

# LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

FRANÇOIS BONVIN

1817 Paris - Saint-Germain-en-Laye 1887

## *Homme assis à une table*

Black chalk on paper; 1859.

Signed and dated lower left: *F. Bonvin (18)59.*

370 x 340 mm

By 1859 Bonvin was a confirmed artist working assiduously to prepare for the annual Salon. He had recently moved his studio to the rue Saint-Jacques and was working on a number of still-life subjects.<sup>1</sup> We know that he visited the Louvre to copy Rembrandt's *Le Boeuf Ecorché*.<sup>2</sup> His choice of subjects varied from *The Woman at the Fountain*<sup>3</sup>, inspired by Chardin's work on view at the Louvre; the *Woman Ironing*<sup>4</sup>, a painting ironically anticipating Degas's work of 20 years hence; and *The Coming out of the Basement*<sup>5</sup>, a tavern scene inspired by artists like Pieter de Hooch very much in vogue in France during the Second Empire.

Bonvin exhibited in the Salon of 1859 *La Lettre de recommandation*<sup>6</sup> a religious genre work depicting two young novices being interviewed by a mother superior. He also exhibited that year two portraits commissioned by the French state, a *Kitchen Interior* and *Woman Mending*<sup>7</sup>. Bonvin was fortunate this year because none of his entries were refused by the Salon judges: his young colleagues Théodule Ribot, Alphonse Legros, Fantin-Latour and Whistler all had their works withheld from public view. Bonvin kindly offered them his studio as an exhibition space, which they accepted.

The picture for which our drawing is a study, *Three Men Sitting at a Table* or *Interior of a Tavern* [fig. 1], was not exhibited in the Salon of 1859.<sup>8</sup> However, the same year Bonvin completed a more developed version of the same subject<sup>9</sup> inspired by his contemporaries Gustave Courbet and Thomas Couture, which he did exhibit in the Salon of 1861. In the picture for which we have a study, three men are seated at a table in Bonvin's father's tavern in the Paris suburb of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. A waitress is seen in the background descending stairs. The figure in our drawing sits on a stool in the foreground, a pipe in his right hand, his left hand grasping the stool. He is in working attire and wearing an apron. The drawn version of our figure is almost identical to the painted version, although Bonvin has slightly rotated the stool to give more of a dynamic to the stationary figure, as well as lengthening his apron. We know of no other studies for this painting. The style of the sheet and its degree of

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<sup>1</sup> See Gabriel Weisberg, *Bonvin, la vie et l'œuvre*, Paris, 1979, pp.57-58 (henceforth indicated by "GW").

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*, p.58.

<sup>3</sup> Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery, GW 25

<sup>4</sup> Philadelphia Museum, GW 23

<sup>5</sup> New York, The Anderson Galleries, GW 22

<sup>6</sup> Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, GW 24, repr.

<sup>7</sup> GW 26, repr.

<sup>8</sup> *op. cit.*, GW 27, oil on canvas, 45 x 37 cm.

<sup>9</sup> Arras, Ancienne Abbaye de Saint-Vaast, GW 28, repr.

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## KUNST

completion is similar to many drawings of the same period, although these are mostly isolated studies of genre subjects, not sketches for paintings.<sup>10</sup>

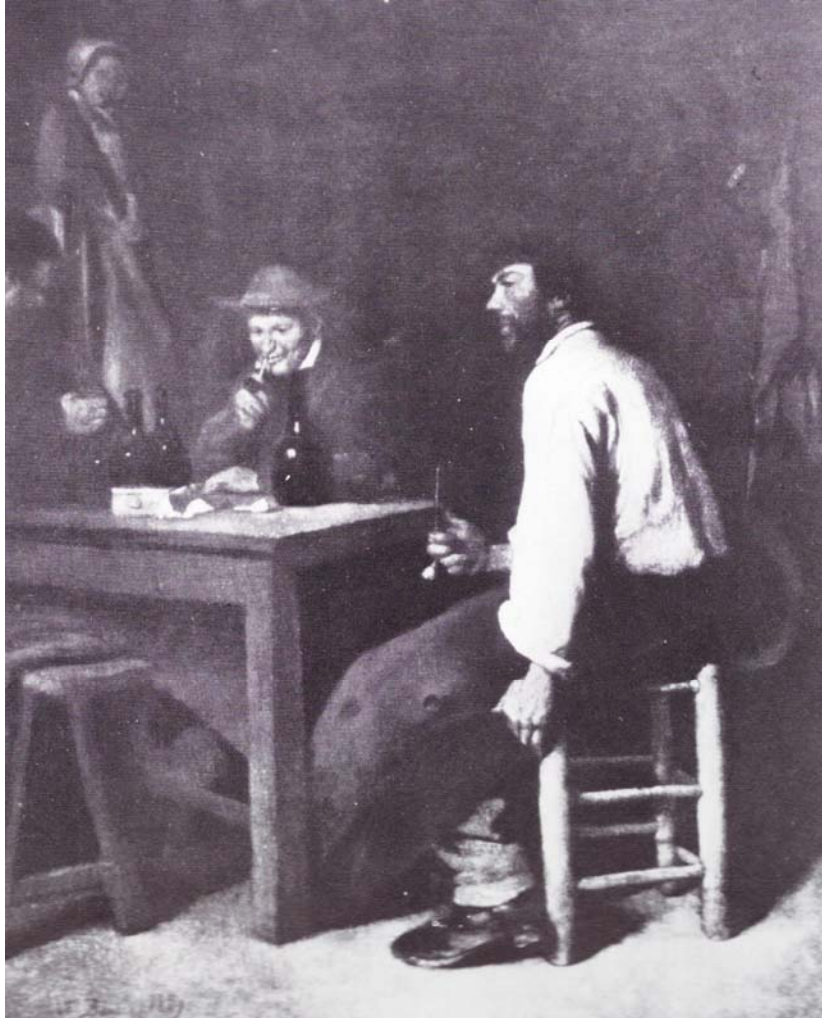


Fig. 1: *Three Men Sitting at a Table or Interior of a Tavern*, oil on canvas, 45 x 37 cm, (GW 27), present location unknown

<sup>10</sup> *op.cit.*, particularly *The Scourer*, GW 261; *The Small Cooking-Pot* GW 262; *A Good Pinch of Snuff* GW 267; *Woman Reading* GW 268; *The Winder*, GW 69bis; *Girl Reading*, GW 271.