

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**Ludovic-Napoléon LEPIC (Paris 1839 - Paris 1889)**

## **A Dog (Clairon) with a Letter**

Gouache with pen and brown ink on brown paper, backed.

Inscribed with a letter in brown ink.

587 x 451 mm. (22 3/4 x 17 1/2 in.)

Ludovic Lepic was a lover and breeder of dogs, and canine subjects account for some of his most charming works as a painter, draughtsman and printmaker, particularly in the early part of his career. Indeed, at his Salon debut in 1863 he showed three etchings of dogs. One of his first well-known prints, published the same year in a portfolio issued by the Société des Aquafortistes, was of a similar subject to the present sheet. Entitled *Pour les pauvres* (For the Poor), the etching depicted a beggar's dog with a paper sign around its neck. It was singled out for praise by an English critic the following year, in an account of the prints published by the Société des Aquafortistes: 'Many of M. Lepic's drawings of dogs are spirited and fine. This dog's face is eager and intelligent, and really very well done. The wiry texture of the hair is quite truly given, and the bright eyes beg eloquently for the poor dog's poor master.'

The letter carried by the dog may be translated as follows: 'My dear Bol, there is awful weather again and again, and one doesn't know where to blow one's nose. The chimneys are smoking, the rain is coming in through closed windows and doors, so it is freezing inside as well as out. This morning, the Customs officer came to tell me that there was a beautiful wreck on the Chemin des Anglais. I got there quickly and found a lot of people chatting about it, trying to guess what it might be. I went into the water and there was indeed a big thing that looked like a ship's [?], but which I quickly recognised as a whale rib. It was the right catch, and I immediately tied a rope to it to bring it ashore; we pulled and pulled as hard as we could, and so hard that the rope broke, and there we were, my entire crew with their backsides in the water. As they were mostly women, the men were delighted. So I have my rib, and I can

assure you that if the one that God the father took from the side of Adam to make a woman looked like this one, the fair sex is beautifully built and made of the right material. My bone was large, measuring at least 3 meters, and I hung it from the ceiling of my room, where it makes the most beautiful ornament. This evening, I went to the cabin, as it was thawing the ice cracked under me and I took [?] a [?] of [?] full. I locked myself in my hide with my dog and at the break I did a double hit on some ducks. I sent the dog after them, he took one and [?] he dropped the first one to come back to the second which he caught in his leg. The first one still had some strength and tried to fly. Bobo dropped his duck and went back to the first, which flew out from under him, he quickly went back to the second, which also flew off. The poor animal was going crazy. Having these 2 ducks in his mouth [?] came to bring them back, which seemed to him to be quite an astonishing thing. [?][?] I was able to find one that had hidden in the weeds; as for the other, it will have died in [?] without benefit to anyone. My africanis continues his services, jumping out of the window on the 1st floor at least once a day; he will certainly break a leg one of these mornings. I haven't sailed since my last [?] I must admit I've had enough for the moment [?] of 8 frozen men. That leaves you with my sad imagination and I confess that I still have a few figures in front of my eyes. When you have a moment give me some news! You must have plenty to tell me. [?][?] was a success. I took it for you. Farewell my dear Bol. I beg and charge Clairon, the son of Trompette, to bring you this letter and I hope he will fulfil his mission by being well-mannered, knowing his place in the world and not forgetting himself in front of the furniture or behind the curtains. Try not to tire yourself too much, if you can, and above all I wish you every success. My love to you. Count Lepic.'

### **Artist description:**

An artist, archaeologist, museum curator and art patron, Count Ludovic Lepic (sometimes Le Pic) was expected to follow his father and grandfather into a military career but was allowed to pursue his desire to be an artist instead. He was trained by the Belgian artists Gustave Wappers and Charles Verlat, who encouraged him to take up etching. By 1861 Lepic was established in a studio at the Louvre, and had begun to work as a printmaker, selling his work through the shop of the print publisher Alfred Cadart. He had a particular interest in expanding the technical possibilities of the etching medium and became the youngest associate member of the Société des Aquafortistes, founded by Cadart in 1862. The following year Lepic entered the studio of Charles Gleyre, where among his fellow pupils were Frédéric Bazille, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir and Alfred Sisley, and also exhibited for the first time at the Paris Salon. During much of the 1860s Lepic was best known as an animal painter, with a particular penchant for canine subjects, aptly described by one critic as 'chiens héroïques'. He was also interested in the prehistoric archeology and ethnography of France and established a museum in the spa town of Aix-les-Bains, on the shores of the Lac du Bourget in Savoie, to which he donated artifacts and objects from his archaeological excavations. As an artist, Lepic often worked on the northern coast of France and in Holland, and in the 1870s converted a sailboat into a floating studio, producing numerous paintings of marine subjects. He continued to send paintings, watercolours, gouaches and etchings to the annual Salons, where he won a third-class medal in 1877, and its successor, the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français, until the end of his career. From 1877 onwards he spent several summers in the seaside resort town of Berck-sur-Mer in the Pas-de-Calais, where he painted beach subjects and fishing scenes, often from his boat. In the winter months Lepic would return to his Montmartre studio, where he entertained lavishly and which became a popular meeting place for fellow artists, as well as musicians and writers.

Although only tangentially associated with the artists of the Impressionist movement, Lepic was invited by his friend Edgar Degas to take part in the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, to which he sent three watercolours and four etchings. He likewise participated in the second Impressionist exhibition two years later, when he showed many more works, including twenty-two paintings and sixteen watercolours, mainly of coastal landscapes and marine subjects, together with a number of etchings. Lepic and Degas had been friends since youth, having met sometime in the late 1850s, and often visited the Opéra and the races at Longchamp together. Both were members of the Parisian club Le Cercle de l'Union Artistique (or 'Les Mirlitons'), and Lepic appears in eleven works by Degas, most notably in the painting Place de la Concorde (Vicomte Lepic and his Daughters crossing Place de la Concorde), painted in 1875 and today in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. (Lepic was also the subject of a portrait etching by another friend, the artist Marcellin Desbouts, which was shown at the Salon of 1876). Lepic seems to have been influential in persuading Degas to take up the practice of monotype printmaking, and in 1876 the two collaborated on what was to be Degas's first monotype, a ballet scene

which was signed by both artists.

In 1879 Lepic has his first solo exhibition at the offices of the weekly illustrated magazine *La Vie Moderne* in Paris, followed in 1881 by a second show that included around a hundred works. The same year he was appointed painter to the Ministry of the Marine, under whose auspices he was sent on a scientific expedition to Egypt. In 1883 Lepic's oeuvre was the subject of a large retrospective exhibition, numbering over three hundred works, at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, where they were shown alongside a large number of works by James Tissot. An occasional sculptor, Lepic also produced a number of costume designs for the Paris Opéra as well as designs for a porcelain dinner service that was exhibited at the Exposition Universelle in 1889, the year of the artist's death at the age of fifty.