

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

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## FÉLIX VALLOTTON

1865 Lausanne - Paris 1925

### *Soleils, poires et raisin*

Oil on canvas; 1922.

Signed lower right: *F. Vallotton.*

54.0 x 65.0 cm

PROVENANCE: Galerie Paul Vallotton, Lausanne [no. 6190] – Pierre Bossert, Epinal [acquired in 1923] – Jacques Thouvenot, Fontenay-sous-Bois – Thence by descent – Auction sale, PIASA, Drouot, Paris, 31 March 1999, lot 218, repr. – Huguette Berès, Paris – Bruno Meissner, Zurich – Private collection, Switzerland – Auction sale, Galerie Kornfeld, Bern, 18 June 2010, lot 149 - Private collection, Switzerland

LITERATURE: Félix Vallotton, *Livre de raison*, no. 1414 - Marina Ducrey and Guy Ducrey, *La Galerie Paul Vallotton, depuis 1913...*, Galerie Vallotton, Lausanne 1988, p. 28 – Marina Ducrey with Katia Poletti, *Félix Vallotton 1865-1925; l'œuvre peint*, III, Zurich/Lausanne 2005, no. 1488, repr. p. 1922

‘What is more, his still lifes serve him as an exercise in obedience, or, if you will, objectivism. Not a single viewer has failed to express astonishment at the most recent examples.’<sup>1</sup> This characterization of Félix Vallotton’s approach is too simplistic, given his predilection for exploring and scrutinizing the deeper meaning of what he saw. He executed some two hundred and sixty-seven still lifes, many of them later in his career. All of them are open to different interpretations and offer up different meanings. On 21 August 1919, he noted in his personal journal: ‘*Trompe l’oeil* wouldn’t be too bad, at least as something to aim for, because I know for certain that I wouldn’t be able to do it, but it doesn’t strike me as futile to apply ourselves to what lies at our farthest limits, even what is unachievable.’ He set himself high standards and was not in the habit of taking the easy route. This was a trait that he admired just as much in his colleagues as in his greatest ideal, Paul Cézanne. In his review of the 1907 Salon d’Automme Vallotton wrote: ‘Nothing [is] easy; to Cezanne, everything is a problem’.<sup>2</sup>

It was in his still-life canvases that Vallotton most successfully captured the rich variety of everyday objects and materials. Unlike the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, he chose not to allow pictorial elements to take centre stage but rather the object itself.<sup>3</sup> The focus of the present painting lies on a group of objects placed on an indeterminate brown surface, almost certainly a wood floor – a length of brown skirting board is visible in the background. The motif appears in a number of other still lifes by Vallotton. The perspective is unusual and the relationship of the objects to the setting is ambiguous. A plate of fruit, an apple and a blue ceramic jug containing golden-yellow rudbeckia and poppy are laid out on an everyday blue-and-white checked tablecloth. There is nothing casual about

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<sup>1</sup> André Thérive, ‘Le peintre Félix Vallotton’, in *La Vie*, Paris, 15 June 1922, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Félix Vallotton, in *La Grande Revue*, Paris, 25 October 1907. See Katia Poletti, ‘Luxuriant Matter’, in exhib. cat., *Félix Vallotton – Fire Beneath the Ice*, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam 2014, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Félix Vallotton, *Journal*, 31 July 1919.

the composition or its structure; the positioning of the objects is carefully planned and their formal characteristics succinctly formulated. The folds of the tablecloth have a precise, almost sculptural stiffness. The relationship of light and shadow is balanced. The sharp diagonal of the blue-and-white cloth is hemmed in by the horizontal of the brown skirting. The palette is vivid and the smooth surfaces and clear contours of the jug and fruit give them a tactile quality. Visual complexity, clarity and objectivity characterize this striking composition and lend it a certain photographic quality. Vallotton fuses still-life tradition with something approaching hyperrealism.<sup>4</sup>

Vallotton used the same everyday blue-and-white checked tablecloth in a *Nature morte sur une serviette à carreaux bleus* which is dated 1919. It belongs to a private collection, Switzerland [Fig. 1].<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 1: *Nature morte sur une serviette à carreaux bleus*, 1919.  
Oil on canvas, signed and dated, 54 x 73 cm.  
Private collection, Switzerland

<sup>4</sup> Linda Schädler, 'Hyperrealistische *natures mortes*', in exhib. cat., *Félix Vallotton – Idylle am Abgrund*, Hamburger Kunsthalle and Kunsthhaus Zürich, Zurich 2007, pp. 72-3.

<sup>5</sup> Marina Ducrey with Katia Poletti, op. cit., III, Zurich/Lausanne 2005, no. 1299, repr. p. 710.