



Henri-Joseph Harpignies

(French, 28.06.1819 - 28.08.1916)

Paysage à Roquebrune

Signed lower left H. Harpignies 1912 and inscribed lower right 'a ma amie Rose Maireau'

Oil on canvas
117 x 82 cm / 46.1 x 32.3 inch

ABOUT

This painting shows that Henri-Joseph Harpignies is rightly called the 'Michelangelo of trees'. As one of the leaders of the Barbizon School, he painted outdoors and is known for his depiction of landscapes with grand, prominent trees. This piece shows us a view of a creek in an autumnal landscape and a prominent two-trunked tree that acts as a strong repoussoir.

The construction of the paint layers in the composition is interesting. Instead of applying different layers of paint on top of a base, where mostly foreground covers background, Harpignies worked the other way around in this piece. Starting with a brown base colour, which is to be seen throughout the painting, he later filled in the creamy colour of the sky and other elements. So he actually painted the air through the branches of the tree.

Since the work is dated in the lower left corner, we know Harpignies painted it in 1912, four years before he passed away. He was a renowned painter during that time, having won the Legion d'Honneur already in 1900. Furthermore, he annotated the work in the lower right corner, dedicating it to his dear friend and companion Rose Maireau: 'a ma amie Rose Maireau'.

BIOGRAPHY

(Henri-Joseph Harpignies)



Henri-Joseph Harpignies, also known as "the Michelangelo of trees," was born on July 18th, 1819 in Valenciennes, France. He spent most of his childhood working hard at the family's sugar beet factory. It was not until Harpignies reached the age of 27 that he started to paint and was subsequently taught by the landscape painter Achard. When the revolution of 1848 broke out, Harpignies escaped with his mentor. They sought shelter in The Netherlands and Brussels to study the northern landscapists of the 17th century. Harpignies also started to travel to Germany and Italy, where he met many of the artists of the Villa

Medici in Rome. In 1854 and the following years he would regularly stay in Marlis and Fontainebleu, where he became friends with Corot, among others. Corot's compositional style and colourful way of painting is clearly visible in the work of Harpignies. In the 1870s Harpignies spent his summers in Herrison, where he assembled a group of young landscape artists around him known as the "ecole d'Herrison." Harpignies not only concentrated on oil painting, but started spending more and more time painting watercolours, in which he reached an exceptional level. He was a master in choosing the proper perspective and remarkably adept in the precise depiction of the French country side with the aid of daring colours. Harpignies belongs to the last generation of Barbizon painters and is seen as an extremely influential master in the triumphant ascent of landscape painting. Harpignies passed away at the age of 97 in Saint-Prive, having won the Legion d'honneur and the Grand Prix at the Exposition Universelle of 1900.