

LE PIÈGE AUX OISEAUX « GRAND HÔTEL PARIS »

Scenes featuring bird catching are recurrent in painting. Lancret and Boucher have illustrated the theme, with its gallant innuendo equalling catching birds to catching love.



Nicolas Lancret: on the left, 'Spring' (Louvre); on the right, 'The Bird Catchers' (Wallace Collection)



François Boucher: 'The Bird Caught in the Net' (Louvre)

Lauronce also chose this theme for one of his fans. The model on which his print was made has not been identified at the moment but shows similarities with the paintings illustrated above.



It shows figures clad in classical antique dress. A young woman is pointing to a child the net that her companion is about to set in motion to catch birds. On the left two children are playing with a dove and a bird cage.

It must have been one of the most popular of all Lauronce designs for there are over a dozen remaining fans displaying it, printed on satin, paper, in various colours, plain or with embroidery, signed or unsigned. Obviously Mourguiart went on printing the design long after Lauronce's death.



In 2011 I bought one of these, which deserves a special study for although it is of poor quality it is of great interest: it is one of the three known examples of advertising fans by Lauronce.



The fan is fairly large: the guard measures 11.8 in. for span of 22.8in. The design is printed on a copper-coloured metallic background. It is not signed. The reverse is white paper, blank. In his essay on lithography, Alfred Lemerrier explains how to 'bronzé' paper (real gold not being used except on very high quality items) using a mixture of metallic powder and mordant:

"Bronze powder is applied with a cotton wad or better with a velvet pad coated with a small quantity of bronze. It is rubbed energetically over the paper and the excess is removed with a clean cloth. When the process is over the sheet is rolled between cylinders to enhance the sheen. [...] Bronze powders come in a whole range of shades. There are more than 40 different hues, from silver to reddish gold. [...] The bronzing process is the job of women or young apprentices. It is a most noxious activity. When practised over a long period of time it causes particles to be carried into the body and can constitute a major health hazard." [Note 1]

From time to time one should be reminded that the fans in our collections owe much to the harsh labour of men, women and children.

The sticks are plain wood, so roughly cut out that splinters always come off whenever one handles the fan. The guard is stamped with a scroll-like motif showing the inscription "Souvenir du Grand Hôtel Paris". The last two words have faded but are still visible under slanting light.



So the fan is not a special design for the Grand Hôtel but rather a low quality item that was simply 'customized' before being presented to guests.

Le Grand Hôtel Paris

The Grand Hôtel was intended to provide accommodation for visitors coming to Paris for the Universal Exhibition in 1867. It was built in 1862/63 by architect Armand. With its 800 rooms it soon was a favourite among wealthy American and British travellers. Its cosy and refined atmosphere culminated in the dining room, with its pillars, mirrors and painted decoration.



The following ad in an 1880 magazine [Note 2] gives a precise description of the services available and the price range.



In 1878 the price of a Lauronce fan with bones sticks was 4 Francs [Note 3], the equivalent of a lunch comprising wine, coffee and brandy. The price of a low-quality fan, such as the one studied here, must of course have been much less. It is impossible to know how many of these fans were given away to the hotel guests. A single one is quite enough to add a new chapter to the study of Lauronce's production: advertising fans.

NOTES

1/ Alfred Lemercier, *La lithographie française et les arts qui s'y rattachent*, Paris, 1896.

2/ From *Le Monde Illustré*, 1880. So the exhibition referred to in the ad must be the 1878 Paris Universal Exhibition.

‘ The current rate has been set since the end of the Exhibition. Bedrooms: 4, 6, 8, 10 or 12 Francs depending on floor. Discount according to length of stay. Long-term rental at fixed prices including accommodation, service, lighting, meals with wine included: 16,18,20 or 22 Francs. Ultramodern lifts to all floors. Lunch served at private tables: 4 Francs including wine, coffee and brandy. Menu dinner: 6 Francs, wine included. *A la carte* restaurant reasonably priced. Non-resident guests can have access to menu dinners or *à la carte* restaurant.’

3/ Report of the Jury of the International Exhibition, Paris, 1878, Group IV, Class 37.

