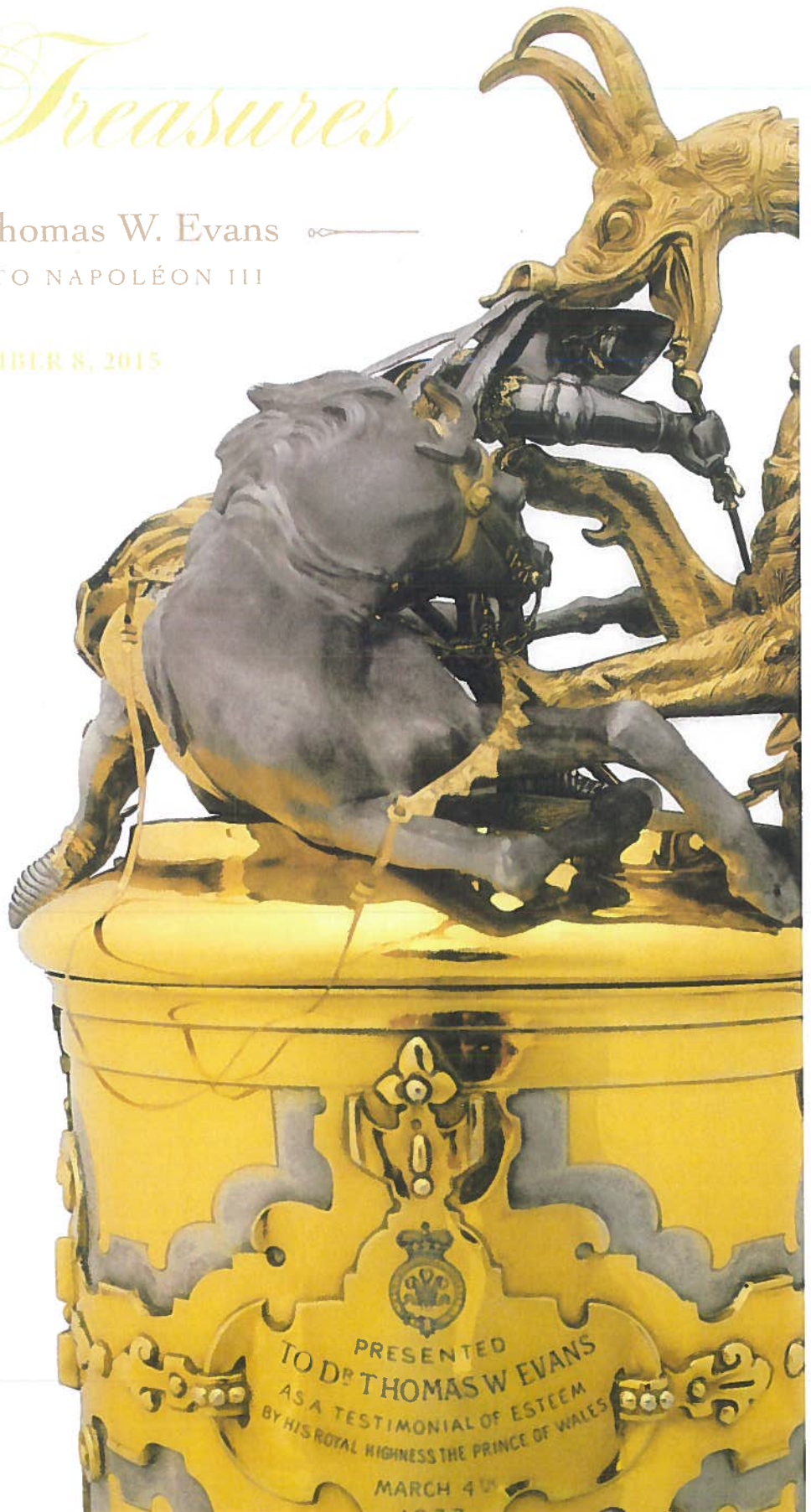


# *Courtly Treasures*

— The Collection of Thomas W. Evans —

SURGEON DENTIST TO NAPOLEÓN III

JULY 18 - NOVEMBER 8, 2015



ARTHUR ROSS GALLERY

Published on the occasion of the exhibition organized by the Arthur Ross Gallery and the Office of the Curator in collaboration with the School of Dental Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

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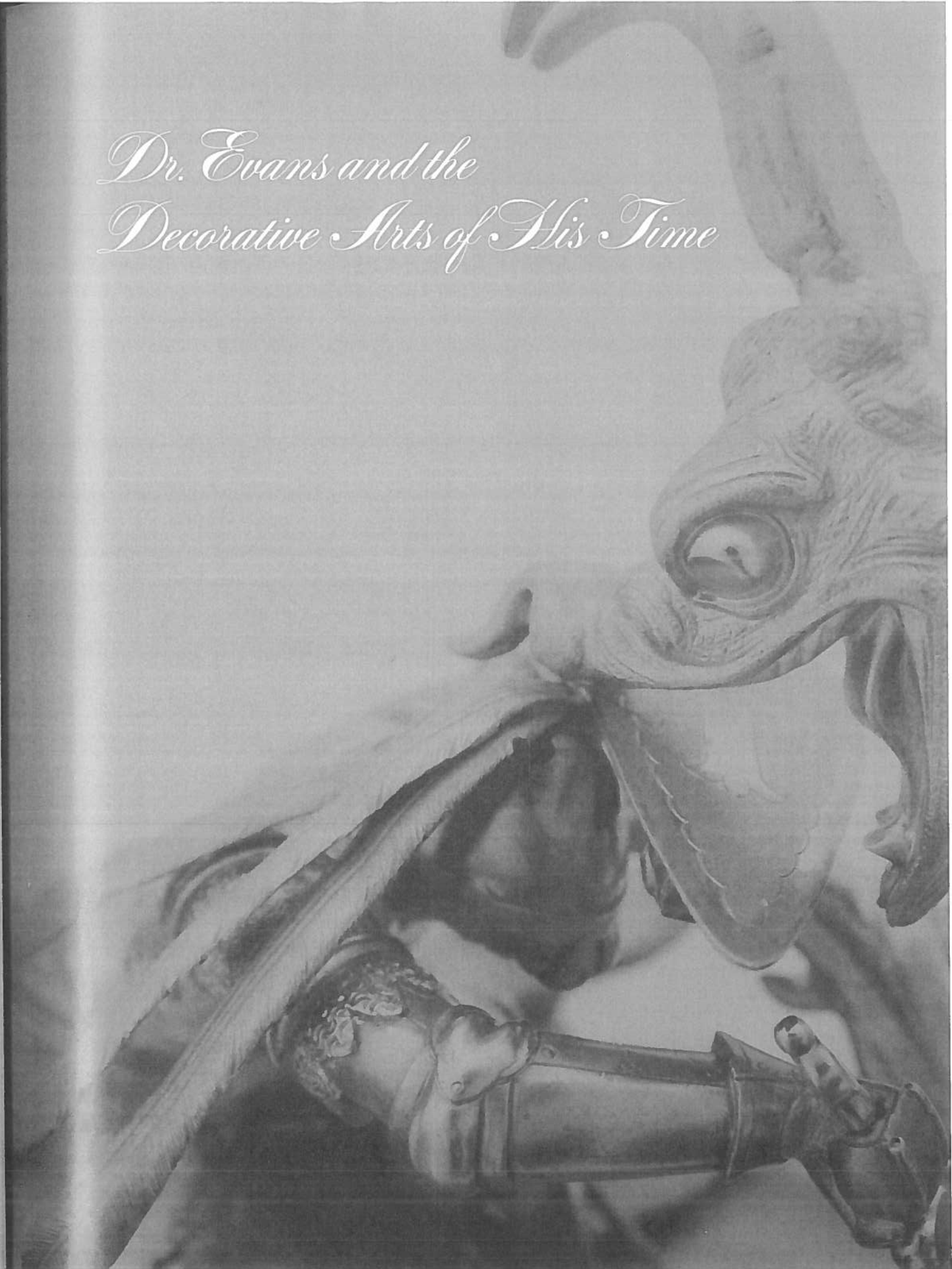
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LYNN MARSDEN-ATLASS

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*Dr. Evans and the  
Decorative Arts of His Time*







After the mid-nineteenth century, the industrial revolution and the rise of finance capitalism together contributed to a massive shift in the production and consumption of decorative goods. Faster and cheaper manufacture meant that more objects were made, bought, and discarded than ever before in history.

In order to support such a mass of things, usefulness became secondary to “decorative” value. The home, promoted in department stores and world’s fairs as the realm of private self-fulfillment, became the primary site of one’s manifold material possessions. In the home, a kind of stylistic eclecticism and ornamental excess ruled that mixed historical Western design vocabularies with those of the non-West, promoted excessive accumulation and outsized formats, heralded imitation materials, accommodating nearly every level of income and nuance of taste.

Around this time, the machine-made, or partly machine-made, began to seriously challenge the primacy of handicraft, and hybrid objects that were partly made by machine and partly by hand became the norm. An often flagrant mimicry of the handmade emerged, and the machine, even if only asked to initiate and facilitate the work of the craftsman, imparted its aesthetic terms onto the materials and objects it touched. Modernism has often made this situation out to have been a wholly undesirable way of life, emphasizing that the machine either needed to defer to progressive “design” standards, or else give way once again to the demand that the hand be the master principle of *manufacture*. The Arts & Crafts Movement starting in the 1860s was perhaps the earliest challenge mounted against the Victorians’ materialist splendor, pitting an ideology that equated good design with honest materials against the glittering albeit artificial surface effects that seemed to mark so much of the period’s products. However, what this modernist reaction to much nineteenth-century taste seems to have misunderstood was the degree to which it was actually opposing an earlier form of the “machine aesthetic,” one that transubstantiated its mechanical origins into intricate surfaces, at least partly produced by mechanized means. With their various historicist and oriental citations, overloaded surfaces, material deceits, and minimized functionality, many objects, roughly from the 1860s to the 1890s, bespeak a profound fascination with, even an unbridled celebration of, mechanization and overconsumption as novel and exhilarating features of everyday life.

A highly migratory, promiscuous, and anti-modernist aesthetic is in many ways the key to the objects in Thomas Evans’s possession as well. This aesthetic demonstrates that Michel Foucault’s characterization of the visual culture in the

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FIG. 1, FRANCE, *Boulle Secretary Desk*, 19th century, Ebonized cherry, mahogany, oak, tortoise shell, and brass, 59 ½ x 33 x 11 inches, University of Pennsylvania Art Collection, (1912.0005.0146)

decades after about 1860 rang true even outside the realm of photography, which was his immediate interest. Foucault defined what he called “photogenic painting,” but his principles are more widely applicable to the entire material world of the period:

The years 1860 to 1880 witnessed a new frenzy for images, which circulated rapidly between camera and easel, between canvas and plate and paper—sensitized or printed; with all the new powers acquired there came a new freedom of transposition, displacement, and transformation, or resemblance and dissimulation, of reproduction, duplication, and trickery of effect.<sup>1</sup>

During those decades, the decorative arts promoted a similar taste for “multiplicity” on many levels, maximizing the freedom of aesthetic expression provided by boundless choice and mixture of materials, functions, and styles.

In Dr. Evans’s collection these qualities can be found in abundance as markers of his elevated social standing—the sheer quantity of possessions catalogued in 1897 after his death speaks to this fact perhaps most eloquently. But in many ways, Evans’s collection is typical of a specific subset of responses to the machine revolution after the 1860s. Here the hyperbolic mobilization of old handicraft expertise and precious materials, aided by the machine, but never completely usurped by it, pushed mechanized production back again to a certain degree, while espousing the eclectic and surface-oriented aesthetic that industry had brought about. Not surprisingly, these intensely decorative objects—which brought the highest standards of handicraft in direct exchange with mechanized production—found a ready audience from the highest social ranks, ranging from the remaining European aristocracies and monarchies to the growing *haute bourgeoisie*, all of whom understood such highly decorative exaggeration and flagrant display of value as a means for social distinction in the same way their counterparts had in previous centuries.

Indeed, the monarchies now under threat of extinction, whom Evans served, required these aesthetic displays more than ever before, and turned to more moneyed-looking and overstylized types and forms of the general taste: high-luxury objects, made almost exclusively of the most precious materials and styled to produce even more sumptuous surfaces than anything that was available for larger audiences. The monarchies of the late nineteenth-century, before the revolutions that swept several of them aside, legitimized themselves partly through the commerce in such objects, which combined the highest forms of craft adopted from prior centuries with the hybrid aesthetic that the late nineteenth century machine and market promoted. The examples of this phenomenon are plenty: the so-called

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FIG. 2. R. & S. GARRARD & CO., *Tankard*, 1877, Silver gilt and gold, 19 ½ x 12 ½ x 11 ½ inches. University of Pennsylvania Art Collection, (1912.0005.0115)







style *Second Empire* promoted by Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie, or the many finely crafted objects circulating in the English, Prussian, and Russian courts, many of whom were clients of Dr. Evans.<sup>2</sup> The most extreme form of the taste for the hyper-exclusive and overly decorative are the various décors that King Ludwig II of Bavaria commissioned for his castles, in which stylistic citations and mutations reign, while function plays a minor role at best.<sup>3</sup>

The many objects in Evans's possession given to him by this group of exclusive clients and their dignitaries indeed share telling characteristics. Even though they were made in a variety of techniques and materials, more often than not they consist of combinations of materials (such as metal with hard or precious stone, porcelain or glass; woods augmented with bronze mounts and other applications; and so on). Their surfaces are embellished to the extreme (lowlier metals gilded or plated in precious metals, at times augmented with intricate enameling) or covered in an ornamental language so detailed that it is unimaginable that a human hand could execute it. Function is clearly a secondary consideration, and most of them have either no or too many purposes: trophies, urns, display vases, small boxes for anything and nothing, tankards probably never used for drinking, desk set items that are hardly a practical part of nineteenth-century epistolary culture.

Looking around Evans's mansion and offices, one would have noticed the intricate Boulle work of a cabinet-desk, a style exceedingly popular during the Second Empire when this baroque technique was revived, with its detailed inlaid surfaces of expensive lacquered woods, tortoise shells, and bronze mounts (FIG. 1); a silver tankard topped with a sculptural group of Saint George slaying the dragon that is partly gilded and so large and heavy that it could never have served as a drinking vessel, thus advertising its status as an exclusively decorative and commemorative object (FIG. 2); the many intricately decorated boxes that serve mostly as an excuse for the anchoring of costly matter, such as ivory, malachite, and other precious stones; as well as the many objects of sizable proportions that are nothing but *to-be-displayed*, such as the large trophies that combine various materials like horn and metal, or the grand vases imported from Asia or the Middle East, often made of intricately glazed ceramic, which, set on pedestals, would emphasize the corners of rooms and the spaces between windows, or add height to a piece of furniture. One of the most spectacular pieces in Evans's collection was a large urn-shaped vase in a neo-Renaissance or neo-Mannerist style made by the famous Parisian silversmiths *Maison Odier* (FIG. 3). Large in size and elaborate in its decoration, the vase was part-mechanically produced in silver, and thus as modern in technique of manufacture as it was historicist in style. Similar versions were then also available in electroplated silver (electroplating was invented in 1805 and became widespread after about 1840). That such aspects mattered to the consumer of the period, and

FIG. 3. ODIOT, *Vase*, 1885, Silver, 26 x 11 ½ x 10 inches, University of Pennsylvania Art Collection, (1912.0005.0035)

that such markers of “modern production value” were noticed, is evident in the fact that Napoléon III, who could easily have afforded nothing but silver services, also commissioned silverplated ones, the first French leader to do so.<sup>4</sup>

Many of these objects came with display support, such as the small pedestals and wooden or marble plinths on which they rested, in order to emphasize their “artistic” status. Many of them were kept safe in plush velvet casings, photographs parked in velvety frames, all of a piece with the rise in luxurious, tufted upholstery (and chairs and seats whose wooden armatures were entirely covered in fabric), which started to be *en vogue* during the Second Empire. Such protective features were meant to set decoration apart from merely useful things and practical purposes, to shore up the object’s “display value” and the home’s elevated role as social scenario. Walter Benjamin called this process “the glorification of things” in the interior, “free from the bondage of being useful.”<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Evans’s *objets d’art* usually have an empty space or a cartouche on which to receive an engraved monogram, dedication, and date. In some cases, such acts of material personalization and commemoration cementing high-ranking connections and relationships are likely the object’s sole reason of existence. Because this task was most easily performed on metal surfaces, many of the objects in Evans’s collection are indeed metallic in nature. We suspect they were never of much use to him, but neither were they merely decorative, nor simply to be understood as equivalent to specific sums of money. Instead, they should be seen as the manifestation of the newly recognized elevated status of science, evidence of the place of technology and medicine in a new social hierarchy.

That Dr. Evans had on his desk—if that is indeed where he kept it—a small golden letter holder that consisted of nothing but an enlarged Napoleonic capital “N” with a crown is indicative (FIG. 4). This clever object “speaks” on multiple levels; it objectifies the Napoleonic insignia, making it an actual fact of the material world; it connects all those who have received a similar item, establishing a circle of possessors of the Napoleonic “N” including the emperor himself; and finally, it posits Evans not just as the receiver of Napoleonic correspondence, but as part of those who see in that “N” the very center of language and rule itself. When Evans placed a letter into it, the golden “N” stood out against the white background of paper—political ideology taking a haptic and intensely precious form, beatified both as a miniaturized world view and the very context of all meaning, material and otherwise.

#### ANDRÉ DOMBROWSKI

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FIG. 4. FRANCE, *Napoléon III Letter Holder*, c. 1860, Gilded brass and leather, 4  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 3  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 5 inches, University of Pennsylvania Art Collection, (1912.0005.0095)



*Dr. Evans's Manets*







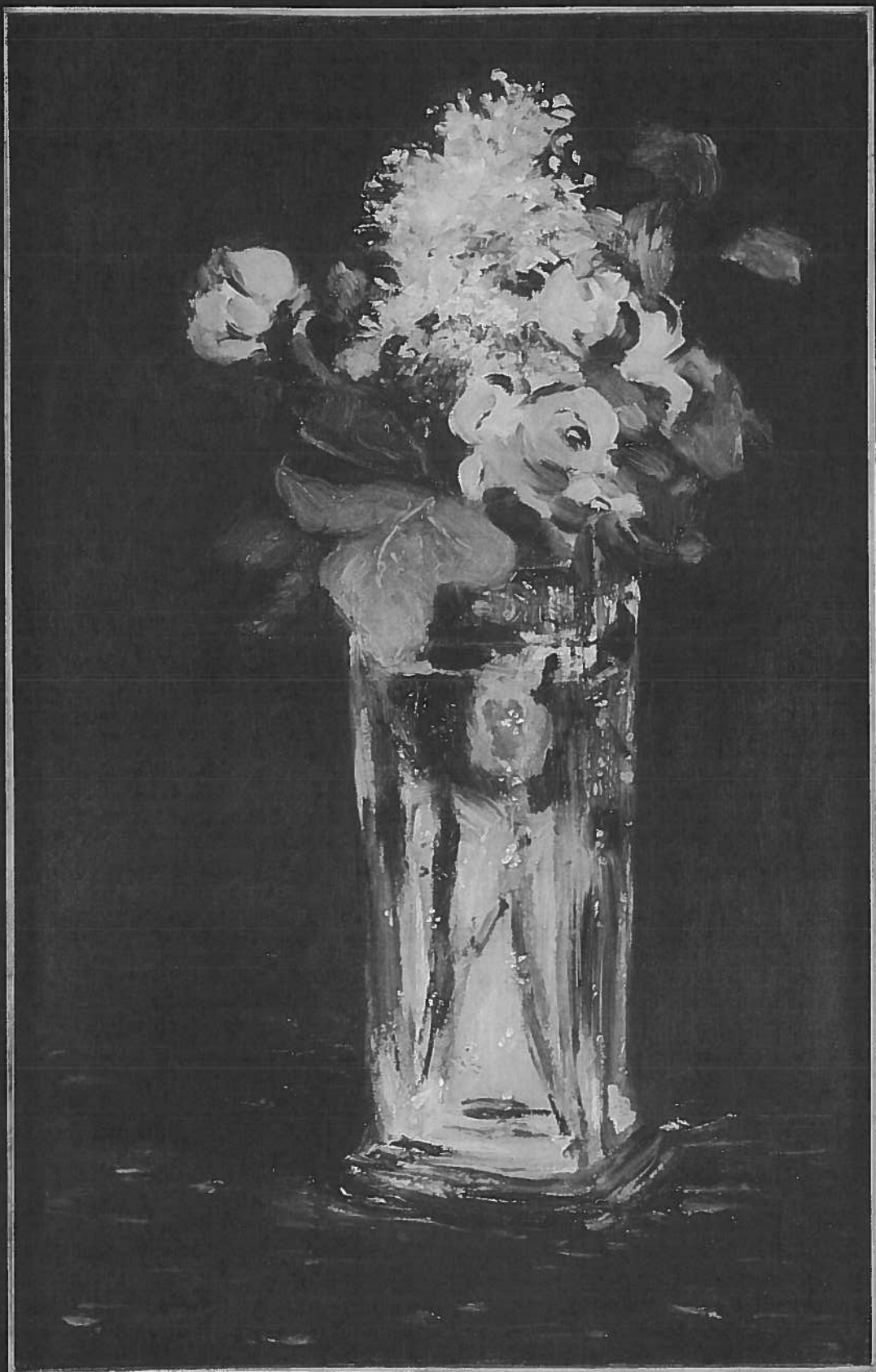
Among Dr. Thomas W. Evans's large collection of paintings, sculptures and *objets d'art*, a set of works by the early modernist painter Édouard Manet stands out.

The list of Manets in Evans's possession was fairly substantial, totaling at least three works in oil—the late *Brioche on a Delft Dish* (also known as *Still Life with a Brioche*) in Pittsburgh (FIG. 1) and *Flowers in a Crystal Vase* at the Musée d'Orsay (FIG. 2), as well as *Beach, Low Tide* of 1871 in a private collection—and likely three works on paper if not more.<sup>1</sup> This number indicates more than a fleeting taste for a painter who still in the 1880s and 1890s had the reputation of an artistic rebel and upender of pictorial traditions. Manet's infamous *Olympia*, for instance, eventually was purchased by the French State in 1890, some seven years after the artist's death, but only after much public outcry. Nothing in Evans's collection quite prepares one for the presence of Manet's works: the dentist's taste tended toward highly ornate and precious objects; in the realm of painting, he preferred portraits, landscapes, and mostly contemporary genre, history, and military scenes, all of a kind that was popular within the wealthy and aristocratic circles in which he traveled.

At the same time, business and status minded Evans established ties to the Parisian avant-garde; having access to the city's glittering literary and artistic worlds became key to his social standing as well. After he began a life-long liaison with the fashionable, sophisticated, and highly intelligent actress and socialite Méry Laurent in the late 1860s or early 1870s (he provided her with an income, a Parisian apartment, and a summer house for several decades), Evans was at home within her circles, just as much as he was in the European royal palaces where he worked.<sup>2</sup> Laurent had made her way to Paris after a failed marriage to a Nancy grocer, in whose store she had initially worked, but had quickly left her first life behind, and now shared with Evans a life of social advancement to the high-bourgeois elite (FIG. 3). In addition to Manet, Evans met through Laurent Stéphane Mallarmé, François Coppée, and Théodore de Banville, among others. The painter James McNeill Whistler became a close acquaintance, too, and Evans frequently published the artist's self-promotional statements in the newspaper he had acquired, *The American Register*.

By the 1870s, when Evans likely met Manet (the exact date of their first meeting is not known), the painter, himself from the Parisian upper classes, had started to style himself less as an anti-bourgeois painter, and had begun to establish friendships with wealthy and influential Parisians with avant-garde taste, such as Méry Laurent, with whom he socialized frequently and painted on occasion. Manet's

FIG. 1: ÉDOUARD MANET, *Still Life with a Brioche*, c. 1880, Oil on canvas, 21 3/4 x 13 7/8 inches, Pittsburgh, Carnegie Museum of Art, Photo credit: Visual Arts Library/Art Resource, NY



most ambitious rendition of her likeness was as allegory of *Autumn*, clad in black fur or feathers, in front of a bright flowery backdrop; the painting formed one part of a presumed four-part series of allegories of the seasons (FIG. 4). We can be fairly certain that it was she who suggested the Manet purchases to Evans, who made them at a time when Manet's health—the painter died in 1883, likely of syphilis—had started to deteriorate and the painter needed the extra income.

We cannot conclude from this scenario, however, that Evans simply gave into Laurent's proclivities when buying Manets, though we can certainly assume that she made the initial introductions and nudged the affluent dentist towards the purchases. Mere opportunity, or an act of charity from wealthy benefactor to ailing artist, do not seem enough to explain the total number of works by Manet that Evans owned, or the prominent display they received among his possessions.

Indeed, Evans seems to have treated them on par with the other status symbols he called his. The dentist mixed his Manets in with the rest of his collection and rather prominently displayed his more avant-garde pictures in his home and public offices at 43, avenue Bois de Boulogne, as an 1897 inventory attests, which was assembled shortly after his death and subsequently often copied and augmented. In it, the Manet works are listed as hanging in his office and in a "small room at one side of the Office." The inventory lists Manet's *Brioche on a Delft Dish* as "Bun in a Delft Dish," valued at 150 francs, right after "A work in crayon, black and white, by Rosa Bonheur, Eighteen hundred and sixty three, 'A Cow,' valued at one hundred and fifty francs" and before "A photograph, 'Fruits,' after Meissonni-



FIG. 3: Carte-de-visite of Méry Laurent, 1870s, Albumen print, University of Pennsylvania Archives, Evans Collection, box 11, folder 30

FIG. 2: ÉDOUARD MANET, *Flowers in a Crystal Vase*, 1882, Oil on canvas, 21 ½ x 13 ⅞ inches, Paris, Musée d'Orsay, Photo credit: RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY



FIG. 4: ÉDOUARD MANET, *Autumn (Portrait of Aléxy Laurent)*, 1882, Oil on canvas, 28  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches, Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Photo credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

er, valued at fifteen francs.”<sup>3</sup>

If anything, these valuations indicate that in the mind of the appraisers, a work on paper by Bonheur had the same value as an accomplished late still-life in oil by Manet, while a major Camille Corot painting in Evans’s collection, *The Banks of the River Oise*, was valued ten times that, namely 1,500 francs. This evidence seems to indicate that for Evans, a Manet was very much of a piece with the old masters he owned (by Canaletto, Ruisdael, Steen, Teniers, and others), the “school of” and “copy of” paintings that decorated so many a period wall including Evans’s, and the nineteenth-century painters he collected (like Corot, Diaz, Bonvin, and Meissonier, among others), all more predictable choices for a man of his standing in the 1880s and 1890s than the two still lifes and works on paper by Manet he bought. Evans’s taste, even if veering between high-imperial opulence and the occasional modernist reduction of expressive means, demonstrated, if nothing else, an esteem for production value and consummate craft, qualities that bespeak both extremes of his collection.

In his office, Evans displayed a “marine view,” as the inventory lists it, today known as *Beach, Low Tide*, and an example of the third state of Manet’s *Polichinelle* lithograph of 1876, his only color lithograph. In the smaller room adjacent to the office, there was “a photograph under glass, *The Good Stag*, by Manet, with dedication” which was valued at 25 francs, and a watercolor, today unidentified, entitled *The Old Musician*.<sup>4</sup> This room also featured the two late still lifes, which, even though they are of roughly equal format, were never meant to be pendants nor displayed next to each other, since they are listed with about ten other pictures between them in the inventory. *Flowers in a Crystal Vase* is one of a set of small flower still lifes that Manet painted in his last years, often given away as presents, and this one dedicated to “my friend,



the Dr. Evans," who purchased it for 1,000 francs around 1882 directly from the artist.<sup>5</sup> Painted with some speed and Manet's usual facility and elegance of touch, the painting, like all his late flower still lifes, celebrates an intense simplicity and nonchalance. Composed of just a few flowers—roses and lilacs it would seem—in a square vase placed at the picture's center, *Flowers in a Crystal Vase* is a tour-de-force of pictorial bravado. A few strokes herald the material and experiential immediacy of the delicate flowers and leaves, while the stems refract through crystal and water as a sign of Manet's exultation of the painted surface's manifold illusions.

The most accomplished painting by Manet that Evans owned was certainly the *Brioche on a Delft Dish*, painted in 1880, which Evans bought that same year directly from the artist for 500 francs, as we know from Manet's accounting books (350 francs more than its 1897 assessment).<sup>6</sup> The University of Pennsylvania sold the painting in 1983, when it entered the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. Manet did not paint a brioche for the first time in 1880, but had made two earlier still lifes that included a brioche in 1870 and 1876 respectively. But the final example was for sure the most unusual among the group. Slim and vertical in format—in the shape of a portrait more than a still life—the painting includes some of the most daring truncations Manet ever executed, cutting two pears in half at bottom right and showing only a sliver of his cat "Zizi" at top right (whom he painted several other times in 1880 and mentioned in his correspondence, hence our knowledge of the cat's name). This emphasis of the picture's right edge was once countered by a lemon that Manet had painted in the lower left, lying in front of the dish, but he decided to paint it out again, leaving that area empty. This extreme asymmetry of the composition is met instead by the strange arrangement of a flower on top of the brioche that sits on a small Delft-style dish in the painting's center, a bit moved to the left. The sugar-glazing of the baked good shimmers with radiance, an active and flickering "surface" within the painting that is just as curious and oddly-shaped as the inventive composition as a whole. This small painting is thus anything but simple. It arrives at its artfully staged de-composition through a set of infallibly placed, quick strokes that celebrate both the immediacy of the material world and the painter's powers to preserve its freshness in paint. In this strange assembly of sensuous items, Manet proved that he was a consummate practitioner of his craft. It is not a stretch to imagine that Evans—trained as a silver and goldsmith—appreciated precisely such a display of sheer virtuosity and ease of craft.

It is true, furthermore, that with his still lifes—both as depictions of things and objects in themselves—Manet participated in an elaborate system of gift giving and reciprocal exchanges that was not dissimilar from the economics of Dr. Evans's collection itself, so chock-a-block with diplomatic goods. Antonin Proust, Manet's early biographer, for instance, published the following statement by Manet, which relates the complex set of gifts and payments associated with another sale arranged by Méry Laurent:

Then, I have a good story to tell you, I sold one of my cafés-concerts to Mr. Étienne Barroil. It was Méry Laurent who made him buy the picture, and because Mr. Barroil is a gentleman, he sent me from Marseille a box of mandarins, a piece of his sun. When I go out, I take a heap of them with me, stuffing my pockets, and I give them to the kids of the neighborhood who demand alms. They would perhaps have liked money more, but me, I give them a part of what delights me. The joys of this world! Ah, they are made up of those things that mean nothing to some, but a lot to others.<sup>7</sup>

This is an interesting dance between gifts and purchases, art and commodities, commodities and natural products, monetary transactions and charitable acts. Manet does not mention the actual sum paid for the painting, but only the mandarins received in addition to that sum, but he immediately shifts from receiver to giver, spreading the fruit again instead of money in an act both selfless and deeply selfish (as the fruit pleased him more than the street urchins he gave it to). On the walls and shelves of Dr. Evans's home and offices, the many gifts and purchases, including the Manets, perpetually perform a similar transcendence of capital into art, of services and labor beautified into precious objects received in lieu of pay. In this way, symbolic value trumps material value, no matter how precious the received objects are. Manet's still lifes and the circumstances under which Evans had come to possess them spoke to the dentist about such elegant maskings of capital perhaps more frankly than most of his other pictures, and that is, perhaps, why he hung the Manets among them.

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<sup>1</sup> The most detailed account of the Manets in Evans's collection remains Anne Coffin Hanson, "A Tale of Two Manets," *Art in America* 67, no. 8 (December 1979): 59-68.

<sup>2</sup> On Méry Laurent, see especially Blandine Chavanna, ed., *Méry Laurent, Manet, Mallarmé et les autres*, exh. cat. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> *Inventory After the Decease of Doctor Evans*, January 26, 1901, transcript of January 6, 1908, 18-19, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Record Center, Philadelphia.

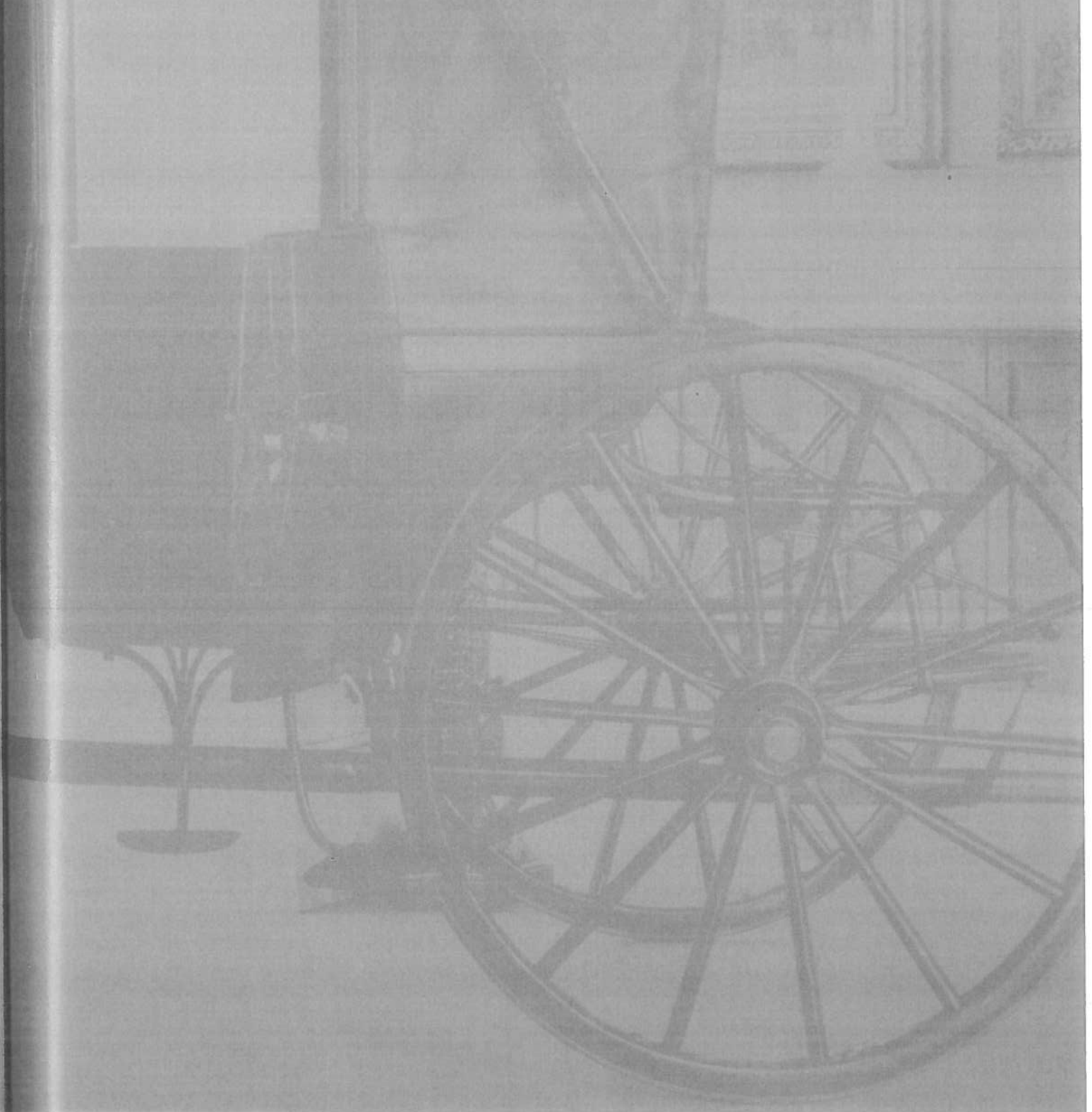
<sup>4</sup> Hanson, "A Tale of Two Manets," 61.

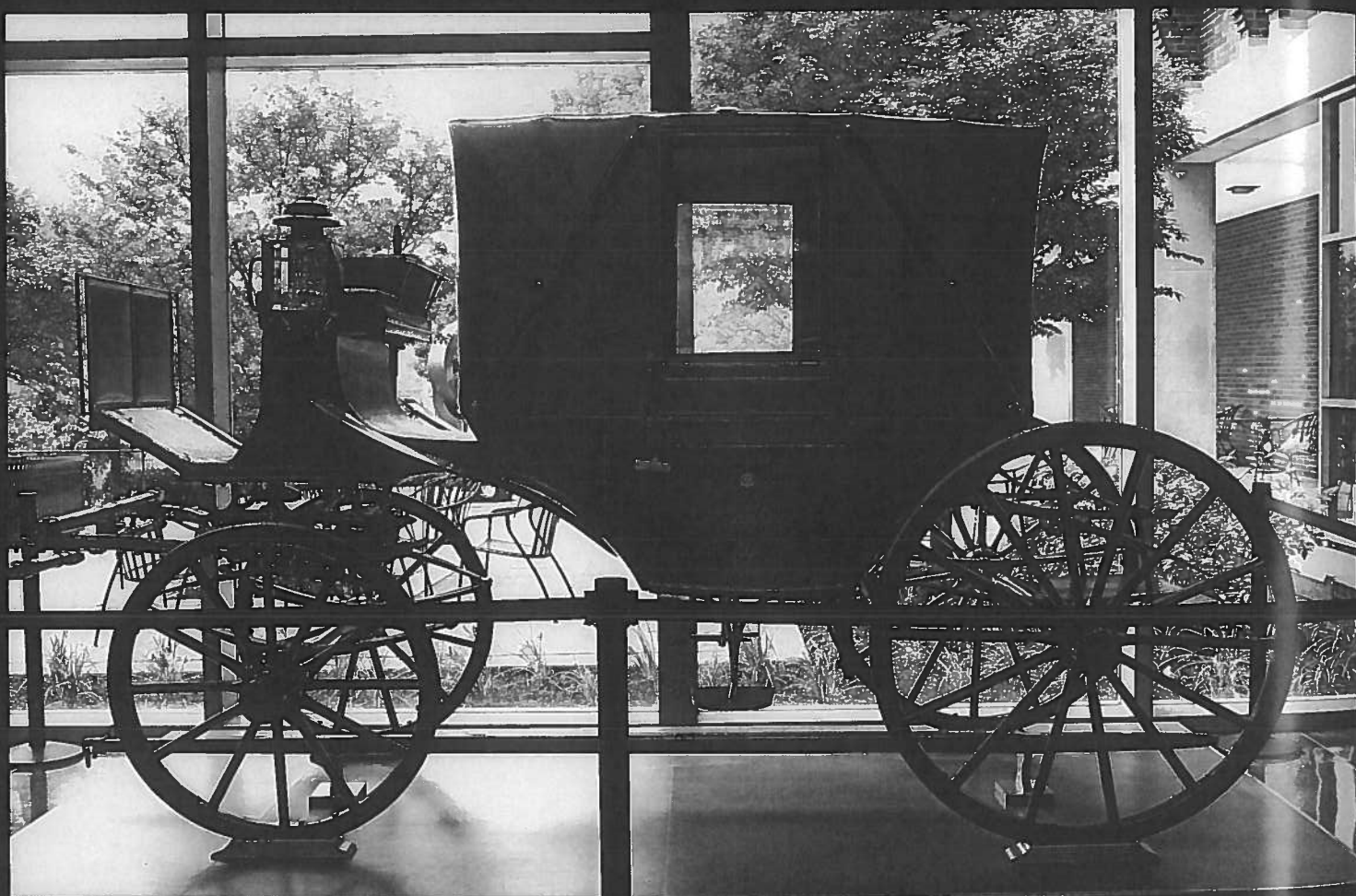
<sup>5</sup> Stéphane Guégan, ed., *Manet: The Man Who Invented Modernity*, exh. cat. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 2011, 282. On the late flower paintings, see Robert Gordon and Andrew Forge, *The Last Flowers of Manet*, (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, 1986); and James H. Rubin, *Manet's Silence and the Poetics of Bouquets*, (London: Reaktion, 1994), esp. ch. 4. Briony Fer delivered a lecture on Manet's late flowers and their relationship to twentieth-century abstraction, entitled "Manet Backwards," at the conference "Manet: Now and Then," University of Pennsylvania, Institute of Contemporary Art, April 11, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> On the painting, see Elizabeth Prelinger, "From Paris to Pittsburgh: Edouard Manet's *Still Life with Brioche*," *Carnegie Magazine* 107, no. 3 (May/June 1984), 6-10; and George Mauner, *Manet: The Still-Life Paintings*, exh. cat. Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 2001, 138-41.

<sup>7</sup> "Puis, j'ai une belle nouvelle à t'apprendre, j'ai vendu un de mes cafés-concerts à M. Étienne Barroil. C'est Méry Laurent qui m'a fait acheter ce tableau, et comme M. Étienne Barroil est un gentleman, il m'a envoyé de Marseille une caisse de mandarin, un morceau de son soleil. Quand je sors, je prends des tas de ces mandarines, j'en remplis mes poches et j'en donne aux gosses du quartier qui me demandent l'aumône. Ils aimeraient peut-être mieux de l'argent, mais moi je leur donne une part de ce qui me réjouit. Les joies de ce monde! Ah, elles sont faites de choses qui ne sont rien pour les uns, mais beaucoup pour les autres." Antonin Proust, *Édouard Manet: Souvenirs* (1913), Paris: L'Échoppe, 1996, 59-60, cited in Barbara Wittmann, *Gesichter geben: Édouard Manet and die Poetik des Portraits*, (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 240.

*Empress Eugénie and  
Dr. Evans's Carriage*







At times, objects bespeak drastic historic change with unparalleled economy. These objects are condensed material forms of a historic situation with its intersecting actors, actions, and unforeseen events.

The carriage of Dr. Thomas W. Evans is just such an object, famous not as a particularly extravagant or technologically innovative example of its kind, but for the person it once rescued from war-torn Paris, the Empress-Consort Eugénie de Montijo, wife of Napoléon III who was emperor of the French from 1852 to 1870 (FIG. 1). The carriage played a major role in one of the most crucial episodes in modern French history, the fall of the Second Empire and the birth of the Third Republic, twinned events of early September 1870, after France's disastrous loss against Prussia at Sedan where the emperor surrendered to Otto von Bismarck and his armies before being taken to the castle of Wilhemshöhe as prisoner of war. Dr. Evans was especially satisfied to have repaid the imperial family in this manner for the many favors, material and otherwise, it had bestowed on him over the years of his service. Indeed, he remained loyal toward the Bonapartes after the fall of the empire and recounted the episode, and his bravery, with pride later in life. As he recalled in his memoirs, well aware of the historic role foisted upon him:

And if I felt a certain pride in having been chosen as the protector of this noble but unfortunate lady, I knew that I should have still better reason to feel proud and happy when I had justified the confidence she had placed in me, by my efforts to rescue her from the danger that seemed imminent, and which she certainly had cause to fear... Providence had seemingly ordered it otherwise: that I was to prove to the world my devotion to the Imperial family by saving for the Emperor his wife, and for the Imperial Prince his mother; while to France I was to repay my debt of gratitude by preventing the people from the possible committal of a crime which, in a moment of excitement—forgetting the old traditions of French courtesy, the respect due to misfortune, the regard due to the feeble—they might have been led to, and which would have left an ineffaceable stain upon the name of the country.<sup>1</sup>

Evans, and his carriage, thus took their places in history with the full awareness of their figurative weight in the decline of imperialism and rise of democracy.

As military regimes, not “divinely” ordained monarchies, the first and second French empires mobilized the symbolic potential of material insignias as much, if not more, than most other political regimes. Few objects came to embody the lost

FIG. 1 Dr. Thomas W. Evans's landau carriage, built by Labourdette, Paris, 1860s, restored 2015, on display in atrium of the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine's Robert Schattner Center

fortunes of the Napoleonic Empire as powerfully as does Evans's carriage, rivaled only perhaps by the lavish cradle of the King of Rome, Napoléon I's heir, as a three-dimensional emblem of the Bonaparte Empire's will to stay, or the infamous Krupp cannon at the 1867 World's Fair in Paris, which stood as material prefiguration of Prussian aggression still to come. As a carriage, it offered up its function — transportation — as an allegory of historic change and a metaphor for the transience of power. As Evans's carriage, it signaled the degree to which imperial rule had been replaced by bourgeois might, and French nationalism blemished by German and American drive. When the empress set foot in it, the carriage was selected by history for a certain notoriety, asked to encapsulate a historic process years in the making and with shadows deep into the twentieth century, as it made just one of its many rides in and outside Paris.

The carriage was never meant for such a destiny and such hyper-symbolic accrual of signification. I doubt that it would have survived and been transported back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean as many times as it has, if it had not "rescued" Eugénie in 1870 and brought her from Paris to Deauville where she departed for England, her exile. For many years after Evans's donation to the University of Pennsylvania, it took pride of place in the university's Dental School, as it does again today (FIG. 2). Surely luxurious and modern for its time, it was more status symbol than presumed active historic agent when purchased by Evans at some point in the 1860s. Many of its kind must have enabled the bourgeoisie's active and mobile lifestyle at the time — the speedy transportation of goods and people being one of the most prized values of Haussmann's exceedingly productive and itinerant Paris. Evans chose a landau with center doors made by the luxury carriage maker Labourdette in Paris, a city vehicle with a folding leather top that granted the occupants maximum visibility in public, emblematic of the period's conspicuous self-displays. Sinuous in its curves, the carriage epitomized a nonchalant and elegant city life of business and leisure. Coachman driven, it was a four-seater with facing seats, perfect for an urban ride that doubled as an imperative social occasion. Dr. Evans's carriage is of a restrained black, both inside (where it was upholstered in dark leather) and out; the monogram of Thomas W. Evans graces both doors. When Evans left his Parisian mansion with Eugénie in the early morning of September 5 *en route* to Normandy — she had fled the Tuileries Palace the day before when it was about to be invaded by the Parisian mob upon the proclamation of the Third Republic — I doubt many expected an empress in his landau. But the vehicle had nonetheless become its own character in history, introduced as such by Evans when he recalled in his memoirs that "a servant announced that my landau, a four-seated covered carriage, was at the door, and we were ready to go."<sup>2</sup>

What is perhaps most astonishing about the episode is that Evans continued to draw cultural capital from it well after the Second Empire's end. Evans held the episode up as one of his great achievements, as his true brushing up against history

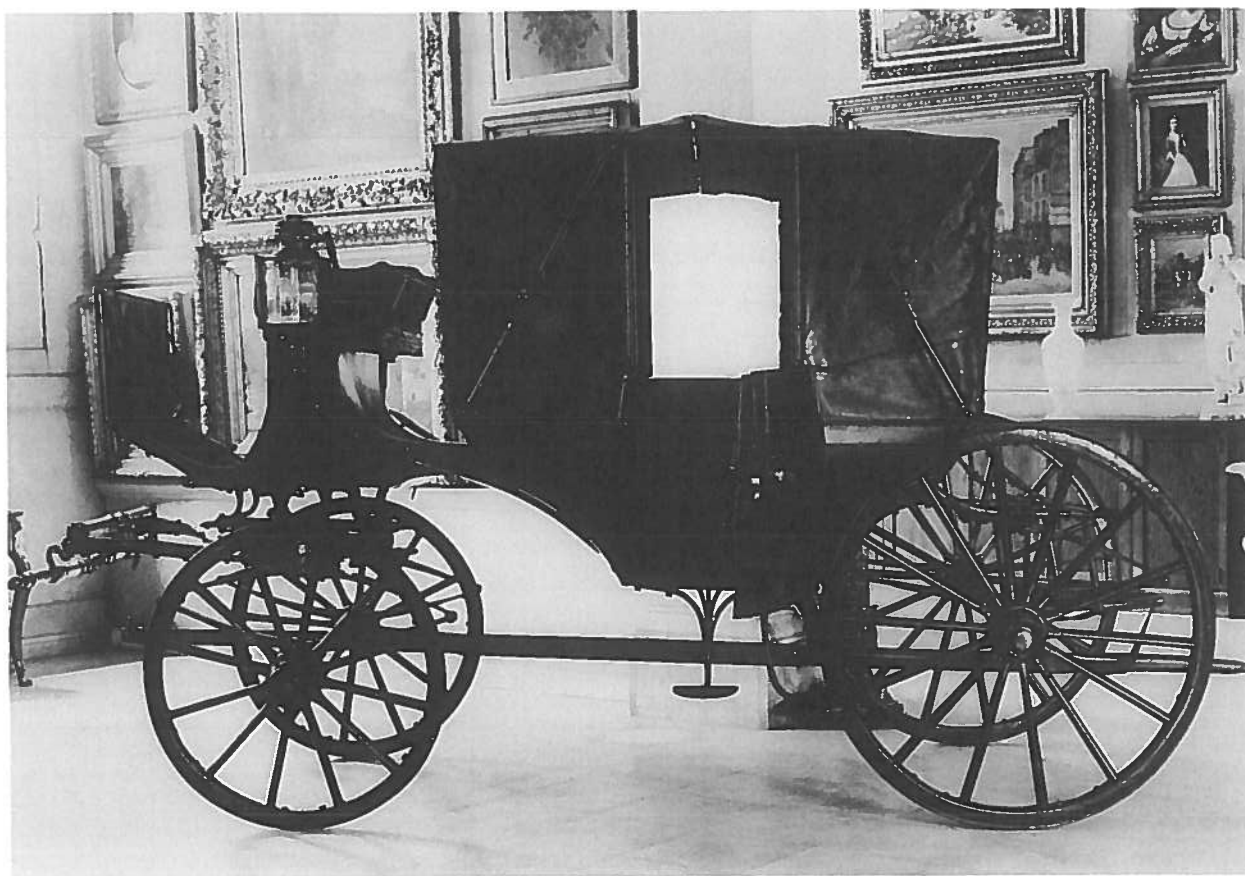


FIG. 2: Dr. Thomas W. Evans's landau carriage on display in the Thomas W. Evans Museum, c. 1915, University of Pennsylvania Archives

proper. It took up the major part—chapters nine to fourteen of an eighteen-chapter book—of his posthumously published memoirs that double as an account of high social life under the empire. He recounts every detail of his role in the eventful early September 1870 days, which began when the empress realized that she would have to flee the Tuileries Palace after news of her husband's surrender to the Prussians had reached Paris; the Republic had been declared (and thus her former Parisian chateau become public property); and the Parisian mob began to invade the Louvre, the palace, and eventually her former private apartments. She had some reason to fear and flee public rage, as Evans never tired of reminding his readers, as she had been repeatedly blamed, along with the Emperor, of leading France into defeat. For every Empress Marie Louise, Napoléon I's second wife, who fled Paris after her husband's abdication in April 1814, but was handed the duchy of Parma to rule over instead, there was a Queen Marie Antoinette, guillotined nine months after her husband, King Louis XVI, was executed in 1793, and a Princess de Lamballe, massacred on the Parisian streets in September 1792. Queen Maria Amalia, wife of King Louis Philippe, who abdicated the throne during the 1848 Revolution, perhaps had the most similar fate to Eugénie's. After a somewhat chaotic and quick departure from the palace, she lived in



FIG. 3: EMMANUEL FLAMANT, Composite photograph of *Empress Eugénie's Escape from the Tuileries on September 4, 1870*, 1870s, Albumen print, Photo credit: Getty Images

English exile until her 1866 death; reportedly, upon departure, she fainted and had to be lifted into her carriage when fleeing Paris.

According to Evans, Eugénie accepted her fate with more grace and poise. Taking little from the palace as she fled in haste, to be accompanied only by her "reader," Madame Lebreton, she was aided in her escape by Constantino Nigra, the Italian ambassador; and Prince Richard von Metternich, the Austrian one, who guided her through the vast palace and Louvre galleries until they reached the street and a cab. This element of the narrative was among the few "illustrated" shortly afterwards, when, likely in the early 1870s, the photographer Emmanuel Flamant created a composite photograph of Eugénie leaving the palace and getting into the cab, bidding farewell to the small group of attendants who had aided her departure, and marketed the result widely in carte-de-visite format (FIG. 3).

Dr. Evans's residence was not the two ladies' first destination, but the other high-positioned acquaintances they visited were not home. When they arrived at Evans's mansion, the dentist was not present either, but his staff, not recognizing the visitors, asked them to wait inside, and Evans appeared a short while later. Plans were made, changed, confirmed. The empress was to stay the night and rest

before leaving Paris in Evans's landau, accompanied by Madame Lebreton, Evans, and his colleague Dr. Edward Crane. They left Paris unrecognized early the morning of September 5. No one followed them, and the guards at the gates of Paris had not been instructed to be on the look out for the escaping empress. During the next few days, they rode to Deauville in Normandy, a resort town where Evans's wife was then vacationing. From there, on September 7, they boarded a ship for England, where the empress would settle for the rest of her long life (she died in 1920 at age 94).

Until Evans's memoirs were widely published after his death (the first edition dates to 1905), an important firsthand account of these events had been missing from the official records of the Second Empire and Franco-Prussian War, although other accounts of the events had been available for some time. Given the turbulent months that followed the collapse of the empire, ending in the Paris Commune of 1871, Eugénie's escape from Paris never seemed to rise to the level of import reserved for historic affairs of state, adding insult to injury. This much Evans confirmed as well when he uttered his surprise at how easy it was to get Eugénie out of Paris.<sup>5</sup> Because no one seemed to have been looking for her, there wasn't much record-keeping either.

Early accounts of the events thus got the story largely wrong. A late nineteenth-century historic-genre painting by the Düsseldorf-school painter Emil Hünten, for instance, imagines the empress, somewhere close to the battle action, escorted by Prussian soldiers after the fall of the empire, a revision of history perhaps only plausible from this Germanic perspective (FIG. 4). Furthermore, James McCabe's thick and seemingly authoritative *History of the War Between Germany and France*, published in 1871, makes the diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps, developer of the Suez Canal, the central figure who helped Eugénie and Madame Lebreton leave the Tuileries and hid them in his Parisian mansion until they fled Paris for Le Havre by train, and then embarked for England.<sup>4</sup> The fiercely anti-imperial pamphlet *Madame Napoléon*, published anonymously in Brussels in 1871, also credits de Lesseps with Eugénie's departure for England, but mentions in passing, as if accommodating conflicting information, that "You fled with your dentist, isn't that right?," and adds that the empress had to dis-



FIG. 4: EMIL HÜNTEN, *Empress Eugénie Led Away by Prussian Soldiers*, 1880s, Oil on canvas, 25 3/8 x 33 1/2 inches, Private Collection, Photo credit: Lempertz Auctions



FIG. 5: "FAUSTIN" (FAUSTIN BETBEDER), *Madame de Framboisie*, 1871, Lithograph, 12 x 9 1/8 inches, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Photo credit: V&A Museum

guise herself as a servant and make her way, this time to Trouville, in a lowly farming vehicle.<sup>5</sup> An 1871 caricature by "Faustin" (Faustin Betbeder) is especially damning, showing Eugénie as *Madame de Framboisie*, sneaking out of the Tuileries with a large sum of money and a casket of jewelry (FIG. 5).<sup>6</sup>

When, in 1885, the recollections of the months from July 1870 to February 1871 of the Count Maurice d'Hérissou, the imperial aide-de-camp, appeared in print and subsequently ran through many editions and translations, an account close to the one Evans would write down himself became part of the public record.<sup>7</sup> This publication had been preceded by one year by the curious painting formerly in Evans's collection and now at Penn, shown at the Paris Salon of 1884: Henri-Louis Dupray's *Incognito Departure* (*Départ incognito*) (FIG. 6).<sup>8</sup> In its middle ground, the painting shows the empress, Madame Lebreton, Crane, and Evans as they emerge from the dentist's mansion to step into the landau waiting for them at the picture's left edge. In the foreground stand a

servant and a gardener, mouth agape, as they recognize in whose presence they find themselves. The painting thus includes a clever pun on Eugénie's successful disguise and the various "audiences" she encountered (and largely fooled) along her way, now including the Salon audience itself.

Later memoirs, like those of Eugénie "herself," which the Count Maurice Fleury claimed to have assembled from a set of primary documents and published right after her death in 1920, tell the events almost entirely according to Evans's account, but provide Evans with a "brown" landau.<sup>9</sup> In later conversations, Eugénie seems to have been less than generous toward her American friend, though this impression might have been generated by Maurice Paléologue, who in 1928 published a set

FIG. 6: HENRI-LOUIS DUPRAY, *Départ incognito* (*Departure of Empress Eugénie*), 1884, Oil on canvas, 40 1/2 x 56 inches, University of Pennsylvania Art Collection (1912.0005.0057)





of "intimate talks" with the empress from the final two decades of her life. Here, he puts the following words in her mouth, portraying her as skipping over this "nightmare" episode in her life: "She hastened her account still more in picturing her precipitate departure from the palace... the humiliating last resort of being obliged to ask shelter of Dr. Evans, the American dentist; the pitiful trip to Deauville in a closed landau with the dentist on the box."<sup>10</sup>

However, when the events of early September 1870 occurred, Evans had already elevated the prosaic nature of the journey to truly historic proportions, attaching symbolic weight to it throughout, just as the carriage itself would later come to designate Eugénie's fall. In his memoirs, he showed how the escape pointed backward and forward in time, seeking references and parallels to the recent French past, encapsulated in objects and places brimming with the weight of history:

Yet there was something inexpressibly sad in the thoughts suggested at every turn in our route. On the right once stood the Château of Neuilly, the favorite residence of Louis Philippe. It was only a little over twenty years before, in February, 1848, that I had seen the splendid building plundered by the mob, and almost burned to the ground... A few minutes later we passed the gate of the Park of Malmaison, the famous Château in which the Empress Josephine so long resided, and where she died; ... What memories the word 'Malmaison' brought to mind! Everything about us was suggestive. The very road we were traveling had been a *via dolorosa* of the history of the Bonaparte family. And of the moving scenes of romance and tragedy of which this place had been the witness, was this hurried flight to be the last?<sup>11</sup>

Evans, besides being a respected dentist, also proved himself an able materialist historian, sensitive to the ideologically loaded sites of memory and commemoration they passed, knowing that the places along their journey and the objects associated with their flight would from then on be similarly burnished with that luster reserved for exceptional occurrences of national proportion. And indeed, on the first anniversary of her escape, the empress sent Evans not just a letter expressing her gratitude, but also a "souvenir" to Mrs. Evans, a material token of their bond, once more affirming that objects can mean more than words: a gold bracelet decorated with two diamonds and two emeralds engraved with the date "September 4, 1870." Here was yet another *objet d'art* in Evans's collection that transubstantiated the weight of history, capital, and politics into the evanescent glint of light refracted off objects of gold and precious stone.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas W. Evans, *The Second French Empire: Memoirs of Dr. Thomas W. Evans*, ed. Edward A. Crane, (New York: D. Appleton, 1905), 297, 299.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>3</sup> This point is also emphasized in Pierre de la Groce's extensive *Histoire du Second Empire*, 7 vols., (Paris: Plon, 1894-1906), vol. 7, 423.

<sup>4</sup> James D. McCabe, *History of the War Between Germany and France*, (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co. and Jones, Junkin & Co., 1871), 298-304.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, *Madame Napoléon*, (Brussels: Bureau du Petit Journal, 1871), 47-48.

<sup>6</sup> On the caricature, see *Alison McQueen, Empress Eugénie and the Arts: Politics and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, (Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2011), 285; and Susan Lambert, *The Franco-Prussian War and the Commune in Caricature, 1870-1871*, exh. cat. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1971, no. 48.

<sup>7</sup> Comte Maurice d'Hérisson, *Journal d'un officier d'ordonnance, Juillet 1870-Février 1871* (1885; Paris: Société d'éditions littéraires et artistiques, 1908), 93-107. Evans remarked on this text in his memoirs: Evans, *Memoirs*, 301.

<sup>8</sup> The 1884 Salon catalog description of the painting, displayed as number 852, reads: "L'impératrice Eugénie ainsi que Mme Lebreton après avoir passé la nuit du 4 au 5 septembre 1870 dans l'hôtel du docteur Thomas William Evans, partent pour l'Angleterre sous sa protection." *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants exposés au palais des Champs-Élysées le 1er mai 1884*, (Paris: E. Bernard, 1884), 78.

<sup>9</sup> Comte Maurice Fleury, *Memoirs of the Empress Eugénie; Compiled from Statements, Private Documents and Personal Letters of the Empress Eugénie, from Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon III and from Family Letters and Papers of General Fleury, M. Franceschini Pietri, Prince Victor Napoleon and Other Members of the Court of the Second Empire*, (New York and London: D. Appleton, 1920), 467.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Paléologue, *The Tragic Empress: A Record of Intimate Talks with the Empress Eugénie, 1901-1919*, (New York and London: Harper, 1928), 197.

<sup>11</sup> Evans, *Memoirs*, 315-16.

<sup>12</sup> Gerald Carson, *The Dentist and the Empress: The Adventures of Dr. Tom Evans in Gas-Lit Paris*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 130.