JOHN MITCHELL

FINE PAINTINGS



Gabriel Loppé (1825 - 1913)

Bergün: Pont sur l'Albula au dessus de Bergün, 23 juillet
pencil on paper

9¼ x 11¾in. (23.5 x 30cm.)

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From the early to mid-1850s onwards Loppé produced hundreds of studies in oils and pencils made *en plein air* and some of these drawings of rocks, glaciers, torrents, bridges, footpaths, plants and conifers found favour with publishers. Financial independence was still a way off but from the sale of them he was able to raise money to cover his rent, the cost of his artist's materials and his excursions. Most of the pencil drawings were done on blue or ochre papers using white *gouache*, or bodycolour, for highlights. Loppé's style was careful and precise with detailed attention given to the handling of the foregrounds as well as recording the locations.

In 1854 Loppé received his first important illustration commission from a publisher: *La Savoie historique et pittoresque* was an ambitious two-volume work to contain over 130 drawings and Loppé would produce nearly two-thirds of them with a further three artists contributing the rest. Unfortunately, as

the completed book never materialized none of these drawings have ever been found. This relatively large body of work probably disappeared into some editor's vault in Chambéry never to be seen again. They may reappear one day but the recent discovery of an entire sketchbook by Loppé entitled *Voyages à Grisons* and dated on the cover 1866, is a good indicator of how the drawings would look.

There are very few oil paintings by Loppé of the Engadine region that have yet to come to light and as his diaries from the 1850s and 1860s have been lost, this appears to be the only known trip he took to Graubunden.

As with many of his Alpine drawings, the only colour that Loppé used was a white gouache which he applied to delineate waterfalls, clouds or glaciers. On some sheets the pigment has deteriorated naturally over time but the medium was obviously applied with a brush over the finished drawings. For a painter who was less at ease with painting rocks and trees in oils than snow and ice, it is interesting to see how delicately and accurately his pencil brought to life the rocky foregrounds and wooded areas in *Voyages à Grisons*.