

BIOGRAPHY

Auguste Lauronce was born in Pau, in the South West of France, on July 8th, 1837, the son of a trading agent, the youngest of eight children, seven boys and a girl. Of his early years nothing has come to light yet. He may have learnt his trade with his brother Pierre-Charles, who was a printer-lithographer in Bordeaux. In 1873 we find him established as a printer-lithographer himself in Paris, 33, Rue des Vinaigriers. Later he moved to 207, Boulevard Voltaire, and there he met his next-door neighbour, Laure Prudent, who lived in the same street, at Number 276. They were married in 1876 and had two children, a son named Maurice, who died at the age of two, and a daughter, Gabrielle. Auguste had a creative mind: between 1873 and 1885, he took out no less than nine patents related to his trade, lithography.

The directory of 19th century French printers-lithographers introduces him as:

Lauronce (A.) imprimeur-lithographe, 207 bd Voltaire, inventeur d'un procédé qu'il baptise 'grattomanique'.

He coined this strange word in the first patent he took out on June, 10th, 1873, describing it as: "a process called 'grattomanie' whose aim is to teach the art of gradually highlighting and shading a drawing."

Here is one of the cards he printed with this method. It is part of a series illustrating puns, showing on one side a humorous play on words and on the other side, the literal meaning of the phrase.



Carte grattomanique: 'a man full of spirit'

At the time, his other known works included ads for the Zéphyr Corset, paper fan leaves and trade cards for Parisian department stores.



Trade card for ' A la Ville de Saint Denis'

But his real concern was for printing on fabric, as shown by his other patents, all connected directly or indirectly with fans. For instance:

June 17th, 1873 (only one week after the one mentioned above) :
 "Printing on cloth,(...)for bank notes,sun- and lamp-shades,hand screens,fans (...)

July 1874:
 "Printing on silk,satins,fabric of all colours (...) for fans, screens, sachets, (...)

This patent is the most interesting one because from it derived his fan printing business on a large scale and also because it was the object of a long lawsuit, lasting from 1877 to 1880. It reveals another aspect of Auguste: the shrewd businessman.

As the result of Lauronce's huge success in printing fans, one of his former employees Mr Arthus, with an associate Mr Grandet, opened their own business of fan printing. Lauronce sued them for counterfeiting.

Arthus and Grandet defended themselves by having a witness, Mr Ploncard, testify in their favour. Ploncard showed fans that he himself had printed, he said, prior to Lauronce's patent. There followed a highly passionate debate, in which judges, experts, lawyers, all dignified gentlemen, quarrelled endlessly about "Red Cherubs", "Bunch of Roses with Putti" or "Girl on a swing".

Realizing Lauronce was about to sue him for counterfeiting as well, Ploncard took legal action to have Lauronce's patent invalidated. A sort of 'shoot first ' strategy, one might say.

Three years and many fans later, it all ended in a no-win. Lauronce's patent was declared valid but contrary to his assumption, it didn't give him the exclusive right to print fans.

It was a bit of a setback, but more success came Lauronce's way in 1878 at the Paris International Exhibition.

He was awarded a Bronze Medal in the category "Printers" (group II,class 9). The jury noted that "Mr Lauronce (...) exhibited exquisite fans of his own making".

Alfred Lemerrier, President of the French society of lithographers, marvelled at "the magnificent results that we were able to see in Mr Lauronce's show case."

Other medals followed, in 1882 a Silver one at the Exhibition of the Union of Decorative Arts.

Lauronce became a counsellor to the Society of printers-lithographers.

But in 1885 an ad in the Bulletin of Printing and Stationary announced that "the printing works A.Lauronce is up for sale, due to ill-health."

Auguste died on November, 8th, 1886, a widower, leaving little Gabrielle, aged 6, in the care of the family in Bordeaux.

The business was not sold after all. Auguste's niece, Marguerite Lauronce (the daughter of his brother Pierre-Charles) and her husband Jean-Charles Mourguiart took charge of it quite naturally, since Mourguiart already worked there as a lithographer.

My guess is that they continued the fan-printing activity, using the same stones and Lauronce's designs, only adapting them to changing fashions.

But with Lauronce's main 1874 patent coming to an end in 1889, they must have come up against fierce competition. In 1890 Mourguiart sought to get new capital by bringing in associates. The business was thus listed as "Mourguiart & Replinger" (spelt Replingen in some sources), then shortly after, as "Mourguiart & Kohler" and eventually filed for bankruptcy in October 1893.

On November 20th of the same year, a notice from the Paris Court announced the division of property between Jean-Charles Mourguiart and his wife, née Lauronce.

Mourguiart signed an agreement with his creditors in April 1894, allowing him a six-year delay to pay back his debts. What he did during these six years is not known, I suppose he continued printing fans using Uncle Auguste's designs, eventually dropping the famous signature.

The 207 Boulevard Voltaire still exists today, it houses a branch of a famous chain of artists' supplies. Of the numerous customers purchasing brushes, gouache and canvasses, few can imagine that in the past, the building was alive with the throbbing of machines printing fans.
