

LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

ÉDOUARD VUILLARD

1868 Cuiseaux (Saône-et-Loire) - La Baule 1940

Petite allée aux Clayes

Pastel and charcoal on paper; c.1932-8.

Signed lower right: *EV*.

256 x 245 mm

PROVENANCE: The artist's studio – Private collection, France

LITERATURE: Antoine Salomon and Guy Cogeval, *Vuillard, The Inexhaustible Glance, Critical Catalogue of Paintings and Pastels*, Milan/Paris 2003, III, p.1621, no. XII-382, repr.

Château des Clayes, a fourteenth-century château located between Versailles and Saint-Cyr, was to be Vuillard's last country refuge and his major source of inspiration in the last twelve years of his life. Once a nobleman's residence, the château had been demolished during the Revolution but was restored in 1810. The gardens had been laid out by André Le Nôtre in the seventeenth century. The vast park of the château lent itself to meditation, inspiring most of the paintings and pastels of Vuillard's later career. His preferred subjects were the gardens, the menagerie and the woods which he captured from many different viewpoints.

From 1930 onwards Vuillard divided his time between Paris and the Château des Clayes, making occasional trips abroad. At the château he spent his time in the company of his lifelong friends and closest companions, Jos (Joseph) and Lucy Hessel. The Hessels had purchased the estate in 1925. Vuillard had his own ground-floor rooms in one of the wings of the château. The view from his window overlooking the park recurs frequently in his late work. It was the solitude and the relative lack of distraction that he seemed to appreciate most. The time spent at the Château des Clayes was very fruitful. Jacques Salomon recalls that *one would often catch sight of Vuillard in a chair on one of the pathways, his box of pastels and his little square of cardboard on his knee. . .*¹

In the present pastel a palette of vivid greens dominates the composition, defining lawn and foliage. Varying shades of pink on the pathway and in the sky form a striking colour contrast. This subtle use of colour recalls Vuillard's artistic beginnings as a Nabi. Writing to Félix Vallotton on 10th August 1900 he described his response to the effects of natural light and colour: *But I'm discovering some great things, marvellous spectacles, I really enjoy being in the country. [...] I'm astonished to see the sky, by turns blue, grey, green, and that the clouds come in all sorts of different shades and colours, and that without bending backwards to find subtleties there is much pleasure to be had from things in simple terms.*²

In 1910, François Thiébaud-Sisson, discussing Vuillard's landscapes, observed that he was *a synthesist preoccupied solely with effects of light and colour.*³ His objective – to capture a momentary impression in a

¹ See *Édouard Vuillard*, exhib. cat., Washington, National Gallery of Art; Montreal, Museum of Fine Arts; Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais; and London, Royal Academy of Arts, 2003-4, p.453f.

² Cited in Mary Anne Stevens and Kimberley Jones, *The triumph of light*, in *Édouard Vuillard*, exhib. cat. (see above), p.284.

³ Op. cit., p.285

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lasting image – is what makes this pastel so arresting. Vuillard invites the viewer to share with him the beauty of the natural world and its chromatic richness.