



Giacinto Massola, Episode Of The Retreat Of The French Army From Russia

1 250 EUR



Signature : GIACINTO MASSOLA

Period : 19th century

Condition : Bon état

Material : Paper

Length : 48,5 cm

Height : 32 cm

Description

GIACINTO MASSOLA
EPISODE OF THE
RETREAT OF THE FRENCH ARMY FROM
RUSSIA
GIACINTO MASSOLA Sarzana, 1820 -
Genoa, 1865
Pencil and grey wash with white
heightening on toned paper
32 × 48.5 cm / 12.6 ×
19.1 in
Framed: 53 × 70.5 cm / 20.9 × 27.8
in
Museum mount; frame in the style of the
1930s
This drawing depicts a rare subject in
mid-nineteenth-century Italian art: the retreat of
Napoleon's Grand Army from Russia. Giacinto
Massola's engagement with this theme marks a
significant moment in his artistic development
and reflects a broader transformation in his
approach to historical subject matter during the
early 1850s. In 1851, Massola undertook an
extended journey to London and subsequently to
Paris, where he found himself at the centre of

Dealer

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Europe's most dynamic artistic environment. The culmination of this experience was his visit to the Paris Salon of 1851, the largest and most influential art exhibition of the nineteenth century. The Salon offered an unparalleled panorama of new artistic forms, a wide range of subjects and techniques, and an exceptional opportunity to compare differing approaches to painting and drawing. The impact of this encounter proved decisive for Massola's artistic outlook. During this period, the academic foundations of his art began to evolve, giving way to a stronger late Romantic sensibility. This shift is reflected in the emergence of themes that were highly unusual within the Italian tradition, including dramatic interpretations of the Napoleonic wars and, in particular, the tragic episode of the French army's retreat from Russia. The choice of subject can be understood as an echo of Massola's exposure to the work of two major painters of the mid-nineteenth century, Paul Delaroche and, above all, Ary Scheffer. In their art, the Napoleonic campaigns occupied a central place and served as a vehicle for moral and historical reflection. Massola offers his own interpretation of this legacy, restrained in tone yet profoundly tragic in its emotional register. In this drawing, the artist employs a distinctive technique of working with white highlights on toned paper. This choice is not only closely aligned with the subject itself, but also plays a crucial expressive role. The white passages evoke snow, frozen air, and a heavy winter sky, while simultaneously heightening the dramatic tension of the scene. Through this technical approach, Massola avoids overt heroism and instead focuses on exhaustion, vulnerability, and the silent weight of collective catastrophe. The drawing occupies a distinctive place within the artist's oeuvre, illustrating his sustained interest in historical themes reinterpreted through emotional experience and ethical reflection. Here, history is not presented as a triumphal narrative, but as a space of human suffering and loss.