

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



ACHILLE-ETNA MICHALLON

1796 - Paris - 1822

View of the Sistine Chapel from the Piazza del Forno, Rome

Brush and brown ink, brown wash over black chalk on Paper. Framing lines in pen and brown ink. Signed and dated in brown ink, lower right: *Michallon 1819*.

22.5 x 28.2 cm.

PROVENANCE: Sir Thomas Phillipps, 1st Baronet (1792-1872), Middle Hill, Broadway, Worcestershire, thence by descent – By 1946, a large part of the Phillipps collection was acquired for 100.000 £ by the antique booksellers Philip and Lionel K. Robinson (1897-1983), London. This part of the collection was at that time uncatalogued and unexamined. The Robinson brothers endeavoured to sell the books through their own catalogues until 1957. After their retirement they sold many remaining works from the Phillipps collection through auctions or directly to collectors.¹ – Stefanie Maison, London (with her label on the back of the mount), who probably acquired the drawing in the 1970s. At that time, she was an independent dealer specialized in nineteenth-century French drawings. In the late 1970's, she joined the art dealers Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, London. – Collin Clarke, London.

Achille-Etna Michallon was raised among artists. He was the only son of Claude Michallon, who had won the Grand Prix de Rome for sculpture in 1785, and Marie-Madeleine Cuvillon, stepdaughter of the sculptor Guillaume Francin. The family had been awarded lodgings at the Louvre. At an early age Achille Etna copied the etchings of Claude Lorrain and he began to take drawings lessons when he was about eight. As a young man, he received instruction from Pierre Henri de Valenciennes, and Jean-Victor Bertin. Michallon exhibited two paintings at the Salon of 1812 at the age of 15. Five years later, he became the first recipient of the newly established Prix de Rome for historical landscape painting, and on 24 December 1817 he arrived at the French Academy in Rome. As the curriculum for the winner was vague, Michallon was forced to develop his own course of study, which consisted in large measure of drawing and oil sketching in Rome and its environs. He formed a close friendship with his fellow student Léon Coignet and also became acquainted with other landscape painters, who were living in Rome, notably François-Marius Granet. He was to remain in Italy for three and a half highly productive years. When he returned to Paris in 1821, he opened a studio and soon established himself as a teacher. Among his students was Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. Although Michallon died the following year (at the age of 25), he is regarded not only as one of the most accomplished French landscape painters of his generation but also the link between Corot, on one hand, and the art and theory of Valenciennes, on the other.²

¹ In 1978, the Metropolitan Museum, New York, acquired a *View of the Tiber from the North Bank, with the Temple of Vesta, the Campanile of S. Maria in Cosmedin and the Ponte Rotto*, by Achille-Edna Michallon. This drawing was also executed in brush and brown wash over traces of black chalk, and framing lines in brown ink. It came from the collection of Sir Thomas Phillipps and was acquired by the Robinson Brothers. Then it was sold by the Trustees of the Robinson Trust to the art dealer and collector Eugene Victor Thaw, who sold it to the Metropolitan Museum in 1978. [Fig. 1] It is most probable, that the drawing in the Metropolitan Museum and our drawing came together into the possession of Philip and Lionel Robinson. In 1970 both drawings were sold to the art dealers, Eugene Thaw and Stefanie Maison.

² For the biography see: Vincent Pomarède, Blandine Lesage, Chiara Stefani, *Achille-Etna Michallon*, exhib. cat., Musée du Louvre, Paris 1994 – Jeremy Strick, 'Achille-Etna Michallon', in: *In the Light of Italy, Corot and early open-air painting*, exhib. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, The Brooklyn Museum, The Saint Louis Art Museum, 1996, p. 185 f. – William M. Griswold, *The Thaw Collection, Master Drawings and Oil Sketches, Acquisitions Since 1994*, exhib. cat., The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, 2002, cat. no. 93, p. 202.

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The present view shows the rectangular façade of the Sistine Chapel, seen from the Piazza del Forno, a courtyard at the building's northwest corner, near the present-day Rampa dell'Archeologia. [Fig. 2] The complex perspective includes the steeply receding height of the Chapel itself and the interlocking diagonals of the walls and gates on the perimeter. On the far right is the adjacent façade of St Peter's, in the foreground the entrance door whilst on the left is a small fountain in the centre of the courtyard.

The Sistine Chapel was built between 1473 and 1481 under Pope Sixtus IV. It replaced the former Cappella Maggiore, which was in danger of collapsing. After its completion, it was decorated inside with frescoes by the most famous artists of the High Renaissance, including Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Perugino and Michelangelo. Until today, the Sistine Chapel is used for solemn papal services and here the Conclave of the Cardinals takes place, when a new pope has to be elected. Despite this outstanding ritual importance, there exist almost no views of the outside of this building. Actually, the Sistine Chapel is completely surrounded by other buildings. The visible outer walls are not decorated with architectural details, and enormous buttresses are blocking the views. The building has neither a façade nor visible portals, as all entries are always from inside the Apostolic Palace. The roof is like a fortress, with guardrooms and encircled by a battlement parapet. It is therefore not surprising that for long times it was not a motif for an artistic representation.

This changed, for a short time, in the early 19th century, presumably because the artists' views had changed. Michallon was not concerned with a representative depiction of the building, although he has captured its situation excellently in perspective. Rather, it was the special atmosphere of this quiet place near the Vatican gardens that appealed to him. He was obviously attracted by the play of the southern sun on the walls and the contrasts of light and shadow on the various surfaces. The light plays a prominent role in almost all of Michallon's drawings and oil sketches. You can see it in his landscape drawings, such as *The Cascades at Tivoli* [Fig. 3], where the landscape is illuminated by the blazing sun, and in his depictions of Roman monuments, as in *View of the Tiber, with the Temple of Vesta, the Campanile of S. Maria in Cosmedin and the Ponte Rotto* [Fig. 1], where the sun rays break through the clouds spectacularly.

The only comparable relevant view of the Sistine Chapel, that we found, was executed in the same year 1819 by an artist, who was also fascinated by complicated effects of light, with sunsets, moonlight or rainbows. It's a rapid outline pencil drawing by William Turner. It is part of a sketchbook that he filled during his four months stay in Italy. [Fig. 4] Turner made only a few watercolours in Rome, and he complained that 'it would take up too much time to colour in the open air – he could make 15 or 16 pencil sketches to one coloured.'³ So we can only say, that Turner is one of the very few artists, that had been attracted by the exterior façade of the Sistine Chapel, a motif that he would not have seen depicted before.

The present drawing by Achille-Etna Michallon is carefully prepared with black chalk and fully executed with a fine brush and an effectful differentiated wash. The drawing displays a seriousness and ambition that is consistent with the teachings of Valenciennes. On the other side it differs from that by a more naturalistic approach and the dramatic contrasts of dark and light. In this regard, a certain influence of François-Marius Granet might be perceptible. Finished drawings in such a quality, excellent condition, and with such a prominent provenance are very rare.

³ Cited after: Andrew Wilton: *J.M.W. Turner, His Art and Life*, Secaucus, New Jersey, 1979, p. 143, n. 27.

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One of Michallon's most important drawings, *A Window View of the Villa Medici and Sta Trinità dei Monti from Ingre's Studio in the Pavillon San Gaetano in Rome*, was also executed in 1819. It was acquired from us by the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005. [Fig. 5]



Fig. 1: *A View of the Tiber, with the Temple of Vesta, the Campanile of S. Maria in Cosmedin and the Ponte Rotto*
Brush and brown wash over black chalk on paper; signed and dated: Michallon Roma 1819. 22.3 x 32.5 cm
The MetropolitanMuseum of Art, New York, [Inv. 1978.271]



Fig. 2: *View of the Sistine Chapel from the Vatican Gardens*, 2017
Photograph by Sailko, (Wikimedia Commons / CC-BX.3.0)
(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Veduta_della_cappella_sistina_dai_giardini_vaticani,_03.jpg)

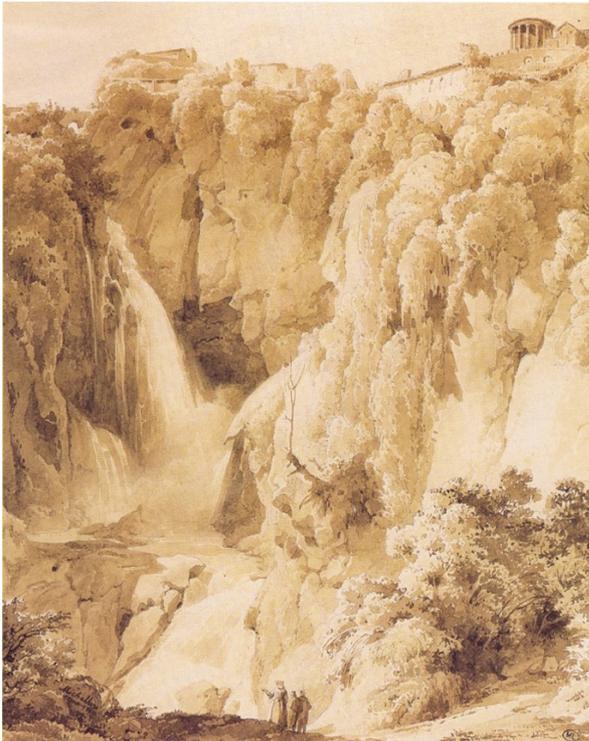


Fig 3: *The Cascades at Tivoli*
Brush and brown wash over black chalk on paper; signed and dated: *Michallon rome 1819*. 255 x 203 mm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris [Inv. RF 14 277]



Fig. 4: Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775 - 1851),
The Exterior Façade of the Sistine Chapel, Rome, 1819.
Part of the *Albano, Nemi, Rome Sketchbook*. Graphite on paper, 113 x 189 mm.
Tate Gallery, London, [Inv. D 15364, Turner Bequest CLXXXII 37]

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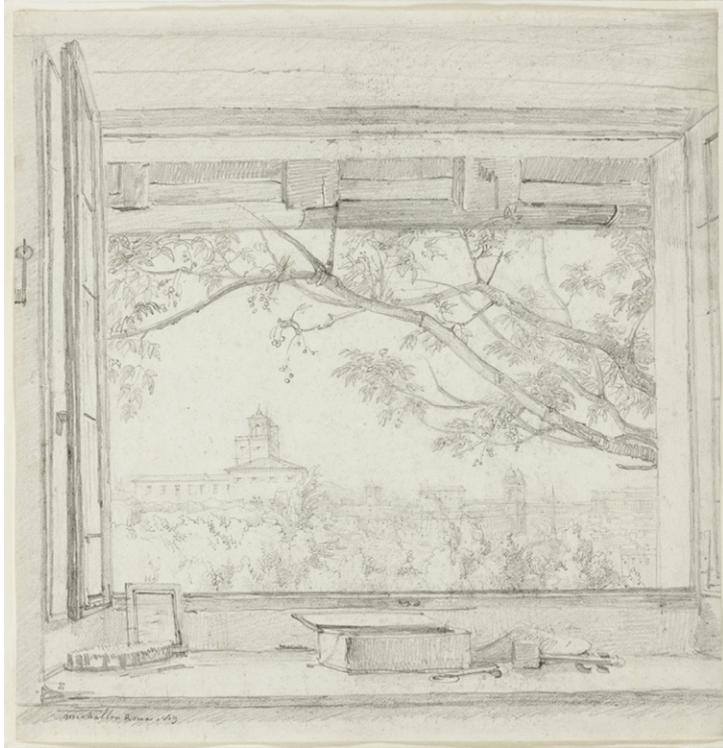


Fig. 5: *View of the Villa Medici and Sta Trinità dei Monti from Ingre's Studio in the Pavillon San Gaetano, Rome*
Graphite on laid paper; signed and dated: *Michallon Roma 1819*. 286 x 275 mm.
With Thomas le Claire Kunsthandel, Hamburg (2003-05), sold to the Art Institute of Chicago, [Inv. 2005.1]