

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM

TABLEAUX - DESSINS - SCULPTURES

EUGÈNE DELACROIX

Charenton Saint Maurice 1798 - Paris 1863

French School

CHRIST ON THE SEA OF GALILEE

Oil on panel

H. 0,18 m; W. 0,23 m

Deforges stamp on the reverse

DATE: ca. 1853

PROVENANCE:

Fernand Antonin Mercié, Paris, 1918

Walter Pach, New York

Anonymous sale; Parke-Bernet, New York, 6 January 1949, lot 31 (unsold)

By descent from Walter Pach to the present owner

EXHIBITED:

New York, Marie Harriman Galleries, *Courbet & Delacroix*, 1933.

Portland (OR), Portland Art Museum, and Buffalo, Albright Art Gallery, *Delacroix*, 1940.

New York, Wildenstein, *Delacroix*, 1944, no. 35.

RELATED WORKS:

Our oil study could be preparatory for a painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is one of six versions of the same subject, painted by Delacroix between 1841 and 1854: four of them feature a rowboat, two later versions a sailboat.

Rowboat group:

1) Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City; Johnson¹ no. 451, ca. 1841, oil study, H. 0,46 m; W. 0,55 m.

2) Portland Art Museum, Oregon, Johnson no. 452, ca. 1841, oil on canvas, H. 0,46 m; W. 0,56 m.

3) Private collection, Switzerland; Johnson no. 453; securely datable to 1853.

4) Metropolitan Museum, New York (H. O. Havemeyer Collection), ca. 1853, oil on canvas, H. 0,51 m; W. 0,61 m, signed lower left *Eug. Delacroix*, Johnson no. 454.

¹ Lee Johnson. *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A Critical Catalogue*, vol. III and IV (1832-1863), Oxford, 1986.

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Sailboat group:

5) Kunsthau Zürich (E. G. Bührlé Collection), Johnson no. 455, signed and dated lower right *Eug. Delacroix 1853*, oil on canvas, H. 0,60 m; W. 0,73 m.

6) Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Johnson no. 456, dated 1854, oil on canvas, H. 0,60 m; W. 0,73 m.



Metropolitan Museum, New York (H. O. Havemeyer Collection), ca. 1853, oil on canvas, H. 0,51 m; W. 0,61 m.



Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, ca. 1841, oil study, H. 0,46 m; W. 0,55 m.



Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, dated 1854, oil on canvas, H. 0,60 m; W. 0,73 m.



Kunsthau Zürich (E. G. Bührlé Collection), 1853, oil on canvas, H. 0,60 m; W. 0,73 m.

Delacroix was profoundly attracted by this Biblical subject² showing Christ asleep during a storm on his boat, his disciples terrified in a raging sea. He referred to the subject as early as 1824-1826 in a sketchbook at the Louvre.³ The painter had just enjoyed his first

² Matthew 8, 23-27; Mark 4, 35-41; Luke 8, 22-25.

³ Louvre sketchbook 1750, inv. RF 9145, quoted by Michèle Hannoosh, *Eugène Delacroix: Journal*, Paris, 2009, t. I, p. 1454-1455.

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success with *Dante and Virgil in Hell*, also called *The Barque of Dante*, a large painting bought by the royal administration following its exhibition at the 1822 Salon.

From 1841, Delacroix began to work on the theme of Christ on the Sea of Galilee, and painted the first two pictures. He returned to the theme in 1853-1854 when he made four other versions of it. They are all quite small paintings, intended probably for friends or collectors. The most famous painting of this series is the one at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, for which our sketch could be a preparatory study.

The figures' expressionism, the impetuous and unleashed handling, the dark and intense colours gave rise to great admiration. The Metropolitan Museum version was exhibited amongst others, at the exhibition *Maîtres du Siècle*,⁴ organized in April and May 1886 at Gustave Doré's former studio in Paris. On that occasion, the painting left a lasting impression on Vincent van Gogh who mentioned it in six letters to his brother Theo and to Emile Bernard. Thus, Van Gogh wrote to Bernard on 2 June 1888: "Ah – E. DELACROIX's beautiful painting – Christ's boat on the sea of Galilee, he – with his pale lemon halo – sleeping, luminous – within the dramatic violet, dark blue, blood-red patch of the group of stunned disciples. On the terrifying emerald sea, rising, rising all the way up to the top of the frame."⁵

⁴ *Exposition de Maîtres du Siècle. [1786-1886]*, April-May 1886, Paris, 1886, p. 10, no. 78.

⁵ Van Gogh to Emile Bernard, 26 June 1888, in Fritz Erpel (éd.), *Vincent van Gogh. Recueil des lettres*, t. 5, Borhheim-Merten 1985, p. 261.

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