

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Paul Albert BESNARD (Paris 1849 - Paris 1934)

A View of Rooftops in Rome at Sunset, with the Monument to King Victor Emanuel II of Savoy
Watercolour.

230 x 145 mm. (9 x 5 3/4 in.)

Albert Besnard is much less well known as a watercolourist than as a painter and muralist. The present sheet may be dated to the period of Besnard's second stay in Rome, between 1913 and 1921, when he served as the director of the Académie de France at the Villa Medici. This view over the rooftops of Rome appears to be from the Villa Medici itself, looking due south. Prominent in the left background is the national monument dedicated to the first Italian King, Vittorio Emanuele II, which was constructed between 1885 and 1935.

Exhibitions

Possibly Paris, Galerie Paul Prouté S.A., Dessins originaux anciens, Dessins originaux modernes - XIX^e et XX^e siècles, Spring 1978, no.281 (Vision. A la Villa Medici, composition de ciel et d'ombre. Aquarelle. 145 x 230., priced at 600 francs).

Artist description:

Albert Besnard entered the École des Beaux-Arts in 1866, studying with Alexandre Cabanel before making his debut at the Salon in 1868. Six years later he won the Prix de Rome with a painting of the Death of Timophanes, Tyrant of Corinth. His five years at the Villa Medici in Rome were followed by three years in London, between 1879 and 1881, during which he obtained several important portrait commissions. By the 1880's Besnard was one of the most highly regarded and fashionable society portrait painters in Paris. He developed a particularly evocative manner of depicting his sitters that relied on luminous, vibrant colours, dramatic (and at times artificial) lighting and bold brushwork. These elements also found their way into the artist's other main activity; his work as a decorative mural painter.

Besnard painted large decorative schemes for several public buildings in Paris, including the Sorbonne, the Ecole de Pharmacie and the Pavillion des Arts Décoratifs at the Exposition Universelle of 1900, as well as ceiling decorations for the Salon des Sciences of the Hôtel de Ville, the Comédie Française and the Petit Palais. He also created mural decorations for a number of private homes, including L'Art Nouveau Bing, the shop of the Parisian dealer and collector Siegfried Bing on the rue de Provence in Paris, and the villa of Baron Joseph Vitta at Evian.

Although Besnard was strongly influenced by the work of the Impressionists, he never exhibited with them, leading Edgar Degas to comment that 'Besnard is flying with our wings'. Besnard did, however, exhibit regularly at the Salons, and at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts from 1890 onwards. He also worked as a printmaker, executing a series of twenty-six etchings on the theme of Death for his patron Baron Vitta in 1900, and produced designs for stained glass. In 1910-1911 he travelled extensively around India, and the paintings from this trip were exhibited to critical acclaim in 1912 at the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris. Between 1923 and his death in 1934 Besnard served as the director of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.