

CHARLES MICHEL-ANGE CHALLE

1718 - Paris - 1778

Vue d'une glacière à Champigny

Black and white chalk on blue paper.

Signed at the lower right: *Challe* (erased). On the verso inscribed in pen and brown ink: *Vue d'une Glacière à Champigny | par M.A. Challe* (the artist's name erased), and numbered: *No 27*. Inscribed by a later hand in pencil: *élève de Boucher* (erased). Inscribed by a later hand in pencil: *J. B. Oudry 1686-1755*.

293 x 435 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, South Germany

Charles Challe first trained as an architect but went on to study painting in the studios of François Lemoyne and François Boucher. He won the *Prix de Rome* in 1741 and went to Rome to study at the Académie de France as a *pensionnaire du Roi*. Finding favour with Jean-François de Troy, the Director of the Academy, he was able to extend his studies to 1749. In Rome, Challe made the acquaintance of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, who was to have a formative influence on his artistic output. He imitated Piranesi's free drawing style, particularly in his architectural drawings and his designs for festive decorations. Almost all these drawings were executed in pen and ink.

Although landscape drawing fell outside the curriculum of the Académie de France, it was to grow increasingly popular among French art students in Rome in the 1740s. Challe is known to have made chalk drawings from nature depicting Roman views. He worked in a fairly large format, using black and white chalks on blue or buff paper and applying bold but soft strokes to create strong contrasts of light and dark. This technique was probably indebted to Boucher's Roman landscapes executed a decade earlier. Back in Paris, Challe's ambitions as a history painter fell victim to the negative critical reception of his work at the biennial Salons. Diderot was a particularly harsh critic though praising him as a draughtsman. He noted: *Challe has brought back from Italy in his portfolio several hundred views drawn from nature in which there is grandeur and truth*. In 1765, Challe was appointed *dessinateur de la Chambre et du Cabinet du Roi* and kept busy with the design of stage sets and decorations for funerals and festivities in a style influenced by Piranesi.¹

As the inscription on the verso of the present sheet states, the drawing depicts the entrance to an ice house at Champigny, a village situated on the river Marne southwest of Paris. The sheet owes much to Boucher both stylistically and in choice of scene. But the blue paper and the handling of white accents show similarities with Jean-Baptiste Oudry's drawings of the duc de Guise's park at Arcueil. The intermingling of black and white chalk on the blue paper creates an attractive pictorial effect. A variant of this composition was sold at auction in Paris on 27 March 2003. The composition was signed and executed on the pinkish-beige paper common to many of Challe's drawings [fig. 1]. Two figures are depicted – a sleeping woman and a man watching her. The figures are overly small in relation to

¹ The biographical overview is based on Perrin Stein's entry in *French Drawings from the British Museum, Clouet to Seurat*, exhib. cat., British Museum, London and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2005, p. 134, no. 53.

the architecture. When compared with the present sheet the composition would appear to have been slightly enlarged at both sides and the walls, trees and wine barrel stretched as if to fill the space. A reworked, signed counterproof, presumably executed after the present drawing, is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York [fig. 2].² It shows the figure of a man seated near the entrance to the ice house. The figures discernible in the doorway in the wall are identical to those depicted in the present drawing.

The present sheet is of finer quality than the other two versions. The ductus is more spontaneous and more highly differentiated. Much of the detail is more clearly defined and the rendering of depth more convincing. The fresh condition, particularly in relation to the colour of the paper and the strong layers of chalk, enhances the attractiveness of the drawing. It is thus not surprising that in the past it was attributed to a more famous draughtsman, namely Oudry.



Fig. 1: *Bergère endormie devant une chaumière*, black and white chalk on pinkish-beige paper; signed: *M.A. Challe*, numbered: *no 49*; 300 x 468 mm. Paris, Drouot-Richelieu (Thierry de Maigret), auction sale, 27 March 2003, lot 96



Fig. 2: *Farmyard*, black and white chalk; grey wash, over a black chalk counterproof; signed in pen and black ink *M.A. Challe*; 301 x 474 mm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York [inv. no. 68.105]

² See Jacob Bean and Lawrence Turcic, *15th-18th Century French Drawings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1986, pp. 56-7, no. 54, repr. – John Baskett, *Exhibition of Old Master and English Drawings*, London 1968, cat. no. 43.