THE REMBRANDT OF PECQ.

ARCHIVES

"Abraham Entertaining the Angels."

PROPERTY OF STÉPHEH BOURGEOIS,
No. 29 Chausée d'Antin, Paris.

1892

CHICAGO:
W. B. CONKEY COMPANY
PRINTERS.
THE REMBRANDT OF PECQ.

"Abraham Entertaining the Angels."

No picture has occasioned as much excitement in Paris as the Rembrandt of Pecq. Even the famous "Angelus" by Millet, did not bring as many visitors to inspect it as this picture when first discovered. Art critics, art connoisseurs, artists, art collectors, all rushed to view it. Its known history was peculiar. It had been in the possession of a family of very moderate means, residing in the small hamlet of Pecq, near St. Germains, France, during their life-time. It was begrimed and dirty, and had never received any attention, until after the death of the male head of the house, when it was put up at auction with the rest of the deceased's effects to be sold for the purpose of closing the estate. The physician who attended the deceased, told Mr. Stephen Bourgeois, of Paris, that a very remarkable picture hung on the walls of the house, and suggested that he examine it. He did so, and was at once convinced that it was well worth looking after. When the sale took place he hired a man residing in the neighborhood to purchase it, and it was bid in by him for the small sum of 4,060 francs.
The picture was catalogued as "Pilgrims of Emmaüs," of the school of Rembrandt, suggesting that it was not painted by that master, but was after his school. Immediately on coming in possession of it, Mr. Bourgeois took it to his home, at No. 23 Chaussée d'Antin, Paris, and proceeded to renovate it. The closer he inspected it, the more fully he was convinced that he had procured a great prize. The signature of the author was discernible under the coating of dirt, and when it became known that the picture was a veritable "Rembrandt," the widow of the former owner instituted a suit to recover possession of it. After considerable litigation, Mr. Bourgeois was forced to settle with her and got a clear title to it.

It is safe to say that most of the art connoisseurs of Europe inspected it, subsequently, and naturally among the number there were some skeptics. Mr. Bourgeois' reputation, however, as an expert, particularly in the work of the old Dutch Masters, and his decided opinion in regard to its authenticity, tended to give it the great renown it now enjoys. The newspapers were full of articles in regard to it; the theatres had representations of it in their plays; the pictorial papers printed copies of it; the singers at the varieties sang verses in regard to it, and the "Rembrandt of Pecq" became familiar with all Paris; and, in fact, in all the art circles of Europe.

After many solicitations, Mr. Bourgeois has consented to exhibit the picture in this country, so that the American people may see it and judge of its merits. He has in this connection given for publication a number of the letters received in regard to it; also, the articles written by some of the most prominent art critics in Europe, all
of which have been translated into the English and are herein published. His own certificate of authenticity has also been translated and is appended as a fitting introduction to the others. It might be added that many of the most celebrated Rembrandts now hanging on the walls of museums and in private collections were discovered by this same person:

I, undersigned, Stephen Bourgeois, of 23 Chaussée d'Antin, Paris, do by this present declare on my honor and conscience, that the picture representing “Abraham Entertaining the Angels,” bought by me at Mad. Legrand’s auction, at Pecq, is an original and genuine work of Paul Rembrandt van Ryn.

My long experience, and the numerous pictures of the master I have owned, and the greater part of which adorn museums and the greatest private galleries, constitute, so I think, a sufficient guarantee for my assertion and for my competence in the matter.

Any contradictions can, therefore, according to me, but be attributed to malevolence and incompetence on the part of their authors.

In witness whereof I have put my hand to this present, on this day of 6th October, 1890.
(Signed) STEPHEN BOURGEOS.

[Opinion of TONY ROBERT-FLEURY, Esq., Professor and Historical Painter.]

The work is a magnificent one; its beauty suffices to constitute the most eloquent and the most unquestionable witness in favor of the authenticity of the signature.

Not one among the pupils or competitors of Rembrandt is able to have painted this wonderful picture. I will add, moreover, that I strongly wish to see this work get into the Louvre. Its beauty not only is absolute, but it bears also with it a great and useful lesson.
Referring to "the reproaches made to certain secondary parts of this picture," the writer accounts for the same by recalling Rembrandt's life, and says: "About the age of forty, being in the impossibility to sell his pictures, which were reproached to be treated in a too summary manner, at least for what concerns their less important parts, he set to work painting with meticulous care, and the works of this period of his life are much more 'pushed' than the preceding ones.

But the great artist soon got tired of these too minute attentions, and in those works contemporaneous to that of "Abraham Entertaining the Angels," (which he painted when forty-eight years old,) some very prominent defects are noticed which one ought not to be astonished to meet within the Rembrandt of Pecq.

[From *Le Temps*, Feb. 17, 1890, written by Mr. Paul Mantz, Inspector of Fine Arts.]
Happy the gallery that shall be allowed to suspend to its walls this masterpiece of feeling and of painting.

(Signed) PAUL MANTZ.

The *Le Temps* subsequently consulted several experts and artists of renown in reference to the picture in question, and they all share Mr. Bourgeois' opinion, and pronounce the work a genuine Rembrandt.

Mr. George Lafenestre, Commissioner to the Museum of the Louvre, says: "The picture purchased by Mr. Bourgeois is a remarkable work of Rembrandt, and it is to be wished that the Louvre, whose financial resources are unfortunately too limited, could acquire it."

Mr. George, also a member of the Commission of Museums, says: "This picture unquestionably is a work of Rembrandt, a pure unpainted and unretouched work, and it is really to be deplored that the sale of such valuable articles should be entrusted to people who understand so little about it. I affirm that he who does not notice this picture of Rembrandt's, has never seen a picture.

"And when an expert happens to have for sale a picture possessing such remarkable qualities as the one which now calls our attention, if he doubts of its genuineness, it seems to us he might at least take advice from really competent people.

"When I was an expert, and when an object of art, the importance of which I was not apt to value, was set before me, I would have taken good care not to put it up for sale without having taken advice of such of my fellow members as were reputed good judges.

"But nowadays auctioneers make sales so very inconsiderately, that certain auctions must needs bring on sad mistakes."

[Opinion of Mr. ARTHUR POUGIN, as expressed in the *Gironde*, Feb. 19, 1890.]

Whatever it may be, here is a masterpiece fortunately returned to artistic circulation and which appears
destined not to increase. Rembrandt’s fame, which at present is no longer possible, but to make his invaluable and admiral genius still more appreciated and admired.

Mr. Paul Mantz says so in proper terms: “From all points of view the ‘Abraham Entertaining the Angels,’ will teach something even to those who believe best to know the divine Rembrandt. Happy the museum that shall be enabled to hang up in its gallery that masterpiece of feeling and of painting.”

May that museum be the Louvre! What happiness for all those among us—and I know some of them—who have a taste for the glory and genius of the “divine” Rembrandt, as Mr. Paul Mantz so well calls him.

[Extract from the *Guide de L’Amateur*, Feb., 1890.]

For our part we believe the opinion of Mr. Bourgeois alone outweighs that of all these painters together, and is of far more authority.

But, can it be that there are still people who think that painters know more than the rest of the world about painting? Do not they know that each one judges according to his character, and consequently that their opinion never can become an article of faith?

[Opinion of DARCAL, Manager of the Cluny Museum.]

*Anneville par Duclair* (Spec. Inf.),

25th Sept., 1890.

*Dear Sir:*—You are much too kind to me in attributing to me any competence whatever in the line of pictures.

A work appears to me to be either beautiful or ugly: I see talent in it, and it seems to me to be of such or such a school, but my knowledge goes no further.

It is in these conditions that “Abraham Entertaining the Angels” has appeared to me to be a very fine work, and that I attribute it to Rembrandt, being really at loss to know whom else I might honour with its authorship.
In my opinion it is even a very fine Rembrandt, whatever deficiencies may have been noticed in any one of its parts. Even the drawing of the British Museum seems to sign and seal it.

Now, I do not in any way pretend to be an expert in pictures, and I very readily admit one may think differently from what I here tell you, and I beg you to believe me.

(Signed:)

Truly yours,

DARCAL.

[Opinion of Jules Breton, Esq., a member of the Institute.]

DOUARNENEZ (FINISTERE), 26th Sept., 1899.

Dear Sir: In reply to your favor of 7th inst., I am pleased to state by writing what I have already told you verbatim.

Yes, in my opinion, the picture of "Abraham Entertaining the Angels" is indeed a Rembrandt.

No imitator of that great master could have conceived or executed this subject of a feeling so lofty and of a thought so elevated.

Here we are fully in ideal, and just on account of this, its execution (very grand in other respects) is less accurate than in other Rembrandts of an interest less immaterial. This consideration seems to me to answer to all objections that have been set up against its identity. Yes, there is no doubt for me about it being a Rembrandt. Believe me, sir,

(Signed)

Truly yours,

JULES BRETON.

[Opinion of Florent Willems, Esq., Artist-Painter, Commander of the Legion of Honor, etc., etc.]

PARIS, 1st Oct., 1899.

Dear Mr. Bourgeois: I am glad to have the opportunity of expressing you my admiration of your picture.
of Rembrandt; "Abraham Entertaining the Angels," which I declare, together with those artists and experts who have witnessed it before me, to be an exceptional work of that great genius. I think my opinion must be of weight, owing to my experience, having always been surrounded with masters of that fine Dutch school, and having, in many instances, been lucky enough to save by a precious restoration, pictures of the said school. Believe me, sir, Truly yours, F. Willems.

(Signed)

[Opinion of Julien Le Blant, Esq., a Painting Artist.]

Dear Mr. Bourgeois: It is very easy for me to let you know all I think of your Rembrandt, so much discussed last winter, for I have examined, without the least excitement, this picture, and my opinion on it was settled the very first day I saw it.

The "Abraham Entertaining the Angels" you have bought at Pecq is by Rembrandt—by its execution as well as by its composition.

None else but him can have painted this piece, and I will not alter my opinion till I am told who is the painter that composed this masterpiece.

A good many names have been put forward, but according to me none of them is the right one. Like all or most works of the masters, the picture has been touched up in certain parts.

Being since a long time in France, it has crossed many a broil, and it is a known fact that in our dear country, during disturbed times, no more regard is shown for works of art than for persons.

Such is, my dear Bourgeois, my sincere opinion, and if you thought my competence to be of any weight, you may take advantage of my judgment.

Hoping soon to see you, believe me Truly yours,

(Signed) J. Le Blant.
[Opinion of Mr. Louis Grose, Manager of *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, as printed in that paper 15th and 22nd Feb., 1890.]

**A PICTURE OF REMBRANDT DISCOVERED AT PECQ.**

In an auction after decease which has taken place these last few days at Pecq, near St. Germain, was comprised a large picture, signed Rembrandt, 1656.

The expert, an expert from Paris, having announced the picture as representing the "Pilgrims of Emmaus" (school of Rembrandt), the picture with great difficulty fetched 4,060 francs. (£162. 8 s.) and even that thanks to the presence at the auction of a painter, who, chancing to be there, had smelled the masterpiece behind the dust of neglect.

It was knocked down at that price to a well-known merchant of Paris, Mr. B——, who a few hours later was offered £4,000 which he refused, declaring he would not part with his acquisition for less than £10,000. It is indeed a Rembrandt of a marvelous style and quality and of a large size.

We have just seen the picture: it is one of that master's most splendid works. **** This scene contains four figures, half waisted and life size. In the middle Abraham, seated between the two angels, is in the act of blessing the meal a servant is setting before them. **** "This scene does not present the least analog with the "Pilgrims of Emmaus."

It has not come to our knowledge whether the heirs of the aged dame to whom the picture belonged have addressed their warmest thanks to the expert entrusted with the auction. **** But the salary he will pocket for this fine job will certainly serve him as a consolation.

We are assured this expert is attached to the Public Demesne; if this be true, it must be acknowledged that the interests of the Demesne are in good hands.
[Opinion of Luigi Chialiva, Esq., Painting Artist.]

Ecquen, 23d Sept., 1892.

My dear Friend: Just two words to tell you how much I regret you were not in Paris these last days, for I would have shown your marvelous Rembrandt, "Abraham Entertaining the Angels," to one of my friends who takes interest in the future Cincinnati museum.

It is true I told him all I think about it; that is to say, that it is one of Rembrandt's finest pictures, in which the master has resumed all of the wideness and the elevated conception of the art he created.

My friend Mr. Andrews has handed me a letter of introduction to one of the leading members of that committee which actually is in Italy, and I hope to bring him to you in order to show him your masterpiece.

In case you should be away from Paris, be so kind as to give instructions to let us see the picture. Believe me affectionately yours.

(Signed)

L. Chialiva.

[Opinion of Mr. A. Alexandre, Art Critic of Paris, as printed in that paper 17 Feb., 1892.]

The Rembrandt of Pecq.

To conclude, this picture is a marvel; there is no doubt about that.

The mysterious beaming, which in the absence of a signature, would suffice to fix the certain attribution; the warm and vibrating execution of the middle figure, the one of the blessing patriarch; the high and mighty simplicity of the composition; the exceptional quality of those reds, of those golds! All this constitutes a first-rate work, as fine as that of the Museum of Cassel, much above that of the Museum of the Hermitage; and if the State, this time doubly warned, lets it escape, it will be the true crime of Pecq, much more of consequence than the other one.

(Signed)

Arsène Alexandre.
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[Opinion of L. Nicole, Esq., Professor of Art in Lausanne, Switzerland.]

Square Georgette 4, Lausanne,

2d March, 1890.

Sir: You have done me the greatest pleasure by allowing me to admire your Rembrandt. While reading all of the accounts, without any exception, ridiculous and erroneous as well as the proofless disputes which have appeared up to this day in the papers concerning this wonderful work, I have been seized with great indignation, and sat to work studying the origin.

It is the result of these investigations concerning the nature of the subject, the drawing, the types, the coloring and the signature, which I beg to send you within two or three days at the utmost, solely with the object of artistic interest. Believe me, sir,

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) Prof. L. Nicole.


With respect to Mr. Bourgeois, he has been so worried by discussions, variances, etc., that he was bedridden yesterday.

This illness alone, as we were told, prevented him from concluding the sale of his Rembrandt with the Commissioner of the Berlin Museums, who arrived yesterday morning and who did not hesitate energetically to declare the picture to be genuine.

If he is right, and such is our humble opinion—very humble indeed, but very strong now that we have very carefully seen and studied this masterpiece over again—it would really be a very great pity if we were to let Germany carry off a canvas to which an immense value is attributed, even by those by whom Rembrandt’s fathership is denied to it.

One can, in fact, if one chooses, find fault with the accessory figures, namely, with the foreshortening of the
angel on the left-hand side of the patriarch; but no man having the sense and love of beauty will fail to experience the divine impression imparted by the picture by filling the eye with the warm and fair light with which the master has moulded Abraham.

(Signed)  HENRY NADAL.

[Opinion of Mr. GEORGES MONVAL, as expressed in Le Temps, 12th March, 1890.]

"THE REMBRANDT OF PECQ."

The Intermédiaire des chercheurset des Curieux, whose process of inquiry by questions and answers has often solved intricate problems, could not but receive exchanges of views on the authenticity of the picture of Pecq.

The following note addressed to this paper by a reader seems likely to furnish experts with fresh elements of appreciation:

A REMBRANDT TO BE RETRIEVED.

What has become of the master canvas of the collection of Robert Soyer, engineer of bridges and roads, thus noted under No. 1 of the postmortem inventory, got up on the 6th of November, 1802, by Mr. Bouet, a notary public of Orleans?

A picture of Rembrandt representing the "Benedicite," Soyer was a neighbor and friend to Aignan Desfriches, the well-known amateur, whose son-in-law, Cadet de Limay, had bought Soyer's house during this latter's lifetime.

Now, Mad. Legrand, a widow, to whom the picture recently purchased at Pecq. (Veziinet) by Mr. Bourgeois, was born Miss Desfriches.
This "Abraham Entertaining the Angels at his Table," which Mad. Legrand possessed by inheritance, should it perchance not be the above mentioned "Benedicte," attributed to Rembrandt about a year ago?

(Signed) 

GEORGE MONVAL.

[Opinion of CHS. GEORGE, Esq.]

The picture belonging to Mr. Stephen Bourgeois, "Abraham at Table with the Angels," is, in my opinion, a genuine work of Rembrandt.

(Signed)

CHS. GEORGE.

25th Sept., 1890.

[Opinion of MR. A. DE LOSTALOT, Art Critic to the Gazette des Beaux-Arts.]

The picture which has been knocked down to Mr. Bourgeois for a mere song, and for which he is said actually to refuse over £8,000, may be ranked amongst the capital productions of art. The figure of Abraham is an admirable piece of painting, beaming with light and of surprising execution. The angels do not present the same importance, especially the one on the left hand side, which seems made after a current process, 'de chic' as painters style it. As for the accessories, such as the dishes, the varnished earthen flask, the quarter of mutton, and the dish containing the unleavened loaves, everything in this wonderful and amazing deadnature reveals the hand of a master, and who else but Rembrandt can this master be? As for a dead certainty, it never shall be had. Rembrandt himself should have to be induced upon deciding over the matter. As well painters and amateurs are divided in two factions. Bouhat and Gerome deny the master the fathership of the work; Tony Robert-Fleury, Paul Mantz, together with most professional critics, embrace the affirmative opinion.

Who is to believed?

One thing is certain, and this is that we stand before an admirable picture.
And now for the morality to be drawn from this tale: The heiress of the old dame of Pecq has lost the clearest part of her legacy; to speak the truth, she is done; but, having been legally, in the presence and by the authority of a sworn expert, despoiled of her property, the best thing for her to do is to declare herself contented. However, perhaps Mr. Bourgeois would act well in insuring the unfortunate lunatic a first-class pension; but, if he does so, and I consider him capable of acting in such a gentlemanly manner, it will be mere generosity, for he, as a dealer in pictures, has strictly kept himself within the limits of his right.

[Opinion of Theodore Weber, Esq., Painter to the Department of the Navy and the Colonies, and Honorary Member of the National Academy of the Brazils.]

Paris, 20th Sept., 1890, (37 Rue des Martyrs.)

Dear Sir:—I am very sorry to hear your picture called "The Rembrandt of Pecq" is about to leave France. I deplore the too limited means of our museums should not have permitted to purchase this fine picture of Rembrandt, which is a most genuine one, for our National gallery of the Louvre. Believe me, sir,

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) TH. WEBER.