

# S P H I N X F I N E A R T



**Karl Pavlovich Bryullov (St. Petersburg 1799 - Marciano 1852)**

## **Greek Lying on a Rock**

signed with monogram (upper right)

ink on paper

21.7 x 26 cm (8<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in)

lumped against a rock, the Greek casually gazes up at the viewer, leaning his head on his right arm. The sword, propped against the man's legs, lies redundant and the composition is awkward; this may suggest that the weapon was a last minute addition, perhaps to identify the Greek as a soldier. The lazy and relaxed posture of the man contrasts with the concerned expression of his face. The man appears weary and his face is cast down, however, his eyes stare wildly out at the viewer. This might suggest that the drawing was completed in a short space of time, perhaps from life, when the artist travelled through Greece. However, it could also be that Karl Pavlovich Bryullov depicted the man's eyes in such a manner in order to evoke the common nineteenth-century perception of the East as a wild and mysterious place.

The roughly drawn background indicates a wild and sparse landscape, and in the distance an architectural form can be seen atop a rocky hill. The inclusion of a background gives the painting a sense of depth and these compositional experiments may indicate that Bryullov was planning another work, perhaps a painting, based on this drawing.

Bryullov's work is rich with emotion and imagination. *Greek Lying on a Rock* is representative of the artist's observations from his travels. Bryullov's interest in the clothing and accessories of the Greek is apparent by his detailed and descriptive depiction.

Bryullov was the Russian son of an Italian sculptor; he enrolled at the Imperial Academy, St Petersburg at the early age of nine and studied from 1809 to 1821 under Andrei Ivanov (1772-1848). Bryullov never fully embraced the neo-Classical style taught by the Academy, preferring instead realistic accuracy counter-balanced with a love of romanticised melodrama. He travelled to Rome after completing his studies and established himself as a promising and imaginative student. Bryullov predominantly worked as a portrait and genre painter, however, he is best known for his historical painting *The Last Days of*

*Pompeii*, 1830-1833. The subject matter is classical, but his dramatic treatment and generous use of chiaroscuro renders the painting somewhat farther advanced than the neo-Classical style. Before returning to Russia, Bryullov travelled to Greece, Turkey and Asia Minor and as 'a master of drawing, sepia and watercolour' produced a suite of studies of Greece; the present drawing is most probably part of this set of works.<sup>2</sup> The State Tretyakov Gallery has a similarly titled and more complete drawing, probably depicting the same man (fig. 1). On his return to Russia in 1835, he became a professor and between 1843 and 1847 he undertook the decorations for St. Isaacs's Cathedral. He has works in many collections throughout Europe and is remembered as 'one of the most significant Russian painters'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd, B.G., *The St. Petersburg State Academic Institute of Fine Arts, Sculpture and Architecture*, (St. Petersburg, 2001), p.112.

<sup>2</sup> Boime, A., *Art in an Age of Counterrevolution, 1815-1848*, Vol. 3, (Chicago, 2004), p. 269.

### **Artist description:**

Bryullov was born into an artistic family and showed an outstanding talent for drawing at an early age. He studied at the Imperial Academy of Arts from 1809 to 1822 and graduated with a first-class gold medal. He was sponsored on a journey to Italy, along with his brother, by the Society for the Encouragement of Arts in 1822. He remained there for thirteen years, working in Milan, Naples and Rome, where he painted his most famous work, *The Last Day of Pompeii* (Russian Museum, St. Petersburg). This dramatic and powerful piece, combining Renaissance Classicism with realism and intensity of emotion, was inspired by archaeological research, Pliny's (23-79) account, and Pacini's (1796-1867) opera of 1825 based on the historical event. The painting gained widespread admiration in Rome and throughout Europe, was praised by Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) and was also the subject of a poem by Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837). A contemporary claimed that, 'the last day of Pompeii became the first day of Russian painting'.

Having cemented his reputation as one of the finest European painters of his day, Bryullov triumphantly returned to St. Petersburg in 1835, where he enjoyed a privileged place among the aristocracy and intellectual elite of the city.

Bryullov quickly became professor of the Imperial Academy of Arts and was also a professor of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, in addition to contributing to exhibitions in Rome, Milan and Paris. With his health deteriorating Bryullov left Russia for Madeira in 1849. He spent the last three years of his life in Rome and was buried in the Cimitero degli Inglesi.