

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



EMIL ORLIK

1870 Prague - Berlin 1932

*Street Scene with Strollers in front of an illuminated Window, Paris*

Gouache, watercolour and pastel on cardboard. Probably executed c.1898.

Monogrammed in the lower right: *EO*.

335 x 483 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Belgium

At first glance, this unusual motif could be mistaken for a stage scene, framed by curtains at the sides and revealing a brightly lit scene with flowers and shrubs in the centre.<sup>1</sup> Against this contrasting background, several people act in the dark. The silhouette of a simply dressed woman carrying a laundry basket appears in the centre. She leans forward to take a closer look at the scene with the flowers. Behind her, two more elegantly dressed ladies leave the picture space to the right. They may be talking about what they have seen. A gentleman in a top hat and long coat is about to leave the picture to the left, looking back once more to take a last look at the illuminated plants. Upon closer inspection, one realizes that this must be a street scene. The pavement is the stage, the scene is an illuminated shop window and the spectators are passers-by in a city at night.

The style, the pastel technique and the clothing of the passers-by clearly reveal the influence of French art of the 1880s and 1890s. Dr Birgit Ahrens, who is currently compiling the catalogue raisonné of Emil Orlik's prints and who has seen our original art work, confirmed this impression: *I also suspect a Parisian scene, which is set in motion with the profile representations of the people cut from the edge of the picture and overlapping, and which picks up design elements of Japanese woodblock prints with the two-dimensional layered foreground and background. The same is true of the filled black areas, which are contoured against a coloured background. Of course, this scene is also reminiscent of Toulouse-Lautrec, whose striking style was characterised by contrasts: close-up | distant view, contrasting colours, compact design, asymmetrical arrangement of motifs. He was also fascinated by the Japanese woodblock print. Orlik first came to Paris on a study trip in 1898 and returned there regularly between 1903 and 1913. After the First World War, he stayed there annually from 1924 to 1930 and also rented a studio for a time. During his trip to Japan in 1900/1901, Orlik had intensively studied Japanese woodblock prints, their technical finesse and design features, and incorporated them into his own woodblock prints. And so Orlik's early poster work (1897), in which he incorporated French influences, may also have had an influence on the design of the pastel.*<sup>2</sup>

The effect that makes our artwork look so exciting is the strong contrast between the dark foreground and the brightly coloured background. Here, in fact, two “worlds” collide. The artist has deliberately refrained from depicting architecture, window frames or reflections on the stained-glass window in order to repeat the surprise effect on the viewer that passers-by also experience.

This effect is triggered by the bright artificial light and one has to realize that this experience was something completely new for people in the 1880s and 1890s. Thomas Edison had developed his

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<sup>1</sup> The French artist Jean-Louis Forain (1852 - 1931) created a pastel at around the same time in Paris, showing a comparable scene in which two thespians act in front of a brightly lit stage set depicting a seascape. [Fig. 1]

<sup>2</sup> Email on the 28th of June 2021.

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electric carbon filament light bulb in the USA in 1880 and presented it for the first time at the Paris world exhibition in 1881. It immediately went into mass production and by 1890 had replaced the outdated light bulbs in many places. Gas light had been around since 1820, but Carl Auer von Welsbach, a German inventor, patented the incandescent mantle in 1885, which enabled gas lamps to emit a whiter and much brighter light. This invention also caught on quickly and soon changed the night-time appearance of cities. Not only were boulevards and parks brightly lit, but the theatres and vaudevilles in particular used the new inventions for their stages. Shopping temples, too, could now present their wares in spectacularly decorated and illuminated shop windows. One cannot imagine the effect of these changes on the people of the time. Naturally, artists also noticed these changes and made them the subject of their paintings. For example, George Seurat's oil study for the painting *La Parade de Cirque* [Fig. 2], painted around 1888, shows a row of nine glistening gas lights at the top, transforming the nocturnal square in front of the building into a radiant sea of lights. The painting *Avenue de Clichy, cinq heures du soir* [Fig. 3] by Louis Anquetin, dated 1887, shows the busy street in blue evening light. From a brightly lit *entrée* on the left edge of the picture, a warm light shine into the cool surroundings. It seems to magically attract people and those who approach the entrance, seem in a figurative sense, to be lit up. A chalk-wash drawing depicting a *Night scene with women in front of a shop window* [Fig. 3] is by Théophile Steinlen. This picture, which was probably also made at the end of the 1890s, comes closest to our art work in terms of motif.

Emil Orlik is known to have opened himself wide to new artistic stimuli during his travels. On his trip to Japan from 1900 to 1901, he created a graphic work group of woodcuts, lithographs and etchings that were completely oriented towards Japanese art.<sup>3</sup> Among these works, too, there are prints that demonstrate Orlik's special interest in particular lighting situations. Examples include the etching *In the Evening* [Fig. 5] and the pastel *Two Geishas* [Fig. 6], in which sliding doors covered with paper and artificially lit - also with female figures - are depicted once from the outside and once from the inside.

Within Orlik's oeuvre, the present pastel indeed occupies a singular position. In addition to the strong influence of French art, which can certainly be felt in some other works, there is also the outstandingly high quality of the drawing in our sheet. Stays in Paris at the turn of the century had also inspired other German artists to achieve top results. The shape of the monogram on our print is also unusual, with the E completely enclosed by the O. Later Orlik used the ligated form OE, but he also varied it. An intermediate state of the monogram can be found in the woodcut *Frenchwoman* [Fig. 7], in which O and E are ligated and at the same time enclosed in a round form.

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<sup>3</sup> See also: Birgit Ahrens and Rüdiger Joppin, *Like a Dream, Emil Orlik in Japan*, ed. by Peter Voss-Andrae, exhib. cat., Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg 2012.

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Fig.1: Jean-Louis Forain, *On Stage in Front of the Scenery*, 1895-1900,  
pastel on paper, 508 x 616 mm.  
Dixon Gallery & Gardens, Memphis, TN



Fig.2 : Georges Seurat, *Study for La Parade de Cirque*, 1887-88,  
Oil on wood, 16.5 x 26 cm.  
Collection Emil G. Bührle, Zurich [Inv. No. 95]



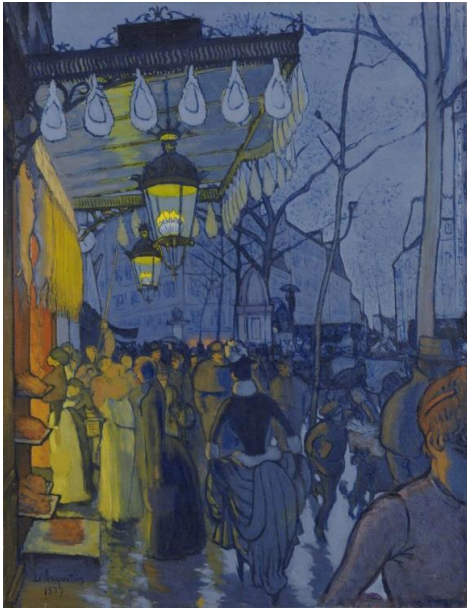


Fig.3: Louis Anquetin, *Avenue de Clichy, cinq heures du soir*, 1887,  
oil on paper on canvas, 69 x 53 cm.  
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. [Inv. 1966.7]



Fig.4: Théophile Steinlen, *Night scene with two women in front of a shop window*,  
black chalk and watercolour, heightened with white, 360 x 265 mm.  
Formerly: Koller, Zurich, 19. 9.2014, Lot 3518



Fig.5: Emil Orlik, *In the Evening*, 1901  
Colour etching, Aquatint, drypoint and roulette on Japan paper,  
Sheet 12 of the portfolio *From Japan*. Plate: 16.3 x 11.7 cm.  
Private collection, Hamburg



Fig.6: Emil Orlik, *Two Geishas*, 1900  
Pastel and opaque white on brown paper  
46 x 32 cm.  
Villa Grisebach, Berlin, Auction 27.5.2011 [Lot 2]

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Fig.7: Emil Orlik, *Frenchwoman*, 1898  
Woodcut, watercolour on Japanese handmade paper,  
from the series *Kleine Holzschnitte 1896-1899*  
Block: 15.7 x10 cm.  
Formerly: Galerie Fach, Oberursel in Taunus