

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Paul CEZANNE (Aix-en-Provence 1839 - Aix-en-Provence 1906)

Study of Trees and Foliage [recto]; View of a Town (Emagny) [verso]

Watercolour and pencil on white wove paper.

310 x 434 mm. (12 1/4 x 17 1/8 in.)

This fine double-sided watercolour is a late work by Paul Cézanne, datable to between 1885 and 1890. Studies of trees and vegetation, such as that on the recto of the present sheet, form one of the largest subgroups of Cézanne's landscape watercolours. The subject allowed the artist to divide the scene into lines and dabs of colour, with the white areas where the paper was left in reserve used for the sunlight filtered through the canopy of trees, branches and leaves, which are depicted with thin washes of watercolour. As Götz Adriani has written of such works, *'watercolors proved to be almost ideal for recording the most fleeting natural phenomena on the spot. As he gained assurance in the niceties of watercolor technique, Cézanne was able to register his ideas instantly. Isolated treetops, blossoming tendrils, or simple patterns formed of branches and leaves that would scarcely have been of sufficient interest for long and tedious work on canvas reveal, when depicted in watercolor, a remarkably lyrical aspect of the painter. The most trivial things are presented with great care, and ephemeral impressions not normally associated with him – the barely perceptible motion of small branches in the wind, or the diaphanous reflection of clusters of trees in the water – are captured and given permanence.'*

In his critical catalogue raisonné of Cézanne's watercolours, John Rewald noted of the verso of the present sheet that it depicts the same view - *'though seen from a spot farther away, higher up, and more to the left'* - as the watercolour *Bourg avec Église (Emagny)* in the Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Museen in Berlin. In both works the church and belltower of the village of Emagny are identifiable.

Situated some twenty kilometres northwest of the city of Besançon, Emagny is on the Ognon river in the Doubs département of the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region in Eastern France. Cézanne was in the area in the spring of 1890, when he and his wife Hortense Fiquet, together with their son Paul, stayed in the Hôtel de la Gare in Emagny for several weeks while Mme. Cézanne settled her late father's estate.

During this stay at Emagny the artist made numerous drawings and sketches of the surrounding countryside, including the banks of the Ognon and the woods of Les Rompeaux and L'Abbaye. It has been suggested that the verso of this watercolour was probably drawn from the hillside above the train

station at Emagny, looking towards the village.

As the artist's early biographer Georges Rivière has noted, '*In their transparency, Cézanne's watercolors call to mind the sumptuous stained-glass windows that once decorated the aisles of dark cathedrals and gave so much richness to the naves they illuminated with a flamboyant glow. These watercolors give off light, it seems, as if the sun had penetrated them.*'¹⁰ Furthermore, Meyer Schapiro has perceptively noted that '*It is one of the charms and also a mystery of the arts commonly grouped under the name of painting that a few pencil lines with some added washes of color, hardly filling the surface and made as a preliminary study for what is to be a fully-covered canvas, can possess an intrinsic completeness... We do not have to interest ourselves in the workshop procedure of Cézanne to enjoy these offshoots of his process. Our admiration is independent of curiosity about method and technique, so compelling is the harmony of these incidental stages of his work, a harmony which is not to be confused with the values of an unfinished canvas. These modest notes achieve wholeness through the same operations of choice and perfected habit that determine the order of the most complex composition. Unlike the unfinished picture they say what they were meant to say – if only to the painter himself – and although a watercolor could have said more, they seem to us a perfect achievement as they are.*'

An early owner of this delicate watercolour was the Croatian-born businessman Zdenko Bruck (1903-1979), who studied first in Vienna and later in Bern, where he lived and worked until 1941, when he settled in Argentina. Bruck collected Old Master and modern drawings and prints, and in particular assembled a fine group of graphic works by Goya, some of which he later gifted to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Bruck probably purchased this watercolour from the art dealer Marcel Guiot, whose gallery in Paris was active between the 1920s and the 1960s. In 1980, the year after Bruck's death, part of his collection of works on paper was dispersed at auction in Bern.

This fine double-sided watercolour by Cézanne was unknown to Lionello Venturi when he published his catalogue raisonné of the artist's work in 1936. Indeed, it has only been exhibited in public once, when it was lent by Zdenko Bruck to an exhibition of 19th and 20th century drawings in Argentina in 1959, and has thus remained relatively little known to modern scholars and connoisseurs.

Exhibitions

Buenos Aires, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, *Dibujos. Siglos XIX y XX*, October 1959, no.9 ('*Una aldea*')

Literature:

John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne. The Watercolours: A Catalogue Raisonné*, London and New York, 1983, p.150, no.277a [recto], illustrated fig.277a (where dated c.1885-1890), and p.168, no.344 [verso], illustrated fig.344 (where dated c.1890); Raymond Hurlu, 'Quand Cézanne vient peindre au pays de Courbet...', in Denis Coutagne, ed., *Courbet / Cézanne: La vérité en peinture*, exhibition catalogue, Ornans, 2013, p.110; Société Paul Cézanne, *The Paintings, Watercolors and Drawings of Paul Cézanne: An Online Catalogue Raisonné*, [www.cezannecatalogue.com], nos.FWN 1214 [recto] (where dated 1885-1890) and FWN 1258 [verso] (where dated c.1890).