

**Jacques-François BLONDEL (Rouen 1705 - Paris 1774)**

**Design for a Keystone with the Head of Flora**

Red chalk.

The sheet hinged onto part of an album page.

169 x 226 mm. (6 5/8 x 8 7/8 in.)

Datable to c.1730-1735, this is a preparatory study for an engraved illustration in Jacques-François Blondel's two-volume *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance et de la decoration des édifices en general*, published by Charles-Antoine Jombert in Paris in 1737 and 1738. This image appears on the lower half of plate 37 of the second volume, signed *B inv. et f.* and captioned *TÊTE DE FLORE DANS UN CARTEL Formant le Claveau d'un Porte decorée de son bandeau*. As Alastair Laing has pointed out, the head of Flora in this drawing by Blondel is inspired by a similar design by the Rococo sculptor, woodcarver and ornémaniste Nicolas Pineau (1684-1754) for one of the rocaille ornaments above the doors of the Hôtel Mazarin in Paris.

Other red chalk drawings by Blondel for the *Maisons de plaisance* are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

**Artist description:**

One of the leading architects and theorists of the second half of the 18th century in France, Jacques-François Blondel was also, in the words of the late Alastair Laing, 'an extraordinarily accomplished and delicate draughtsman of ornament.' A pupil of his uncle Jean-François Blondel and Gilles-Marie Oppenord, Blondel was tasked with writing many of the entries on architecture for Denis Diderot's Encyclopédie, and also published several treatises of his own, notably L'architecture françoise in the 1750s and Cours d'architecture, which appeared in the 1770s. In 1746 Blondel established a private École des Arts, where among the teachers was the young Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, and in 1762 was appointed to a professorship of architecture at the Académie Royale. In both his teaching and in his later writings, as Mary Myers has pointed out, Blondel 'strongly promoted the primacy of French classical architecture of the previous century…In championing French classicism in these works published from the 1750s on, he inveighed mightily against the Rococo and the work of Nicolas Pineau, [Jacques de] Lajoüe…and [Juste-Aurèle] Meissonier…whom he saw as the creators of the genre pittoresque and thus as subverters of the great French classical tradition.'

Despite his later pronouncements, however, the particular influence of the Rococo can be seen in much of Blondel's earlier work, notably the illustrations for his book De la distribution des maisons de plaisance et de la decoration des édifices en general, published in two volumes in 1737 and 1738. A guide to the construction, decoration and ornamentation of country houses and their gardens, the Maisons de plaisance and the ornamental designs depicted within it, illustrated in the form of engravings by Blondel himself, proved highly successful and influential. As Laing has noted, Blondel was 'by aptitude a draughtsman and engraver perfectly attuned to the balanced symmetry of rocaille ornament'.