

ROYAT 1891 : a fan by Mourguiart ?



This simple fan with plain wooden sticks shows some intriguing characteristics which are worth studying. It is printed on cream coloured fine paper, the first unusual feature. Lauronce paper fans are usually printed on a thick type of paper with a metallic finish, in shades of gold, bronze or blue-grey. ((See the series "Piège aux Oiseaux" in the chapter My Collection)

A tiny label is glued to the reverse of the guard. It reads : "Maison Bail, Cotillon, 210 rue de Rivoli" . Except for the signature « V.Hugot », which appears on three fans in my collection, it is the only instance of a mention concerning the firms trading with Lauronce.



On the left of the leaf there is a stamped inscription in gold letters "Royat 1891". The inside of the letter O has disappeared, leaving an oval shaped hole in its place.



Royat is a city in the Puy de Dôme, the central region of France. Ancient volcanic activity has created numerous thermal springs, known since antiquity. Royat expanded in the 19th century thanks to the fashion for spa resorts and had the privilege to be host to their Majesties Emperor Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie.



The Thermal Premises and the Eugénie Spring

So this fan is an advertising fan. Did some event take place in Royat in 1891, requiring the printing of a special souvenir fan? Probably not, and the subject, a medieval peasants' dance, doesn't allude to an historical fact and appears on other Lauronce fans. It is more likely a type of fan given to the guests of the spa as a souvenir of their stay.

The date 1891 may be immaterial to the history of the city, but it is quite significant in the history of Lauronce fans. We must remember that in 1891 Lauronce had been dead for 5 years and the printing business 207 Boulevard Voltaire was in the hands of Jean-Charles Mourguiart, the husband of Lauronce's niece Marguerite. The business was in financial troubles. For unknown reasons (a change in fashion, competitors) Mourguiart could not cope and had to get new capital. In 1890, in a few months' time, a new company was formed, "Mourguiart and Replinger" then almost immediately cancelled and succeeded by a new one "Mourguiart and Kohler". Apparently Mourguiart was not a born businessman.

Was he more gifted technically speaking?

He doesn't seem to have produced under his own name. No printed fan signed by Mourguiart has been spotted yet. I think he simply went on printing Uncle Auguste's designs, reducing costs with lower quality standards. (See "Introducing the Fiancée" in the Chapter 'From Painting to Fan')

But the Lauronce firm must have retained some prestige, from the time when Auguste's production had been rewarded in national and international exhibitions. My guess is that Mourguiart used his uncle's signature long after Lauronce's death, to get better visibility in the trade.

For this fan dated 1891 *is* signed "A.Lauronce". I can't imagine that it was printed before 1886 and that it was shelved for 5 years before being sold to the Maison Bail to be used as an advertising fan.

Here we come to the logical and inescapable conclusion: this is *not* a Lauronce fan. It was printed using Lauronce's design, and in his printing press Boulevard Voltaire, but Auguste can't have signed it.

And on a closer look, the signature itself is most unusual: it is printed in blue, instead of the brown or black used on other fans.



I have shown in the chapter "Printing the Fan leaves" that there were not one but many Lauronce signatures. And that this one, featured as #2, only appeared on very large fans, of the kind that were in fashion in the 1890ies.

I suggest this signature should be considered posthumous and the fans using it as Mourguiart's work.
