

Philippe ROUSSEAU (Paris 1816 - Acquigny 1887)

A Red Stork in a Landscape

Watercolour, black chalk and coloured chalks, with touches of white heightening.
Signed Ph. Rousseau at the lower right.
171 x 140 mm. (6 3/4 x 5 1/2 in.) [image]
212 x 198 mm. (8 3/8 x 7 3/4 in.) [sheet]

This vibrant watercolour is a fine example of the way in which Rousseau could depict animals in their own right, without any apparent reference to fables or literature. The delicately rendered stork stands preening in a barren marshland, seemingly disinterested in the storm that rages overhead. Here Rousseau is spontaneous and perceptive. His use of a combination of watercolour and pastel display the freedom and ease with which he portrayed animals.

Rousseau depicted storks in a number of paintings, including Storks and a Peacock near a Pond, signed and dated 1863, which appeared at auction in London in 1966 and a painting illustrating the fable of The Fox and the Stork, sold at auction in 1991. A painting of storks was also among the decorations commissioned from Rousseau for the dining room of James, Baron de Rothschild and shown at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855.

Artist description:

Philippe Rousseau was a student of Baron Gros and Jean-Victor Bertin, and began his career as a landscape painter, particularly of views of Normandy. He exhibited landscapes at the Salons between 1831 and 1843, after which he showed mainly still lives and animal subjects. Rousseau's reputation was first established in 1845, when his painting The City Rat and the Country Rat, based on a fable by Jean de La Fontaine and combining his flair for animal painting with his talent for still-life compositions, was exhibited at the Salon to critical acclaim. Admired by such critics as Théophile Gautier, E.-J.

Delécluze and Charles Baudelaire, the painting was praised by the latter in his review of the Salon; ‘This is what making still lifes freely is all about, as a landscape painter, as a genre painter, as a man of spirit…’. In 1850 Rousseau received his first state commission, for a large canvas of a dog and cats for which he was paid 2,400 francs; the painting is today in the Musée d’Orsay.

It was in particular through his paintings illustrating the Fables of Jean de La Fontaine that Rousseau combined his love of depicting animals and storytelling, and in 1859 he decorated the Hôtel d’Albe on the Champs-Elysées with seven paintings on themes taken from La Fontaine. As a still life painter, Rousseau was regarded as the contemporary equivalent of Jean-Baptiste Chardin, who was, along with Jean-Baptiste Oudry, a lifelong influence and inspiration. Although working in what was then regarded as the ‘minor’ genres of animal painting and still life painting, Rousseau’s work was greatly admired and he enjoyed considerable success; among his patrons were Napoleon III, the Duc de Trévise, the Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, Alexandre Dumas and the Barons de Rothschild. Like Oudry before him, Rousseau also designed tapestries for the tapestry factory at Beauvais.

The illustrations of the fables of La Fontaine led to Rousseau being able to paint a great number of animals such as frogs, lambs, hares, turtles, dogs, foxes and birds. He therefore never had to limit himself to one animal, although he typically did not paint predators or large game animals. Rousseau liked to show such typical confrontations as that between a cat and a mouse or a cat and a dog.