

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Charles Thevenin (Paris, 1764-1838)

The Farewell of Hector, c. 1800

Pen and brown ink, brown wash, white heightening, with black pencil preparation and squaring.

35 x 54 cm (13 3/4 x 24 1/4 in.)

Provenance:

Private collection, France.



Son of the architect Jacques Jean Thevenin - famous for having designed the Queen's Dairy in Rambouillet for Marie Antoinette - Charles Thevenin trained with François-André Vincent at the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. After five attempts, he finally obtained the grand prix of painting in 1791, shared with Louis Laffite, for his magnificent *Regulus returns to Carthage*, (Paris, Ecole des Beaux-Arts).



Fig. 1. Charles Thevenin. *Storming of the Bastille*, c. 1793, 41 x 58.5. Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Eight years later, Thevenin travelled to Rome. In c. 1793 he made his great etching of the *Storming of the Bastille*, (fig. 1) a work of great expressionist violence - it is in fact believed that Thevenin witnessed these events in first person. Two years later, Thévenin continued to chronicle the most salient moments of the Revolution with his *Feast of the Federation* (Paris, Musée Carnavalet). He also entered the Year II competition with *The Charge of the Prince of Lambesc, 12 July 1789*. The proceeds from this endeavour enabled him to return to mythological subject matter, notably in *Oedipus and Antigone* (1794; Paris, National Assembly).

During the years of the Terror, Thévenin gradually moved away from depicting contemporary events, turning instead to more decorative and mythological subjects. The Napoleonic epic will inspire him towards the great genre and cult of Heroes, for example with *The passage of the Great Saint Bernard by the French army* (Versailles, Castle Museum). Director of the Académie de France in Rome from 1816 to 1822, he befriended Ingres, who made many portraits of him. Back in Paris, in 1825 he was elected a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and became curator of the Cabinet of prints of the Royal Libraries and later curator of paintings at the Palace of Versailles.

As for the iconography of the present drawing: when the battle raged between the Greeks and the Trojans, Hector - the eldest son of Priam, King of Troy, and the foremost Trojan champion - takes leave of his family before meeting Ajax, among the greatest of the Greek warriors after Achilles. Our drawing captures the warrior's final, fatal moment, as he confronts death amid the lamentations of his grieving family.

The *comiat* of Hector had a particular currency in the decades around the Revolution, precisely because it offered an antique paradigm of public duty negotiated through private loss. In late eighteenth-century France, such narratives were repeatedly mobilised within the moral ambitions of history painting, with Hector cast as the exemplary citizen-soldier who accepts death for the common good, and whose farewell to Andromache and Astyanax dramatises the costs of patriotic virtue. Jacques-Louis David's monumental 1783 *Andromache Mourning Hector* (Musée du Louvre, fig. 2) is an early and influential example of this renewed investment in the Hector

cycle. The theme remained resonant in the post-Revolutionary and Napoleonic climate, when antique heroism was again harnessed as an ethical and civic model, as shown in Pierre-Narcisse Guérin's 1810 *Andromaque et Pyrrhus* (Musée du Louvre).

Thevenin's imposing drawing is associated with the nervous and expressive manner of Vincent's Neoclassical sheets. However, the density of the ink and gouache makes the composition more accomplished in its finished complexity, comparable examples are the *Retour de Marie Stuart en Ecosse* at the Louvre (fig. 3). The final painting for which our drawing served as a preparatory study is currently unknown. However, close correspondences with some of the artist's works strongly support an attribution to Charles Thévenin (see the below comparisons with Thevenin's *Regulus returns to Carthage*, fig. 4, and *Joseph recognized by his brothers*, fig. 5).



Fig. 2. Jacques-Louis David. *Andromache Mourning Hector*, 1783, oil on canvas. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 3. Charles Thévenin, *Retour de Marie Stuart en Ecosse*, black chalk, pen and brown ink, beige and brown wash, white heightening. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 4. Charles Thévenin, *Regulus returns to Carthage* (and details), 1791, oil on canvas. Paris, Ecole des Beaux-Arts





Fig. 5. Charles Thévenin, *Joseph recognised by his brothers* (and details), 1789, oil on canvas. Angers, Musée des Beaux Arts

