

# JOHN MITCHELL

## FINE PAINTINGS



**Antoine Berjon (1754 - 1843)**

**A Basket of Roses and a Hydrangea on a Marble Ledge with a chequered Beetle**

oil on oak panel

14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 19 inches

signed

With fine Louis XVI carved and gilded antique frame

Provenance:

With Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 1965;

Sotheby's Monaco, 3rd December 1989, where acquired by John Mitchell & Son, London;

Private Collection, Europe, until 2023.

Literature:

Jacqueline Custodero, *Antoine Berjon (1754-1843), peintre lyonnais* (doctoral thesis, University of Lyon, 1985), no. 91, as whereabouts unknown;

Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier & Etienne Grafe, *Les Peintres de Fleurs en France de Redouté à Redon*, (Les Editions de L'Amateur 1992), col. pl. pp.128-9.

The appearance of this painting at an auction in Monte Carlo in 1989 coincided - perhaps happily for Sotheby's - with the height of my father's obsession with this elusive flower painter, and his commensurate desire to buy and acclaim the artist's work whenever possible. Few, alas, were the opportunities to do so, and in the intervening thirty-five years only a handful of paintings and drawings have been added to Berjon's recorded oeuvre, confirming my father's theory that, in spite of his long life, Berjon painted very few oils. In recent years two have been wisely bought by the Toledo Museum of Art and Stockholm's Nationalmuseum, this latter once discovered in a private collection in Lyons by our firm. Thus Berjon's fabled reputation today hangs on a handful of justly celebrated still lifes and the anecdotes of his rather cantankerous nature and reclusive ways.

Here, then, is one of them, a magical flowerpiece which my brother and I have always been intrigued to see, but which, until now, has been hidden away for a generation. In terms of quality it compares favourably with the exclusive cadre of museum examples, in particular the Louvre's *Bouquet de lis et de roses dans une corbeille posée sur une chiffonnière* of 1814, in which there is the same interplay between luxuriant flowers and the hard textures of woven basket and marble. With the composition filling all the pictorial space, and flowers or leaves reaching into three corners, this is unmistakably Berjon at his best; everyday summer flowers mysteriously achieve monumentality and neo-classical grandeur, and one is reminded why an early critic claimed, more than a century ago, that his paintings have 'la sensation de réalité et de beauté des meilleurs Chardin.'