

SNACKERS ANTIQUES & FINE ART



Paris en Helena

Oil on canvas

This painting of Paris and Helena is by François Kinsoen. It is an exceptional work within the oeuvre of this painter, who became known primarily for his portraits.

The painting is signed F. Kinsoen. Its technique and execution are very similar to his portraits. It is exceptional because it is a history painting. It is possible that it is a portrait historié, but this cannot be proven, and if so, it is also exceptional within the artist's oeuvre.

Frans Jozef Kinsoen was the eldest son of a blacksmith named Frans Kinsoen in Bruges. He apprenticed at the Bruges Academy of Fine Arts under the painter Bernard Fricx (1754-1814) and the ornamentalist L.F. De Grave. In 1790, he was the first in his class to draw from life. To complete his apprenticeship, he moved first to Ghent and later to Brussels.

In 1794, when the unrest of the French Revolution had subsided somewhat, Kinsoen moved to Paris.

He settled there and married Augustine Le Prince on October 31, 1801. The marriage remained childless. Kinsoen integrated into Paris seemingly effortlessly, where after his marriage he painted several portraits of high-ranking figures. He maintained contact with Bruges and Belgium, not only in Paris, where he regularly met with compatriots, but also through visits to his homeland, where he also painted portraits. He painted several portraits of Napoleon and his entourage. In 1808, he was appointed court painter in Kassel to one of Napoleon's brothers, Jerome Bonaparte, the King of Westphalia. This marked a very successful period for Kinsoen, during which he painted numerous portraits. When the Bonaparte regime ended in 1813, Kinsoen found a new patron in the son of Charles Philippe of France, the Duke of Angoulême. He painted several portraits of princes, including those of the King of the Netherlands in his homeland. After 1830, when revolutions put an end to the reign of Charles X and that of the House of Orange in Belgium, Kinsoen continued to paint in Paris, primarily for ladies of the aristocracy. Kinsoen died in his birthplace during a visit to his family. Although he lived and worked in Paris for most of his life, he is now remembered as a Bruges painter.

Kinsoen's work was strongly influenced by that of Jacques Louis David (1748-1825). He may even have taken lessons from this painter. David's studio was freely accessible in those years, and as a result, David had at least 400 pupils, most of whom are unknown by name because their names were not recorded.

In the recently published catalogue raisonné, a separate chapter is devoted to his only known history painting to date, *Belisarius*, now in the museum in Bruges. He presented this painting at the 1817 Paris salon. It was received somewhat scornfully. Because Kinsoen was known to critics only as a portrait painter, this unexpected turn of events was met with surprise. Kinsoen would never sell the painting and, in 1836, donated it to the Bruges Academy, where he had received his first art lessons. The academy received it with thanks.

In his letter of gift, Kinsoen mentions a commission for a history painting for the city of Beauvais, which he ultimately never produced. The author of the book "*Kinsoen*" concludes that the *Belisarius* was Kinsoen's only history painting.

The painting "*Paris and Helena*" was unknown to him. It is possible that "*Paris and Helena*" was owned by the Bruges painter and sculptor Pierre Rousseau in the 19th century. On Monday, April 12, 1858, the following painting was auctioned under number 144 at the auction of his estate: "*Kinsoen (Signé) Mythological Subject.*"

It is, of course, tempting to assume that this is the "*Paris and Helena*." However, this cannot be proven. The somewhat strange title suggests that this is not unreasonable. While other paintings in this catalog are clearly described, the auctioneer was at a loss with this painting by Kinsoen. He labeled it as mythological. The same can be said for this painting. The subject of the painting is clearly mythological, given the figures' clothing. However, it's difficult to interpret because the subject isn't often seen. Why is this *Paris and Helen*?

Paris is known in art primarily for the Judgment of Paris. The subject depicted here is clearly connected to Paris, but the main subject of the judgment is not depicted. Why is this Paris? The apple of discord involved in the judgment lies before him, and Paris can be recognized by the Phrygian cap on his head. This is a typical symbol associated with Paris. The subject then becomes somewhat diffuse because the painter deviates here from the usual depictions of Paris. Here, Paris peers around the corner at a sleeping beauty. Behind him stands Aphrodite, the goddess to whom he gave the apple in exchange for the promise that she would help Paris win the love of the most beautiful woman on earth: Helen, daughter of Leda and wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Paris succeeds in abducting Helen and taking her to Troy. Menelaus mobilized the Greeks and marched his armies on Troy. Ultimately, after ten years, Troy fell thanks to a ruse, and Paris was killed.

H. 167.5 cm. W. 230 cm.