

An album of Figure studies from travels through France and Russia

Robert Kerr Porter



Description

Sir Robert Ker Porter (1777-1842)

An album of Figure studies from travels through France and Russia

Forty-one, many signed with initials and dated between 1814 and 1816

Pen and ink and watercolour on laid paper, mounted onto a sheet in the album, within original wash lines

Each sheet approx. 17.2 by 10.8 cm., 6 ¼ by 4 ½ in.

Provenance:

Sir Raymond Smith KBE (1917-2002)

Sir Robert Ker Porter had a distinguished career as a painter, writer and diplomat, and was knighted in 1812 by the Prince Regent. At the age of 13, he entered the Royal Academy Schools on the encouragement of Benjamin West. His earliest commissions were altarpieces, but his interest lay in military subjects. He made his name with the exhibition of a monumental panorama depicting the Storming of Seringapatam, at the Lyceum Exhibition Room, London, in 1800. It was about 40m long with 700 life-size figures, extending in a ¾ circle. As a result of this work, Porter was invited to Russia by Tsar Alexander I in 1805 to decorate the admiralty in St Petersburg. Porter clearly fell in love with the country (and a Russian Princess, who became his wife) and returned to Russia frequently throughout his life, often for long periods. In 1825, he was appointed British Consul in Venezuela, where he spent 15 years in Caracas. His wife, Mary, daughter of Theodor de Scherbatoff, whom he had married in 1811, died in 1826, but in 1841 he returned to Russia to see his daughter, who was married to a Russian army officer. He died suddenly whilst in Russia and is buried in St Petersburg.

Porter published several illustrated books, on his various extended travels including Travelling Sketches in Russia and Sweden during the years 1805-7 (published 1809), Letters from Portugal and Spain, written during the March of the Troops under Sir John Moore, also published in 1809 and Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia 1817-20, published in two volumes in 1821.

The present album of carefully detailed and annotated studies of French and Russian figures, are similar to some of the illustrations in Porter's first travel book. The annotation on the French drawings as being at Chatillon in March 1814, is interesting as between 5th February and 5th March, the Allies (England, Russia, Austria, Prussia and other German states held a peace conference at Châtillon-sur-Seine in an effort to bring an end to the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon sent Armand-Augustin-Louis de Caulaincourt to negotiate. The Congress of Chatillon failed to bring about a peace, however by 31 March, Paris had fallen to the allies and by 4th April, Napoleon had surrendered.