ANTOINE-LOUIS BARYE

FORÊT DE FONTAINEBLEAU

Barbizon period (1849-1875)

Oil on canvas

H : 18 cm, L : 24 cm

Signed « Barye » in red in the lower left corner of the canvas; on the back : red wax seal from the Barye Sale, "431" pencil inscription and "Archives Signac 2015" ink stamp seal.

Provenance :

Artist studio

his after death sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, February 7-12, 1876 n°42 (145 Frs, purchased by Mme Barye)

former Paul Signac and Françoise Cachin collection

then by descendance.



Although Antoine-Louis Barye was a student of Baron Gros at the École des Beaux-Arts and exhibited graphic creation as early as the Salons of 1831 and 1833, his painted output only reached full maturity during his so-called “Barbizon” period. It was then that his oils, mostly executed on panels, became an integral part of his artistic production.

From 1849 onward, the sculptor regularly frequented the village, forming friendships with the painters of the Barbizon School, notably Camille Corot, Théodore Rousseau, Narcisse Diaz, and Jean-François Millet.

After several stays at the Auberge Ganne between 1852 and 1853, he immersed himself in the practice of painting outdoor in the heart of the Forest of Fontainebleau. From 1859, he rented a large house at 26 Grande Rue, which he occupied every summer with his family until his death in 1875.

His pictorial practice then became a regular, almost daily activity: the majority of his landscapes (the Gorges d'Apremont, the Bas-Bréau), as well as his famous representations of wild animals integrated into rocky settings, date from this decade of the 1860s.

Unlike his bronzes, Barye did not exhibit his oil paintings, although he showed a few watercolors at the Salons of 1831 and 1833 and regularly sold his watercolors (perhaps out of friendship, so as not to overshadow his fellow artists in the village?). These oils represented for him a form of relaxation but, above all, surrounded by his painter friends, an aesthetic experimentation centered on light and mineral masses.

The posthumous inventory of 1875 confirms that the majority of this collection was kept in his Barbizon residence. These small-format piece were revealed to the public only at the retrospective exhibition held at the École des Beaux-Arts that same year, and then at his posthumous sale in February 1876, which dispersed 114 paintings. Among them were around ten studies after the Old Masters, until then kept in the "daughters' rooms" in Barbizon

The first Forest of Fontainebleau painting presented here is of exceptional interest: repurchased by his widow at the 1876 sale, it later entered the collection of the painter Paul Signac. This provenance is even more significant as the masterpiece displays a singular luminosity, whose influence on the master of Pointillism is readily apparent. Paul Signac indeed admired in Barye the "decomposition" of light in his forest landscapes and owned several of his piece, praising their pre-Impressionist modernity.