

TECHNICAL EXAMINATION REPORT

Artist: Josef Chelmonski (1850-1914)

Title: Russian Horse Fair

Medium/Support: Oil on Canvas

Date: 1878

Dimensions: H x W x D (inches): 25 ¼ in. x 60 in. x ¾ in.

Accession #: EPTG43632

Examination Report Date: 10/25/2023

Conservators: Josephine Ren, Elise Effmann Clifford

Condition Summary:

The painting is in good condition overall. The canvas is structurally stable: it is adequately secured to and supported by its 6-member wooden stretcher. All tacking margins have been cut down and the painting has a glue-paste lining. The painting was executed on a light gray-white ground, which is visible along all edges and shows through the paint layer in some broad areas, especially in the lower half of the composition. The paint layer is stable, and cracking patterns due to drying and artist's technique are apparent. Cracking in the paint is visible along the entire length of the seamed addition at the top. A thick, glossy natural resin varnish is present and has discolored over time, imparting an uneven yellow tone to the piece. Accumulations of discolored, brown varnish are present in the low points of impasto and brushstrokes.

The frame appears to be a late 19th century box-construction frame. Overall the object is in fair condition and structurally stable. Some of the ornamentation along the face of the members is unstable, as several elements exhibit cracking and detaching from the support. The left side of the rabbit is unstable and cracking along its join. The frame will be treated in preparation for loan and exhibition.

Observations:

In summary, major compositional differences between the FAMSF Chelmonski titled *Russian Horse Fair* (Fig. 1) and the original Paris Salon de 1878 version known as *Return from Market* (Fig. 2) lie in the center background scene framing the horizon. The leftmost building in the earlier version has been omitted, and an expanded group of human and horse figures has been added to the background of the FAMSF variant. Differences in the central foreground group occur primarily in individual figures: for example, the different clothing worn by the rider at center right, and the omission of the white horse at far left. The following sections outline results from infrared imaging and X-radiography of the FAMSF Chelmonski.

The FAMSF painting's stretcher appears to have been modified to accommodate the stitched canvas addition at the top of the painting. The initial 4 members have beveled outer edges, and the top and bottom members have non-beveled, 1.5 inch-width strip additions along the lengths of their outer edges (Fig. 3). These strip additions might be butt-joined with an adhesive, as no joinery or nails are visible in the X-ray. The combined widths of these two stretcher bar additions add up to the canvas addition's width of 3 inches (Fig .4). The stretcher bar and canvas modifications were possibly added to increase the FAMSF copy's dimensions and proportions to match those of the original.



Figure 1. Josef Chelmonski, *Russian Horse Fair*, 1878. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. 61.44.30.



Figure 2. Josef Chelmonski, *Return from Market*, 1878. Original Salon de 1878 version. Source: "The Art Treasures of America: Being the Choicest Works of Art in the Public and Private Collections of North America, Vol. II." Earl Shinn, 1881. <https://archive.org/details/frick-31072002554634/page/n235/mode/1up>



Figure 3. FAMSF painting, back, annotations of strip additions to top and bottom stretcher bars.



Figure 4. FAMSF painting, front, annotation of canvas addition.

Infrared Reflectography (IRR):

Areas of underpainting and underdrawing were revealed through infrared reflectography, demonstrating compositional planning and changes (Fig. 5). In the left center of the IR reflectogram there appears to be a rough shape partially resembling the leftmost building from the earlier Salon version (Fig. 6). An outline and possibly some sketching of the building are present. It appears that the striped pole structure to the right of the building in the Salon version was also initially sketched out in the FAMSF version and later omitted (Fig. 6). The form of the figure originally sitting on the center left horse was also initially sketched out and then omitted

(Fig. 7). Also visible are compositional changes around the rightmost horses (legs and head), a hoof in the center right horse with a rider, and legs of the leftmost horse.

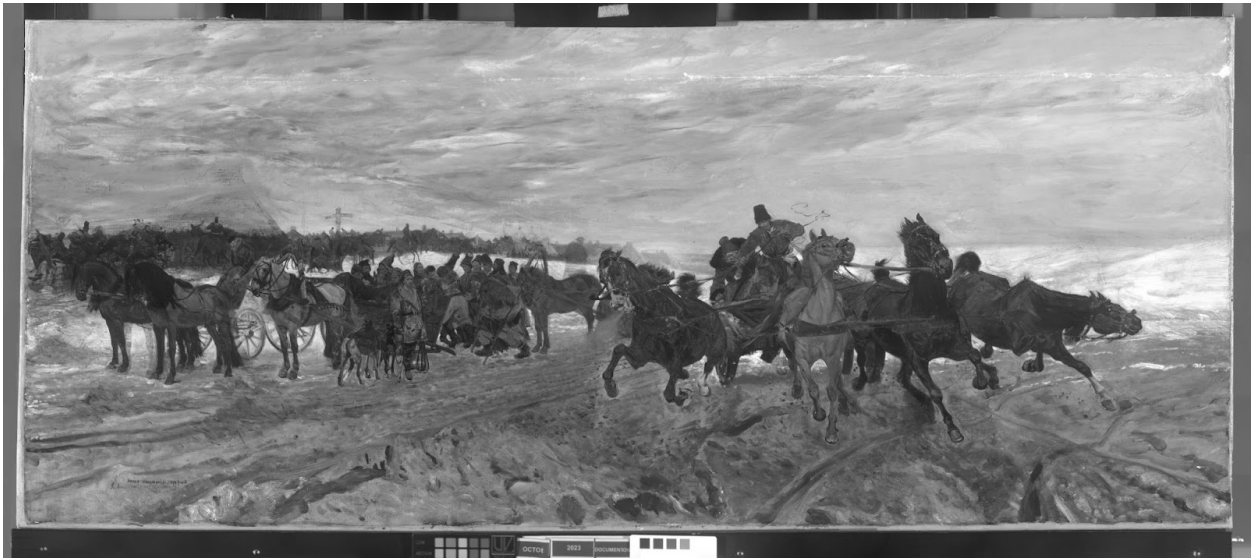


Figure 5. Infrared reflectogram of *Russian Horse Fair*, Josef Chelmonski, 1878, FAMSF.



Figure 6. Details of compositional changes in the background structures.
a: Salon painting. **b:** Infrared image of FAMSF version. **c:** Normal light image of FAMSF version.



Figure 7. Details of compositional change in the foreground horse rider.
a: Salon painting. **b:** Infrared image of FAMSF version. **c:** Normal light image of FAMSF version.

IRR also revealed a covered up inscription below the signature in the bottom left corner (Fig. 8). The inscription was written in black paint and then painted over. This action appears to be done by the artist, as the paint covering it runs below the signature and drying cracks running through the area appear consistent with aging cracks in other similar painted areas. A possible reading has been extrapolated and annotated as: "Retour Du Marché (Ukraine)". This phrase would be consistent with curatorial information regarding the earlier painting. A 1984 curatorial letter from Tadeusz Matuszczak of the National Museum in Poznań to Ruth Berson of the de Young Museum states the following about the Salon version:

"The first version of your painting was painted in the early part of 1878. This is: A Polish Fair or Return from Market...Signed and dated lower left corner: JOZEF CHELMONSKI 1878 / Après la foire (Ukraine)." (Matuszczak, 1984)

This letter also states that the Salon version was documented at the time as "Retour du marché - souvenir de l'Ukraine" along with a photogravure with the description: "Joseph Chelmonski 1878 / Après la foire - (Ukraine) / Retour du marche - Souvenir de l'Ukraine."

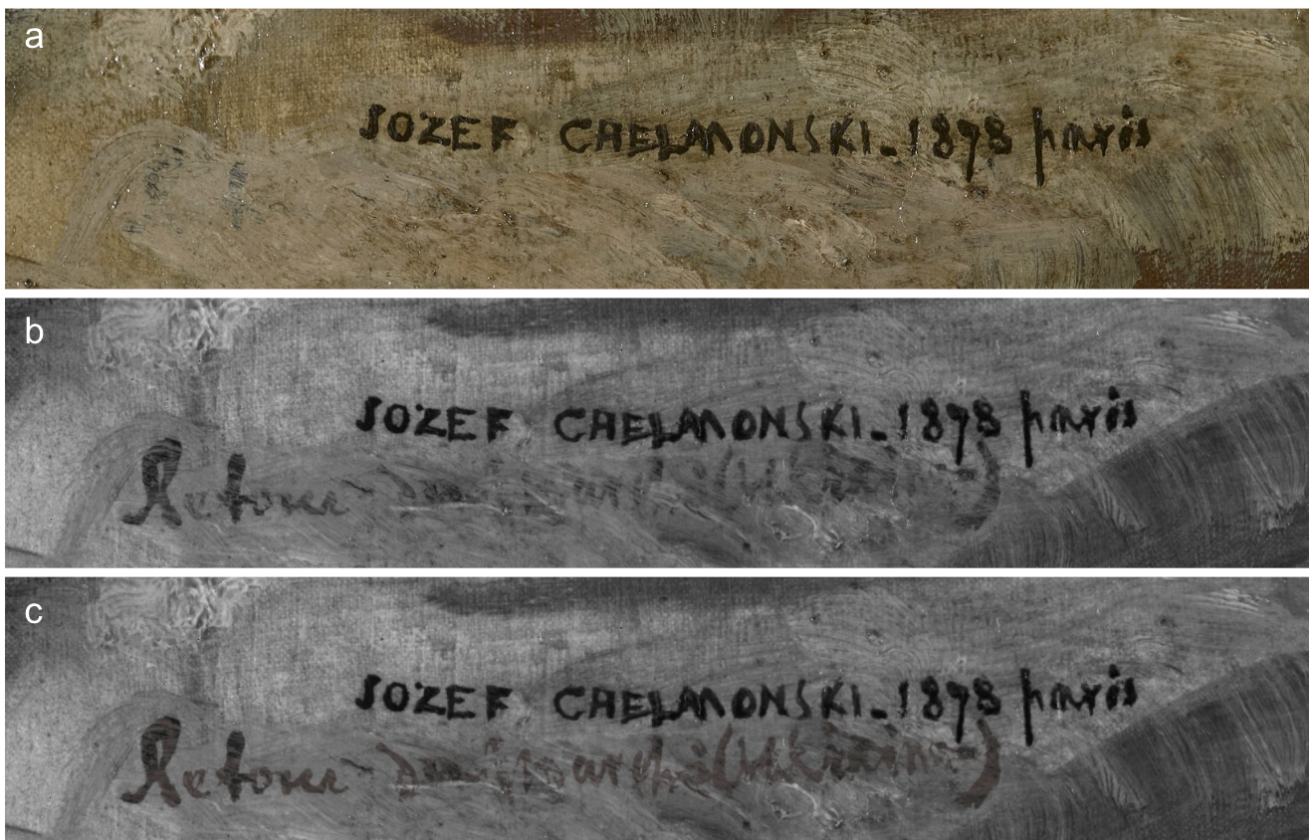


Figure 8. Detail images of signature and covered up inscription in the FAMSF painting.
a: Normal light. b: Infrared image. c: Infrared image with annotated enhancements made using Notability.

X-Radiography:

The X-radiograph shows the extent of cracking that has occurred in the media layers along the seam of the canvas strip addition (Fig. 8). There are dark impressions of evenly spaced out

“ticks” along this line of cracking, which appear to represent the stitching along the seam. This seam appears to be somewhat visible in the paint surface texture when viewed in normal and raking light, which may have resulted from effects of time and previous restoration. Correspondence between Chelmonski and his dealer Adolphe Goupil indicates that they did not want the seam to be noticeable. The central figures appear to be painted prior to the landscape and sky, as the X-ray indicates that the snowy background and sky are painted around the figures rather than underneath them. Visible light examination also suggests that the central figures were mostly painted first, and then the landscape and sky were painted up to and around them. Some minor background details, such as the smaller buildings in the far back, appear to be added in on top of the sky.

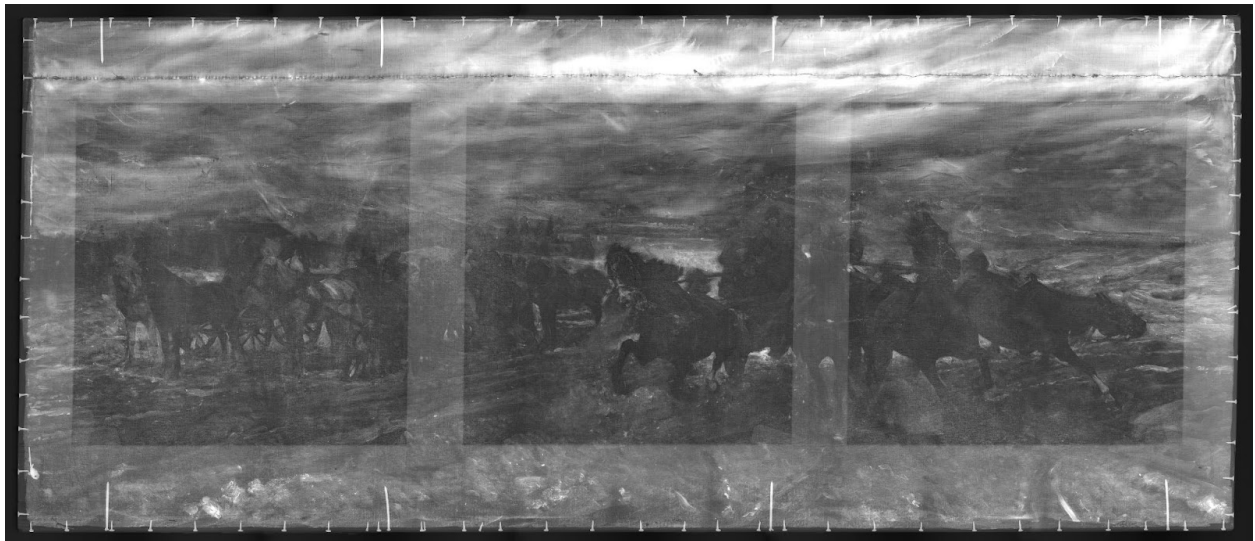


Figure 9. X-radiograph of *Russian Horse Fair*, Josef Chelmonski, 1878, FAMSF.