

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Alexandre Nozal (Neuilly-sur-Seine 1852 - Paris 1929)

The Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Médard in Soissons, in the Moonlight

Watercolour and gouache, on paper laid down on board.

Signed and inscribed (St. Médard) A. Nozal. at the lower right.

Stamped with the Salon stamp SOCIETE DES ARTISTES FRANCAIS – Salon de peinture 1895 on the reverse of the backing board.

715 x 518 mm. (28 1/8 x 20 3/8 in.)

According to the Salon stamp on the backing board, this large watercolour was exhibited at the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français in Paris in 1895, the same year that the artist was admitted to the Légion d'Honneur. The drawing does not, however, appear in the Salon catalogue of that year, and may have been exhibited hors-catalogue.

Once one of the greatest Benedictine monasteries in France, the abbey of Saint Médard at Soissons, in the Picardie region, was founded in 557. It was among the wealthiest abbeys in the country until the 16th century, when its resources were drained by the Wars of Religion. Restored in 1637, the abbey never regained its former status or riches, however, and was dissolved during the French Revolution. Much of the building had fallen into ruin by the beginning of the 20th century, and only the 9th century crypt still remains today.

Artist description:

A pupil of Evariste-Vital Luminais (and also, albeit informally, of Henri-Joseph Harpignies), the landscape painter Alexandre Nozal made his debut at the Salon in 1876. He continued to exhibit there

regularly throughout his career, winning medals in 1882 and 1883 and at the Expositions Universelles of 1889 and 1900. Nozal travelled extensively around France – in Normandy, Brittany, Provence, the Pyrénées, Corsica and elsewhere – and also visited Switzerland and Algeria. Much of his work, however, was devoted to the landscape along the banks of the river Seine. Inspired by the example of English watercolour painters, notably J. M. W. Turner, Nozal was a painter of river, lakes and coasts, often depicted at twilight or in the morning mist. As a draughtsman, he worked extensively in pastel and watercolour, with a masterful technique, and his luminous drawings, mostly executed en plein-air, find him coming close to the work of the artists of the Barbizon school and the Impressionists.

In 1974 an exhibition of some sixty paintings, drawings, pastels and watercolours by Nozal was held at the Musée départemental de l'Oise in Beauvais, which houses a large group of works by the artist, donated by his heirs. In the checklist of the Beauvais exhibition, Nozal is aptly described as 'this subtle artist, this nuanced pastellist, this brilliant draughtsman for whom nature was the great source of inspiration...for its powerful effect, its wealth of colour, a very sensitive manner of drawing seen in the beautiful studies of trees on dark paper, Nozal here joins a certain number of realist landscape painters on the fringes of Impressionism.' Other works by Alexandre Nozal are in the collections of the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée du Petit Palais in Paris, as well as the museums of Bourges, Dieppe, Gray, Lille, Limoux, Montpellier, Pontoise and Rouen. In May 1978 an auction of around 150 paintings and works on paper by the artist was held at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris.