



ARMAND GUILLAUMIN

(Paris 1841 - 1927 Orly)

La lecture. Circa 1890-1900.

Gouache on canvas.

Signed lower left: Guillaumin.

60 x 73 cm.

Provenance: - Jack Aghion, Paris. - Auction Hotel Drouot Paris, 29 March 1918 (sale of the Aghion collection, lot 34 (with ill.)). - Private property, Strasbourg (until 1924). - Private property, Zurich (through heritage). Exhibition: (presumably) Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune (with the label on the reverse on the coverboard, loaner Aghion). Armand Guillaumin was an Impressionist of the first and last hour. He studied with Cézanne and Pissarro at the Académie Suisse in 1866 and worked with them in Pointoise and

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Auvers-sur-Oise. He exhibited at the first (1874) and the last (1886) Impressionist exhibitions. In 1927 he died at the age of 86 as the last survivor of the Impressionists. "La lecture" is one of the few portraits by Guillaumin and one of his most beautiful works. Usually rendered in pastel shades, they show Guillaumin's wife or one of his daughters reading or playing the piano. The painter evidently made use of these occasions of suspended concentration of his family members to create these impressive depictions, which are characterised by a particular sensitivity. This is also shown in the extraordinary technique (gouache on canvas). In these scenes, Guillaumin attached great importance to the details, such as the patterning of the carpet. One is also able to see the way in which the Guillaumin family has surrounded itself with Asian decorations and representations. The so-called "Japonisme" craze strongly emerged in France in the late 19th century, especially among the Impressionists. This painting is a very typical work from the time known as the "Fin de Siècle" (1890-1914), a decisive period in the development of Modern Art. In his important text about this period, John Rewald writes: "The term 'post impressionism' is not a very precise one, though it is certainly a very convenient one. In a broad sense it covers the period from about 1886, when the impressionists held their last and incomplete exhibition at which the neo-impressionists appeared for the first time, until some twenty years later, when cubism was born and with a completely new era which ushered in what we may call contemporary art." (John Rewald, Post-Impressionism, From Van Gogh to Gauguin, 1978, p. 9.). This period is characterised by an awareness of life, that an epoch is approaching its end. Social changes were increasingly becoming a burden and people felt a premonition of the impending great wars and that these changes would not develop for the good. The artist thus retreated into the private sphere. Indeed, Guillaumin enjoyed increasing success through a large win in the lottery in 1891 and through progressively good sales of his works, but became more and more of a family person: "Guillaumin est devenu un père tranquille; il répugne à tout ce qui constitue l'agitation. Sa vie se limite à deux unique préoccupations: la peinture et la famille." (Raymond Schmit in Serret/Fabiani, Armand Guillaumin, Catalogue Raisonné de l'œuvre

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peint, Paris 1971, p. 75). The provenance of "La lecture" is also very interesting: it belonged to Jack Aghion. A native Egyptian, Aghion was brother-in-law of the two Bernheim-Jeune brothers, as well as Félix Vallotton. He was a banker and had good connections in the art market, enabling him to acquire an important collection which also included very important works by Van Gogh, Boudin, Pissarro and Vuillard. The collection was auctioned at Hotel Drouot in 1918, where "La lecture" was No. 34, and where it was acquired by the family of the grandmother of the present owner. Coming from Strasbourg, she married and moved to Zurich in 1924, and the work, together with other important works of Modern Art, has hitherto remained with the family, not being presented to the public again until now.

CHF 30 000 / 50 000

€ 30 930 / 51 550

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