Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Pierre PRINS (Paris 1838 - Paris 1913)

The Mouth of the River Laïta at Le Pouldu, Brittany

Pastel on paper, laid down on board.

Signed Pierre Prins at the lower right.

Further signed and dated 1900 / PP at the lower right. Inscribed La Laïta au Pouldu / 1899 and stamped COLL. J. Cl. BARRIÉ twice on the backing board.

Stamped 65 on the backing board.

269 x 655 mm. (10 5/8 x 25 3/4 in.)

Like such artists as Paul Gauguin, Maurice Denis, Paul Serusier and Claude-Emile Schuffenecker, Pierre Prins was fond of the small town of Le Pouldu, on the Atlantic coast of Brittany, which he visited four times, in 1888, 1892, 1899 and 1900. Drawn on the last of these trips, the present sheet has been exhibited several times, most recently in 2013, when it was noted that 'With the pastel La Laïta au Pouldu, the artist offers...a wide view of the river flowing into the ocean; the eye is only stopped by the hills on the horizon. The vast expanse of water thus gives pride of place to the reflections of nature, the sky and the light on its surface. A sailing boat...seems ready to cross the mouth of the river.'

A related oil painting by Prins of The Mouth of the River Laïta at Le Pouldu is recorded but is now lost. A large pastel of the same subject - The Laïta at Le Pouldu at Low Tide, signed and dated September 1899 - is in a private collection in France.

As Daniel Wildenstein has noted, 'Prins was above all a painter of the sky and of light in their most subtle expressions. With the art of a visionary, and yet without any of the fairy-tale romance of Turner and Bonington, he was capable of catching their most fleeting effects. In this he was particularly successful with pastel, which he used with great mastery and which, in his hand, turns into a luminous haze in boundless space, resting on a very low, very distant horizon only slightly more substantial than the clouds. He makes the slightness of pastel serves [sic] the insubstantiality of the sky, thus bringing the means and the end into harmony.'

Exhibitions

L'Isle-Adam, Musée Louis Senlecq, Charles Agard 1866-1950: Peintre de l'Ecole du Val d'Oise, 1993

(according to a label on the old backing board, but not in the catalogue); Aulnay-sous-Bois, Galerie de l'Hôtel de Ville, Un certain regard (1850-1950): Oeuvres sur papier, 1994, no.28; Chatou, Musée Fournaise, Pierre Prins, l'ami de Manet, 1999, no.64, 'Paysages' no.4; Fécamp, Musée de Fécamp, Pierre Prins: un pastelliste impressioniste, 2013.

Literature:

Fécamp, Musée de Fécamp, Pierre Prins: un pastelliste impressioniste, 2013, p.79.

Artist description:

Shy and unassuming by nature, Pierre Prins worked in relative solitude for most of his career. Although he was close friends with several of the Impressionists, notably Edouard Manet, Alfred Sisley and Frederic Bazille, he preferred not to take part in the artistic debates and controversies of the period. His style, while at times close to that of the Impressionist painters, remained distinctively his own. In 1878, inspired by Manet's pastels, he began to work in the medium, becoming highly proficient and eventually working almost exclusively in pastel. In 1890, at the age of fifty, he had his first one-man exhibition, showing some forty landscapes – almost all executed in pastel - at the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris.

Prins exhibited regularly at the Salons and with such dealers as Georges Petit, Durand-Ruel, Goupil and Boussod et Valadon. However, on his deathbed, he asked his heirs not to exhibit his work, nor to release any work from his studio, for a period of thirty years after his death. As a result, his work remained almost completely unknown for much of the period when that of his friends and contemporaries among the Impressionists rose to new heights. His paintings, pastels and drawings were only again exhibited in Paris during the Second World War, but it was not until a retrospective exhibition at the Galerie Durand-Ruel in Paris in 1963 that his work came to be better known and appreciated.

In the 1880's and 1890's Prins spent much time on the coast of Normandy and Brittany, and produced a large number of pastel studies of the sea and sky. While some of his pastel landscapes are very large, reaching almost two metres in size, most are smaller in scale and more intimate. He often used a coarse-grained coloured paper, and almost never used any fixative, so as to keep his pastels as bright and fresh as possible. An interest in atmospheric effects is evident in much of his work, with a particular interest in the sky at sunrise, in full sunlight, at twilight and at sunset.