Primary Maker: Anne-Marguérite-Joséphine-Henriette Rouillé de Marigny, Baroness Hyde de Neuville
Title: Man Writing at a Folding Secretary by Candlelight
Date: ca. 1790-1802
Medium: Black and white chalk with stumping and gray watercolor on beige paper
Dimensions: Sheet (irregular): 6 1/4 × 8 1/8 in. (15.9 × 20.6 cm)
Credit Line: Gift of Mark Emanuel
Object Number: 2018.42.4

Classification: DRAWINGS

Curatorial Remarks:
Neuville executed this nocturnal study primarily in black chalk, the medium she preferred when learning to draw in Sancerre, with white chalk and gray watercolor. Already apparent is her interest in people studying, reading, writing, or drawing—one of the major themes in her oeuvre. The bespectacled sitter occupies the same “fauteuil” (armchair) with identical candlesticks nearby as the woman in another of her drawings (2018.42.3). The artist’s warm attitude toward the pair underline their intimate domesticity, suggesting that her sitters were family members. Studied over time, the works’ finished nature differs from Neuville’s later, more notational sketches. Neuville represented the aristocratic gentleman and chair on another sheet (2018.42.11); both his powdered hair/wig and the Louis XVI fauteuil buttress an early dating for the drawings. About the Artist Born in Sancerre, France into an aristocratic family, Henriette, as she preferred to be called, received an education that probably included drawing lessons. At the fall of the Bastille in 1789, she and her father fled Paris for their country house, Château de L’Estang, where she began her artistic self-education. In 1794, during the height of the French Revolution, she married the
handsome and hot-headed Jean Guillaume Hyde de Neuville, an ardent royalist who became involved in conspiracies to reinstate the Bourbon monarchy. In 1800, the couple was imprisoned and forced into hiding under aliases because of his role in the “English Conspiracy.” The baron was also condemned as an outlaw for his alleged participation in a plot to assassinate Napoleon. Fearing for her husband’s safety, the independent baroness attempted to disprove the charges. In 1805, she took her cause directly to Napoleon in a dramatic odyssey across Germany and Austria in pursuit of the French army, finally obtaining an audience with him in Vienna. Impressed with her courage, the Emperor allowed the couple to go into exile. They arrived in New York in 1807, where they stayed for seven years. During their second residency (1816–22), when her husband served as French Minister Plenipotentiary and was made a baron, they lived primarily in Washington, DC, where Henriette became an influential presence and celebrated hostess. After her return to France, the baroness seems to have retired her pen and watercolors. John Quincy Adams described her in his diary as “a woman of excellent temper, amiable disposition . . . profuse charity, yet judicious economy and sound discretion.”

Physical Description:
Half-length representation from the side of a man seated on a fauteuil at a secretary writing and wearing spectacles. Two candles in candlesticks rest on the folded out leaf.

Related Objects: