

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Léon Augustin Lhermitte (Mont-Saint-Père 1844 - Paris 1925)

The weaver

63 x 49 cm

signed *L. Lhermitte* lower left

A draughtsman, printmaker, painter and illustrator, Léon Augustin Lhermitte was the son of a village schoolmaster and his precocious drawing skill won him an annual grant from the state. In 1863 he went to Paris and became a student at the Petite Ecole. He exhibited for the first time at the Salon of 1864 and in 1874 won a third-class medal at the Salon for his painting *The Harvest*. That year Lhermitte spent several months working in Brittany, a region where he would return frequently and which became the subject of several works. In 1882 he achieved a considerable measure of success with the exhibition of his painting *The Paying of the Harvesters*, which was purchased by the State on the opening day of the Salon. From this point onwards he began to concentrate on depictions of rural and peasant life, centred on his native town of Mont-Saint-Père, on the banks of the Marne river in Picardy. He enjoyed considerable commercial and critical success throughout his long career, and his paintings and drawings of daily life in the countryside were especially popular with British and American collectors.

As a draughtsman, Lhermitte produced mainly pastels and charcoal drawings, for which he was very highly regarded. His charcoal drawings were exhibited widely as independent works, in both France and London. Lhermitte's charcoal drawings, or fusains, were avidly collected and also much admired by other artists, notably Vincent Van Gogh, who noted of Lhermitte in a letter to his brother Theo, written in September 1885, 'He's a master of the figure. He's able to do what he likes with it - conceiving the

whole neither from the colour nor from the local tone, but rather proceeding from the light - as Rembrandt did - there's something astonishingly masterly in everything he does - in modelling, above all things, he utterly satisfies the demands of honesty...When I think about Millet or about Lhermitte – then - I find modern art as great – as Michelangelo and Rembrandt - the old infinite, the new infinite too - the old genius, the new genius.'

This impressive drawing showing a weaver at work can be compared to another charcoal by the artist (Le tisserand, 38 x 27 mm, signed and dated 1887) which was one of the illustrations Lhermitte realized for the book *La Vie Rustique* by André Theuriot and first published in Paris in 1888.[1] On both drawings the interior, the angle with which it is depicted and the two figures are the same, only the positions of the latter differ.

[1] see lit., Pelley Fonteny, p. 412, n. 486, illus.

Literature:

Comparative literature

M. Le Pelley Fonteny, Léon Augustin Lhermitte (1844-1925). *Catalogue raisonné*, Paris, 1991, cat. 486