

# LE CLAIRE

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FÉLIX VALLOTTON  
1865 Lausanne - Paris 1925

### *La confiance*

Black ink on paper; 1894.  
Monogrammed lower right: F. V.  
180 x 140 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, France

This drawing is Vallotton's final study for the two female figures depicted at the right of a drawing reproduced as the frontispiece to a portfolio of five zincographs titled *Paris intense*, published in 1893-4<sup>1</sup> [Fig. 1].

In the portfolio Vallotton takes a critical look at contemporary Parisian life. Beginning with the frontispiece, the viewer is introduced to a colourful mix of characters. Lined up in a row, rather like actors auditioning for parts in a play, are a coachman in uniform, an elderly woman with a smartly dressed boy, an inebriated tramp unsteady on his feet, two young women, and a haggard gentleman with a peaked cap. A policeman casts a critical eye towards the motley group.<sup>2</sup>

Vallotton unmasks the rifts in the elegance, optimism and prosperity of Belle Époque Paris and portrays a succinct image of the harsh realities behind the city's pretentious facade. This is not a love poem to the city but a sober review of ordinary human lives, the plight of the individual and his isolation within society. Vallotton's penchant for clear, confident outline and strong, skilfully modulated contrasts produces an ironic, gently acerbic characterisation of the figures that populate the city's streets. The social panorama he creates is unashamedly honest and plumbs the depths of Parisian life in all its intensity.

Atmosphere, rather than style or technique, is what gives Vallotton's graphic art its originality. Although he focused on many of the subjects that the *Nabis* addressed – interiors and scenes from modern Parisian life, in which the artist plays the role of a spectator in an urban theatre – the rest of his work bears little resemblance to theirs. The crowds that fascinated Vallotton are depicted as motley groups out of which he picks "types" to provide an implicit critique of social injustice and official repression. Moral hypocrisy and the image of women, both recurrent themes in Vallotton's paintings, also play a key role in his prints.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maxime Vallotton and Charles Goerg, *Félix Vallotton, Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre gravé et lithographié*, Geneva 1972, nos. 45-51d.

<sup>2</sup> Felix Krämer, 'Félix Vallotton. Leuchtendes Schwarz', in Felix Krämer and Hubertus Gaßner, *Félix Vallotton. Idylle am Abgrund*, exhib. cat., 15 February-18 May 2008, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Guy Cogeval et al., 'The Tragic Violence of a Black Spot', in *Vallotton l'Expo*, exhib. cat., Galerie Nationales, Grand Palais, Paris, 2 October 2013 – 20 January 2014, p. 171.

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A number of changes were made to the design for the frontispiece before the final version of *Paris intense* was published, particularly in terms of detail. A preliminary study in graphite, charcoal and ink shows differences in the handling of the two female figures at the right [fig. 2].<sup>4</sup>

This drawing will be included in the *Catalogue Raisonné des dessins de presse et illustrations de Félix Vallotton* published by the Vallotton Foundation.

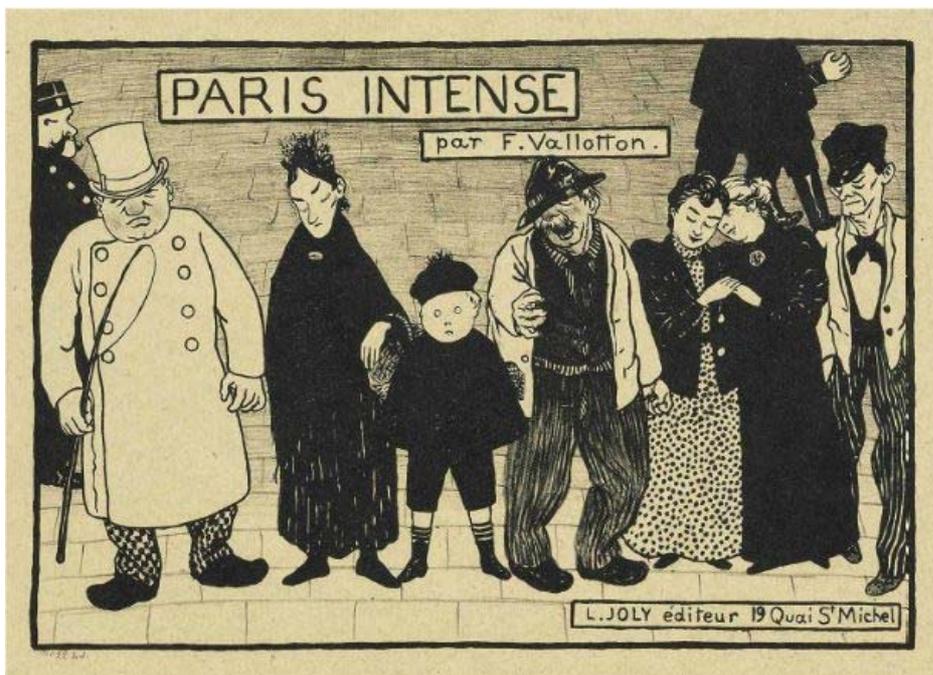


Fig. 1: *Paris intense*, zincograph, 1893-4, The Baltimore Museum of Art

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<sup>4</sup> Sale: *The Vallotton Collection. Prints and Preparatory Drawings*, Sotheby's Zurich, 4 June 1997, lot 212, p. 108 (repr.).

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Fig. 2: *Paris intense*, Frontispiece, graphite, charcoal and ink on paper, 1893-4.  
Private collection