

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Charles Meynier (Paris 1768 - Paris 1832)

Télémachus, pressé par Mentor, quitte l'île de Calypso

Circa: 1800

1800

154 x 203 cm

Télémachus, pressé par Mentor, quitte l'île de Calypso, is the masterpiece of Meynier's career. For two centuries thought lost, the painting, until now, has only been known through an engraving. The painting was received with great praise from both the public and critics alike when it was first presented at the Salon of 1800 and can be considered not only the artist's chef-de-oeuvre but also a key painting within the canon of French Neoclassicism - representing a sublime example of the very particular aesthetic of turn of the century Napoleonic France.

A pupil of François-André Vincent, Meynier shared the prestigious Prix de Rome with Girodet in 1789, staying in Italy until December 1793. Returning to Paris, under the Empire, he received orders for military paintings to the glory of the Emperor and made three ceilings for the Louvre Museum, still in place. Telemachus represents a key moment in French neo-classical painting in which the propagandist subject matter of the last decade - often glorifying military prowess and which had been strictly adhered to - were relaxed, allowing artists such as Meynier to explore new themes such as History Painting.

Meynier's subject of Telemachus, the Son of Odysseus, is taken from Greek Mythology as re-told by François Fenelon in his acclaimed contemporary novel published in 1699, *The Adventures of Telemachus*. Fenelon's reworking of Homeric legend was recognized by contemporaries as a scathing rebuke to the autocratic reign of Louis and an allusion to the virtuous ideals espoused by the revolutionary Directoire. Indeed, Fenelon's story portrays the moral evolution of Telemachus very much in the vein of a proletarian hero rather than an ennobled one as, it is through experiences of passions and renunciations - which make him human - which he must learn to overcome and master in order to be a wise leader.

In true neo-classical spirit, in which the figures enact the unfolding events surrounding Telemachus trials in a tableau-like composition, the figures are eloquently quoted from antiquity. Mentor is derived from the Apollo Belvedere, Telemachus from the Capitoline Antinous, Eucharis from The Borghese Dancers, the three attendants of Calypso from The Three Graces, Calypso from Diana Chasseresse of Versailles, and the attendant of Calypso holding the Dogs, loosely based on the statues of Alexander and Bucephalus. Indeed, Joseph Fulchiron, owner of the present work and patron of Meynier, wrote of also owning several drawings by the artist, done after the antique whilst he was living in Rome and which, such as Apollo, clearly acted as preparatory figure studies for *Télémachus, pressé par Mentor, quitte l'île de Calypso*.

Meynier uses chiascuro to capture not only the mysticism of such a mythological scene but more importantly its innate drama, as the light falls, dappled by the trees, upon the faces of the protagonists to wonderful effect. The blue and silver palette, the carefully composed composition and master draughtsmanship all combining to make a powerful painting. One that was so well received at the salon of 1800 it was included in the decennial celebratory Salon exhibition of masterpieces in 1810, held at the Louvre.

Joseph Fulchiron (1744-1831) purchased the painting directly from the Salon in 1800 and the work has remained in the family ever since. A banker from Lyon, Fulchiron was a great patron of Meynier, already owning *Androcles* (now lost) which he had bought at the Salon of 1795 and also commissioning from him a *Milo of Croton* (also lost but the modello for which is at the Museum of Fine Arts of Montreal).

Provenance

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Joseph Fulchiron (1744-1831) bought at the Salon of 1800 for 4000 francs.

Château de la Seilleraye

Private Collection, Nantes, since the 1930's and by descent to the present owner

Exhibited:

Paris, Salon of 1800, no. 266 (second prize of the first class)

Paris, Louvre, Decennial Exhibition, (*Exposition des prix décennaux au Louvre*), August-November 1810.

Exhibitions

Engraved:

Alexis Chataignier (1772-1817), metal engraving (designed by S. Le Roy and finished by E. Bovinet), published in, '*Concours décennal, ou, Collection gravée des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture et médailles, mentionnés dans le rapport de l'Institut.*' Filhol et Bourdon, Paris, 1812.

Literature:

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Landon, C.P., *Annales de Musée et de l'Ecole Moderne des Beaux-Arts*, vol.1. pp. 31-32, pl XIV, engraved by Landon, 1801, Paris.

Schnapper, A., Arlette Sérullaz, sous le direction de Jacques Louis-David, 1748-1825, exh. cat. 1989, p. 527.

Johnson, D., Jacques-Louis David: The Farewell of Telemachus and Eucharis, Getty Museum Studies of Art, Los Angeles, 1997, p. 47-48.

Bordes, P., Jacques-Louis David, Empire to Exile, exh. cat. 2005, pp. 247-248 engraving of Chataigner reproduced fig. 34.

Mayer-Michalon, I., Charles Meynier 1763-1832, Paris, Arthena, 2008, p. 39, pp. 130-131, (listed as lost, comments from critics of the Salon of 1800 are transcribed pp. 262 and 263.).