



Louvre Museum : Rembrandt Painting Restoration makes the headline

Claire Betelu

► To cite this version:

Claire Betelu. Louvre Museum : Rembrandt Painting Restoration makes the headline. Rembrandt Conservation Histories, Nov 2018, Amsterdam, Netherlands. hal-03608468

HAL Id: hal-03608468

<https://hal.science/hal-03608468>

Submitted on 14 Mar 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

LOUVRE MUSEUM : REMBRANDT PAINTING RESTORATION MAKES THE HEADLINE

Claire Betelu – University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

claire.betelu@univ-paris1.fr



In less than fifty years, three Rembrandt paintings of the Louvre Museum made the headlines. The Louvre was blamed for:

- Failure in Conservation management;
- Lack of transport conditions control;
- Over-cleaning.

Conclusion : a gap between critique and the reality of Louvre's management.

1894 : “Murder of masterpieces at the Louvre”

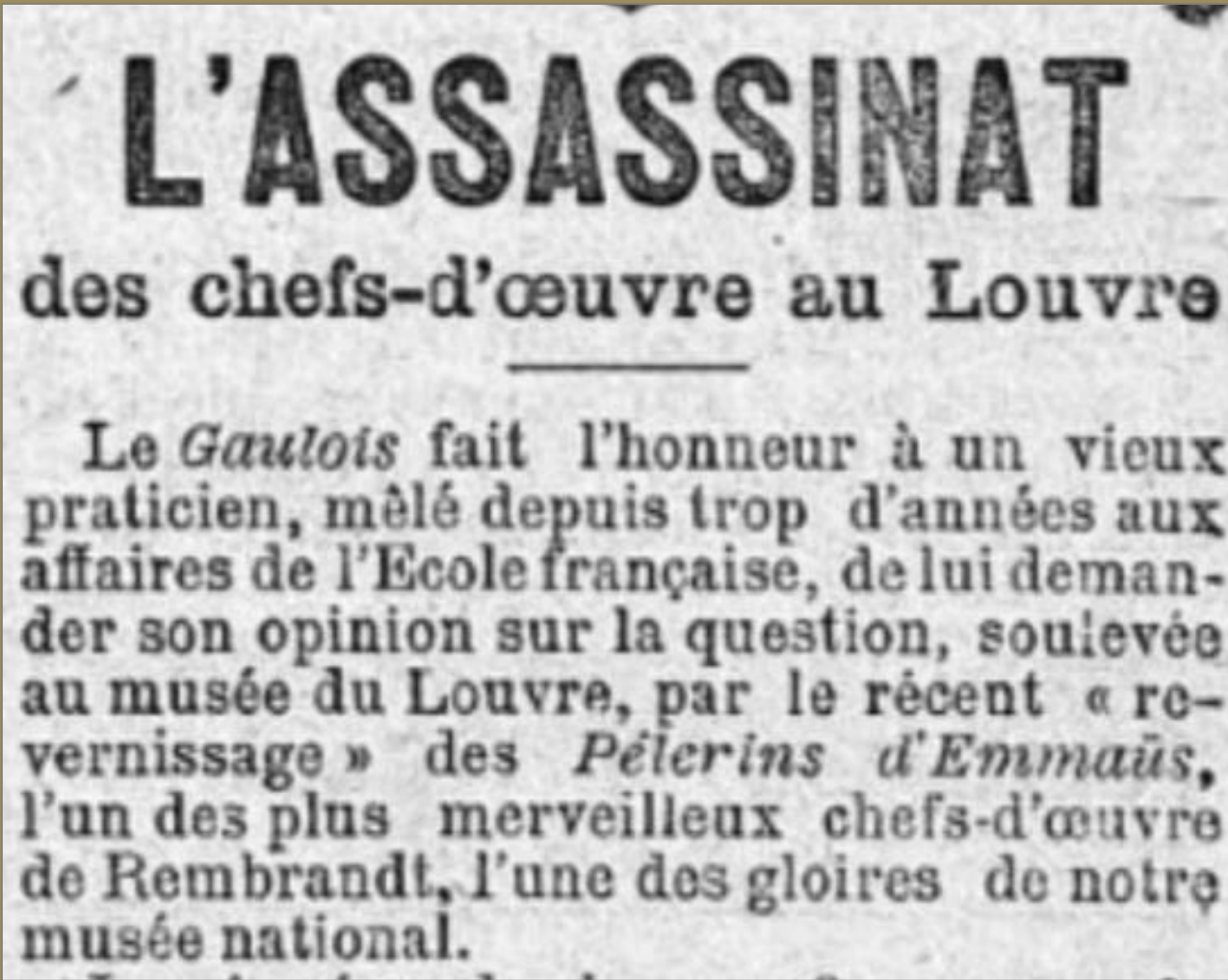
The 5th of June 1894, *Le Gaulois*



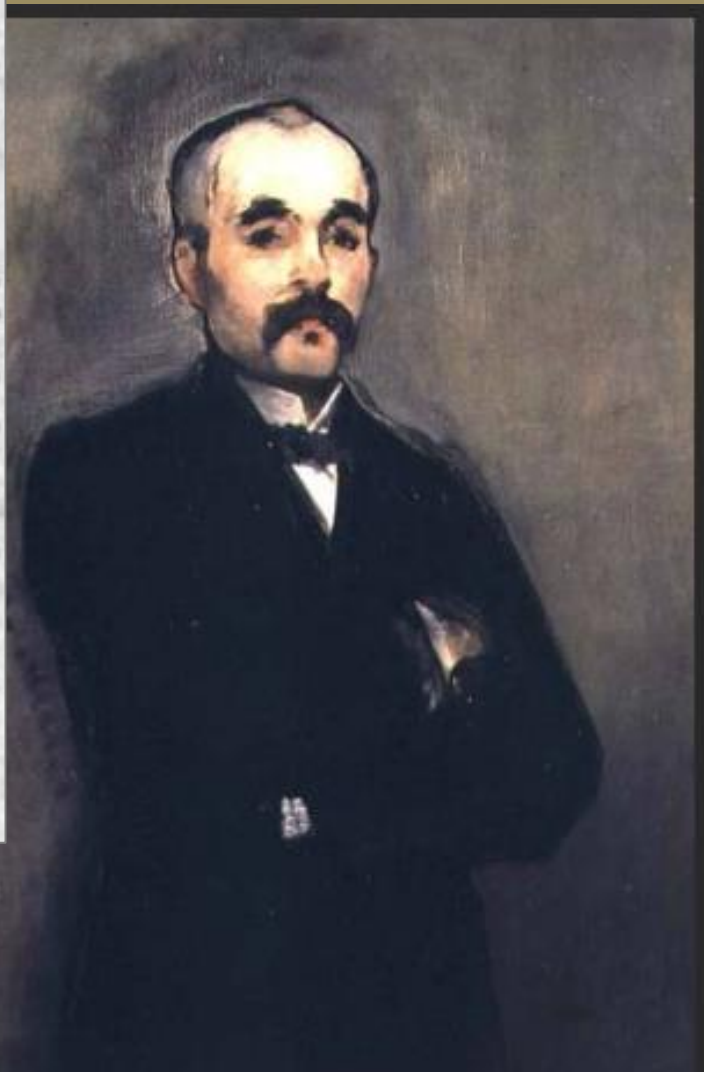
Rembrandt van Rijn, *The supper at Emmaus*, 1648, oil on panel, 67,8 x 65 cm, Paris, musée du Louvre, INV.1739 (RMN)

In Spring 1894, Brigadier Brehm, a museum attendant, took the initiative to remove the varnish of *The Supper at Emmaus* (inv. 1739). He argued in his defense that he did as the restorer Briotet used to do. Three days later, Chapuis, a painting restorer, decided on his own initiative to varnish the painting. These failures in conservation management were rapidly discovered by the press, who exposed the Museum and its choices concerning restoration. George Clemenceau, The manager of *La Justice*, is one of the most aggressive critics of his time.

After this case, the Luxembourg museum's Conservator suggested that museum's attendants should be trained for easy painting maintenance.



G. Clemenceau, *La Justice*, 6th of June 1894

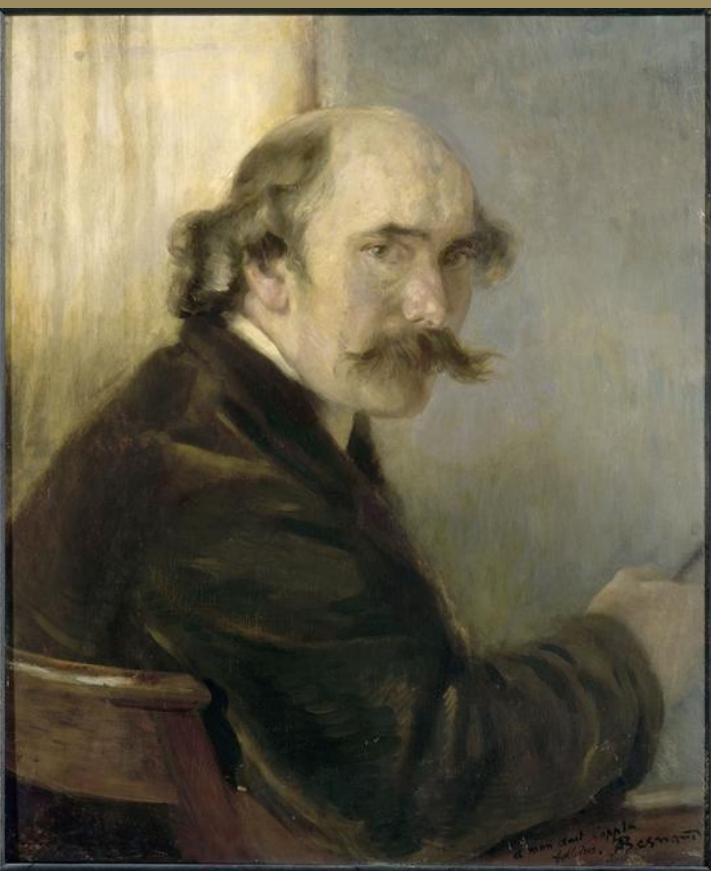


Edouard Manet, *Portrait of G. Clemenceau* (1841-1929)

April 1936 : “The Supper at Emmaus back from New York in critical condition”(Coppier, *Coemedia*)

The 30th of April 1936, Coppier, Art Historian, criticized *The Supper at Emmaus's* condition upon its return from the Worcester Art Museum. He made the front page of the *Coemedia*. The same day, the Restoration Commission met urgently on the matter. Official Position : the painting came back in a perfect state. There was definitely a bleaching but it was due to uncontrolled hygrometry in the Louvre.

It is still difficult to get a clear idea on this case. In June 1958, Goulinat's memoirs accounted for another version. According to him, a deep bleaching was caused by its trip to America in 1936. It made it untransportable.



Albert Besnard, *Portrait d'André-Charles Coppier* (1890), Paris, musée d'Orsay (RMN)

From 1936 to 1946, *Comoedia* was a daily paper and the main French cultural newspaper. Charles-André Coppier was a famous engraver and known for his publications about Rembrandt.

Les Eaux-fortes authentiques de Rembrandt, Paris, 1929.



Coppier, *Coemedia*, 30th of April 1936

December 1936 : Legitimacy of removing the varnish.



Follower/ studio of Rembrandt *Portrait of a Young Man or Titus*, ca. 1658, oil on canvas, 75 x 60,5 cm, Paris, musée du Louvre, INV.1749 (RMN)

In December 1936, *Portrait of Titus* (inv. 1749) was presented in the Louvre gallery after a few months of restoration. Goulinat, a painting restorer, was in charge of its varnish removal. While the restoration choices were decided and approved by the conservation department, newspapers questioned the legitimacy of removing the varnish.

Goulinat worked on *Titus* restoration under the control of the Commission. Each step was discussed and validated. Cleaning tests were observed under UV light and cottons kept all along the cleaning. And even if a large part of the varnish was removed, it was decided to keep a layer for safety reasons.

