Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Auguste Bonheur (Bordeaux 1824 - Bellevue-Meudon 1884)

Mountain Landscape in the Auvergne

Oil on canvas. Signed A Bonheur at the lower left. Inscribed Auvergne on a small label pasted at the lower right. 139 x 308 mm. (5 1/2 x 12 1/8 in.)

This is one of a group of fresh and spirited landscape oil sketches by Auguste Bonheur that have only come to light in recent years, having been found in his studio after his death and retained by his descendants. Produced during the artist's extensive travels throughout France, notably in Brittany, the Auvergne and the Pyrénées, these works can be seen as Bonheur's particular contribution to the 19th century French tradition of plein-air painting. As the critic Théophile Gautier noted in a review of the Salon of 1861, 'Auguste Bonheur has dared, and it is great audacity, to unvarnish nature, to take away the smoke and the dirt, to wash off the bitumen sauce with which art ordinarily covers it, and he has painted it as he sees it...his foliage [has] the bright freshness of plants washed by the rain and dried by the sun.'

Bonheur was particularly fond of the rugged, mountainous landscapes of the Cantal in the Auvergne, to which he returned repeatedly throughout his career, and which provided the setting for many of his oil sketches and finished paintings. Similar oil sketches by Bonheur of views in the Auvergne appeared on the art market in 1993 and 1995. The small label inscribed with the location depicted and attached to the corner of the oil sketch is typical of the artist's working practice.

Provenance:

The studio of the artist, Magny-les-Hameaux, near Versailles.

Artist description:

The younger brother of Rosa Bonheur, Auguste Bonheur was, in his day, as celebrated a painter of landscapes and animalier subjects as his sister. Like her, he was a pupil of his father Raymond, a landscape painter, before entering the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1848, where he studied with Paul Delaroche. (All of Auguste's siblings were to become artists. Apart from Rosa, with whom he sometimes collaborated, his brother Isidore was both a painter and sculptor, while his other sister Juliette was a painter.) Auguste Bonheur made his debut at the Salon of 1845, and continued to exhibit there regularly, first as a portrait and genre painter and, by the early 1850's, showing mainly landscapes. At the Salon of 1853 a landscape of the Auvergne was bought by the Duc de Morny, one of the most passionate collectors of the Second Empire. Six years later, in a review of the Salon of 1859, the critic Louis Auvray praised the artist's work over that of his more famous elder sister, noting that 'M. Auguste Bonheur, the brother of Rosa Bonheur, is a painter whose talent makes a success of [paintings of] animals and landscape. His colour is solid and bright at the same time; his brush is firmer, more daring than that of his sister.'

At the Salon of 1863 Bonheur's painting of Le Ruisseau, souvenir de Auvergne won a first class medal, and by this time he had firmly established his reputation as a paysagiste. In 1865 Bonheur settled at Magny-les-Hameux in the département of Seine-et-Oise, in the house of his friend and fellow Bordelais, the painter Jacques-Raymond Brascassat. Aided by the dealer Ernest Gambart, who was also active in promoting Rosa's work, several of his paintings were sold to English collectors, and he also exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1857, 1873 and 1874, as well as in Leeds and Manchester. Today, paintings and oil sketches by Auguste Bonheur are in several French provincial museums as well as the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, the Brooklyn Museum, and elsewhere.