

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



ÉDOUARD VUILLARD

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

*Sous la grande lampe à Saint-Jacut*

Glue-based distemper on paper mounted on canvas; executed in 1909.

Stamped at the lower right: *É Vuillard.*

76.8 x 60.0 cm

PROVENANCE: Antoine Salomon, Paris – Henri and Stella Fischbach, New York (acquired circa 1964) – Thence by descent

EXHIBITED: *Édouard Vuillard*, exhib. cat., Palazzo Reale, Milan 1959, no. 71, repr. – *Édouard Vuillard*, Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi 1960, no. 52 – *É. Vuillard (1868-1940)*, Durand-Ruel & Cie., Paris 1961, no. 46, repr. – *Vuillard*, Wildenstein & Co., New York 1964, no. 49, repr.

LITERATURE: Claude Roger-Marx, *Vuillard. Intérieurs*, Paris and Lausanne, 1968, plate XIII – Antoine Salomon and Guy Cogeval, *Vuillard, The Inexhaustible Gance, Critical Catalogue of the Paintings and Pastels*, Paris 2003, II, no. VIII-286, repr. in colour p. 960

This painting, titled *Sous la Grande Lampe à Saint-Jacut*, is a fine example of Édouard Vuillard's life-long interest in domestic interiors. It depicts an afternoon at the Villa des Écluses, a property Jos Hessel and his wife Lucy had rented for the summer at Saint-Jacut de la Mer on the Côte d'Émeraude in Brittany. Hessel was manager of the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in Paris and Vuillard's primary dealer and agent. Vuillard spent the summers as a guest of the Hessels from 1901 until his death in 1940. His association with them promised domestic comfort and the opportunity to move in an intimate circle of privileged and wealthy friends whose lifestyle provided him with a compelling source of artistic inspiration: *What did a country holiday mean to Vuillard and his hosts? An art of refined leisure. What did people do? Embroidered, played cards and draughts, read, got up late and strolled gently down to the beach in the afternoon to make the most of the sunshine. The pleasure of going to spend part of the year on the Channel coast was in fact quite new, and seaside resorts like Deauville were of recent growth.*<sup>1</sup> Vuillard's leisurely summers spent on the coast or in the country with the Hessels offered much more than a change of scene or relaxing distraction – they also presented him with innumerable opportunities for artistic dialogue and discussion among friends.<sup>2</sup>

The present painting depicts members of the Hessel ménage seated at a table. Loose sheets from a portfolio, materials, various utensils and an open solander box are randomly distributed on the table, occupying the foreground. A large lamp dominates the composition, its dimensions accentuated by the low, close-up viewpoint. All figures are identifiable – Jos Hessel, seated at the right – clearly leading the discussion – André Picard, at the left, a famous writer, and Marthe Mellot, a film actress and the wife of the Louis-Alfred Nathanson.

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<sup>1</sup> Antoine Salomon and Guy Cogeval, op. cit., 2003, p. 822.

<sup>2</sup> Astrid Reuter, *Räume wie Stillleben – Gezeichnete und gemalte Interieurs nach 1900*, in exhib. cat., *Édouard Vuillard*, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe 2008-9, p. 155.

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A preliminary study in pen and black ink depicts two additional figures – Lucy Hessel<sup>3</sup> seated at the left, sewing, and Pierre Aron, standing at the right. The study is now in the collection of the Kunsthalle Karlsruhe [Fig. 1]. A further, thematically related interior in distemper titled *Les Amis autour de la table, Saint-Jacut* [Fig. 2] is held in the Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain in Strasbourg.

Vuillard was an enthusiastic photographer, producing a body of over two thousand photographs during his lifetime. He began working with a handheld Kodak box camera in the late 1880s. He used it to experiment with spatial ambiguity and to record casual everyday moments in his circle of family and friends, or the details and patterns of interior settings. Many of his photographs would serve him as the basis for later paintings. The immediacy of the present, highly unconventional composition is attributable to his experiences as a photographer.

This painting was executed using *peinture à la colle*, or distemper. Vuillard developed a growing preference for the medium in the years around 1908-9: Kimberly Jones writes: *These two summers Vuillard spent in Brittany [1908-09] – and especially the summer at Saint-Jacut – were intensely productive. The paintings he produced are exceptionally striking, in large part because of a growing preference for the medium of 'peinture à la colle', or distemper [...]. His Brittany paintings, audacious in their abstraction, subordinate the impulse towards naturalism to more fundamental pictorial concerns [...]. There is an unprecedented freedom in this mingling of medium and support in these paintings, all the more striking in view of the painstaking and preplanned method imposed by 'peinture à la colle', which effectively precluded working directly from the motif. The illusion of spontaneity that permeates these paintings is precisely that.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lucy Hessel was to play an increasingly important role in Vuillard's life after 1900, when she replaced Misia Natanson as his muse. Vuillard's private journals for the years 1895 to 1907 are lost but it is thought that the relationship with Lucy may have developed into an affair around 1899, during his first summers with the Hessels. The liaison lasted until Vuillard's death, over a period of some forty years. See Patricia Ciaffa, *The Portraits of Edouard Vuillard*, Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, New York 1985, pp. 44-9 and 342-60.

<sup>4</sup> Kimberly Jones in *Édouard Vuillard*, exhib. cat., The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal; Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris; The Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2003-4, pp. 449-50.

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Fig. 1: *Les Amis autour de la table, Saint-Jacut, 1909.*  
Pencil, pen and black ink on paper, 100 x 156 mm.  
Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe [inv. 1974-21]



Fig. 2: *Les Amis autour de la table, Saint-Jacut, 1909.*  
Distemper on paper mounted on canvas, 96.5 x 135 cm.  
Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg