

Pierre Honoré Hugrel (born in 1827) - Venus and Cupidon



Oil on canvas, signed lower left

Dimensions : H. 168 x W. 110 cm (with frame: H. 186 cm x W. 126 cm)

In 19th-century Europe, the Beaux-Arts reinvented "the antique body in all its finery". There was a major revival of interest in ancient Greece and Rome, which provided academic art with its main subjects. Led by William Bouguereau (1825-1905), this art form enjoyed immense success, before being pejoratively referred to as "pompier" with the advent of modern art. Highly appreciated in the United States, this remarkable academic painting was rehabilitated in the 1970s, and the art world today appreciates the talent of these exceptional artists.

Born in 1827, Pierre Honoré Hugrel apprenticed at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He was taught by Charles Gleyre, the Swiss painter who trained Alfred Sisley, Claude Monet and Frédéric Bazille, among others. But unlike the latter, Hugrel chose to remain on the classical path, excelling in portraits, nudes and mythological subjects. As in his painting preserved in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice (*Le Sacrifice au dieu Pan*), Hugrel drew inspiration from the Italian Renaissance, and Botticelli in particular, to create a mythological yet dreamlike universe. His remarkable drawing technique also enabled Hugrel to carry out official commissions, such as a large portrait of Emperor Napoleon III commissioned by the French government in 1862 (now housed at the Musée de la Légion d'Honneur, next to the Musée d'Orsay). Pierre Honoré Hugrel exhibited at the Paris Salon from 1850 to 1880, winning a medal in 1868; however, only a few large-format works are known, most of which are owned by major French museums (Nice, Laval, Beaune, Rouen...). Paintings by this artist are extremely rare on the market.

This masterpiece shows the care Pierre Honoré Hugrel took with each of his monumental works. This is undoubtedly the painting with which the artist won a medal at the Paris Salon in 1868. It depicts an unclothed Venus, who with a sweeping gesture confiscates her son Cupid's quiver full of arrows. Every detail of the composition is handled with skill and mastery. The transparent drapery falls with suppleness, the complexion and hair are admirable, and the flowers and butterflies in the foreground are drawn with astonishing realism. Note that Venus's hair is the same as that on the Bacchante (138

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cm x 206 cm), a work by Pierre Honoré Hugrel painted in 1864 and now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen.

