

Edouard VUILLARD (Cuiseaux 1868 - La Baule 1940)

Landscape with a Little Girl, a Dog and a Goat: Study for a Decorative Panel

Pencil and pastel, on a page from a small sketchbook.
Stamped with a Vuillard atelier stamp (Lugt 909c) at the lower right.
156 x 105 mm. (6 1/8 x 4 1/8 in.)

The present sheet is closely related to large painting by Vuillard of a Landscape with a Little Girl, Dog and Goat, last recorded on the art market in Switzerland in the 1970s. Mathias Chivot has recently suggested that the present sheet may also represent a first idea for one of the decorative mural panels commissioned from Vuillard by his art dealers, the brothers Josse and Gaston Bernheim, to decorate the ground floor of Bois-Lurette, their summer villa at Villers-sur-Mer, a seaside resort on the Normandy coast between Trouville and Cabourg. This series of thirteen large murals was painted over a period of three successive summers, in 1911, 1912 and 1913. The first panels to be painted, in August and September of 1911, were depictions of the garden at Les Pavillons, the villa at Cricqueboeuf in Normandy rented for the summer by Vuillard's close friends Jos and Lucy Hessel. Two of these panels show Lucy Hessel accompanied by Denise Natanson, the young daughter of Vuillard's friends and patrons Alfred and Marthe Natanson, playing in the garden with a small dog, and it may have been while the artist was working out the compositions for this pair of upright panels that this little sketchbook page was drawn.

As MaryAnne Stevens and Kimberly Jones have noted of the Bois-Lurette paintings, 'The initial commission for these panels appears to date from August 10, 1911, when Vuillard lunched with the Bernheims at their villa while he was vacationing at Cricqueboeuf. Within days he was at work on the first group of paintings...Vuillard kept to his now standard practice of undertaking a rigorous preparation, producing small sketches in charcoal and pastel prior to attacking the large-scale work in distemper. Unlike so many of his earlier decorations, which were constructed in the studio from

sketches and photographs...the Bois Lurette canvases were executed on site.'

The paintings for Bois-Lurette, for which Vuillard was paid 15,000 francs, were fitted into the wood panelling of the ground floor rooms of the villa, where they remained until the property was sold by the Bernheims in 1933. The paintings were removed from the walls of the villa in 1933 and reworked by Vuillard the following year, before eventually being dispersed.

The present sheet is accompanied by a certificate from the Comité Vuillard of the Wildenstein Institute, dated 12 July 2016.

Provenance:

The artist's studio, Paris
Thence by descent in the family of the artist.

Literature:

To be included in the forthcoming supplement to the Vuillard catalogue raisonné.

Artist description:

At the start of his career, Edouard Vuillard joined a group of young artists - including Maurice Denis, Paul Sérusier, Pierre Bonnard and Kerr-Xavier Roussel - who called themselves the Nabis and were united by a desire to develop a new, more expressive pictorial language, inspired by the work of Paul Gauguin. In the 1890's, Vuillard began receiving a number of private commissions for wall panels intended to decorate the rooms of private houses. This was a genre in which he was to become very successful, and between 1892 and 1901 he painted a number of these large-scale panneaux décoratifs, almost all the result of commissions from a small group of mutual friends and enlightened collectors. Vuillard's work of this type remained largely unknown to the public at large until several panels were exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1905.

In the early years of the new century, enjoying the fruits of a commercial arrangement with the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Vuillard began expanding his repertoire of decorative panels and small, intimiste domestic interiors to include portraits and landscapes. Although his work as a peintre-décorateur was largely confined to private homes, he did receive a handful of public commissions, including the decoration of the foyer of the newly built Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in 1912. The later years of his career found Vuillard saw mainly as a portrait painter, often depicting his sitters within an interior setting. He rarely exhibited in public after 1914, and it was not until a large retrospective exhibition of his work was held at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1938, two years before his death, that interest in Vuillard was renewed.

As a modern scholar has noted, 'Vuillard was in many ways the supreme graphic artist among the Nabis. He drew throughout his life, indeed daily...' From around 1900 onwards he used mainly pastel for his drawings, and came to master the subtlety and vibrancy of this challenging medium. In one of the first monographs on the artist, the critic and art historian Claude Roger-Marx wrote that, 'Vuillard often found expression by means of pastels', and he made more extensive use of the pastel medium than perhaps any French artist since Degas in the previous generation. Pastel was to become an essential part of Vuillard's working process until the end of his career, and was used for landscape and figure studies, compositional drawings, still life subjects and as preparatory studies for portraits.