



Gallery Notes

SUMMER 2014

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JOHN MITCHELL  
FINE PAINTINGS



This summer will mark a decade for our firm in Glyn's House, or 44 Old Bond Street to the postman. On relocating from 160 New Bond Street to this former milliners with its distinctive pink and white 1906 façade, an American colleague proclaimed from the street in plain New York language: "The building is your advert!"

This was a convincing quip in the context of an industry then absorbing so many new art fairs, art advisors and the expanding reach of individual websites. Today's premium on retail space in Bond Street and its neighbourhood has witnessed massive, 'Monopoly' style transactions to secure leases, inevitably forcing out both established art dealerships and smaller galleries. Various recent articles and interviews have chronicled the rise of the big fashion emporia, bringing into question the very relevance and sustainability of a 'Bond Street' gallery.

Now in its third premises in the same street, this eighty year old family partnership remains first and foremost a gallery based business. We feel very fortunate to have this location but, nonetheless, participate in major art fairs and art 'weeks', we advertise regularly and actively use our website to the best of its potential. Indeed, albeit yet more 'advertising', our recently added News section will, hopefully, draw attention to the more interesting aspects of our trade, such as new pictures, exceptional *trouvailles* and offer some commentary on exhibitions in museums and other galleries.

Our short News features will not replace our tried and tested *Gallery Notes* even if they will appear more frequently on the website. It bears repeating that *Gallery Notes* is anything but a comprehensive new stock catalogue with outsourced research and scholarship, and its ongoing appeal may derive from the brevity of content!

We are delighted to include three newcomers in this June 2014 *Gallery Notes*, namely paintings by Cerrini, Willem van de Velde the Elder and Prevost the Younger. We are proud that, to the best of our knowledge, none of these pictures have been offered for sale over the last thirty years, if at all, and only the Guillemet and Berjon paintings are recorded in any recent literature.

We will be taking part in Art Antiques London in Kensington Gardens (12-18 June), Masterpiece at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea (26 June-2 July) and Master Paintings Week here in the gallery (4-11 July). We very much look forward to welcoming you to these exhibitions.

William Mitchell  
June 2014

**Gian Domenico Cerrini (1609 -1681)***A Vanitas: Time revealing Truth*

oil on canvas, 60 x 73in (151.5 x 185cm)

## PROVENANCE

Possibly painted for Tomasso Fantacci circa 1670 in Florence.  
Private collection, Belgrade, Serbia.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Francesco Federico Mancini, *Gian Domenico Cerrini, il Cavalier Perugino tra classicismo e barocco*, September 2005 -January 2006, Palazzo Baldeschi al Corso, Perugia. Silvana Editoriale, Milano (2005)

'Veritas filia temporis': Truth is the daughter of time. Gnarled with age, Father Time's left hand points to a sensuous young woman reclining on a poster bed. One of two heavy and ornate curtains has been pulled across revealing Time's daughter, Truth, who is holding up a posy of flowers in her right hand. A string of pearls runs through her blond hair and a gold band studded with precious stones is wrapped around her upper left arm. An open book lies beside her together with more gold chains and bracelets with stones. A small lap dog, symbolising Vanity or even Envy, stares up at the young woman's face. Depicted naked apart from a dark blue cloth across her left thigh, Truth is reclining against a tasselled cushion as she gazes straight out at the viewer. Time's right hand rests on an hour-glass with its sand almost full below. He too looks out at us and behind him, beyond his huge wings, an obelisk, an allusion to the sun as the generator of life, rises up above some trees. In front of the half-drawn curtain on the far side of the bed, a skeleton, representing Death, leers out from the deep shadow. In its right hand of bare bones, Death holds a large scythe over his back.

The recent and extensive cleaning of this newly discovered painting by Gian Domenico Cerrini uncovered the figure of Death which had been intentionally obliterated from the composition with over-painting. Death's sinister reinstatement has radically altered the picture's meaning. It has gone from a Vanitas theme with the jewellery, flowers, book and dog alluding to earthly conceit, to a more complex one, namely Father Time drawing a veil aside to expose the naked figure of Truth watched over by Death. Truth is the only figure bathed in light which enforces the idea that she lies hidden until unearthed by Time. Although Truth portrayed as a young beauty was one of the most popular figures in Baroque allegory, scenes that included an actual skeleton as a personification of Death instead of Father Time's habitual hour-glass and scythe were quite infrequent. Our dramatic and bespoke rendering of this theme takes the Vanitas idea to a new, more disturbing level. Despite her beauty and beguiling pose, Truth stands to lose it all; here she is at the mercy of Death in a literal and physical sense as his left arm extends out behind her shoulders in a feigned embrace. Truth's jewels epitomize her pointless, narcissistic possessions that Death will soon steal, and her bouquet of flowers become symbols of brevity and inevitable decay. In pointing at her, Time isn't just displaying how purity is vindicated in the end, with truth coming out in the long run, he is also identifying for us his next victim. He will take away her life and also destroy her youth and beauty. And in revealing the truth, Time also metes out justice.





Cerrini, also known as Il Cavalier Perugino, painted three other large allegories on the Time and Truth theme; two are in the Gemäldegalerie in Kassel, Germany and the more famous two and a half metre high version entitled, *Time destroying Beauty*, hangs in the Prado, Madrid. Including our picture, which has the identical figure of Father Time as the Kassel work, (see illustration) these 'Time and Truth' subjects date from the last decade of his career when Cerrini was in Rome having fully embraced the Baroque movement.

Born in Perugia, Cerrini first studied with the late Mannerist painter, Giovanni Antonio Scaramuccia (1580-1633). In 1638 he moved to Rome where he reputedly entered Guido Reni's former studio or at least associated himself with the Bolognese masters such as the Carracci, Lanfranco, Domenichino and later Guercino. It is undeniable that Reni and these Roman-Bolognese painters had a long lasting influence on Cerrini's style. However a clue to a clearer understanding of this long neglected painter's context in art history terms lies in the subtitle to Francesco Mancini's three hundred page catalogue (see bibliography), *Gian Domenico Cerrini, il Cavalier Perugino tra classicismo e barocco*, which was written to accompany the first major exhibition held in 2005 in Perugia. Accompanied by a panel of specialists in seventeenth century Italian art, Mancini's extensive research showed to what extent Cerrini's work, from his Roman and Florentine periods, was based 'between Classicism and the Baroque' as per the succinct catalogue title.

In the Eternal City Cerrini enjoyed success and received a lot of commissions quite early on. His *Holy Family with Saint Agnes and Catherine* and a *St. Ursula* were his first major paintings done in 1643 for the church of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane whose Borromini façade singles it out as one of the archetypal baroque churches. But given the plethora of talent amongst his Roman contemporaries then it is perhaps understandable why so many of his paintings have been misattributed over the last few centuries. Despite their usually very large size and distinctive *chiaroscuro*, more often than not, Cerrini's pictures have been catalogued as circle of Reni or attributed to other 'migrant' painters in Rome at the time, in particular, Cozza, Romanelli, Sassoferrato, Sacchi, Gimignani and even the French Pierre Mignard. However the presence of Cerrini's pictures in all the established *palazzi* removes any doubt that may have been cast over his status. It also proves that Cerrini, notorious for his non-conformity, was an independent master capable of winning commissions alone. The families of the Colonna, (see his superlative 1650 *St. Sebastian*, Galleria Colonna, Rome) Barberini, Chigi, Corsini, Pallavicini and Spada were amongst his principal patrons as well as, most importantly, the future pope, Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi. In fact, as well as choosing Cerrini to paint a series of frescos for the Santa Maria della Vittoria church in 1655, Rospigliosi continued to commission pictures from him for over three decades. Ironically, this *Assumption of Saint Paul* cycle of frescos in the Vittoria church became his most famous legacy yet the cause of such hostility and jealousy that Cerrini, stung by widespread criticism, would abandon Rome for several years.

In rebuilding and adding to the existing *corpus* of known Cerrinis, Mancini and company's research has come a long way in explaining the painter's abrupt departure for Florence in 1656 at a moment when there seemed to be endless commissions. Successful or not, Cerrini was still an interloper in Rome, a painter from the provinces who, having won favour with the Spada family and the powerful Cardinal Rospigliosi, aroused envy and rancour. The Cardinal and the Spada family, nonetheless, stood by him ensuring his swift entry to the Medici court where he would spend six years working for Ferdinand II and his brothers. In Florence, Cerrini befriended the Medici's principal comptroller, Tommaso Fantacci, for whom we



Gian Domenico Cerrini  
*Il Tempo rapisce la Bellezza*  
oil on canvas  
49½ x 66½ in (126 x 169 cm)  
Gemäldegalerie, Kassel, Germany

now believe our Time revealing Truth was painted with many other pictures by him. Fantacci became a leading patron of Cerrini independent of the Medici, yet many of these Florentine pictures known from Medici inventories remain untraced today despite good evidence of the quantity commissioned even when Cerrini had moved back to Rome in 1661. Further research has shown that without Fantacci's support, this self-imposed exile that bred so much bitterness in Cerrini, did not actually land him any major commissions unlike his Roman period.

Throughout the 1660s the 'master of the agitated draperies' entered his most baroque period. He began a more two dimensional approach to larger figures right in the foreground and his handling of the soft *chiaroscuro* enveloping his subjects' limbs became increasingly sophisticated. Cerrini amplified the drama in his models' gestures and his undulating draperies became folds and whirlpools of Florentine colour and light as if he wanted to emulate and translate Bernini's vitality into paint. Like sponges absorbing the 'Late Baroque' in Rome, his distinctive paintings took on more complexity. Taking into account these stylistic changes, we can confidently place in date and context *Time revealing Truth* alongside the two Kassel pictures and the Prado one. In Mancini's esteemed view, the Prado's *Time destroying Beauty* is one of Cerrini's finest achievements in terms of its compositional balance and interplay of the statuesque Time and Truth figures surrounded by whirls of drapery.

There appear to be a few more recorded 'Truth' pictures in inventories yet to be 'revealed' but why Cerrini chose this allegory and returned to it on a few occasions in the last decade of his career remains unclear. A plausible suggestion might be that the rejection he experienced in Rome early on had spurred him to success, but perhaps the sense of injustice had never left him after all. Alone and with no documented pupils, Cerrini had always been an outsider thus the parallels between his approaching demise and the need to 'out' the wrongs of the past are too tempting to overlook!

We are indebted to Dr. Erich Schleier from Berlin for his invaluable help in identifying this painting as a new addition to Cerrini's work.



**Willem van de Velde the Elder (1611-1693)**

*An English two-decker lying-to at sea in a moderate breeze, with boats pulling towards her*

brush, pen and ink, and wash 'en grisaille' on canvas, 22 x 25in (56.2 x 63.5cm)  
signed and indistinctly dated 169(?)

PROVENANCE

Auction at Prestel's, Frankfurt-am-Main, 18-19 Nov., 1921

LITERATURE

M.S. Robinson, *The Paintings of the WILLEM VAN DE VELDES*, National Maritime Museum, 1990, 2 vols., p.96, no. 796

A magnificent English warship, a two-decker of sixty or seventy guns, is seen from three-quarters astern heaving to. On her poop deck is gathered a large part of the ship's company, and her sails are being variously backed or hauled down to take way off the ship. At the starboard bow her best anchor is just about to sink below the waves. About the ship several crowded pinnaces make their way towards her, and, not far off her starboard quarter, two sister ships are seen on the opposite tack also taking in sail. Further beyond, across the whole horizon, the rest of the squadron stands out to sea. This is a late masterpiece by the great Dutch marine painter Willem van de Velde the Elder, presented for the first time since it was last recorded at a sale in Germany nearly ninety years ago.

This painting is one of Van de Velde the Elder's distinctive 'pen paintings' or *penschilderij* as they were known in the artist's native Dutch. At a time of renewed interest in the work of Van de Velde and his son, Willem the Younger, the re-emergence of this canvas is nothing less than a revelation. For it establishes that Willem van de Velde the Elder could still turn out a highly detailed, competent ship portrait in his preferred *penschilderij* technique even in the very final years of his life. It must be remembered that most of his pen paintings – seventy-seven being a credible estimate – date from before 1672, and that only eighteen are recorded from then on until his death in 1693. This pivotal change in his output is attributable, of course, to the artist's move to England with his son in 1672 or 1673, with its attendant implications for their patronage and the value of their work.

Upon their arrival in England and for nearly fifty years afterwards, the Van de Velde family was paramount in the field of marine painting and brought popularity to the subject, which in turn engendered a new domestic school of maritime art. Van de Velde the Elder himself had grown up in the era of the flourishing first generation of Dutch realist marine painters – the earliest in the history of art – and had been at work doing ship drawings *en grisaille* as early as the 1640s. His presence as an established court painter in later Stuart England therefore constitutes an important link between early Dutch marine art and the English sea painters of the early Georgian period, among whom Charles Brooking was pre-eminent. (Brooking was both the Van de Velde's greatest apologist and the finest English marine artist until Turner.)

In the gilded history of picture collecting in Britain in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, 'Vandervelde' became a generic term encompassing father, son and workshop, to the point that their separate identities were suppressed. Indeed, it is this writer's belief that by the term 'a Vandervelde' the connoisseurs understood specifically an oil painting by Willem the Younger, and that in their minds the father was dismissed as merely a prolific, if assiduous, draughtsman. Nor were these noble collectors necessarily mistaken, for it is generally agreed today that Van de Velde the Younger was a far more talented artist, and that his influence on subsequent marine painters was the greater. It is also the case nowadays, however, that 'father' Van de Velde's work is excessively rare compared to that of his son and that art historians have come to a greater appreciation of the Elder's stature as an artist.

As with so many artists, even ones as eminent as the Willem van de Velde, the documentation of their lives is fragmentary. There are few letters to turn to, and no mention by spirited Dutch diarists of the time, only official records of births, marriages and deaths and instructions about their work with the Dutch and, later, English fleets. Much about them has therefore, inevitably,



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been left to conjecture, but the signal factual distinction between father and son is that the Elder frequently went to sea throughout his life and, most famously, observed at close range ships in action in several of the significant naval engagements of the Anglo-Dutch Wars. Grounded in the tradition of the pioneering Dutch marine artist Hendrick Vroom (1566-1640), there was no more patient and astute observer of ships than Willem Van de Velde the Elder, and there are literally thousands of his drawings in existence today, ranging from rapid sketches of sea battles to huge friezes commemorating the same events. His large-scale ship portraits in black chalk with grey washes survive in their hundreds, too, as do those of his son working in identical fashion. Indeed it has been said that ‘as a result of the Van de Veldes we know more about the appearance of individual Northern ships in the seventeenth century than we do of those in the eighteenth.’<sup>1</sup>

It is traditional to assume that Willem the Younger worked from his father’s painstaking, often hard-won drawings to create his own remarkable oil paintings. Happily for scholars, even wise King Charles II acknowledged their working relationship in his oft-quoted contract of January 1674, in which he agrees to give:

the Salary of one hundred pounds p. Annum unto William Van de Velde the Elder for taking and making Draughts of seafights, and the like Salary of One hundred pounds p. Annum unto William Van de Velde the Younger for putting the said Draughts into Colours for our particular use.

<sup>1</sup> E.H.H. Archibald, ‘The Willem van de Veldes; Their Background and Influence on Maritime Painting in England’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, cxxx/5310 (1982), pp. 347-360.

This neat distinction does not, alas, survive closer scrutiny of the these artists, and the huge quantity of paintings and drawings that the Van de Veldes produced has caused considerable problems of attribution. Even Michael Robinson’s wildly ambitious attempt at a catalogue raisonné of their combined efforts (see Literature reference on page 8) makes no attempt to separate the work of father and son, and at the same time greatly overstates the roles of studio hands in their authentic works.

It seems that at some point in the 1650s Van de Velde the Elder began to work up his careful drawings into elegant and informative compositions for his patrons using the *penschilderij*, or *pinceel schilderijen* technique. To quote one modern biographer, ‘He [Willem the Elder] was not alone in developing pen painting, but perfected it to a degree far beyond the ambitions or capabilities of its other practitioners’ (George S. Keyes, *Mirror of Empire – Dutch Marine Art in the Seventeenth Century*, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1990, p.419). Intended to furnish or adorn, Willem’s pen paintings were also expected to inform, and ships are drawn therein with sufficient precision to be identified. (It is only a matter of time, we hope, before the subject of ours can be named.) Acute observation of ships in action combines with a flair for decorative composition in his battle scene paintings, of which good examples are *The Battle of the Sound* (London, National Maritime Museum) and *Battle of Scheveningen* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). The curiously static feel and over-stylization of his earliest paintings are conspicuous by their absence in our example from four decades later. Indeed the latter displays all of the technical interest of his earlier work but is, if anything – and some good judges agree with this writer – enriched and mellowed by a harmony and softening of tone redolent of an artist’s advancing years.

Pen paintings on canvas – as opposed to panel – begin to appear in Van de Velde the Elder’s oeuvre in the mid-1660s, a notable example being *The Battle of the Sound, 29 October 1658* dated 1665, bought by Cosimo de’ Medici in Amsterdam in 1667 (Florence, Palazzo Pitti, oil on canvas, 143 x 300cm) Generally it may be said that his paintings become smaller and more delicate in later years (see for example *An English three-decker with the fleet in light airs* (1680), National Maritime Museum, BHC 0859). In Van de Velde’s *penschilderij*, outline drawing with pen and brush in inks would be followed by cross-hatching and other engraving-like techniques to produce shade and gradations of tone. Pale washes would then be applied, as here to suggest volume in sails, to create a sea surface and sky. Before any of this could happen, however, the white lead priming of the canvas over a gesso layer had to be allowed to harden sufficiently to accept the artist’s methods and, lastly, his varnishes.

In the well-charted, teeming waters of the golden age of Dutch art, the Van de Velde straits remain comparatively little explored, and seem to have much to offer up. We are told that an exhibition about them is planned for 2016 in Amsterdam; for this writer, at least, it cannot come soon enough.

JAMES MITCHELL



**Antoine Berjon (1754-1843)**

*A still life of flowers including lilac, roses, tulips and lilies in an urn with a basket of fruit and a melon upon a marble ledge*

oil on unlined canvas, signed lower right  
with fine original period frame, 39¼ x 30in (97 x 76.2cm)

PROVENANCE

French private collection, Lyon, since the 1830s;  
with John Mitchell and Son, 1983;  
Private collection, England.

LITERATURE

E. Hardouin-Fugier and E. Grafe, edited by P. Mitchell: *French Flower Painters of the 19th Century – A Dictionary*. 1989, P. Mitchell, Ed.(cover illustration) p.89, ill. p.96

This is the first large oil painting by Antoine Berjon available for sale in over thirty years. Even in the context of the Lyon school of flower painting, the richest in France, Berjon's magical qualities of originality, poetry and mystery were unmatched. In Berjon, France possessed one of the most technically gifted still life painters in the history of the genre. And yet given such a life span of eighty-nine years the paucity and scarcity of known and unknown paintings and drawings has undermined his neglected genius. This very evident rarity has bedevilled the chance to breathe new life into his work and, crucially, bring it to a wider audience.

There are three remarkable large oil paintings by him in the Louvre, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon and in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and all share the same air of mystery and tension present in this powerful composition. The careful arrangement of the fruit and flowers and sharp delineation naturally display Berjon's knowledge of Dutch still life from the Golden Age, but the prominence given to the cut stem in the foreground and the distinctive, white radiating light from the centre, including the 'signature' bee are hallmarks of his highly individual style.

This spectacular still life of flowers stands out as one of Berjon's masterpieces in its density, vigour and grandeur. On first hand inspection this picture also neatly dispatches any claim that Berjon was merely an accomplished flower painter taking his place behind his undoubtedly more famous and successful contemporaries from the North, and all with Flemish roots, namely, the van Spaendoncks, Redouté and Van Dael. As an equally superb draftsman and colourist, Berjon was in fact a highly original artist. The satin finishes on his roses, magical sheen of the basket, ethereal lighting and the daring and protruding cut vine, to name a few keynotes, betray the hand of a rare and beautiful 'Master' in the best sense of the term.

The discipline and conventions of flower painting have always presented a challenge to the creative artist not felt by the craftsman painter. Among the artists who have succeeded in expressing their personality through flowers, Antoine Berjon is one of the most fascinating. Standing in front of his pictures in the Louvre, Philadelphia, Lyon or a private collection fortunate enough to include a Berjon, one instantly recognizes his hand and the measure of his artistic personality. Seeing his work hanging together is to realize that such a mastery of his subject, such evident individual emotion, could only be the product of a prolific artistic output.

The young Lyonnais started out working for a silk manufacturer who specialised in church vestments and embroideries although he had, in fact, been destined for the Church – or becoming a doctor - before studying flower design at Lyon's Free School of Drawing. In 1794 a Revolutionary Army staged a three month siege of the city, in the process destroying the silk industry that had, at its peak, employed some 18,000 people fifty years before. Together with many other young painters Berjon left the beleaguered city to seek work in Paris where he could partly rely on some contacts and silk designers. His first Salon exhibit in 1791 of three flower paintings and a pastel of fruit and flowers found favour with the critics who compared his work to the Empress Josephine's favourite painter, Jan-Frans van Daël. By 1810 Berjon was back in a revitalized Lyon firstly employed by the silk manufacturers Bissardon and Bony who made the Empress's coronation robe and supplied silks for many of Napoleon's palaces. Yet in July that year he was appointed as the professor of flower design at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. In thirteen years in this role Berjon taught over two hundred pupils but, alas, his well-documented egotism and irascibility cost him his livelihood as he was dismissed in 1823. He spent the last two decades of his life as a recluse if not in poverty as the city gave him a generous pension. He was honoured by a memorial exhibition of his works in Lyon in 1843.

Despite Berjon's reputation of excellence amongst museums and collectors around the world there has never been an exhibition of his elusive paintings and drawings outside his native Lyon and not for want of trying. A future exhibition should be aptly named, *Antoine Berjon- Painter of Mystery*.

WILLIAM MITCHELL





**Jean- Louis Prévost le Jeune (circa 1760-after 1810)**

*Bouquets of flowers in porcelain 'tazze' on marble ledges – a pair (2)*

gouache on oval card  
9¾ x 8in (25.5 x 20cm)  
both signed



This exceptionally well preserved pair of flower bouquets painted in gouache display all the hallmarks of the 'Golden Age' of French flower painting: technical virtuosity and aesthetic sensitivity.

A pupil of Jean-Jacques Bachelier (1724-1806) in Paris, Prévost exhibited numerous paintings and drawings at the Salons, and his last recorded entry was in 1810. Unlike his contemporary, Redouté, Prévost's goal was not primarily scientific. His original watercolours were used as models for a series of exquisite colour-plate botanical books and references for porcelain and fabric pattern designers.

In 1987 Sotheby's held the greatest sale of flower books in the 20th century, the de Belder Collection. One of Prévost's flower-pieces was used for the cover illustration.



**Alfred Stevens (1823-1906)**

*Trahie-Perplexité*

oil on panel,  
13½ x 10in (34 x 25.5cm) signed

PROVENANCE

Acquired by Colonel Merlin from the artist.  
Merlin sale, Hotel Drouot, Paris, 27 June 1900, no. 36  
Private collection, France.

EXHIBITED

*L'oeuvre d'Alfred Stevens*, Brussels and Antwerp, 1907, no. 48

LITERATURE

G. Van Zype *Les frères Stevens*, 1936, no. 257

In April 1867 Alfred Stevens exhibited a larger version of this marvellous composition at the 'Exposition universelle', when all eyes were on Second Empire Paris with its high levels of prosperity, advances in industry and dominance across the board in the arts. Napoleon III, the Tsar, the King of Prussia, Bismarck and the Shah of Persia formally opened the giant exhibition spread out over forty acres of the Champ-de-Mars.

In total there were eighteen Stevens paintings on display, thirteen of them single female figures, earning the francophile Belgian a first-class medal.

This small, powerfully executed oil painting on panel is a recent discovery, long hidden away in a private collection in France. Aside from the young lady's prettiness, the typically Stevens pyramid composition of the seated figure, the rich colours and exquisite details throughout all show off Stevens working to the best of his considerable abilities. These small, intimate single figure subjects are the finest endorsement for Stevens' status as one of the leading painters of his time; a claim familiar to readers of *Gallery Notes* and followers of our numerous Stevens publications and exhibitions.

It is important to keep in mind that Alfred Stevens was strictly a genre painter. He did not consider himself a portraitist and made no secret of his real and everlasting preference for women as his sitters. Critics often lamented the lack of anecdote or narrative in his pictures but there was far more to Stevens' *mise en scène* than meets the eye. Nor was he the least concerned by accusations of facile or empty subjects. Not only had he overcome and even embraced his dual nationality working in the French capital, he also, bravely, opted to

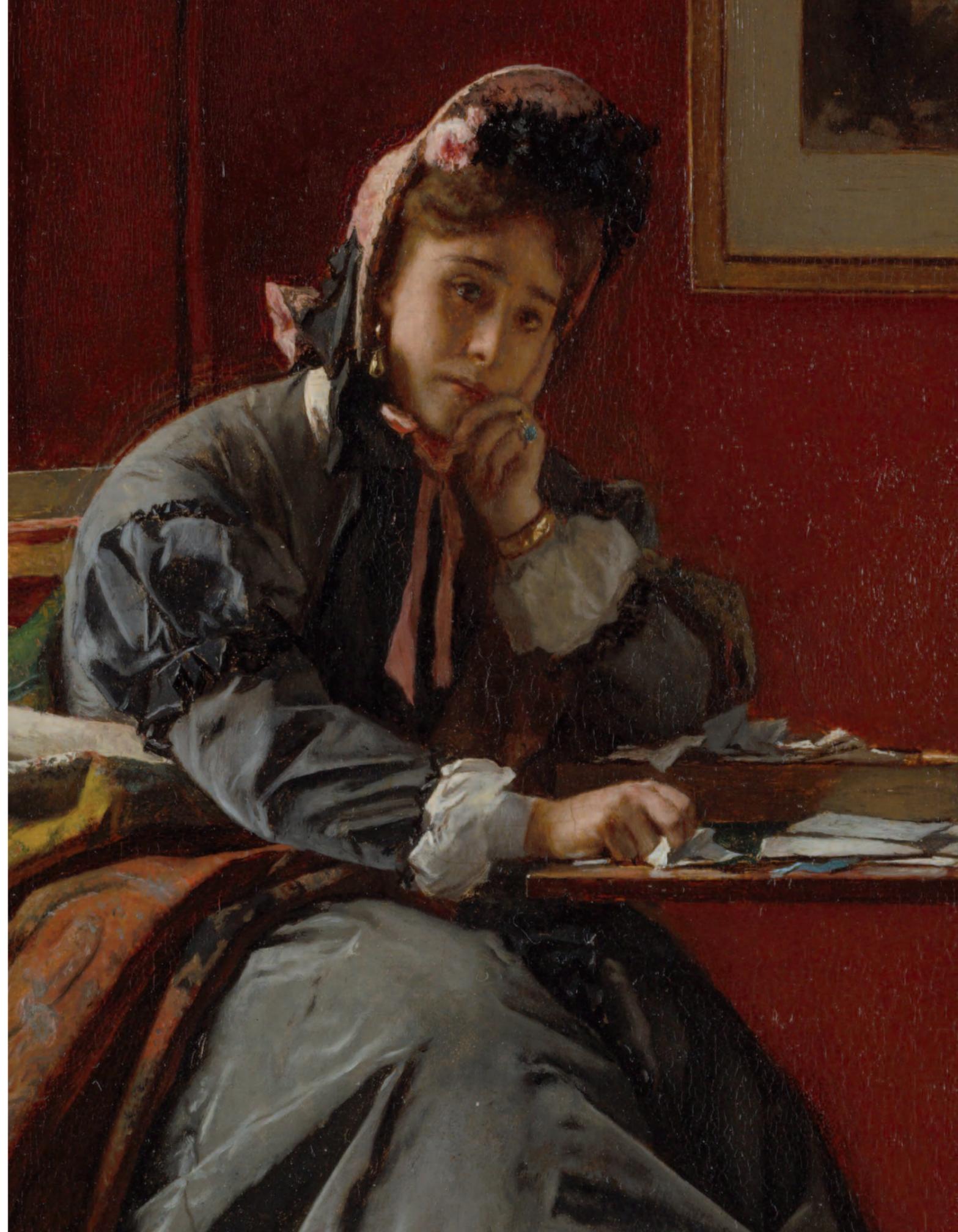
concentrate more and more on these enigmatic subjects with their unusual and ambiguous titles, deliberately chosen by himself, as with the present picture. In this instance Stevens knew exactly what he was doing: through remarkable draughtsmanship and understanding of colour and its values, he could conjure an amazingly intimate scene. The viewer is left to decide whether the young girl is portrayed heartbroken or merely bored, and so on. Despite the oft-repeated motif of the letter, or *faire-part*, and its open inspiration from the pictures by great Dutch Old Master genre painters such as Gerard Ter Borch and Gabriel Metsu, it was ultimately his rendering of the dresses, gloves, hats and delicate *japonisme* that brought the pictures to life. His brushes and adoration of the subject certainly breathed life into them but such was his skill that his paintings never fell into the empty and sentimental nostalgia, now so prevalent in nineteenth century specialist auctions and galleries.

Since my father's exhibition in 1973, more paintings by Alfred Stevens have been studied, exhibited, sold at auctions and acquired by dealers, collectors and museums than at any other time since the turn of the last century. The large 'set piece' Salon interiors, garden scenes with numerous figures and the *élegantes* by the coast have often brought his name great commercial acclaim. Nonetheless, financial difficulties pushed Stevens towards repetition and mass production and it is now all too clear that by the early 1880s his ability to seduce his viewers had waned.

John Mitchell Fine Paintings has certainly had more than its fair share of the Alfred Stevens market but we can confidently predict that *Trahie Perplexité* and other smaller pictures from his 'power' years will prove to be his best legacy.

WILLIAM MITCHELL

This small, powerfully executed oil painting on panel is a recent discovery, long hidden away in a private collection in France. Aside from the young lady's prettiness, the typically Stevens pyramid composition of the seated figure, the rich colours and exquisite details throughout all show off Stevens working to the best of his considerable abilities. These small, intimate single figure subjects are the finest endorsement for Stevens' status as one of the leading painters of his time.





**Antoine Guillemet (1841-1918)**

*Villerville*

oil on unlined canvas  
21¼ x 29in (54 x 73.5cm) signed  
with fine original period frame

LITERATURE

P. J Mitchell *Jean Baptiste Antoine Guillemet*, a loan exhibition. London 1981, cat.10, pl.18, p.53

P. J Mitchell *Antoine Guillemet* John Mitchell and Son, London 1998  
cat.4, pl.17, p.18

If we were to gauge the character and popularity of Guillemet from the company he kept, our long-standing study of his life and work would suggest a decidedly heady social existence. He could count Daubigny, Corot, Manet, Cezanne, Barye, Stevens, the Morisots and, closest of all, Zola as his friends. But appearances were deceptive. For over thirty summers, Antoine Guillemet would make his home among the oyster gatherers and fishermen on the Normandy coast. Dressed in a shabby smock and boots, the familiar, tall figure must have resembled something of a weather-beaten and distracted recluse with his easel and paint box in tow.

This exceptional beach scene painted at Villerville to the west of Le Havre proves to what extent he rivalled or, arguably, exceeded Boudin and Daubigny as the unofficial painter of the Normandy coast. His first important Salon exhibit in 1872, *Mer basse a Villerville*, now hanging in the Grenoble museum, was a major critical success. Of the four most important Villerville landscapes, two are in French public collections, Grenoble and Caen. The other large 1881 Salon exhibit, *Le vieux Villerville* [Antoine Guillemet, John Mitchell and Son, London 1998, p. 19] is in a private collection in South America and the fourth, seen here, has never been available for sale until now.

Having handled more than a hundred Guillemet paintings since the 1970s it has become so apparent to us how, in his self-imposed seasonal isolations at the coast, he must have revelled in the timeless combinations of sky and windswept clouds, of the sea and the sweep of the horizon. Guillemet's diaries and copious correspondence record an endless quest for excellence urging him to tackle the same subjects again and again. Our archive has more than forty photographs of Guillemet paintings of St. Vaast-la-Hougue and Villerville. It is no mere exaggeration on our part that this *Villerville* ranks as one of the finest pictures from Guillemet's long career as one of France's leading 'non-impressionist' landscapists.

Although most of his contemporaries were the future Impressionists (he too had initially been a fellow *refusé* in 1866 and 1867), Guillemet, like Manet, preferred to keep to traditional paths. Manet did more for his friend than just immortalise him in his famous *Le Balcon* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) where Guillemet appears as the tall, rather urbane man standing behind Berth Morisot and Fanny Claus, with a cigarette in his hand. Manet also influenced the younger artist towards a painterly, impasto style of brushwork which would remain a strong characteristic of Guillemet's work throughout.

When repeated successes at the Salon won Guillemet a place on the Salon jury in 1881, it gave him the right to introduce one painter without opposition. Seizing his chance, he went for Paul Cézanne who had always been refused the admission – and recognition – he craved. This was how Cézanne could appear for the first time ever, listed as a pupil of Guillemet! Once he had become one of the 'Establishment' figures with a high rank in the Legion of Honour and many Salon medals, Guillemet was always respected for his unwavering encouragement of others.

With several paintings acquired directly from the Salons by French museums, Antoine Guillemet was over the years awarded almost every medal, honour, and distinction available to nineteenth-century French artists.



**Otto Scholderer (1834-1902)**

*Lepus europaeus*

oil on canvas  
42 x 24¼in (106.6 x 61.5cm)  
with fine original frame

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A few years before his death, the German-born Scholderer wrote to Fantin-Latour about his ongoing admiration for Chardin: "As always I keep thinking what a great artist he was, not just in his delicate and almost spiritual method of painting but the fact that his ideas were so original and almost naïve" (quoted in *Revue du Louvre*, Paris 2003, p.80).

Hanging alone against a spare kitchen or larder wall, this life-size hare is very close in style and brushwork to Scholderer's *Nature morte, gibier* (Bremen, Kunsthalle). Still-lives of dead hares feature throughout all European paintings, in particular in Dutch seventeenth century work, but the iconic and immediately recognizable ones – and most reproduced today – came from the French painters, Oudry and Chardin.

In 1870 Henri Fantin-Latour painted a large group portrait to exhibit at the Paris Salon. Its official title was *Un atelier aux Batignolles* and it became one of his best known paintings, as well as an instantly recognisable image of the early Impressionist period. Today it hangs in splendour in the Musée d'Orsay. Seated at his easel with brushes and palette in hand, the central figure is Edouard Manet surrounded by seven friends. Standing apart from the group, behind Manet, is Otto Scholderer who was the only foreigner and non-resident in Paris in the portrait. The other friends in the portrait were Bazille, Zola, Renoir, Edmond Maitre, Zacharie Astruc and Monet. The previous year they were referred to as the 'Ecole de Batignolles' by the Salon art critic, Louis Duranty, and the name stayed with them. At the time there could have been no better proof of Scholderer's well-earned status as a still life and portrait painter than to be included in Fantin's 1870 painting.

Scholderer was born in Frankfurt into a family of teachers. Having shown a lot of promise as a violinist, by 1854, aged twenty, he was studying with the revered landscapist from Karlsruhe, Johann Wilhelm Schirmer. Through his teacher, Scholderer befriended the Francophile Victor Müller who promoted modern French painting throughout Germany. Thanks to Müller's support and friendship Scholderer moved to Paris in 1857 where he finally met Fantin-Latour and Courbet whose work especially he had so admired earlier in the decade at exhibitions in Frankfurt.



**Otto Scholderer**  
*Miss Elizabeth Bruel*  
pastel on paper on canvas, 43½ x 30in (110.5 x 76.2cm)  
signed and dated 1889.  
The J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Whilst studying and copying paintings in the Louvre the still young Scholderer fell under the spell of Chardin's paintings, an enthrallment he enjoyed for the rest of his life. From then on his association with his two mentors and other contemporary French painters remained social rather than professional as he chose to style his work as a traditional 'Old Master', or more aptly a 'Chardin Revivalist'.

Scholderer returned to Germany in the 1860s, establishing himself as a still-life painter and portraitist but remained in close contact with his fellow painters in Paris through frequent visits and correspondence.

At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, Scholderer happened to be in Paris but was forced to return to Munich. While some of his French friends and colleagues including Bazille and Manet enlisted for action, others fled to safer cities, many to London.

Scholderer's fiancée, Luise Steuerwaldt, had been staying with friends in London in 1869 and 1870 and now decided to move there persuading Scholderer to come with her. In March 1871 Otto and Luise were married in Roehampton. No one could have foreseen that they would stay in London for another twenty eight years. By the time the ban on German nationals living and working in France was lifted in the early 1870s Scholderer was too ensconced in London life to want to return. Living in Battersea Rise and working from a studio in Soho, with a strong community of Germans there, Scholderer entered the busiest period of his artistic career, painting portraits and still-lives as well as landscapes with a predominantly English clientele.

We first encountered Scholderer's work in 2009 when we discovered an exceptionally well-preserved pastel portrait by him of a striking young woman, Elizabeth Bruel. Wholly intrigued and attracted by its quality rather than any prior knowledge of his work, we sold the beautiful pastel, dating from the artist's London period, to The J.B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky (see above).





**Wolfgang-Adam Töpffer (1766-1847)**

*Geneva and Mont Salève seen from near Petit-Saconnex*

oil on paper  
11 x 16¾in (28 x 42.5cm)  
with fine original period frame

PROVENANCE

Artist's granddaughter, Adèle Töpffer  
By descent, private collection, Switzerland.

LITERATURE

*Wolfgang-Adam Töpffer* Lucien Boissonnas, Benteli Verlag, no.250, p. 241

Looking south over his native Geneva, Töpffer's beautiful *plein air* study shows Mont Salève in the background. The towers of the city's cathedral, Saint Pierre, stand out above some poplars with Lac Lemman hidden by a big stand of trees on the left. Painted in oils on prepared paper, Töpffer contrasts the olive greens and russet coloured trees of the orchard and woods with the pale purple of the far-off hills under a delicate morning sky.

Despite its small format, the compact composition creates much pictorial space and depth suggesting a larger and more formal composition would follow back in the studio. However, more often than not, Töpffer made these sketches as separate motifs to be incorporated into his genre scenes as well as his large Salon landscapes. The recently published, comprehensive *catalogue raisonné* by Lucien Boissonnas, printed in 2011, illustrates a few dozen small but accomplished landscapes mostly painted on the spot. All of them are topographically precise and many depict panoramic vistas in the Geneva canton and further afield. Their topographical accuracy proves that Töpffer considered himself a landscapist as much as a genre and portrait painter, a fact that is often overlooked as his outdoor tavern and fêtes scenes tend to be reproduced and exhibited more. Indeed no exhibition on Swiss painting is ever without a formal genre painting by Töpffer. Yet large format pictures aren't always the most desirable; a tavern scene, dated 1805, was acquired from us by the Musée du Louvre twelve years ago but only measured 12 x 15 inches.

Töpffer's demise is, morbidly, one of the most quoted biographical details about him! His daughter, Ninette, found her highly industrious father dead at his easel. Whilst in fact true, the anecdote becomes less grim on looking through the above mentioned *catalogue raisonné*. As accomplished and prolific a painter as he was, Töpffer also excelled at watercolour portraits, genre scenes, landscapes and, more famously, his satirical caricatures which loosely resemble Rowlandson's work.

In 1786 the twenty year old Töpffer was sent by the Geneva *Société des Arts* to Paris where he underwent training with the portrait painters, Francois-Xavier Fabre and Jean-Baptiste Suvée. Having befriended the leading animal painter and fellow Genevan, Jacques-Laurent Agasse in Lausanne a few years before, Töpffer wasn't a complete novice in Paris. He soon showed promise until the Revolution forced him to return to Geneva where he became commercially successful as a portrait and landscape painter.

In 1798 he sent his first submissions to the Paris Salon where he established relationships with Boilly and Demarne which eventually led to patronage back in Geneva from the Empress Josephine who bought five landscapes from him in 1803. By 1805 Töpffer was receiving commissions from the Russian royal family and Austrian and Italian royalty. In 1822 he co-founded the *Société des Amis des Beaux-Arts* in Geneva, by then incorporated into Switzerland, where Töpffer remained the leading Swiss painter until the mid 1840s.

WILLIAM MITCHELL

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## FINE PAINTINGS

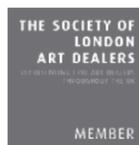
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Designed and produced by Sinclair Communications  
Photography by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd





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