

# John Charles Robinson in 1868: a Victorian curator's collection on the block

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Figure 1 Baron Carlo Marochetti, *Sir John Charles Robinson*, 1864-5. Bronze, 38.5 cm (Victoria & Albert Museum, London, A.202-1929)

Sir John Charles Robinson (1824-1913) (fig. 1) was a central figure of the Victorian art world. Trained as an artist, his groundbreaking catalogues, which ranged from Italian sculpture to Michelangelo drawings to Spanish decorative arts, were models of early art historical scholarship. After more than a decade of service to the South Kensington Museum (SKM; renamed the Victoria and Albert (V&A) in 1909), Robinson's position as chief curator was first redefined in 1863 when he became an 'art referee'<sup>1</sup> and then abolished altogether nearly five years later.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly,

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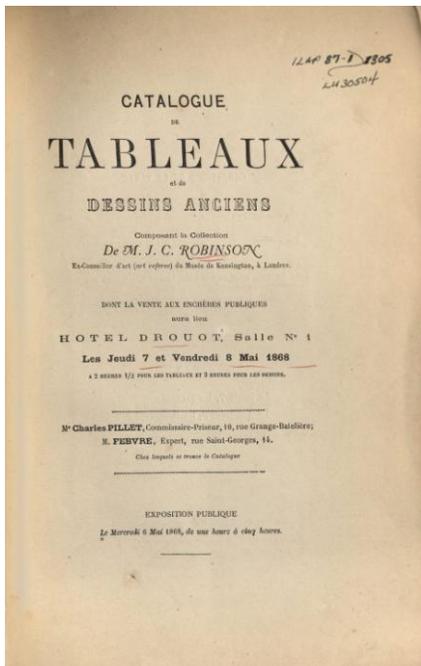


Figure 2 Title page, *Catalogue de Tableaux et de Dessins Anciens Composant la Collection de M. J. C. Robinson...*, 7-8 May 1868, Paris, Hôtel Drouot (Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

this episode has attracted some attention with divergent interpretations in the literature of the early history of the museum and publications that take as their focus Robinson himself. Another event of 1868, however, forms the subject of this essay: the two-day auction of Robinson's collection of paintings, miniatures, and drawings. Undoubtedly connected to the change in Robinson's professional status, the sale on 7-8 May (fig. 2) was the first time paintings and drawings Robinson had accumulated were displayed as a substantial group to the public.<sup>3</sup> However, it was

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<sup>1</sup> See JCR Papers, Ashmolean Museum, File 8 (ex 46) Letter to the Privy Council on Education (18 March 1863).

<sup>2</sup> See JCR Papers, Ashmolean Museum, File 9 Letter to Duke of Marlborough (27 February 1868). For an official account of Robinson's connection first to the Schools of Design and then the South Kensington Museum, see Elizabeth Bonython and Anthony Burton, *The Great Exhibitor: The Life and Work of Henry Cole*, London: V&A Publications, 2003, 152, 160 ff, as well as Burton's *Vision and Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, London: V&A Publications, 1999, especially Chapter 4.

<sup>3</sup> In her entertaining account of Victorian collecting, Jacqueline Yallop cites Robinson's need to raise money as the reason behind the sale, but does not provide any documentation [*Magpies, squirrels & thieves: how the Victorians collected the world*, London: Atlantic, 2011, 99].

not the English public that had easy access to view works of art that included El Greco's *Christ Cleansing the Temple* (now National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC). Instead, Robinson chose to bring the collection to Paris to be sold by the commissaire-priseur Charles Pillet (1824-1887) under the umbrella of the Hôtel Drouot.<sup>4</sup> Although there is no documentation in the Robinson papers held at the Ashmolean Museum to explain his decision to locate the sale across the Channel, by examining in detail the contents of the sale and the fate of representative lots that can be traced, light will be cast on the reasons behind the sale and its location. Furthermore, an examination of this episode of quick accumulation and even more rapid dispersal reminds us that, at this period, the British took full advantage of the opportunities for extensive and relatively inexpensive art purchases on the Continent in both the fine and decorative arts. Then, as now, the art market was an active and ever-present consideration for curators, collectors, as well as members of the trade, with porous lines between professional roles. Looking first at the personal and professional context of those years will show how tacit codes of conduct developed for those engaged in the nascent field of curating in mid-Victorian Britain.

Robinson's papers at the Ashmolean Museum, an institution for which he wrote an important early catalogue of their holdings of Michelangelo and Raphael drawings, and the archives of the V&A provide a wealth of detail about this period. As Helen Davies' dissertation and the published literature demonstrate, however, these documents can be interpreted in various ways.<sup>5</sup> The debate around the circumstances of Robinson's rapid rise within the new museum located at Marlborough House while the first buildings were being constructed in South Kensington, the change in his title and responsibilities, and his ultimate dismissal have revolved around the question of the role of the art museum curator in the 1850s and 1860s. Historians of the V&A tend to portray Robinson as a difficult

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Helen Davies has also described the sale as prompted by his need to raise funds [Davies, 'Sir John Charles Robinson: his role as a connoisseur and creator of public and private collections', Oxford: unpublished PhD dissertation, 1992, 318]. Robinson had earlier in the decade sold his collection of drawings to Robert Napier, the engineer and shipbuilder; he 'compiled' the catalogue Napier's entire collection, which was published in 1865 [*Catalogue of the Works of Art forming the Collection of Robert Napier, of West Shandon, Dumbartonshire*, London: Privately Printed, 1865]. Napier's drawings were displayed at the Leeds exhibition of 1868, which opened a few weeks after the May auction [*National Exhibition of Works of Art, at Leeds, 1868*, London: Edward Baines & Sons, 1868, 125 and ff.].

<sup>4</sup> The Hôtel Drouot became the principal location for auctions in Paris in 1852.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Robinson, *A Critical Account of the Drawings by Michel Angelo and Raffaello in the university galleries*, Oxford, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1870. An additional difficulty is that Robinson's handwriting is often more like a scrawl; even his descendent noted 'If only his writing were readable there must be a mine of interesting information on matters of art in his innumerable travel notebooks, but alas I have not the time at present to decipher his hieroglyphics'. F. Robinson's diary, 1 July 1916 [V&A, J. C. Robinson Papers].

personality who consistently proved insubordinate to his superior, Henry Cole (1808-1882), the founding director of the museum. The first published explanation of Robinson's dismissal appears in the introduction to Charles Oman's 1968 catalogue of the V&A's Spanish silver collection. In a footnote, Oman cites a draft letter held by the Public Record Office (PRO) as proof that Robinson's dismissal was a direct result of his having used his trips to the Continent on behalf of the museum to acquire works for his own benefit.<sup>6</sup>

Because of Cole's undeniable importance in shaping the Victorian institution, he has been the subject of a number of biographies, including most recently *The Great Exhibitor* in which Elizabeth Bonython and Anthony Burton thoroughly examine the "Life and Work" of the director. Their chapter on the final years of Robinson's tenure reads as a contest between the upstart curator and his clear-eyed former mentor.<sup>7</sup> In her Oxford dissertation and two published articles, Davies contests Oman's reading of the incident, demonstrating that Cole was cognizant of Robinson's sidelines as a collector in his own right and as an advisor to others and that the reasons behind his dismissal were conceptual not behavioural. According to Davies, Robinson's objective to acquire genuine historical objects for the museum conflicted with Cole's own vision for a more contemporary collection and this disagreement led to the elimination of his position.<sup>8</sup> In a recent history of the museum, Julius Bryant and Burton adopt Davies' interpretation and present a more balanced treatment of Robinson and his association with the V&A.<sup>9</sup> The biographical note at the end of the volume casts doubt on the theory that Robinson's dismissal was 'on account of purchasing works for private collectors while on official business', and concludes that 'His career was not damaged by his dismissal.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Oman, *The Golden Age of Hispanic Silver 1400-1665*, London: HMSO/Victorian and Albert Museum, 1968, x, fn1.

<sup>7</sup> The title of this chapter, 'Consolidating the Stronghold, 1863-1867', reinforces the authors' presentation of the differences between Robinson and Cole as a power struggle [Bonython and Burton, *The Great Exhibitor*, 211 ff].

<sup>8</sup> Davies, 'Sir John Charles Robinson', 14, 418. Davies's dissertation is a thorough overview of Robinson's career both in public institutions and his relationships with private collectors. See also Davies, 'John Charles Robinson's Work at the South Kensington Museum Part I: The creation of the collection of Italian Renaissance objects at the Museum of Ornamental Art and the South Kensington Museum, 1853-62', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 10: 2, 1998, 169-188 and 'John Charles Robinson's Work at the South Kensington Museum Part II: From 1863 to 1867: consolidation and conflict', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 11: 1 (1999): 95-115. Robinson wrote extensively on the role of museums throughout his career; his address 'On the Museum of Art' as part of a series of lectures for the Science and Art Department, discusses the origins of the SKM's collection and critiques other museums [J. C. Robinson, 'On the Museum of Art', London: Chapman and Hall, 1858].

<sup>9</sup> Julius Bryant, "Albertopolis: The German Sources of the Victoria and Albert Museum", in *Art and Design for All: The Victoria and Albert Museum*, edited by Julius Bryant, London: V&A Publishing, 2011, 25-39.

From 1882 to 1901 he was Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures'.<sup>10</sup> Robinson's current status as a respected early curator at the museum has been commemorated by the commissioning of contemporary sculptor Felicity Powell to create the *John Charles Robinson Medal*.<sup>11</sup>

This scholarly debate provides the context in which to examine the sale of part of Robinson's early collection. Although the May 1868 sale is addressed in both Davies' work on Robinson and Elon Danziger's account of the formation of the Sir Francis Cook collection, my discovery of the auction register in the Archives de la Ville de Paris clarifies formerly misunderstood aspects of Robinson's attempt to raise funds at this time.<sup>12</sup> The chronology of events—the restructuring of the curatorial staff at the SKM in the early 1860s, Robinson's repeated protests against this reorganization, the sale itself held on 7-8 May 1868, Robinson's private publication of his *Memoranda on Fifty Pictures* also in 1868—is straightforward enough. However, Robinson's decision to hold the sale in Paris, with Charles Pillet as 'commissaire-priseur' and Alexandre Febvre as 'expert', and not London, the identity of the buyers at the sale, and the results of the sale—both the immediate financial result and the longer-term consequences for Robinson's career—deserve greater attention and help us to understand the evolving definition of the role of the curator in the public and private realms, the cross-channel networks of the museum, collecting and commercial art worlds, as well as the relationship between art experts and the market.

Evidence that twentieth-century accounts of Robinson's final years at the SKM might overstate their tendentiousness appears on the very cover of the 1868 sale catalogue. The curator's association with the museum and the opportunities provided by his extensive Continental travels are proudly announced on both the title page and in the prefatory note in the sale catalogue. Robinson is identified as 'Former art advisor (art referee) of the Museum of Kensington, London'<sup>13</sup> and,

<sup>10</sup> The note also describes Robinson as 'a museum curator and art collector whose professional life was entwined with the history of the V&A' [*Art and Design for All*, 284].

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/j/john-charles-robinson-medal/> [accessed 9 August 2017].

<sup>12</sup> The most recent published scholarly consideration of Robinson focuses on the curator's essays on connoisseurship from the last decade of the nineteenth century [Jonathan Conlin, 'Collecting and Connoisseurship in England, 1840-1900: The Case of J. C. Robinson' in Inge Reist, ed., *British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response*, Farnham: The Frick Collection/Ashgate, 2014, 133-143]. He also is a recurring figure in Giles Waterfield's important history of the rise of regional museums in Britain [Waterfield, *The People's Galleries: Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800-1915*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015, see especially 134-135].

<sup>13</sup> 'Ex-Conseiller d'art (art referee) du Musée de Kensington, à Londres' [*Catalogue de Tableaux et de Dessins Anciens Composant la Collection de M. J. C. Robinson Ex-Conseiller d'art (art referee) du Musée de Kensington, à Londres, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 7-8 May 1868, t.p. (hereafter Catalogue)*].

according to the introductory note, 'Over the course of these travels, M. Robinson also acquired paintings and drawings for his own collection'.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the very activity cited as a reason for Robinson's dismissal is promoted just a few months after Robinson had written to the Duke of Marlborough to confirm that there would not be any implication of curatorial misconduct in official reports.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the catalogue often includes information as to where he had acquired the work of art, reflecting both Robinson's access to Continental sources and his scholarly interest in provenance. Notes such as 'Acquired in Turin' in the case of Cherubino Alberti's *Portrait d'un vieillard*<sup>16</sup> or that Henri de Bles' *Adoration des Mages* was 'Acquired in Spain, formerly in the Escorial'<sup>17</sup> are tantalizing clues today, and, at the time, brought a level of thoroughness to a catalogue assembled by a museum curator. Indeed, these provenance notes are not typical of auction catalogues published in France. For example, at the sale of M. Berthon's collection of old master paintings, prints and drawings at the beginning of 1868 with Pillet as commissaire-priseur and Febvre acting as expert for the paintings, no indication is given in the catalogue of any of the collector's sources.<sup>18</sup>

Of the 127 works in the catalogue, forty-nine were paintings, seven were oil sketches, and seventy-one were drawings.<sup>19</sup> The greatest number of paintings and

<sup>14</sup> 'Dans le cours de ces voyages, M. Robinson récoltait aussi des tableaux et des dessins pour sa propre collection' [*Catalogue*, 3].

<sup>15</sup> Robinson expresses his relief that he has had 'fresh satisfaction in as much as it conveys the distinct assurance, that the abolition of my office has been based on ground of public policy and convenience, and not on any personal consideration as regards myself' [JCR to Duke of Marlborough, 28 January 1868, V&A MA/3/25/175]. Robinson's correspondence with the Duke, who was the Lord President of the Council for the Department of Science and Art and thus the ultimate overseer of the SKM, is extensive and can be found as part of Robinson's official reports at the V&A archives.

<sup>16</sup> 'Acquis à Turin' [*Catalogue*, no. 2]; Register for Vente Robinson, Drouot 5 Salle 2, Charles Pillet, Commissaire-Preneur, D48E<sup>3</sup>53, no. 9814, Archives de la Ville de Paris [hereafter *Register*]. I have not been able to trace this painting. Please note that I will be using the attribution and titles given to the works of art in the auction catalogue, providing any current information about those works their attribution and location where possible.

<sup>17</sup> 'Acquis en Espagne, il etait autrefois à l'Escorial' [*Catalogue*, no. 9]. The painting appeared in neither of Arago's sales both of which were held at the Hôtel Drouot with Eugène Féral as expert. The first sale was held 8-9 February 1872 under the auspices of Charles Pillet [*Collection de M. E. Arago. Tableaux, Aquarelles & Dessins Anciens et Modernes*]; the second had Paul Chevallier in the role of commissaire-priseur [*Catalogue de Tableaux Anciens et Modernes...Aquarelles et Dessin...formant la collection de feu Etienne Arago, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 4-5 May 1892*].

<sup>18</sup> *Catalogue de Tableaux Anciens, Gravures & Dessins provenant de la Collection de Feu M. Berthon, de Versailles, 7-8 January 1868*.

<sup>19</sup> There are 123 lots on the sale register: these include the two lots that were withdrawn prior to the sale and two works sold as one lot. In addition, three works in the catalogue do not appear to be on the register [see Appendix].

drawings were seventeenth-century Dutch with fifteen paintings attributed to Rembrandt, Nicholas Berchem, Karel Dujardin, and others, and twenty-eight drawings given to Adrian van Ostade, Adrien van de Velde, Paul Potter to name a few. However, Robinson also put up for auction a significant number of Italian paintings—ten—sketches—three—and drawings—twenty-one—ranging from the late fifteenth-early sixteenth century Botticelli, *La Vierge, l'enfant Jésus et saint Jean*<sup>20</sup> to the seventeenth-century Domenico Feti oil sketch with the subject of St. Peter denying Christ.<sup>21</sup> More remarkable are the works from the Spanish school, though this emphasis should not come as a surprise considering the time Robinson had spent touring the Peninsula on behalf of the SKM.<sup>22</sup> While we associate his scholarship with research into the decorative arts of this region, his sale included paintings and drawings catalogued as by El Greco, Alonso Cano, Murillo, and others.<sup>23</sup>

According to the French law instituted during the Revolution and expanded upon in 1816, the right to stage an auction was given to the commissaire-priseur, who, in addition to the stipulations requiring the auctioneer to be at least twenty-five years of age and able to put up a security of up to twenty thousand francs, had to submit an account of each sale to the state.<sup>24</sup> These manuscript registers,

<sup>20</sup> The entry for the painting in the catalogue describes the composition of Botticelli's depiction of the Virgin and Child with St. John and notes that it was acquired in the painter's home city of Florence: 'Panneau circulaire, peint à la détrempe, dans son cadre primitif sculpté et doré, figurant des fleurs et des fruits. La Vierge, debout, le visage empreint d'une profonde expression mélancolique, embrasse tendrement l'enfant Jésus qu'elle tient dans ses bras. Elle porte un vêtement bleu, et un voile transparent couvre sa tête et ses épaules. Vers la gauche, le petit saint Jean se penche en avant dans une attitude d'adoration. Fond de paysage, pays ouvert; avec une rivière ou un lac, dans le lointain, une ville [*Catalogue*, no. 10].

<sup>21</sup> Feti's *Saint Pierre reniant Le Christ* is described in the catalogue simply as 'Admirable esquisse avancée sur toile' [*Catalogue*, no. 24].

<sup>22</sup> The V&A Archives includes a list composed by Robinson in May 1866 of all the cities he visited on his travels in Spain and Portugal [MA/3/19/248-250].

<sup>23</sup> The Spanish numbered seven paintings—Alonso Cano, *Virgin in Glory* (No. 14), two miniatures by Sanchez Coello (Nos. 17 and 18), two works by El Greco (Nos. 25 and 26), Murillo, *Half-length of a Saint* (No. 31), Velázquez, *Child with the Head of a Servant* (No. 49)—and one drawing—Murillo, *Portrait of a Man and Head of a Child* (No. 124).

<sup>24</sup> For a useful history of the French auctions, see Isabelle Rouge-Ducos, *Le Crieur et le Marteau: Histoire des commissaires-priseurs de Paris (1801-1945)*, Paris: Belin, 2013, which includes a reprint of Champfleury's *L'Hôtel des commissaires-priseurs* first published in 1867. Nicholas Green's article 'Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformation of the Artistic Field in France during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,' first published in *Art History* in 1987 and reprinted in 2007, provides the context for the reputation of auctioneers in France from the 1840s through the 1870s [in Mary Tompkins Lewis, ed., *Critical Readings in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 34-5, see especially footnotes 12, 13, and 17]. Lucy H. Hooper provides a description of the sales

organized according to the name of the commissaire-priseur presiding over the sale, are held by the Archives de la Ville de Paris.<sup>25</sup> Each register is composed of a signed agreement between the commissaire-priseur and the seller; this contract is followed by a listing of each lot. To the extreme left of the list is the name of the buyer, followed by the order of sale, catalogue number, description of the lot and its hammer price. As was typical for auctions conducted in Paris, Robinson's sale did not follow the order of the catalogue.<sup>26</sup> Thus, while the paintings in the catalogue are ordered alphabetically, the first work to be sold on the first day of the sale was Jean Lingelbach's *Marchand d'orviétan italien, jouant un air de guitare avant de montrer sa merchandise*, number twenty-eight in the sale catalogue.<sup>27</sup> The register indicates that the painting was sold for 255 francs to Guimbart, who resided at 60 boulevard de Clichy in Montmartre.<sup>28</sup> Lot descriptions are very general; for example, the register records the second painting offered as 'Un tableau (Giovanni Batista Moroni) adjugé cent quatre vingt quinze francs à Robinson.'<sup>29</sup>

Between its ownership by Robinson and its entering The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, as part of the Kress Collection (1957.14.4), El Greco's *Le Christ chassant les vendeurs du Temple* (cat. no. 25; Figure 3) was in Sir Francis Cook's extensive collection. Although esteemed today as a work reflective of the Cretan artist's exposure to Paolo Veronese and Venetian painting, in 1868 it was bought in at 2,900 francs.<sup>30</sup> At that estimate, it was one of the most highly valued at the sale: only four other paintings were bought for more or given higher estimates. Grouped

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rooms of the Hôtel Drouot in the latter part of the nineteenth century [Hooper, 'The Hôtel des Ventes, Paris', *Art Journal*, n.s. 3, 1877, 313-4].

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Isabelle Rouge-Ducos for her introduction to the Archives and for Vincent Tuchais, the head of Reader Services, who went out of his way to make the material accessible to me in June 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Bénédicte Miyamoto, "'Making Pictures Marketable': Expertise and the Georgian Art Market,' in Charlotte Gould and Sophie Mesplède, eds, *Marketing Art in the British Isles, 1700 to the Present*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, 125.

<sup>27</sup> In addition to the evocative title given to the painting, the sale catalogue gives further details of the composition 'Trois enfants forment l'auditoire; l'un d'eux enseigne à un chien à se tenir sur les pattes de derrière. Dans le coin à droite, sur une pierre, les initiales du peintre: J. L.' [*Catalogue*, no. 28]. I have not been able to trace this painting.

<sup>28</sup> Register, Archives de la Ville de Paris. Because the register is handwritten (with two distinct hands for the two days of sale), some names are more difficult to decipher than others. These difficulties are compounded when the clerk misspelled proper nouns. For example, on the record of the transactions of the first day Salting is noted as 'Saltin'. From the National Gallery of Art, we know that it was Frédéric Reiset who acted as intermediary for Princesse Mathilde. However, on the register, his name is recorded as 'Rezet' (see also note 30). I am indebted to Stijn Alsteens, Laurence Lhizares, and Benjamin Peronnet for their expertise in identifying some of the buyers.

<sup>29</sup> The second day listings do not even include the name of the artist. This Moroni remains untraced.

<sup>30</sup> The Register of the sale records the painting as number 38 to come under the hammer.



Figure 3 El Greco, *Christ Cleansing the Temple*, probably before 1570, oil on panel, 65.4 x 83.2 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1957.14.4)

close together in the order of sale, these paintings were: Jacob de Bray's *Portrait de l'artiste et de sa femme* (cat. no. 11; lot no. 33), which was bought for 4,010 francs by Reiset<sup>31</sup>; Jehan [sic] Clouet's *Portrait, vu de trois quarts, d'Eléonore d'Autriche, femme de François Ier* (cat. no. 16; lot no. 35), which the City of Paris bought for 5,000 francs; Velazquez, *Figure d'enfant, à mi-corps, avec la tête d'un serviteur* (cat. no. 49; lot no. 36), which was bought by the English collector George Salting for 4,850 francs. Roger van der Weyden's *La Vierge et l'Enfant Jésus, avec saint Jean-Baptiste et saint Pierre, saint Côme et saint Damien* (cat. no. 53; lot no. 37), the sale's highest valued work, was bought in for 6,800 francs.<sup>32</sup> In total, the 125 lots fetched nearly 60,000 francs. However, over the course of the two days, forty-eight lots were bought in at a value of 26,860 francs. By today's standards the sell through rate of about sixty per cent would be considered poor.

<sup>31</sup> According to Arthur Wheelock of the National Gallery of Art, the painting was bought by Reiset for Princess Mathilde née Mathilde N. M. Bonaparte, the niece of Napoleon I. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., 'Jan de Bray/*Portrait of the Artist's Parents, Salomon de Bray and Anna Westerbaen/1664*', *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <http://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/108661> (accessed June 19, 2017). The painting was subsequently sold under the name Jean de Bray at the princess's sale in May 1904 without any indication where and when it had been acquired [*Catalogue des Tableaux Anciens... par suite du décès de S. A. I. Mme la Princess Mathilde, 17-21 May 1904, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, cat. no. 21*].

<sup>32</sup> Lot number 35 (cat. no. 30) was the painting of the *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* given to Parmegiano [sic], which was bought in at 2,000, but in Cook's collection later that year [see Tancred Borenius, *Italian Schools: Volume I of A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House Richmond & Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook BT, Visconde de Monserrate*, edited by Herbert Cook, London: William Heinemann, 1913, cat. no. 96, ill.]



Figure 4 School, Spanish, *A Man and a Child eating Grapes*, probably 19<sup>th</sup> century. Oil on canvas, 73 x 57.8 cm. Salting Bequest, 1910 (NG2526) © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY

Besides Robinson, the name that appears most frequently on the register is George Salting (1835-1909).<sup>33</sup> In addition to the so-called Velázquez, he acquired two miniatures sold as Sanchez Coello (lot 11; cat. nos. 17 and 18—200 francs); the Domenico Feti (lot 44; cat. no. 24—300 francs) and more than a dozen, mostly Dutch, drawings.<sup>34</sup> Salting bequeathed his impressive collection to public institutions in London. The unfinished painting of a child eating grapes was part of his bequest to the National Gallery, London, where it had been on loan for at least a decade. This painting's attribution and dating has been doubted for some time and is now catalogued as Spanish (?), 19<sup>th</sup> century (?), *A Man, and a Child Eating Grapes* (fig. 4);<sup>35</sup> the museum's archives include two notebooks in which Salting's own estimation of the works can be deduced. In these notebooks, the collector recorded the value of

<sup>33</sup> Frank Davis included Salting as one of the dozen Victorian collectors he profiled, noting that the Australian-born, Eton-educated bachelor was 'odd and difficult to the point of eccentricity' [Davis, *Victorian Patrons of the Arts: Twelve Famous Collections and Their Owners*, London: Country Life Limited, 1963, 80]. Patricia Rubin's analysis of Salting, his bequest to the British Museum, V&A, and National Gallery addresses this characterization, which she notes 'went back to his school days' [Rubin, "'The Outcry': Despoilers, donors, and the National Gallery in London, 1909', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 25: 2, 2013, 255].

<sup>34</sup> See Appendix for a list of these drawings.

<sup>35</sup> Neil MacLaren addresses the authorship of the painting in the short entry in *National Gallery Catalogues: The Spanish School*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Allan Braham, London: The National Gallery, 1952, 97-8. Salting's acquisition of the work is here recorded as 'by 1883'. The National Gallery's dossier does not shed any additional light on the work.

the paintings he had lent to the National Gallery. Over the years, Salting's appraisal of the work increased; first recorded as having a low value of three hundred and a high value of five hundred pounds,<sup>36</sup> by the time the work is on loan to the museum in 1900, Salting has raised the value to one thousand pounds.<sup>37</sup> For a painting which he bought for about £194 this increase in value was significant.<sup>38</sup>

In total, there were about two dozen buyers at the auction (see Appendix), each acquiring between one to ten lots. Alexis Joseph Febvre (1810-1881), who had acted as the expert for the sale, purchased six lots—one painting and five drawings.<sup>39</sup> While Salting represented himself at the auction, agents acted as intermediaries for their clients. For example, Frédéric Reiset (1815-1891) acquired Jacob de Bray double portrait on behalf of the Princess Mathilda.<sup>40</sup> Otto Mündler (1810-1870), whose role as an agent for both German museums and England's National Gallery is well known, successfully bid on Chardin's *Le Confessionnal*.<sup>41</sup> The buyer of the aforementioned Botticelli was the French sculptor Baron Henri de Triqueti (1803-1874), who was married to the granddaughter of the British neo-classical sculptor Thomas Banks.<sup>42</sup> From Robinson's correspondence, we know he was acquainted with Triqueti. In a letter addressed to the Duke of Marlborough and

<sup>36</sup> This list is undated, but it is followed by a list dated 1883; the last list in this notebook is dated 1888 [National Gallery Archives, NGA9 (2) George Salting MSS].

<sup>37</sup> NGA9 (1) George Salting MSS. This notebook is dated October 1900.

<sup>38</sup> At this period one British pound was the equivalent to about twenty-five French francs. The sketch by Domenico Feti is also included in these notebooks; the earlier notebook records the value of the sketch as between 25 and 50 pounds, while the 1900 notebook gives it a value of 75, but in a different ink crosses out the name of the artist and inserts 'Ricci (Seb perhaps)' [National Gallery Archives, NGA9 (1) and NGA9 (2) George Salting MSS].

<sup>39</sup> See Appendix of Buyers

<sup>40</sup> See Wheelock Jr., 'Jan de Bray/*Portrait of the Artist's Parents, Salomon de Bray and Anna Westerbaen/1664*', *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <http://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/108661> (accessed June 19, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> The Chardin is untraced; it was not part of Mündler's posthumous sale [*Succession de feu Otto Mündler: Objets de curiosité, tableaux anciens de différentes écoles*, Hôtel Drouot, 30 November 1871]. For more on Mündler's role as agent for the National Gallery, see David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, 140 ff. The RKD's copy of the Robinson sale catalogue is annotated with comments on the authenticity of some of the lots. The Chardin is considered 'faux'.

<sup>42</sup> The Register records the purchaser as Triqueti, the sculptor Baron Henri de Triqueti (1803-1874) [Register, no. 25]. The circular panel was sold at the sale of his collection in 1886 [*Catalogue de Tableaux...Provenant de la Collection de M. le Baron de Triqueti*, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 4 May 1886, cat. no. 3; ill.]. According to the first volume of the Doughty House paintings, the school of Botticelli painting of the same subject and shape was the one catalogued in Robinson's *Memoranda*, acquired by Cook in 1868 [Borenius, *A Catalogue of the Paintings*, no. 24]. However, the dimensions confirm that the Baron's version (also '85 cent.') and not the Cook version ('0.666 metres') was that sold by Robinson. While the Triqueti Botticelli is illustrated in the 1886 sale, the Cook school of Botticelli is not.

dated 28 February 1868, Robinson enclosed a letter from the Baron endorsing the authenticity of marble sculptures that Robinson had acquired for the SKM.<sup>43</sup> A few years previously, Triqueti had reviewed very positively Robinson's installation of sculpture in the new galleries at SKM.<sup>44</sup> Robinson and Triqueti's relationship underscores the interconnectedness of the Anglo-French art world in the Victorian-Second Empire period.

This evidence of sales to buyers based in Paris, collectors who had travelled there specifically to buy works of art, as well as agents and dealers, belies the notion that the primary purchaser of works from this early collection assembled by Robinson was the emerging collector Francis Cook (1817-1901). The relationship between the curator and the merchant-landowner was, as detailed by Elon Danziger, in its early stages in 1868. Based upon research in the Cook family archives, Danziger notes that Cook acquired about thirty paintings from Robinson *before* the sale and bought a further twenty at the sale itself and that some of those twenty were first bought in.<sup>45</sup> Comparing the register with the three-volume catalogue published under the auspices of Sir Francis's grandson, Herbert, it is possible to identify eight paintings and sketches that appeared in Paris and after having been bought in, acquired by Cook.<sup>46</sup> These are often, but not always, described as having been acquired from Robinson in 1869. In the case of Rubens' *Allegory of Rome Triumphant* (cat. no. 39) the name of the buyer on the register is

<sup>43</sup> JCR to the Duke of Marlborough, 28 Feb. 1868, JCR Papers, Ashmolean Museum, File 9.

<sup>44</sup> Henri de Triqueti, 'The New Court, South Kensington Museum', *Builder*, 3 May 1862. Triqueti had written glowingly of Robinson in his volume published the year before [*Les Trois Musées de Londres*, Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1861, 103].

<sup>45</sup> Danziger, 'The Cook Collection. Its Founder and Its Inheritors', *Burlington Magazine*, 146, July 2004, 446.

<sup>46</sup> These include: Berckheyde's *Interior of St. Bavo at Haarlem* bought in in 1868 for 485 francs; Roger van der Weyden's *Madonna and Child*, which nearly fifty years later was considered a school work; and Parmigianino's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, which was bought in for 2,000 francs [*Register*]. Robinson's name appears with frequency in the three-volume catalogue of the Cook collection. Of the nearly two hundred Italian paintings catalogued by Borenius in the first volume, twenty-four are noted as having been acquired through Robinson and eleven of those are cited as included in Robinson's *Memoranda*. Twenty-three of the Dutch and Flemish school paintings were acquired through Robinson, though the two that appeared at the 1868 sale—Berckheyde's *The Old Amsterdam Stock Exchange* and Van Dyck's *The Magdalen*—do not include any reference to Robinson [J. O Kronig, *Dutch and Flemish Schools, Volume II of A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House, Richmond & Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook BT, Visconde de Monserrate*, Herbert Cook, ed, London: William Heinemann, 1914, nos. 209 and 248]. Twenty-four of the paintings in the third volume are noted as connected to Robinson, with six cited as appearing in his *Memoranda* [Maurice W. Brockwell, *English, French, Early Flemish, German and Spanish Schools and Addenda, Volume III of A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House, Richmond & Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook BT, Visconde de Monserrate*, Herbert Cook, ed, London: William Heinemann, 1915].

Hirsch and not Robinson, so it was not Robinson alone who bought on Cook's behalf at the sale.<sup>47</sup>

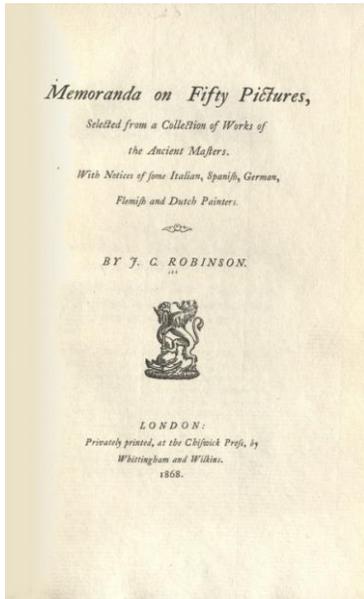


Figure 5 Title page: John Charles Robinson, *Memoranda on Fifty Pictures, Selected from a Collection of Works of the Ancient Masters*. London: privately printed, 1868 (Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Another document associated with 1868 both sheds light on and complicates Robinson's collection at that time. Published privately on good quality paper and distributed to Robinson's friends, *Memoranda on Fifty Pictures Selected from a Collection of Ancient Masters* (fig. 5), is less an English version of the sale catalogue than a memorial of the most significant paintings and oil sketches that Robinson had assembled over the past decade or so.<sup>48</sup> Although the entries on the paintings that were auctioned are often abridged versions of those that appear in the *Memoranda*, not all the works that Robinson sold are included, nor were all the paintings included in the publication put up for sale.<sup>49</sup> Unlike the sale catalogue, the *Memoranda* divides the paintings into sections according to school. The catalogue entries (both those in the auction catalogue and the *Memoranda*) are excellent gauges of Robinson's analysis of works of art and marketing skills.

<sup>47</sup> The Cook catalogue notes that the painting was bought from Robinson for £150 but does not give the date of acquisition [Kronig, no. 340].

<sup>48</sup> Danziger notes that all the copies he has examined have been inscribed to friends of Robinson [Danziger, 'The Cook Collection', 446]. The copy held by Watson library was in the collection of Augustus Wollaston Franks (1826-1897), a curator at the British Museum. The Frick Art Reference Library copy belonged to Robert Napier, whose collection Robinson had catalogued in 1865 [*Catalogue of the works of art forming the collection of Robert Napier of West Shandon, Dumbartonshire*, London: privately printed, 1865].

<sup>49</sup> Davies mistakenly conflates the paintings in the sale catalogue and those in the *Memoranda* [Davies, 'John Charles Robinson', 318]. Fourteen of the paintings included in the *Memoranda* were offered in Paris (see Appendix for details).

For example, describing the purported Velázquez bought by Salting, the entry in the sale catalogue transforms the question of the work's level of finish, which Robinson calls 'a study of the master after nature', into an elevation of the identity of the child, going so far as to propose that he is the canonical painter's own son.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, its status as a study at once accounts for the admittedly odd composition and allows Robinson to praise the painting as 'having all the exuberance and artistic power' associated with the Spanish master.<sup>51</sup> In the *Memoranda*, Robinson slightly reworks the wording of the first few sentences, noting 'The head only of this figure is completely terminated; the drapery and accessories being rapidly and dexterously sketched on the canvas in brown and white.'<sup>52</sup> Beyond these observations of formal aspects of the study, Robinson takes us through the steps familiar to a scholar, explicating its position in the context of other known paintings by the Spanish master. Noting the stylistic differences and similarities to the artist's oeuvre, Robinson sets out to establish a hypothetical date for his painting: 'It is, to a certain extent, different in style from any of his other known pictures, but the affinities to other of his productions, which it clearly manifests, seem to point out almost its exact place in the sequence of his works.'<sup>53</sup> He continues with a comparison of the painting to two very well-known works by the Spanish master: 'This seems to be betwixt the "Aguador de Sevilla," in the Duke of Wellington's collection, and the "Borrachos," in the Madrid Gallery (or it may even have been produced shortly after this last-named famous work).'<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Robinson demonstrates his familiarity with the scholarly literature on the subject, citing the Spanish art historian Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez's dating of the *Waterseller* to Velázquez's early Seville period. He concludes optimistically: 'The present picture, at all events, shows a great advance on that work. The writer is disposed to refer it to about the year 1623, in which year

<sup>50</sup> 'c'est une étude du maître d'après nature, représentant, sans nul doute, l'enfant de quelque noble personnage espagnol, peut-être un de ceux du peintre même' [*Catalogue*, 33].

<sup>51</sup> 'et avec toute l'exubérance de sa puissance artistique' [*Catalogue*, 33].

<sup>52</sup> *Memoranda*, 42. While Robinson devotes four pages in his *Memoranda* to the Velázquez, the entry in the auction catalogue runs to three paragraphs which describe the composition, technique and dating [*Catalogue*, no. 49].

<sup>53</sup> *Memoranda*, 45. The French text reads 'Comme plusieurs autres des productions de Velazquez, l'étude n'est pas entièrement achevée, mais l'affinité qui y est manifeste avec d'autres de ses oeuvres, indique avec certitude à quelle époque elle se rattache' [*Catalogue*, 33].

<sup>54</sup> 'Cela paraît devoir être placé entre l'Aguador de Séville, du duc Wellington, et les Borrachos de la galerie de Madrid, ou peut-être est-ce-même contemporain de ce dernier tableau' [*Catalogue*, 33]. Here I have used the English version printed in the *Memoranda* as it is a direct translation of the French text.

Velasquez finally settled in the capital.<sup>55</sup> The final note in both the catalogue and the English publication reveals that Robinson acquired the painting not in Spain but from the Earl of Clare.<sup>56</sup> As we know, Robinson's judgment of the painting was shared by Salting.

In contrast to the demoted Velázquez, El Greco's *Christ Cleansing the Temple* has retained its attribution and is central to the National Gallery of Art's Spanish holdings since given as part of the Kress Collection in 1957.<sup>57</sup> For the sale catalogue, Robinson contributed two paragraphs, the first describing in detail the composition. He goes on to establish the rarity (and desirability) of El Greco's easel paintings and alludes to the Cretan-born painter's often fantastical style: 'this example is in his most tempered style, and one can say that it is one of the most perfect specimens of the master to be seen both in Spain and elsewhere.'<sup>58</sup> To emphasize its privileged status, Robinson states, 'Even the Prado does not include an example of this type.'<sup>59</sup> He then displays his knowledge of the physical condition of a work of art, claiming that 'it is in a perfect state of conservation and in an antique carved and gilded frame, probably executed according to the master's design.'<sup>60</sup> He concludes with the seemingly irrefutable evidence of authenticity: the presence of the artist's signature, reproducing the Greek inscription.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> 'En tout cas, le tableau actuel montre un progrès manifeste sur cette composition; il est probable que l'exécution remonte à 1623, époque à laquelle l'artiste s'installa définitivement dans la capitale' [*Catalogue*, 33. *Memoranda*, 45].

<sup>56</sup> 'De la collection du comte de Clare'; 'It was obtained from the collection of the late Earl of Clare' [*Catalogue*, 33. *Memoranda*, 45].

<sup>57</sup> In the National Gallery of Art's systematic catalogue, the provenance listing dates Cook's acquisition of the painting to 'by 1894' at which time, Cook lent it to the exhibition of *Venetian Art* at the New Gallery [Jonathan Brown and Richard G. Mann, *Spanish Paintings of the Fifteenth through Nineteenth Centuries*, Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990, 67, 70]. Currently, the museum's website explains 'More than a dozen paintings from the Robinson sale went to Cook. To judge from annotated auction catalogues, some were bought outright, while others such as NGA 1957.14.4 were bought in and subsequently offered to Cook' [<https://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.43723.html#provenance> accessed July 30, 2017]. I am grateful to Nancy Yeide and Ann Halperin of the National Gallery's Department of Curatorial Records for access to the object file.

<sup>58</sup> 'Celui-ci est dans la manière la plus tempérée, et l'on peut dire que c'est un des plus parfaits spécimens du maître qui se puissent rencontrer non-seulement en Espagne, mais ailleurs' [*Catalogue*, 20].

<sup>59</sup> Robinson translates the sentence 'La galerie même de Madrid ne contient pas de spécimen de ce genre' [*Catalogue*, 20] in the *Memoranda* as 'It may be noticed that the Madrid Gallery contains no example of its class' [*Memoranda*, 41].

<sup>60</sup> 'Il est dans un parfait état de conservation, et dans son antique cadre de bois sculpté et doré, probablement exécuté sur le dessin du maître même.' [*Catalogue*, 20]

<sup>61</sup> 'il porte la signature habituelle...' [*Catalogue*, 20]

Robinson's interest in what he clearly considered a significant work of art is expanded in the *Memoranda*. While he had addressed the question of El Greco's often flamboyant style rather obliquely in the catalogue, here he treats the master's singularity by comparing him to that icon of modern British art, J. M. W. Turner: 'The admirable early and mature works of Turner are, in fact, not more widely different from the formless absurdities of his later time, than are the various pictures of Il [sic] Greco from one another.'<sup>62</sup> Robinson's analysis of Turner's late works reveals his rather conventional understanding of the artist at this period of the British painter's reception, but the connection between contemporary painting and the sixteenth century, demonstrates Robinson's wide-ranging references. Indeed, it is important to remember that Robinson had trained to be an artist and that that professional training was typical for the first curators—even as far back as the seventeenth-century when Velázquez himself took on that role for Philip IV.<sup>63</sup>

The fact that artistic training was a through-line in many of the careers of early museum professionals should not be a surprise given certain themes in the discourse of connoisseurship. As the secondary market for works of art developed and matured from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, there was a greater need for the exercise of artistic judgment and expertise. The recognition that artists, by dint of their technical training, often had a privileged understanding of the physical attributes of a painting or drawing led to collectors' consulting artists when acquiring objects on the secondary market. In Robinson's lifetime, the career of the preceding generation, Sir Charles Eastlake (1793-1865) provides a good point of comparison. While Robinson's entrée into the museum world was through the drawing schools overseen by the Department of Science and Art, Eastlake followed the more establishment path as an admitted member of the Royal Academy to the position of keeper and then director of the National Gallery, as well as President of the Royal Academy. Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), who was a curator at the SKM at the same time as Robinson and who periodically annotated his monthly art referee reports, was, like Eastlake, a member of the Royal Academy.<sup>64</sup> Augustus Wollaston Franks (1826-1897), the recipient of the copy of the *Memoranda* now held by Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, has long been recognized for his role as Keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum, as well as a very active collector; Franks, in contrast, to Robinson (or other artists-turned-curators) represents a different path to the profession. Educated at Eton and Cambridge, his financial resources were not

<sup>62</sup> *Memoranda*, 39.

<sup>63</sup> See Waterfield on the role of the artist-curator [Waterfield, *The People's Galleries*, 17].

<sup>64</sup> For a useful analysis of Redgrave's approach to artists' biographies, see Julie F. Codell, 'Righting the Victorian Artist: The Redgraves' *A Century of Painters of the English School* and the Serialization of Art History', *Oxford Art Journal*, 23: 2, 2000, 97-119.

limited to his earned income from the museum.<sup>65</sup> At the heart of Robinson's dissatisfaction first with the redefinition of his position at the SKM and then in 1867, was the reduction of his salary, on which he was completely dependent. For months after his dismissal, he lobbied for a pension.<sup>66</sup>

Beyond a trained eye, however, Victorian museum curators such as Robinson developed an expertise on the market. Included in Robinson's papers at the Ashmolean (and studied thoroughly by Davies) is his Account Book. However, the record begins only in 1874 and thus sheds little light on his early collection. Along with the Account Book, there is also evidence of his extensive travels. These documents supplement the official reports Robinson filed with the SKM, which are still held by the museum. Although these reports do not make reference to the works of art he bought for his own collection or those works he sold to other collectors, they do provide extensive information on those he bought on behalf of the museum. It should be emphasized that these were in the vast majority objects, not paintings and drawings. As the art referee, Robinson made purchases directly from collectors, through dealers, and at auction both at home and abroad. In July 1863, for example, he states, 'During the past month of June I have carefully followed the various sales and inspected the collections of dealers, and of several persons who have imported objects of Art from the Continent, in respect to recommending works for acquisition to the Museum'.<sup>67</sup>

Robinson regularly commented on the state of the market, remarking on numerous occasions that none of the upcoming auctions contained works he considered worthy for acquisition by the museum. Some of the most interesting reports concern auctions that he considered particularly important, such as the Piot sale of 1864 and the Pourtalès sale of the following year, both of which were handled by Charles Pillet.<sup>68</sup> The day before the five-day sale of the collection of Eugène Piot, Robinson sent a list to Cole of the most important objects at the sale and estimates the prices they will fetch.<sup>69</sup> For his monthly report, he describes his activities during the course of the sale, stating: '...I

<sup>65</sup> See the essays in A. W. Franks. *Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry, eds, London: British Museum Press, 1997. Eloise Donnelly's article on Franks in this issue of *Journal of Art Historiography* provides further evidence of the curator's experience.

<sup>66</sup> JCR to the Duke of Marlborough, 8 June 1868, V&A MA/3/26/198-9.

<sup>67</sup> JCR, Report of the Art Referee for June 1863, 24 July 1863, V&A MA/3/6/53.

<sup>68</sup> *Catalogue des Objets d'Art et d'Antiquités des tableaux, dessins, et médailles de XVe et XVIe Siècle de la collection de M. Eug. Piot*, Paris, Hôtel Drouot (Charles Pillet, commissaire-priseur; MM. Roussel, Rollin et Feuardent, experts), 25-30 April 1864; *Catalogue des Objets d'art et de haute curiosité, antiques du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance qui composent les Collections de feu M. Le Comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier*, Paris, Hôtel Drouot (Charles Pillet, Eugène Escribe, commissaires-priseurs; MM. Roussel, Mannheim, experts) 6 February-21 March 1865.

<sup>69</sup> JCR to Henry Cole, 24 April 1864, V&A MA/3/6/275-6.

closely watched the Piot sale during the entire week of its continuance and at the same time occupied myself in the discovery of art in Paris'.<sup>70</sup> A full four months before the Pourtalès sale, Robinson advises that the budget for the year should take into consideration potential acquisitions at this event.<sup>71</sup> In this report, he reveals that he had previously kept a record of objects in the famed collection that would be desirable for the new museum.

A month after the Piot auction Robinson provides an analysis of the reasons behind the unusually quiet English sale season:

One main cause of this has probably been the increasing infrequency of importations of works of art from the Continent, owing to the exhaustion of foreign countries in this respect. And the great appreciation of such objects in the localities which have heretofore been the principal sources of supply, in other words the prices of works of art of all kinds having risen on the Continent in a ratio which has outstripped the progress in this respect in England; all previous conditions in respect to such works have become reversed.<sup>72</sup>

The dependency of the British market on the Continent's sources of supply reflects the situation since the late seventeenth century. Although no studies to date have focused on the mid-Victorian period, it has been estimated that nearly 20,000 paintings were imported into Britain between 1722-1760.<sup>73</sup> These years cover the period in which Hogarth famously railed against the taste of British collectors. A century later the major difference in this cross-channel art trade was that some of the key players were not individual collectors per se, but public institutions such as the National Gallery under Eastlake and the SKM, the first museum dedicated to the collecting and display of the so-called 'applied arts'. Newly-established museums in Germany were also key players in the transfer,<sup>74</sup> and just a couple of decades later, American collectors and museums would enter the market.

<sup>70</sup> JCR, Report of the Art Referee for April 1864, 18 May 1864, V&A MA/3/7/3-4.

<sup>71</sup> He writes: 'In its 'ensemble' this will be one of the most celebrated and important / private collections now existing...and my Lords may probably think it desirable to keep this sale in view in apportioning the outlay of the grant for acquisitions for the forthcoming year' [JCR, 15 October 1864, V&A MA/3/10/157].

<sup>72</sup> JCR, Report of the Art Referee for May 1864, 28 June 1864, V&A MA/3/8/102.

<sup>73</sup> Dries Lyna, 'In Search of a British Connection. Flemish Dealers on the London Art Market and the Taste for Continental Painting (1750-1800)', in Gould and Mesplède, 104.

<sup>74</sup> For a recent consideration of the influence of German museums on those of the United States, see Kathleen Curran, *The Invention of the American Art Museum: from craft to Kulturgeschichte*, Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016.

This new model of museum-building, not by the opening of a previously-formed royal or princely collection, but by the active participation of public institutions in the marketplace necessitated a new role for curators. Knowledge of the contents of private collections, an understanding of the monetary value of individual objects when these collections came onto the market, the ability to justify the purchase price, and the freedom to act in the fast-paced circumstances of the public auction were attributes that the mid-Victorian curator needed to possess. In the case of Robinson, he applied these skills developed over the course of his employment at the SKM to the dispersal of his own collection. His familiarity with both London and Paris auction houses and the buyers and sellers in those locations led him to choose Charles Pillet and the Hôtel Drouot as the most advantageous location to offer his collection of old master paintings and drawings. Here he attracted buyers who were both active collectors—primarily French but also British—as well as members of the art trade. A comparison of the number of sales of paintings, paintings and drawings, or paintings and other material held in these two cities in the first months of 1868 reveals that Paris handily outstripped London, with thirty-five auctions to London's sixteen. Thus, while London was an important hub for the dispersal of works of art to British collectors, Paris remained central to the pan-European market.

By putting this two-day sale under the metaphorical microscope, it is possible to draw broader conclusions. Robinson's decision to bring his collection to Paris demonstrates his expertise not only as a scholar but also as a player in the art market during the second half of the nineteenth century. For a newly-established museum that focused on objects rather than paintings, the Continent provided opportunities for making significant but not budget-breaking acquisitions. However, this very activity could not help but affect the market, leading to greater competition from other European museums and increasing prices that hampered the SKM's purchasing power. Coupled with the museum's evolving mission as conceived of by Henry Cole, these market conditions set the stage for Robinson's reduced and ultimately eliminated role. As the author of the biographical note in *Art and Design for All* has observed, Robinson's career after his tenure at the SKM was by all accounts a success, culminating with his assumption of the position of Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures in 1882. Unlike collectors such as Salting who purchased works from Robinson, however, he was not in a financial position to keep all the works he purchased in these early years of his career or bequeath them to a public institution on his death. Of the works offered in 1868, there is evidence of only one remaining with Robinson until he brought to auction his collection of drawings at Christie's in 1902.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the unusually extensive entries in

<sup>75</sup> This drawing was Claude, *Study of Trees, after nature* (cat. no. 116); it was lot 81 in the 12-14 May 1902 sale held at Christie's, London. While this catalogue notes the drawing's previous

the auction catalogue along with his *Memoranda* demonstrate Robinson's desire to retain a tangible memorial to this short-lived collection. In 1895, Robinson presented the National Gallery with a second, later version of El Greco's *Christ Driving the Traders from the Temple* (NG1457).<sup>76</sup> Although he does not mention the painting that he put up for sale in 1868, in the letter addressed to Edward Poynter, then director of the museum, he writes in terms reminiscent of his words from nearly thirty years before: 'I have seen literally hundreds of Greco's pictures in Spain & amongst them only very few up to the level of the present work.'<sup>77</sup> Here, Robinson continues to draw upon his extensive knowledge of works of art that he had seen on his travels through Europe. It is not difficult to imagine that in making this gift to the nation he was, in some part, paying tribute to his early collection.

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presence in the Esdaile and Mayor collections, it does not include a reference to its appearance at the 1868 auction [*A Collection of Drawings by Old Masters Formed by a Well-Known Amateur During the last Forty Years*, 11]. The sale totaled 451 lots.

<sup>76</sup> He acquired the painting at an anonymous sale held at Christie's 30 June 1877. In the dossier at the National Gallery, it is noted that the auctioneer's catalogue at Christie's gives the vendor's name as Samuel Mira [NG Archives, NG1457].

<sup>77</sup> JCR to Edward Poynter, 18 May 1895 [NG Archives, NG1457]

Appendix:  
Buyers active at the 7-8 May 1868 Sale of John Charles  
Robinson (in alphabetical order)

Paintings and oil sketches were catalogued as lots 1-56, drawings  
followed as lots 57-127

ARAGO, Etienne

Henri de Bles (attribué), Adoration des mages (cat. no. 9/order of sale: 45): 120  
francs

Rembrandt, Étude de vieux mendiant ou juif assis (65/96): 26 francs

Peter Molyn, Deux paysages hollandais montés sur la même feuille (74/60) 41  
francs

Adrian van Ostade, Un mendiant ou colporteur à la porte d'une chaumière.  
Composition de six figures (80/105): 121 francs

ARMAND, Alfred [7 blvd des Capucines]

Van Dyck, Esquisse en clair-obscur sur panneau (21/30): 1,780 francs

Van Dyck, Le Jardin d'amour (23/28): 320 francs

André del Sarte, Portrait de Lucrezia Fede, sa femme (96/120): 195 francs

Le Titien, Le sacrifice d'Isaac (97/114): 330 francs

Parmegiano, Cupidon qui vient de lancer une flèche (101/117): 120 francs

BOULANGER

Mortier, Portrait d'une dame française (123/89): 43 francs

BOURGEOIS

Henry Martin Rokes Sorgh, Allégorie de la Paix (37/22): 900 francs

Sieberechts, Paysage hollandaise avec figures et animaux (45/23): 760 francs

BRUANT [rue Fléchier]<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Bruant acted as an expert for Pillet in sales such as that of 31 January 1865 (L.28242) and Charles Oudart on 16 April 1869 (L.31190)

Marcello Venusti (d'après Michel-Ange), La Sainte Famille dite 'Il Silenzio'  
(50/18): 1,360 francs

*Memoranda*, no. 6

DANLOS, Auguste

Antoine van Dyck, Portrait d'homme (60/82): 136 francs

DÉLÉCLUZE

Bartolommeo Schidone, Adoration des berger (44/49): 49 francs

DUVAL

Le Corrège, Un saint tenant un livre et entouré d'anges dans des nuages  
(100/112) 225 francs

FEBVRE

Dirck van Bergen, Paysage avec figures et animaux (5/7): 785 francs

Ecole Flamand (première moitié du XV siècle), Un évêque tenant sa crosse, assis  
et foulant aux pieds plusieurs figures d'hommes qui luttent ensemble (58/79):  
84 francs

Adrien van de Velde, L'apparition de l'ange aux bergers (77/108): 220 francs

Adrian van Ostade, Intérieur d'un cabaret. -- Composition de plusieurs figures de  
paysans buvant et fumant (79/106): 400 francs

Lorenzo Costa, Deux tritons ayant chacun une sirène sur le dos et luttant ensemble  
(91/118): 290 francs

[Italian], Feuille de vélin d'un grand livre de chœur italien du XVe siècle, avec  
bordure enrichie d'enluminures représentant des épisodes de l'histoire de Joseph  
(110/57): 2 francs

FÉRAL [?]

Atkinson, La Plage de Brighton; départ des pêcheurs (127/72): 55 francs

GIGOUX, Jean (1806-1894)

Van Dyck, Le mariage de saint Catherine (61/58): 30 francs

Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout, Le repos en Egypte (69/54): 8 francs 50

Adrien van de Velde, Paysage. Intérieur d'une forêt (78/56): 13 francs

Elizabeth A. Pergam

John Charles Robinson in 1868: a Victorian curator's  
collection on the block

Nicolas Maas, *L'Adoration des bergers* (66/94): 30 francs

GUIMBART [?]<sup>79</sup>

Jean Lingelbach, *Marchand d'orviétan italien, jouant un air de guitare avant de  
montrer sa merchandise* (28/1): 255 francs

Dirck Stoop, *Halte de chasseurs* (46/5): 425 francs

HIRSCH

Rubens, *Allégorie de Rome triomphante* (39/32): 1,900 francs

*Memoranda*, no. 37

Cook collection, Vol. II: no. 340 ['bought from Sir J. C. Robinson for  
£150']

Rubens, *La même sujet autrement traité* (40/31): 142 francs

HULOT, Anatole Auguste

Barroccio, *Descente de croix*. -- *Esquisse achevée en grisaille sur papier huilé*  
(3/121) 430 francs

Lot 132 of *Catalogue des tableaux anciens et modernes composant l'importante  
collection de M. A. Hulot*, Paris, Hôtel Drouot (Paul Chevalier,  
commissaire-priseur; Eugène Féral, Georges Petit, experts), 9-10 May  
1892 (L. 50896)

Rubens après Jules Romano, *Neptune sur son char, traîné par des chevaux marins,  
entouré de tritons et de sirènes* (59/80): 89 francs

Philippe de Koning, *Une femme hollandaise* (68/92): 211 francs

Adrian van Ostade, *Une vieille femme hollandaise* (81/107): 1,400 francs

Peter Bout, *Un corps de garde hollandais* (89/84): 81 francs

Fra Bartolommeo, *Composition de plusieurs figures de saints rangés autour d'un  
tabernacle, dans lequel on voit un calice avec l'hostie* (94/119): 116 francs

[Italian], *Deux feuilles de vélin d'un petit missis florentin enrichies d'exquises  
enluminures, fin du XVe siècle* (109/115): 355 francs

<sup>79</sup> In the annotated catalogue held by the Frick Art Reference Library, the buyer is identified  
as Binbar; however, that spelling of the buyer's name is most likely incorrect.

Elizabeth A. Pergam

John Charles Robinson in 1868: a Victorian curator's  
collection on the block

Claude Lorrain, Paysage italien. Dans le premier plan un troupeau de boeufs  
passant sur un petit pont (112/101): 420 francs

Louvre RF29,013 [Roethlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Drawings*, no. 493]

Claude Lorrain, Paysage classique -- Au premier plan Narcisse se mirant dans l'eau  
(113/102): 330 francs

Copenhagen, Royal Museum of Fine Arts [Roethlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The  
Drawings*, no. 832]

Gaspar Dughet, Paysage (119/81): 87 francs

Martin Schongauer, Sainte tenant à la main deux flèches (125/70): 83 francs

Hans Holbein, Soldat allemand tenant une hallebarde sur l'épaule (126/77) 70  
francs

MARQUISET, Gaston (1826-1889)

Antoine Watteau, Saint Antoine en prière (120/71): 40 francs

Marquiset sale (L49505), Hôtel Drouot, Paris (Delestre/Féral), 28-29  
April 1890, lot 152; sold for 610 francs

MEAUME, Edouard

Adrian van Ostade, Le Roi boit. -- Composition de cinq figures de paysans  
hollandaise (82/104): 24 francs

MOURIAU

Italian/Dossi (2), Deux dessins: un plafond attribué à Dosso Dossi, et un sujet  
d'architecture italienne du XVe siècle (111/61): 25 francs

François Boucher, Deux dessins montés sur la même feuille à scènes pastorales.

Deux jeune bergers endormis, et une jeune fille avec un panier et un enfant dormant  
à son côté (121/52): 23 francs

MÜNDLER, Otto

Chardin, *Le Confessional* (15/46): 110 francs

PARIS, VILLE DE

Jehan Clouet, Portrait, vu de trois quarts, d'Éléonore d'Autriche, femme de  
François Ier. De grandeur naturelle, avec fond vert somber (16/35): 5,000 francs

Chevalier RAMBERT

Cherubino Alberti, Portrait d'un vieillard tenant une flèche ou arme de trait à la  
main (2/51) 141 francs

*Memoranda*, no. 23

REISET, Frédéric [for Princesse Mathilde]

Jacob de Bray, *Portrait de l'artiste et de sa femme* (11/33): 4,010 francsJan de Bray, *Portrait of the Artist's Parents, Salomon de Bray and Anna  
Westerbaen*, 1664 (National Gallery of Art, 2001.86.1)

SALTING, George

Alonso Sanchez Coello, *Portrait d'un chevalier de Santiago* (17/11): 200 francs  
(with cat. no. 18)Alonso Sanchez Coello, *Portrait d'une dame* (18/11): see aboveDomenico Feti, *Saint Pierre reniant le Christ* (24/44): 300 francsVelazquez, *Figure d'enfant, à mi-corps, avec la tête d'un serviteur* (49/36): 4,850  
francsSpanish (?), 19<sup>th</sup> century (?), *A Man, and a Child Eating Grapes* (NG2526)Rembrandt, *Femmes enseignant à une jeune enfant à marcher* (62/93): 211 francs  
British Museum 1910,0212.187Rembrandt, *Joseph interprétant les songes de sommelier et du boulanger de  
Pharaon* (63/87): 12 francsRembrandt, *Abraham and Isaac* (64/95): 60 francsPhilippe de Koning, *Une femme montée sur une mule et conduite en  
procession par une foule de vieillards et d'hommes armés* (67/53): 26 francsPeter Molyn, *Paysage, scène d'hiver. Un canal hollandais avec quantité de  
figures et traîneaux sur la glace* (73/59): 31 francs

British Museum 1910,0212.160

Paul Potter, *Etude de quatre cochons* (75/67): 42 francs

British Museum 1910,0212.173

Cornelius Saftleven, *Trois moutons et un veau dans une prairie* (76/62): 15  
francsJacob Esselens, *Paysage. L'entrée d'une femme* (87/62): 12 francs

Backhuysen, Marine. Les bords du Zuyderzée. Cabanes de pêcheurs avec  
plusieurs figures et bateaux (88/109): 220 francs  
British Museum 1910,0212.113

Jacob Cats, Paysage hollandais. Au premier plan, un paysan conduisant un  
jeune taureau (90/86): 110 francs  
British Museum 1910,0212.129

Fra Bartolommeo, Saint Famille. La Vierge avec l'Enfant Jésus, sainte Élisabeth  
et saint Jean-Baptiste (93/111): 355 francs  
British Museum 1910,0212.10 as school/circle of

Pocetti, L'Evanouissement de la sainte Vierge (105/69): 56 francs

Francesco Vanni, Sacra conversazione. -- La Vierge avec l'enfant Jésus assis sur  
un trône, avec saint Jean-Baptiste et sainte Catherine (106/64): 31 francs

Guercino, Sainte Famille (107/65): 36 francs

Guercino, Vénus, Mars et Cupidon (108/73): 70 francs  
British Museum 1910,0212.4

Claude Lorrain, Vue d'un château italien entouré de maisonnettes (114/103):  
420 francs  
British Museum 1910,0212.90 [Roethlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The  
Drawings*, no. 622]

Claude Lorrain, Ruines d'un temple antique (118/99): 49 francs  
Possibly British Museum 1910,0212.94 [Roethlisberger, *Claude Lorrain:  
The Drawings*, no. 718]

Jean-Jacques de Boissieu, Paysage. Vue d'un village dans un pays montagneux  
(122/90): 83 francs  
British Museum 1910,0212.85

TRIQUETI, Baron Henri de  
Botticelli, La Vierge, l'enfant Jésus et saint Jean (10/25): 1,530 francs  
*Memoranda*, no. 3

Bought in by ROBINSON  
Mariotto Albertinelli, Quatre petits panneaux dans un même cadre, peints à  
l'huile sur fond d'or (1/41): 300 francs  
*Memoranda*, no. 5

Lot 64 of *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures by Richard Wilson, R.A....Old Pictures...*, Christie's, London, 14 June 1929: bought by Agnews for £189

Giovanni Bellini (école), Portrait d'une dame vénitienne, vêtue d'une robe richement brodée (4/42): 300 francs

Nicolas Berchem, La Sainte Famille, endormie dans une étable, est avertie par l'ange qu'elle doit fuir vers l'Égypte. Effet de nuit (6/10): 165 francs

Gerard Berkheyden, Intérieur de la Vieille Église à Amsterdam, avec nombre de figures (7/6): 485 francs  
Cook collection, Vol. II, no. 206 (as by 1869)

Job Berkheyden, Intérieur de la Vieille Bourse d'Amsterdam, avec un brillant effet de soleil (8/8): 440 francs  
Cook collection, Vol. II, no. 209

Moretto da Brescia, La Vierge, placée sur un siège élevé, désigne de sa droite à l'enfant Jésus, assis sur ses genoux, les fidèles qui sont supposés être aux pieds du trône, en le priant de les bénir. L'enfant répond par des careesses à la demande de sa mère (12/43): 260 francs

Pedro Campana, Le Crucifiement, avec la Madeleine embrassant le pied de la croix et la mise au tombeau dans le fond (13/14): 245 francs

Alonso Cano, La Vierge dans sa gloire, entourée d'anges (14/26): 1,400  
*Memoranda*, no. 30  
Leeds, 1868, no. 45  
Cook collection, Vol. III, no. 512

Lucas Cranach, La Tentation (19/12): 540 francs  
*Memoranda*, no. 35

Karel Dujardin (attribué), Paysage avec animaux (20/3): 280 francs

Antoine van Dyck, Étude de grandeur naturelle d'une tête de Madeleine repentante (22/29): 370 francs  
Cook collection, Vol. II, no. 248 (as by 1869 for £16)

Domenico Theotocopolo, Le Christ chassant les vendeurs du Temple (25/38): 2,900 francs  
*Memoranda*, no. 28

Cook collection, Vol. III, no. 495

El Greco, *Christ Cleansing the Temple* (National Gallery of Art, Kress  
Collection, 1957.14.4)

Domenico Theotocopolo, Tête ou buste du Sauveur donnat la bénédiction; la main  
gauche est appuyée sur un globe (26/16): 170 francs

Nicolas Maas, Vertume et Pomona (29/20): 1,400 francs

Giovanni Battista Moroni (attribué), Portrait de Marco Carena, célèbre joueur de  
luth véronais (30/2): 195

Murillo, Demi-figure de saint tenant un baton (31/15): 95 francs

Cook collection, Vol. III: no. 530 (as attributed to)

Parmegiano, Repos en Egypte (32/34): 2,000 francs

*Memoranda*, no. 13

Cook Collection, Vol. I: no. 96

Courtauld Gallery, London (P.1978.PG.308)

Antonio Pollajuollo (attribué), Un sacrifice (33/47): 45 francs

François Porbus (ou Pourbus), Portrait en buste d'Isabelle de Bourbon, fille d'Henri  
IV et première femme de Philippe IV d'Espagne (34/13): 580 francs

Rembrandt, Jésus sur le montagne des Oliviers, visité par l'ange (35/27): 700

Felice Riccio, Les Disciples dans la barque, sur le lac de Galilée, avec le Christ  
sauvant saint Pierre (36/4): 140 francs

*Memoranda*, no. 22

Rubens, Jupiter et Danaé (43/48): 325 francs

David Teniers, Le Jeu du croquet (47/17) 450 francs

David Teniers, Portrait d'un gentilhomme (48/50) 90 francs

Ecole de Léonard da Vinci, La Vierge avec l'Enfant Jésus et saint Jean dans un  
paysage (51/19): 750 francs

*Memoranda*, no. 10

Ary de Vos, Tête de jeune homme (52/21): 950 francs

Roger van der Weyden (ou Hugo van der Goes), La Vierge et l'Enfant Jésus, avec  
saint Jean-Baptiste et saint Pierre, saint Côme et saint Damien (53/37): 6,800 francs

*Memoranda*, no. 33

Cook Collection, Vol. III: no. 454

Phillips Wouwerman, Vue sur la côte (54/9): 960 francs

Phillips Wouwerman, Apparition de l'ange aux bergers (55/24): 1,800 francs

Michel-Ange (d'après), Tête de femme, vue de profil (56/66): 46 francs

Ecole de Jean van Eyck, Deux femmes à genoux, vêtues de riches costumes  
flamands du temps (57/78): 89 francs

Jan Livens, Portrait du grand-pensionnaire de Witt (70/74): 30 francs

Jan Livens, Portrait de Jan de Stein, peintre de fleurs (71/83): 125 francs

Adam Elsheimer, Paysage. Au pied d'une colline un village entouré d'arbres. Effet  
de soir (72/76): 42 francs

Jean Hackert, Paysage italien. Vue d'un pays montagneux richement boisé. Un  
ruisseau au premier plan. Brillant effet de soleil (84/91): 85 francs

Cornelius Vischer, Tête de jeune garçon. -- Étude d'après nature (85/75): 71 francs

Théodore Helmbrecker, Etude d'après nature. Tête de jeune homme en raccourci  
(86/55): 15 francs

Lorenzo da Credi, Tête de vieillard (92/85): 88 francs

Léonard da Vinci, Vénus debout (95/122): 410 francs

Le Titien, Portrait d'homme (98/113): 92 francs

Paul Véronese, Sainte Famille, avec sainte Catherine et saint Jean-Baptiste (99/87): 70  
francs

Parmegiano, Etude de figures classiques (102/68): 60 francs

Parmegiano, Le Mariage d'Alexandre et de Roxane (103/97?)<sup>80</sup>

Parmegiano, Trois hommes traversant une rivière dans un bac (104/88): 103 francs

Claude Lorrain, Paysage. Les dehors des murailles d'une ville italienne, effet de soleil de midi (115/97): 180 francs

[Roethlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Drawings*, no. 143 as Gathorne-Hardy Coll., Newbury]

Claude Lorrain, Étude d'arbres d'après nature (116/100): 128 francs

JCR sale, 12 May 1902, lot 81

[Roethlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Drawings*, no. 55 as Gathorne-Hardy Coll., Newbury]

Claude Lorrain, Vue d'une porte sur le Tibre (117/98): 86 francs

Murillo, *Portrait d'homme et tête d'enfant* (124/116): 195 francs

No. 123 in the order of sale was also bought in by Robinson (for 75 francs), but the catalogue number is illegible

WITHDRAWN

Rubens, Paysage avec un berger et un troupeau de moutons (38)

Rubens, Méléagre et Atalante, dans un paysage boisé, chassant le sanglier (41)

NOT ON THE REGISTER

J. D. De Heem, Sujet de fleurs, fruits et oiseux (27)

Rubens, Jésuite prêchant un sermon devant un auditoire d'hommes et de femmes qui sont représentés assis dans un église. Composition d'un grand nombre de figures (42)

Adrian van Ostade, La Boutique d'un fabricant de cadres (83)



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<sup>80</sup> Because the register does not include the artist associated with the drawings, it is particularly difficult to connect the catalogue number to the sale order when the handwriting is illegible.

