen, in the province of Hesse, between 1825 and 1831. (Von Reutern had settled in the village in 1824.) As Rhoda Eitel-Porter has noted of these charming drawings, 'The studies combine the precise linear style of late neoclassicism with an interest in the beauty of simple rural life, characteristic of early realism.'

'Platzburschen' was the name given to youths chosen by the young men of the village of Willingshausen to lead the village dance, and who were tasked with arranging the order of the dances and keeping accounts. Another portrait drawing in pen and ink of Ludwig Dörr by von Reutern, showing the youth from the front, was exhibited alongside the present sheet in 1978. Comparable portrait drawings of the Willingshausen period by Gerhardt von Reutern are in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York and elsewhere.

Exhibitions

London, Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, Gerhardt Wilhelm von Reutern 1794-1865: Drawings and Watercolours, 1978, no.18.

Literature:

London, Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, Gerhardt Wilhelm von Reutern 1794-1865: Drawings and Watercolours, exhibition catalogue, 1978, p.16, no.18, pl.18.

Artist description:

Born into an aristocratic German family in the northern Baltic region of Livonia (an area today divided between Latvia and Estonia), Gerhard von Reutern studied at University of Dorpat in modern-day Estonia, where he received some instruction in art from the local painter and engraver Karl August Senff. He was, however, largely self-taught as an artist. Reutern served as an cavalry officer in the Russian army and, at the age of nineteen, was severely wounded in battle against the Grande Armée of Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813, losing his right arm. While recovering from his wounds in Germany the following year, the young Reutern met the writer and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who encouraged him to pursue his career as an artist, and to learn to draw with his left hand.

In August 1814 Reutern visited the village of Willingshausen in the province of Hesse, where he stayed with the von Schwertzell family, the parents-in-law of his elder brother Carl. He later married Charlotte von Schwertzell and in December 1819 resigned his army commission. After spending some time in Switzerland he settled in Willingshausen in 1824, where the following year he met and befriended the artist Ludwig Emil Grimm, who had come to draw landscapes. The two artists explored the area around Willingshausen together, making landscape sketches as well as portrait and costume studies of the local folk. Reutern established the Willingshäuser Malerkolonie, an artist's colony that remains today the oldest association of artists in Germany. From the middle of the 1830s onwards Reutern began to concentrate more and more on oil painting, and in 1837 was appointed court painter to the Russian imperial family.