

PRINTING THE FAN LEAVES

Lauronce's fans are chromolithographed, that is, they are printed with a stone matrix and lithographic inks.

The technique

The invention of lithography by Aloys Senefelder (1771-1834), an Austrian musician, actor and self-taught printer, was soon followed by numerous attempts to achieve colour printing without having to touch up the print by hand. Godefroy Engelmann (1788-1839), a French lithographer from Mulhouse in Alsace, invented in 1839 a colour printing process he called *chromolithography*.

The textile industry soon got interested in adapting chromolithography to fabric and in the 1850ies many patents perfected the technique.

Auguste Lauronce, a printer-lithographer specializing in fans, developed his own improvements, which he patented in 1874. The novelty of his technique consisted in "applying many layers of undercoats suppressing the original colour of the fabric and replacing it with a perfectly smooth white surface on which chromolithographic printing can be applied free of hand-touching." (Note 1)

Here is how Lauronce himself described his technique:

"You have to print a white undercoat which gives the outline of the design you want to obtain. To achieve this, I print in white the first colour, applying silver leaf or silver powder on top. I print again the same colour, powdering it with white. The aim of this process is to suppress the colour of the background and allow the printing of the other colours, even the most delicate ones.(...) To render the final relief and simulate hand-painting, I apply highlighting touches using wallpaper printing technique." (Note 2)

These white undercoats are still clearly visible on some fans, especially on the edges of the design, where they seem to merge into the fabric, creating an effect of perspective and depth. All the experts that examined Lauronce's work during the law suit with Ploncard (See the Chapter 'Biography') agreed that his prints were of a far greater quality than everything that had been produced before. No wonder many antique dealers sell them nowadays as "hand-painted".

The Backgrounds

Printing could be done on a variety of backgrounds. Satin was the most frequently used – or satins in the plural, one should say, as in the 1874 patent. For there are many kinds of satins, from the coarse cotton "satin de 4" (one thread under, three threads over) to the fine silk satins of 6, of 7, of 8 (one under, five over, and so on...) producing a highly glossy surface. Lauronce also took out a patent on January 17th, 1878 for :

"printing on transparent fabrics such as gauze [grenadine] tulle, crêpe,etc.."

I haven't yet seen a Lauronce on crêpe or gauze. The corrosive chemicals used for preparing the leaf prior to printing and the lithographic inks must have destroyed those fragile surfaces.

Cloth and paper were used too and the same design indifferently printed on fabric or paper, the paper usually having a gold-coloured metallic finish .

To appeal to different customers and tastes a wide range of colours was available:

- White in all shades (cream, ivory, off-white) with pastel or brightly coloured printing.
- Black with contrasted colour schemes : blue and copper; turquoise, green and orange; or with grisaille for mourning fans.
- And of course vibrant blue, red, or gold, on which the finest detail can stand out thanks to the numerous undercoats.

The layout

Lauronce fan leaves usually display a centered design, more rarely a design in the left reserve, leaving in both cases a wide expanse of fabric or paper free of printing. This is what makes Lauronce fans so easily recognizable, his trademark, so to speak. I think it is an artistic choice, for Lauronce could also have produced leaves printed all over: indeed one such leaf does exist, but it is the only one of its kind.



The design could be framed with a border. I know four different types, but there may be others.

- The Birds and Flowers, very pretty and delicate:



- The Roses and Forget-me-nots, on two unmounted leaves (Collection C.&PH.Biger)



- The Geomerical Frieze, perhaps meant to look like lace:



- The Persian Frieze with an oriental-style design:



The Signature

The signature was not part of the lithographic stone but an element added at the end of the printing process, clearly on top of the rest of the design and usually using the same colour as the contour: brown, more rarely black. It must have been a sort of 'stamp' perhaps even used by the boss himself after a quality-check.

In fact there is not one but a number of signatures. On the more than 80 fans in my collection I found 15 different signatures, a little more than one per year over a period of 13 years of activity. My study is

based on the overall size of the signature and the shape of the letter 'R'. Additional clues include the shape of the letters 'A' and 'L' and of the flourish underneath.

That explains why identical designs either do not have the signature in the same place or have a different signature, if another batch was printed later, or are not signed at all: those would be the ones produced by Mourguiart when he took charge of the business following Lauronce's death. Instead of being labelled as 'after Lauronce' they should be more accurately described as 'Lauronce printed by his nephew'.

Some links may be noticed between the type of signature and the size of the fan:

The most common type of signature appears on medium-sized fans (less than 29 cm/ 11.41 in.) but only on 8 large fans (over 30 cm/ 11.81 in.) .



Whereas a large signature with a looped L only appears on very large fans. As it also appears on a fan dated 1891 (See the Chapter 'Focus on', Royat 1891, a fan by Mourguiart?) , five years after Lauronce's death, I suggest that this signature may be posthumous and that the fans displaying it should be considered as Mourguiart's production.



NOTES

1/ In : « Annales du Tribunal de Commerce », Paris, 1878

2/ In : « Annales de la Propriété industrielle », Paris, 1880