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Robert Fishko, *Director*

PABLO PICASSO

(1881-1973)

Le Repas frugal, 1904 (September, Paris)

From the *Suite des Saltimbanques*

etching and scraper printed on Van Gelder Zonen

wove paper with Van Gelder Zonen watermark

18 1/4 x 14 3/4 inches (image)

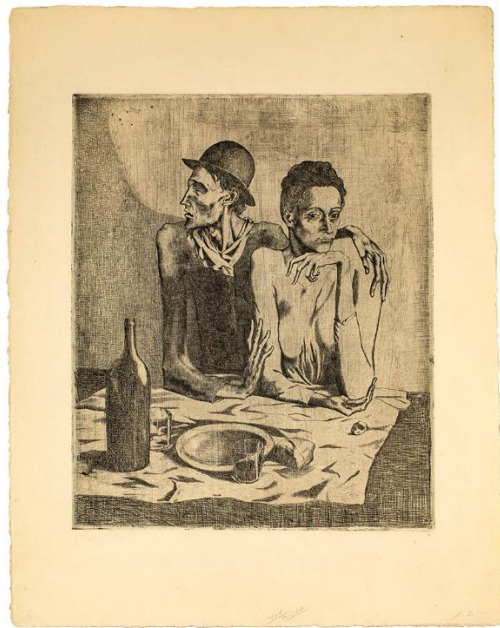
25 3/4 x 19 7/8 inches (sheet)

Edition of 250, of the second (final state)

Printed by Fort, 1913

Published by Vollard, 1913

[Bloch 0001] [Baer 2.II.b.2]



Provenance

The Artist

Private Collection, Berlin, Germany

Selected Literature

Geiser, Bernhard and Brigitte Baer. *Picasso: Peintre-Graveur, Tome I, Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Gravé et Lithographié et des Monotypes, 1899-1931*, A Berne Editions Kornfeld, Switzerland, 1933 and 1955, no. 2, p. 18-20, Illustrated.

Bloch, Georges. *Pablo Picasso: Volume I, Catalogue of the Printed Graphic Work 1904-1967*, Berne: Editions Kornfeld and Klipstein, 1971, no. 1, p. 20-21, Illustrated.

Wye, Deborah. *A Picasso Portfolio: Prints from the Museum of Modern Art*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010, no. 1, p. 19, Illustrated.

Note

Pablo Picasso was only twenty-three when in 1904 he rendered the masterpiece *Le Repas frugal*, the largest and most imposing plate of *La Suite des Saltimbanques*. That same year, Picasso moved into the ramshackle building known as Bateau Lavoir in Montmartre where Fernande Olivier, recognized as Picasso's first great muse, visited him in August of that year. In her memoir, *Picasso and his Friends*, published in 1965, Olivier wrote: "Picasso was working at the time on an etching, which has become famous since: it is of a man and a woman sitting at a table in a wine shop. There is the most intense feeling of poverty and alcoholism and a startling realism in the figures of this wretched, starving couple." [pp. 27-28]

Remarkably, the print was the result of the artist's second attempt at etching, a technique in which he appears to have been given instruction by his Spanish friend Ricardo Canals (another inhabitant of the Bateau Lavoir) and Auguste Delâtre. This monumental portrait of human suffering and isolation, borne with dignity in the face of life's hardships, has become an icon of Picasso's Blue Period.

The gaunt figures with chiseled features in *Le Repas frugal* appear in several works of the period and are thought to be Madeleine, one of Picasso's lovers at the time, and a blind man from Picasso's past in Barcelona, from where Picasso had just moved months earlier. Picasso carried a lifelong fear of blindness, terrified of losing his gift of vision, the conduit to his artistic genius.

The delicate treatment of lines and details in *le Repas frugal* reveals Picasso's empathy for his subjects, while stylistically, the composition reflects Picasso's classical training and his urge to depart from strict realism, the tablecloth and flattened perspective hinting at the radial abstraction he was to invent in the coming years. The expressionistic handling of the figures with their elongated limbs (reminiscent of El Greco whose work Picasso surely encountered at the Prado while studying in Madrid) emphasizes the theme of melancholy that defined Picasso's Blue Period. Yet the couple's embrace and the woman's knowing smile hints at Picasso's imminent shift into his Rose period, a body of work in which the Artist turned his attention to the saltimbanques, the strolling acrobat street performers of Paris.

Following the earliest impressions printed by Auguste Delâtre between September 1904 and March 1905, *Le Repas frugal* was exhibited at the Galeries Serrurier in Paris, along with some other prints now associated with *La Suite des Saltimbanques*. In 1911, after Picasso had begun to achieve some renown for his Cubist work, the important dealer Ambroise Vollard purchased the plates and went on to become a champion of Picasso's career. Vollard had the plates steelfaced to protect the delicate lines.

This impression is part of an edition of 250 published by Vollard in 1913. Picasso did not share a happy working relationship with Delâtre who printed the plates as he interpreted them, and so for this edition Picasso chose to work with the printer, Louis Fort, who followed Picasso's instructions to an exacting degree.

Presenting rich tonal values, this impression is from the second (final) state. Little about the composition itself was changed between the two states of this edition, but Picasso did experiment with the tonalities. Even at this time, when Picasso's printmaking was in its infancy, in *Le Repas frugal* his command of the medium and the experimentation evident in the expression of the image achieved via the practice of inking and wiping to create lights and darks is astounding. Few of these impressions were signed, and if so, only at Picasso's whim.

An enduring legacy of twentieth century art and the quintessential icon of Picasso's Blue Period, *Le Repas frugal* is recognized as one of the greatest in the history of printmaking and a key work of Picasso's early career.