Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Henry SOMM (Rouen 1844 - Paris 1907)

Elegant Figures in a Parisian Square

Brush and brown wash.
Signed Hy. Somm at the lower right.
213 x 321 mm. (8 3/8 x 12 5/8 in.)

ACQUIRED BY THE VAN GOGH MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM.

Henry Somm is perhaps best known today for his depictions of Parisian society. As the scholar Elizabeth Menon has noted, however, 'The artist has been termed a "petit impressioniste" by art critics and historians. While some of his works – mainly scenes of leisure in the city of Paris – exhibit stylistic qualities that support this designation in a broad sense, careful examination of his drawings reveal that Somm is a transitional figure between Impressionism and Symbolism, whose subject matter is principally concerned with contemporary life in Paris.'

The fascinating technique of this drawing, with the use of a combination of ink blots and pale brown washes applied with a brush to create a composition devoid of pen outlines, is highly unusual in Somm's oeuvre.

Provenance:

Peter H. Dietsch, New York
By descent to a private collection, London.

Artist description:

After studying at the École Municipale de Dessin in Rouen, François Clément Sommier, known professionally as Henry Somm, settled in Paris in the late 1860s, where he trained briefly with Isidore Pils. He enjoyed a successful career as an illustrator and draughtsman, contributing regularly to such popular journals as Le Monde parisien, Tout-Paris and Alfred Cadart's bi-monthly L'Illustration Nouvelle, as well as providing illustrations for satirical books like Jacques Olivier's Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice de femmes, published in 1876. Somm was also active as a graphic designer, providing menus, theatre programs, invitations and announcements for the many fashionable events of Belle Epoque Paris. He also produced visiting cards and bookplates, as well as designs for plates for the Haviland porcelain factory, commissioned by the firm's artistic director, Félix Bracquemond. At the invitation of Edgar Degas, Somm took part in the fourth Impressionist exhibition of 1879, showing his prints alongside those of Braquemond and works by Degas, Mary Cassatt and Camille Pissarro. The 1880s found Somm among a group of artists associated with the cabaret Le Chat Noir in Paris, for whose

eponymous journal he published reviews and articles. Somm's finished drawings are often related to his more commercial work as an illustrator for magazines or such books as Georges Montorgeuil's La Parisienne peint par elle-même, published in 1897. In the latter part of his career, he was chiefly employed by the periodical Le Rire. Required to provide several drawings for each issue, his draughtsmanship became both more economical in line and more self-assured. Somm died in 1907 in relative obscurity.