

Paul LaCroix (1827 - 1869)

Still Life with Fruit, 1864

signed "P. LaCroix" and dated "64" lower right

oil on board

10" x 14"

Paul LaCroix, an immigrant from France, appeared in New York some time before 1855. Urban centers such as New York and Philadelphia witnessed an influx of foreign artists at mid-century who left "to escape the turmoil of the revolutions of 1848" (1). European immigrants such as LaCroix brought with them the Dutch, German, and French traditions of still-life painting, which became aesthetically popular among American patrons and artists. "The economic growth of America in the 1840s and 1850s permitted more refinements in the average home; a still life for the family dining room was part of an improved standard of living" (2).

In the Dutch tradition of still life, LaCroix's objects, such as the severed stems and broken watermelon, act as symbols that are intended to remind viewers of the mortality of living objects, and, in turn, themselves. The scene incorporates the viewer as well in that the presence of human beings is implied by the droplets of water that appear on the freshly washed fruit. *Still Life with Fruit* presents an austere arrangement of assorted produce on top of a wooden table in a shallow, isolated space. Here LaCroix espouses a painting style that seeks a balance between the overtly suggestive and overtly realistic. The composition offers an intriguing range of textures, which the artist depicts with sensitive handling and a pleasant contrast of warm and cool colors. The subject is illuminated dramatically at the center, with the light fading off towards the dark toned background.

LaCroix's work is often confused with that of the prolific and contemporaneous still-life artist Severin Roesen (1815-1872), a German painter who arrived in America nearly a decade earlier. LaCroix was listed as an artist in *Polk's City Directory* in 1857, the year before Roesen left for Philadelphia, signaling an overlap of their careers (3). Similarities between the two artists have caused speculation as to whether LaCroix was a student of Roesen; it is known that Roesen took students in Pennsylvania, but there is no evidence whether he had done the same during his decade in New York. Furthermore,

[Roesen] did not teach his students the fundamentals of drawing, painting, and art history; but rather he taught them how to paint in precisely his own manner using the formula he had developed for himself (4).

Like Roesen's work from the 1860s and 1870s, *Still Life with Fruit* displays a simplified format on a small wooden panel and depicts the fruit being close to life-size.

There is little information about the life and career of LaCroix; he was active for only a short while. He began exhibiting his still-lives at the National Academy of Design in 1863, and submitted paintings to the annual exhibitions over the course of the next eight years. In 1867, he moved from Manhattan to Hoboken, New Jersey where he lived until his death.

Provenance: From a private Maryland collection to the artist.

Bibliography:

1. William H. Gerdts and Russell Burke, *American Still Life Painting* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 61.
2. Gerdts and Burke, 60.

3. Judith Hansen O'Toole, *Severin Roesen* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1992), 70.
4. O'Toole, 52.