

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



ERNST FRIES

Heidelberg 1801 - 1833 Karlsruhe

Path between Trees near Ariccia

Verso: *Mountain Gorge with two Bridges and a Building*

Pen and brush in greyish-black ink, sepia wash over pencil. The verso in pencil.

On laid paper watermarked: *C & I Honig*. Executed between 1824 and 1827.

Numbered *III, 2* in pencil on the verso.

PROVENANCE: The Estate of Bernhard Fries – Eugen Dreisch, Munich – Thence by family descent.

This furiously worked study was captured from a viewpoint on the western slopes of the Colli Albani near Ariccia. At the centre of the image is a small section of distant landscape – the plains south of Rome and the outline of the Tyrrhenian Sea. A gently curving path leads the observer's eye past a group of holm oaks set in a rocky hillside. At the left is a steep, densely vegetated area of shadow where the land appears to drop away sharply. A watercolour held in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin has many of the same landscape elements but they are seen from a slightly different viewpoint [fig. 1]. Common to both drawings are motifs such as the path, the ancient oak with exposed roots wrapping around a boulder, and the three trees whose slender trunks have grown outwards in the direction of the light source. The inspiration for a painting now in the collection of the Kurpfälzisches Museum in Heidelberg can almost certainly be traced to these drawings. Fries executed the painting – *Ariccia, Trees in the Park of the Villa Chigi* – in 1830, three years after his return from Italy [fig. 2]. Although the work displays a number of differences in terms of detail, its overall composition closely follows the two drawings.

The present study was executed on Fries's extended sojourn in Italy in 1823-7. This artistically productive period coincided with a creative highpoint in his career. He set out for Italy in the autumn of 1823. His travelling companions were Johann Heinrich Schilbach and the brothers Gottfried and Johann Christoph Rist. Fries spent the winter months in Rome, where he made sketches of the city's ancient monuments and undertook expeditions to sites outside Rome to record the natural beauty of the landscape. In May 1824, he travelled with Carl Begas and Heinrich Hess to the town of Albano which lies on the southern shore of the picturesque crater lake Lago Albano. Here, he joined a larger group of fellow artists and friends – Ludwig Richter, Carl Wagner, the Rist brothers, Carl Götzloff, Ernst Oehme and Johann Andreas Boerner. The Colli Albani were particularly popular among German painters, who delighted in *their charmed heights, adorned with a most luxuriant profusion of trees*, and the extensive view they afforded of the sea, the distant city of Rome and the peak of Monte Soratte.¹ Fries regularly set up his easel to sketch on the slopes of Monte Cavo (Monte Albano). The path northwards from Albano to Castel Gandolfo, lined with ancient oaks and known as the 'galleria',² was another of his preferred motifs. He remained in Albano for most of the month of July, before

¹ H. Richter (ed.), *Adrian Ludwig Richter, Lebenserinnerungen eines deutschen Malers*, Frankfurt am Main 1887, p. 150.

² See Sigrid Wechsler, *Ernst Fries (1801-1833), Monographie und Werkverzeichnis*, Heidelberg 2000, nos. 167-73 for comparable drawings.

moving on to Ariccia. He sketched profusely in the park of the Villa Chigi,³ and it was here that the present drawing was made, either on this first visit in 1824 or on a later visit in 1826-7. Ludwig Richter described the wild, densely wooded park as a popular destination and a magnet for painters: *Legend has it that the park is all that is left of the much favoured hunting ground of the goddess Diana, and the owners of this splendid stretch of nature are allowing it to remain utterly untouched by cultivation. The mightiest of oak and holm oak once crowned the steep hills in large groups, offering the finest of study material for painters. (...) In short, it resembled a wood from a fairy tale, a kind of enchanted forest that not even the liveliest of imaginations could describe. The blue of the sea peered from afar into this secret forest.*⁴

Sigrid Wechsler included the drawing in the supplement to her catalogue raisonné of the work of Ernst Fries in 2003-4.



Fig. 1: *Study of Trees and Rocks*, c.1826-7, watercolour and pencil, 432 x 632 mm. (Wechsler no. 531). SMPK Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin [inv. SZ 97]

³ See Wechsler, op. cit., nos. 176-185.

⁴ Richter, op. cit. (1887), p. 155.

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



Fig. 2: *Ariccia, Trees in the Park of the Villa Chigi*, 1830,
oil on oak panel, 19.2 x 27.0 cm. (Wechsler no. 634).
Kurpfälzisches Museum der Stadt Heidelberg [inv. G191]