

## Article from The Times

### **Never trust a first impression!**

Paris police have arrested the artist Pellettier and his acquaintance the boulevardier Naudet, and charged them with the death of the Impressionist painter Santier, found dead while painting in the Bois du Boulogne some weeks ago. Their suspicions fell on Naudet, a man about town whose creditors were pressing him for money, as he alone stood to gain from Santier's death. Although not a known collector, he had recently acquired several works by the painter, the value of which has since gone up to around Fr 5000 each! Pellettier had also been behaving strangely, said acquaintances, having been liberal in his praise of Santier's work before his death, but then, strangely, very scathing of the same after the painter's mysterious demise. On investigation he was found to have 3 of Santier's paintings hidden behind the bidet in his lodgings on the top floor of the Maison de Tolerance in the street where Santier had his studio.

Pellettier, after a little persuasion, has since confessed to carrying out the murder, say the police. He also admitted to forging the painting found on the easel. This, proudly explained the Inspector, clearly had not been painted by Santier as it was not his usual size 5 canvas. It had also been signed when he was still working on it, appeared to have been painted indoors, as there was no unpainted canvas lower centre where the wooden easel support would have been, and the bright red of the boat was not among the colours on his palette. The 'refusé' stamp on the back referred to another painting under the forgery.

'Naudet put me up to it', whined Pellettier, nursing a black eye. 'He desperately needed cash, and so did I, and I was very bitter about the fact that so many painters are only appreciated after their deaths, when the large sums their works fetch only enrich collectors and dealers, notoriously already rolling, while the artists die of starvation. My latest painting, with infinitely more advanced technique than the blobs of unformed colour produced by these so-called 'impressionists', had been yet again refused by the Salon. Naudet suggested he buy some works by a promising painter like Santier, and that once concluded the deal, we ensured he died rapidly. He would give me two of the pictures for my part in the scheme. I climbed into Santier's studio through the window on the roof, saw what he was working on, and painted a similar landscape. Then I went back and put a large dose of powdered digitalis, which Santier used in pill form for a heart complaint, in the hip flask full of brandy he always takes with him when working 'en plein air', which is the ridiculous expression these daubers use. Next morning I put the forged canvas in my pack with my own work and went out as usual. I only had to keep an eye on Santier from behind a hedge, and when he collapsed I had ample time to change over the paintings and substitute the flask before disappearing. I thought his death would have been attributed to his weak heart. Thus I could count on having three of his works to sell after their prices had soared.

'I find it deploring that anyone could meet their death because of paintings that a 5 year old could do better', said Chef de Police Marcel Duchamp, 'what is French culture coming to?'

Diana Jennifer Malden – Arezzo 18<sup>th</sup> October 2008