

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Louise Lesauvage, active during the mid-19th century

The Amazone Mattei (after Phidias)

Charcoal on paper. Inscribed lower right: *Bosse 1re série 1er prix Decerné à Mlle Louise Lesauvage*; also signed: *David d'Angers* and *Emile Signol... Directrice et professeurs / septembre 1851*. Circular stamp of the *École de dessin de Jeunes Personnes*. Inscribed inside the stamp "Concours des prix de 1851".

88 cm x 61.5 cm (34 5/8 x 24 in.)



This charcoal drawing by the French artist Louise Lesauvage represents the so-called *Mattei Amazon*, a celebrated example of High Classical Greek sculpture, whose prototype is attributed to Phidias or his circle and dating to around 430 BC. Conceived for the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the original bronze is today lost, but its legacy survives through Roman marble copies, notably the one in the Vatican Museums formerly part of the Mattei collection (Fig. 1). It portrays a wounded Amazon warrior, exuding both resilience and subtle suffering. In a slight *contrapposto* stance, she lifts her injured thigh while using a spear for support, which is partially missing in the present model.

Through her subtle use of *chiaroscuro*, Lesauvage captures the interplay of light and shadow, using charcoal to emphasize the sculpture's tridimensionality of contours and musculature. The drapery is rendered with exceptional detail, each fold suggesting the intricate texture and weight of fabric, contrasting with the smooth exposed skin. Finer lines delineate the details of the Amazon's face, with subtle shading around the eyes and mouth, and the delicate curvature of her hair.

This drawing is a brilliant example of the academic approach to classical study, particularly in vogue during the 19th century. Such works would serve as exercises in mastering the use of the medium and understanding the complexities of human anatomy, all while paying homage to the artistic achievements of antiquity, in a quintessentially neoclassical fashion. However, in mid-19th-century Paris, women's artistic education was restricted due to prevailing gender norms. Unlike their male counterparts, women were often excluded from formal state-sponsored training until the late century and their practice often relegated to more "suitable" genres, such as portraiture and still life.

Private ateliers provided an alternative, giving them access to life drawing classes and teaching from renowned artists. As can be deduced from the inscription in the lower right and the related stamp, in 1851 Lesauvage's *Amazone Mattei* was awarded the first prize at the *École de dessin de Jeunes Personnes*, under the direction of David d'Angers (1788–1856), a highly influential French sculptor. The *École de dessin pour les Jeunes Personnes* was founded in Paris in 1803 and was part of a broader movement aimed at providing drawing education to young women, often from modest backgrounds (Fig. 2). These institutions were critical in shaping the professional landscape for women in the arts, offering young girls an opportunity for technical training.¹

¹ See Laurent Besse, "Former des artistes ou des ouvrières habiles ? Les cours publics et écoles de dessin pour femmes et jeunes filles en France au XIXe siècle" in *Faire oeuvre. La formation et la professionnalisation des artistes femmes aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, 2023.



Fig. 1. *Amazzone Mattei* (after a bronze original from 430 BC attributed to Phidias), first half of the 2nd century BC, white marble, Vatican Museums, Rome.



Fig. 2. Léon Leymonnerie, *Ecole de Dessin pour les Jeunes personnes*. Porte N° 7 Rue Dupuytren, 1875, charcoal on paper inscribed in brown ink, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.