

LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

HENRI-JOSEPH HARPIGNIES

1819 Valenciennes - Saint-Privé 1916

Hérisson-sur-Allier

Watercolour over black chalk on paper.

Signed and dated at the lower left: H. *Harpignies 76* and inscribed at the lower right: *Hérisson*.
250 x 275 mm

EXHIBITIONS: French Gallery, London, February 1923, no. 60 – Marlborough Gallery, London,
February-March 1957, no. 34

Henri-Joseph Harpignies was one of the most skilful and prolific draughtsmen of the second generation of French landscape watercolourists. In 1852, after travels to Holland, Flanders and Italy, he established his own studio in Paris. The developments of English artists of the Norwich School, exemplified by the work of John Sell Cotman and the brilliant *plein-air* watercolours of Richard Parkes Bonington, Thomas Shotter Boys and John Constable, had a profound influence on the young artist.

In 1853 Harpignies began to make excursions into the countryside and the Forest of Fontainebleau in order to paint *en plein air*. On these tours he encountered Corot, Daubigny, Diaz de La Peña, Dupré, Millet, Troyon, Rousseau and other artists of the Barbizon School. Many of these artists belonged to the French Realist movement and rejected classical academic tradition, insisting upon direct study from nature to achieve a truer representation of life in the countryside.¹ The influence of Corot and the Barbizon masters is apparent in many of Harpignies's landscapes. He made his Salon debut in 1853 and continued to exhibit regularly thereafter. Like many of his fellow Barbizon painters, he did not confine himself to working in a single region but produced paintings and watercolours in the Bourbonnais region of the Massif Central, in the Nivernais and in the Auvergne.

In September 1869 Harpignies discovered the old fortified town of Hérisson in the Allier, a department in the northern Auvergne. He was to return there every summer until 1879. The town is situated on a loop of the river Aumance and has preserved its picturesque architectural ensemble up to the present day. This watercolour depicts a square in the town centre. Flanking the square is the bell tower of the former church of Saint-Sauveur, a 12th-century building [fig. 1]. A group of painters later known as the École d'Hérisson grew up around Harpignies. In 1878, he acquired a small country house in the village of Saint-Privé on the river Loing in the department of the Yonne, where he lived until his death in 1916. He regarded watercolour as a major art form and his greatest works were executed in this medium.

This watercolour will be included in the forthcoming Henri-Joseph Harpignies catalogue raisonné being prepared by Anne Hellebranth and François Delestre.

¹ Chantal Georgel, *La forêt de Fontainebleau, un atelier grandeur nature*, exhib. cat., Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 2007.

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Fig. 1: Hérisson-sur-Allier, photograph showing the bell tower of the former church of Saint-Sauveur as it is today.