

# *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

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Armand Guillaumin, *Nature-morte à la marmite*, Galerie de la Béraudière, Brussels, Belgium

*Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 2016)

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Citation: James H. Rubin, "Armand Guillaumin, *Nature-morte à la marmite*, Galerie de la Béraudière, Brussels, Belgium," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 2016), <https://doi.org/10.29411/ncaw.2016.15.3.8>.

Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

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## New Discoveries

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### Armand Guillaumin, *Nature-morte à la marmite*, Galerie de la Béraudière, Brussels, Belgium

by James H. Rubin

Armand Guillaumin's (1841–1927) *Nature-morte à la marmite* (fig. 1), dated 1867, is no. 2 in the catalogue raisonné of his oeuvre published in 1971 by Georges Serret and Dominique Fabiani.[1] Its recent emergence on the art market (Galerie de la Béraudière, Brussels) after a disappearance from public view of approximately forty years is both a rediscovery and a discovery.[2] Although the still life was known from photographs, another, no doubt earlier study, never published at all, is on the canvas's back (fig. 2). Much of Guillaumin's early work, like Camille Pissarro's, was destroyed during the Prussian siege at Louveciennes in 1870.[3] As one of the few surviving early works by the least-known Impressionist master, the Guillaumin still life can remind us of the role this genre played in the early years of Impressionism as well as of the collective stylistic researches, studies, and interrelations among the young Impressionists in the wake of paintings by Edouard Manet.



Fig. 1, Armand Guillaumin, *Nature-morte à la marmite* (Still Life with a Cooking Pot; recto), 1867. Oil on canvas. Galerie de la Béraudière, Brussels. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 2, Armand Guillaumin, Study after a cast of a female torso (verso of *Nature-morte à la marmite*), ca. 1865–66. Oil on canvas. Galerie de la Béraudière, Brussels [\[larger image\]](#)

Surely, the unfinished image of a classical female nude cast on the painting's back was painted a few years before the still life, when Guillaumin was part of the group studying at the Atelier Suisse. The cast was common in studios of instruction at the time. (Van Gogh painted the same one, probably nineteen years later, when he worked in the *atelier libre* run by Fernand Cormon on the Boulevard de Clichy.)<sup>[4]</sup> Guillaumin was a clerk at the Paris-Orléans Railway in the 1860s, at what is now the Gare d'Austerlitz.<sup>[5]</sup> Like many young artists, he was undoubtedly forced to economize, and so he redeployed an unfinished earlier canvas for his more ambitious still life. Although a mere study, the back of the canvas is interesting for its stylistic contrast with the still life on its front.

The latter reveals Guillaumin's response to Manet at a time when Cézanne, Pissarro, and others felt forced to engage with the controversial pictures Manet had been showing since the Salon des Refusés in 1863. In 1867, the latter organized an independent exhibition at the Avenue de l'Alma, at which he showed a number of still lifes for the first time.<sup>[6]</sup> The renewed taste for still life during the 1860s is well documented, as is the role of still life as a traditional vehicle for training and experimentation. Manet's homage to the tradition of Chardin and the Dutch was evident, but critics paid far more attention to Manet's bold brushwork,<sup>[7]</sup> flattened surfaces, and unmodulated colors, as well as to the unrefined taste he appeared to show in his choice of motifs like a decapitated salmon, an eel, or asparagus.

Guillaumin's objects, like those of Cézanne and others, were more conventional—at least until Cézanne painted his notorious *Still-Life with Black Clock* for his friend Zola (Private Collection). In fact, *Nature-morte à la marmite* compares quite closely to Cézanne's *Nature morte au pot vert et bouilloire d'étain* at the Musée d'Orsay (fig. 3). The 1867 date on the Guillaumin might support those who put both Cézanne still lifes closer to 1867 than to 1870.<sup>[8]</sup> Guillaumin's brushwork is less flashy than Manet's, although his thick surface, the bold contours of his forms, and the insistent folds and shadows in the foreground on his tablecloth all certainly echo the latter. Two experimental elements do stand out, however. First is the remarkable foreshortening of the fork and spoon to the right. Note that these implements have been substituted for the proverbial knife found in so many still lifes, and neither overhangs the table edge. It is as if Guillaumin refused the traditional trope for

spatial recession invented by the Dutch in favor of an experiment both more daring and more subtle, if not altogether successful.



Fig. 3, Paul Cézanne, *Nature morte au pot vert et bouilloire d'étain* (still life with Green Pot and Pewter Kettle), ca. 1867. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)

And yet the awkwardness of that passage, the stiff tablecloth, and the boldly brushed, simple brown background combine with elements like the ambiguous shadows of the main elements to convey a naiveté made powerful by the compactness of the sculptural group of objects crowded together in the center. It may be worth observing that the plate on which the black pot is resting seems either an uneven piece of handcraft or slightly tilted, since the area of its inside surface diminishes as the eye moves to the left. The cookpot's slightly decentered position on the plate, leaving an open expanse of brightly lit inside surface to the viewer's right, both emphasizes this crowding and yet contributes, along with the plate's ambiguous position, to a delicate instability and tension one is used to finding in Cézanne's paintings.

The transparencies and glosses on the bottle, wine glass, and shiny black pot are de rigueur in still lifes of this period; various kinds of interplay between objects are expected. The second outstanding element in the painting therefore is the color of the wine. Harmonizing beautifully with the limited palette that characterizes the composition as a whole, its rich Bordeaux red resonates deeply. Guillaumin became a highly original colorist, even within the Impressionist group, using bright violets and oranges in ways that would be taken up even more broadly by painters who knew him in the early and mid-1880s, namely Gauguin and Van Gogh.<sup>[9]</sup> After Guillaumin won the lottery in 1891,<sup>[10]</sup> freeing him from financial constraints, his use of color became so liberal and often dissonant that he might be called a Fauve *avant-la-lettre*. In this early still life, however, there is little indication even of the Impressionist brightening of the palette and certainly not of these later seeming incongruities.

What does emerge is the artist's general sensitivity to color, a principle that is specific to his work throughout his career, both when it is pleasing and when it is less so. Whether a celebration of the coloristic subtleties of painting or of the translucent beauty of wine itself,

the red wine declares itself the center of this picture's focus. The painting thus exemplifies both a unique artistic personality and the shared vocabularies characterizing early Impressionist experimentation during the mid-1860s, following Manet's compelling new leadership.

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## Notes

[1] Georges Serret and Dominique Fabiani, *Armand Guillaumin (1841–1927), Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint* (Paris: Éditions Mayer, 1971).

[2] The painting appeared at the June 12, 2002 Tajan sale "Tableaux et sculptures des XIXe et XXe siècles" at Four Seasons Hotel, George V, Paris (no. 9). As indicated by labels on the back of the painting's stretcher, the last public showing was at an exhibition called "La Gourmandise," November 29, 1977 through January 14, 1978 at Galerie André Pacitti, Paris (no. 4).

[3] See Christopher Gray, *Armand Guillaumin* (Chester, PA: Pequot Press, 1972), 9; and Gary Tinterow and Henri Loyrette, eds., *Origins of Impressionism*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 448, no. 164.

[4] See, for example, *Plaster Cast of a Woman's Torso*, done in Cormon's studio in 1887, now in the collection of the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (F0216h, JH1058).

[5] Gray, *Armand Guillaumin*, 2.

[6] The catalogue for Manet's 1867 exhibition includes no fewer than eight still lifes. *Catalogue des tableaux de M. Edouard Manet exposés Avenue de l'Alma en 1867* (Paris: L. Poupart-Davyl, 1867).

[7] See, for example, Joséphin Péladan, "Le procédé de Manet d'après l'exposition de l'École des Beaux-Arts," *L'Artiste* 1 (February 1884), 101–17, in which Péladan draws a direct parallel between Manet's *Brioche* (1870, Metropolitan Museum of Art) and the still lifes of Chardin, but quickly turns his attention to the heaviness of Manet's brushwork.

[8] The two paintings by Cézanne are respectively nos. 136 and 137 in the catalogue raisonné by John Rewald, *The Paintings of Paul Cézanne: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), and 708 and 709 in the recent online catalogue raisonné, Walter Feilchenfeldt, Jayne Warman, and David Nash, *The Paintings of Paul Cézanne: An Online Catalogue Raisonné*, accessed September 13, 2016, <http://www.cezannecatalogue.com> [login required]. Based on the comparison with the Guillaumin and the relative complexity of *Nature-morte à la pendule noire*, I would put *Nature-morte à la bouilloire* as the earlier of the two, hence reversing their order in both the print and the online catalogues raisonnés.

[9] For a thorough account of Guillaumin's relationships with Van Gogh, Gauguin, and other painters working at that time, see chapters 4 through 6 of Gray, *Armand Guillaumin*: "1881–1885: Toward Recognition," "Friction, Splinter, Search, Success," and "Art and Philosophy."

[10] *Ibid.*, 45.

## Illustrations



Fig. 1, Armand Guillaumin, *Nature-morte à la marmite* (Still Life with a Cooking Pot; recto), 1867. Oil on canvas. Galerie de la Béraudière, Brussels. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Armand Guillaumin, Study after a cast of a female torso (verso of *Nature-morte à la marmite*), ca. 1865–66. Oil on canvas. Galerie de la Béraudière, Brussels [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Paul Cézanne, *Nature morte au pot vert et bouilloire d'étain* (still life with Green Pot and Pewter Kettle), ca. 1867. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)