

LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

HENRI EUGÈNE AUGUSTIN LE SIDANER

1862 Port-Louis - Versailles 1939

Automne doré, Quimperlé

Pen and black ink, black and coloured chalks, watercolour and gouache on paper; 1922.

206 x 249 mm

PROVENANCE: Jules Augry, Paris (director of Galerie Georges Petit, Paris)

This work is accompanied by a photo-certificate of authenticity from Yann Farinaux-Le Sidaner dated 2 March 2011 [No. LS 438]. It will be included in the forthcoming supplement to his Le Sidaner catalogue raisonné.

This artist succeeds in conveying a sense of silence, and perhaps that is the reason why his canvases enthrall us, commented Émile Verhaeren, the Belgian poet and art critic, writing about his friend Henri Le Sidaner.¹ And it is true that an enigmatic quality emanates from his works. His pursuit of the effects of light clearly follows the Impressionist tradition but he was also to some extent an adherent of Symbolism. To a Symbolist, the role of images was not to create precise, true-to-life representations, but to stimulate emotions and thus point to hidden affinities between visible and spiritual reality.² Between 1898 and 1900 Le Sidaner produced a series of forty views of medieval Bruges. These drew on Georges Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-morte* published in 1892. Infused with Symbolist qualities, the views are highly evocative and swathed in the ethereal stillness of the ending of the day. Similar views were to become Le Sidaner's major preoccupation. He found many of his motifs in cities like Paris, London and Venice but he also regularly escaped to the countryside where the calm of small French provincial towns offered him an attractive counterpoint to the hustle and bustle of the cities. The contemplative quiescence of these small towns provided a window into a utopian world that even then stood at the brink of disintegration.

On a visit to the coast of Brittany in the autumn of 1922 he produced several seascapes and a large number of views. Many of these views depict motifs found in towns like Le Croisic and Quimperlé and feature canalside houses, bridges and boats. The present drawing was executed on this visit. His views are almost always unpeopled. Paul Signac noted this, writing: *His entire work is influenced by a taste for tender, soft and silent moods. Gradually, he has gone so far as to eliminate from his paintings all human figures, as if fearing that the slightest human element might disturb their cocooned stillness.*³ On his return from Brittany Le Sidaner delivered twenty-seven paintings and drawings to the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris. It is probable that at about this time the present drawing passed into the hands of Jules Augry, the director of the gallery. Yann Farinaux-Le Sidaner, the compiler of the Le Sidaner catalogue raisonné, describes Le

¹ Émile Verhaeren on Le Sidaner's painting *Le Quai* (1898), in *Mercure de France*, 1906, cited in Dominique Maréchal, *Verging nicht diese Stadt? – Brügge als Treffpunkt europäischer Symbolisten*, in *Der Kuss der Sphinx, Symbolismus in Belgien*, exhib. cat., Vienna, BA-CA Kunstforum, Ostfildern 2007, p.38.

² Karin Sagner, *Henri Le Sidaner, A Magical Impressionist*, in *Henri Le Sidaner (1862-1939)*, exhib. cat., Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz 2009, p.15 and p.34.

³ *Toute son œuvre est marquée par le goût des atmosphères tendres, douces, silencieuses. Il va même peu à peu jusqu'à supprimer de ses toiles tous les personnages, comme s'il craignait que la moindre silhouette humaine vienne en troubler le silence ouaté.* Paul Signac, cited in Yann Farinaux-Le Sidaner, *Le Sidaner, l'œuvre peint et gravé*, Milan 1989, p.30-1.

Sidaner's career in 1922 and 1923 as [...] *a time of the utmost creative expression, where the artist reaches a peak of artistic achievement.*⁴ His paintings proved increasingly marketable in the United States in the years between 1923 and 1929. They were handled by the Knoedler Gallery in New York.

This drawing is a preparatory study for the painting *Automne doré, Quimperlé*⁵ (Fig. 1) which Le Sidaner executed in the studio in early 1923. It depicts a stone embankment dappled by sunlight on an autumn afternoon. The view is framed by golden leaves – delicate accents indicating their reflection on the surface of the water. The handling is masterly and the draughtsmanship and use of colour are highly unusual. Using coloured chalks he first applies areas of colour and then adds highlights in watercolour and body colour with fine, pointillist strokes. The shadows are deepened with a flurry of brief, rapid strokes of the pen. Jacques Baschet commented in detail on this original and complex technique in the magazine *L'Illustration* in 1924: *He is a pointillist, but not the kind who decomposes tones and applies them unmixed, thereby letting our eyes reconstitute the colours on our retina. His palette is extremely varied and subtle. The oils bind and melt into one another in highly delicate harmonies [...]. With him, contours seem to emerge from the interplay of light, and in this respect, he is similar to Claude Monet.*⁶



Fig. 1: *Automne doré, Quimperlé*, 1923, oil on canvas, 71 x 81 cm, private collection.

⁴ Y. Farinaux-Le Sidaner, op. cit., p.37.

⁵ *Automne doré, Quimperlé*, 1923, oil on canvas, 71 x 81 cm, private collection. (Y. Farinaux-Le Sidaner, op. cit., no. 493). There are two further preparatory studies for this painting, both in private collections: a drawing in black and coloured chalks, 1923, 160 x 190 mm (Y. Farinaux-Le Sidaner, no. 1147) and an oil on panel, 1923, 32.5 x 41 cm (Y. Farinaux-Le Sidaner, no.1148).

⁶ *Il est pointilliste, mais non à la manière de ceux qui désagrègent les tons et les appliquent sans mélange, laissant à nos yeux le soin de reconstituer les couleurs sur la rétine. Sa palette est extrêmement variée et nuancée. Les pâtes se lient, se fondent en accords très délicats [...]. Les contours, chez lui, semblent naître du jeu de la lumière. Par là, il s'apparente à Claude Monet.* Jacques Baschet, *L'Illustration*, 1924. Cited in Y. Farinaux-Le Sidaner, p. 36-7.