

PANCRACE BESSA

Paris, 1772 – Écouen, 1846

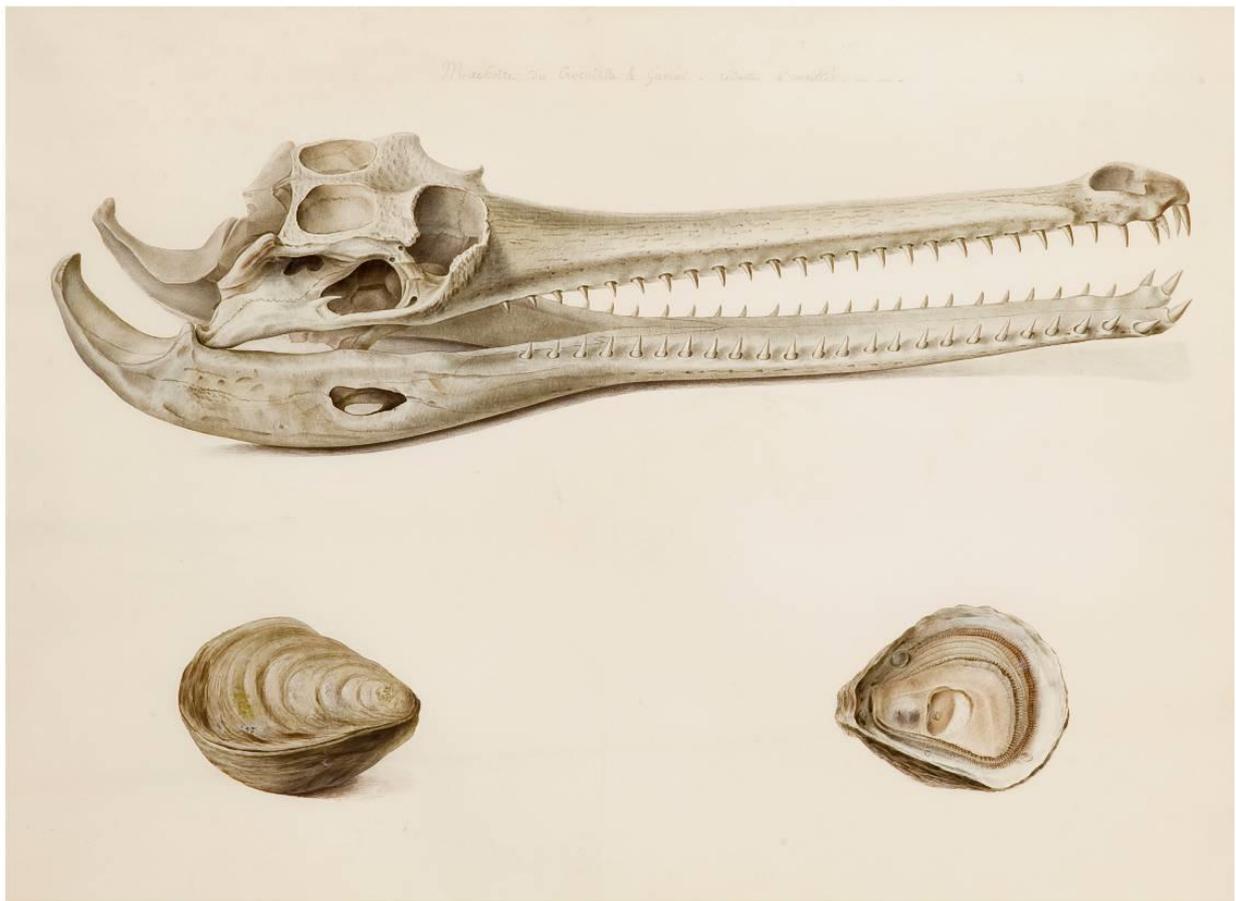
Study of Gharial Jawbone and Studies of Oysters

First half of the 19th century

Gouache on vellum

325 x 425 mm

Inscription: « Mâchoire de crocodile, le gharial, réduite à moitié » (“Crocodile jaw, gharial, reduced to half size”).



Pancrease Bessa is a French artist who occupies a relevant place in the artistic scene in Paris from the end of the 18th century until the mid-19th century, since, besides being disciple of Gerard van Spaendonck and working together with Pierre-Joseph Redouté, he would regularly exhibit in the Paris Salons between 1806 and 1831.

Furthermore, in 1816, he instructed the Duchess of Berry in the art of painting and worked on *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. From 1823 until his death, he would participate in the French royal collection of gouaches and watercolours on vellum, the *Vélins du Roi*, representing flowers and animals, started at the end of the 18th century by the brother of King Louis XIII and further enriched until the beginning of the 20th century.

Naturalism stands out among the themes preferred by the France of the Enlightenment: the 18th century saw an increasing interest in birds and exotic animals and all over Europe a great number of nurseries and zoological gardens were established for the scientific study of said specimens as objects of curiosity. We find the antecedents of this

phenomenon in the cabinets of which arose between the 16th and 17th centuries, where a multitude of strange objects were collected, such as finds originating from explorations or technically advanced objects.

Bessa follows this double scientific and artistic current when realizing numerous botanical watercolours describing in detail flowers and fruits as well as studies such as the one presented here.

In *Study of Gharial Jawbone and Studies of Oysters*, the artist provides us the detailed description of an animal skull with a protruding jaw that evokes that of a crocodile and the inside and outside of an oyster.

As for its origin, contrasting the technique and the support, it is likely that this sheet would have been part of the *Vélins du Roi* collection. The perfect shading and detailed richness of the textures reveal a remarkable and outstanding talent, appreciated by his contemporaries.