Dear Sir,

After closely examining your double sided drawing, I can confirm that it is in fact an authentic drawing by Théodore Géricault. I am proposing the following entry:

Théodore Géricault (1791-1824)

- **Study of a female nude for the Erotic Trio (Trio érotique)**, recto. 1816-1817, Conté crayon on white paper (no watermark), 12.8 x 20.6 cm (measurements include the mount).
- **the Combat of Hercules and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons**, verso (reversed compared to the recto), and **Woman on the ground a woman in half-length** (reversed, as underlying sketch), 1816-1817, Conté crayon on white paper, 12.8 x 20.6 cm.
- This work will be included in the *Catalogue raisonné des dessins inédits et retrouvés de Théodore Géricault*, currently being prepared by Mr. Bruno Chenique.

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1°) **Study of a female nude for the Erotic Trio (Trio érotique)**, recto. 1816-1817, Conté crayon on white paper (no watermark), 12.8 x 20.6 cm (measurements take into account the mount).

According to Charles Clément, the first cataloguer of his work, Théodore Géricault created an erotic painting which he catalogued as follows:

“Paintings (1818-1820).

“[n°] 131. *Interior Scene*. A man holding a woman around the waist. Another woman is lying on a bed. A. Dantan jeune.

“H., 20. – L., 29 cent.1”

This painting was for a long time totally unknown until its reappearance on the art market in 1992. It is now at the Getty Museum (Los Angeles) with the rather more explicit title of *Three Lovers*.2

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The recto of the drawing which is the subject of this expertise is not only the first drawing known that is directly related to this painting, but it is an addition to a long series of erotic drawings which have gradually come to us, surviving decades of prudishness which Paul Huet evoked as early as 1857 during a tour around Normandy:

“I wanted to talk to you about Mortain, since I promised you. Following a family dispute, two or three old women own a few pictures by Géricault and a few hundred sketches. You can judge the desire I felt in glancing at these lost sheets by our great painter. Our attempts, it must be admitted, were unsuccessful. These witches, incapable of judging, or of benefitting from these works which chance has thrown into their hands, do not allow, it is said, anyone to glance at them; on the first day, a fire lit by some priest will end up devouring these drawings, on the pretext of nudity or other more or less diabolical or cabbalistic signs. Have therefore a home town and family, be Géricault, so that destiny can play in this way with your dreams of glory and thus with your entire existence of struggles and effort.”

Géricault’s eroticism, which is undoubtedly still not fully rediscovered, would not have been anything exceptional in itself if behind it one of the most fiery artists of the 19th century didn’t hide behind it, who challenged the academic standards of the grand genre in the same way that he transgressed the laws of marriage and incest. Among art historians, two pioneers have studied this series of drawings.

Yours, as I have already said, therefore wonderfully complements an entire series of erotic drawings like the one in the Jean Bonna collection in Geneva (which has only been known since 1994) showing an Embracing Couple (graphite, Conté crayon, pen and black ink, white gouache highlights on beige paper, 19.4 x 24.2 cm). The Coupling (Conté crayon, 14.6 x 23 cm) and, even more recently Susanna and the Elders (pencil 17.9 x 22.3 cm) drawn around 1815-1817.

Your drawing, as I have said, is on the other hand the first of these erotic drawings that can be directly related to the famous Three Lovers. Although some variants compared to the painted version should be mentioned, it is easy to agree that this is in fact a true preparatory study. I will point out the differences:

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7 This drawing, which was unpublished at the time, was sold by Sotheby’s, New York, 29 October 2002, p. 11, n° 5, repr; Bruno Chenique, “Désirs”, catalogue of the exhibition Géricault, la folie d’un monde, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 19 April - 31 July 2006, p. 138, n° 70, repr.
- The woman’s right arm is folded
- Her head is looking upwards
- Her body is completely naked and reveals her legs

Although the graphic style is still characteristically of Théodore Géricault in the years 1815-1817, it is nevertheless very hard, given the current state of research on Géricault, to say whether the painted version is contemporary with the artist’s sojourn in Italy (October 1816-November 1817), earlier, or slightly later (the canvas bears traces of the stamp of a French supplier).

This beautiful drawing of a female languid nude again dispels the myth according to which the painter was hardly interested in women.

Michelet, who was partly responsible for this legend, had the information from Belloc, a childhood friend of the painter. On 12 February 1846, during one of his lectures at the Collège de France, the historian lamented Géricault’s early death and exclaimed: “he was only at his period of struggle. Like so many others of the Empire, he was a hero. He had the period of grace (he could not yet make a woman and said to Mr. Belloc: “When I want to do a woman, it turns into a lion”)”. Expresssed again in 1848: “I start a woman,” he would say, “and it becomes a lion”, the phrase would be peddled by Théophile Gautier and validated by Clément.

Much later, the expression which had become famous would cause his paintings to be proclaimed as misogynistic, his masculine nature dominant, and the hypothesis of his homosexuality to be suggested. The final sentence in fact came from Chesneau: he never painted women. In 1867, Clément followed the general trend and amplified it: Géricault “did not, so to say, depict women. […] it seems that the audacious and erudite painter did not understand feminine beauty in what it has

13 Clément, 1868 and 1879, p. 218.
of delicacy and distinction. He said […] in a very informal way, in striking the shoulder
of one of his friends “We two X…, we love fat w…” he needed ample and robust
forms, well defined and violent movements”. 18

But when he used the adverb yet (“he could not yet do a woman”), Michelet did
not stipulate in any way any lack of interest whatsoever towards women. Quite the
contrary. Alert to the artist’s sexual morals, his criteria for beauty, eroticism and
sensuality, the historian took care to note in his Journal of 12 May 1840 the few
anecdotes he had been able to glean: “Géricault blushed for taking precautions to…
with his ephemeral mistresses. And when he was ill at ease from it, as a result, he
would say: How do you want me to degrade a beautiful creature with these
delinquencies? In the least noble pleasures, he retained something of the sentiment
of love (according to Belloc)”. 19

Clément’s assertions display a deliberate, if not puritan, desire to erase any
romantic relationship from Géricault’s life”. 20 In response to Houssaye’s letter, who
doubted that Clément knew much about the painter’s loves, Clément admitted to him
that one of his relations had in fact played “a lamentable role in Géricault’s life”. 21
The biographer was in fact perfectly aware of the birth of Géricault’s illegitimate son
on 21 August 1818, the fruit of his adulterous relationship with Alexandrine Modeste
Caruel (née de Saint-Martin), his uncle’s young wife. The secret was well kept and it
is only in 1885 that Antoine Etex mentioned the existence of this child and in 1976
that Michel Le Pesant revealed his mother’s name. 22

For Clément, therefore it was a question of obliterating all traces of this
scandalous incestuous relationship. An act of adultery for which at that time the two
lovers could have been punished by a two year prison sentence. 23 In other words,
the rebel in art was clearly coupled with a transgressive libertine who undermined
the symbolic maintenance of social order and its taboos. We understand the censorship
better.

In this context, the association of the woman and the lion is especially interesting
because it indicates on what level the artist’s sexual urges, which appear in his
famous erotic drawings, were experienced or fantasized.

Around the omnipotence of desire, Géricault explored the different phases of the
excesses of the drive and laid out a discourse on brute force, abduction, rape and
intercourse in art that is hardly obscene. Regarding these tragic hand to hand
combats Régis Michel writes: “according to Géricault, intercourse is only a pure
principle of instinctive violence: he aims to annihilate the other. […] Elsewhere,
Géricault denied the woman in her being (femininity), by saturating her body with
virile signs, where the muscle, phallic attribute par excellence, triumphed. Here he

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18 Clément, 1868 and 1879, p. 218.
19 Jules Michelet, Journal (1828-1848), complete text established and published by Paul Viallaneix, t. I,
Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 328; Bruno Chenique, “Le masque de Géricault ou la folle mémoire d’un
culte sentimental et nauséabond”, catalogue of the exhibition Le Dernier Portrait, directed by
20 Clément, 1879, p. 433, no 173 bis.
22 Antoine Etex, Les trois tombeaux de Géricault, 1837-1884, Paris, Perrin, 1885, p. 17; Le Pesant,
1976, pp. 75-81.
23 Patricia Mainardi, “Husbands, Wives and Lovers. Mazeppa or Marriage and its Discontents in
Nineteenth Century France”, symposium papers, Géricault, (Paris, Auditorium of the musée du Louvre,
collective publication directed by Régis Michel, t. I, Paris, La documentation Française, 1996, pp. 278-
280, 285.
destroys her in her body under the furious effect of mythological impulses. It is little to say that she is a victim."

The sadistic climate is added to by that of threat, jealousy and the war of the sexes, where men who are called Paris, Hercules and Mazeppa clash with women and in turn are the victims of their love.

Around 1822-1823, in one of his too rare love letters, Géricault questioned in this way the mystery of the difference between the sexes: “men are not made like women and they would be grossly wrong if they wanted to judge us by comparison, I do not want to talk about the physical difference, which as you know consists of very few things... but I mean the moral difference [...]. Have I already told you that I was very jealous, do you like that, it seems that it does not hurt when we have no reason to be so. Tell me do I have to reassure you?”

Since the physical is minor and this sexual difference creates an impossible, is it not vain to want to name what would be the relation between the man and woman. Before the enigma of this otherness, it would be important to be oneself. This is very clearly the Sadean program of the romantic revolt: to invent, through sexuality, a world that is unlimited in its freedom of expression, to extol absolute freedom from morals while refusing the alliance of freedom and virtue. Faithful to this line of thought, we should hardly be surprised that at the announcement of the dismissal of Decazes, Louis XVIII’s favourite minister, Géricault, like the far left, unleashed his political mockery and celebrated the news by fucking (he used the Italian chiavare).

Shortly before his death at the age of 32, Géricault confided again, to those close to him who recorded his words, the subjects he would like to treat if his strength allowed him: “I will also make a painting of horses, life size, and one of women. But of women of women,” he added, these last words implying the idea of the force which he hardly separated from beauty. In Géricault’s mouth, the repetition of the word woman is like a manifesto and the claim of an excess of desire.

2°) The Combat of Hercules and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, verso (reversed compared to the recto), and Woman on the ground a woman in half-length (reversed, as underlying sketch), 1816-1817, Conté crayon on white paper, 12.8 x 20.6 cm.

The recto of your drawing again contributes new information to the study of Géricault. We have additional proof that Géricault, while he was exploring sexual themes, was still interested in the life and exploits of Hercules.

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The theme of Hercules was an early one for Géricault. There are two depictions of Hercules in the famous Zoubaloff sketchbook in the Louvre, an early sketchbook worked on from 1810. In his catalogue, Clément, under numbers 86 and 87, listed two drawings of *Mars and Hercules* "nude and standing on a chariot" which he dates to the years 1816-1817 but the precise title of which we find on a list of subjects that Géricault was planning to work on in 1814: “Mars and Hercules on their chariot wanting to leave to help the [...] are separated by Jupiter who has launched a bolt of lightning between the [...] wanting to terrify [...].”

Géricault’s time in Rome (1816-1817) is often summarized by three subjects of major importance for which he prepared a very large number of drawings: the famous race of the riderless horses to which he had hoped to devote a monumental painting, the series of the Roman populace and robbers and finally the group devoted to the loves of the gods.

Of this series, Wheelock Whitney has recently brought to light – for the first time – the legendary figure of the demigod Hercules (son of Zeus and Alcmene), reproducing seven drawings by Géricault illustrating the episode of Hercules fighting the Nemean Lion, a panther and a bear – a series to which two other drawings have been added. In smothering the Nemean Lion, Hercules accomplished the first of the twelve tasks which he had been ordered to complete by Eurystheus (a great-grandson of Zeus) for having killed his wife and children as a result of a delirious episode caused by the jealous Hera (wife of Zeus).

In Rome, Géricault therefore seized the life and tasks of Hercules to make a large number of studies. The cycle opens with a magnificent drawing of *Hercules as a child, asleep*, and continues with the following tasks: *Hercules and the Nemean Lion* already mentioned; *Hercules and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons*; *Hercules Combating the Dragon in the Garden of the Hesperides* Paris, École des Beaux-Arts; *Hercules Replacing Atlas*. Other episodes from Hercules’ eventful life were also illustrated by Géricault: *Hercules and Lychas*; *Hercules saving Hesione from the dragon*; *Hercules and the Centaurs*. The Abduction of Deianeira, Hercules'...
Wife, by the Centaur Nessus.\textsuperscript{41} The cycle of Hercules’ exploits end finally with a landscape evoking the gift he had made to Philoctetes of his arrows so he could agree to light the pyre which would end his life: Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos, shooting a bird with Hercules’ arrows (Alger, Musée des Beaux-Arts).\textsuperscript{42}

An important drawing must be added to this list, which had been catalogued this way in 1867 by Clément: “Hercules raising a bull to his shoulders. Drawing in sepia with white gouache highlights and a blue sky. – A. Benoît-Champy. height, 120. – width., 170 mill.– [sic: the dimensions have been inversed]”.\textsuperscript{43} Finally it was classified in the section “(1816 to 1817)”, in other words the two years that correspond to Géricault’s Italian voyage (late September 1816 – late October 1817 to be precise).\textsuperscript{44} This drawing reappeared in December 2003, at Piasa under the title: Hercules and the Bull of Minos.\textsuperscript{45}

Hercules and Géricault, we understand, form an enigmatic couple which the biographers of the artist have to discuss. Why, during his Italian journey, did the artist take on the famous hero? The murderer of his wife and his children, Hercules is stricken by remorse and his masochistic tasks aim to repair the original fault (he is only a demigod). His twelve legendary tasks, like an initiatory journey aim to make him reborn in himself through the victory over his enemies and regenerating death (death on the pyre in order finally to reach Olympus).

Géricault created two further skilful compositions of Hercules’ hardships, catalogued and reproduced by Clément in 1867:
- “The Man driven by pleasure and madness”, from the His de La Salle collection\textsuperscript{46}
- “The Man tearing himself away from the arms of Vice. (this inscription which appears above the drawing is in Géricault’s hand.). The Herculean figure, which is repelling the various vices, is very powerful. – in pen. – A. M. Sauvé. Height, 170. – Width., 135 mm.”\textsuperscript{47}

In fact, Clément does not stipulate that it relates to episodes from the life of Hercules, even though he uses the expression “Herculean figure”. The titles that Géricault gave to his drawings apparently confirms that the vision he had of Hercules was not limited only to that of a slaughterer of monsters, a champion of strength, but that he also embodied a model of self control. Before being condemned to execute

\textsuperscript{40} Bazin, t. IV, 1990, p. 158, n° 1251.
\textsuperscript{42} Bazin, t. IV, 1990, pp. 102-103, n° 1088.
\textsuperscript{45} Importants dessins anciens et des XIXe – XXe siècles, Piasa, Bruno and Patrick de Bayser, experts, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, Room n° 11, 10 December 2003, p. 69, colo. repr.
his twelve tasks, we know that the young Hercules was sought after by Vice who dangled the pleasures of a soft and voluptuous life before him, while Virtue showed him the steep path that leads to honour and glory (it is a scene that Annibale Carracci placed at the centre of the Farnese Camerino, a painting now at the Capodimonte museum in Naples).

The third drawing by Géricault in pen and ink and broadly washed with india ink (whereabouts unknown) undoubtedly complements the two drawings already mentioned. It shows The Young Hercules Slaying a Lion, a Bear, a Tiger and a large Snake. Géricault annotated it: La force victorieuse de ses ennemis [Strength victorious over its enemies]. When commenting on this sketch in 1879, Étienne Charavay, claimed that Géricault apparently “in a way, has painted himself in this sketch”.48 The hypothesis is seductive and was repeated in 1912 by François Monod: “Géricault appears today as the symbolic centre of all the new forces which triggered the art of the century after David, like Heracles, who died too early, who carried in himself not only the pathetic and dramatic zeal of romanticism, but the same powerful sap of human and picturesque realism from which Millet, Daumier, Courbet came.”49 In 1983, Lorenz Eitner also wrote: “These works seem to be personal messages, which he possibly sent himself.”50

Hercules’ victorious strength associated with Géricault’s creativity (the father of Romanticism) would be in a way the emblem of a moral and aesthetic heroism, serving the combat of his enemies, in other words his internal monsters.

Therefore, we can understand perhaps even better the rediscovery of this drawing of the Combat of Hercules and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, of which a more finished version exists in a private collection (pen and brown ink, Conté crayon, brown wash and white gouache highlights, 13 x 19.7 cm).51

Your beautiful drawing (recto and verso) – in which we find the graphic style that is so typical of Géricault – was until now, completely unknown to the specialists on the artist. This explains its absence from Germain Bazin’s catalogue raisonné.

I can confirm to you that I will therefore reproduce this work in my future Catalogue raisonné des dessins inédits et retrouvés de Théodore Géricault.

Yours sincerely,

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48 Inventaire des autographes et des documents historiques composant la collection de M. Benjamin Fillon, séries IX et X, artistes, compositeur de musique, Baudry, auctioneer, Étienne Charavay, expert, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, room n° 4, 15-17 July 1879, p. 87, n° 1911.
51 B. Chenique, 2006, p. 140, n° 73, repr..