

Constance-Marie Charpentier (1767 - 1849)

Academy Drawing of a Man

Black and white chalk on paper
56 x 43 cm

Provenance:

Private collection

Constance-Marie Charpentier, a student of Jacques-Louis David, distinguished herself in late 18th- and early 19th-century Paris as a highly skilled portraitist. Despite the obstacles faced by female artists of her time, Charpentier gained recognition and was even awarded a gold medal at the 1814 Salon—a rare and significant honor. This work, a male nude academy drawing, is exceptional not only for its technical quality but also because it was created by a woman. At that time, it was extremely unusual for a woman to study from nude models, a practice almost exclusively reserved for men and essential to the training of artists in the Grand Genre.

Under David's influence, who was an open-minded mentor supportive of educating female artists, Charpentier acquired the skills needed to master the rigor of academic drawing. Although David was initially forced to close his first studio for women, he continued teaching by opening another studio on rue du Faubourg-Saint-Martin, where his students had access to nude model studies. This unconventional openness allowed Charpentier to develop her abilities in a field typically restricted to men, achieving remarkable mastery in representing the male form.

This drawing, with its finely observed details and skillful use of black and white chalk, demonstrates Charpentier's ability to capture not only anatomical structure and musculature but also a powerful expressive presence. Comparable to another drawing from the same series sold at auction in 2021 (now housed in the Stockholm National museum), this piece highlights Charpentier's audacity and technical skill, enabling her to transcend the conventions of her time and to contribute to the academic tradition with a unique sensitivity.