

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Jean-Robert ANGO

An Architectural Capriccio of Roman Ruins with Figures

Watercolour, pen and black ink, on two joined sheets of paper.

Inscribed and dated an T(?) Octobre 1761, with a paraphe, on the verso, backed.

325 x 650 mm. (12 3/4 x 25 5/8 in.)

This large sheet, drawn with transparent washes of colour on two joined sheets of paper, is a fine and rare example of Jean Robert Ango's skill as a watercolourist, and is a faithful copy of a signed watercolour by Hubert Robert, of an identical composition and of similar dimensions, in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. Also in the same collection is a pendant watercolour by Robert of An Architectural Capriccio with the Colosseum and the Statue of Marcus Aurelius, which is signed and dated 1758. (Both Hermitage watercolours are, however, in very poor condition.) Depicted here are some of the most famous monuments of ancient Rome; the Pantheon, one of the pair of colossal statues known as the Dioscuri, Trajan's Column and the Pyramid of Caius Cestius. As Margaret Morgan Grasselli has noted of Hubert Robert's capriccio watercolours, 'His ingenuity in bringing together unrelated monuments to create complex, novel compositions was already well developed, and he shows off with great confidence and delight his deep familiarity with the ancient and modern attractions of Rome.'

Some of the main architectural and sculptural elements in the present drawing are also found in a watercolour of an Architectural Capriccio with Roman Monuments and Washerwomen, formerly attributed to Robert, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

It has been suggested that the present sheet may have been the large capriccio watercolour attributed to Hubert Robert that was once owned by the 18th century artist Charles-Joseph Natoire (1700-1777) and sold in his posthumous sale in 1778, as 'Un grand Dessin colorié & compose de différens monumens de anciens Romains: on y distingue le Panthéon, le Tombeau de Bacchus, les Chevaux de Monte Cavallo, la Colonne Trajane, l'Arc de Constantin, & la Pyramide ce Cestius.' The first known modern owner of this watercolour was the 20th century French industrialist Maurice de Wendel (1879-1961).

Exhibitions

Paris, Galerie Cailleux, Le dessin français de Watteau à Prud'hon, April 1951, no.117 (as Vue dans les ruines de Rome, lent by Maurice de Wendel).

Literature:

Catherine Boulot et al, J. H. Fragonard e H. Robert a Roma, exhibition catalogue, Rome, 1990-1991, p.57, under no.5, fig.5b; Sarah Catala, 'Signed "Roberti": Drawings by Hubert Robert and Jean Robert Ango', Master Drawings, Winter 2024, illustrated p.504, fig.14 (as Ango).

Artist description:

Very little is known of the life and career of Jean Robert Ango; a contemporary of Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Hubert Robert in Rome in the 1760s, his place and date of his birth is unrecorded. Although not formally enrolled as a pensionnaire at the Académie de France in Rome, Ango was one of the colony of French artists living and working in the city and was closely associated with the French Academy. There are no known paintings by Ango, and the main evidence of his artistic activity are a large number of drawings copied after Italian paintings and sculptures in Rome and Naples. These drawn copies, usually in red chalk and occasionally signed 'Roberti', represent a wide variety of Italian masters, from the Renaissance (including a large number of drawings after Michelangelo) through to the early 18th century. Most of Ango's drawings depict paintings found in Roman churches (among them San Giovanni in Laterano, Sant'Andrea della Valle, San Marco, Santa Trinità dei Monti and others) and palaces, notably those of the Chigi, Farnese and Giustiniani families.

Apart from his copies after Italian works of art, Ango also made drawn copies after the work of his friends Fragonard and Robert; indeed, his drawings have often been mistaken for those of both of these artists. Ango produced several reworked drawings on counterproofs taken from original chalk studies by Robert, and his close relationship with Robert (who also often signed his drawings 'Roberti') has been the subject of recent scholarship. As Sarah Catala has noted, 'Ango's reworking of Robert's models and counterproofs were a vehicle for his own direct elaborations... Through contact with Robert, Ango developed a veritable performative habit of imitation... the unique relationship enjoyed by the two artists [was] a collaboration that combined ambition with playfulness, since the pair signed their drawings with the same name.' Ango is also known to have accompanied Fragonard to Naples in March 1761 at the invitation of the Abbé de Saint-Non. The two artists are recorded as having received permission to make copies in the Capodimonte museum, and indeed a number of copies by Fragonard and Ango after the work of Neapolitan masters are known, perhaps intended for Saint-Non.

Among Ango's major patrons and supporters was the amateur Jacques-Laure Le Tonnelier, Bailli de Breteuil, who arrived in Rome in 1758 as the Ambassador for the Order of Malta. He soon commissioned Ango to make copies of the paintings in his extensive collection, and eventually assembled one of the largest collections of his drawings. Struck down with illness in 1772, and reduced to begging for a living, Ango is believed to have died the following year, sometime after the 16th of January 1773. Ango's drawings were collected by the director of the Académie de France in Rome, the artist Charles-Joseph Natoire, who owned more than a hundred sheets by the artist, and the Bailli de Breteuil, as well as such connoisseurs as Pierre-Jean Mariette and the Marquis de Chennèvieres. A group of more than forty drawings by Jean Robert Ango is today in the Louvre.