

French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945

The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor



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Léon-Augustin Lhermitte, *Potato Planting in Spring*, 1888

Artist	Léon-Augustin Lhermitte, French, 1844–1925
Title	<i>Potato Planting in Spring</i>
Object Date	1888
Alternate and Variant Titles	<i>La plantation des pommes de terre au printemps; La plantation des pommes de terre</i>
Medium	Pastel and charcoal on paper, mounted on canvas
Dimensions (Unframed)	16 7/8 × 22 3/8 in. (42.9 × 56.8 cm)
Signature	Signed lower right: L. L hermitte
Credit Line	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Gift of James W. Sight and Dr. Heidi Harman in honor of the 75th anniversary of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2014.21

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Catalogue Entry

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In 1888, the same year Léon-Augustin Lhermitte completed the Nelson-Atkins pastel *Potato Planting in Spring*, he illustrated a book entitled *La Vie Rustique* by his friend André Theuriet, a poet, novelist, and playwright. Theuriet described their approach to the subject of rustic life in the introduction:

*We have tried to piously collect here the relics of these customs, these faces and these landscapes which are about to disappear—and we will be amply rewarded for our efforts, if we have thus been able to preserve for our great-nephews the picture of a world and a nature they may no longer know.*¹

Indeed, farming and rustic life were at a moment of great transition in the mid- to late nineteenth century, set against the backdrop of the industrial revolution.² And yet, no evidence of that shift is present in the Nelson-Atkins composition, in which Lhermitte depicts a rural worker who digs a trench by hand in a small garden, preparing the soil for his female counterpart to place a potato tuber. Setting the figures against a hazy sky and a landscape just beginning to green and bloom

in the spring sun, Lhermitte represents the laborer with genuine empathy. With the advent of machines came a loss of traditional skills and understanding of how to work the land by hand, including digging, sowing, reaping, cutting with a sickle, and tying a sheaf of grain. The mechanization of farming changed the relationship between humanity and nature. Railways connected city and country, offering opportunities for farmers to seek alternative sources of income. They also brought the city into the country in the form of agro-industry and business middlemen.³ As if to memorialize the way of life of the rural laborer from a time that was quickly disappearing, Lhermitte's acutely observed works serve as a testament to an era before that cataclysmic change.⁴

Born in Mont-Saint-Père, a rural farming community approximately sixty-five miles northeast of Paris along the Marne River in the Hauts-de-France region, Lhermitte spent nearly twenty years there observing its customs and ways of life before leaving for Paris in 1863. He displayed an early interest and talent for drawing and enrolled in the *École Impériale de Dessin*, where he excelled in landscapes of his native town. Lhermitte came of age during a period that not only witnessed a great transformation of agrarian life but also transitioned stylistically from Realism to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Although he incorporated stylistic elements from all these groups, his work exhibited none of the social protest of Realist painters like Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) or Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), nor the visionary qualities of avant-garde painters, including Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890).⁵ Instead, as Monique Le Pelley Fonteny suggests, "his scenes were expressive of his time," bearing the influence of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875), the Barbizon School, and Jules Breton (1827–1906)—yet they remain objective, incorporating elements that appealed to public taste. Celebrated for his great powers of observation and insight into the types of people around whom he had grown up, Lhermitte was highly successful during his lifetime.

Those powers of observation come into sharper focus when examining the Nelson-Atkins pastel, a medium the artist had only been using since 1885.⁶ Lhermitte renders a couple planting potatoes on a small farm, possibly the Ru-Chailly, located across from the Marne from his studio, which served as the site for many of his compositions.⁷ Potato farming was hard work, and when done on a small scale, as seen in the pastel, it was not very profitable. In reality, potatoes were mass-cultivated in northern France from the 1850s. The cooler climate of

Mont-Saint-Père, with its average two hundred days of rainfall per year, provides the perfect environment for potato farming. In fact, in France today, production of potatoes is concentrated largely in the Hauts-de-France region, which encompasses Mont-Saint-Père.⁸



Fig. 1. Alfred Watkins (English, 1855–1935), *Bee Stands at Upton Mill, Herefordshire*, 1880s, gelatin silver print, Herefordshire Council, Alfred Watkins Collection, Alf1654

The composition in Lhermitte's pastel forms a triangle with its base at the foreground. Lines recede from the planting scene along the edges of the small plot of cultivated land and extend into the background. The apex of the triangle points to a small row of straw beehives that sit on four-legged pedestals with flat tops similar to those in a period photograph (Fig. 1). These traditional wicker skeps (or hives) prevailed for centuries in England and France.⁹ On top of the skeps are conical straw hackles, which protect the hives from rain. The author of a beekeeping manual from 1879 offered a method, accompanied by an illustration, of how to make a straw hackle of precisely the kind seen in Lhermitte's pastel (Fig. 2). The hackles are made from soaked straw tied securely with basket-maker's twigs. Hoops were then fastened within—at points K, L, M, and N in the illustration—and then fitted over and adapted to the form of the hives and left to dry, stiffen, and set. A wooden peg that passed through the hackle above the hoop into the hive prevented the wind from disturbing it.¹⁰

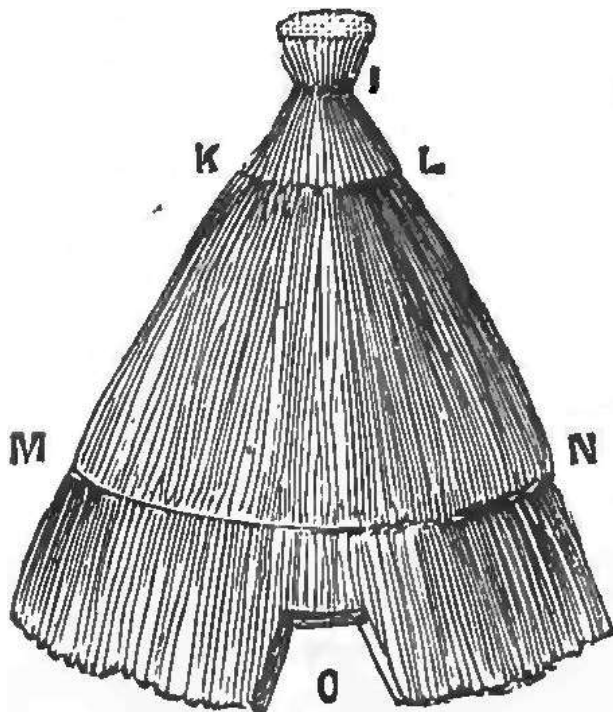


Fig. 2. Illustration of a straw hackle for a beehive, ca. 1879, published in John Hunter, *A Manual of Bee-Keeping*, 4th ed. (London: W. H. Allen, 1884), 76

Although Lhermitte depicted this traditional beehive, the modern movable-comb hive had been developed fifty years before by the Polish apiarist Johann Dzierzon. This new type of hive allowed for manipulation of individual honeycombs without destroying the structure of the hive, through the introduction of grooves into the side walls of the hives, with added wooden strips for moving top bars (Fig. 3). This provided more space for bees to roam and allowed for a safe extraction of honey. Much of what Dzierzon introduced is still used in beehives today.¹¹

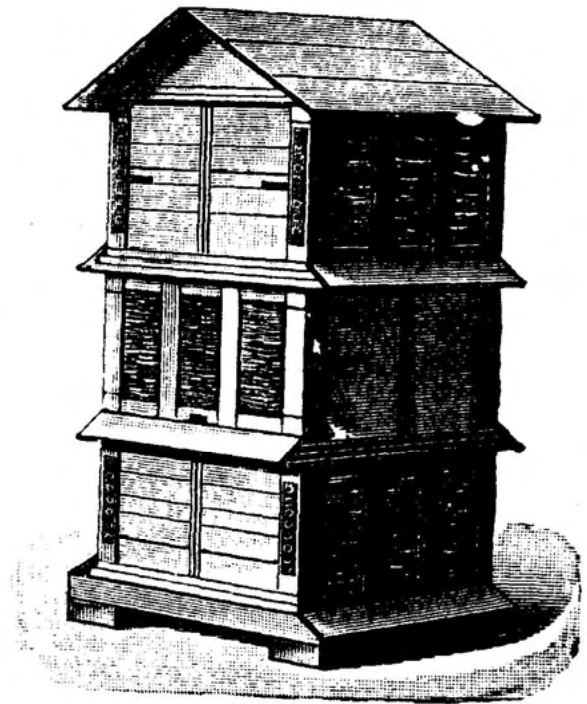


Fig. 3. Moveable hive (stack of Johann Dzierzon's twin domes), 1905, illustrated in Bernhard Meijer, ed., *Nordisk Familjebok: Konversationslexikon och Realencyklopedi*, 2nd ed. (Stockholm: Nordisk familjeboks förlags aktiebolag, 1905), 3:493–94

Beekeeping was a year-round activity, with the start of the season, like potato planting, tied to spring. Representations of seasons symbolized by human activity is a prevalent theme in art since the Middle Ages and remained a subject that mid-to-late nineteenth-century artists mined consistently. For Lhermitte, this activity began in 1885 with drawings he submitted to the journal *Le Monde Illustré* for a section called “The Rustic Months.” This particular series caught the attention of fellow artist Vincent van Gogh, who repeatedly asked his brother Theo to send him these monthly submissions.¹² For the month of October, Lhermitte submitted a scene of women harvesting in a potato field (Fig. 4). In a letter to Theo on November 28, 1885, after receiving the print, Vincent described it in a single word: “Magnificent.”¹³ Van Gogh was drawn not only to Lhermitte’s subject matter of laborers and rural life but to the depth of understanding he brought to his figures. “Lhermitte’s secret,” Van Gogh wrote to his brother, “is none other than that he knows the figure in general—namely the sturdy, severe workman’s figure—through and through, and takes his subjects from the heart of the people.”¹⁴



Fig. 4. Léon-Augustin Lhermitte (engraved by Clément Edouard Bellenger), *The Potato Harvest* from the series *Cultivators in the Field*, 1885, engraving on paper, 5 x 7 5/8 in. (12.7 x 19.3 cm), published in "Les mois rustiques: Octobre," *Le Monde illustré* 29 (November 21, 1885), plate between pp. 344 and 345. CC0 Paris Musées / Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris



Fig. 5. Jean-François Millet, *Potato Planters*, ca. 1861, oil on canvas, 32 1/2 x 39 7/8 in. (82.5 x 101.3 cm), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 17.1505. Photograph © 2022 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

This intimate knowledge of farm work and life distinguishes Lhermitte's pictures from those of his predecessors, like Jean-François Millet, whose rural workers represent a more generalized type (Fig. 5). Here, Millet's figures engage in the same act of labor as in the Lhermitte pastel, except in Millet's painting, their faces appear shaded in anonymity, and their bodies, wrought large through toil, appear almost sculptural in their monumentality. The rendering of their clothes is also generalized, and although dirt appears at the elbows and knees of the male figure's trousers, their broad shapes are less specific to the activity in which the workers engage. By contrast, in the Nelson-Atkins pastel, Lhermitte bathes his figures in dappled light, making it

possible to examine their features, individual gestures, and the implements of their toil.¹⁵ The creases in their clothing follow the lines of their bodies underneath, and the subtle gradations of color in the woman's apron reflect the natural light conditions, suggesting that Lhermitte completed the composition en plein air. However, as Lhermitte's facility in pastels increased, he was also able to convey the impression of his original source of inspiration from memory in his studio.¹⁶ Among his studio props, Lhermitte kept a supply of rural farm clothing to outfit his models, who were local inhabitants of his native Mont-Saint-Père rather than professional models.¹⁷ In fact, it is tempting to suggest the figures in the pastel are Lhermitte's gardener, Louis Nourry (1863–1915), and his raven-haired wife, Hortense Nourry (1867–1940). They appear in several other works by the artist from around that time, including a charcoal drawing entitled *April* from 1885, in which the couple rest from spring planting amid a similar flowering farmyard near the artist's home (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Léon-Augustin Lhermitte, *April*, 1885, charcoal and stump, erasing, and scratching; sepia chalk and stump; fixed white chalk and black dry pastel highlights on assembly; collage of 6 sheets of the same laid paper lined with a sheet of thick, cream, mildly transparent paper, 30 13/16 x 40 5/16 in. (78.3 x 102.4 cm), Musée des beaux-arts, Reims, 907.19.330. © Reims, Musée des Beaux-arts / photo: C. Devleeschauwer

While life in Mont-Saint-Père and other parts of rural France was dramatically changing, Lhermitte's images of laborers show that performing the rural cycles of sowing, tilling, and reaping were as constant as the seasons themselves. Lhermitte, like many others in France, was drawn to their consistency and stability amid a sea of change.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's. "Nous avons essayé d'y recueillir pieusement les reliques de ces mœurs, de ces physionomies et de ces paysages qui vont disparaître,—et nous serons largement récompensés de nos efforts, si nous avons pu ainsi conserver à nos arrière-neveux le tableau d'un monde et d'une nature qu'ils ne connaîtront peut-être plus." See André Theuriot and Léon Augustin Lhermitte, *La vie rustique* (Paris: Launette, 1888), viii.
2. An important earlier publication on this subject is Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979).
3. Yves Lequin, ed., *Histoire des Français XIXe–XXe siècles* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1983), 85–88, cited in Monica Juneja, "The Peasant in French Painting: Millet to Van Gogh," *Museum International* 36, no. 3 (1984): 169.
4. The literature concerning the transformation of rural life in the nineteenth century, and on Millet in particular, is extensive. Critical in this dialogue are: T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848–1851* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 72–98; and Raymond Crew, "Picturing the People: Images of the Lower Orders in Nineteenth-Century French Art," in *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 203–31. See also Richard R. Brettell and Caroline B. Brettell, *Painters and Peasants in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Skira/Rizzoli, 1983).
5. Lhermitte admired Courbet, Millet, and the Barbizon-era artists, and he was invited by Degas to exhibit with the Impressionists in 1879 (he refused), but he regularly exhibited at the annual Salons of Paris. See Monique Le Pelley Fonteny, "Léon Augustin Lhermitte," in Monique Le Pelley Fonteny, ed., *Léon Lhermitte (1844–1925)*, exh. cat. (Beverly Hills: Galerie Michael, 1989), unpaginated.
6. Le Pelley Fonteny, *Léon Lhermitte (1844–1925)*.
7. See Monique Le Pelley Fonteny, "Leon-Auguste Lhermitte, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre: Catalogue des Peintures, Pastels, Dessins et Gravures" (PhD diss., Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1989), 37n9.
8. Jean-Pierre Goffart et al., "Potato Production in Northwestern Europe (Germany, France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Belgium): Characteristics, Issues, Challenges and Opportunities," *Potato Research* (January 28, 2022): <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11540-021-09535-8>. See also Eloise Trenda, "The Potato Market in France: Statistics and Facts," *Statistica*, October 1, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/topics/8051/potato-market-france/#dossierKeyfigures>.
9. Margaret Willes, *The Gardens of the British Working Class* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 15.
10. John Hunter, *A Manual of Bee-Keeping*, 4th ed. (London: W. H. Allen, 1884), 76.
11. Dzierzon's hive designs built on ideas from Ukrainian beekeeper Petro Prokopovych. See M. L. Gornich, "Petro Prokopovich and World Beekeeping," as reported in Viktor Fursov, "Out of the Past: Petro Prokopovich Remembered; Review of the Scientific Conference, 'Petro Prokopovich's Place in the World of Beekeeping,'" January 26, 2013, Kyiv, Ukraine," *Beekeepers Quarterly* 3 (March 2013): 49–53.
12. Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Nuenen, on or about Monday, March 2, 1885, published in Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten, and Nienke Bakker, eds., *Vincent Van Gogh: The Letters*, online edition (Amsterdam and The Hague: Van Gogh Museum and Huygens, 2009), <https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let484/>; this request was repeated in another letter from Neunen dated Sunday, June 28, 1855, in Jansen et al., *Letters*, <https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let510/>.
13. Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Antwerp, Saturday, November 28, 1885, in Jansen et al., *Letters*, <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let545/letter.f>.
14. Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, The Hague, on or about Thursday, March 29 and Sunday, April 1, 1883, in Jansen et al., *Letters*, <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let333/letter.f>.

15. See Monica Juneja, "The Peasant in French Painting: Millet to Van Gogh," 171.
16. Le Pelley Fonteny, *Léon Lhermitte (1844–1925)*.
17. Le Pelley Fonteny, "Leon-Auguste Lhermitte, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre," 37n7.

Technical Entry

Citation

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MLA:

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Fig. 7. The addition of wooden strips to the left and lower edges of the strainer can be seen through losses in the paper. The later paper additions at upper right are peeling away from the strainer, revealing a layer of brown paper, applied to the primary support, and traces of a blue paper dust cover along the right edge. *Potato Planting in Spring* (1888)

Léon-Augustin Lhermitte's *Potato Planting in Spring* is an example of the artist's mature realist style and his mastery of the pastel medium. The palette clearly indicates early spring by juxtaposing pinks and beiges with new green grass and dark blue-green stalks of allium plants. Lhermitte applied pastel, charcoal, and opaque watercolor to a primed paper attached to a stretched plain-weave canvas. The overall dimensions of the work are expanded by strips of wood attached to the strainer and by added papers that bear media (Fig. 7). The work was likely executed in more than one sitting, with the artist building up the composition in layers.

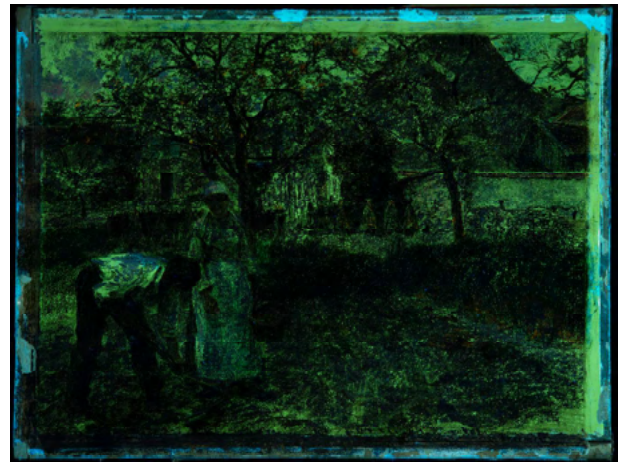


Fig. 8. Ultraviolet-induced visible fluorescence photograph of *Potato Planting in Spring* (1888)

The primary support is made from a mixture of papermaking fibers. It is beige to brown, moderately thick, slightly textured, wove paper.¹ It is coated with a white ground that extends to the edges of the paper and has a rough texture. It is not clear if the ground was commercially prepared or applied by the artist. In the 19th century, Parisian artist suppliers offered papers and canvases prepared with a ground containing abrasives, such as pumice or sand, that provided purchase for the pastel particles.² When exposed to ultraviolet illumination, the ground re-emits a yellow fluorescence (Fig. 8), indicating linseed oil as a possible binding material.

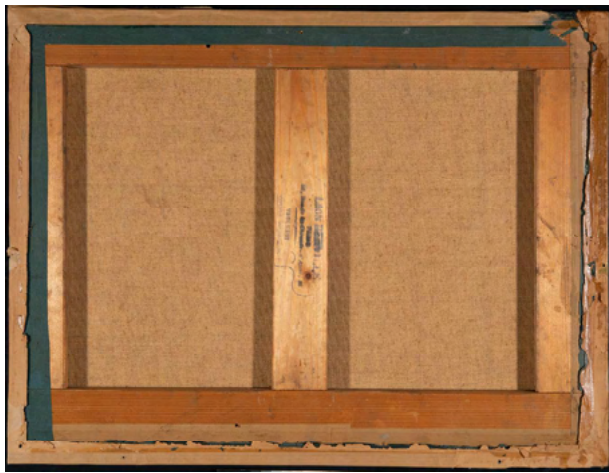


Fig. 9. The back of the artwork. The primary support paper is attached overall to a fine, plain-weave canvas attached to a strainer. *Potato Planting in Spring* (1888)

The paper is attached overall to a brown, plain-weave, linen canvas, which is glued to a strainer. A vertical cross bar (Fig. 9) is marked with Léon Berville's stamp: an artist's palette containing the shop address and specialty notations, "25, Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, 25 / Tableaux / Couleurs, Encadrements" (Fig. 10). The canvas is unprimed, and the primary support paper is visible through interstices in the canvas weave. The edges of the strainer are covered with layers of paper and paper tape. At 41 x 55 cm (16 1/8 x 21 5/8 in.), neither the strainer nor the paper conform to a standard size. Machine-milled wooden boards measuring 1.4 x 2 cm (1/2 x 5/8 in.) are attached to the left and bottom edges of the strainer and are partially covered with paper and additional media (Fig. 7). The boards increase the size of the artwork to 42.7 x 56.3 cm (16 13/16 x 22 1/4 in.).



Fig. 10. Detail of Léon Berville's stamp. *Potato Planting in Spring* (1888)

The boards were likely added during an early framing campaign, as they are covered with the same papers as the strainer members. The boards are the same dimensions and similar in grain and color to the boards that compose the fillet on the frame. Attached to these boards is a paper with the appearance of the primary support, but thinner and without ground.

Other papers are visible along the edges, and these attest to previous matting campaigns. On all edges, and overlapping onto the back of the strainer and the wooden additions, is a blue paper that was commonly used as a dustcover during nineteenth-century framing campaigns (Fig. 9). A brown laid paper, probably another dust cover, is present along all edges and is peeling away from the upper edge (Fig. 7). Along the right edge is a thick, brown, recycled two-ply paperboard.³ Hide glue was used as the main adhesive, and patches of the material, on the extreme borders of the artwork, were identified by the bright white ultraviolet (UV) induced visible fluorescence (Fig. 8).

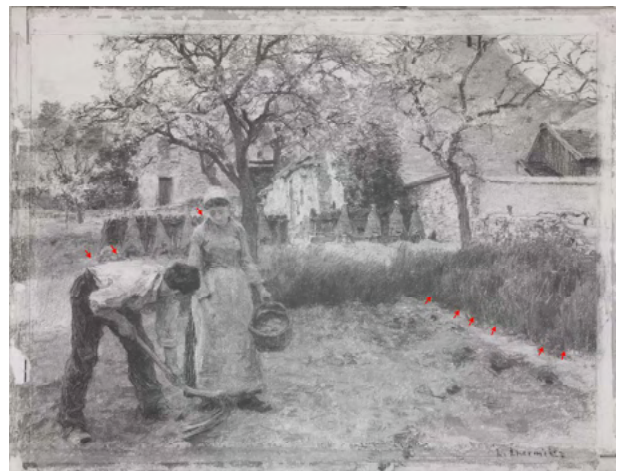


Fig. 11. Detail of the figures, reflected infrared digital photograph. Arrows indicate the original outlines for the man's back, which was higher and rounder, and the woman's shoulder, which was slightly higher than in the finished composition. The edge of a row of allium plants is indicated by three swift strokes of charcoal that were later covered with green pastel. *Potato Planting in Spring* (1888)

Lhermitte may have been working from drawings, as his execution was well planned, leaving behind few revisions. He began his composition by outlining the borders with charcoal. With the aid of digital infrared photography, the outlines of the figures and quick strokes indicating the edge of a row of allium plants at right are visible. These early marks were made with vine charcoal, which is significantly harder than compressed

charcoal and capable of incising into the ground, as seen along the back of the man's proper left leg. During media application, Lhermitte flattened the man's back and lowered the woman's proper left shoulder (Fig. 11). After the major elements of the composition were in place, Lhermitte laid in the background shapes as broad areas of blended color, to which he later added quick, gestural strokes of color. The middle and foregrounds are highly detailed. These are built up as multiple layers of strokes of pointed pastel with the darkest blacks contributed by both compressed and vine charcoals. The white shirt and dark pants of the man, as well as the head scarf of the woman, are thicker layers of pastel.



Fig. 12. Detail of the potato patch, raking light. A fast, undulating line, indicated by arrows, shows where sandpaper was used to abrade and roughen the ground. *Potato Planting in Spring* (1888)

Lhermitte used subtractive techniques in the composition. The gray, beige, yellow, and muted pink strokes that compose the soil of the potato garden were applied over scratches, likely from sandpaper that was used to remove previously applied media (Fig. 12). Lhermitte also appears to have selectively removed pastel from the foreground, possibly with a pointed instrument, so that small spots of the luminous ground layer show through. The white walls of the building in the background are vigorously scraped down to the ground layer, and highlights along the woman's shoulders and apron appear to be scratched into the ground with a small blade.

The ground layer is visible in the upper left and right corners of the composition. At upper right, the artist depicted a blue sky, but at upper left, the sky appears

unfinished until viewed with the aid of ultraviolet radiation (Fig. 8). This brings out clouds, applied as patches of a white media that mildly absorb the ultraviolet radiation and appear darker than the surrounding ground, which fluoresces yellow. The lowest clouds have a mild pink fluorescence, possibly indicative of carmine.⁴ This suggests that the clouds may have originally had a reddish glow at the time the pastel painting was executed, and raises the question of whether Lhermitte set the scene at sunrise or in the very early evening. Touches of carmine fluorescence can also be seen on the woman's shoulder and head scarf. Perhaps they reflected the light of the sky? Finally, orange spots of ultraviolet-induced fluorescence are visible in the tree behind the potato garden. Today the pastel strokes in these areas are a dark yellow or colorless and look like leaves, but they may have originally indicated blooms.



Fig. 13. Detail of the artist's signature. *Potato Planting in Spring* (1888)

The paper additions at left and lower edges appear to be composed of the same papermaking fibers as the primary support; however, they lack the white ground and have a skinned or abraded texture. They have torn edges that overlap and are firmly attached to the picture plane. While there is continuity of both color and design between the additions and image, the application of the pastel is hasty, and individual pastel marks are not as distinct. Only the signature, which is in blue pastel and occurs predominantly on the added paper (Fig. 13), may suggest that the additions were made by the artist.

Rachel Freeman
September 2022

Notes

1. The description of paper color, texture, and thickness follows the standard set forth in Elizabeth Lunning and Roy Perkinson, *The Print Council of America Paper Sample Book: A Practical Guide to the Description of Paper* (Boston: Print Council of America, 1996), unpaginated.
2. There is no documentation that Léon Berville sold primed papers stretched and applied to canvases. However, Lefranc offered pastellists a variety of stretched papers and canvases in rectangular and oval formats, both with or without the inclusion of pumice. Unstretched papers, also in a variety of sizes, were sold with three types of prepared grounds: with pumice, with sand, and smooth. See Lefranc et Cie Catalogue: *Fabrique de couleurs et vernis; Toiles à peindre; Carmin, laques, jaunes de chrome de Spooner; Couleurs en tablettes et en pastilles, pastels et généralement tout ce qui concerne la peinture et les arts; Encres noires et de couleurs Pour la Typographie et la Lithographie; Fabrique à Grenelle* (Paris: Imprimerie P.-A. Bourdier et Cie, 1862), 40–41.
3. Paperboard refers to “stiff and thick ‘paper’ which may range from a ‘card’ of 0.20 mm or 1/125th of an inch or more and vary in composition from pure rag to wood, straw, and other substances having little or no affinity with ‘paper’ beyond the method of manufacture.” See E. J. Labarre, *A Dictionary of Paper and Paper-Making Terms* (Amsterdam: N.V. Swets and Zeitlinger, 1937), 208–09.
4. No efforts, other than visual observation, were undertaken to identify the pigments and dyes used in the pastel media. Carmine is a red colorant derived from cochineal and kermes insects. It produces a vivid pink fluorescence when exposed to ultraviolet radiation. It is not lightfast and fades quickly under even the best exhibition standards. See Helmut Schweppe and Heinz Roosen-Runge, “Carmine–Cochineal Carmine and Kermes Carmine” in *Artist’s Pigments: A Handbook of Their History and Characteristics*, ed. Robert L. Feller (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 1:255–83.

Documentation

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Provenance

Probably with the artist until at least April 7, 1898 [1];

With Boussod, Valadon et Cie, Paris, pastel stock no. 14120 [2];

Dr. Schweisguth (probably Charles “Daniel” Schweisguth, [1865–1943]), Paris [3];

Purchased from *Dessins, Aquarelles, Gouaches, Pastels, Gravures Par: Barye (A.–L.), Besnard, Boldini, Boudin, Chéret, Cross, Degas, Delacroix, Detaille, Foujita, Frank Will, Guys, Harpignies, Isabey, Jongkind, Laprade, Leloir, Lhermitte, Monnier, Puvis de Chavannes, Stenlein, Vernet, Veyressat, De Waroquier, Willette, Etc; Tableaux Modernes Par: Balfourier, Blanchard, Charlot, Clairin, Delpy (H.–C.), Dufeu, Dupray, Eberl, Fantin–Latour, Favory, Flandrin, Guillaumin, Harpignies, Hébert, Kvapil, Lebasque, Lefebvre, Le Noir, Lotiquet, De Luna, Marchand, Mathey, Méheut, De Neuville, Olive, Picard Ledoux, Pierre, Pigal, Planson, Ribot, Ph. Rousseau, Sabbagh, Valtat, Vollon, Ziem, Etc; Assiette décoré par Vlaminck; Sculptures Par: Carpeaux, Jeannot, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, March 12, 1941, no. 36, as *La plantation des pommes de terre*, by André Schoeller on behalf of Gérard frères, March–June 1941 [4];*

Purchased from Gérard frères, stock no. 1651, as *Plantation p. de terre*, by Muller et Clair, Paris, June 20, 1941 [5];

Purchased from Hervé Chassaing, Jacques Rivet et Rémi Fournié, Hôtel des Ventes Saint-Georges, Toulouse, December 15, 1982 [6];

With Galerie du Lethé, Paris, 1982–1983;

With Galerie de l'Obsidienne, Paris, 1983;
Private collection, Rhode Island, April 1983;
Private collection, France, by 1987;
Purchased from the latter by Galerie Jacques Bailly, Paris, 1987;
Jane Schnitzer, by 1988 [7];
Purchased from Schnitzer by Altman/Burke Fine Arts, New York, 1988–no later than 1991;
Purchased from Altman/Burke by Samuel Blatt (b. 1942), Boca Raton, FL, by June 2, 1991–2008 [8];
Purchased from Blatt, through Jill Newhouse Gallery, New York, by James W. Sight (b. 1955) and Dr. Heidi A. Harman (b. ca. 1959), Prairie Village, KS, 2008–2014;
Their gift to The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 2014.

Notes

- [1] The pastel was lent by the artist to the exhibition, *14ème Exposition de Pastellistes Français*, at Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, which opened April 7, 1898. See no. 73.
- [2] In 1887, Boussod, Valadon, et Cie signed an exclusive contract with Lhermitte to sell his paintings and pastels. It seems that the stock numbers for pastels were kept separately from those for paintings. See email from Sylvie Brame, Brame et Lorenceau, to Glynnis Stevenson, NAMA, January 14, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.
- [3] This may be Charles “Daniel” Schweisguth (1865–1943), a Paris doctor who collected pastels and donated several works to the Louvre in 1895. This pastel was not included in the 1924 sale of Schweisguth’s collection.
- [4] The inscription next to lot no. 36 in the minutes from the March 12, 1941 sale reads: “Pastel [Schoeller] seize mille / francs”. See “Commissaire-priseur: ADER, Etienne, Minutes, D42E3 185,” Archives de Paris, France.
- [5] See email from Magdelaine Dickinson, Wildenstein-Plattner Institute, to Glynnis Stevenson, NAMA, January 14, 2021, NAMA curatorial files. See “Mars–juin 1941, Salesbook of Gérard frères,” Wildenstein-Plattner Institute, New York, where the name “Clair” is listed as the buyer of the Lhermitte. That dealership was originally founded by Georges Muller (b. 1892) at 5, rue La Boétie. Muller, who was Jewish, was forced to sell the gallery on June 7, 1941. Its buyer was his business

partner François Clair (1899–1958). The gallery operated under the name Muller et Clair throughout the war, and was registered in the commercial registry of Paris in 1945. We have thus far been unable to confirm when Clair sold the picture. There’s no record of it in the following archive with documentation of Muller et Clair during the war: “Archives de Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives, Dossiers d’Aryanisation des Biens ‘Non Revendiqués’ de la Section VI,” AJ/38/2870, dossier 7425, Archives nationales, Paris.

[6] E. Mayer, *International Auction Records* (New York: Editions Publisol, 1983), 17:477.

[7] This is possibly Jane Schnitzer (b. 1922, Philadelphia; d. 2015, Fort Lauderdale, FL), who was married to Irving Schnitzer.

[8] A label on the back of the frame states, “Courtesy of Sandy Blatt.” See also the notes from a telephone conversation between Sandy Blatt and Nicole Myers, NAMA, June 19, 2014, NAMA curatorial files.

Related Works

Léon-Augustin Lhermitte, *Potato Plantation*, 1900, 12 2/3 x 15 3/10 in. (32 x 39 cm), pastel on paper, Galerie Delvaile, Paris.

Exhibitions

Cinquième exposition de la Société de Pastellistes Français, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, April 6–May 6, 1889, unnumbered; *Exposition universelle*, Champs de Mars (Pavillon spécial), Paris, May 6–October 31, 1889, no. 5, as *La plantation des pommes de terre*.

14ème Exposition de Pastellistes Français, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, opened April 7, 1898, no. 73, as *Plantation de pommes de terre au printemps*.

Léon Lhermitte (1844–1925), Galerie Michael, Los Angeles, November 3–December 31, 1989; Altman/Burke Fine Arts, New York, February 22–March 24, 1990, no. 23, as *Planting Potatoes*.

Revolution in Form: Tampa Collects French Art 1800–1950, Tampa Museum of Art, FL, June 2–August 18, 1991, no. 61, as *Potato Planting in the Spring*.

Paris 1860–1930: Birthplace of European Modernism, Boca Raton Museum of Art, FL, January 13–March 12, 1999; Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico, March 20–June 15, 2000, unnumbered, as *Potato Planting in the Spring*.

19th and 20th Century Master Drawings, Jill Newhouse Gallery, New York, July 5–11, 2008, unnumbered, as *Potato Planting in the Spring*.

Magnificent Gifts for the 75th, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, February 13–April 4, 2010, no cat., as *Potato Planting in the Spring*.

From Farm to Table: Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Masterworks on Paper, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, March 16, 2018–March 17, 2019, no cat., as *Potato Planting in the Spring*.

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"Mouvement artistique: Exposition des pastellistes," *Le Mot d'ordre*, no. 99 (April 9, 1889): unpaginated, as *Plantation de pommes de terre au printemps*.

Alfred Darcel, "Exposition de la Société des Pastellistes Français," *Journal de Rouen*, no. 101 (April 12, 1889): unpaginated.

Desclinville, *Journal de l'Aisne* (April 17, 1889).

Olivier Merson, "Chronique des Beaux-Arts," *Le Monde Illustré* 64, no. 1,673 (April 20, 1889): 262, as *Plantation de pommes de terre*.

"M. L. Lhermitte à l'Exposition des pastellistes," *Courrier de l'Aisne* (April 29–30, 1889), unpaginated, as *Plantation de pommes de terre au printemps*.

A Record of Art in 1898 (French Section) (London: The Studio, 1898), 14, as *Plantation des pommes de terre au printemps*.

Catalogue des Dessins, Aquarelles, Gouaches, Pastels, Gravures Par: Barye (A.-L.), Besnard, Boldini, Boudin, Chéret, Cross, Degas, Delacroix, Detaille, Foujita, Frank Will, Guys, Harpignies, Isabey, Jongkind, Laprade, Leloir, Lhermitte, Monnier, Puvis de Chavannes, Stenlein, Vermet, Veyressat, De Waroquier, Willette, Etc; Tableaux Modernes Par: Balfourier, Blanchard, Charlot, Clairin, Delpy (H.-C.), Dufeu, Dupray, Eberl, Fantin-Latour, Favory, Flandrin, Guillaumin, Harpignies, Hébert, Kvapil, Lebasque, Lefebvre, Le Noir, Lotiquet, De Luna, Marchand, Mathey, Méheut, De Neuville, Olive, Picard Ledoux, Pierre, Pigal, Planson, Ribot, Ph. Rousseau, Sabbagh, Valtat, Vollon, Ziem, Etc; Assiette décoré par Vlaminck; Sculptures Par: Carpeaux, Jeanniot (Paris: Hôtel Drouot, March 12, 1941), 7, as *La plantation de pommes de terre*.

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