Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Frank BRANGWYN (Bruges 1867 - Ditchling, Sussex 1956)

A Hilltop Castle at Sunset

Watercolour over a pencil underdrawing; the sheet folded over at the bottom.
A sketch of a tree in black chalk on the verso.
Signed with initials FB at the lower right, and again on the overlap.
Inscribed white(?) stalks on the overlap.
Further inscribed laib coll on the overlap.
Inscribed (by the artist) to follow cut on the verso.
Further inscribed 3. William de Belleroch Collection on the verso.
171 x 358 mm. (6 3/4 x 14 1/8 in.) [image]
219 x 359 mm. (8 5/8 x 14 1/8 in.) [sheet]

This vibrant watercolour sketch belonged to William de Belleroche (1913-1969), a friend of the artist for twenty-six years, who wrote a number of books about Brangwyn, including Brangwyn Talks, published in 1944, and Brangwyn's Pilgrimage: The Life Story of an Artist, published in 1948. Belleroche owned a large number of works by Brangwyn, including more than eighty watercolours, and also promoted his work tirelessly. He organized several exhibitions of the artist's work, notably the retrospective exhibition held at the Royal Academy in 1952; the first to be devoted to a living artist. As Sir Gerald Kelly, the President of the Royal Academy, referred to him in a letter of that year, 'Count de Belleroche, whose love of Brangwyn passes many men's understanding.'

Provenance:

Count William de Belleroche, Brighton
Possibly his sale ('The Collection of Works by Sir Frank Brangwyn, R.A. formed by Count William de Belleroche (First Portion)'), London, Christie's, 18 July 1961
Robert Kime and Piers von Westenholz, London.

Literature:

Possibly Cyril G. E. Bunt, The Water-Colours of Sir Frank Brangwyn R.A., Leigh-on-Sea, 1958, p.31, no.51 ('Barnard Castle, Yorkshire. 9 1/4 x 14 in. In the possession of Count William de Belleroche').

Artist description:

The son of an architect, Frank Brangwyn was born in Belgium, where his father had settled for work. The family returned to England in 1875, when Brangwyn was eight years old, settling in London. For the most part self-taught as an artist, Brangwyn spent much of his youth studying the works of art in the

South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum. He also worked for a period of two years, between 1882 and 1884, at the workshops of William Morris in London, where he was tasked with copying tapestries and producing drawings for wallpaper and carpets. Brangwyn quickly established an international reputation, receiving numerous commissions from private individuals, companies and public institutions. He became particularly known for large-scale mural paintings as well as interior and architectural designs for private and public patrons. In 1895 he was commissioned by the Art Nouveau pioneer art dealer Siegfried Bing to help decorate the exterior of his flagship store in Paris, the Galerie de l'Art Nouveau.

Brangwyn subsequently worked on numerous decorative schemes, notably for Lansdowne House in Kensington in London, completed in 1900, the Venice Biennale in 1905 and 1907 and the ocean liner RMS Empress of Britain, between 1930 and 1931. Amongst the artist's many mural commissions throughout Britain and abroad were decorations in the Royal Exchange (1900-1906) and the Lloyd's Register of Shipping building (1908-1914) in the City of London, the Cuyahoga County Courthouse in Cleveland, Ohio (1911-1915), the Missouri State Capital building in Jefferson City, Missouri (1915-1925), the New Parliament Building in Winnipeg, Manitoba (1918-1921) and Rockefeller Center in New York (1930-1934), where Brangwyn worked alongside Diego Rivera and José Maria Sert. Yet several other proposed works never came to fruition, such as the decoration of Selfridge's department store in London or the Kyoraku Art Museum in Tokyo, or were later destroyed. In 1917 Brangwyn purchased a house, called The Jointure, in the rural Sussex village of Ditchling. Over the next few years he divided his time between Sussex and London, but following his wife's death in 1924 he settled for good in Ditchling. He built a studio at the house, where he lived and worked until his death thirty-two years later.

Although today best known as a mural painter and printmaker, Brangwyn had a deep interest and understanding of all aspects of decorative design. As he once commented, 'An artist's function is everything: he must be able to turn his hand to everything, for his mission is to decorate life…he should be able to make pots and pans, doors and walls, monuments or cathedrals, carve, paint, and do everything asked of him.' Brangwyn produced over 230 designs for domestic, ecclesiastical and commercial furniture, as well as numerous projects for pieces of furniture, glassware, carpets, tapestry, jewellery, ceramics, stained glass and lamps, some of which were produced commercially by the firm of E. Pollard and Co. in London. As the Brangwyn scholar Libby Horner has noted, 'From the outset Brangwyn applied himself with rigour and equal success to every area of artistic production, becoming a polymath, a quintessential artist-craftsman. The sheer scale and variety of his artistic production daunted the critics.'