

GALERIE SANCT LUCAS . VIENNA

JEAN-FRANÇOIS RAFFAËLLI
1850 Paris 1924

STILL LIFE WITH BOUQUET OF FLOWERS AND FRUIT ON A GREEN TABLECLOTH
1872

Canvas, 45 x 37 cm
Signature lower right: F. Raffaëlli 72.



Stencilled ink mark on the back of the canvas: *R. N. DAME DE LORETTE 46 / ALEXIS OTTOZ / Md. de Couleurs Fines / Toiles à Tableaux / PARIS*¹ (**fig. 09a**).

¹ This mark can also be found on two paintings by Jongkind dated 1873 and 1875 (see **fig. 09a, b and c** as well as Pascal Labreuche, “La maison Alexis Ottoz”, in *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Jongkind*, no. 45A (44th year), 31 December 2014, pp. 49-57).

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Stencilled ink mark on the back of the canvas: 8. This inscription refers to the format of the canvas used.

This painting will be included in the forthcoming Catalogue Raisonné by Brame & Lorenceau.

Nicknamed “the Flaubert of painting”² by Yvette Guilbert, Jean-François Raffaëlli is known mostly for having produced a large body of work reflecting a keen interest in the society of his time and its many upheavals. However, it would be simplistic to reduce him to the role of a “painter of modern life”³, to quote Baudelaire’s famous words, as he was very much an all-round artist. Born in Paris on 28 April 1850, Jean-François Raffaëlli starts his career outside of the field of painting as second bass at the lyric theatre “Théâtre de l’Athénée”. It is, however, his pictorial activities that bring him great success, reaping critical acclaim as well as public and official support. Still, he remains faithful to the eclecticism of his roots by also being an illustrator, engraver and writer. His unusual career indicates some degree of independence. Even when he is regularly exhibiting his works at “salons” and in spite of Gustave Caillebotte’s reservations, he also takes part in two impressionist exhibitions in 1879 and 1881.

This still life, signed and dated 1872, is a work from the artist’s youth. An assiduous museum-goer, Jean-François Raffaëlli starts by teaching himself how to paint. He soon demonstrates distinct qualities, and one of his paintings is accepted by

² *Jean-François Raffaëlli*, Paris, Musée Marmottan-Monet, 1999. Curatorship: Marianne Delafond and Caroline Genet-Bondeville, Paris, Musée Marmottan, 1999, p. 9, from *Les Maîtres artistes. Impressions rapides*. Letter from Yvette Guilbert, 1903.

³ Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne”, in *Le Figaro*, 26 and 29 November and 3 December 1863.

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the jury of the Salon of 1870. This success is, however, limited due to major political events taking place that year that directly affect the young painter. Jean-François Raffaëlli voluntarily joined an infantry battalion before joining a group of musicians during the Commune. Returning to painting in October 1871, he becomes part of Jean-Léon Gérôme's workshop at the École des Beaux-Arts. This experience seems to have been rather inconclusive, as Raffaëlli only stays three months and appears to have been left with bad memories of this training, as evidenced by his *Lettre à mes amis d'Amérique sur l'Art dans une Démocratie* [Letter to my American friends on art in a democracy]⁴. Finally, it is at the Louvre where returns to complete his training and closely studies the art of Delacroix and Corot.

Dating from this period, this painting features a composition with sophisticated chromatics, associating fruits and flowers on a moiré green tablecloth. Raffaëlli paints a bunch of table grapes, two peaches and a pear, probably an Anjou. The oversized fruit are varieties known for their velvety and soft textures. All of them mature in late summer and early autumn. The same applies to the flower bouquet composed of several species including sweet pea, daisies or chamomile, asters and probably phlox⁵. This choice is not insignificant; at a time of great botanical and exotic discoveries⁶, Jean-François Raffaëlli paints everyday fruits and flowers. In this composition, he depicts and glorifies the results of a summer harvest.

⁴ Jean-François Raffaëlli, "Lettres à mes amis d'Amérique sur l'Art dans une Démocratie", in *La Nouvelle Revue*, 15 October 1896.

⁵ I would like to thank Dominique d'Arnoult and Marianne Volle for their invaluable botanical knowledge.

⁶ See Elisabeth Fugier and Etienne Grafe, *Les peintres de fleurs en France de Redouté à Redon*, Paris, Editions de l'Amateur, 1992, 399 p.

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This taste for the mundane is also clearly reflected in his book *Mes promenades au Musée du Louvre [My strolls through the Louvre Museum]*, in which he states that “we should like the simple flowers found in our gardens and fields”⁷.

This work, even though it was painted at the beginning of his career, testifies to the young painter’s great abilities. Raffaëlli shows that he feels perfectly comfortable with still lifes, which allow him to display his skills as a colourist as well as his ability to play with different textures. As an admirer of Chardin⁸ and Delacroix⁹, he applies the lessons he learned through long and careful observation of their work. Besides the two masters mentioned above, Raffaëlli also seems to have been very much affected by Manet’s art. Manet dedicated himself to still life with a passion, a style very popular in the 1860s¹⁰, and thought that a “painter can say all he wants to say with fruits or flowers, and even clouds”¹¹. Raffaëlli’s admiration for the artist appears intact in 1913, as he is moved by

⁷ Jean-François Raffaëlli, *Mes promenades au Musée du Louvre*, Paris, Editions d'art et de littérature, 1913, p. 155.

⁸ According to Raffaëlli, “If Watteau is the great charmer of the 18th century, Chardin is its great painter”. Quote from *Mes promenades au Musée du Louvre*, Paris, Editions d'art et de littérature, 1913, p. 51.

⁹ For Raffaëlli, “Delacroix displays all of his genius and revolutionary spirit [...] by the way in which he visualises and paints a picture”. Quote from *Mes promenades au Musée du Louvre*, Paris, Editions d'art et de littérature, 1913, p. 106.

¹⁰ This trend can also be explained by the collapse of the hierarchy of genres and the calling into question of the academic system.

¹¹ Isabelle Cahn, *Manet, natures mortes*, Paris, Gallimard, 2000, unpaginated [30] p.

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“that which, under the brush of Manet, becomes of a simple herring on a silver platter, next to a half-peeled lemon, and a knife with a black handle lying on the edge of the table covered by a white tablecloth. It is an entire speech, and what a speech! He gives us, in the form of these few items, all of nature spread out before us. And this painting becomes a testimony, a genuine demonstration! And this demonstration becomes a powerful action? – And all of this about a herring lying on a silver platter!”¹²

The buttery appearance of the pear, reproduced by the young artist’s smooth touch, is clearly inspired by Manet (**fig. 01**). In his book entitled *Mes promenades au Musée du Louvre*, Raffaëlli dedicates many pages to still life and flower painting. His discourse on the importance of materiality and textures is a perfect illustration of the work done in this piece painted at the very beginning of his career. He states that

“When you pick a fruit, a peach, a plum, a bunch of grapes, you see on the fruit what we call the ‘bloom’, a kind of silvery down. If you place this fruit on a table, the light and the play of reflections of the bodies around it add shades of grey to its colour. Lastly, the atmosphere, whose colour is azure grey, surrounds everything. And due to this, even the most vivid colours in nature appear bathed in lilies. But only subtle colourists see these spreads of grey all around us, and it is this grey quality that identifies good colourists. A colourist is not the one who puts lots of bright colours on

¹² Jean-François Raffaëlli, *Mes promenades au Musée du Louvre*, Paris, Editions d'art et de littérature, 1913, p. 138.

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his paintings, but rather the one who perceives and adds all the shades of grey to his canvases.”¹³

It is precisely this type of tone and hue that can be found in *Nature morte au bouquet de fleurs et aux fruits sur une nappe verte*.

One of the most interesting aspects of this work is his signature (**fig. 02**). It does not look like the one used by Raffaëlli during the greater part of his career. That one was easily identifiable due to its script being entirely in capital letters (**fig. 03**). The initial of this first name, “J”, which is usually present, is not found here, and the painting merely bears the words “F. Raffaëlli 72”. This signature is characteristic of his beginnings and can be recognized by its bold “R” and its prominent diagonal that ends up in the lower leg. It also features a thin and short “F” and “L”. This type of signature can also be found on two other paintings created in the same year, *Soir d’hiver [Winter evening]* (**fig. 04**) and *L’après-midi dans un parc [Afternoon in a park]* (**fig. 05**). Aside from the script of the signature, these three pieces also share a similar chromatic palette. This specific way in which he signs his work can be interpreted as the sign of a young painter who has not yet fully found his artistic personality and is still looking for his voice, even though he already shows genuine technical brilliance. In 1872, Raffaëlli is not yet the great social painter he will become, and he will only adopt his final signature and vocation later.

This painting is of major importance in Raffaëlli’s body of work; it is his first famous still life, a style he obviously practised assiduously throughout his career (**fig. 06**). Georges Lecomte states that “Between a scene of humble everyday life and a painting evoking a gorgeous side of Paris or one of these flower paintings he created

¹³ Jean-François Raffaëlli, *Mes promenades au Musée du Louvre*, Paris, Editions d'art et de littérature, 1913, p. 51-52.

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with so much taste, bright freshness and poetry, [Raffaëlli] took his time to think seriously about all the ideas popping up in his mind, always active”¹⁴. This early work also testifies to his taste for flowers, which also seems to have remained constant. Two late pictures in particular were taken in his workshop where several bouquets (**fig. 07**) could be found, as well as one of his still lives (**fig. 08**).

Maxime Georges Métraux

¹⁴ Georges Lecomte, *Raffaëlli*, Paris, Editions Rieder, 1927, p. 12.

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Illustrations:



fig. 01: Edouard Manet,
Deux poires [Two pears], 1864,
oil on canvas, 28 x 32 cm,
art auction, sold on 2 February 2004 at Christie's London.



fig. 02: Jean-François Raffaëlli,
Nature morte au bouquet de fleurs et aux fruits sur une nappe verte [Still life with flower bouquet
and fruit on a green tablecloth] (detail), 1872
oil on canvas, 45 x 37 cm,
Galerie Sanct Lucas, Vienna.

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fig. 03: Jean-François Raffaëlli,
La Place d'Italie après la pluie [Place d'Italie after the rain] (detail), 1877
oil on canvas, 38 x 55 cm,
Memphis, Dixon Gallery and Gardens.



fig. 04: Jean-François Raffaëlli,
Soir d'hiver [Winter evening], 1872
oil on canvas, 24 x 33 cm,
art auction, sold on 16 June 1974 by Paul Martin and Jacques Martin at Galerie des Cheval-
Légers in Versailles.

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fig. 05: Jean-François Raffaëlli,
L'après-midi dans un parc (Afternoon in a park), 1872
oil on canvas, 39 x 29 cm,
art auction, sold on 9 February 1999 at Sotheby's New York.



fig. 06: Jean-François Raffaëlli,

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Fleurs et raisins [Flowers and grapes], after 1877
oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm,
art auction, sold on 24 and 25 February 2016 at Christie's Amsterdam.

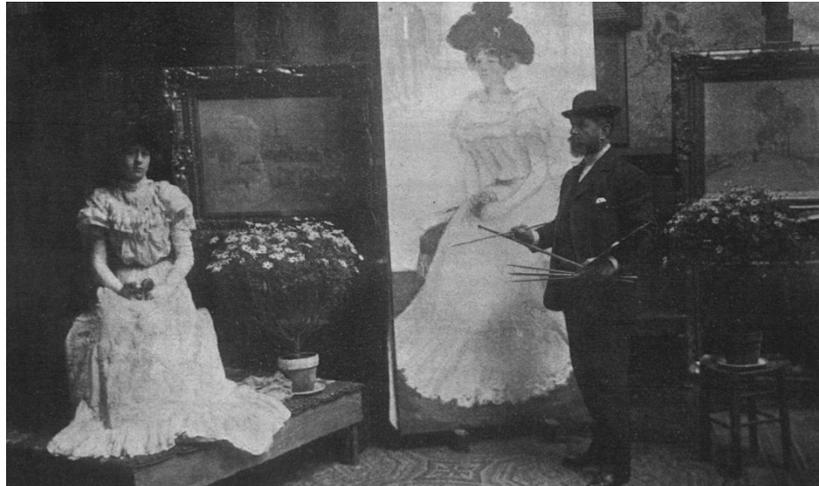


fig. 07: Picture by Gerschell and engraving by Ruckert,
Jean-François Raffaëlli peignant dans son atelier [Jean-François Raffaëlli painting in his workshop], published on 1 June 1901,
in *L'Instance, supplément illustré de la Revue hebdomadaire: romans, histoires, voyages*,
photoengraving, unknown dimensions,
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.



fig. 08: From Frank Wilbert Stokes' collection,
Jean-François Raffaëlli dans son atelier [Jean-François Raffaëlli in his workshop], ca. 1885-
1890,
photograph, unknown dimensions,
New York, The Frick Collection.

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fig. 09a, 09b and 09c: a- Jean-François Raffaëlli,
Nature morte au bouquet de fleurs et aux fruits sur une nappe verte [Still life with flower bouquet
and fruit on a green tablecloth] (back), 1872
oil on canvas, 45 x 37 cm,
Galerie Sanct Lucas, Vienna.
b- Johan Bartold Jongkind,
Vue de Nyon [View over Nyon] (back), 1875
oil on canvas, 33 x 46 cm
Nyon, musée historique et des porcelaines.
c- Johan Bartold Jongkind,
Coucher de soleil en Hollande [Sunset in the Netherlands] (back), 1873
oil on canvas, 33 x 47 cm
Comité Jongkind, Argentine, Buenos Aires.

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