

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



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ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET

1767 Montargis - Paris 1824

*Portrait Roundel of François Pascal Simon Gérard, called Baron Gérard (1770 Rome - Paris 1837)*

Black chalk, stumping, heightened with white, on paper; executed in 1789.

Overall diameter: 111 mm

PROVENANCE: Alexandre Gérard, brother of the artist – Thence by descent

LITERATURE: Charles Lenormant, 'François Gérard, peintre d'histoire', in *Le Correspondant*, XI, Paris 1845, p. 541 – Id., *François Gérard peintre d'histoire. Essai de biographie et de critique*, Paris 1847, pp. 35-6 – Philippe de Chennevières, *Portraits inédits d'artistes français*, Paris 1852, pp. 23-4, repr. p. 22 – *Œuvre du baron François Gérard. Troisième et dernière partie*, Paris 1857, n. p., described as: *Girodet (1789). Dessin au crayon noir, d'une finesse admirable; la tête est vue de profil.* – Henri Gérard (ed.) and Adolphe Viollet-le-Duc (preface), *Correspondance de François Gérard, peintre d'histoire, avec les artistes et les personnages célèbres de son temps*, Paris 1867, frontispiece – Anne Lafont, *Une jeunesse artistique sous la Révolution. Girodet avant 1800*, Phil. Diss., Paris 2001, I, p. 203-4, no. 51 – Bruno Chenique, *La vie d'Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy (1767-1824), dit Girodet-Trioson. Essai de biochronologie*, p. 157.

LITHOGRAPH: By Frédéric Legrip, for Chennevières, op. cit., 1852, p. 22 [fig. 1]

ENGRAVING: By François Girard, frontispiece to Gérard and Viollet-le-Duc, op. cit., 1867 [fig. 2]

In 1780, Jacques-Louis David returned to Paris from Rome. Soon afterwards, he was able to establish a studio in the Louvre, which rapidly hosted a great number of pupils. David revolutionised teaching methods and codes of practice in painting, introducing a new moral seriousness. He opened up the studio to engravers and sculptors, and admitted women artists and painters from outside France. Hennequin and Wicar joined in 1781, Drouais in 1782, Fabre in 1783, Girodet in 1784, Gros in 1785, Isabey and Gérard in 1786. In this fertile and highly competitive artistic environment many friendships were forged. David's pupils vied to outdo one another in self-portraiture and the art of the *portrait intime*. Notable examples produced in the years 1789 to 1791 are Louis Boilly's double portrait of Chenard and Gérard [fig. 4], Jean-Baptiste Isabey's portrait of Girodet [fig. 3]<sup>1</sup> and the present portrait roundel of Gérard by Girodet.

This portrait is an outstanding early example of a 'friendship portrait' by a French artist. The genre would see its heyday in the early nineteenth century, particularly among German artists working in Rome. Changes in the social substructure of France brought about by the Revolution led to a dearth of portrait commissions from the nobility and encouraged the development of a new self-confidence and sense of egalitarianism among artists. The appearance of reciprocal portraits among studio fellow-artists is therefore hardly surprising.

Girodet and Gérard worked together as pupils in David's studio from 1786 to 1789. The present drawing was executed in 1789, as the lettering on Girard's engraving [fig. 2] indicates. The drawing depicts

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<sup>1</sup> See Jean-Loup Champion, 'Un théâtre de miroirs, les autoportraits de Girodet', in *Girodet 1767-1824*, exhib. cat., Musée du Louvre, Paris 2005, p. 98, fig. III, 52.

Gérard at the age of twenty-two. His profile and features are finely delineated, his long wavy hair is delicately articulated and rendered with striking vitality. The soft material of his woollen coat has an extraordinarily tactile quality. The circular format of the miniature and the choice of a profile-view pose are consonant with eighteenth-century tradition, but the naturalness, spontaneity and psychological intensity of the portrait reveal an innovative and forward-looking approach. Other pupils responded similarly to David's teaching, as is evidenced by Isabey's *Portrait de Girodet*. Executed in the same year, it stands on an equal footing with Girodet's drawing in terms of format, medium and style [fig. 3].

In his description of the present drawing, Charles Lenormant, the first biographer of Gérard, alludes to the life-long rivalry between Gérard and Girodet: *C'est pendant son séjour dans l'école de David que celui de ses rivaux dont le nom a été prononcé le plus souvent à côté du sien fixa sur le papier, dans un dessin rempli d'énergie et de grâce, le profil du jeune Romain, C'est déjà Gérard tout entier: la tête est belle, fine et fière; le regard éclate sous l'épaisse chevelure qui l'ombrage, Girodet a mis dans ce dessin tout ce qu'il pensait et tout ce qu'il craignait de son condisciple; il semble dire: Voici un homme qui me donnera du souci; mais je le lui rendrais bien!*<sup>2</sup>

Girodet and Gérard were David's most talented pupils. But as pupils assisting in the execution of their master's paintings they stood under enormous pressure. In his 1827 essay on David, the art critic Pierre Alexandre Coupin gives an illuminating account of studio collaboration – and studio rivalries. He relates how Gérard and Girodet had been assigned the task of completing different sections of David's painting, *Les Licteurs rapportant à Brutus les corps de ses fils* (1789, Musée du Louvre), and how Gérard, who had been entrusted with part of the background, failed to make the head of Brutus stand out sufficiently. Not even David could resolve the problem, so Girodet was instructed to take over. Supremely self-confident and already a master of chiaroscuro, Girodet took up his palette and brushes unperturbed and completed the head to David's fullest satisfaction.<sup>3</sup>

In 1789, Gérard and Girodet both competed for the Prix de Rome, submitting paintings of the same subject – *Joseph reconnu par ses frères*. Girodet won the award, while Gérard was placed second. In 1801, they both received Imperial commissions to execute paintings on Ossianic themes for Napoleon's country retreat at Malmaison. Once again, they attempted to outdo each other. But there is no doubting Gérard's own success as a painter. In the late 1790s, he came to be regarded as one of the outstanding portraitists of his time. His output was prolific and many of Europe's foremost figures sat for him. He achieved fame and a considerable degree of affluence. Honours were heaped on him, but was nevertheless torn by remorse for earlier, unfulfilled ambitions in history painting.

Sidonie Lemeux-Fraitot will include the present drawing in her forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Girodet's work.

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<sup>2</sup> Lenormant, op. cit., 1845, p. 541 : It was during [Gérard's] time as a pupil of David that the one rival whose name has been pronounced most frequently beside his own name set down on paper the profile of the young Roman in a drawing replete with vigour and grace. It is wholly Gérard: his head handsome, fine and noble; his gaze forceful beneath the thick head of hair that shades it, Girodet has invested this drawing with the full measure of his opinion of his fellow student and the full measure of his fearfulness of him; as if to say: Here is a man who will give me cause for worry; but I would give him exactly the same!

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Alexandre Coupin, *Essai sur J. L. David, peintre d'histoire, ancien membre de l'Institut, officier de la Légion-d'honneur*, Paris, 1827, pp. 62-3; cited in Chenique, op. cit., 2005, p. 157.

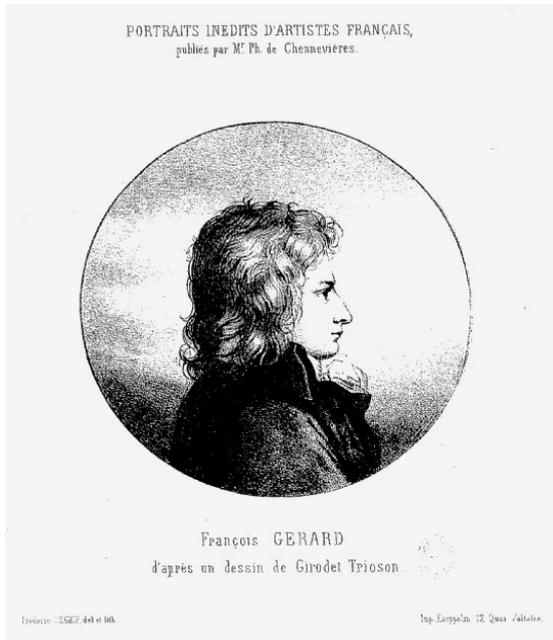


Fig. 1: Frédéric Legrip (after Girodet), *Portrait of Gérard*, lithograph for Ph. de Chennevières, *Portraits inédits d'artistes français*, Paris 1852, p. 22. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris



Fig. 2: François Girard (after Girodet), *Portrait of Gérard*, engraving, (the lettering gives the date of the drawing: *Girodet del. 1789*), frontispiece to H. Gérard and A. Viollet-le-Duc, *Correspondance de François Gérard (...)*, Paris 1867. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris



Fig. 3: Jean-Baptiste Isabey, *Portrait de Girodet*, black chalk, stumping, c. 1789, Diam.: 117 mm. École des Beaux-Arts, Paris [inv. MU8645]



Fig. 4: Louis-Léopold Boilly, *Portraits de Simon Chenard (at the left) et François Gérard (at the right)*, black chalk, heightened with white, c.1791, 192 x 280 mm. Private collection, Paris, formerly with Le Claire Kunst (2015)