

## Reconsidering Anders Zorn's *Omnibus* Paintings

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### Abstract

This article reconsiders the relationship between Anders Zorn's (1860–1920) *Omnibus* paintings. Two large-scale versions exist for the *Omnibus* motif (*Omnibus I* and *Omnibus II*), both of which have historically been viewed as official works that were exhibited by Zorn during the years 1892–1893.

Drawing upon recent technical analyses of the artist's oil paintings, together with relevant archival sources, a discussion is put forward with the aim of reconfiguring the earlier *Omnibus I* (1891) version as an initial sketch (*esquisse*) to the later *Omnibus II* (1892).

[1] At the beginning of the 1890s the young Swedish painter Anders Zorn (1860–1920) was continuing to make a name for himself on the Parisian art scene. Having settled in Paris in 1889, after a period of residence in London, the artist was quickly becoming an exclusive and sought-after society portraitist, with commissions including portraits of the French opera singer Jean-Baptiste Faure (1830–1914) and the comic actor Coquelin Cadet (1848–1909). In addition to undertaking portrait commissions, Zorn also devoted his time to female nudes and genre paintings, with the latter concentrating on scenes from the everyday life of the citizens of Paris. The focus of this article is a well-known example by Zorn on this everyday subject matter: the interior of a Parisian omnibus. Recounting his life's events in his autobiographical writing, the artist makes note of the bustling carriage interior that provided the inspiration for the scene:

*The interior of an omnibus in the evening with electric light thrown into the mix. The subject amused me as well. That mixture of people pressing up against each other during the short journey. The worker, who tired after the toils of the day falls asleep against his beautiful, unfamiliar neighbour's soft shoulder. The kind modiste in the foreground, who receives a slither of the electric light on her face from the middle of the Boulevard, I think is an oft-seen type, representing the diligent, honest and good French working class.<sup>1</sup>*

Continuing, Zorn recounts part of the process that helped inform his composition:

*I had to undertake many a journey with the omnibus from Montmartre before it became clear to me in my mind and later throughout the course of the work. A small glimpse of daylight through a doorway would serve as electric light in the studio.<sup>2</sup>*

[2] Further aspects relating to the artist's painting process are also documented through the remnant material records relating to the composition. Several studies and sketches exist for the omnibus motif, including preliminary works in pencil and ink on paper (Figs. 1-2), as well as value studies in oil (Figs. 3-5).

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<sup>1</sup> "[...] Interiören av en omnibus på kvällen med elektriskt ljus blandande sig i leken. Ämnet roade mig också. Den blandning människor som nötes mot varandra under den korta resan. Arbetarn som trött efter dagens slit insomnar mot sin vackra obekanta grannes mjuka skuldra. Den snälla modisten i förgrunden som får en flik av elektriska ljuset på sitt ansikte från mitten av Boulevarden tycker jag är en väl funnen typ för den strävsamma ärliga och goda franska arbetsklassen [...]". My translation. Anders Zorn, *Självbiografiska Anteckningar*, ed. Hans-Henrik Brummer, Stockholm 1982, 75.

<sup>2</sup> "[...] Jag fick göra många resor med omnibussen från Montmartre innan jag fick min klar i huvudet och sedan under arbetet. En liten glimt dagsljus genom en springa fick tjäna som elektriskt ljus i ateliern [...]". My translation. Zorn, *Självbiografiska Anteckningar*, 75.



1-2 Examples of preparatory pencil/ink sketches by Anders Zorn: (left) *Omnibus study*, c. 1891–1892, pencil/ink on paper. Zornmuseum, Mora (photo: Emma Jansson); (right) *Omnibus study (from sketchbook)*, c. 1891–1892, pencil on paper, 25 x 16 cm. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMH 133/1939 verso (© Nationalmuseum)



3-5 Examples of studies in oil by Anders Zorn: [top] *Omnibus study (oil)*, c. 1891–1892, oil on canvas. Zornmuseum, Mora, (photo: Emma Jansson); [bottom left] *Omnibus study (oil)*, c. 1891–1892, oil on canvas. Zornmuseum, Mora, Z0 120 (photo: Emma Jansson); [bottom right] *Omnibus study (oil)*, c. 1891–1892, oil on canvas. Swedish Royal Collection, Stockholm (© Kungl. Hovstaterna)

[3] In addition, Zorn is known to have painted two large-scale versions of the composition. The first version, commonly referred to as *Omnibus I* (Fig. 6), is signed "Zorn 1891" and currently hangs at the Stockholm Nationalmuseum.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The painting entered the collection in 1985 (purchased through funds from Peter och Malin Beijers Stiftelse). It was previously recorded as being owned by the Swedish collector and close friend of Zorn, Thorsten Laurin. See the Nationalmuseum file for NM 6810.



6 Anders Zorn, *Omnibus I*, 1891, oil on canvas, 99.5 x 66 cm. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NM 6810 (© Cecilia Heisser/Nationalmuseum)



7 Anders Zorn, *Omnibus II*, 1892, oil on canvas, 126 x 88 cm. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, P3e1 (© Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum)

[4] The second painting, *Omnibus II* (Fig. 7), is signed and dated "1892", and belongs to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. In previous art historical literature, it has been assumed that *Omnibus I* was the version exhibited at the Paris Champ de Mars Salon and the Munich Secession in

1892, whilst the later Boston version was the one purchased by Isabella Stewart Gardner at the 1893 Chicago World Fair.<sup>4</sup>

[5] However, despite showing similar subject matter and compositional arrangements, these two paintings are remarkably different when it comes to their facture. The earlier painting, *Omnibus I*, is characterised by its loose and fluid handling; lending the composition a diffuse quality that can easily be likened to the techniques of modernist painters such as the French Impressionists. Contrastingly, the later painting, *Omnibus II*, is relatively academic in terms of its execution, with sharper contours and careful blending between the shadows, mid-tones and highlights. In addition, the later version was painted with finer attention to detail – demonstrated by elements such as the strap buckle on the young *modiste*'s hat box, as well as the blurred scenery of the cityscape outside the window.

[6] Given the stylistic discrepancy between the two works, one might pose the question as to why this is the case. Why did Zorn choose to produce and exhibit two paintings with nearly identical subject matter, yet executed using such vastly different factures? This question becomes all the more pressing if we consider that Zorn's *Omnibus* paintings represent one of the few instances where the artist repeated a composition in this manner. Moreover, the facture of *Omnibus I* appears anomalous within the context of Zorn's broader oil painting oeuvre, particularly when compared with the artist's other Salon paintings from 1892 (Figs. 8-9), which are much closer to *Omnibus II* in terms of their handling.<sup>5</sup>

[7] In an attempt to answer these questions, it is important to consider the possibility of an alternate relationship between Zorn's *Omnibus* paintings, whereby the first version could also have served as a preliminary sketch or *esquisse* to the later work. Indeed, this has been suggested through recent technical analyses and archival research relating to the two paintings.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example: Christophe Leribault et al., eds., *Anders Zorn. Le Maître de la Peinture Suédoise*, exh.cat., Paris 2017; Oliver Tostmann, "Anders Zorn and His International Success", in: *Anders Zorn: A European Artist Seduces America*, ed. Oliver Tostmann, London/Boston 2013, 13-26; Gerda Boëthius, *Zorn: Tecknaren, Målaren, Etsaren, Skulptören*, Stockholm 1949; Görel Cavalli-Björkman, "Anders Zorn's Omnibus", in: *Nationalmuseum Bulletin* 6 (1982), no. 1, 58-66; Cecilia Lengefeld, *Zorn: Resor, Konst och Kommers i Tyskland*, Stockholm 2000, 318.

<sup>5</sup> The other two paintings, the portraits of Mr. Frans Heiss and Mrs. Veronica Heiss, are listed in the 1892 Salon catalogue as nos. 1081 and 1082 respectively. Société nationale des beaux-arts, *Exposition Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Catalogue illustré, des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, et gravure, exposés au Champ-de-Mars le 7 Mai 1892*, Paris 1892, XXX.



8 [left] Anders Zorn, *Porträtt av Fru Veronica Heiss*, 1891, oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NM 2668 (© Cecilia Heisser/Nationalmuseum); 9 [right] Anders Zorn, *Porträtt av Direktör Frans R. Heiss*, 1891, oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NM 2667 (© Cecilia Heisser/Nationalmuseum)

[8] Let us start with the available textual sources with regards to the paintings' exhibition histories. The most commonly cited historical source referring to the 1892 Salon is a review written by the French critic George Lafenestre for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, where the author describes Zorn's *Omnibus* as follows:

*[...] son [Zorn's] étude de plusieurs personnes En Omnibus montre, en cet artiste singulier, un observateur savant de toutes les lueurs, lueurs de physionomies humaines aussi bien que lueurs de soleil, étoffes et vitrages. A côté de M. Zorn, M. Whistler, qui fut considéré autrefois comme un révolutionnaire, est un peintre tout à fait classique.*<sup>6</sup>

[9] Based on this excerpt alone, it would appear that the association between Lafenestre's description and the *Omnibus I* version is based largely on the comparison between Zorn and the American artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), who exhibited his *Portrait of Lady Meux* (Fig. 10) at the Salon that year.<sup>7</sup> Next to Zorn, Whistler is described as "once considered a revolutionary", but now "a completely classical painter". Thus, the identification of Zorn's painting as *Omnibus I* can be viewed in terms of its perceived *modernity* – that is to say, a challenging of the prevailing classical or academic traditions of the period. As such, it is most likely that the earlier version of Zorn's *Omnibus* is the one that has historically been identified as the painting exhibited at the 1892 Salon, since its summary and therefore seemingly impressionistic handling is reminiscent of the modernist facture that is usually associated with this group of painters.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> George Lafenestre, "Les Salons des 1892. II: La Sculpture aux deux salons et la peinture au Champ de Mars", in: *Revue des Deux Mondes* 4 (1892), 182-212.

<sup>7</sup> Listed as No. 1066 in the Salon catalogue, see Société nationale des beaux-arts, *Exposition Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Catalogue illustré*, XXIX.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the term "impressionistic" here is used to refer solely to the summary nature of Zorn's facture. That is to say, it does not imply an association between the Swedish artist and the Impressionist group, in the form



10 James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Portrait of Lady Meux*, 1881–1882, oil on canvas, 193.7 × 93 cm. Frick Collection, New York (CC BY: Frick Collection)

[10] However, what is not made clear in Lafenestre's review, is whether this perceived element of modernity relates to Zorn's technique per se, or to the subject matter being portrayed. This is an important distinction to make, as the urban motif of the scene can arguably also be viewed within this modernist framework.<sup>9</sup> Taken in this light, Lafenestre's commentary on Zorn's *Omnibus* can be seen as relating equally to both versions of the composition, as opposed to just the earlier painting. This in turn raises the question whether the 1892 Salon painting could in fact have been *Omnibus II*. Indeed, if we make the assumption that any claim to modernism within the work relates simply to its subject matter, then there is no reason to favour one identification over the other.

[11] The answer to this question can be found in part through a revaluation of the Salon catalogues and press comments relating to the exhibition. Writing to *Stockholms Dagblad* on 5 June 1892, the newspaper's Paris correspondent provided a detailed description of the exhibited painting's composition:

*[The painting] shows one side of an omnibus interior. A young modiste holding a box on top of her knees, a worker in a white shirt, asleep and with his head resting on his shoulder etc. are the*

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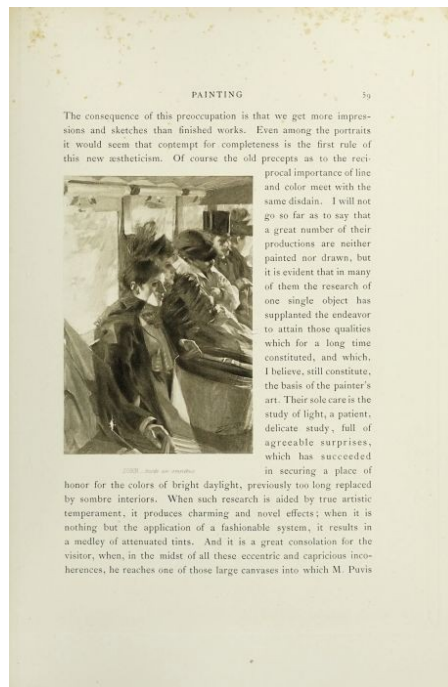
of shared exhibitions etc. For although Zorn was certainly aware of the Impressionists and their oeuvres he is not known to have ever exhibited with them publically during his years of residence in Paris (1888–1896).

<sup>9</sup> For discussions on this topic see: Richard Hobbs, ed., *Impressions of French Modernity: Art and Literature in France 1850–1900*, Manchester/New York 1998; Charles Baudelaire also makes note of this in his 1863 essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, where he provides mention of several aspects that are relevant to the present discussion, including "Beauty, Fashion and Happiness", "The Dandy", "Woman", "In Praise of Cosmetics", "The Carriage" etc. See: Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. J. Mayne, London 1964, 1-41.



passengers. At the very front in the foreground the lower half [Sv. "extremiteterna"] of a man can be seen, whilst his upper half remains out of view.<sup>10</sup>

[12] In this description, there are several compositional elements that point to the painting being *Omnibus II*, such as the worker's "white shirt", as well as the half-visible male figure in the foreground. Moreover, the identification of the 1892 Salon painting as *Omnibus II* was further corroborated during this research through the discovery of a contemporary Salon catalogue, which offers a photogravure reproduction of the painting (Fig. 11).<sup>11</sup>



11 Extract of Gustave Larroumet, *The Salon of 1892, One Hundred Plates in Photogravure and Etchings by Goupil & Co.*, Bacon, H. (trans.), Paris & New York, Bousod, Valadon & Co., 1892, page 59 (photograph provided by the J. P. Getty Museum, Los Angeles)

[13] Similarly, press reviews of the 1892 Munich Secession confirm that even here it was the second version of *Omnibus* that was exhibited. In the following section, taken from *Berliner Tageblatt* (23 September 1892), Zorn's composition is described as follows:

<sup>10</sup> "[...] Den förra visar den ena sidan av en pariseromnibus inre. En ung modist hållande en ask på knäna, en arbetare i vit blus, inslumrad och med hufvudet nedfallet på skuldran m. fl. äro passagerare. Längst fram i förgrunden sticka extremiteterna fram på en herre, hvars öfverdel man icke ser [...]" My translation. *Stockholms Dagblad*, 5 June 1892, 3. A similar description can be found in: *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 4 June 1892 (unpaginated). Both available digitally at: [www.kb.se](http://www.kb.se) (accessed on November 12, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Gustave Larroumet, *The Salon of 1892, One Hundred Plates in Photogravure and Etchings by Goupil & Co.*, transl. Henry Bacon, Paris/New York 1892, 59. Note: the same photogravure image was included in the original French version of the catalogue.

*Anders Zorn in Paris, der geniale schwedische Maler, der sich die Welt so zu sagen im Sturm erobert hat, ist diesmal durch ein Bild vertreten, das die Insassen eines Omnibus zeigt, Herren, auch eine Dame und vorn in der linken Ecke einen einzelnen Arm, zu dem die Figur fehlt.*<sup>12</sup>

Once again, specific mention is made of the partially obscured male figure in the foreground. Based on this information, it seems likely that it was *Omnibus II* (i.e. not *Omnibus I*) that was the painting presented at the official exhibitions in Paris and Munich during that year.

[14] In addition, a more extensive review of Swedish press commentary from the 1890s offers no mention of *Omnibus I* in relation to any of the other official exhibition contexts during this period. In fact, the first press mention of the earlier version does not appear until after the turn of the century, in a review of Zorn's 1906 retrospective exhibition, held in Stockholm between September and October. Writing for *Dagens Nyheter*, the Swedish art historian and critic Georg Nordensvan said the following about the painting:

*Interesting through its boldness in handling, as well as its assuredness in execution is the large study to the omnibus interior, painted in Paris 1902 [Note: Nordensvan appears to have mistaken the original date here, which should read 1892]. The effect of the electric light from the boulevard is quickly captured and reproduced with a secure hand. The motif is known through a later etching – the painting itself has ended up in America.*<sup>13</sup>

[15] These comments, in connection with the observation that *Omnibus I* does not seem to have been exhibited around the time it was first painted, suggest that the work originally functioned as a study (*étude*) or sketch (*esquisse*) to the final version. Such an assumption would further explain the summary, wet-in-wet facture that the artist adopted for *Omnibus I*, which, as noted, presents itself as considerably more impressionistic than his other works from this period. Moreover, the practice of using oil sketches as a preparatory stage within his compositional planning is well documented in Zorn's case, evidenced by the remnant sketches and studies that exist for the *Omnibus* motif.

[16] The fact that *Omnibus I* was signed by the artist does not necessarily disqualify its status as an original sketch, as Zorn's practice of signing even his preparatory works has also been demonstrated in other instances. A notable example of this is the painting entitled *Spetsösöm* (Fig. 12), which was documented by Gerda Boëthius (Zorn's first biographer) as being a study for the large-scale painting *Spetsknypplerskor* (Fig. 13). Commenting on the study, which was painted in Venice in 1894, Boëthius notes how "he [Zorn] made a captivating studio study of two lacemakers, which is more immediate and painterly than the larger work, which was painted under less favourable circumstances and was later reworked in the studio in Paris."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels Zeitung*, 23 September 1892 (unpaginated). Available digitally at: [www.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de](http://www.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de) (accessed on March 24, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> "[...] Intressant genom greppets djärfhet liksom genom utförandets säkerhet är den stora studien till omnibusinteriören, målad i Paris 1902 (1892?). Effekten af det elektriska ljuset utifrån boulevarden är kvickt fångad och fastslagen med orädd hand. Motivet är känt genom en senare gjord radering – själfva målningen har hamnat i Amerika [...]." My translation. *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 October 1906 (unpaginated). Available at: [www.kb.se](http://www.kb.se) (accessed on October 29, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> "Han gjorde en betagande ateljéstudie av två spetsösömerskor, som är mera omedelbar och måleriskt känslig än den stora tavlan, vilken målades under mindre gynnsamma förhållanden och bearbetades efteråt i ateljén i



12 Anders Zorn, *Spetssöm (study for Spetsknypplerskor)*, c. 1894, oil on canvas, 42 x 48 cm. Zornmuseum, Mora, ZO 111 (© Zornmuseum)



13 Anders Zorn, *Spetsknypplerskor*, 1894, oil on canvas, 92 x 64.5 cm. Private collection (CC BY: Wikimedia Commons)

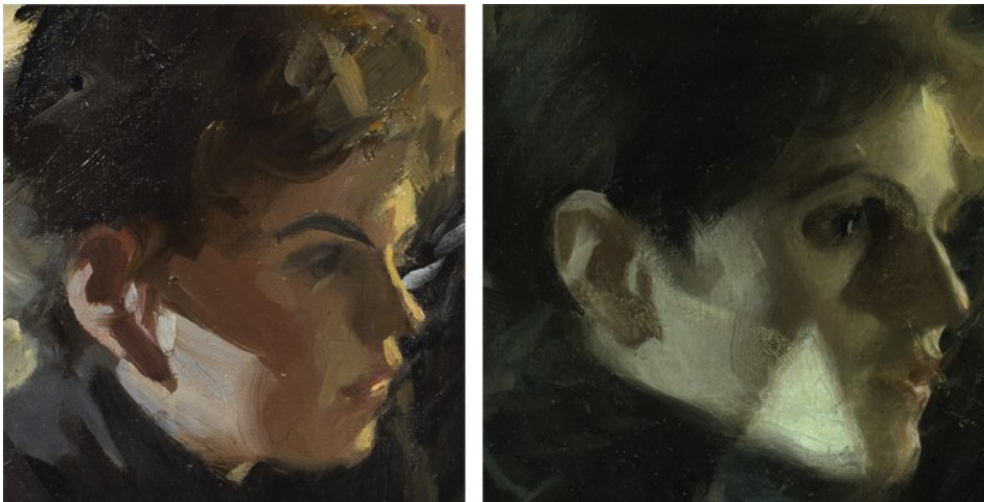
[17] Here, Boëthius touches upon a quality or trait that can be perceived as common to all of Zorn's preparatory works in oil; namely their loose facture, as well as its associated impressions of immediacy and spontaneity in handling. The recent technical analysis of a large group of Zorn's oil paintings (dating from c. 1880–1920) has confirmed this aspect of the artist's practice, whereby his sketches and studies are often considerably less finished than their corresponding final versions,

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Paris." My translation. Boëthius (1949), 341.

whilst also being smaller in format.<sup>15</sup> This is in turn understandable, since the majority of Zorn's preparatory works would have served as either compositional sketches or value studies. As such, they were not intended for public view or sale, which accounts for the relatively unfinished nature of their facture and also explains why several of these smaller paintings remained unsigned.

[18] This discrepancy in handling has already been noted for *Omnibus I* and *Omnibus II* and can be particularly demonstrated in detail by comparing the modelling of the female figure's face in both paintings (Figs. 14-15). In doing so, the quick and deft application of the brushwork in *Omnibus I* becomes apparent. Applied using mostly single, unblended brushstrokes, the facture in this earlier version conveys a sense of rapidity in handling, which in turn places the painting closer to the other remnant sketches for this composition. Contrastingly, the modelling used for the face in *Omnibus II* is more carefully constructed. Examples include the gradual transition between shadows and highlights seen in the figure's forehead, as well as the shape of her proper right ear.



14 [left] Anders Zorn, detail of *Omnibus I* (© Cecilia Heisser/Nationalmuseum); 15 [right] Anders Zorn, detail of *Omnibus II* (© Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum)

[19] In addition to these clear differences in facture, there are other technical aspects that further indicate that *Omnibus I* most likely served as a sketch to the final version. Firstly, the earlier painting is notably smaller in format, measuring 99.5 x 66 cm, whereas *Omnibus II* is 126 x 88 cm. Furthermore, an x-radiograph (Fig. 16) made of *Omnibus II* shows how Zorn made alterations to an earlier version of the painting, whereby he changed the shape of the hat box from being square to rounded in shape. This in turn suggests that the artist initially conceived the composition as being more similar to the arrangement seen in *Omnibus I*, thus creating a clear chronology for the two works. The reasons for this change in *Omnibus II* remains unclear, although it is possible that the size of the hat box was reduced in order to make room for the half-visible gentleman in the foreground, since it appears that the placement of the male figure's hand was shifted slightly upwards, as was the head of the main female figure.

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<sup>15</sup> The results of this technical study will be published in the author's PhD thesis, (preliminary title) *Making in Context: Reconsidering Anders Zorn's Oil Painting Practice* (publication forthcoming).

[20] Another change that is visible in the x-radiograph is the placement of the incident light falling upon the cheek of the female figure's face, whereby its previous position appears to have been more similar to the backlighting seen in *Omnibus I*. In the final version of *Omnibus II*, however, the incident light falling from behind the figure is subdued, favouring the sharp angular lighting striking her face from the front. This particular change is also visible on the surface of the painting due to some slight abrasion in this area, as well as some potential increased transparency of the upper paint layers as they have aged over time. It is also curious to note that the later angular-shaped lighting is not as prominent in the x-radiograph as the earlier backlit highlight, perhaps indicating a change in Zorn's pigment composition between these two areas. However, further elemental analysis, such as non-invasive x-ray fluorescence or cross-section sampling, would be required in order to confirm this observation.<sup>16</sup>



16 Anders Zorn, *Omnibus II*, X-radiograph (© Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum).

[21] These technical observations, combined with the aforementioned archival sources, present a convincing argument for reconfiguring *Omnibus I* as a sketch to the final Salon version of the composition. However, before concluding this discussion it is worth mentioning a handful of subsequent press reviews relating to the earlier version, as it helps account for its later reception and eventual association as a finished Salon *tableau*. In a review of Tor Hedberg's 1910 monograph on Zorn, Nordensvan offers the following reference to *Omnibus I*:

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<sup>16</sup> No elemental analysis was undertaken for *Omnibus I* and *Omnibus II* as part of this research. However, both x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy and cross-section sampling were conducted for a larger number of Zorn's paintings, the results of which will be available in the author's upcoming PhD thesis. See previous note.

*One is, amongst other things, reminded of one or another less well-known painting, for example the first version of the Parisian omnibus painting and of Coquelin Cadet's portrait, which Mr. Thorsten Laurin newly had the luck of purchasing at auction in Paris.*<sup>17</sup>

[22] Then, four years later, on the occasion of the Baltic exhibition in Malmö, an author signed "K.B." mentions Zorn's inclusion of an "omnibus painting" in the artist's section of the show.<sup>18</sup> In the former case, it is clear that the text is referring to *Omnibus I*, since it is recorded as being in the ownership of Thorsten Laurin, to whom the painting belonged prior to its entering the Nationalmuseum collection in 1985.<sup>19</sup> In the later review it is a little more ambiguous as to which version of the painting is being referred to, as there is no mention of a specific owner. However, in the exhibition catalogue there are a few clues that point to the painting being *Omnibus I*, such as its date being listed as "1891" (*Omnibus II* is dated 1892) and the owner as "Director Th. Laurin".<sup>20</sup> Therefore, one can safely assume that the two different reviews are referring to the same painting.

[23] Interestingly, in both cases there is no mention of the painting's original function as a study or sketch to the later Salon version. Since *Omnibus II* would have been out of circulation with regards to the European exhibition context for a period of over twenty years by this date, it is easy to envisage how the earlier version might have been mistaken for the later one. Another interesting observation to make, is that in these later, retrospective exhibition contexts, it would appear that Zorn was, in effect, appropriating *Omnibus I* as a finished painting – this being despite the fact that the work was never officially exhibited around the time it was painted. Indeed, a retrospective appropriation of this kind is alluded to in Ernst Malmberg's overview of the Larsson-Liljefors-Zorn exhibition, held at Liljewalchs Konsthall in Stockholm, in 1916. In discussing *Omnibus I*, Malmberg makes the following comments about the painting: "The exhibited canvas, which belongs to Thorsten Laurin, is a *prélude* – the artist did not want to call it a sketch, as they are two independent works – to the larger canvas with the same subject, which is owned by Mrs. Jack Gardner in Boston."<sup>21</sup>

[24] Zorn's use of the term "*prélude*", which bears with it notable musical connotations, is unusual, if not unprecedented within the context of the artist's oeuvre.<sup>22</sup> This in turn makes it difficult to

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<sup>17</sup> "[...] Man blir bland annat påmint om en och annan mindre allmänt känd målning, exempelvis om den första upplagan af den parisiska omnibus taflan och om Coquelin Cadets porträtt, som hr Thorsten Laurin nyligen hade den turen att förvärfva på auktion i Paris [...]." My translation. *Dagens Nyheter*, 18 February 1910, 8. Available at: [www.kb.se](http://www.kb.se) (accessed 10 October, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> "[...] Av äldre arbeten åter finnas hos Zorn bl.a. Coquelin-porträttet och omnibustavlan från Paris [...]." My translation. *Stockholms Tidningen*, 15 May 1914 (unpaginated). Available at: [www.kb.se](http://www.kb.se) (accessed on 14 November, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> See note 3.

<sup>20</sup> The painting is listed as no. 131 in the catalogue. See: *Katalog öfver Baltiska Utställningen i Malmö 1914: Konstafdelningen*, Malmö 1914, 12.

<sup>21</sup> "[...] Den på utställningen exponerade duken, som tillhör Thorsten Laurin, är en *prélude* – konstnären vill ej kalla den skiss, då de äro två självständiga arbeten – till den större duk med samma ämne, vilken äges av Mrs. Jack Gardner i Boston [...]." My translation. Ernst Malmberg, *Larsson-Liljefors-Zorn: En Återblick*, Stockholm 1919, 102.

<sup>22</sup> In musical terminology, the term *prélude* is often used to refer to an introductory piece of music, most commonly the orchestral opening act of an opera, the first movement of a suite, or a piece preceding a fugue –

interpret precisely what he meant by this term. Whilst it is stated that by this date he considered the two works as separate, the description of *Omnibus I* as a *prélude* nevertheless suggests that it was somehow an introductory piece, and by extension of a different hierarchical order to the final Salon version of the painting. That is, although Zorn may have determined in retrospect that the earlier painting should be considered as an autonomous work (i.e., not a preliminary sketch or *esquisse*), it is also clear that he did not accord it the same status as a finished *tableau*, as was the case with *Omnibus II*. The fact that Zorn regarded the later painting as the official version of the composition is further suggested through the aforementioned etching that exists for the motif (Fig. 17), which follows the format of *Omnibus II* rather than *Omnibus I*.



17 Anders Zorn, *Omnibus (after Omnibus II)*, 1892, etching on paper, 27.9 x 19.7 cm. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMG 35/1894 (© Cecilia Heisser/Nationalmuseum)

[25] Without further comments from the artist himself it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the relationship between the two works. Moreover, as has been made apparent through this discussion, it would seem that the status of *Omnibus I* shifted over time in-line with its changing exhibition context – moving from its original function as a preliminary sketch towards its retroactive appropriation as a *prélude* or introductory work to the official Salon version. In relation to this, one might ask why this later recognition of a previous sketch takes place only towards the latter half of Zorn's near forty-year long career. A possible explanation is that by the beginning of the twentieth century there was a growing acceptance amongst Swedish critics towards the type of loose, impressionistic facture that characterises *Omnibus I* – an observation that can be deduced through reviewing the shifting attitudes of Swedish press commentators between the years c. 1880–1920.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the works of modernist painters such as the Impressionists were also becoming

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the latter being the case in Johann Sebastian Bach's arrangements for *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, to name one example.

increasingly accepted in an official institutional sense by this date, demonstrated by the purchase of several of these works by the Stockholm Nationalmuseum in 1913.<sup>24</sup>

[26] Regardless of Zorn's motivations, the reconsideration of the painting's original function, presented here, allows us to more fully understand the context of a work that has hitherto appeared as deviant within the context of his oeuvre. For, although a work such as *Omnibus I* may not seem conspicuous when placed next to an Impressionist painting by Claude Monet or Auguste Renoir, when considered within the context of the Paris Salon – even the post-1890 Secessionist Champ de Mars Salon – it does not quite fit the style or aesthetic standards that continued to be upheld by these official exhibition spaces during the fin-de-siècle.

[27] As has been noted by Robert Jensen, these official exhibition contexts did not promote the same kind of modern aesthetic that was being represented by the *Indépendants* around this period. Instead, annual shows such as the Paris Salon, the Venice Biennale, as well as the Berlin and Munich Secessions, were more often dominated by artists such as John Singer Sargent, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Jules Bastien-Lepage, Max Liebermann, Joaquín Sorolla and Giovanni Boldini; a group that might loosely be termed the *juste milieu* ("middle way").<sup>25</sup> Zorn is also counted within this loose affiliation of artists, a group which, although not connected in the sense of a school or movement, can nevertheless be characterised as a collective through their shared pursuit of official honors – the kind offered in the form of Salon medals, for example.

[28] The styles and techniques adopted by these *juste milieu* painters in turn differ slightly from the loose and sketch-like facture employed by artists such as the Impressionist, albeit subtly. The Swedish art historian Margareta Gynning has reflected on this distinction within a Scandinavian context, describing the Nordic *juste milieu* painters as "those artists who adhered to some of their academic foundations, whilst also adopting several features from the avant garde" – a characterisation that can also be extended to the abovementioned broader list of artists.<sup>26</sup> This eclecticism in handling, which Jensen refers to as "aesthetic pluralism", is something that has been relatively understudied from a technical perspective within art history, although recent studies on Sargent's, Boldini's and Sorolla's painting techniques are beginning to change this.<sup>27</sup>

[29] It is in turn this hybridized form of *juste milieu* modernism that provides us with the most useful framework for contextualising Zorn's painting technique and practice during this period. In the case of *Omnibus I* and *Omnibus II*, it is easy to see how the relatively academic execution of the latter

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<sup>23</sup> For this research, all available digitised press commentary relating to Zorn was reviewed for this period. All available at: [www.kb.se](http://www.kb.se) (accessed on October-November, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 February 1913. Available at: [www.kb.se](http://www.kb.se) (accessed on 3 November, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, Princeton, N.J. 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Margareta Gynning, "De franska juste-milieu-konstnärernas betydelse för nordiskt 1880-tal", in: *Konst-historisk Tidskrift* 56 (1987), no. 2, 53-56.

<sup>27</sup> See for example: Joyce Townsend and Jacqueline Ridge, "John Singer Sargent's Later Portraits: The Artist's Technique and Materials", in: *Apollo* 148 (1998), no. 439, 23-30; Fabio Frezzato et al., "Giovanni Boldini: Technique and Conservation. A Systematic Scientific Study of Forty Paintings and Eight Watercolours", in: *A Changing Art: Nineteenth-Century Painting Practice and Conservation*, eds. Nicola Costaras et al., London 2017, 100-115; Maria Louisa Menéndez, ed., *Joaquín Sorolla: Técnica Artística*, Madrid 2016.



would have been more acceptable within the official Salon context, whilst still retaining certain elements of modernist facture, albeit in their appropriated *juste milieu* format. The present article has aimed to highlight some of these differences in facture, whilst also consulting relevant archival sources in order to further shed light on this discrepancy. The result has been the discovery of a new relationship between Zorn's *Omnibus* paintings, which has also provided a useful case study for re-examining the artist's placement within the broader modernist canon. Speaking more generally, the shifting functions of a painting such as *Omnibus I* encourage us to reconsider the ways in which works travel and move through history, with their classification being subject to both contemporary and later interpretations.

### About the Author

Emma Jansson completed her postgraduate training in easel paintings conservation at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London in 2016, followed by a two-year fellowship at the Hamilton Kerr Institute, University of Cambridge. During her years training as a conservator, Emma also undertook several internships, including placements at the Victoria & Albert Museum, the National Maritime Museum and the Houses of Parliament in London. She also holds a BA in Japanese Studies and History of Art/Archaeology from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (2010–2013). Since 2018, Emma has been pursuing her PhD in Art History at the Institute of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University, where her research focuses on the materials and techniques of the late nineteenth-century Swedish painter Anders Zorn (1860–1920). In addition, Emma is a cofounder and editor of the peer reviewed journal *Materia: Journal of Technical Art History*, established in spring 2020.

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