

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



HUBERT ROBERT

1733 - Paris -1808

*Women Washing at the Fountain of the Villa Aldobrandini, Frascati*

Red chalk on laid paper.

Signed and dated: *H. Robert* / 1761.

447 x 333 mm

PROVENANCE: Possibly, Pierre-Adrien Pâris (1745–1819), Besançon – Paris, Palais Galliera, 5 December 1964, lot 4, pl. III (as *Les lavandières*) – Private collection, Paris, 1985

LITERATURE: J. de Cayeux, *Les Hubert Robert de la Collection Veyrenc au Musée de Valence*, Valence, 1985, pp. 276, 278, under cat. no. 77, fig. 101 (as *Lavandières sous une voûte arquée*) – *Les Hubert Robert de Besançon*, exhib. cat., Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, 2013–14, p. 70, under cat. no. 42

In Rome from 1754 to 1765, Hubert Robert, nicknamed 'Robert des ruines,' produced numerous drawings, mostly in red chalk, of monuments and famous sites in and around the Eternal City, both direct, on-the-spot observations as well as *capricci*. His Italian drawings are characterized by the strength and assuredness of their handling and often include contemporary figures. Upon his return to Paris in 1765, Robert specialized in architectural subjects and exhibited at the Salon from 1767 until 1798.

The present sheet, large, beautifully executed in red chalk and dated 1761, shows two women washing at a basin in the nymphaeum of the Villa Aldobrandini at Frascati, about twelve miles southeast of Rome. The vaulted, triple-arched space, an arcade or portico, is located on the garden façade of the villa. In Robert's drawing a statue of a nymph holding an amphora out of which pours water is located in a niche on the far wall of the space. In addition to the two women washing at a basin in the centre of the composition, two figures appear in the central arch to the left, while a woman with a child on her lap is seated to the right. A ladder leans against boards closing the left-hand arch; a barrel appears in the left foreground; and a tunnel to the right, surrounded by greenery, leads to the main part of the villa. It is classic Robert – a charming scene from contemporary life set within a grand and older architectural setting, in this instance a famous Roman villa dating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

A counterproof of the present sheet, with the three arches to the right and Robert's signature and date, lower left, was owned by the eighteenth-century architect and collector, Pierre-Adrien Pâris, and is today in the Bibliothèque Municipale, Besançon [Fig.1].<sup>1</sup> Pâris was familiar with and possibly even owned our drawing, as he made a copy of it in the same direction, smaller and in black chalk, today also in the Bibliothèque Municipale [Fig.2].<sup>2</sup> Robert made a version of our drawing in the same direction, *Nymphée de la Villa Aldobrandini à Frascati transformée en lavoir*, slightly smaller, with differences,

<sup>1</sup> Inv. Vol. 452, II, no. 24; Catala, *op. cit.*, repr.

<sup>2</sup> Inv. Vol. 453, I, no. 16; Cayeux, *op. cit.*, p. 278; Catala, *op. cit.*, repr.

and in watercolour, around the same time [Fig.3]. It, too, was owned by Pâris and is today in the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon.<sup>3</sup>

Robert returned to the subject of women washing in the nymphaeum of the Villa Aldobrandini in 1775 in a smaller red chalk drawing of similar compositional motifs, *Lavandières à Frascati* (Valence, Musée de Valence).<sup>4</sup> A pen and ink drawing connected to this sheet is in the Louvre, in an album which was part of the Moreau-Nélaton bequest in 1927 (inv. RF 11525).<sup>5</sup> The Villa Aldobrandini was one of Robert's favorite Roman subjects. Six further counterproofs in red chalk of the villa – of its gardens and garden features – all large and comparable in scale to the present sheet, are in the Bibliothèque Municipale, all also formerly owned by Pâris.<sup>6</sup> The library and museum in Besançon, between them, own more than 180 drawings by Robert, most of them counterproofs, all from the collection of Pâris, who bequeathed them to the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie in Besançon in 1819.

The Villa Aldobrandini was originally built in 1550 by a Vatican prelate, Alessandro Rufini. Pope Clement VIII gave the villa to his nephew, Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, in 1598, at which time work on the villa was begun by the Roman architect Giacomo della Porta (1532–1602). The core of the house was finished by 1603. After Giacomo della Porta's death, Carlo Maderno (1556–1629) continued work on the villa and its gardens for the next twenty years. The magnificent gardens include features such as a *grand jet d'eau*, a *teatro delle acque*, a water stairway, and a belvedere. The villa remains in the possession of the Aldobrandini family.

---

<sup>3</sup> Inv. D 2911; 430 x 305 mm; Cayeux, *op. cit.*, fig. 100, illust.; Catala, *op. cit.*, p. 71, cat. no. 43, repr.

<sup>4</sup> Inv. D. 114; 370 x 285 mm; Cayeux, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-77, cat. no. 77, repr.

<sup>5</sup> Cayeux, *op. cit.*, p. 278; Catala, *op. cit.*, p. 70, under cat. no. 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 74-78, cat. nos. 44, 46-50, all repr.



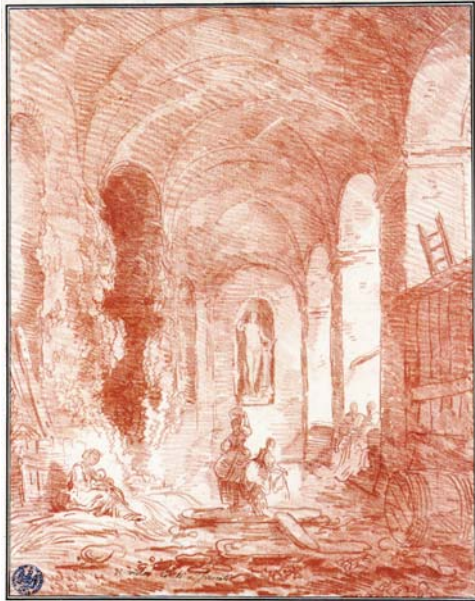


Fig.1: *Fontaine de la Villa Aldobrandini à Frascati*,  
counterproof in red chalk, taken from the present drawing.  
435 x 343 mm.  
Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon [inv. vol. 452, no. 24]



Fig.2 : Pierre-Adrien Pâris, *Fontaine couverte de la villa Conti à Frascati*  
after Hubert Robert, pencil.  
Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon

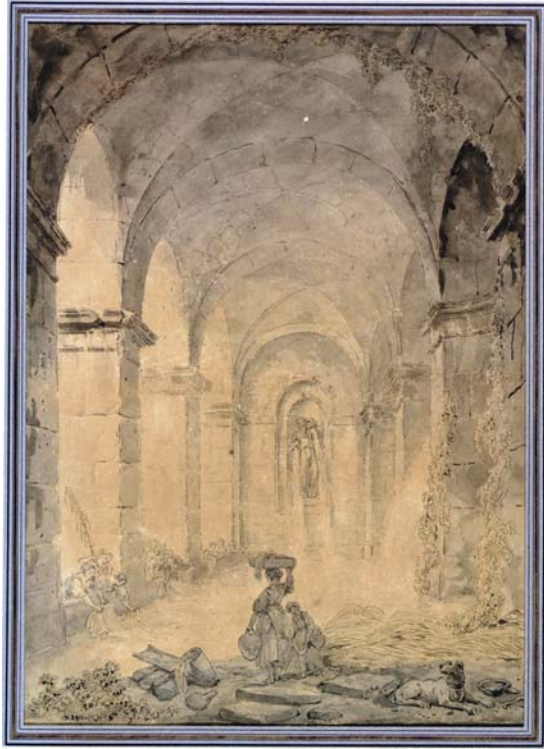


Fig.3 : *Nymphée de la Villa Aldobrandini à Frascati transformé en lavoir,*  
pen and black ink, with brown wash.  
430 x 305 mm.  
Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon [inv. no. D.2911]