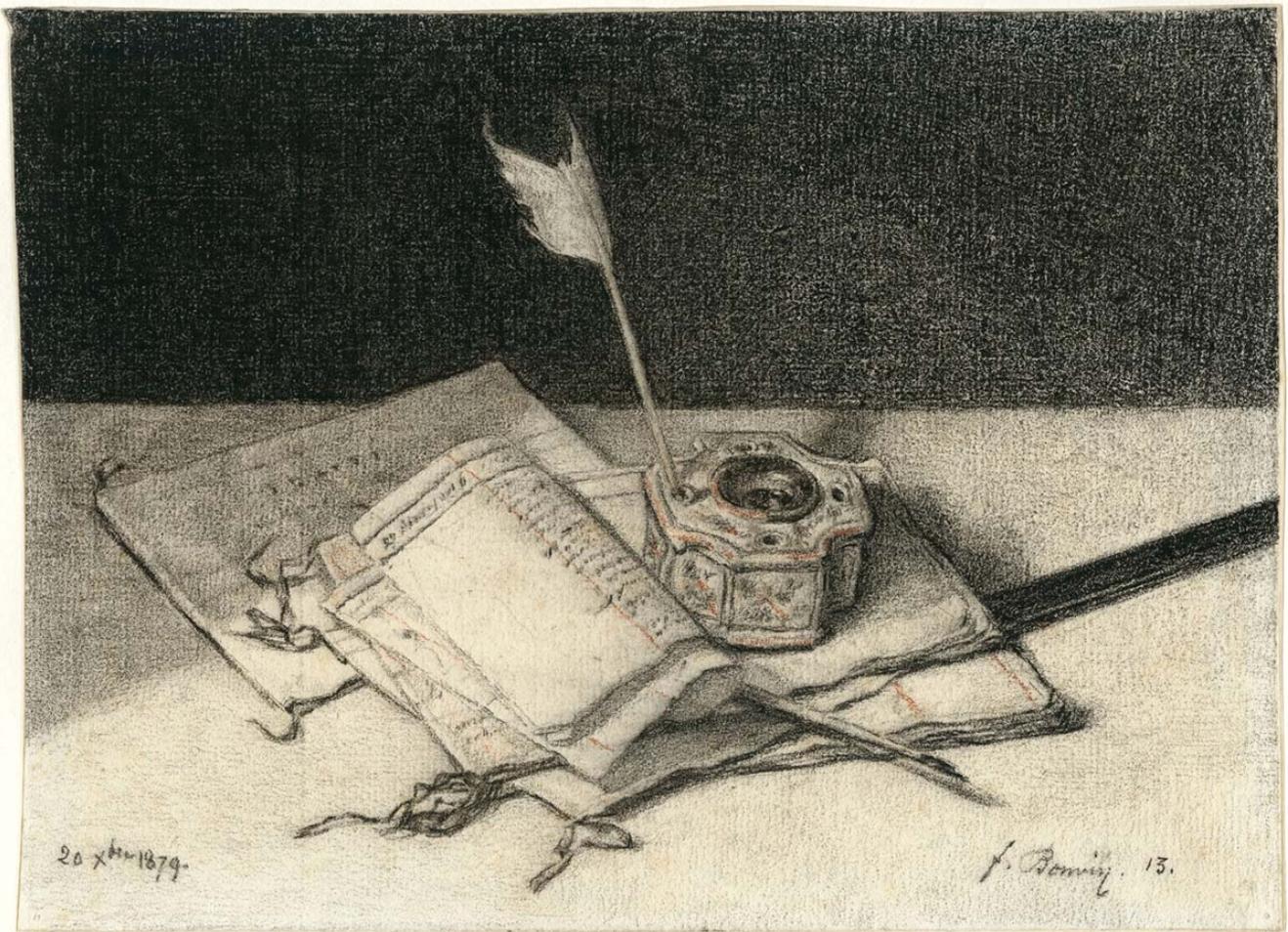


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FRANÇOIS BONVIN

Vaugirard 1817-1887 St.-Germain-en-Laye

Still-Life of a Ledger on a Table with Two Quill Pens and an Inkwell

Signed. Bearing a number lower right: *f. Bonvin. 13*. Dated, lower left, *10 Xbre(October)1879*.

Black chalk with traces of red chalk on off-white laid paper.

150 x 202 mm

PROVENANCE: Private Collection, France

Of generally weak health throughout his life and suffering from frequent bouts of kidney stones, Bonvin was required by his doctors to rest during part of 1878 and most of 1879 in the house he occupied with his companion Louison on the rue des Coches in St.-Germain-en-Laye. Beside completing his only Salon entry of the year, *Les religieuses*¹, his time was occupied with painting or drawing a series of still-lives in oil and black chalk depicting household or culinary objects.

Our drawing is part of a series dated from 1878 to early 1880 in which objects as mundane as a pitcher, coffee pot, skimmer, kettle, frying pan, coffee grinder, candlestick, fish on a grill, are simply depicted against a dark or neutral ground.² Most of them have sequential numbering either on the lower right or left of the page, as though Bonvin had thought of publishing them in a book. They vary in size, our drawing being one of the larger sheets. He appears to have included red chalk in the later drawings, those completed at the end of 1879, early 1880. It should also be noted that Bonvin painted several of these subjects between 1878 and 1880, but these oils tend to be more complex and include several objects.³

In our drawing, a lonely quill pen juts out from a slightly tilted inkwell placed on an open ledger posed negligently on a table over perhaps a ruler on the far right. The contrast between the quills of the pen, like a white flag waving in the night, against a solid black background, the shadow over the notebook on the left, the overturned pages, determine the transitory nature of this world created by Bonvin. As opposed to the artist's inspiration, Chardin, and his immutable world, we are definitely in the presence of an artist invested in the ephemeral nature of daily life.

Bonvin's works may be found in every major institution including the Musée du Louvre and Musée d'Orsay, Paris; the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; The National Gallery, London; The British Museum, London; The National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Philadelphia Museum of Art; The Art Institute of Chicago; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, and The Getty, Los Angeles.

¹ Gabriel Weisberg, Bonvin, Paris 1979 *op.cit.*, no. 66, repr.

² G. Weisberg, *op.cit.*, nos 307-319, repr.

³ G. Weisberg, *op. cit.*, nos. 160-171

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Born into poverty, François Bonvin studied at the Ecole de Dessin in Paris between 1828 and 1830, but had to abandon his studies to begin work as a typesetter and printer. His earliest known works date from the late 1830's, by which time Bonvin was also working as a police clerk. He eventually returned to his studies at the Ecole de Dessin – a school geared primarily towards the decorative arts - and in 1843 began attending life-drawing classes at the Académie Suisse. Around this time he met his mentor, the painter François-Marius Granet, who encouraged him to study 17th century Dutch and Flemish painting as a way of refining his approach to genre subjects. (Bonvin would, in later years, make several trips to the Netherlands to study the work of the Dutch painters in person.) Perhaps with the support of Granet, who was on the jury, Bonvin made his Salon debut in 1847, and he continued to show there until 1880, earning a particular reputation as a genre and still-life painter. Bonvin rose to become one of the leaders of a group of Realist painters in 19th century France who found inspiration in subjects and scenes taken from contemporary urban life. Many of the models for his drawings and paintings seem to have been habitués of the inn owned by his father in Vaugirard. In 1859 a number of his paintings were accepted for exhibition at the Salon, though Realist works by such friends and colleagues as Henri Fantin-Latour, Alphonse Legros, Théodule Ribot and James McNeill Whistler were rejected. As a result, Bonvin invited these artists to exhibit their rejected works at his studio, known as the Atelier Flamand, an offer repeated after the Salon of 1863. Later that year his wife left him, and Bonvin found it difficult to concentrate on his paintings, preferring instead to make numerous drawings. In his final years he grew blind and suffered from paralysis. Although a retrospective exhibition of his work was held in 1886, followed a few months later by a benefit auction intended to raise funds for a pension for the artist, Bonvin died in impoverished circumstances in 1887.