Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Raoul Dufy (Le Havre 1877 - Forcalquier 1953)

Still Life with Pears and Lemons

Gouache and watercolour on buff paper.
Signed, dated and dedicated a Marcelle Oury que je retrouve / à Perpignan ce 23 fév. 1946 Raoul Dufy at the lower left and centre.
329 x 502 mm. (13 x 19 3/4 in.)

According to the artist's inscription at the bottom of the sheet, this still life was drawn in Perpignan on the 23rd of February 1946, and given by Dufy to Mme. Marcelle Oury (1894-1980). A journalist and sometime art critic, Marcelle Oury was a friend of the couturier Paul Poiret, through whom she met Dufy in 1911. Oury enjoyed friendships with many leading figures in the artistic and literary circles of Paris in the 1920's and 1930's, notably Tsuguharu Foujita, Jean Cocteau, André Derain, Kees Van Dongen and Jacques Villon. She spent the years of World War II in Vichy and Geneva, returning to Paris in October 1944. After the war, Dufy had settled in Perpignan in the French Pyrenees, where the climate was better for his health, and Marcelle Oury visited him there. As the artist wrote in a letter to Oury's son in November 1946, 'What a pleasure it is for me to receive your mother as my guest here. She brings a bit of Paris with her and all sorts of souvenirs that are welcome in my Roussillon retreat.'

Marcelle Oury and Dufy were to remain close friends until the artist's death in 1953, and in 1965 she published a book on the artist, entitled Lettre à mon peintre, Raoul Dufy. Oury acquired several works from Dufy as gifts, which decorated her apartment on the rue de Coucelles in Paris. (In later years, as her son recalled, 'I know that four, five times a night, she would get up, contemplate her Dufys and, her eyes full of purple regattas, of fields of wheat, of racetracks where elegant people paraded...Mother would fall asleep again, her mind full of vivid images.') This watercolour appears in the background of a photograph of Marcelle Oury with the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, taken around 1976. After Marcelle Oury's death in 1980, the present sheet later passed to her son, the celebrated French actor, screenwriter and filmmaker Gérard Oury (1919-2006), who continued to add to the collection, eventually assembling a significant group of works by Raoul Dufy.

An earlier variant of this composition, with the addition of a coffee pot, appears in a watercolour dedicated by the artist to the French novelist and performer Colette.

Gérard Oury has left an interesting account of visits he made with his mother to Dufy's studio, on the Impasse de Guelma in Paris: 'Paintings leaning against the walls, stacked against each other, portfolios swollen like the stomach of a pregnant woman, stuffed with watercolours...Raoul Dufy ruthlessly tore and erased watercolours and paintings. Rarely satisfied, he steps back and judges his work: "Not bad!..." The ultimate compliment. And if someone enthuses: 'But you only took ten minutes to do it!"; he would reply, "No, monsieur, fifty years!"'

Provenance:

Given by the artist in February 1946 to Marcelle Oury, Paris
By descent to her son, Gérard Oury, Paris
By descent to his daughter, Danièle Thompson, until 2009
Gérard Oury collection sale, Paris, Artcurial, 20 April 2009, lot 1
Private collection.

Literature:

Fanny Guillon-Laffaille, Raoul Dufy: Catalogue raisonné des aquarelles, gouaches et pastels, Paris, 1982, Vol.II, p.140, no.1446.

Artist description:

Trained in the studio of Léon Bonnat at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Raoul Dufy was deeply affected by his first exposure to the work of Henri Matisse and the Fauve artists at the Salon des Indépendants in 1905. He soon took up the Fauvist manner, and had his first one-man show at the Galerie Berthe Weil in 1906, though by 1908 he had abandoned Fauvism for a more deliberately naïve style. He was at this point struggling to earn an income and, like Kees van Dongen and André Lhote, would sell drawings for five francs apiece to the Paris Journal. He produced his first woodcuts between 1909 and 1910, and around 1911 began working with the couturier Paul Poiret on the design of textiles, fabrics and interior decorations. This was to be the start of a long and fruitful collaboration with Poiret, who was to become Dufy's most important patron.

The years following the First World War found Dufy continuing to work for Poiret, as well as producing book illustrations, tapestry cartoons and designing stage sets. Exhibitions of his work were held throughout the 1920's at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, and the artist divided his time between Paris and the South of France. Dufy travelled to Morocco and Italy and was a regular visitor to England, where he painted the annual regattas at Cowes and Henley and the races at Epsom and Goodwood. He also painted the regattas at Le Havre and Deauville. For the Exposition Universelle of 1937 he was commissioned to paint a massive mural of La Fée Électricité, covering nearly six hundred square metres, for the Palais de la Lumière. This was followed by a series of mural decorations for the Palais de Chaillot and panels for the Jardin des Plantes. Already suffering from the severe arthritis that in later years would confine him to a wheelchair, Dufy nevertheless continued to work steadily throughout the period of the Second World War, and in the years afterwards regularly exhibited at the Salon des Tuileries. A large retrospective exhibition of his work was held in Geneva in 1952, while in the same year an exhibition of more than forty paintings at the Venice Biennale earned the artist the Grand Prix.

Dufy's oeuvre consists of around two thousand paintings and the same amount of watercolours, as well as around a thousand drawings. He provided illustrations for some fifty books, and also produced woodcuts, tapestry cartoons, ceramic pieces and fabric designs, as well as stage sets and mural decorations. He created over two thousand designs for the silk manufacturers Bianchini-Ferrer in Lyons, and his fabric work was regularly exhibited at the Salons des Artistes Décorateurs.

As a draughtsman, however, Dufy has remained somewhat less appreciated, despite the originality of his vision and the popularity of his work in other media. Nevertheless, one recent scholar has justly praised Dufy's 'exceptional fluency, grace and spiritual refinement as a draughtsman', while Sir Kenneth Clark is said to have described the artist as 'comparable only to the greatest draughtsmen in European art, to Tiepolo or to Watteau, and misconceived, under-rated by the English.' As Dufy himself wrote in one of his notebooks, 'My drawings are indeed drawings in themselves, but not one of them exists for itself. They are always designs for paintings...My drawings are always done from nature and they express above all the density of forms and their position in light and space. They are always created to capture the effect of light. That is why they help me paint.'