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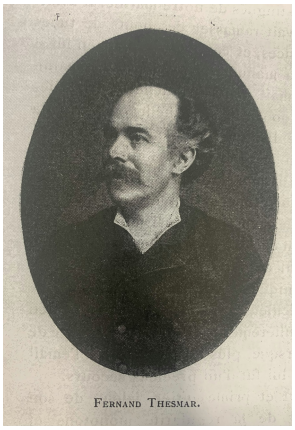

Photograph of Fernand Thesmar Library of the musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

André-Fernand THESMAR and Ferdinand BARBEDIENNE - Plate with Chickadee and butterfly, circa 1872-1880

Fernand Thesmar, Cup made of transparent enamel, 1892
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Fernand THESMAR, Ceramic gardener with applied enamel flowers decoration
Marc Maison Collection

André-Fernand THESMAR et Ferdinand BARBEDIENNE - Plate with a parot, circa 1872-1880
Marc Maison Collection

Fernand Thesmar was born on the 3th March 1843 in Chalon-sur-Saône where he grew up until he was nine with his family. Because of unfortunates events, they are obliged to move and settle in Mulhouse in 1852, city where Fernand started to study. Passionate about chemistry, he's advice to enter the factory of MM. Heimalnn brothers, well known in Mulhouse where chemistry student were taught. Unfortunately, because of the price he could not offer, Thesmar was obliged to give up the idea. He starts an apprenticeship when he's 14 years old on the Schwartz-Huguenin house, where he learns the industrial designer job. His master, Ulrich Tournier, flowers painter, makes him dissect and draw plants, obliging him to an anatomical analyse of the shape and a meticulous copy of the nature.

In 1860, after four years of service, Fernand Thesmar, suffering from the oppressive atmosphere of the factory life, leaves Mulhouse for Paris, he was 17 years old. He enters first, the workshop of Cambon, theatre decorator, with whom he works on flats decoration. He leaves around 1866, to draw tapestry cartons at Beauquier et Delforce. During these years an exceptional work is ordered to him for the Emperor Napoléon III : drawings for the *Vie de César*. Nevertheless, in 1868, he goes back to the carpets industry by accepting to be the director of the Aubusson tapestries factory, until 1870.

After being enrolled in the army during the war, Thesmar returns to Paris and creates tapestry cartons for the Braquenié house. Life is hard as many orders are not always well paid. A financial renaissance appears when he starts working for the art founder Barbedienne in 1872 where he definitively find his path by studying enamel. He's then in charge to supply models for the cloisonné enamel works. This kind of technique is new for the enameller of the 19th century, it's an unknown fabrication that necessitates to be relearnt, in which many surprises, uncertainties and baking difficulties can appear.

He sends the following year, during the World's Fair of Vienna in 1873, an important tray depicting a Chinese roster, congratulated by the official reports. This tray was also presented during the Exposition de l'Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs of 1874 and the Salon of 1875.

He presents at the World's Fair of 1878, three creations: A savage duck, the Spring and Automn. They are very successful consecrating the nascent reputation of Thesmar and strike the public by the enameller's choice to depict a very French décor translated by an exotic proceed. His association with Barbedienne house ends during the last years of the 1870's.

Thesmar is then retired in his workshop on the 25 rue Montrosier in Neuilly during some difficult years. On the verge to be evicted by the owner of the place, the Englishman Chiled helps him by giving him the contact of the antiques dealers Sichel, who rent the workshop for him and are engaged to take his production during a determinate period of time. In 1888, he creates his first work with transparent enamel: a very small cup sold by the Sichels to another Englishman M. Morisson, who comes to Paris searching for the author. When he finds Thesmar, he proposes to him to come to London and to create for him. Thus, Thesmar stayed for two or three years in London and came back to Paris after, where he received a very warm welcome.

Interesting by the porcelain decoration, he starts a new adventure with Charles Lauth, who leads the Manufacture of Sèvres and works there until 1893. He also stays independent and uses the factory whites. In 1891, he files his mark, the monogram formed with two capital F reunited by a T, that he's using since 1875 for his copper enamels. The following year, the École des Arts Industriels of Geneva asks him to teach classes on the enamel art, which he accepts.

Recognized for his talent, he receives in 1895, the Croix de Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur and during the 1900 World's Fair, he's not competing but exhibits in the display of theManufacture of Sèvres and his own and was jury of the silver section.

At the beginning of the century, the artist is also interested in the creation of jewels to which he applies his taste for nature. He exhibits for the last time during the Saint-Louis World's Fair in 1904, in the United States. As his work is also noticed in this country, they propose to him a job as a teacher that he refuses. He suddenly dies, eight years later, on the 6th April 1912 in Paris.

See also

Ferdinand Barbedienne — Japonisme — 1873 World's Fair — 1878 World's Fair — 1900 World's Fair — Sèvres porcelain — Napoleon III style

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André-Fernand Thesmar,
Enameled ceramic gardener,
Marc Maison Collection

Excerpt from the Revue des Arts
Décoratifs, February 1896

Thesmar's marks filed in 1891 but used since 1875