

RÖBBIG · MÜNCHEN

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SUITE OF FOUR GOUACHES: VIEWS OF ROME

JEAN-BAPTISTE LALLEMAND (DIJON 1716 - PARIS 1803)

View of the Castel Sant'Angelo, the Ponte Sant'Angelo and the Vatican

Gouache on paper

Signed bottom left "Lalma. f."

36 x 53 cm

View of the Pons Aemilius

Gouache on paper

Signed bottom left "Lalma. f."

36 x 53 cm

View of the Forum Romanum with the Temple of Saturn, the Arch of Septimius Severus and the Church of SS Luke and Martina

Gouache on paper

No visible signature

36 x 53 cm

View of the Arch of Constantine

Gouache on paper

Signed bottom right "Lalma. f. R."

36 x 53 cm

All these four works on paper show views of ancient Roman buildings and monuments set in Rome as Lallemand knew it in his own day. The first painting is a view from the left bank of the Tiber of the Castel Sant'Angelo, which was originally built by Emperor Hadrian in the second century to serve as his mausoleum and then made into a castle under Popes Nicholas V and Alexander VI. The right-hand half of the picture is dominated by the large fortress with its round central construction, while in the other half the view to the left is closed off by a simple row of houses. In the foreground the shore of the Tiber is brought alive by a few staffage figures and animals; in the middle ground, straddling the strong diagonal axis of the river, we see the Ponte Sant'Angelo with its statues of angels by Gianlorenzo Bernini clearly visible against a backdrop crowned by the basilica of St Peter on the horizon.

The second gouache shows the Pons Aemilius, which dates from the year 174 BC. Although all that remains of the "Ponte Rotto" today is one section standing out on its own on the bed of the Tiber, until 1885 it still had three stone arches and was accessible from the river bank. The construction of this view is very similar to that of the Castel Sant'Angelo. The truncated bridge dominates the middle ground of the right-hand side of the picture, the strongly diagonal orientation of which results from the point of view carefully chosen by the artist. This manner of composition also serves to lead the eye on into the background, which is rendered with a soft and gentle touch and shows the left bank of the river Tiber and the buildings standing above it. In the foreground the bank curves around towards us to close off the picture on the left with a scene featuring bathers.

The third picture of this series of four is a view of the Forum Romanum, depicted from a point on the lower ground between the Palatine and the Capitol. On one side are the remains of the temple of Saturn, in front of which stands a simple house. On the same axis, beyond a lateral view of the three-spanned Arch of Septimius Severus (203 AD), rises the high Baroque church of St Luke and the Roman martyr St Martina, the facade of which is rendered in considerable detail. The church also forms the beginning of a line of houses, the outlines of which are rendered with sfumato technique and fade into the distance in a soft, diffuse light. The two Romans taking their ease on column stumps and pedestals in the foreground are the most prominent of a number of staffage figures that bring life into the picture as a whole.

The last of the four gouaches shows the Arch of Constantine, which dates from 312 AD and is the latest and largest of its kind in Rome. It is clearly recognisable as such on account of the warrior figures on the attic storey and the relief fields and tondi on the sides and front. While the arch dominates the right-hand side of the picture, the left-hand half opens onto a hilly Italian landscape which incorporates a small section of the Colosseum on the far left. Once again, staffage figures and animals bring life and movement into the foreground.

A particularly distinctive and characteristic feature of Lallemand's views is their asymmetrical composition. While these four gouaches are far from being capricci, the artist does not seem to have been primarily concerned to provide detailed or even accurate renderings of these notable examples of ancient Roman architecture but, rather, to integrate them harmoniously with the urban landscape. The French artist achieved this in a remarkably atmospheric manner through a soft and seamless gradation of tones and colours.

Jean-Baptiste Lallemand was born in Dijon in 1716 and entered the Parisian Académie de Saint-Luc in 1745, one year after having received his master title. Between 1747 and 1761 Lallemand lived in Rome, by which time he was already well known for the high quality of his landscapes and marine pictures.

As early as 1666 the foundation of the Académie de France in Rome had predestined the Eternal City to become a choice travel destination for French students and lovers of art. At this institution the best student painters, sculptors, and architects of the Paris Academy had the opportunity to spend four years in Italy with the principal aim of studying antiquity and Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting. But it was not only for purely artistic and historical reasons that Rome was such a significant city for French artists; it was also a place where they made formative acquaintances and friendships. During his time in Italy Lallemand got to know some of the leading landscape artists of his time, including Hubert Robert (1733–1808) and Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714–1789). The example of the latter, along with that of Giovanni Paolo Pannini (c. 1692–1765), clearly exerted an influence on his views of Rome.

During his years in Rome Lallemand received a large number of important commissions. His gouaches gave him access to a particularly lucrative market niche, because with their colours they made a more perfect and complete visual impression than pure drawings and thus fetched higher prices, and they were less time-consuming to produce than oil paintings. In 1761 Lallemand finally returned to France, where he continued his work as a landscape painter and also branched out into different subjects. Lallemand's oeuvre includes architectural views and heroic landscapes with ancient architectural ruins, idyllic landscapes with staffage figures and animals, marine and animal paintings, history painting and genre painting, the latter under the inspiration of the Dutch seventeenth-century masters. Paintings by Lallemand are preserved in such museums as the following: Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon; Musée de la Révolution, Vizille; Louvre, Paris; Musée Carnavalet, Paris; Musée de Brou, Bourg-en-Bresse; and the Hermitage, St Petersburg. Further views of Rome by Lallemand are in the possession of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and of the Horvitz Collection, Cambridge, Mass. (see exh. cat. Ottawa 2011, cat. nos. 60 and 73).

Literature:

Exh. cat. Ottawa 2011

Drawn to Art: French Artists and Art Lovers in 18th-Century Rome. Edited by Sonia Couturier. Exh. cat. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 21 October 2011 – 2 January 2012 .

