

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Walter Richard Sickert (1860 - 1942)

Baccarat

Circa: 1920

1920

55.2 x 45.7 cm (21 ³/₁₆ x 18 inches)

Signed, dated and inscribed 'A Mademoiselle Livache/Souvenir de Walter et Chrstine Sickert – Envermeu – 1920' lower left

In 1920, at sixty years of age, Walter Sickert introduced an entirely new subject into his vocabulary: the gaming rooms of the Casino in Dieppe. Sickert had witnessed the construction, in 1886, of the playful, moorish-style building facing the sea at the far end of the rue Aguado. Its restaurant, terraces, concert hall and above all gaming rooms, made it the focus of fashionable life in Dieppe during the season. Dieppe was Sickert's second home. Apart from a hiatus between 1915 and 1918 caused by the war, until 1922 he spent nearly every summer of his adult life in and around Dieppe. He had lived there permanently between 1898 and 1905; he was in Dieppe when war broke out in August 1914, he returned as soon as it was feasible after the war, when he and his second wife Christine moved from London to go back to live in Envermeu, a village some miles inland from Dieppe. Over the years he had painted nearly every aspect of the port, including the gardens of the Casino. However until 1920 Sickert, not himself a gambler, had never painted inside the building. In 1920 he spent night after night in the Casino, concentrating most of his attention on the rooms where Baccarat (a game higher up the social scale than boule or roulette) was played. Ten oil paintings of Baccarat scenes are known to me, and two of Boule. Several are dated 1920. Only the present painting is also dedicated.

Sickert began by sketching the gamblers openly. Legend has it that following a complaint from his friend Lady Blanche Hozier (mother of Clementine and mother-in-law of Winston Churchill) that players might be recognised, he was forced to draw surreptitiously on small cards which he held beneath table

level. Nine such cards, bound together in a little book, are now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; one bears a study of the woman resting her chin on her hands on the far side of the table in both versions of the current composition (the other version is in a private collection).

The Baccarat paintings and drawings fall into distinctive groups in each of which Sickert focuses on a particular feature. In the present painting it is the woman with her back to us, characterised by the exaggerated jut of her bare shoulder, the elegant droop of her hand and the generous sweep of her cool blue beaded dress, an effective contrast to the acid green of the baize table and lining of the semi-circular light shades. The attraction for Sickert of the Casino as a subject must have been hugely increased by the opportunity it gave him to study the effects of electric light. He also relished the chance to exploit his talent for caricature by capturing the essence of a figure through gesture and shape.

The painting has a distinguished provenance. It has passed by descent from Robert Emmons, Sickert's pupil and first biographer; before Emmons it belonged to Sylvia Gosse, Sickert's disciple, friend and helpmeet. One mystery remains: who was Mademoiselle Livache, the lady to whom it is dedicated? A clue may be found in the unique dedication: 'Souvenir de Walter et Christine Sickert – Envermeu 1920'. The mention of Christine may imply that there was a connection between Sickert's ailing wife, who died in October 1920, and Mlle Livache. The swift sale of the such an unusual and accomplished work to Sylvia Gosse suggests Mlle Livache was not a collector of paintings. Could she have nursed or otherwise helped Christine in the final months of her life? We may never know.

Wendy Baron, 2016

Provenance

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Mlle Livache, a gift from the artist and his wife, 1920

Sylvia Gosse

Sale, Christie's London, 2nd December 1932, lot 115

Major Lessore, purchased at the above

Robert Emmons, by 1941, then by descent to

Private collection, USA

Exhibitions

Exhibited:

London, Beaux Arts Gallery, Paintings by Richard Sickert ARA, July 1933, n. 27

Literature:

Literature:

Robert Emmons, *The Life and Opinions of Walter Richard Sickert*, London, 1941, illustrated opposite p. 170, as Baccarra

Wendy Baron, *Sickert*, London & New York, 1973, p. 378, n. 398

Wendy Baron, *Sickert: Paintings and Drawings*, New Haven and London, 2006, p. 473, no. 543.1