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LOUIS-LEOPOLD BOILLY

1761 La Bassée - Paris 1845

Portraits du chanteur et comédien Simon Chenard (1758-1831), et du peintre François Pascal Simon Gérard (1770-1837), dit Baron Gérard

Black chalk, heightened with white, on blue paper; c.1791-6.
192 x 280 mm

PROVENANCE: Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 30 May 1968, lot 11 – John M. Wisdom, Jr., New Orleans – Shepherd Gallery, New York 1975 – David Daniels, New York – New York, Sotheby's, *Old Master Drawings*, 12 January 1994, lot 242 – Thomas le Claire Kunsthandel, Hamburg 1994 – Private collection, Berlin

EXHIBITED: *Ingres and Delacroix through Degas and Puvis de Chavannes. The Figure in French Art 1800-1870*, exhib. cat., Shepherd Gallery, New York 1975, no. 4, repr. – *Princeton Alumni Collections, Works on Paper*, The Art Museum, Princeton University 1981, p. 88 f.

Louis-Léopold Boilly was born in La Bassée in 1761. He trained under his father, a woodcarver. At the age of fourteen he moved to Douai to be taught *trompe l'œil* painting techniques by a relative. His remarkable talents as a portraitist were immediately apparent and by the late 1770s he had produced nearly three hundred portraits. He settled in Paris in 1784, where he lived and worked for the rest of his life. Soon after his arrival he began painting *scènes galantes*. His boudoir scenes were reproduced in large numbers by printmakers. He was one of the first members of the *Société des Amis des Arts*, an association founded by the architect Charles de Wailly (1729-98) in 1790. He was a regular exhibitor at the Paris Salon in the years 1791 to 1824.

Portraiture remained Boilly's most reliable source of income throughout his career. He specialized in small-format portraits that could be completed in the short space of two hours – he was renowned for his astonishing rapidity of execution. In the course of his long life – his career as a painter spanned over seventy years – he experimented in almost every painting technique available. He also produced a large body of drawings.

Boilly's work had something of a modernist flavour at the time. He handled traditional subjects from a new angle. He drew on folk art and integrated popular themes and scenes from contemporary life into his genre paintings. Many of the compositions of the 1780s display a somewhat moralistic and sentimental timbre but those of the 1790s and later are more lively and more complex. The psychological component in his portraits grew increasingly pronounced.

The present double portrait of two young *bohémien*s was executed in this period. Neither sitter is bewigged and this enhances the naturalness and spontaneity of the drawing. Boilly uses the blue tone of the paper to emphasize the intensity of his ductus. The energetic diagonal hatching in black chalk on collars and shoulders to indicate the jackets and the rapid notational highlighting of the fashionable neckties are entirely characteristic of Boilly's draughtsmanship in the 1790s.

ELBCHAUSSEE 386 · 22609 HAMBURG · TELEFON: +49 (0)40 881 06 46 · FAX: +49 (0)40 880 46 12

LECLAIRE@LECLAIRE-KUNST.DE · WWW.LECLAIRE-KUNST.DE

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This drawing depicts two figures from Boilly's circle of close friends. The young man portrayed at the left with the curly hair, bushy sideboards, chin dimple and sharp gaze is Simon Chenard (1758-1831). Between the Revolution and the Restoration he was one of the most popular actors and singers in France. His career was launched at the *Académie royale de musique*, where he first earned fame in the role of Orestes in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* in 1782. He joined the *Comédie-Italienne* in 1783 (it was renamed the *Opéra-Comique* in 1801) and performed with the company until 1823. His circle of friends included artists like Boilly, Gérard, Prud'hon and Isabey and he was an avid collector of their paintings and drawings.¹ He lived at the same address as Boilly and when Boilly's first wife died in 1795 he appointed Chenard guardian of his five children. Boilly was to produce a number of portraits of Chenard. One example is the painting titled *Le Chanteur Chenard en costume de sans-culotte*. Executed in 1792, it is now in the Musée Carnavalet [Fig. 1]². Chenard is also depicted in Boilly's famous group portrait titled *Réunion d'artistes dans l'atelier d'Isabey*. This was exhibited at the Salon in 1798 and is now in the Louvre [Fig. 2].³ In this painting he wears a large hat and stands beside Boilly, his arms folded, in profile to the left, while Boilly's hand rests on his left shoulder. A preparatory oil sketch for the two figures in the painting is today in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille [Fig. 3].⁴ In the lower right corner of a drawing titled *Seize portraits d'hommes*, depicting the portrait heads of sixteen male figures, Boilly again depicts his friend next to his self-portrait. The drawing shows him *de face*, his gaze directed towards the viewer. The sheet is now in the Prat Collection in Paris [Fig. 4].⁵

The young man portrayed at the right of the present sheet is identifiable as the painter François Pascal Simon Gérard, known as 'Baron Gérard' (1770-1837). He had started as a history painter, illustrator, and since the late 1790's he became one of the most excellent portrait painters of his time. His features strongly recall those in a portrait of Gérard by Baron Antoine Jean Gros (1771-1835). This portrait is dateable to the years around 1790 and is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York [Fig. 5].⁶ Both Gros and Gérard were students in the atelier of Jacques Louis-David. Here, intense friendships and near-fatal rivalries were to develop. Gros probably made the sensitive and delicate portrait of Gérard in Paris before Gérard left in 1790 to continue his studies in Rome. Despite the later rift in their friendship, Gérard kept the portrait for the rest of his life. In the present drawing Boilly portrays Gérard, his hair of similar length, in a pose that recalls the pose depicted in the Gros portrait. And like Chenard, Gérard also occupies a prominent position in Boilly's *Réunion d'artistes dans l'atelier d'Isabey* mentioned above – but here, his hair is shorter. Gérard is depicted at the left, seated and contemplating a painting on an easel. Isabey is depicted directly behind him wearing a red coat. The brilliance of the red highlights Gérard's profile and head.

In the large-format group portrait of 1798 both men appear to be older than is the case in the present drawing. However, the Gros portrait shows a slightly younger Gérard. It is therefore very probable that the present drawing can be dated to the years between 1791 and 1796.

¹ See : P. Berthier, *Chenard et les peintres*, *Bulletin de la Société des Sciences historiques et naturelles de l'Yonne*, XCV, 1947-52, p. 130-4, and for Chenard's iconography : *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1963-I, p. 27.

² See *Boilly (1761-1845)*, exhib. cat., Palais des Beaux Arts de Lille, Lille 2011, p. 121 f., no. 53.

³ See *Boilly (1761-1845)*, Lille 2011, op. cit., p. 142 ff., no. 68. – A comprehensive study of the painting, with full documentation, has been published by: Sylvain Laveissière, *L'Atelier d'Isabey: Un Pantheon de l'amitié, in Boilly 1761-1845, Un grand peintre Français de la Révolution à la Restauration*, exhib. cat., Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lille, 1988-89, pp. 52-63.

⁴ See *Boilly (1761-1845)*, Lille 2011, op. cit., p. 154, no. 89.

⁵ Pierre Rosenberg, *Passion for Drawing. Poussin to Cézanne, Works from the Prat collection*, Alexandria, Virginia 2004, p. 166 f., no. 49, repr.

⁶ See Garry Tinterow, in *The Wrightsman Pictures*, New York 2005, pp. 268-71, no. 73, repr.

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Two further portraits of Chenard testify to the closeness of the relationships in this group of friends. One is a half-figure portrait of Chenard by Gérard (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Auxerre) and the other, a finely worked portrait drawing by Jean-Baptiste Isabey – somewhat English in style – depicting Chenard sitting under a tree in a landscape (Musée des Beaux Arts, Orléans). Both works were at one time owned by Chenard [Figs. 6 and 7].⁷

As Susan L. Siegfried has pointed out: *Boilly's celebrations of living artists [...] in public settings [...] were a new type of subject-matter. The seminal work was 'Réunion d'artistes dans l'atelier d'Isabey' from 1798, which enjoyed so much success that it established the future viability of such subjects in France, not only for Boilly but for later artists as well. [...] Boilly extended the eighteenth-century tradition of 'les grands homes' to the modern art world.*⁸ While the present drawing cannot be regarded as a preliminary study for Boilly's large-format group portrait, thematically, it forges an important link with it. It is an outstanding early example of the friendship portrait genre in France. The genre would see its heyday in the nineteenth century, particularly among German artists working in Rome.

Etienne Bréton and Pascal Zuber will be including the drawing in their forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Louis-Léopold Boilly's *oeuvre*.

⁷ For the portrait by Gros, see <http://auxerre.historique.free.fr/personnages/simon_chenard.htm> – For the drawing by Isabey, see *Entre Lumières & Romantisme, Dessins du Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans*, exhib. cat., Vevey and Orléans 2006, p. 132, no. 61, repr.

⁸ Susan L. Siegfried, *The Art of Louis-Léopold Boilly, Modern Life in Napoleonic France*, New Haven and London 1995, p. 95 f.

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Fig. 1: *Le Chanteur Chenard en costume de sans-culotte*, c.1792; oil on panel, 33.5 x 22.5 cm.
Musée Carnavalet, Paris [inv. P.8]

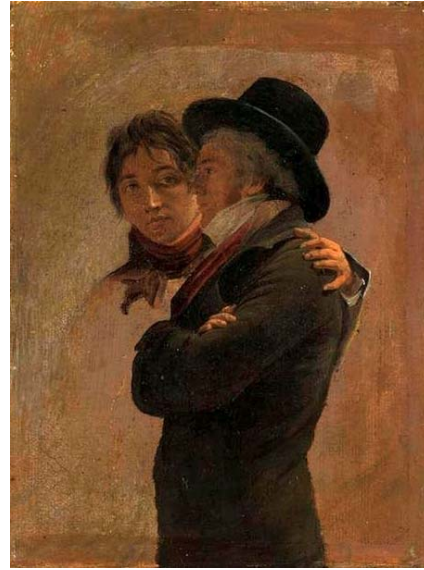


Fig. 3: *Louis Boilly et Simon Chenard*, before 1798; oil on paper, laid down on canvas, 24 x 18 cm.
Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille [inv. P384]



Fig. 2: *Réunion d'artistes dans l'atelier d'Isabey*, 1798; oil on canvas, 71.5 x 111.0 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris [inv. R.F. 1290 bis]

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Fig. 4: *Seize portraits d'hommes*, c.1790-6;
black chalk, heightened with white, on blue paper,
575 x 455 cm.
Prat collection, Paris



Fig. 5: Antoine Jean Gros, *Portrait de François Gérard*, c.1790; oil on
canvas, 56.2 x 47.3 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Charles
Wrightsman [inv. 2002.441]

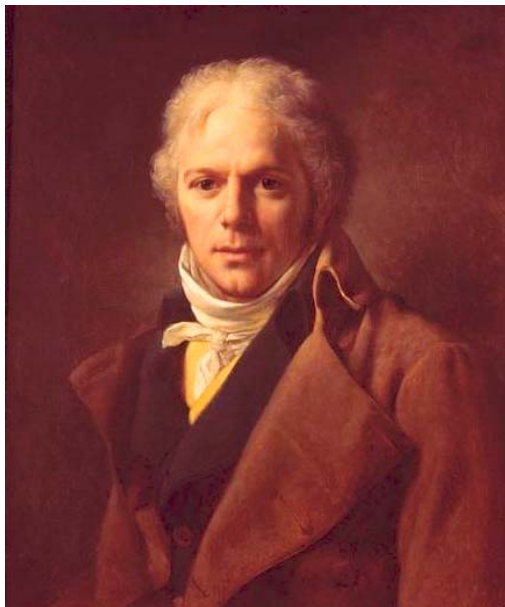


Fig. 6: François Gérard, *Portrait de Simon
Chenard*; oil on canvas, 65 x 55 cm.
Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Auxerre



Fig. 7: Jean-Baptiste Isabey, *Portrait de Simon
Chenard*, 1796; black chalk with stumping,
580 x 420 mm.
Musée des Beaux Arts, Orléans