Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Théodore GERICAULT (Rouen 1791 - Paris 1824)

A Horse Seen from Behind

Pencil and black chalk.

244 x 295 mm. (9 5/8 x 11 5/8 in.)

As the pioneering 19th century scholar Charles Clément noted of Théodore Géricault, 'His horse was his own, absolutely. It is not Phidias's admirable horse; nor that of Raphael; so beautiful in its selection of forms, but abstract or decorative; and even less the chimerical, apocalyptic colossus painted by Rubens. It is, rather, a living animal, superb and true.'

The attribution of this fine sheet to Géricault was confirmed in 1999 by the late Lorenz Eitner, who dated it to between 1818 and 1820 and compared it to a pencil study of a horse raising its hind leg, of similar dimensions, which is part of an album of drawings by Géricault in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago; that drawing is a study for a finished watercolour of Horses Battling in a Stable of c.1820 now in the Cleveland Museum of Art. Also stylistically comparable are two further pencil drawings of horses, datable to c.1818-1819, in the same Chicago album.

As another Géricault scholar, Philippe Grunchec, has written, 'Quite apart from the simple delight that Géricault took in representing his subjects, we cannot but be impressed by the care with which he distinguished the various species, coats, and postures. In his art the horse ceases to be an abstract entity and becomes an assembly of multiple characteristics that in one variable or another give the animal its identity', adding that 'Géricault, before all else, must be credited with giving us a living animal…He must also be credited with having succeeded – without the aid of photography, needless to say – in achieving verisimilitude, if not correctness, in his representation of various gaits, even the most rapid, by rejecting the conventional attitudes…Follow Géricault into the stables where he set up his easel, where he opened his sketchbook, and right away we see that dominant psychology of the horse – his insatiable curiosity!'

Literature:

Bruno Chenique, Les chevaux de Géricault, Paris, 2007, p.72, fig.76 (as La jument).

Artist description:

When Théodore Gericault died in January 1824, at the age of thirty-three, he was best known as the painter of The Raft of the Medusa, which had caused a sensation when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1819. The public at large knew little or nothing of his work as a draughtsman, however, so when the contents of his studio – containing some 220 paintings and several hundred drawings and sketchbooks - were sold at auction in November 1824, the works on paper were a revelation, and were eagerly acquired by collectors. Several important collections of drawings and watercolours by Gericault were formed in France in the 19th century – by Alfred Armand, Louis Bro, Philippe de Chennevières, Alexandre Colin, L. J. A. Coutan, Horace His de la Salle and François Marcille, among others - and works by the artist have remained popular with collectors and connoisseurs ever since.