Drawing - Les trois commères

Object: Drawing

Place of origin: Paris

Date: late 1850s

Artist/Maker: Daumier, Honoré, born 1808 - died 1879

Materials and Techniques: Pen and black ink over black chalk, heightened with white

Museum number: CAI.122

Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level C, case IONIDES, shelf 3

Public access description

This drawing showing three gossip women is emblematical of Honoré Daumier (1808-79)'s work. The artist was well versed in the workings of lifestyle and theatrical scenes, showing the different social classes in a relevant and humorous way. Daumier’s expressive faces and compositions reveal his interest for individuality. His career has been deeply marked by his caricatures lithographed in different French newspapers such as La Caricature and Le Charivari. It is not unlikely that this drawing was intended as a preparatory study for an engraving executed in the late 1850s.

Descriptive line

Drawing, 'Les trois commères' by Honoré Daumier, French School, 19th century

Physical description

Three elderly women gossiping between each other, the woman on the left is holding a candle, the one in the centre is praying, teh woman on the right is holding an unidentified object (a cross?). On the top right, a faded profile sketch.

Dimensions

Height: 164 mm, Width: 262 mm

Museum number

CAI.122

Object history note

C.A. Ionides, by whom bequeathed to the museum in 1900.

Historical context note

This drawing depicts a scene of everyday life characterised by a hint of humour and a great attention to details. The linear treatment of the figures is emblematical of Daumier’s vigorous style, and reminiscent of his caricatures for the satirical journal Le Charivari.

These three gossiping women are drawn with an accurate realism. We can imagine that the woman on the right side just learnt of a ‘crucial’ information she wants to share with her friends. The two other women obviously overreact in their own way: showing a very surprising face or praying in a desperate attitude. The gravity of the situation is grown by the clenched gesture of the main character. The dramatic atmosphere is clearly inspired by the theatre.

Two other versions of the same composition can be found: one in a private collection, Chicago (see Maison 694); and another of whereabouts unknown (see Maison 696). A watercolour shows a full-length version of the Trois Commères set in a dark staircase (M. Georges Encil collection, Montreal – Maison 697). According to the Bibliothèque nationale de France, all these drawings have been realised as a reprise of the 1852 lithograph published in the series Actualités (sheet 277) of Le Charivari. This engraving represents three women in a staircase talking about the recent earthquake in Bordeaux.

However, another lithograph published in Le Charivari entitled La Comète de 1857 (ill. 2925 in Le Peintre-Graveur, Honoré Daumier by Loys Deleti) seems to resume exactly the same expressions as in the V&A commères, which could be in fact a preparatory sketch for this late engraving. In this regard, the present drawing could dated in the late 1850s.

Daumier was most celebrated during his life time for his satirical and anti-monarchist illustrations rather than his paintings and drawings. This sheet is a good example of Daumier’s observation of the French society and social classes. It focuses on his observation and interest for theatrical production. He did a few series of sketches focusing on different categories such as musicians, comedians, art collectors, rustic life, saltimbanques...

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O517503/les-trois-commeres-drawing-daumier-honore/