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# JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID

1748 Paris - Bruxelles 1825

*Vieillard en buste, vu de face, la tête drapée*

Black chalk; *c.*1818.
160 x 115 mm

PROVENANCE: Paragraphs of Eugène (L. 839) and Jules (L. 1437) David lower right – Probably sale David, Paris, 17 April 1826 (and following days) – Hôtel Drouot, Étude Massol (without catalogue), 6 march 2002 – Galerie Ratton-Ladrière, Paris – Private collection, Paris

LITERATURE: Pierre Rosenberg, Louis-Antoine Prat: *Jacques-Louis David. 1748-1825. Catalogue raisonné des dessins,* Milan 2002, vol. II, p. 1279, no. 340 bis (repr.)

EXHIBITION: *Dessins anciens*, Galerie Ratton-Ladrière, Paris 2002

When news of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, on June 18, 1815, arrived Paris, David knew his position would be precarious under the restored Bourbon monarchy, given his history as a regicide and his close relationship with Napoleon during both the Empire and the Hundred Days. Returning back from Paris from a trip to Switzerland and Eastern France, he was sentenced to banishment from France, along with many others who were politically active during the Revolution. Out of respect for his exceptional talent, David was given the opportunity to renounce his past actions and remain in France, but he refused. On January 27, 1816, he and his wife arrived in Brussels.[1]

It can no longer be said that the late work of David after 1816 is neglected[2]. The way he exploited the grain of the paper with a soft crayon noir produced a rough and velvety visual effect that is at times strikingly close to lithography[3]. For David in exile, the appeal of its distinctive style was favourably overdetermined, since satirists rallied to the liberal opposition employed it, and even distinguished artists as Gúerin, Regnault, Gros, and Girodet gave it a try. David's drawing technique thus imbued with a well-defined air of modernity[4].

With the publication of the catalogue raisonné of David's drawings in 2002 by Louis-Antoine Prat and Pierre Rosenberg, the full range of his output can be appreciated. If one includes some drawings from 1815 that are extremely close in style and spirit to those that follow, about one hundred and thirty sheets can be assigned to the last ten years of his life. Of these, roughly fifty are studies of single heads (many can qualify as *têtes d'expression*), and forty are portraits. The present drawing is stylistically

[1] Perrin Stein, *Jacques Louis David – Radical Draftsman*, in exhib. cat., the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2022, p. 247.
[2] Perrin Stein, New York 2022, op. cit., p. 254.
[3] The technique, imported from Germany, was experimented since the beginning of the century, but was mostly considered a *produit de l'industrie* until 1816 (see Godefroy Engelmann, *Recueil d'essay lithographiques, Royal Academie des Beaux-Arts*, Paris 1815). After a few short years of presence at the Salons, lithography was duly annexed to the fine arts.
[4] Philippe Bordes, in exhib. cat., *Jacques-Louis David – Empire to Exile*, The Jean-Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles 2005, p. 265.

comparable to a small group of thirty sheets, having certain characteristics in common, merit to be considered a set apart, as Arlette Sérullaz first observed in 1989[5]. They represent bust-length or half-length figures - in David's words, « des figures coupées »[6] - usually dressed in costumes inspired by antiquity or the Renaissance, and perhaps most important, assembled without a clear narrative intention [fig. 1]. They are all about the same size and were probably drawn on pages torn from sketchbooks[7].

*Vieillard en buste, vu de face, la tête drapée* is a beautiful and rare example from the artist's late period in exile in Brussels, It is among the sensitively observed and drawn studies.




Fig.1: *Buste de viueillard échevelé, légèrement tourné vers la droite*,
crayon noir, 220 x 179 mm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen (inv. no. 975-4-2281)

[5] Arlette Sérullaz, in *Jacques-Louis David*, exhib. Cat., Paris and Versailles, 1989-90, p. 548.
[6] Letter to Navez, dated 22 Mar. 1818. See Daniel and Guy Wildenstein, *Documents complémentaires au catalogue de l'œuvre de Louis David*, Paris 1973, p. 210, no. 1814.
[7] Philippe Bordes, op. cit., p. 266.