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A Discovered Painting: Albert Edelfelt's *Study for Woman from Arles*

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**Albert Edelfelt, *Study for Woman from Arles*, 1891–93,
oil on canvas, 41.5cm x 32cm**

Albert Edelfelt Association, Paris™

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakarinen

On 22 November 2019, the Albert Edelfelt Association¹ bought a portrait in an auction organised by Morand & Morand at the Hôtel Drouot, in Paris. The painting, which had remained in France since its creation, was not listed in Bertel Hintze's catalogue raisonné of the Finnish artist Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905), which serves as the authoritative reference book on the artist. The oil painting was described as a portrait of Marie Félicité Dani, wife of Francis de Saint-Vidal, and signed Albert Edelfelt. The indication of provenance was the Dani family estate.²

As the work was not catalogued, a material and historical study was undertaken to ensure its authenticity, as well as ascertaining its place in the painter's oeuvre. In April 2021, when travel became possible again after the Covid-19 pandemic, the painting was brought to Finland

- ¹ The Albert Edelfelt Association has been set up in Paris by the French relatives of Albert Edelfelt, descended from the Swedish line of the artist's father, Carl Albert Edelfelt. Dedicated to improving the knowledge and appreciation of the art and life of Albert Edelfelt, it reaches out to, among others, the French-speaking audience on the internet: www.albertedelfelt.com (accessed 18 February 2023).
- ² Morand & Morand, Commissaires-priseurs [auctioneer], Drouot, Vente intérieurs parisiens, 22 November 2019, lot 109.

to be conserved and studied by Tuulikki Kilpinen, a member of the Albert Edelfelt research team.³

This essay retraces the historical research, from false leads to coincidences, that made it possible to retrieve the painting into Albert Edelfelt's production. It leads to and sheds light on another little-studied work by the artist, preserved in Finland. The two paintings are being reunited on the occasion of the Ateneum Art Museum's Albert Edelfelt exhibition in the spring of 2023.

False leads and valuable information

The investigation of the model and her husband in the early stages of the research yielded some more information. Marie Félicité Dani (1864–1950) was a sought-after model, who posed for several artists. In 1895, she married Francis Porral de Saint-Vidal (1840–1900), a renowned French academic sculptor who exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Français between 1875 and 1898.

The talent of Saint-Vidal had already been noticed in 1865 by Alexandre Dumas fils. The writer introduced the young sculptor to his renowned friend Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827–75), who became his professor. Saint-Vidal was indebted to Carpeaux's neo-rococo style and is considered his follower. He produced several portraits of celebrities (e.g. Ludvig van Beethoven, Hector Berlioz, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, and the soprano Jeanne Granier), works which were appreciated for their expressive power, as well as a monument dedicated to the painter Alphonse de Neuville (1889).⁴

Originally based in Bordeaux, Francis de Saint-Vidal was an elected member of the National Academy of Science, Literature and Fine Arts of Bordeaux from 1876 until 1882, when he moved to Paris. *The Five Parts of the World*, a monumental fountain placed under the Eiffel Tower during the World Fair of 1889, was the breakthrough for the artist, who was rewarded with a bronze medal. He exhibited for the last time in 1898 and died in 1900 in Riom; Marie Félicité Dani was his widow.⁵

The name of Saint-Vidal was forgotten after his bronze monuments were melted down during the German occupation to be reused in the Second World War. A marble fountain placed in Setif, in Algeria, has been vandalised in recent years for its depiction of female nudity. The loss has ultimately created a renewed interest in this forgotten sculptor.⁶

The private life of Saint-Vidal had been quite turbulent. Married in Bordeaux in 1869 to Mathilde Hernozant, he divorced her in 1890. He lived in an open relationship with Irma Antoinette Delmas, and also with Anna-Marie Tréouret de Kerstrat⁷. Children were born from each union.

Marie Félicité Dani and Francis Porral de Saint-Vidal were married on 29 June 1895 at the French Consulate in Florence. Their marriage was registered at the end of the year in Nice⁸, the city of her birth. The desire to avoid scandal may explain these circumstances, the

3 See Tuulikki Kilpinen's article 'How Albert Edelfelt's *Portrait of Mme Dani* turned out to be a study for *Woman from Arles*' in this same issue 1/2023 of FNG Research, <https://research.fng.fi/2023/04/03/how-albert-edelfelts-portrait-of-mme-dani-turned-into-study-for-woman-from-arles/>. The Edelfelt research team – Edelfelt expert, art historian Marina Catani, specialist scientist Seppo Hornytkyj and conservator Tuulikki Kilpinen – has studied Albert Edelfelt's artworks many times during the past decades and also published articles on their research.

4 Prosper Georges Marcelin Bouniceau-Gesmon. *M. F. de Saint-Vidal et sa fontaine, étude critique*. Paris: Alphonse Lemerre Editeur, 1889.

5 Registre des décès [Death Register] [6 E 3253]. Archives départementales du Puy-de-Dôme, <https://www.archivesdepartementales.puy-de-dome.fr/> (accessed 10 May 2022).

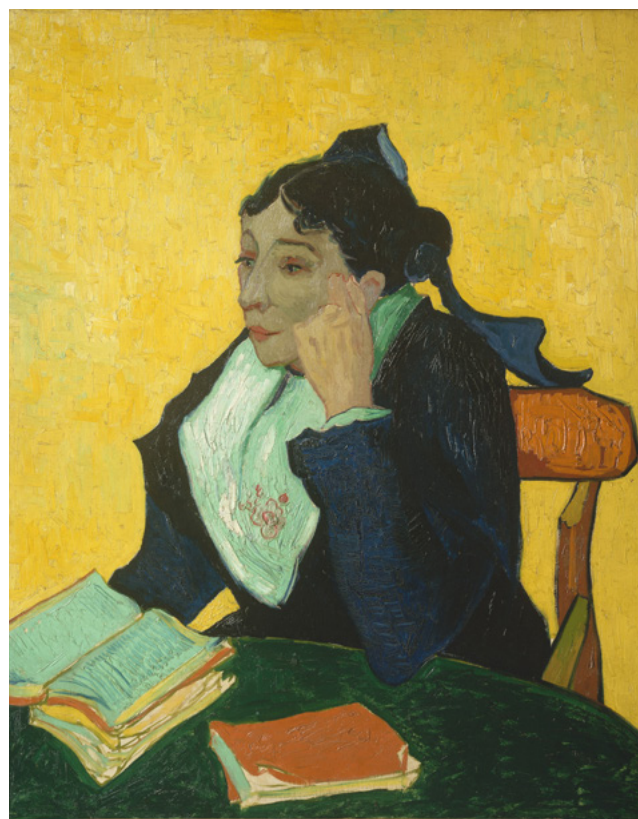
6 Armand Vial. *La Belle de la source*. Alger: Tafat Editions, 2021.

7 I am grateful to the sculptor Laurent Davidson for information on his great-grandfather. Laurent Davidson's email to the author, 9 May 2022.

8 Registre des mariages [Wedding Register], Nice 1895. Archives départementales des Alpes-Maritimes, <https://www.departement06.fr/culture/archives-departementales-2797.html> (accessed 15 May 2022).



A photograph of an Arlesian woman (*Arlésienne en costume*), c. 1890
 Museon Arlaten-Musée de Provence
 ©J.L.Maby - Cd13, Museon Arlaten-musée de Provence



Vincent van Gogh, *L'Arlésienne: Madame Joseph-Michel Ginoux*, 1888–89, oil on canvas, 91.4cm x 73.7cm
 Bequest of Sam A. Lewisohn, 1951, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



two spouses being divorced. Marie Félicité Dani had divorced Louis-Zacharie Dalaise in 1894, with whom she had two children.

The initial hypothesis of a link between Saint-Vidal and Edelfelt, as suggested by the auction house when revealing the painting, was misleading. There seems to have been no connection between the two artists other than their common appreciation of the beauty of Marie Félicité Dani. It is unclear how the painting entered the family estate, whether it was a gift or a purchase due to the quality of the portrait.

A new lead: the costume

The black dress and the headdress raised questions. However, Marie Félicité Dani's biography ruled out a mourning costume. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of regional costumes at the end of the 19th century was confusing.

Thanks to the publication of a book by the art historian Maria Vainio-Kurtakko, *Ett gott parti. Scener ur Ellan de la Chapelles och Albert Edelfelts liv*⁹, I was able to identify the black

9 Maria Vainio-Kurtakko. *Ett gott parti. Scener ur Ellan de la Chapelles och Albert Edelfelts liv* [A good match. Scenes from the life of Ellan de la Chapelle and Albert Edelfelt]. Helsingfors: Svenska Litteratursällskapet in Finland / Appell Förlag, 2022. The Finnish version was released in the autumn of 2022: *Sovelias liitto. Kohtauksia Ellan de la Chapellen ja Albert Edelfeltin elämästä*. Helsinki: Teos, 2022.

costume worn by Marie Félicité Dani. The sketches found in a letter representing Arlesian women and reproduced on page 264 of the book matched her costume. After consultation, the Museon Arlaten confirmed the depiction of a costume from Arles.¹⁰

According to the museum's specialists, the Arlesian costume is not worn correctly in the painting.¹¹ There is no brooch or jewel securing the white scarf, and there is something strange in the way the headdress is placed, which points to the interpretation of a painter who was unfamiliar with local traditions. The portraits of Madame Ginoux by Paul Gauguin (1888, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow¹²) and by Vincent van Gogh (1888, Musée d'Orsay, Paris¹³; 1888–1889, The Metropolitan Art Museum, New York; and 1890, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo¹⁴), painted during their stay in Arles in 1888–90, also depict the sitter wearing the typical Arlesian costume.

Albert Edelfelt in the south of France

A trip to the sun had been recommended for Albert Edelfelt's frail little son, Erik, aged three. Edelfelt and his wife Ellan de la Chapelle (1857–1921) arrived in Ospedaletti, in Liguria, on the Italian coast in early March 1891. Edelfelt visited Cannes for a few days on his own and on his return the whole family prepared to move on to the French Riviera. The appeal of the Riviera was linked to the presence of French and Scandinavian friends and acquaintances. Edelfelt was eager to respond to an invitation he received while in Cannes from his painter friend Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret (1852–1929). Madame Borget, the mother of another friend, the writer Henri Amic (1853–1929), owned the villa Les Bambous in Cannes, which had become a convivial centre for these friends. As soon as the health of his wife and son allowed it, Edelfelt and his family moved to the Cannes Hôtel Paradis. Emilie von Etter (1842–1923), who was also in Cannes, offered pleasant company to Ellan de la Chapelle. Albert Edelfelt knew Emilie von Etter from the summers spent by the Edelfelt family in the Haikko Manor estate, her property near Porvoo in Finland.

At the end of their stay in Cannes, Ellan de la Chapelle and the young Erik left for Lyon, while Albert Edelfelt made a detour via Arles before joining his family in Lyon and returning to Paris. Arles had become a tourist destination, popularised by the play *L'Arlésienne*, by Alphonse Daudet with incidental music by Georges Bizet (1879). Edelfelt was an avid reader of Daudet (1840–97), whom he had met and portrayed in 1881 for the illustrated newspaper *L'illustration*, and to whom he later paid homage in an article.¹⁵ Arles was famous for its cultural sites, in particular the arena, a Roman amphitheatre used for bullfights, and St Trophime, a Romanesque cathedral. Albert Edelfelt was familiar with the church thanks to his father, Carl Albert Edelfelt (1818–69). His parents had made a trip to the south of France at the beginning of their marriage, combining their honeymoon with an architectural study trip for Carl Edelfelt, who was to become an architect.

In a letter to his mother, from Arles, dated 4 May 1891, Albert Edelfelt noted his disappointment at having missed a bullfight because of the rain and concluded with a visit to an empty arena. He also expressed awe when visiting the church of St Trophime. He emphasised the antiquity of the church, dating it from the year 1000 (in fact the end of the

10 The identification of an Arlesian costume has been confirmed by Aurélie Samson, Director of the Museon Arlaten. Aurélie Samson's email to the author, 18 August 2022.

11 Aurélie Samson's email to the author, 18 August 2022.

12 See the image of the painting: https://pushkinmuseum.art/data/fonds/europe_and_america/j/2001_3000/zh_3367/index.php?lang=en#top (accessed 4 March 2023).

13 See the image of the painting: <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/larlesienne-14058> (accessed 4 March 2023).

14 See the image of the painting: <https://krollermuller.nl/en/vincent-van-gogh-l-arlesienne-portrait-of-madame-ginoux> (accessed 4 March 2023).

15 Albert Edelfelt, 'Till Alphonse Daudets porträtt', *Ateneum*, n° 2, 20 March 1898. Republished in *Hvad Albert Edelfelt har skrivit: minnesteckningar uppsatser och konstbref*. Helsingfors: Förlagsaktiebolaget Helios, 1905, 24–28.



Albert Edelfelt's sketches in a letter to his mother Alexandra Edelfelt, Arles, 4 May 1891, page 5.

Albert Edelfelts brev. Elektronisk brev- och konstutgåva, utg. Maria Vainio-Kurtakko & Henrika Tandefelt & Elisabeth Stubb, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2014–20, <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:sls-3479-1403107531410> (accessed 12 March 2023)

12th century), and the beauty of the scene, which he witnessed:

I walked into the church of St Trophime, a Romanesque church from the year 1000, and saw all the women wearing the beautiful Arlesian costume – black and white. It was unexpectedly beautiful.¹⁶

The local people who attended mass in traditional costume captivated the artist. He considered the Arles costume to be the finest traditional costume in France. His letter includes the aforementioned sketches of three Arlesian women of different ages, underlining their classical profile.

In the letter Edelfelt references Carl August Ehrensvärd (1745–1800), although without attribution, pointing to the assimilation of the people of Provence with the standard of beauty based on antique sculpture:

In France, everywhere he saw women wearing the same headdress – these headdresses are, however, very different, and the Arlesian ones are among the most dressy and much more full of character than Normandy's.¹⁷

- 16 Albert Edelfelt's letter to his mother Alexandra Edelfelt, 4 May 1891. *Albert Edelfelts brev. Elektronisk brev- och konstutgåva*, utg. Maria Vainio-Kurtakko & Henrika Tandefelt & Elisabeth Stubb, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2014–20, <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:sls-3479-1403107531410> (accessed 18 February 2023). 'Jag gick här in i kyrkan St Trophime, en romanisk kyrka från år tusen och såg der alla kvinnor i den vackra arlesiska dräkten – svart och vit. Det var oväntadt vackert.'
- 17 Albert Edelfelt's letter to his mother Alexandra Edelfelt, 4 May 1891. *Albert Edelfelts brev. Elektronisk brev- och konstutgåva*, utg. Maria Vainio-Kurtakko & Henrika Tandefelt & Elisabeth Stubb, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2014–20, <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:sls-3479-1403107531410> (accessed 18 February 2023). 'Ehrensvärd skriver: I Frankriet såg han öfverallt densamma hufvudbonaden på qvinfolket, nämligen af mössor – dessa mössor äro dock mycket olika, och de arlesiska äro bland de mest klädande jag sett och bra mycket mera karaktärfulla än de normandiska.'



Albert Edelfelt, *Woman from Arles*, 1893, oil on canvas, 76cm x 60cm
 Tampere Art Museum
 Photo: Tampere Art Museum / Jari Kuusenaho

At the Paris atelier

The powerful emotion felt in Arles did not vanish after Edelfelt returned to Paris. A letter sent to his mother on 6 May 1891, once again evoked his experience there. His enthusiasm had not faded and it spurred him to paint a motif based on his recollections from Arles.

*Has Mama received my letter from Arles? I was so charmed by Arles and the Arlesian women that I wrote an enthusiastic letter – I hope it has arrived.*¹⁸

A month later, on 12 June 1891, he wrote that he had found a model from the south of France to pose for *Arlesian Woman*. It is my assumption that Marie Félicité Dani, born in

18 Albert Edelfelt's letter to his mother Alexandra Edelfelt, 6 May 1891. Albert Edelfelts brev. *Elektronisk brev- och konstutgåva*, utg. Maria Vainio-Kurtakko & Henrika Tandefelt & Elisabeth Stubb, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2014–20, <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:is-3480-1403107531420> (accessed 18 February 2023). 'Har Mamma fått mitt brev från Arles? Jag var så förtjust – Arles och arlesiennerna att jag derifrån skref ett entusiastiskt brev – måtte det ha kommit fram.'



**Albert Edelfelt, A sketch in Edelfelt's sketchbook, 1891–94, A II 1517:87, page 89, pencil
 Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum**

Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Kirsi Halkola



Nice in 1864, was the 27-year-old model from Le Midi. The costume she was wearing was sent from Arles.

Also, I have started an Arlesienne – I ordered a costume from Arles. Here is namely a model from Le Midi who is so beautiful and typical, and I did not have the heart to miss the opportunity, now that I still have the impression of the promised land so fresh. I really think I can do something good with her. Unfortunately I can have her only once a week, she is so busy.¹⁹

Albert Edelfelt's biographer, Bertel Hintze, ignored the painted study after Marie Félicité Dani that remained in France. He only referred to the final painting of *Woman from Arles*.²⁰ To document the latest, he mentioned a sketchbook by Edelfelt, in which the title 'Memories of Arles' appears.²¹ However, Hintze did not seem to take into account a sketch in Arles costume from the same sketchbook²². With its profile pose, this preparatory drawing seems to be part of Edelfelt's early research to which the painted study belongs. Turning to the left, in three-quarter profile, Marie Félicité Dani is more coquettish than in the final painting, begun two years later.

Edelfelt's concern about the limited availability of his model had an impact on his work, which suffered from a long interval before being resumed in 1893. It is likely that the final painting of *Woman from Arles*²³ was based on a combination of several models. In this final work, the Arlesian woman is standing in front of a wall, locating the scene at the St Trophime cloister. A lush and sunny garden can be seen through the opening. In the painted study, a bouquet of flowers placed near Marie Félicité Dani in bright light seems to anticipate the garden to come.

- 19 Albert Edelfelt's letter to his mother Alexandra Edelfelt, 6 May 1891. *Albert Edelfelts brev. Elektronisk brev- och konstutgåva*, utg. Maria Vainio-Kurtakko & Henrika Tandefelt & Elisabeth Stubb, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2014–20, <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:is-3480-1403107531420> (accessed 18 February 2023). 'Dessutom har jag börjat en Arlesienne – och skrivit efter en kostym till Arles. Här finns näml en modell från le midi som är alldeles utmärkt vackert och typisk, och jag har ej hjerta att låta tillfället gå mig ut händerna, nu, då jag ännu har intrycket från det förlofvade landet så friskt. Jag tror mig verkligen kunna göra något riktigt bra med henne. Beklagligtvis kan jag få henne bara engång i veckan, så upp tagen är hon'
- 20 Bertel Hintze. *Albert Edelfelt*. Porvoo: WSOY, 1953, p. 609, "Arlesitar", no 652.
- 21 Albert Edelfelt's sketchbook 1891–94, A II 1517:87, p. 112, Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum.
- 22 Albert Edelfelt's sketchbook 1891–94, A II 1517:87, p. 89), Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum.
- 23 Hintze, *Albert Edelfelt*.



Pascal Adolphe Jean Dagnan, also known as Dagnan-Bouveret,
Arlesian Woman, c. 1905–10, oil on canvas, 60.5cm x 43.8cm
 130 A 88 – Collection Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Pontarlier – France
 Photo: Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Pontarlier

It may be noted that Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret also painted his own *Arlesian Woman* in the following years.²⁴ His model is a young woman wearing the traditional black costume with a white scarf and headdress. She turns her gaze towards the viewer, a book of the mass in her hand. The green background places her outdoors, in a garden.

According to Hintze, Albert Edelfelt's final painting of *Woman from Arles* was sold directly to the Finnish merchant and industrialist August Eklöf, a neighbour at Edelfelt's summer house in Haikko. It now belongs to Tampere Art Museum.

After being conserved, reframed in a period frame and studied in Finland, the study will be presented together with the final painting at the Ateneum Art Museum. The Albert Edelfelt exhibition will thus trace the story of the Finnish painter's discovery of Arles and the creative process of his Arlesienne painting. It will then return to France, where it had remained since its early days.

'Albert Edelfelt', Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki, 5 May – 17 September 2023

²⁴ Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret, *Arlesian Woman*, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Pontarlier. The date is uncertain, although Brice Leibundgut has suggested the period 1905–10. Brice Leibundgut's email to the author, 19 July 2022.