

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM
FINE ARTS

FRANÇOIS BONVIN

Paris 1817 - Saint-Germain-en-Laye 1887
French School

BRETON WOMAN KNITTING IN A DOORWAY

Oil on canvas
H. 0,33 m; W. 0,25 m
Signed lower left: *F. Bonvin. 55.*

DATE: 1855

PROVENANCE: Private collection

With his choice of subjects and immediate manner, François Bonvin followed the realism movement that developed in France from the 1840s. He was chiefly known for his small format intimate paintings of genre scenes and still lifes taken from everyday routine. He was inspired by the Dutch masters of the Golden Age – especially De Hooch and Rembrandt – and French masters of the 17th and 18th centuries, such as Le Nain and Chardin.

To make a living, François Bonvin worked for a printer. He was mostly self-taught as a painter, making copies after the Dutch masters of the 17th century in the Louvre amongst others. François-Marius Granet became his patron and influenced him considerably. Around 1843, Bonvin attended the evening classes of the Gobelins factory and the Swiss Academy where he drew from the live model. He became friendly with Gustave Courbet and Jules Amédée Louis Fleury (Champfleury), who wrote about Bonvin's art several times.

Between 1847 and 1880, Bonvin exhibited at the Salon, where he won a medal of the 3rd class in 1849 (*The Cook*, Mulhouse) and a 2nd class medal in 1851 (*The Girls' School*, Langres). For financial reasons, Bonvin accepted a position at the police headquarters around 1850-1851. In 1867, 1869 and 1873, Bonvin went on study trips to Flanders and the Netherlands. He became a chevalier of the Legion of Honour in 1870. During the Paris Commune of 1871, he joined the federal commission of the Federation of Artists, helping his friend Gustave Courbet.

François Bonvin's work encouraged younger French genre painters to look for models among the Old Masters. Bonvin's paintings were collected by the middle classes touched by his themes and subtle colours. A few larger compositions were acquired by the State and are now conserved in provincial museums. Contemporary critics considered Bonvin to be the main representative of the renaissance and development of the still life, and as a genre painter close to his own time. His drawings are of high value and contributed to make drawing an independent work and a popular object to be acquired by collectors.