

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



Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg, R.A. (Strasburg 1740 - Chiswick 1812)

Two Men, One Sleeping

with inscription 'J. Loutherbourg' (on the mount)

pen and black ink, grey wash

13.6 x 12.4 cm (5³/₈ x 4⁷/₈ in)

In this drawing Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg has shown a robbery in process. One man is fast asleep; the spilt flagon suggesting that he is either drunk or has possibly been drugged. The second man looms over the sleeping figure, his arm outstretched. It appears that he is about to steal whatever the sleeping figure cradles in his arms. The thief is dressed in torn, ragged clothing, has a straggling beard and long, unkempt hair. His appearance suggests that he is an impoverished street thief and his sly, gleeful grin confirms his wickedness. The prominently positioned flagon is decorated with an oriental text, thus the present work possibly shows the robbery of a naive foreigner.

In *Two Men, One Sleeping* the robber's clothing strongly reflects his character. His costume quickly establishes his role in the image and the focus on costume is a feature in several of de Loutherbourg's drawings, such as [Man in Uniform](#). Although this drawing has no narrative, as it is a study of the figure of an officer in his uniform, like the figure of the thief in *Two Men, One Sleeping*, the viewer gains an immediate, concise and clear insight into the officer's character. His tight-fitting jacket accentuates his rather portly figure, and as it clings to his large stomach, the buttons seem on the verge of popping off. It

creates a slightly comical appearance although the man is clearly well-off. His chubbiness, confident upright bearing and his jolly, round face creates an image of a well fed, upper class man that is ever so slightly mocking. This is an example of the characteristic humour found in de Louthembourg's work.

De Louthembourg's father, Philipp Jakob (1698-1768) was an engraver and miniature painter to the court of Darmstadt. In 1755, he took his family to Paris, where de Louthembourg became a pupil of Carle van Loo (1705-1765). At this early stage he specialised in landscape painting but the focus of these works was often on the foreground figures, which are framed by natural formations that occasionally fall away to reveal distant horizons. His original style was extremely popular with the French public but in 1771 he went to London, intending to take advantage of the wealthy English market. Here he met the English actor and manager David Garrick, who employed de Louthembourg as his chief scene designer at the Drury Lane Theatre. De Louthembourg became the most inventive set designer in eighteenth-century Europe. His lighting and sound effects, use of puppets and models, introduction of painted act drops between scenes and the diversity of his stage pictures set a precedent for all future attempts at theatrical illusion. *Two Men, One Sleeping* is itself a very theatrical drawing, with the dramatic gesture of the thief and the clarity of the narrative. De Louthembourg's work became characterised by its variety, from landscape to caricature and he often adapted his art to suit the market. De Louthembourg was also a prolific illustrator, contributing twenty plates to John Bell's second edition of Shakespeare (1786-1788), as well as publishing his collections of engravings, *The Picturesque Scenery of Great Britain* (1801) and *The Picturesque and Romantic Scenery of England and Wales* (1805).

Provenance:

Louis Corot, Nimes (his stamp, Lugt. 1718).

Artist description:

Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg was an English artist of French origin.

He was born in Strasbourg where his father, the representative of a Swiss family, practised miniature painting. However, De Louthembourg spent the greater part of his life in London, where he was naturalised. He was educated at the University of Strasbourg.

He insisted on being a painter and placed himself under Charles-André van Loo (1705-1765) in Paris. The result was an immediate and precocious development of his abilities. De Louthembourg became a figure in the fashionable society of his time. In 1767 he was elected a member of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture although he was not old enough according to the rules of the institution. De Louthembourg painted landscapes, sea storms, battles, which were all very successful.

De Louthembourg then travelled to Switzerland, Germany and Italy, celebrated for his paintings as well as for his mechanical inventions. In 1771 De Louthembourg came to London and was employed by David Garrick (1717-1779), who offered him £500 a year to work at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane inventing mechanical devices and painting sets. Garrick's own play, the *Christmas Tale*, introduced the novelties to the public, and the delight not only of the masses but also of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) and the artists was unbounded. At the same time De Louthembourg was commissioned large naval pictures to commemorate British victories (National Maritime Museum, London).

De Louthembourg became a member of the Royal Academy in 1781. Shortly after, he decided to travel with the Count Alessandro di Cagliostro (1743-1795). In his final years, De Louthembourg took interest in faith healing and the philosopher's stone.

De Louthembourg died in 1812.