



Jean-Louis Forain

1852-1931

"Le foyer de l'Opéra"

Oil on canvas / Signed lower left

Dimensions : 61 x 80 cm

Dimensions : 24.02 x 31.50 inch



Biography

Jean-Louis Forain was born in Reims in 1852. After moving to Paris in 1860, he first began by drawing at the Louvre. Following a brief period at the École des Beaux-Arts and then in Gérôme's studio, he studied under the painter André Gill and the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux. He was expelled from Carpeaux's studio after confessing on behalf of another that he had broken one of the master's sculptures. His furious father then expelled him from the family home.

At seventeen, Forain found himself in dire poverty. In his own words, he then "led an extraordinary bohemian life; working at any price, drawing advertisements and executing posthumous portraits." After taking part in the Franco-Prussian War, Forain returned to Paris, where he met and befriended Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud. In the early 1870s, he also became a member of an artistic circle whose regulars gathered at the Café de la Nouvelle-Athènes, which included Anatole France, Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and the art critic J. Huysmans. Forain was the life of these gatherings, "the impish spirit whose charming wit amused his elders." Degas remained Forain's friend throughout his life and profoundly influenced his work. It was Degas who urged Forain to participate in the fourth exhibition of the "Independent Artists"-the future "Impressionists"-in 1879. He also exhibited there in 1880, 1881, and at the final exhibition in 1886. Meanwhile, he was refused by the official Salon in 1874.

To earn a living, beginning in 1876 he sold his drawings to several newspapers such as *La Cravache parisienne*, *Le Scapin*, and *La Vie moderne*, displaying a spirited irony that gradually established his reputation. A regular at the salons of Nina de Callias and the Comtesse de Loynes, he met writers such as Maurice Barrès and Paul Bourget there, and frequented Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas. Degas, appreciating the graphic causticity of his younger colleague, invited him to join the fourth Impressionist exhibition in 1879, where his works were noticed. Forain also benefited from the support and friendship of Huysmans, who helped bring him out of obscurity by dedicating several laudatory articles to him, and in 1880 entrusted him, alongside Jean-François Raffaëlli, with illustrating his *Croquis parisiens*. The painter subsequently experienced a steady and progressive rise toward success and stability, beginning with the acceptance of one of his canvases at the Salon of 1884.

In 1886, Durand-Ruel exhibited his paintings in New York alongside those of Renoir, Manet, and Degas. At the same time, following in the footsteps of Daumier, Forain became through his press drawings a sharp chronicler of Parisian life, from the Opera and the Folies Bergère to the corridors of the Palais de Justice. He thus became the favored illustrator of *Le Courrier français* and later of *Le Figaro*, with which he collaborated for nearly forty years. This collaboration was exceptional in scope: approximately one thousand drawings, produced-with interruptions-over some four decades. Jean-Louis Forain is considered by many scholars to be the greatest social and satirical draftsman since Goya and Daumier. In 1893, he was named Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

During the First World War, the artist supported the cause of the Poilus in numerous newspapers through a multitude of Rembrandtesque drawings, which he later gathered after the conflict in the album *De la Marne au Rhin*, published in 1920. Although he was admitted to the Institut in 1923, his painting only intensified the satirical verve of his early years, and the music-hall and nightclub scenes he painted during the Roaring Twenties took on increasingly expressionist accents in certain respects, always resolutely modern.

His studio was cluttered with drawings, canvases, and cardboard sheets. This disorder reveals the way Forain worked: his painted studies on easels were surrounded by pencil sketches, for he never painted directly from life, except in certain portraits. Likewise, his satirical works were never drawn from nature, but executed from movements and attitudes noted in small notebooks that he never parted with, and above all drawn from his astonishing memory. Forain spent his life tirelessly tracing lines on countless sheets that piled up in his studio

until he achieved the synthesis of line so characteristic of his talent. Forain and Degas shared the same passion for the incisive quality of drawing and its ability to cut to the quick, beyond appearances, to lay bare the profound truth hidden beneath.

Museums

Musée d'Orsay , Paris.

Cabinet graphique du Musée du Louvre.

The Dixon Gallery and Gardens Collection, Memphis, Tennessee.

The Art Institute of Chicago

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russie

Hirshorn Museum, Washington DC.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

M F A, Boston

National Gallery of Art, Washington

National Gallery, Ottawa

National Gallery, Londres

Courtauld Institute of Art, Londres.

Aberdeen Art Gallery, Ecosse

Ashmolean Museum of Art, Oxford.

Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid.

Bibliography

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Charles Kunstler, Forain (60 planches hors-texte en héliogravure), F. Rieder & cie, Paris, 1931.

J.-L. Forain, peintre, dessinateur et graveur : exposition organisée pour le centenaire de sa naissance, Bibliothèque nationale, juin-septembre 1952, Bibliothèque nationale, paris, 1952, Jean-Louis Forain : chroniqueur - illustrateur de guerre, 1914-1919 (catalogue édité à l'occasion de l'exposition organisée par la Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Musée des deux guerres mondiales, janvier-juillet 1986.

-Jean-Louis Forain, 1852-1931 (catalogue d'exposition, 8 avril - 28 septembre 2003, Musée Angladon, Avignon, Musée Yves Brayer, Les Baux-de-Provence), 2003.