

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Eugène DELACROIX (Charenton-Saint Maurice 1798 - Paris 1863)

Faust and Mephistopheles Galloping Through the Night past the Witches' Sabbath on Walpurgisnacht [recto]; Studies of Horses [verso]

Brush, black ink and grey wash.

The verso in pencil.

230 x 347 mm. (9 x 13 5/8 in.)

This spirited drawing is a preparatory study for one of a series of seventeen lithographs by Eugene Delacroix illustrating scenes from the first part of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play *Faust*, which were produced to illustrate a lavish French translation of the play, published in 1828. The scene depicted here comes near the end of the text, with Faust and Mephistopheles on horses galloping to the dungeon where the Faust's beloved, Margaret (or Gretchen) has been imprisoned. They pass a gallows field known as the Rabenstein, where witches have gathered to celebrate their sabbath. Faust attempts to rein in his horse and at the same time tries to hold back Mephistopheles, who obstinately gallops onwards; *'Delacroix...offers a powerful portrayal of two horses in full gallop; the animals seem almost electrified with energy and terror as they race past the gallows.'*

Delacroix seems to have been inspired to depict scenes from *Faust* after seeing a performance of Goethe's play at the Drury Lane Theatre in London in June 1825. He began working on the lithographs for an illustrated edition of *Faust* in 1825, not long after his return to Paris, and the works were printed at the studio of the publisher Charles Motte. Delacroix's choice of the relatively new medium of lithography allowed him to utilize the rich, velvety black tones inherent in the process of working on the lithographic stone to depict the many night scenes in the story. Published with an accompanying French translation of Goethe's text by Albert Stapfer in 1828, *Faust* was one of the first books in France to be illustrated with lithography.

In November 1826 Goethe himself saw impressions of the first two of the planned *Faust* lithographs, including a proof of the *Faust and Mephistopheles Galloping Through the Night on Walpurgisnacht* for which the present sheet is a preparatory study. He praised both works, noting that *'One must acknowledge that this M. Delacroix has a great talent, which in Faust has found its true nourishment. The French public reproach him for an excess of savage force, but actually it is perfectly suitable here. He will, I hope, go all through Faust...And if I must confess that M. Delacroix has, in some scenes, surpassed my own notions, how much more will the reader find all in full life,*

and surpassing his imagination.' By the end of 1827 Goethe had received a full set of the lithographs, well before the eventual publication of the book the following year, and in another letter he praised Delacroix for having '*accompanied a restlessly striving hero with a similarly restless pencil.*' Although the book was not a commercial success – critics and collectors alike seem to have taken against Delacroix's exaggerated style and bold lithographic techniques, as well as his emphasis on the diabolical elements of the story – *Faust* has long since been established as a pioneering work of 19th century Romantic book illustration.

Delacroix produced three preparatory compositional studies for the lithograph of Faust and Mephistopheles Galloping Through the Night on Walpurgisnacht. A preparatory drawing in the same direction as the print is in the Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam; executed in pen, brush and brown ink and wash, it is as bold and freely-drawn as the present sheet. As Dorit Schäfer has noted of the present drawing, by comparison with that in Rotterdam, '*It depicts the breakneck ride with a similarly impetuous, albeit somewhat more restrained, manner, by altering the direction of the riders, who have already left the Rabenstein behind them. The movements of the horses and the poses of the two riders are already close to those in the final composition in the lithograph. This suggests that this sheet was created after the drawing in Rotterdam.*'

Two other studies for the composition of the lithograph, both in the opposite direction to the print, are also known. A pencil drawing of Faust and Mephistopheles on horseback, formerly in the collection of Etienne Moreau-Nélaton, is today in the Louvre, while another study, executed in pencil and ink on papier calque, recently appeared at auction in London and is now in a private collection. A sheet of studies by Delacroix, in the Fondation Martin Bodmer in Geneva, includes a study for the figure of Mephistopheles with his index finger raised in warning, as seen in the final print.

Exhibitions

Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, *Aus der Werkstatt des Künstlers: Druckgraphik und vorbereitende Zeichnungen der Sammlung Hegewisch*, 1999.

Literature:

Adolphe Moreau, *E. Delacroix et son oeuvre*, Paris, 1873, p.324, no.388 ('*Faust et Méphistophélès fuyant. Sépia. Acheté par M. Rodrigues. 510 fr.*'); Alfred Robaut, *L'oeuvre complet de Eugène Delacroix*, Paris, 1885, p.405, no.1535 ('*Faust et Méphistophélès fuyant -1827.*'); Sebastian Giesen, *Aus der Werkstatt des Künstlers: Druckgraphik und vorbereitende Zeichnungen der Sammlung Hegewisch*, exhibition catalogue, 1999-2000, pp.88-89, illustrated p.20; Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, *Eugène Delacroix*, exhibition catalogue, 2003-2004, pp.148-149, under no.47, fig.47/1.

Artist description:

Eugène Delacroix has long been recognized as one of the finest draughtsmen of the 19th century in France. Adept in a variety of techniques – notably pen, pencil, watercolour, charcoal and pastel - he produced a large and diverse number of drawings of all types. As a modern scholar has noted, 'For their number, variety and importance he attached to them, drawings are an essential, if not fundamental part of Delacroix's oeuvre...they represent the most faithful testimonies of the man and the artist with his foibles but his greatness as well.'

However, Delacroix's output as a draughtsman remained almost completely unknown and unseen by scholars, collectors and connoisseurs until the posthumous auction of the contents of his studio held in February 1864, six months after the artist's death, which included some six thousand drawings in 430

lots. The sale included not only preparatory compositional sketches and figure studies for Delacroix's paintings and public commissions, but a myriad variety of drawings by the artist, including studies of wild animals, landscapes, copies after the work of earlier masters, costume studies, scenes from literature, still life subjects and the occasional portrait, as well as finished pastels. In the words of the Delacroix scholar Lee Johnson, 'It came as a surprise to many that an artist who had been so consistently criticized throughout his career for incompetence as a draughtsman and laxity in composition was revealed by the many hundreds of graphic works, the fifty-five sketchbooks, and scores of oil sketches at his sale to have been a draughtsman of extraordinary versatility and one who went to infinite pains to elaborate the compositions of his paintings through preliminary studies of many kinds, from the inchoate scribbles of an idea in germ, to more articulate designs, to detailed drawings of pose and gesture.'

The largest single collection of drawings by Delacroix, numbering almost three thousand individual sheets and twenty-three sketchbooks, is today in the Louvre.