



CHARLES THÉVENIN (1764 - 1838)

Self-portrait of the artist, bare-chested in an open shirt

Circa: Circa 1817

Circa 1817

Circular, 7.5 cm (3 inches) high

Graphite on vellum

In a later red velvet mount with gilt-metal spandrels of a lighted torch

Known most widely for his occasional etchings and history paintings, including *The Talking of the Bastille* (1793, Paris Museums), and *The French Army Crossing the St Bernard Pass* (1806, Private Collection), here we see an example of Charles Thévenin focusing much less on the grandeur of the French political sphere, and instead reflecting on himself, and his humility. The artist had been recognised for his talents and contributions to French art, becoming the Director of the French Academy in Rome between 1816 and 1829. Following his departure from the Villa Medici, where the academy was based, he was appointed the head of the Cabinet des Estampes in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. He would remain in his native Paris until his death, in 1838.

While residing in the Villa Medici, Thévenin had met now-famed Jean Ingres (1780-1867). For Ingres, times were hard, and he had lost many of his patrons in Rome because of the fall of the empire[1]. However, his introduction to Thévenin improved his situation slightly- the director had been impressed with his talent and gave him his support. The result of this act of friendship was a sketch done by Ingres of the artist, done in 1817[2]. It is this sketch, and its exact dating, that allow for the present work to be dated to around the same period, given the apparent similar age of Thévenin in both depictions. The striking difference between the two is the extremely intimate nature of the present work. Ingres depicts the artist fully dressed, and though his posture does imply that the sitter was comfortable with the artist, he is certainly given an air of power. Here, however, he is half-dressed, and looks softly towards the viewer. His hair is slightly dishevelled, and his collar is not folded correctly. This was not a work that was to be displayed to others, but instead a portrait taken as a study of the self, for the self.

[1] G. Tinterow and P. Conisbee, eds. *Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch*, New York, 1999, p.213.

[2] G. Tinterow and P. Conisbee, eds. *Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch*, New York, 1999, p.216, cat.74 (illustrated).