Jean-Léon Gérôme (Vésoul 1824 - Paris 1904)

Portrait of Armand Gérôme, brother of the artist
160 x 94 cm.

Signed and dated near the lower right J. L. GEROME / 1848

This striking full-length portrait represents Armand Gérôme (1827-1850), the artist's younger brother. He is shown wearing the dark uniform of the Ecole polytechnique, a prestigious school of higher education founded in 1794[1]. This sober outfit allows the painter to focus on his brother's face, with its drooping eyelids and slight pout. Appearing somewhat melancholic, the young man would die of meningitis two years later.

Gérôme only made a handful of portraits, selecting his sitters from his close circle of friends or his family. The present painting was exhibited at the 1848 Salon in Paris but believed lost until its recent rediscovery. It is a wonderful expression of Gérôme's talent – he was only 24 years old at the time – as well as his refined and elegant manner. The smooth surface, ingenious use of light, dramatic composition and sophisticated details make it a magnetic work.

A related oil on canvas of smaller dimensions shows a head and shoulders portrait of Armand (National Gallery, London; 50.2 x 43.8 cm). A drawing represents Armand in a different position, standing and holding his hat in his hand (location unknown, squared for transfer)[2].

[1] The school still exists today and leads to careers in science, industry and politics. In 1804 Napoléon gave the Ecole military status and its motto "For country, science and honour".

[2] Reproduced in Ackerman, p. 215

Provenance
Provenance:

Property of the artist until his death; Collection of Marie-Antoinette Conte, née Breton

From around 1930, private collection, France until

sold by Christophe Joron-Derem, Drouot, Paris, 27th April 2013, lot 47

Exhibitions
Exhibited

Paris, Salon, 1848, n. 1934

Literature:
Published

G.M. Ackerman, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Paris, 2000, listed under n. 21 p. 214 as lost.