

CHARLES EDE



Jean Frédéric Bazille (French, 1841–1870)

*Mélopée*, 1870

Oil on canvas, unlined

32.4 × 24.5cm

**PROVENANCE**

The estate of the artist, and by inheritance to, Paul Castelnau (1833–1892), by descent to his daughter Jeanne Castelnau (1856–1921), and her husband Felix Rouffio (1845–1915), by descent to their son Paul Rouffio (1885–1951), by descent to his sister Marie Rouffio (1897–1987), and her husband Frédéric Westphal (1891–1978) (documented in a photograph taken in the family house) Private collection, France, by descent from the above, until 2026

**PUBLICATIONS**

Schulman, Michel, *Frédéric Bazille: The Digital Catalogue Raisonné*, 2023, as Msb — 87, available at: <https://www.bazille-catalogue.com/monotonous-chant-87.html> (accessed 2026).

*The work is included in the online catalogue raisonné of Frédéric Bazille compiled by Michel Schulman (no. 87). A certificate from Michel Schulman, dated 21 January 2022, will be provided to the purchaser. The work is also accompanied by a signed attestation from the consignor, a descendant of the Bazille family.*

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Mottin, Bruno, “L’œuvre de Frédéric Bazille (1841–1870) examiné au laboratoire,” *Technè*, no. 46, 2018, pp. 30–38, available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/techne/335> (accessed 2026)

Schulman, Michel, *Frédéric Bazille: Catalogue raisonné*. Paris: Éditions des catalogues raisonnés, 1995.

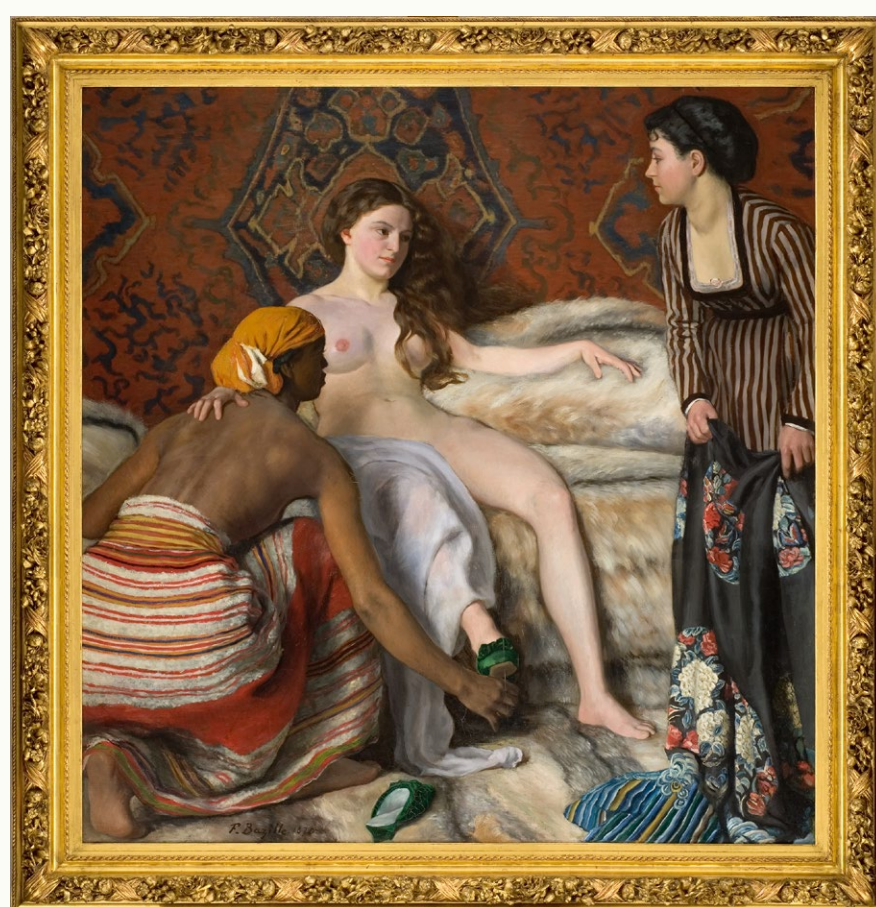
Schulman, Michel, *Frédéric Bazille: Supplément au catalogue raisonné*. Paris: Chez l’auteur, 2023.

Bindman, David, and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds., *The Image of the Black in Western Art. Vol. V: The Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.



One of Bazille's final works, *Mélopée* occupies a distinct position within his production of 1870, the year of his death in the Franco-Prussian War. Painted contemporaneously with two major late compositions, *La Toilette* (Musée Fabre, Montpellier) and *Young Woman with Peonies* (known in versions at the Musée Fabre, Montpellier and the National Gallery of Art, Washington), it features the same Black female model who appears in both works, establishing her as a central presence in his practice at this decisive moment. Her recurring use of a headscarf, consistent across these compositions, reinforces this continuity of model and motif. The painting was executed in Bazille's studio on the Rue de la Condamine in the Batignolles district, a workspace he shared in the final years of his life with Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

The painting has never been publicly exhibited or offered for sale and is presented here for the first time, having remained with the descendants of the Bazille family. It is unlined and in excellent condition, preserving the immediacy and clarity of the original brushwork.



*La Toilette*, 1869–70,  
Oil on canvas 153 × 143 cm  
Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France



*Young Woman with Peonies*  
Oil on canvas, 60.3 × 75.2 cm  
Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France

Detail of *Young Woman with Peonies*  
Oil on canvas, 60.3 × 75.2 cm  
Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France





Thomas Eakins (1844–1916),  
*Female Model*, c.1869  
 Oil on canvas, 76.8 × 68.6cm  
 De Young Museum, San Francisco

Although her name is unrecorded, the model appears to be the same woman represented in Thomas Eakins's *Female Model* (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco). Eakins resided in Paris between 1866 and 1869, directly overlapping with Bazille's most active years. The model's presence in both artists' work points not simply to the circulation of professional sitters, but to a shared visual culture within the Batignolles circle, in which models moved between studios and became part of a common artistic vocabulary. Within Bazille's own production, she can be identified across a small but significant group of late works, including both versions of *Young Woman with Peonies* and *La Toilette*, making *Mélopée* part of a coherent and sustained engagement with a single sitter.

This circulation is inseparable from the social fabric of late nineteenth century Paris. The Batignolles district, where Bazille's studio on the Rue de la Condamine was located, was a heterogeneous and rapidly changing environment, shaped by migration from both the French provinces and from France's colonies. The increased visibility of Black Parisians within this milieu formed part of the lived reality that underpinned the emergence of modern painting. In this sense, the presence of Black models in Bazille's work is not incidental, but reflects the demographic and cultural conditions of the Batignolles group. Bazille's treatment inevitably invites comparison with Édouard Manet's *Olympia*, where the figure of the Black maid occupies a structurally essential role within a radically modern composition. Bazille, however, advances this development further. Rather than positioning the Black figure as an adjunct within a larger pictorial system, he places her at the centre of the composition, granting her full pictorial and psychological autonomy. The resulting image is quieter,

but more concentrated, aligning with a distinctly modern redefinition of subjecthood.

This engagement coincides with a marked development in Bazille's work around 1869 to 1870, when he begins to explore Orientalist subject matter, albeit refracted through an Impressionist and distinctly modern sensibility. In *La Toilette*, conceived as a large scale Salon picture, he adopts a theme drawn from the established repertoire of Orientalist painting, depicting a female bather within an implicitly exoticised, harem like setting, signalled through details such as the oriental carpet and costume. This work emphasises the extent to which Bazille was willing to adapt his painting to the perceived expectations of the Salon jury. The choice of subject, closely aligned with the Orientalist galleries of the Louvre, reflects an awareness that one of the decisive voices within the jury would be Jean Léon Gérôme, its president and a leading exponent of the genre. It was an approach that had recently proved effective within his immediate circle, notably in the case of Renoir, whose *Odalisque* of 1870 was accepted by the jury. Given that Bazille shared a studio with Renoir at this time, this success can only have reinforced the appeal of such a direction.

In this context, Bazille's adoption of an Orientalist subject may be understood as a calculated attempt to secure recognition within the official system. The outcome, however, was uncertain. While *La Toilette* was ultimately rejected, *Scene d'ete* or *The Bathers* (Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts) was accepted, underscoring the often complex and political nature of Salon decisions, a situation that appears to have remained a source of frustration for the artist. A related interest is evident in *Woman in Moorish Costume* (Norton Simon Museum), where the emphasis lies less on ethnographic precision than on painterly handling and the presence of the figure. Yet even within this framework, Bazille's approach remains distinct, eschewing Gérôme's highly finished surfaces in favour of a more direct



Edouard Manet (1832–1883),  
*Olympia*, 1863–5  
Oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



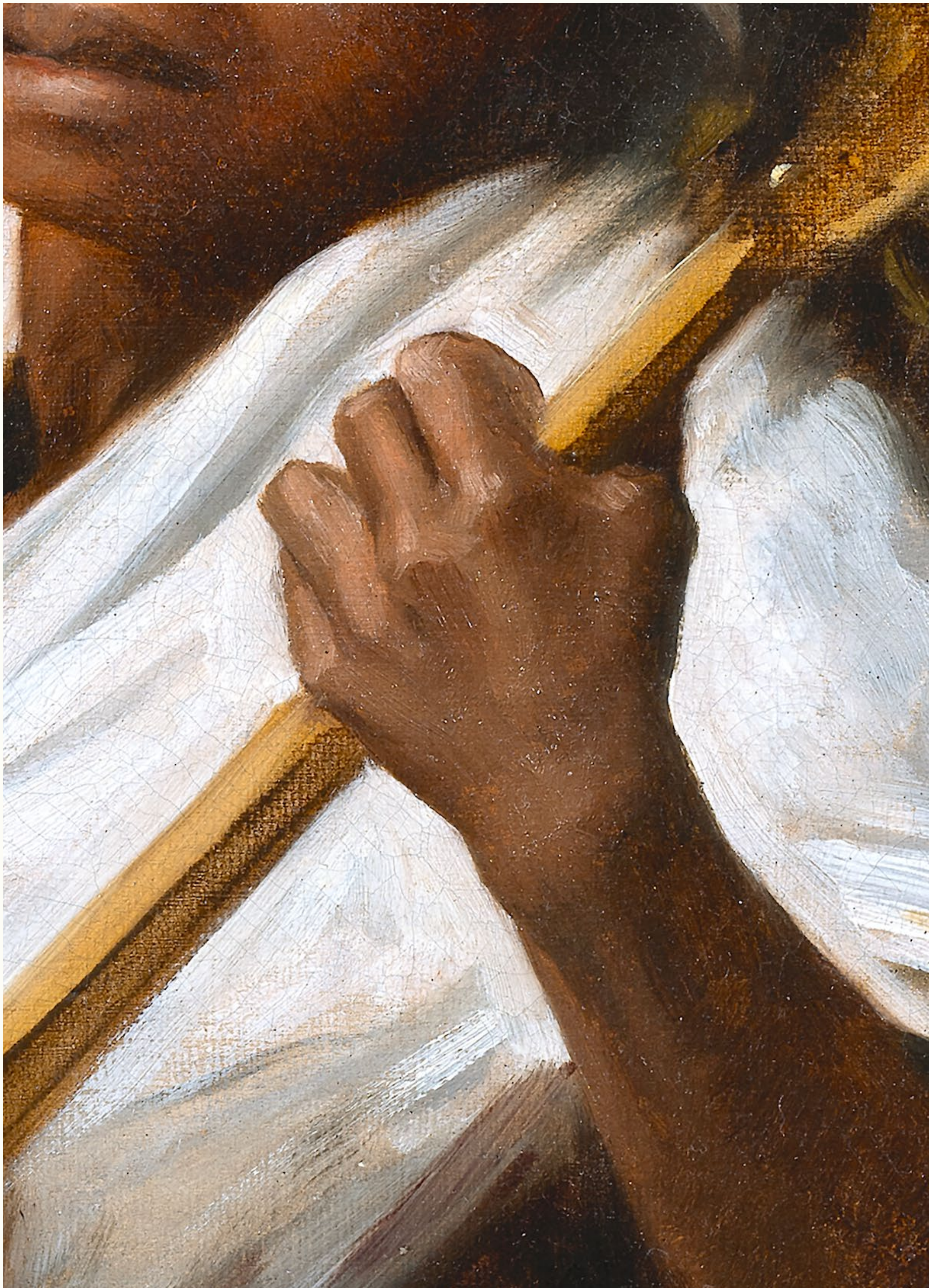
*Woman in a Moorish Costume*, 1869  
Oil on canvas, 99.7 × 59 cm  
Norton Simon Museum of Art

and painterly execution, integrating Orientalist motifs into a broader modern pictorial language.

The importance of this composition within Bazille’s practice is underscored by its appearance, unfinished, at the centre of Bazille’s *Studio on the Rue de la Condamine*, where it occupies a pivotal position among the works in progress. Contemporary correspondence further illuminates his engagement with the model: in letters to his mother, Bazille describes having found a “ravishing model”, noting that she was “ruinously expensive” and a “superb négresse”, remarks that point both to her professional status and to the particular value he placed upon her presence in the studio.

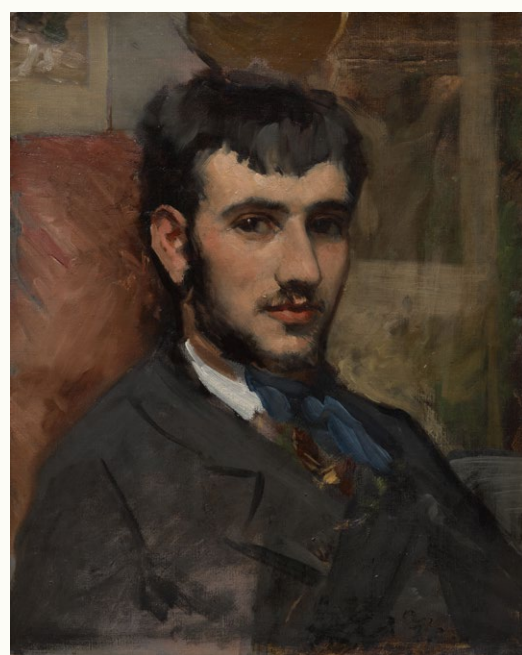
As David Bindman has suggested, the model may nevertheless have been known personally to Bazille rather than engaged purely as an anonymous sitter (Bindman and Gates, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 2012). Her repeated appearance across his late works suggests a sustained and deliberate focus. Taken together, *Mélopée*, *La Toilette*, and *Young Woman with Peonies* form a tightly connected group in which Bazille turns decisively towards Black sitters. In doing so, he not only reflects the social realities of Batignolles and the wider Parisian diaspora, but also contributes to the broader modernist project of redefining who may occupy the centre of a painting.

In *Mélopée* she is shown alone, seated and playing a long necked string instrument, possibly a loutar or lotar, related to the lute traditions of the Greek and Arab worlds. Music, a recurring interest for Bazille and the subject of his lost *Young Girl at the Piano* (Salon of 1866), provides the motif. The emphasis, however, rests on the



Detail of *Mélopée*

LEFT: *Portrait of Renoir*, 1867  
Oil on canvas, 40.5 × 32.5 cm  
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland,  
Ohio



RIGHT: Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919)  
*Odalisque*, 1870  
National Gallery of Art, Washington



figure herself: her hands poised on the strings, her expression composed and introspective. The articulation and execution of the hands are closely comparable to those in *Young Woman with Peonies*, and more broadly to the handling seen in *La Toilette*, suggesting a consistent late approach to anatomy and gesture.

The composition is structured through refined chromatic and spatial contrasts. A deep crimson field occupies one side of the background, recalling the uniform tonal grounds used in works such as the *Portrait of Paul Verlaine* and *Young Woman with Peonies*. As Michel Schulman has observed, Bazille repeatedly employed flat areas of colour to isolate and strengthen the presence of his figures. Here, as in the *Portrait of Edouard Maitre*, 1869 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, Schulman Msb 48) and in his *Flowers*, 1870, (Musée Fabre, Montpellier, Schulman Msb 63), the setting is constructed from two planes of wall set at a right angle or nearly so, creating a shallow but deliberate spatial framework. This use of planar division, combined with a restrained palette, reinforces the clarity and immediacy of the figure.

The handling of whites plays an essential role, as in *La Toilette*, where pale passages are set against darker tones to heighten contrast and presence. In *Mélopée*, these whites stand out against the red and



*The Studio on the Rue de la Condamine*,  
1869–70  
Oil on canvas, 98 × 128.5 cm  
Musée d'Orsay



Portrait of Verlaine, 1867  
Oil on canvas, 57.2 × 41.1 cm  
Private collection



Detail of *Mélopée*

*Self-Portrait in Shirt Sleeves, 1870*  
Oil on canvas, 46 × 38 cm  
Private collection



Detail of *Mélopée*

*Two Herrings*, 1864  
 Oil on canvas, 41 × 27.5  
 Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France

black fields, lending the composition both balance and luminosity. The treatment of fabric, particularly in the headscarf, shows a fluidity of handling comparable to that seen in *Two Herrings*, while the broader interest in costume and surface aligns with the Orientalist inflection present in works such as *Woman in Moorish Costume* (Norton Simon Museum) and passages within *La Toilette*.

More generally, Bazille's preference for simplified or flattened backgrounds, often articulated as distinct planes, recurs across his late work and contributes to a modern pictorial economy in which the figure is brought into sharper focus. The angled positioning of the sitter in *Mélopée*, comparable to that in *Young Woman with Peonies* (Musée Fabre), further enhances this sense of immediacy and structural coherence.

Unpublished and previously unseen on the market, *Mélopée* deepens understanding of Bazille's final year, extending the dialogue between his figural compositions, musical themes, and evolving modern sensibility. One of only four known paintings in which he depicts a Black model, it reflects a broader contemporary interest in representing the Parisian diaspora, while remaining firmly anchored in the artist's own distinctive formal language.



Detail of *Mélopée*

Technical examination of the present work reveals a palette and method entirely consistent with mid nineteenth century practice. The pigments identified include lead white, barium white, zinc yellow, iron oxides (hematite, ochres, and umber), chrome yellow, and vermilion, with calcite employed as a charge. Multispectral imaging further confirms that these materials correspond to those in use in the nineteenth century. Such findings align closely with the results of technical studies carried out on Bazille's work, notably those undertaken by the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF) in connection with the 2016 to 2017 exhibition.

The painting is executed on a fine, tightly woven canvas with a relatively fluid, lead rich ground containing minimal filler. The thinness and quality of the support are comparable to those observed in *Young Woman with Peonies* (Montpellier and Washington), where the refined canvas has been noted to contribute to the high quality of finish. The canvas remains unlined and retains a high degree of structural integrity, with minimal intervention. Ultraviolet examination indicates only limited and localised retouching, primarily confined to lighter passages, with no evidence of significant restoration. The preservation of the original surface allows the fluidity of the brushwork and the subtleties of the paint handling to be read with particular clarity.

Particularly significant is the presence of a fluid brown red underpaint, or “sauce”, used to establish the composition and to articulate contrasts between coloured zones. This method, applied with a diluted medium to produce a transparent and mobile layer,

*Woman with Peonies*, c.1870  
Watercolour, gouache, black chalk and  
graphite on card, 33.5 × 52.5 cm  
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



*Young Woman with Peonies*, 1870  
Oil on canvas, 60 × 75cm  
National Gallery of Art, Washington





LEFT: Detail of *Young Woman with Peonie*  
Oil on canvas, 60.3 × 75.2 cm  
Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France



RIGHT: Detail of *Mélopée*

is a defining feature of Bazille's working practice and is consistently observed in the technical analyses carried out at the C2RMF (B. Mottin, Technè, 2018). In the present work, this underlayer plays an active structural role, guiding both tonal relationships and compositional clarity.

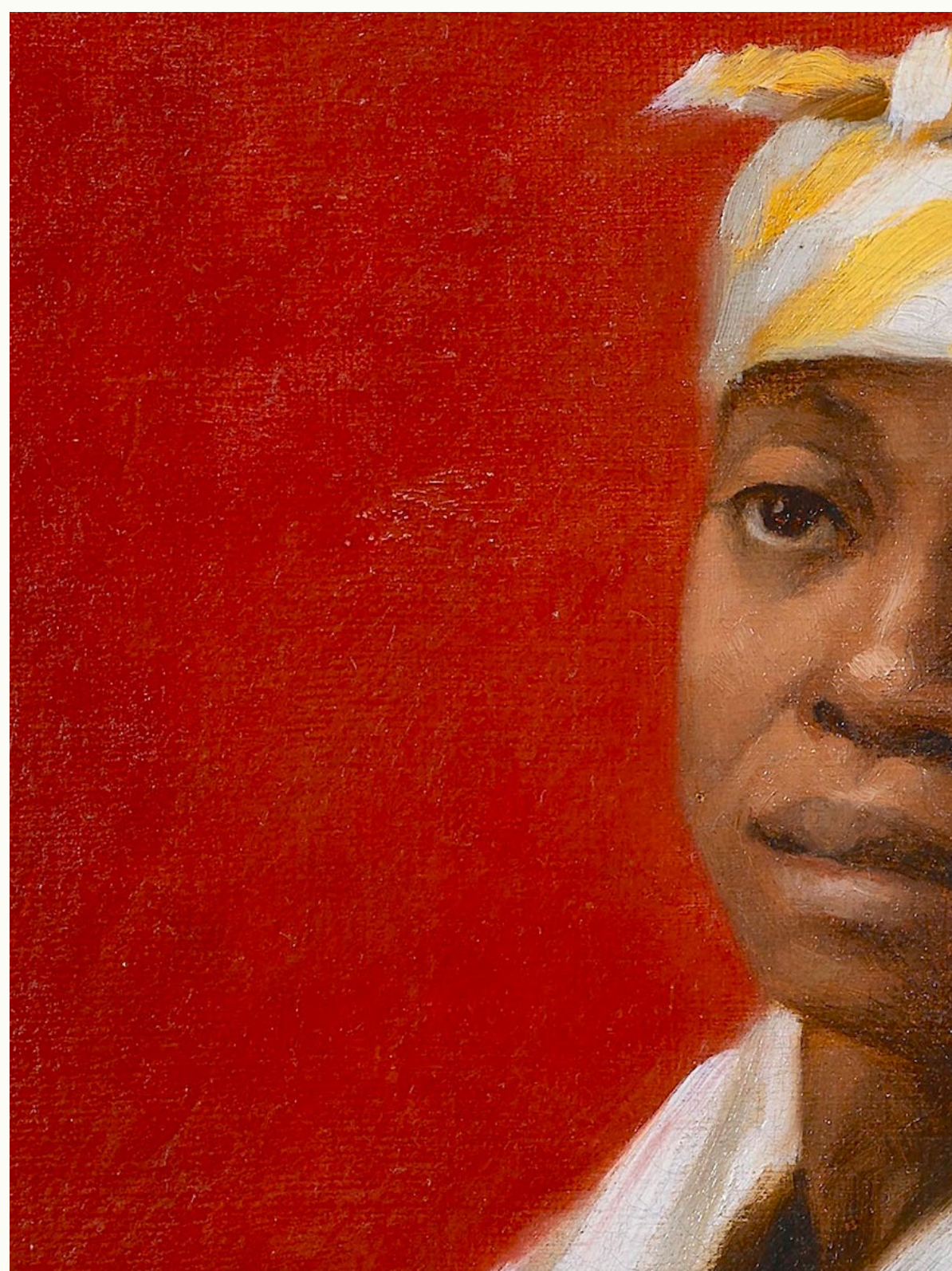
No detailed underdrawing is apparent. Instead, the composition appears to have been laid in directly with the brush, using a succinct and economical linear indication. This approach suggests a degree of rapidity in execution and aligns with Bazille's preference for a direct and fluid working method, notwithstanding the relative scarcity of documentary evidence concerning his precise techniques.

The pictorial layer is built up through a succession of fluid touches, creating a coherent range of warm tonalities. More substantial applications of paint are reserved for key elements, including the figure, the headscarf, and the instrument, where thicker strokes and selective highlights serve to anchor the composition. This progression from thin, broadly applied layers to more defined accents corresponds closely to the stratigraphic structure observed in Bazille's paintings examined at the C2RMF.

Overall, the technical characteristics of the present work, including its materials, support, ground preparation, use of a brown red "sauce", brush led execution, and controlled build up of the paint surface, are consistent with those identified in the scientific study of Bazille's oeuvre. As Michel Schulman has observed, Bazille's painting is distinguished by both clarity of vision and sensitivity of execution, qualities that are fully evident in the present work, which adds coherently to the established corpus of the artist.



Photograph the *Mélopée* hanging in the home of the Westphal family



LEFT: Detail of *Mélopée*

RIGHT: Detail of *Young Woman with Peonies*, 1870  
Oil on canvas, 60 × 75cm  
National Gallery of Art, Washington

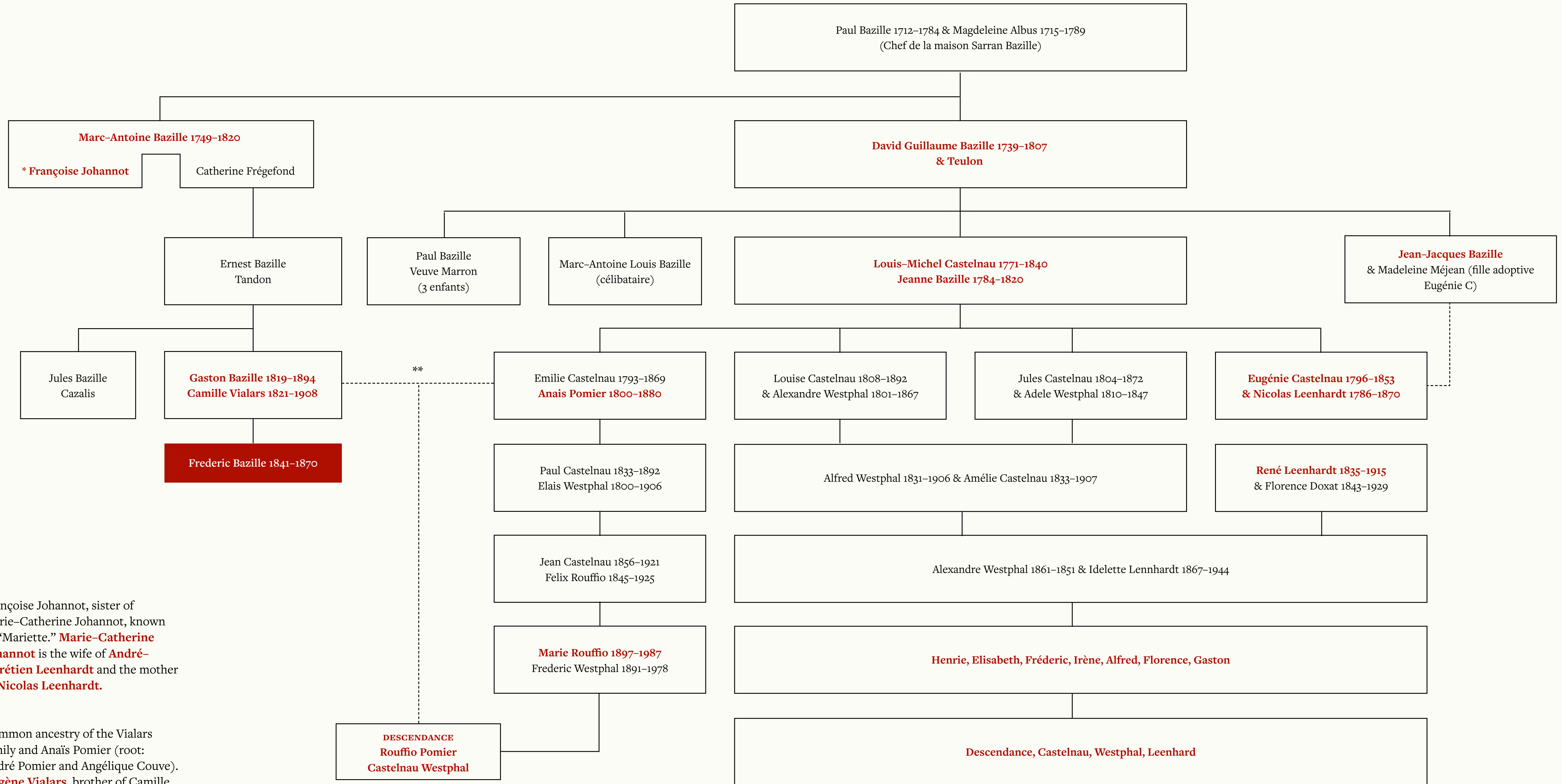


ABOVE: Detail of *Young Woman with Peonies*, 1870  
Oil on canvas, 60 × 75cm  
National Gallery of Art, Washington

BELOW: Detail of *Mélopée*

# Alliances Bazille — Westphal — Leenhardt — Castelnau — Vialars — Pomier

Partial table of family relationships, produced by Malo Westphal based on the family tree of Félix Rouffio dated 1905, supplemented by the Bazille, Leenhardt, Vialars, and Pomier family trees.



\*  
Françoise Johannot, sister of Marie-Catherine Johannot, known as "Mariette." **Marie-Catherine Johannot** is the wife of **André-Chrétien Leenhardt** and the mother of **Nicolas Leenhardt**.

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Common ancestry of the Vialars family and Anais Pomier (root: André Pomier and Angélique Couve). **Eugène Vialars**, brother of Camille Vialars, inherits the name "Pomier Layrargues." He marries **Antonie Leenhardt**, sister of **René Leenhardt**.



Jean Frédéric Bazille (French, 1841–1870)  
*Mélopée*, 1870  
Oil on canvas, unlined  
32.4 × 24.5cm

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