

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Jacques Villon (Damville 1875 - Pueaux 1963)

Milk Bottle (Boîte à lait)

Oil on cradled panel.

Signed and dated Jacques Villon / 12 at the lower left.

223 x 169 mm. (8 3/4 x 6 5/8 in.)

Painted in the same year as the inaugural exhibition of the Section d'Or in 1912, this small painting dates to the very beginning of Villon's interest in Cubist methods. Unlike his paintings and prints of 1911 or even the early part of 1912, in which the subject is readily evident, this painting is one of the first works by Villon in which the object depicted - a milk bottle, painted with faceted planes of colour - is not immediately apparent. A related painting of the same year, of nearly identical dimensions and closely related to the present work in style, technique and tonality, depicts a cow in profile, as seen on the label of a bottle of milk. Above the cow is a semicircular sign, which could be that of a shop, and the letters ITE, which must be part of the sign LAITERIE.

As Douglas Cooper and Gary Tinterow have written, 'Towards the end of his life, Villon referred to himself as 'the Impressionist Cubist' and this description is apposite because...a play of light and luminous tonalities were characteristic features of his work...He made a limited use of the technique of faceting and progressively evolved, under the combined influences of Gleizes and Delaunay, a style based on fragmented forms and a succession of overlapping planes of colour used to evoke volume and a sense of space.'

Provenance:

Acquired from the artist by Louis Carré, Paris
By descent to his wife, Olga Burel Carré, Bazoches-sur-Guyon
Her posthumous sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 3 July 2003, lot 4
Private collection, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, until 2011.

Exhibitions

Oslo, Kunstneres Hus, Jacques Villon, 1959-1960, no.2; Bergen, Bergens Kunstforening, Jacques Villon: Maleri, 1960, no.2; Stockholm, Moderna Museet, Jacques Villon: Måleri och Grafik 1902-1959, 1960, no.2; Paris, Galerie Berès, Au temps des Cubistes 1910-1920, 2006, no.215.

Literature:

Anisabelle Berès and Michel Arveiller, Au temps des Cubistes, 1910-1920, exhibition catalogue, Paris, 2006, pp.532-533, no.215.

Artist description:

Born Gaston Emile Duchamp, Jacques Villon adopted his name to distinguish himself from his younger brothers, the sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon and the painter Marcel Duchamp, as well as his sister Suzanne Duchamp, who was also a painter. Villon arrived in Paris in 1895 and soon met Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who was to be a particular influence on Villon's early work as an illustrator. He also took up the practice of colour etching, creating a number of fine prints of Belle Epoque subjects around the turn of the century. Villon's early career was devoted to engraving and commercial illustration, and it was not until around 1910, at the age of thirty-five, that he began working full time as a painter. In 1911 he was a founder member of Puteaux Group – better known as the Section d'Or, a name Villon came up with - along with his brothers and the artists Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, Juan Gris, Fernand Leger, Robert Delaunay, Frantisek Kupka and Francis Picabia, among others. In 1912 Villon exhibited with the Section d'Or, and the following year nine of his paintings were included in the seminal Armory Show in New York, all of which were sold. He also produced a number of significant prints in the Cubist idiom. After the First World War, Villon's work began moving towards a form of geometric abstraction.

Villon was one of the few French artists of the period to achieve a measure of success in America, where his work had been shown at the 1913 Armory Show in New York and was acquired by such important collectors as John Quinn. In 1921 he had his first one-man show in America; indeed within a few years his work was better known in America than in France. By the early 1930's Villon had begun exhibiting with the Abstraction-Création group, and in 1938 met the art dealer Louis Carré, who was to become his exclusive agent. In 1942 the contents of Villon's studio were acquired en bloc by Carré, who proceeded to establish the artist's reputation in France. A one-man exhibition at Carré's Galerie de France in 1944 secured the artist's renown among younger artists. In 1956 Villon won the Grand Prize for painting at the Venice Biennale, and his international reputation was firmly established by an important retrospective exhibition of his work at the Galerie Charpentier in Paris in 1961.