

Mathurin MEHEUT (Lamballe 1882 - Paris 1958)

Peacocks: Notes de Céramique

Watercolour, pen and brown and black ink with brown and grey wash, with framing lines in brown ink and grey wash.

Signed with the artist's monogram MM at the lower right.

Inscribed Mlle / JULIETTE / THIERRY / RENNES at the top, and NOTES / DE / CÉRAMIQUE at the bottom.

Further signed and inscribed by the artist En Souvenir des Vacances . MM on the verso.

328 x 237 mm. (12 7/8 x 9 3/8 in.) [image]

343 x 252 mm. (13 1/2 x 9 7/8 in.) [sheet]

Likely to date from relatively early in Mathurin Meheut's career, when he produced a number of decorative drawings, the present sheet may have been intended as a design for a book cover, although it possibly never have come to fruition. The pair of peacocks at the upper left of the composition appear to derive from the form of a peacock comb designed by the glass and jewelry designer René Lalique in c.1897-1898, an example of which is in the collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Among stylistically and thematically comparable decorative watercolours by Meheut is a design for a plate, in the Musée de Bretagne in Rennes.

The 'Juliette Thierry' mentioned in this drawing may conceivably be identified with the artist who, in 1901, won a first prize and an honourable mention in the 'cours de jeunes filles' section of the Ecole

regionale des Beaux-Arts in Rennes. Two years later, in the Courrier de Rennes newspaper of 20 June 1903, it was noted that 'Mlle. Juliette Thierry, dessinateur, élève de notre école' had won an honorable mention in the 13th annual nationwide concours de composition decorative, organized under the auspices of the Société d'Encouragement à l'Art et à l'Industrie.

Exhibitions

Lamballe, Musée Mathurin Méheut and Pont-l'Abbé, Musée Bigouden, Mathurin Méheut: brodeur d'images, 2016 [ex-catalogue].

Artist description:

A Breton painter, Mathurin Méheut studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Rennes, from which he graduated at the age of twenty. He completed his studies at the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, with the designer and decorator Eugène Grasset, while at the same time contributing to the magazine Art et Décoration to help finance his studies. In 1904 he provided illustrations for the book Fantôme de Terre-Neuve by Léon Berthaut, the first of several books he worked on throughout his career, and in 1906 began exhibiting regularly at the Salon des Artistes Français.

Although Méheut settled in Paris and established his career there, he returned frequently to Brittany, working at Douarnenez, Paimpol, Quimper, Roscoff and elsewhere in the region. Between 1910 and 1912 Méheut worked alongside naturalists at the marine biology station in Roscoff. His illustrations of sea creatures resulted in the publication of a book, Etude de la mer, flore et faune de la Manche et de l'Océan, which was accompanied by the exhibition of around 450 drawings at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1913.

The artist also travelled extensively outside France; visiting Turkey, Crete, Egypt and Syria, as well as even further afield, to New York and also to Hawaii and Japan; the latter trip was cut short by the outbreak of the First World War. After serving in the army, Méheut returned to working in Brittany, and in 1921 a second large exhibition of his oeuvre at the Pavillon de Marsan of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs included several scenes of military life, as well as views of Brittany and Japan. Throughout his travels, Méheut was interested in recording the appearance of the peoples, sites, animals and plants of the places he visited.

A member of the Académie de la Marine, Méheut achieved considerable success and was appointed official painter to the Marine Department in 1921. In 1924 he began to decorate commercial passenger ships and ocean liners, and in the same year painted murals for the Villa Miramar on the Côte d'Azur, for the banker Albert Kahn. Another important exhibition of his work was held at the Galerie Charpentier in Paris in 1928. Méheut spent three months in America in 1930, painting an extensive mural decoration on the theme of the discovery of the New World for the Heinz residence in Pittsburgh. In 1934 he participated in the decoration of the luxurious French ocean liner, the SS Normandie. Méheut was active as a decorative mural painter, book illustrator, tapestry and textile designer, stained glass painter and, not least, a ceramic painter; working at the Sèvres manufactury and for Villeroy and Boch. Later in his career he completed a series of celebrated illustrations for Florian Le Roy's book Vieux métiers bretons. The largest extant collection of the artist's oeuvre is today in the Musée Mathurin Méheut in the town of Lamballe in Brittany, established with works donated by the painter's daughter Maryvonne.