

FREDERICK NASH

(British 1782 - 1856)

The Seine, Looking Towards the Louvre and the Pont Royal

watercolour over pencil with bodycolour, scratching out and gum arabic
21.2 x 32.2 cm (8³/₈ x 12⁷/₈ in)

Provenance: Agnew's, London.

Literature: John Scott & P.B. de la Boissière, *Picturesque Views of the City of Paris and its Environs* (London, 1823), vol. 1, engraved; 'The Tuileries and Pont Royal'

THE PRESENT WORK DEPICTS ONE OF THE MOST famous of Parisian vistas; the exterior of the Louvre from across the Seine. In the foreground washerwomen have come to the edge of the water to rinse their cloths, and just down river. from them some horses are being watered. In *Picturesque Views of the City of Paris and its Environs*, for which the present work was engraved, these washerwomen are described as women 'with laughing eyes', with 'flapping white caps, richly coloured handkerchiefs, and bare fleshy arms...dragging and dabbling their linen in the Seine'. The river is filled with various barges and boats, as the people of Paris attempt to make a living. The poverty of these figures directly contrasts with the majesty of the Louvre on the right bank, an overt symbol of wealth, opulence and power. As our eye follows the palace and river back into the painting it settles on Pont Royal, the third oldest bridge in Paris, dating to 1632. The whole scene is bathed in the soft morning light which glimmers off the water, and under which the stone of the buildings gently glows.

The Louvre, today best known for housing the famous museum, was originally the site of a twelfth-century fortress, the foundations of which can still be seen. The medieval fortress was demolished in 1546 by King Francis I (1494-1547), in favour of a larger royal residence, and the building was constantly added to by subsequent monarchs. As a result the complex is made up of numerous varied pavilions. It was the seat of power in France in France until Louis XIV (1638-1715) moved to Versailles with his government in 1682, and today, in addition to the museum, the palace also houses various government departments.

The first bridge to be constructed where the Pont Royal now stands was the Pont Sainte-Anne. This was a wooden toll-bridge, built in 1632, where previously there had only been a ferry. However, this bridge suffered an eventful but short life, being repaired in 1649, rebuilt in 1651, burnt in 1654, flooded in 1656, rebuilt in 1660 before finally being carried away by a flood in 1684. In its place was built the stone Pont Royal, so named as it was financed by Louis XIV, although it was temporarily renamed Pont des Tuileries during the First French Empire (1804-1814).

Paris played a crucial role in Frederick Nash's career. In addition to *Picturesque Views of the City of Paris and its Environs*, Nash's depictions of



Frederick Nash, *Pont Neuf and Pont des Arts*, 1824, Tate Britain, London (Figure 1)

the city were also published in *Panorama of Paris; A Series of Thirty-Eight Views*. The Tate's *Pont Neuf and Pont des Arts*, see figure 1, depicts a view just upriver from the present work. It is constructed in a similar manner to the present work, with a few humble Parisians occupying the river bank in the foreground, which gives way to the great bridges and buildings of the city in the background. Both works are executed in Nash's expressive brushwork, painted in a relatively narrow palette which unifies the work.

Nash was born in London and was a pupil of Thomas Malton (1748-1804), one of the major architectural painters of the age. His work first started to appear at the Royal Academy in 1800 and he continued to exhibit there until 1847. In 1808 he was elected a member of the Watercolour Society, where he exhibited nearly 500 works, and the present work is testament to his skill in the medium. In addition to Paris, he toured many of the great European cities, depicting his favoured architectural views. His work found favour with many of the most noted contemporary artists including Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), Benjamin West (1859-1931) and J. M. W. Turner (see inventory), who is said to have considered Nash to be the finest architectural artist of the day.

