

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

French School, c. 1835

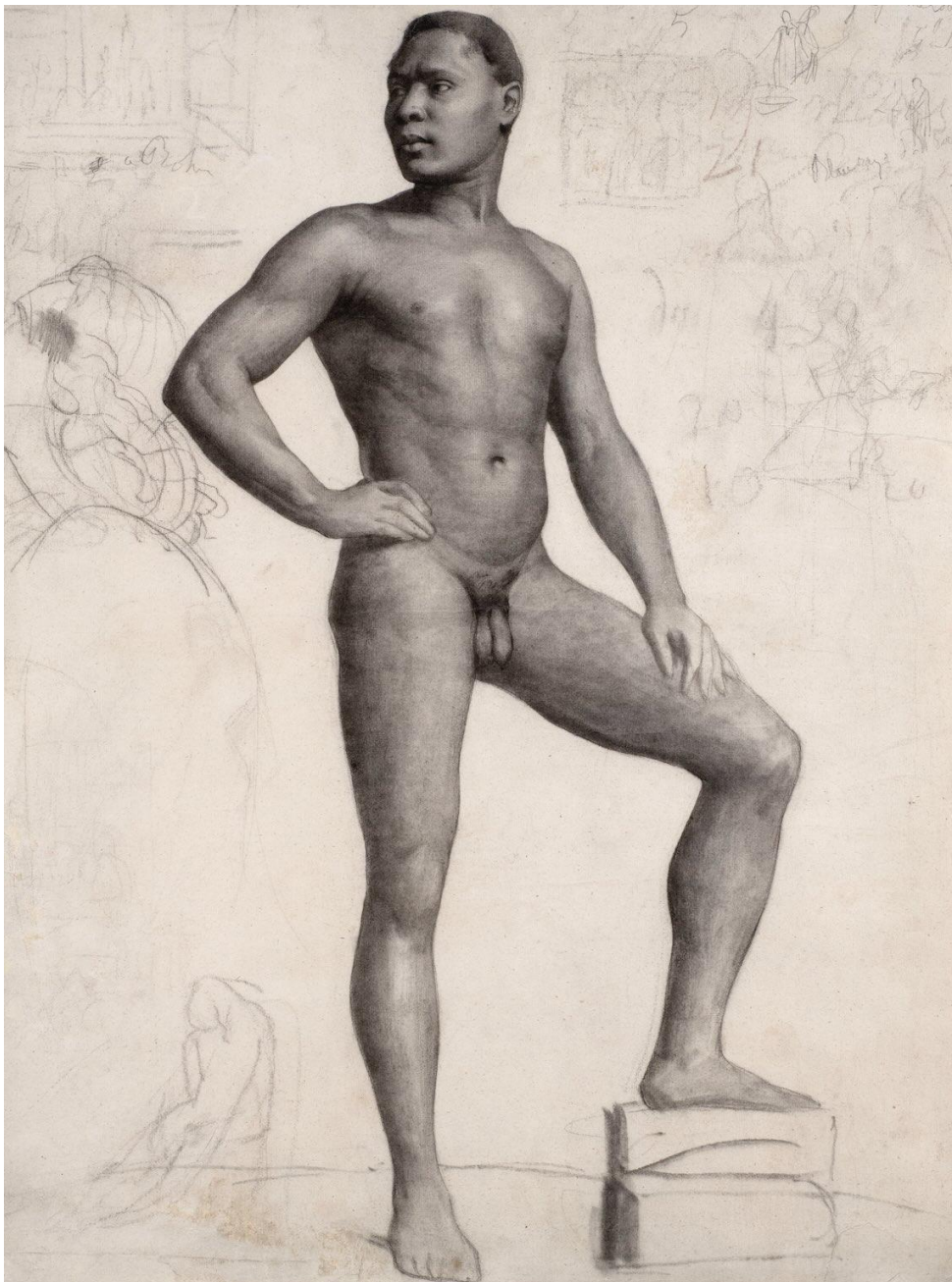
Academic study of Joseph

Charcoal on paper

59 x 44 cm. (23 ¼ x 17 ½ in.)

Provenance:

Private Collection, Paris.



This academic study depicts the Black model Joseph, a celebrated figure in mid-century Paris known for his links to Géricault, Ingres and Chassériau. As *Le Figaro* noted in 1858, 'there is not a single painter or sculptor in France who does not know Joseph, the most handsome model frequenting the ateliers of Paris'.

This study dates to around 1835 and was most likely produced by a student at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, where Joseph worked as a model between 1832 and 1835, earning a salary of 45,89 francs. Joseph would have had to hold this pose, and ones like it, for multiple hours at a time, alternating with the two other male models employed by the *École*.

Life studies of nude men, known as *academie d'hommes*, were the cornerstone of an aspiring artist's education. The doodles and scribbles surrounding Joseph suggest the wandering mind of a student and were likely added after the class, away from the watchful eyes of the professor. Executed in the polished, Ingresque style that dominated the arts in France at the time, any specific attribution would be speculative. However, the quality of the work indicates a draughtsman of talent.

A comparison with Chassériau's well-known oil study of Joseph (fig. 1) supports a dating to the mid-1830s, as Joseph appears around the same age in both works. Chassériau's painting, depicting Joseph floating against a blue background, was created at the request of Ingres, when the young artist was just seventeen.



Fig. 1, Théodore Chassériau, *Academic study of Joseph*, circa 1836, oil on canvas, 55 x 73.5 cm, Musée Ingres Bourdelle

Joseph's family name remains unknown, though it is believed he was born in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, present-day Haiti, around 1793. He arrived in France around 1804, initially settling in Marseille before moving to Paris in 1808. In Paris, he worked as an acrobat and actor in Madame Saqui's troupe.

Joseph began his modelling career by posing for Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, where he is prominently depicted as the man waving a cloth while standing on a barrel at the front of the raft. Géricault's celebrated portrait of Joseph (fig. 2), now housed at the Getty Museum,

was created as a preparatory study for the painting. In addition to his work at the École des Beaux-Arts, Joseph posed for numerous prominent artists, including Horace Vernet, Alfred de Dreux, Charles Gleyre, and Adolphe Brune.



Fig. 1, Théodore Géricault, *Portrait of Joseph*, 1818-19, oil on canvas, 47 x 38.7 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum

By the 1860s, Joseph's presence in recorded history began to fade. While he may have occasionally posed later in life, it is likely that he passed away sometime in the late 1860s or early 1870s. The lives of artists' models were often left undocumented, making the details we do know about Joseph all the more remarkable. His enduring legacy as a sought-after model speaks to his significance within Paris's artistic community.