

July 31, 1947

Art Unearthed In Famous Flea Mart

Many stories have recently broken into print about art treasures being unearthed from pieces bought at low prices for mere decorative items. The local story has a more curious twist, for 'twas an artist that made the purchase on the theory that it might possibly be a masterpiece.

Ten years ago, as Yun Gee, E. 10th St., was browsing in the famous Flea Market in Paris, he

saw an obscure, unsigned canvas which inspired the belief that he had inadvertently stumbled upon a masterpiece. The Chinese-American artist paid the sum of 200 francs, or approximately \$6. After much study, research and consultation with art connoisseurs in France and America, he finally obtained verification that he had indeed purchased a priceless rarity, a Gavarni.

Soon after buying the painting, which measures 46"x34", he took it to the Louvre for analysis by experts who authenticated the fact that Mr. Gee had unearthed a treasure, although they were unable definitely to establish its creator at that time. Setting the date at around 1830, they said it was a painting of a typical French character showing a decided English influence, possibly a Daumier.

In 1939, Connoisseur, an English magazine, had this to say about what they called the Portrait of a Sportsman: "The picture appears

34-36 BETHUNE ST

to us to represent a 'burlesque' sportsman, probably l'Anglais, as seen by some French caricaturist of the middle years of the last century." More recently it was brought to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York where authorities also suggested that it was executed by a master.

With this store of expert opinion, Mr. Gee carefully started scraping the canvas. He discovered that beneath a layer of paint which had been used to "restore" the picture, was his real treasure. A photograph of the altered canvas was then shown to Mr. Sterling of the Metropolitan Museum who confirmed his former opinion and named Gavarni as the artist.

The disclosure of this master work is particularly significant since there are so few oil paintings by Gavarni at large. Whereas Rembrandt, Daumier, Watteau, Delacroix, and others who influenced Gavarni's brush have many canvases which may be seen today, there were only three known oil by Gavarni, all in French collections.

During his 62 years, Gavarni had a tremendously busy life in the arts. Born Guillaume Sulpice Chevalier, in 1804, he assumed the pen-and-brush name of Hippolyte Gavarni. He lived and worked for a time in England and the stamp of that country was forever imprinted on his art. He was a many-sided character whose talents led him to fame as a lithographer, draughtsman, designer of fashions, and book illustrator. As a painter, he used mostly water colors and perfected his process of "Aquarelle a la gouache." His oils are rare and proportionately valuable. The masterpiece uncovered by Mr. Gee is one of the best examples of Diablism in existence. Gavarni was called the "peintre endiable" and was considered one of the leaders of the school of Diablism.

In addition, Gavarni was an ardent mathematician and writer. He founded and edited the paper, "Journal des Gens du Monde," and is considered to have had a great influence on the modern American press. As a champion of free speech and free art, his work has historical as well as artistic worth.

Andon Play Continued