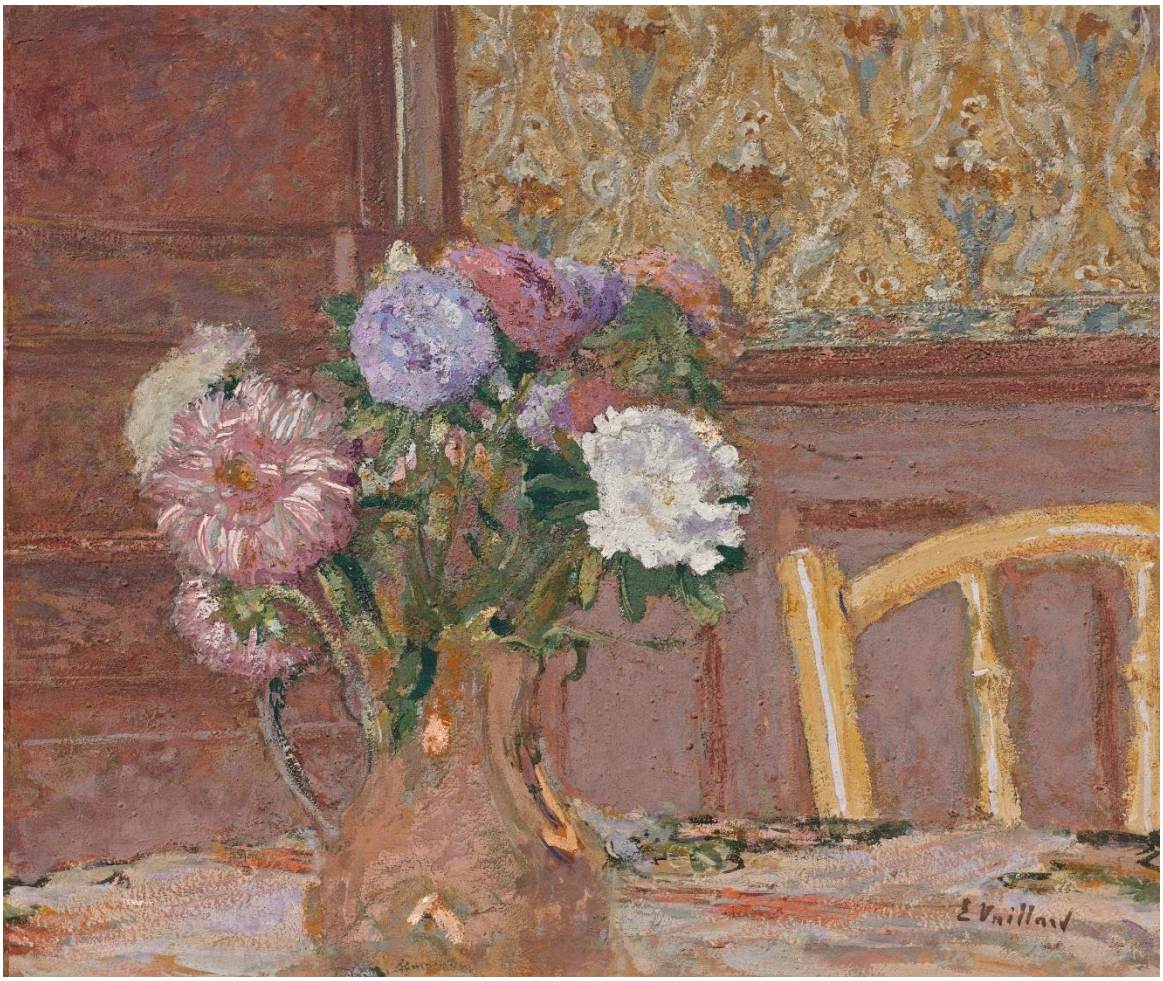
EDOUARD VUILLARD

Cuiseaux, Saône-et-Loire 1868 - 1940 La Baule near Saint-Nazaire Ref: CE 121

Les reines-marguerites



Signed lower right: *E Vuillard*
Mixed technique: 14 ¼ x 16 ½ in / 36.2 x 41.9 cm
Frame size: 22 x 24 in / 55.9 x 61 cm

Painted *circa* 1921-1922



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Provenance:
Jos Hessel and Bernheim-Jeune, acquired from the artist for FFr.2,500 on 24th March 1922 (stock number 23000, *Fleurs*)
Knoedler & Co., Paris and London, from 13th April 1927 until at least 1930 (bought for FFr.37,500);
Fernand Javal, Paris, probably acquired from the above;
by descent in a private collection, France

Exhibited:
Albi, Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, *Exposition Edouard Vuillard, Peintures, Aquarelles, Dessins*, July-September 1960, p.34, no.77 (as *Fleurs dans un pot en cuivre*; dated *vers 1930*)

Literature:
Antoine Salomon and Guy Cogeval, *Vuillard, The Inexhaustible Glance, Critical Catalogue of Paintings and Pastels*, vol. III, Paris 2003, p.1315, no.XI-33, illus.

Edouard Vuillard's painting is steeped in the *intimisme* of domestic life. As a student copying paintings in the Louvre, his preferred subjects were seventeenth century Dutch interiors and the still lifes of Chardin. Like John Constable with his Stour valley landscapes, Vuillard's imagination was set free by the familiar. In 1889 he joined the Nabis ('Prophets'), a group of artists including Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis and Pierre Bonnard, who experimented with Synthetism, which prized memory rather than direct observation, simple blocks of colour and the deliberate focus on the two-dimensional picture plane.

By 1905 Vuillard had moved away from the Synthetist style and introduced more light and space into his paintings, while retaining a love of pattern and a richly decorative palette. He had segued into the *haut bourgeois* world of Jos Hessel, a partner in the art dealing firm of Bernheim-Jeune, with whom he began exhibiting in 1900. From 1901 until the First World War Vuillard spent summers in Normandy and Brittany with Hessel and his wife Lucy, who became his mistress and muse.

In the 1920s Vuillard rented the Closerie des Genêts at Vaucresson eight miles west of Paris, a prosperous, leafy town with picturesque villas. The Hessels took the Villa Anna next door, later buying the Clos Cézanne. Vuillard was by now one of the most prominent French portraitists of his day, embedded in a circle of artists, intellectuals and theatre folk. Apart from portrait commissions, he continued to delight in depicting the cluttered, cosy bourgeois interiors, often with family members, that had intrigued him from his youth. In the early 1920s he painted a number of views of rooms in the Closerie des Genêts seen from oblique angles, the play of walls and vistas to further rooms and distant windows showing an interest in complex depths of field. Vuillard's elderly, widowed mother is a tranquil presence in many of these works, a black-clad, dignified matriarch who is rarely shown idle: knitting, writing or sewing. Equally important to the poise of such works are the modest vases of flowers on mantelpieces or the dining room table.

In *Les reines-marguerites*, Vuillard hones in on a vase of late-summer China asters in the dining room, its sinuous, floral wallpaper recognisable from works such as *Madame Vuillard in a bonnet at the Closerie des Genêts*, 1921 (private collection, USA)[1]. The asters' gentle pink and raspberry hues set the tones for the rest of the composition, which are based around plum colours and purple-brown, contrasted by the buttermilk colour of the shiny, rustic chair. Vuillard's palette is much lighter than in his Nabi days. He revels in the tactile qualities of paint, using half-dry brushes, stabs of colour and liquid highlights, for example in the bold stripe of white which runs down the chair. Everyday life is woven from intricate patterns, from the impressionistically-expressed wallpaper to the complex reflections on the jug. The subtly audacious use of colour bathes this painting of the artist's middle years in a mellow glow, reflecting a 'period seen by many critics as Vuillard's coming of age'[2].

[1] Salomon and Cogeval, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p.1314, no.XI-32, illus. in colour.

[2] *Ibid.*, p.1297.

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Edouard Vuillard was born in Cuiseaux in 1868, the son of Honoré Vuillard, a Captain in the Marine Infantry, and his wife Marie Michaud, who came from a family of textile manufacturers. In 1877 the family moved to Paris, where Edouard attended the prestigious Lycée Condorcet, along with his friends and future artists Kerr-Xavier Roussel and Maurice Denis. He studied at the Académie Julian and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with Jean-Léon Gérôme, as well as making copies of paintings in the Louvre, particularly seventeenth century Dutch interiors and the still lifes of Chardin.

In 1889 Vuillard joined the Nabis ('Prophets'), a group of artists including Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis and Pierre Bonnard, who experimented with Synthetism, which prized memory rather than direct observation, simple blocks of colour and the deliberate focus on the two-dimensional picture plane. Throughout the 1890s Vuillard painted domestic scenes, frequently featuring his dressmaker sister and mother in their modest Parisian apartment. He used a dark palette, with emphasis on simplification and flat pattern-making influenced by Japanese prints. Vuillard was a keen theatre-goer and the mysterious relationships in these works reflect his exposure to the plays of Maeterlinck and Ibsen.

Vuillard was taken into the *haut bourgeois* world of Thadée Natanson, Editor-in-Chief of the *Revue Blanche*, and his flamboyant wife Misia. In 1894 he was commissioned by Thadée's brother Alexandre Natanson to execute nine panels on the theme of *Public gardens* for his mansion in the Avenue du Bois (now scattered between the Musée d'Orsay, Paris; the Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; the Museum of Fine Art, Houston, TX and the Musée d'Art Moderne, Brussels). In 1900 Vuillard began exhibiting with Bernheim-Jeune. From 1901 until the First World War he spent summers in Normandy and Brittany with Jos Hessel, a partner in the firm, and his wife Lucy, who became Vuillard's muse and mistress. Vuillard frequently depicted the interiors of the Hessels' comfortable homes, still taking a delight in patterns and domestic minutiae, but employing a lighter palette and more three-dimensional space. The Hessels' circle included actors and playwrights: in 1912 Vuillard received his first commission for a public building, decorations on *Classical Comedy* and *Modern Comedy* for the new Comédie des Champs-Elysées. He was also in demand as a portraitist of the *beau monde*, portraying his sitters within interiors that expressed their personalities or professions, for example the writer *Théodore Duret in his study*, 1912 (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC).

Vuillard was a war artist in the First World War and painted two panels of assembly-line work at the Lazare-Lévy munitions factory (Musée d'Art Moderne, Troye), where Thadée Natanson was a Director. In 1937 his four portraits of his Nabi friends Roussel, Denis, Bonnard and Maillol were shown at the Exposition Internationale and bought by the City of Paris (Petit Palais, Paris). A final major project was the huge mural (*in situ*) for the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Vuillard was elected to the Institut de France in 1937 and a major retrospective of his work was held at the Pavillon de Marsan in Paris the following year. He fled Paris upon the Nazi invasion and died in La Baule near Saint-Nazaire on 21st June 1940.