

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present *Theodore & Jules-Germain Olivier: Ecole des Beaux Arts Competition Watercolors and Project Drawings (1845-1900)*, on view July 14 thru August 15, 2005. Produced by an important architect and his son active in France during the golden era of industrialization, this collection of drawings offers an unusual view of a traditional 19th century architectural practice in transition to modernity. This body of work has been in a private collection in Toulouse, and is shown here for the first time. An essay by Meredith Martin, PhD candidate, History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University accompanies the exhibition.

As a group, these drawings and watercolors are elevations, plans and cross sections of public commissions of a sophisticated, regional office, which attracted clients seeking to emulate the new Parisian trends in industrial design or, opulent 18th century neoclassicism. Among the projects are an opera house, a racetrack field house with an observation tower, a train station, a winery, a domed theatre and a public bath with a glass cupola.

The exhibition also includes the Olivier's spectacular student competition drawings: a fortified military compound, an imposing neoclassical façade of a senate building and ink wash studies of Corinthian columns, all stamped with the Ecole imprimatur. These works document the unique rendering skills acquired at the Ecole where the trademark discipline was the capacity to reveal light and shadow on form in ink and watercolor washes. Digital technology will be challenged to achieve such luminous results.

Both Theodore and his son Jules-Germain were trained at the most prestigious architectural academy in France, the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, established by Louis XIV in 1671. When Théodore, born in Paris in 1821, entered the Ecole in 1842, he studied under the last proponents of the Neo-classical style, followers of Napoleon's architect Charles Percier. From 1850-1874 Theodore was chief architect of the département of Tarn-et-Garonne, near Toulouse. His son, Jules-Germain, was born in Montaugan in 1869 and moved to Paris to enroll in the Ecole in 1890, joining his father's firm thereafter.

The degree to which both Oliviers understood the central tenet of the Ecole – the supremacy of classicism - can be seen in their respective designs for an amphitheatre and an opera house. In Theodore's sumptuously rendered, oversized watercolor from around 1845 we observe the theatre slowly unfurling itself across the page from the strictly classical portico of its façade at left, through its entrance vestibule, main stage, all the way to the waiting room for the actors at the rear. The vaults and domes of Roman architecture are glorified in this cross section. Half a century later, Jules-Germain would begin his career at the dawn of the twentieth century, a time when the preoccupations of the previous era-an obsession with speed, utility and public works- had not only come to a head, but had been combined with a fascination for history. Jules-Germain would take up the same program, a theater, but would produce designs less inspired by the classical tradition than by recent achievements of the Second Empire: in fact, the son's design would seem to be an exact copy of Garnier's Paris Opera, were it not for the omission of two bays on the central façade and a slightly more symmetrical layout of the building's interior. Jules-Germain's elevation view of the opera in particular indicates that by the end of the nineteenth century young architects, while maintaining an interest in the Ecole's principles of composition, had become captivated by

the exciting, dramatic possibilities of a new, scenographic style. His generation sought to anchor the new in the old while refining the recent past.

These dramatic works on paper speak from a glorious moment when Paris, the undisputed center of culture in the Western world, and its academy of art and architecture, held on to the forms of the ancients while adapting to the materials and needs of the modern, industrial era.

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