

LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

LEON-AUGUSTIN LHERMITTE
1844 Mont-Saint-Père (Aisne) - Paris 1925

Marché aux Herbes à Grasse

Pastel on paper, mounted on cardboard; 1911.
Signed with initials, lower left: *L. Lh.*
251 x 326 mm

PROVENANCE: The artist's studio – Private collection, Paris

LITERATURE: Monique Le Pelley Fonteny, *Léon Augustin Lhermitte (1844-1925). Catalogue Raisonné*, Paris 1991, p.190, no. 163.

EXHIBITION: Salon de la Société nationale des beaux-arts, 1924, cat. no. 664

Following in the footsteps of Jean-François Millet, Léon-Augustin Lhermitte took as his central subject the imagery of simple rural life. His interpretation of this pictorial tradition also reflects his exposure to contemporary Realist tendencies. He was to carry the tradition through into the early years of the twentieth century. In his lifetime his work was highly regarded and he achieved considerable international recognition. He was honoured with numerous prizes and medals.

In spring 1911 Lhermitte travelled with his family to the South of France. His daughter-in-law had fallen ill and the family hoped that the milder climate would speed her recovery. They took lodgings in the hilltop town of Grasse. The town, set back in the hinterland of the Côte d'Azur between the sea and the mountains, was already famous as the centre of the French perfume-making industry.

On his visit to Grasse Lhermitte is known to have produced at least four pastels of the town – *La Villa Felicita*, *Le Marché à Grasse*, *Place aux Aires* and *Fontaine à Grasse*.¹ The present sheet is traditionally thought to represent the Grasse herb and spice market but it is very probable that it depicts the fish market on the *Place de la Poissonnerie* in the town centre. This was a covered market under a large awning supported by two cast-iron pillars [fig. 1]. The roof construction was designed in Belle Époque style and is still *in situ* today.

The theme of the market as central to the life of a rural community frequently reoccurs in Lhermitte's work. The most famous of these images is the painting titled *Les Halles*, executed in 1894 and commissioned by the City of Paris to decorate the Hôtel de Ville. This monumental panorama depicts the market workers at Les Halles. It is an extraordinarily powerful image of a working environment.² On his travels Lhermitte repeatedly handled the subject of market squares with their hustle and bustle.³

¹ M. Le Pelley Fonteny, op. cit., p. 189, no. 159 and p.258, nos. 565 and 566.

² Oil on canvas, 4.75 x 6.9 m, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris [inv. municipaux 4404]. Le Pelley Fonteny, op. cit., p.114, no. 66.

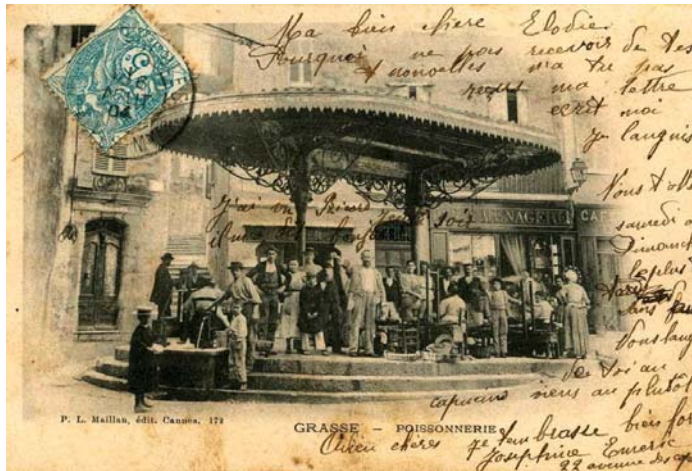
³ M. Le Pelley Fonteny, op. cit.: *La Halle aux Légumes, à Saint-Malo*, two pastels, 1893, p.221, nos. 339-40; *Le Marché de Château-Thierry*, one pastel and two drawings, 1894, p.223, no. 349 and p. 398, nos. 417-1, 417-2; *Jour de Marché à Villeneuve*, drawing,

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In the present pastel the fishmongers busy at their stalls are indicated in spontaneous, cursory strokes to something of an abstract effect. Lhermitte has focussed his attention on the ambience of the market and the play of light and shade in the narrow streets, alleys and squares of a historic southern town rather than on the human figures.



Grasse, *Place de la Poissonnerie*, postcard, c.1904

1894, p.422, no. 547; *Le Marché à Nuremberg*, drawing, 1896, p.423, no. 556; *Marché à Bourges*, four pastels, 1916-17, p.197, nos. 211-14.

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