

Claude GELLÉE called LORRAIN (Chamagne c.1600/04 - Rome 1682)

The Garden Wall of the Villa Medici in Rome, with Part of the Aurelian Wall

Pen and brown ink and two shades of brown wash.

Inscribed claudio lorenese at the lower left.

101 x 157 mm. (4 x 6 1/8 in.)

The present sheet may be included among a large group of drawings by Claude after nature, for the most part done in a twenty-year period between 1630 and 1650. As Richard Rand has noted, 'These are studies presumably made in the open air in front of the motif, created as part of Claude's process of observing and recording natural phenomena that he would then use when painting his canvases back in the studio. Most of the nature drawings date to the decades of the 1630s and 1640s…[and] by the 1650s he had assembled a large cache of nature studies that he could return to as inspiration or aide-mémoire when painting. By drawing in the open air Claude was continuing a longstanding tradition of artists in Italy – particularly those who had traveled from the north – for landscape sketching was seen as an important component of one's education and training. Claude pursued the practice with particular dedication and enthusiasm, and his studies of nature remain his most innovative and appealing drawings.' These drawings seem to have been done simply as exercises in the study of nature, and, as has been noted, Claude found much in common with the approach to landscape drawing of some of the Netherlandish painters working in Rome at the same time, such as Bartolomaeus Breenbergh, Paul Bril and Cornelis van Poelenburgh.

Relatively few of Claude's nature drawings depict prominent buildings or vernacular architecture, although several sheets from a small early sketchbook of c.1630, now broken up, include studies of ruins and buildings in and around Rome. In his magisterial catalogue raisonné of the artist's drawings, Marcel Roethlisberger dated the present sheet to between 1635 and 1650, adding that 'The houses look as if they were built on an ancient town wall and its towers, perhaps in Rome…Claude's drawing appears very simple, consisting of only a few strokes of the pen and plain surfaces of wash. The handling seems to confirm the attribution to Claude.' The present sheet is indeed a Roman view, and depicts the road on the Pincio hill between the walls of the garden of the Villa Medici on the left and part of the 3rd century Aurelian walls bordering the gardens of the Villa Borghese on the right. The road is today known as the Viale del Muro Torto.

Roethlisberger further suggests that this landscape study may be grouped with around a dozen

drawings of identical size and style, mostly datable to the later 1630s and 1640s, that are on the same type of paper and may once have formed part of a small sketchbook. Other drawings from this putative sketchbook - which must have been broken up by the beginning of the 18th century, given the early provenance of several of the sheets - are in the Teyler Museum in Haarlem, the Uffizi in Florence, the British Museum in London and the Biblioteca Reale in Turin, as well as in several private collections. Among other thematically and stylistically comparable early drawings by Claude is a view of the Ponte Sisto in Rome of c.1630-1635, in the Musée Condé in Chantilly.

The first known owner of this drawing was the scholar and antiquary Reverend Dr. Henry Wellesley (1794-1866), a nephew of the Duke of Wellington, who was the Principal of New Inn Hall in Oxford and also served as a curator at the Bodleian Library, the Taylor Institution and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Wellesley owned a very large number of drawings by Claude, amounting to more than two hundred examples. The present sheet was acquired at the 1866 sale of Wellesley's collection by the scholar, curator and collector Sir John Charles Robinson (1824-1913), a leading figure in the Victorian art world who was the chief curator at the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum) in London before being appointed Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures in 1880. Two years after he acquired this drawing, Robinson selected it as one of seventy-one drawings from his collection – together with six other sheets by Claude – to be offered for sale at auction in Paris in 1868.

The present drawing by Claude remained unsold, however, and was later acquired from Robinson by the Scottish collector John Malcolm, 14th Laird of Poltalloch (1805-1893), who assembled, largely on the advice of Robinson, a very fine collection of Old Master drawings and prints. While the majority of Malcolm's collection was inherited by his son John Wingfield Malcolm, 1st Baron Malcolm of Poltalloch (1833-1902), and was sold by him en bloc, for the sum of £25,000, to the British Museum in 1895, the present sheet was one of six drawings by Claude earlier given by the elder Malcolm to his daughter Isabella Louisa Malcolm (1842-1924) and son-in-law Alfred Erskine Gathorne-Hardy (1845-1918). The drawing thence passed by descent within the Gathorne-Hardy family until it was sold at auction in London in 1976, and it was soon afterwards acquired by the actor and collector Alain Delon.

Literature:

J. C. Robinson, Descriptive Catalogue of the Drawings by the Old Masters, forming the Collection of John Malcolm of Poltalloch, Esq., London, 1869, p.168, no.475 ('Landscape View outside the Walls of an Italian Town, probably a study from nature. Brilliant effect of midday sun. Pen drawing washed with bistre. Signed in the left, "Claudio Lorenese. W. 5 1/4 in.; H. 4 in. Collection (W.)"'); A. E. Gathorne-Hardy, Descriptive Catalogue of Drawings by the Old Masters in the Possession of the Hon. A. E. Gathorne-Hardy, 77 Cadogan Square, London, 1902, p.31, no.58; Marcel Roethlisberger, Claude Lorrain: The Drawings, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968, Vol.I, p.122, no.143, Vol.II, fig.143; Elizabeth A. Pergam, 'John Charles Robinson in 1868: a Victorian curator's collection on the block', Journal of Art Historiography, June 2018, p.30.

Artist description:

Aptly described by one scholar as 'The first and greatest French artist to specialize in landscape painting', Claude Gellée, more commonly known as Claude Lorrain, was born around 1600 in the village of Chamagne, south of Nancy in the Duchy of Lorraine in northeastern France. The most informative accounts of his life are the contemporary biographies written by Joachim von Sandrart and Filippo Baldinucci, although the two authors differ on the details of Claude's boyhood and youth. After being orphaned at the age of twelve, he is thought to have arrived in Rome around 1617, and there may have found employment as a pastry cook before working as a servant in the household of the artist Agostino Tassi, who eventually took him on as an apprentice and taught him the techniques of painting. Between 1618 and 1620 Claude completed his training in Naples with the German landscape artist Goffredo (Gottfried) Wals, who had also been a pupil of Tassi. In 1623 he is recorded back with Tassi in Rome, but by 1625 had returned to Nancy, where he worked under the supervision of Lorrainese court

painter Claude Deruet on the fresco decoration of the Carmelite church there. Towards the end of 1626 he was back in Rome, where he was to spend the remainder of his career. As Baldinucci records, 'he settled and began to establish a reputation through the numerous paintings he executed for different local and foreign connoisseurs. He was commissioned by Cardinal Bentivoglio to execute two landscapes, which earned him a great deal of credit not only with this distinguished prelate but also with Pope Urban VIII, who saw them even before they were finished. From that time on, Bentivoglio, other cardinals and princes of all kinds began to frequent his studio.' Claude's earliest dated oil painting is from 1629, four years before he became a member of the Accademia di San Luca. At around the same time he was one of several artists charged with painting landscapes for the Buen Retiro Palace near Madrid, and began producing a number of landscape etchings.

Claude became known as a landscape painter and draughtsman, working extensively en plein-air in Rome and on sketching expeditions to the surrounding Campagna, notably at Tivoli and Subiaco. As Sandrart, who met and befriended the artist early in his career, and often accompanied him on such tours, recalled of Claude 'He tried by every means to penetrate nature, lying in the fields's secrets by all the means at his disposal, stretched out in the fields from dawn to dusk, so as to learn how to represent accurately daybreak, sunrise, sunset and the eventide.' The popularity of his paintings led to forgeries and imitations of his works being produced as early as the middle of the 1630s, and it may have been in part to circumvent this that the artist began compiling a drawn record of all his finished canvases, compiled into an album known as the Liber Veritatis that was maintained until the end of his life. In 1643 he was named to the Congregazione dei Virtuosi al Pantheon, the exclusive Pontifical Academy of Fine Arts and Letters. At the height of his career, Claude counted numerous important patrons and collectors – including Popes Urban VIII and Clement IX, King Phillip IV of Spain, and Princes Camillo Pamphili and Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna – among his clients, and his paintings fetched high prices. He enjoyed a reputation as perhaps the most successful landscape painter in Europe, receiving commissions for easel pictures from collectors in Rome and throughout Italy, as well as from France, Germany, Spain and elsewhere. The artist died in Rome in November 1682 and was buried in his local church of SS. Trinità dei Monti. While he had very few pupils or studio assistants, Claude's influence on landscape painting and drawing in Europe was significant and lasted into the 19th century.

Claude valued his drawings highly, rarely parting with them. The artist or his heirs seems to have assembled many of his drawings into albums, and the inventory of the contents of his studio after his death lists, alongside bundles of loose sheets, twelve 'books of sketches', although much of this material has since been dispersed. An album known as the Liber Veritatis, containing highly finished landscape drawings recording the composition of every painting the artist completed after around 1635, survives in the British Museum, while an album of sixty autonomous landscape drawings known as the 'Wildenstein album', assembled after Claude's death by his heirs, was only broken up in the 1970s. Other sketchbooks or albums of drawings can be reconstructed on the basis of numbering or size, including one small album of animal studies and two others known as the 'Tivoli sketchbook' and the 'Roman Campagna sketchbook', each containing around sixty landscape drawings from nature done around 1640. Another sketchbook, containing landscapes, figure and animal sketches, was discovered in the early 1980s and is today in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. Claude seems to have kept almost all of his drawings in his studio until his death, and, despite the interest of contemporary collectors, only very rarely gave them away or sold them. Nevertheless, his drawings became well known for some time after his death since several hundred of them were reproduced in the form of mezzotint prints, by Richard Earlom and others, in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Throughout his long career, the practice of drawing was of great importance to Claude, occupying a central role in his artistic process. Almost five times as many drawings as paintings by him are known, amounting to some 1,200 sheets, ranging from nature studies and compositional drawings to figure and animal studies and independent landscapes, as well as records of finished paintings. He was, as the Claude scholar Marcel Roethlisberger has written, 'a born draftsman who, during his whole life, took an evident pleasure in producing his drawings...But all his drawings are at the same time much more than mere working stages for the paintings. From a purely functional point of view, most drawings reach beyond the target. They are works of art in their own right. Unlike the majority of the drawings by Carracci and even Poussin, there are hardly any sketchy or unfinished-looking drawings by Claude…A conscientious perfectionist in the design and execution of his paintings, he deployed the same effort and attention to the last of his sketches…The autonomy of Claude's drawings derives from his

profoundly pictorial vision, thanks to which every sketch became a little picture of its own.’