Louis Valtat (1869-1952) - Undergrowth in Choisel



Oil on canvas, trace of monogram lower right

Dimensions : H. 32 x L. 40 cm (with frame: H. 53 x L. 61 cm)

Louis Valtat is one of the great French Neo-Impressionist painters. His painting, influenced by that of his friends Cross and Signac, is powerful and colorful. Valtat entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris at the age of 18, and continued his apprenticeship in the workshop of Gustave Moreau then at the Julian Academy. His talent was quickly recognized and he exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1889. Like Van Gogh, Louis Valtat sought the study of light and settled until 1914 in Anthéor, near Lavandou and Saint-Tropez. Valtat's colors are pure and violent, except when he encountered and was inspired for a moment by the Nabis movement around 1900.

Valtat is a wild beast by nature. In 1903, he participated in the first Salon d'Automne where he presented landscapes with an extremely colorful palette, prefiguring the Fauve movement. Ambroise Vollard, the art dealer who revealed Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso, quickly became interested in Valtat and decided to organize a personal exhibition for him. In 1905, Louis Valtat was noticed at the Salon d'Automne in the Cage aux Fauves with Marquet and Matisse. He will remain closer to Guillaumin and Cross than to Matisse, of whom he is nevertheless the exact contemporary.

Installed in the Paris region after 1914, Valtat evolved alone, in a style always concerned with plastic and colorful balance. From this date, he will often return to Normandy, the country where he grew up, and from where he brings us views of the port and landscapes. Until 1948 when he unfortunately lost his sight, Valtat's painting remained imbued with Fauvism.

In 1952, a major retrospective in homage to his work was organized at the Salon d'Automne.

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Our painting was created around 1925 in the woods of Choisel, a small village in the Chevreuse valley, where Valtat had acquired a property. This is where he liked to receive his friends, Georges d'Espagnat or Maximilien Luce.

This painting immediately captures the eye of the viewer, whether secular or enlightened. The subject, an undergrowth without any human or animal presence and where the sky is almost invisible, is nevertheless a challenge. With abundant foliage and a simple path in the forest, Valtat manages to give an augmented reality to the scene thanks to a simplification of the line and clever lighting. If we look closely, the trunks and branches are created by contours where the brush does not rise: Valtat is at the top of his art, his mastery of lines is total.

If the green color dominates, their nuances are infinite in order to suggest the depth and the light which infiltrates into the holes of greenery. The flat areas of pure and contrasting colors, particularly on the path, are a model of suggestive simplification; the play of shadows and lights invites us to enjoy a beautiful sunny day in the freshness of the trees.