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FÉLICIE SCHNEIDER NÉE FOURNIER

(Saint-Cloud 1831 – 1888)

Le Grain (The Squall)

signed Félicie Schneider in the lower left
oil on canvas
51 ½ x 38 ½ inches (130.81 x 97.79 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Private Collection, Westport, Connecticut

EXHIBITED

Paris, Salon, 1884, no. 2187

LITERATURE

F.-G. Dumas, *Catalogue & Livret Illustrés du Salon*, Librairie D'Art L. Baschet, Paris, p. XLVI, no. 2187

Th. Véron, "Mme Félicie Schneider" in *Dictionnaire Véron, Salon de 1884*, Chez M. Bazin, Paris, 1884, p. 346

Journal Général De L' Imprimerie et De La Librairie, volume 73, Au Cercle de la Librairie, De L' Imprimerie, Paris, 1884, p. 416, no. 952

Pierre Sanchez and Xavier Seydoux, "Salon de 1884" in *Les Catalogues des Salon des Beaux-Arts*, volume 14, L'Echelle de Jacob, Paris, c. 1999 – 2014, p. 195, no. 2187

Schneider was born into an artistic family. Her parents were the engravers Amable-Nicolas Fournier and Félice Fournier née Monsaldy, whose own father Antoine Maxime Monsaldy or Monsaldi was a well-known engraver and draftsman. Schneider's father exhibited at the Salon from 1835-1850, and her mother from 1837-1847. Schneider received her training from her father as well as Léon Cogniet.¹ Cogniet was regarded as a first-class teacher of both men and women.²

Schneider first exhibited at the Salon under the name Mlle Fournier in 1849. By the following year she was Mme Schneider having married fellow artist Louis-Amable Schneider, who had also studied with her father and specialized in engravings and paintings. In 1870 she was

¹ Biographical information taken from Thieme-Becker, "Amable (Louis A.) Schneider (Schneider)" in *Allgemeines Lexicon der Bildenden Künstler*, volume xxx, Veb L. A. Seeman Verlag, Leipzig, 1907-1950, p. 191; and E. Benezit, "Amable-Nicolas Fournier" in *Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs*, volume 4, Librairie Gründ, Paris, 1970, pp. 464-465.

² Germaine Greer, " 'A tout prix devenir quelqu'un' : the women of the Académie Julian" in *Artistic Relations, Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1994, pp. 41-42.

awarded a medal and exhibited at the Salon continually until 1888 the year of her death as well as at the Exposition Universelle of 1867 and 1878.³

Although Paris was the center of the art world by 1884, female artists faced numerous obstacles in achieving any kind of success. Women were not admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts and were ineligible for the Prix de Rome, medals, official commissions, the Légion d'Honneur, nor the Institute of France.⁴ "Serious art was still widely understood to be 'man's work', demanding hard physical labor on large canvases or monumental sculptures, vigorous rural expeditions to paint landscape and a life undistracted by mundane domestic concerns."⁵ Without the support of her parents and husband, Schneider would have faced extreme difficulty in sustaining a career as a painter, the prerequisite being of course her talent.

During this period "the female painter was encouraged to devote herself to themes that men seemed less capable of handling, especially childhood, and to place her sensibility in the service of a 'maternalistic' message. More categorically Joris-Karl Huysmans [a French novelist and art critic of the time] wrote that only a woman can paint childhood. There is a particular feeling there that a man cannot render."⁶ Additionally "John Ruskin in his famous 1864 lecture 'Lilies: of Queens' Gardens' ... stated that women should not only maintain the home and its surroundings but also understand and preserve the larger forces and secrets of nature."⁷ As if in direct response to these clarion calls, Schneider for her Salon entry of 1884 produced *Le Grain (The Squall)*. Théodore Véron, in reviewing the 1884 Salon for his Dictionnaire, compellingly described the work. "A young Breton woman sitting by the sea has stopped knitting to cast an anxious gaze at the distant horizon where she does not see her husband's boat. Anguish is painted on her young and beautiful face while contemplating this funereal sky which seems covered with crepe slashed by the white wings of gulls. The smiling face of the poor child produces a sharp contrast, which accentuates the emotion of this painful drama. A skillful understanding of the composition, an excellent perspective and correctly understood light effect ensure Madame Schneider serious claim to a deserved award."⁸

While fully attuned to the dictates of her period, Schneider painted a remarkable work that transcends time. Seated along the edge of a rocky cliff overlooking the ocean emphasizing the precarious nature of the situation, a young mother harbors thoughts of widowhood and destitution if suddenly left alone with a young child. Without doubt their lives would unravel just like the ball of yarn lying in the dirt in the foreground. The clarity and realistic rendering of the potential plight of a fisherman's wife and child was an unusual subject for any artist of the period, let alone that of a woman. Painted in the same year Schneider's husband died, *Le Grain's* truth endures. So much has changed for women since 1884, yet in many ways so little. For most women this reality remains the same, as the sudden loss of a partner would emotionally and financially be the equivalent of falling off a cliff.

³ A. Seubert, "Félice Schneider" in *Allgemeines Künstlerlexicon oder Leben und Werke der Berühmtesten Bildenden Künstler*, volume 2, Verlag von Ebner & Seubert, Stuttgart, 1879, p. 257; and Emile Bellier de la Chavignerie & Louis Auvray, "Mme Schneider" in *Dictionnaire Général des Artistes de l'École Française*, volume 2, Librairie Renouard, Paris, 1885, p. 480.

⁴ Laurence Madeline, "Into the Light": Women Artists, 1850-1900" in *Women Artists in Paris 1850-1900*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017, p. 16.

⁵ Richard Kendall, "Women Artists in a Man's World", in *Women Artists in Paris 1850-1900*, op.cit., p. 48.

⁶ "Picturing Childhood" in *Women Artists in Paris 1850-1900*, op.cit., p. 144.

⁷ "A Modern Landscape" in *Women Artists in Paris 1850-1900*, op.cit., p. 168.

⁸ Th. Véron, "Mme Félicie Schneider" in *Dictionnaire Véron, Salon de 1884*, op.cit., p. 346. (translated from the French)

At this point in Schneider's career, she was exempted from submitting works for selection to the Salon's jury having the right to be automatically included as the result of winning a medal in 1870. But it also made her ineligible for any further awards⁹ as Vêron rightly suggested should have been awarded to *Le Grain*.

⁹ Harnis C. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*, The University of Chicago, 1993, pp. 31, 47.