Frank BRANGWYN (Bruges 1867 - Ditchling, Sussex 1956)

A Design for a Wall with a Fireplace

Watercolour, pen and brown ink and brown wash, with touches of white heightening, over a pencil underdrawing, on paper laid down on board.

Inscribed *Study for living room* / *for* [?] [?] *glass* / [?] [?] in blue chalk on the backing board.

362 x 405 mm. (14 1/4 x 15 7/8 in.)

From around 1899 onwards Frank Brangwyn worked extensively on architectural and decorative projects for private interiors. The first scheme of this kind was a bedroom for the Australian art collector Edmund Davis at Lansdowne House in London's Holland Park, for which Brangwyn planned and executed all of the decorative aspects of the interior, from the furniture to the marquetry inlay, the windows, the door catches and even the electric light switches. Among his later projects for interior decoration were the design of a room in the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice for Baron Lionel Hirschel di Minerbi, which was never executed, and the dining room of the villa known as the Casa Cuseni in Taormina in Sicily, the home of the painter Robert Hawthorn Kitson. In all the artist designed some forty decorative schemes for interiors, of which around a quarter were realized. Each of Brangwyn's interior designs of this type are characterized by similar themes, including the shared division of the space, with a dado of panelling and a decorative frieze crowning the architectural pattern of the room. As the Brangwyn scholar Libby Horner writes, Brangwyn '*could successfully design complete and harmonious interiors and demonstrated a technical understanding of each discipline…The defining features of Brangwyn's interiors are, in general, restrained backgrounds which acted as a foil to areas of decoration or paintings, line as the pre-eminent form of expression and the coordination of all aspects of furnishing, producing an aesthetic whole (Gesamtkunstwerk)…a unified interior.*'

Datable to around 1900, this large sheet displays many of the characteristics of Brangwyn's interior design practice, notably the use of wood (in this case apparently cedar) panelling and its division into squares and rectangles, the mottled tiles, and the insertion of a decorative enamel panel above the fireplace. It has been tentatively suggested that this drawing may represent a design for the interior of Temple Lodge, a late Georgian villa in the London borough of Hammersmith where Brangwyn took up residence in 1900, eventually building a large studio next door. A stylistically comparable design by Brangwyn for the wall of a billiard room for the firm of Thurston & Co., datable to c.1902, shared the

same provenance from the collection of Edward Peacock.

The present sheet was part of a large and important group of drawings by Brangwyn, for the most part representing his varied work as a designer and decorator, which the artist bequeathed to Edgar Peacock, the son of his longstanding housekeeper in Ditchling in Sussex. These drawings remained completely unknown to collectors and scholars until their dispersal at auction in 2000, following Peacock's death, and their rediscovery has since served to shed much new light on Brangwyn's extensive output as a designer.

Exhibitions

London, Haslam and Whiteway Ltd., *Frank Brangwyn Exhibition*, 2001, no.3; London, The Fine Art Society and Liss Fine Art, *Frank Brangwyn: A Mission to Decorate Life*, 2006, no.155.

Literature:

Charles Holme, ed., *Modern British Domestic Architecture and Decoration* [*The Studio*, Special Summer Number], 1901, illustrated in colour p.43, pl.2 ('*Design for a Fireplace in Cedar Wood, to be decorated with an enamel panel*'); Libby Horner, *Frank Brangwyn: A Mission to Decorate Life*, exhibition catalogue, London, 2006, p.151, no.155 (where dated c.1900).

Artist description:

The son of an architect, Frank Brangwyn was born in Belgium, where his father had settled for work. The family returned to England in 1875, when Brangwyn was eight years old, settling in London. For the most part self-taught as an artist, Brangwyn spent much of his youth studying the works of art in the South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum. He also worked for a period of two years, between 1882 and 1884, at the workshops of William Morris in London, where he was tasked with copying tapestries and producing drawings for wallpaper and carpets. Brangwyn quickly established an international reputation, receiving numerous commissions from private individuals, companies and public institutions. He became particularly known for large-scale mural paintings as well as interior and architectural designs for private and public patrons. In 1895 he was commissioned by the Art Nouveau pioneer art dealer Siegfried Bing to help decorate the exterior of his flagship store in Paris, the Galerie de l'Art Nouveau.

Brangwyn subsequently worked on numerous decorative schemes, notably for Lansdowne House in Kensington in London, completed in 1900, the Venice Biennale in 1905 and 1907 and the ocean liner RMS Empress of Britain, between 1930 and 1931. Amongst the artist's many mural commissions throughout Britain and abroad were decorations in the Royal Exchange (1900-1906) and the Lloyd's Register of Shipping building (1908-1914) in the City of London, the Cuyahoga County Courthouse in Cleveland, Ohio (1911-1915), the Missouri State Capital building in Jefferson City, Missouri (1915-1925), the New Parliament Building in Winnipeg, Manitoba (1918-1921) and Rockefeller Center in New York (1930-1934), where Brangwyn worked alongside Diego Rivera and José Maria Sert. Yet several other proposed works never came to fruition, such as the decoration of Selfridge's department store in London or the Kyoraku Art Museum in Tokyo, or were later destroyed. In 1917 Brangwyn purchased a house, called The Jointure, in the rural Sussex village of Ditchling. Over the next few years he divided his time between Sussex and London, but following his wife's death in 1924 he settled for good in Ditchling. He built a studio at the house, where he lived and worked until his death thirty-two years later.

Although today best known as a mural painter and printmaker, Brangwyn had a deep interest and understanding of all aspects of decorative design. As he once commented, 'An artist's function is everything: he must be able to turn his hand to everything, for his mission is to decorate life…he should be able to make pots and pans, doors and walls, monuments or cathedrals, carve, paint, and do everything asked of him.' Brangwyn produced over 230 designs for domestic, ecclesiastical and commercial furniture, as well as numerous projects for pieces of furniture, glassware, carpets, tapestry, jewellery, ceramics, stained glass and lamps, some of which were produced commercially by the firm of

E. Pollard and Co. in London. As the Brangwyn scholar Libby Horner has noted, ‘From the outset Brangwyn applied himself with rigour and equal success to every area of artistic production, becoming a polymath, a quintessential artist-craftsman. The sheer scale and variety of his artistic production daunted the critics.’