

INTRODUCTION

The jury of the Paris 1878 Exhibition, where Lauronce was awarded a medal in the 'Printing' category, also alludes to Lauronce in the 'Fans' section (Group IV, Class 37) without naming him:

"Chromolithography on fabric, which has been applied to fans since the previous Exhibition, has made possible the reproduction of paintings by famous masters at low prices. By this process, perfected by a Paris firm, it is nowadays possible to have a pretty fan, with bone or ebony sticks, displaying a graceful and well executed design for 4 Francs ; ten years ago, it would have cost 20 Francs."

One cannot help wonder who are the 'masters' of painting whose works are reproduced on Lauronce fans.

Few are known, apart from the inevitable Boucher and his scene of shepherds' bliss, which is to be found on countless fans throughout the 19th century. The acme of French 'galanterie'. The other 'masters' that I have been able to identify are not so well-known, and most of them are not familiar anymore to us.

Eugène Lejeune, Adrien Moreau, Florent Willems or Henry Parsons Riviere have thus been copied by Lauronce. How he selected his subjects is another mystery, but he seems to have favoured contemporary painting over classical ones. One can also notice that most reproductions are made from engravings of the original works, not from the paintings themselves. The printed versions of paintings must have been widely available in printers' offices.

Lauronce fans are often dismissed as mere caricatures of the original paintings, shamelessly altering the artists' works, only using them to print 'cheap' fans. Think of all the mugs, coasters or notebooks adorned with Mona Lisa...

But on the other hand Lauronce has done no worse than countless others: copy. His contemporaries saw no harm in that, on the contrary, they praised him. It is true that he did not care much about copyright, as long as it was not his: all the paintings reproduced here, except the one by Boucher, were done between 1865 and 1880, too early to be protected by the Berne Convention of 1886, but still under some sort of copyright provided by the French law of July 1793 guarding artists' rights.

However nothing proves that Lauronce had not in fact purchased reproduction rights and may have thus copied quite legally.

To adapt a painting to a fan leaf in general, and a printed one in particular, some changes are necessary:

- Lay-out:

Space often has to be reorganized so as to fill in a semi-circular shape.

- Design:

It is simplified, The background and some figures are suppressed. The obvious reason is to reduce costs, but I think there is also an artistic choice behind this change, Lauronce creates his own style of designs, i.e. the finely detailed subjects surrounded with foliage that are his trademark.

- Colour scheme:

It has to be adapted to the colour of the leaf, matching or contrasting with the satin or paper background.
