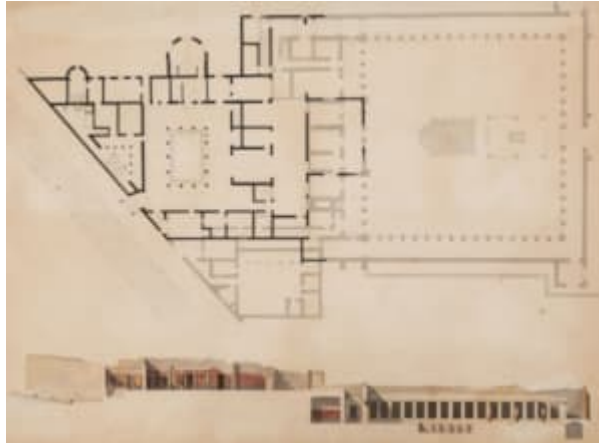


# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Jacques Félix DUBAN (Paris 1798 - Bordeaux 1870)**

## **A Plan and Section of the Villa of Diomedes at Pompeii**

Pen and black and grey ink, watercolour and pencil.

Inscribed *Maison de Diomede. Pompeia / Sur une echelle de 0,005 P.M.* in pencil at the upper left.

370 x 481 mm. (14 5/8 x 19 in.) [sheet]

The present sheet may be dated to Félix Duban's time in Italy, when he made numerous studies of the interiors and exteriors of the newly excavated buildings and houses of Pompeii between 1824 and 1826. As the contemporary critic Charles Blanc noted at the time of the 1872 memorial exhibition, '*The impression that his studies at Pompeii made on Duban was vivid and profound, and it never faded.*'

Three albums of architectural drawings by Duban from this period, entitled *Italie, Rome and Pompeii*, are today in the library of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

The ancient Roman Villa of Diomedes lies just outside the walls of Pompeii, on the north side of the city near the Herculaneum gate. At around 3,500 square metres, it was one of the largest suburban villas of the Roman world. The front, or western side, of the building bordered the road leading to Pompeii's Herculaneum gate, seen in this drawing at the left part of the sheet, while the garden side of the villa faced the ancient coast road to the East. One of the first parts of Pompeii to be excavated, between 1771 and 1774, the Villa of Diomedes – so named for the family tomb of the family of one M. Arrius Diomedes situated on the opposite side of the road – was built on two levels. The main entrance led directly to a peristyle with a garden in the middle, with living spaces, bathing rooms and a kitchen around its four sides. A staircase led down to a large garden, enclosed by a peristyle with seventeen columns on each side, in the centre of which was a summer triclinium, or dining area, and a small pool of water.

Duban made a number of drawings of the Villa of Diomedes, some of which, including a slightly larger version of the present sheet, are to be found in one of the albums in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The present sheet was formerly in the collection of the French architectural historian Roger Rodière (1870-1944), who owned at least one other watercolour drawing by Duban of the same period; a section drawing of one of the so-called Championnet houses at Pompeii, now in a private English collection.

## Exhibitions

New York, The Artis Group Ltd., *Architectural Drawings 1700-1930*, 1985, no.34.

### Artist description:

Félix Duban entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1814, and in 1823 won the Grand Prix de Rome in the category of architecture. He spent the next five years as a pensionnaire at the Académie de France at the Villa Medici in Rome. Soon after his arrival in Rome he visited Pompeii with his friend, the architect Henri Labrouste, and there seems to have been particularly interested in the houses which had been discovered at the beginning of the 19th century. He produced plans and drawings of several of these, as well as of temples, theatres and baths. Duban was also particularly influenced by the polychrome wall paintings of Pompeii, as can be seen in his approach towards interior decoration in his later career.

On his return to Paris, he exhibited elaborate architectural drawings at the Salons of 1830, 1831 and 1833, although he does not seem to have exhibited there in later years. Nevertheless, he enjoyed a successful career as an architect, with perhaps his best known work the main buildings and courtyard of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, begun in 1830 but not completed until some thirty years later. Duban also worked on the restoration of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris between 1839 and 1849 and the Galerie d'Apollon at the Louvre, begun in 1848, as well as the chateaux of Dampierre, Gaillon and Blois. In 1854 he was elected to the Institut and appointed inspector-general of public works.

Duban was a gifted draughtsman, and produced a large body of drawings and watercolours of superb quality. These included not only studies of ancient, medieval and Renaissance buildings in Italy and France, but also imaginative reconstructions of how these buildings once looked, with subjects such as A Room in a Classical Villa, The Cella of the Parthenon with the Statue of Phidias and A Street in Pompeii. He also received private commissions for his drawings, such as a portfolio of Views of Several Paris Monuments Completed During the Reign of Louis-Phillippe, executed in 1837 for the Duc d'Orléans. As has been noted, 'His draughtsmanship is of exemplary quality and goes far beyond the realm of simple architectural drawing... The vacuum left by Duban in terms of theoretical writing seems largely filled by his body of drawings. He was, in every sense, a complete artist - an embodiment of his own ideal as reflected in his achievements at the Beaux-Arts and the Chateau de Blois.' In 1872, two years after Duban's death, a retrospective exhibition of his architectural drawings and watercolours was held at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, to considerable critical acclaim.