

PILLEMENT

MARIA GORDON-SMITH



*Juan Pillement
1768*

IRSA

PILLEMENT

This is the first comprehensive monograph canvassing the entire life and career of the French artist Jean-Baptiste Pillement (1728–1808). As a landscape painter working throughout Europe, from London to Vienna, from Lisbon to Warsaw, Pillement foreshadowed Romanticism. As a designer, countless engravings done after his drawings spread the Rococo style, and in particular the taste for *chinoiserie*, across the continent.

This lavishly illustrated book reproduces hundreds of Pillement's drawings, prints and paintings (including oils, watercolours and pastels) from public and private collections worldwide. Many are published here for the first time.

As well as a richly detailed biography of the artist, chapters include the study of his extensive influence on decorative arts, visible still today, almost 200 years after his death.

The book includes a bibliography, list of illustrations and index.



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by Alastair Laing

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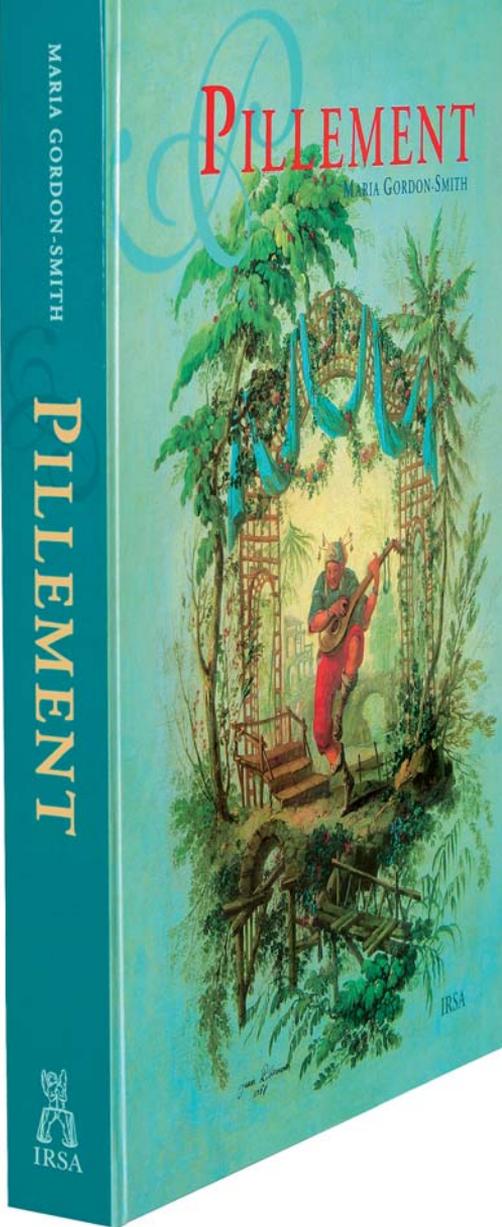
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TO AN ART COLLECTOR, the name of the versatile French painter Jean Pillement can evoke visions of Arcadian landscapes, luminous seascapes, and highly polished pastels and drawings. To the cognoscenti of decorative arts, Pillement is recalled as having been the most prolific and successful master of Rococo fantasy of his time.

Georges Pillement, Jean Pillement's first biographer, described Pillement's landscapes as an "invitation to dream". So, too, were his decorative works. The purpose of this book is to explore those dreams by presenting a comprehensive overview of the international life, artistic *œuvre*, and influence of Jean Pillement.

Jean-Baptiste Pillement was born in Lyon in 1728, and died in that same city in 1808. In the intervening years he travelled widely, both in continental Europe as well as England, achieving a remarkable series of successes along the way.

At the age of just fifteen he was accepted by the *Gobelins* manufactory of tapestries in Paris to pursue his training and work as a designer of cartoons but already in 1745 he left Paris for Spain. Shortly afterwards he left Spain for Portugal, where he achieved sufficient prominence to receive the offer of the title of First Painter to the King Jose I. However, in a display of his remarkable ambition he declined. In 1754, at the age of twenty-six, he then travelled to England. At that time London's art market was starting to compete successfully with Paris. The demand was from all of Europe, from Portugal to Russia, and prints were circulated in the tents of thousands annually. As far as the subject matter of the books of patterns was concerned, Pillement found that the fashion in England was the same as that in France, namely for *chinoiseries*. It was in this field in particular that he came to be regarded as the paramount heir of Watteau and Boucher.

During the reign of the Rococo, *chinoiseries*' essentially decorative character was considered ideal for fine, as well as the applied arts. Pillement excelled at both. In 1755 he



designed and engraved his first series entitled *A New Book of Chinese Ornaments*. This collection was the first of many.

Pillement remained in London intermittently until 1762. Subsequently he travelled extensively, spending short periods in France, Holland, Rome, Florence, Milan, Switzerland, Germany and Vienna. In the latter he was employed by Emperor Francis I and his wife Maria Theresa, and also by the Prince of Liechtenstein.

Following Vienna, he went to Poland to provide paintings and decorative panels for King Stanisław August Poniatowski's two castles in Warsaw. He remained in Poland from 1765 to 1767. During that time he was granted the honorary title of the First Painter to the King of Poland.

Afterwards he returned to France, where over the next 13 years he was to divide his time and work between Avignon, Lyon, and Paris, while continuing to make frequent working trips to London. In 1778 he was nominated Court Painter to Queen Marie Antoinette, in which capacity he provided paintings for the Petit Trianon at Versailles.

In 1780 he returned to Portugal, where he remained for seven years. There he became one of that country's leading landscape and marine artists. He was also named Court Painter to Queen Maria I and King Pedro III, and gained a reputation as one of Portugal's finest teachers of art.

After revisiting Spain, he returned to France in 1789, just as the French Revolution was gaining momentum. However, due to his past association with matters royal, he was forced to seek refuge in the south of France, in the town of Pézenas. There he remained for ten years. It was during that time that he created some of his most admired works of art.

The last ten years of his life were spent in Lyon, where he continued to paint and also teach at its art school. He died there just one month before reaching the age of eighty.

Unfortunately, no known portrait of the artist exists. The man who was called in turn by those who knew him "charming", "amiable" and "admirable" is known to us today strictly through the work that he left behind. Gratefully, as this book hopes to show, that rich and varied *œuvre* provides us with quite a view indeed.

(abridged from the *Introduction*)





VII. Pillemeut's Second Stay in the Iberian Peninsula (1780-1789)



PILLEMEUT ARRIVED IN LISBON in 1780, accompanied by several members of his family. He was joined by his niece, M^{lle} Louvette, a portrait miniaturist and an etcher, the daughter of his sister Louise and Jean-François Sévère de Pétreus. Also with him was his teenage son Victor, as well as his collaborator and companion Allen Ance, an engraver and etcher who was then thirty years old. It was customary for Pillemeut to have some members of his family with him on longer stays abroad.

Pillemeut's sojourn in Lisbon, from 1780 to 1782, is scantily documented, with the exception that a number of his paintings exist in private Portuguese collections signed and dated during that period. We know that he made a short trip to Basel in 1781⁹⁵ as evidenced by an inscription on a pair of drawings of pastoral landscapes signed and dated *J. Pillemeut fait a Bâle 1781* [Figs. 205, 206; p. 211]. In 1782, he travelled to Porto where he made the acquaintance of Domingos Francisco Vieira, an apothecary and painter of landscapes. Vieira was so full of admiration for Pillemeut's paintings that he started to imitate them from then on. Also,

⁹⁵ PILLEMEUT'S SECOND STAY IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA (1780-1789)



⁹⁵ **Male Riders and Herdsmen on a Mountain Trail, 1763**, pastel on prepared canvas, 149 x 110 cm, signed: Pillemeut. Photo: © Museum der Stadt Wien.

⁹⁶ **Rocky Landscape with Hanging Footbridge, 1763**, pastel on prepared canvas, 138 x 113 cm, signed: Pillemeut. Photo: © Museum der Stadt Wien.

⁹⁷ **Winter Landscape with Ice Skaters, 1763**, pastel on prepared canvas, 136 x 116 cm, signed: Pillemeut. Photo: © Museum der Stadt Wien.

⁹⁸ **Rocky Landscape with Shepherd and Goat Crossing a Footbridge, 1765**, pastel on prepared canvas, 137 x 74 cm, signed: Pillemeut. Photo: © Museum der Stadt Wien.

⁹⁹ **Rocky Landscape with a Shepherdless and a Child in the Foreground, 1765**, pastel on prepared canvas, 136 x 74 cm, signed: Pillemeut. In the distance a hanging footbridge with crossing goat and sheep. Photo: © Museum der Stadt Wien.



117. *Market Scene in an Imaginary Oriental Port*, about 1766, oil on canvas, 56.2 x 74.9 cm (probably executed during Pillémet's stay in Vietnam, fabricated in Paris, *Peintures de Manon, La Tournaire en 1769* (1911), cat. no. 60, attributed there correctly to Pillémet and entitled *Un ballez oriental*, engraved by A. Poireton (called Marilid 1828-1883); the painting was wrongly attributed to be after Boucher, *From the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles*, inv. no. 2003.20.

354. The design on the tea service by G&C Inceyons A/S comes from Pillémet's print for the teacup from of Strawberry Hill, England, after 1774 and is called *Chinese Figure*. Subsequently the motif was also adopted by *Joué de France* in France.



the name of Pillémet appears frequently, these are not – as far as can be told – direct copies. Rather, it is the joyful spirit of Pillémet that seems to have caught the imagination of the Portuguese artists, particularly those of the Real Fabrica da Louça (Figs. 350, 351; p. 330).

Pillémet's designs are very much alive today, and enjoy continuing success. This is revealed in an urn by the contemporary Scandinavian company G&C Inceyons A/S. On a *crayon*'s silver-grey background, in imitation of Chinese porcelain, deep blue *chinoiserie* motifs appear on the sides and cover of the urn. These scenes combine Pillémet's *La Leçon de Danse*, featuring a trumpeter, clad in a long coat and a long pointed hat, playing in front of three children who are learning how to dance. Divided by a cluster of strange trees, another composition on the opposite side from the same print shows a Chinese woman with a small child holding a fishing rod. Above her, perched on a branch, a lad is also busy fishing.

All the decorations on this urn come from various designs in *The Ladies Amusement*. Some 245 years after their creation, they resurface today having lost none of their appeal (Figs. 352, 353; p. 331). The same company, G&C Inceyons A/S, also presents a tea service that is beige on white and based on a Pillémet print called *Chinese Figure* (Fig. 354).

Numerous other examples could be cited of ceramics manufacturers employing motifs inspired by Pillémet's designs. Of these, some general observations can be ventured. Most of the featured decorations come from *The Ladies Amusement*, which, as mentioned earlier, included some

355. *George III coffee pot*, Marke London, Sterling standard, 1762–1768, maker's mark of Thomas Whipham and Charles Wright. Photo: Courtesy of Partridge Fine Arts PLC, London.

1500 patterns by various artists. Yet it is Pillémet's *chinoiserie* designs that are apparently most frequently reproduced, destined to reach a clientele ranging from widely different social strata, from superb vessels intended for royal courts, to humble mugs for an English tavern. The fact that the artist's designs were equally appreciated by such widely divergent segments of society can be explained only in part by the tastes of the time. Even more so, however, they owe their success to the inherent qualities of Pillémet's imaginative artistry, the exceptional technical adaptability of his designs, and the cheerfulness of his subject matter.

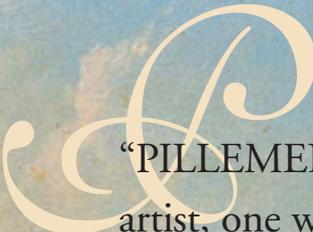


While the *chinoiserie* motif flourished in France during the Rococo period in virtually all fields of the applied arts, there appear to be very few extant pieces of silver inspired by that ubiquitous fashion. One possible explanation is offered by Hugh Honour: "[...] it seems more than probable that many French *chinoiserie* pieces were made and went into the melting pot at the time of the Revolution". In contrast, Susan Hare pointed out that "English silver is an independent growth, and its fully developed style had no parallel on the Continent".

The fashion of *chinoiserie* silver in England lasted from early 1750s until about 1770, and was revived in the nineteenth century. The attributions to the sources of decorations, however, remains uncertain. Scholars of the subject seem to agree that most of the decorations were inspired by French designs. The name of Jean Pillémet is often quoted, but none of his prints appear to have been copied precisely. Yet there are definite echoes of Pillémet's influence on vessels crafted by, for instance, the Thomas Whipham and Charles Wright manufactory in London (1767–1768). These include a lovely pear-shaped coffee pot chased with *chinoiserie* motifs (Fig. 355). A scented Chinaman on the visible panel bears a strong resemblance to Pillémet's shabby and youthful angles who appear in *The Ladies Amusement*, and grace the *Joué d'Enfants Chinois* (such as the one on the Minton dessert dish in Fig. 343, p. 329). Above this figure, there towers a gently curved palm-tree bearing what appear to be coconuts in the centre of its crown.



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“PILLEMENT was a universal artist, one whose multifarious and ubiquitous activities have long cried out for serious extended treatment such as the present book”.

from the *Foreword*
by Alastair Laing

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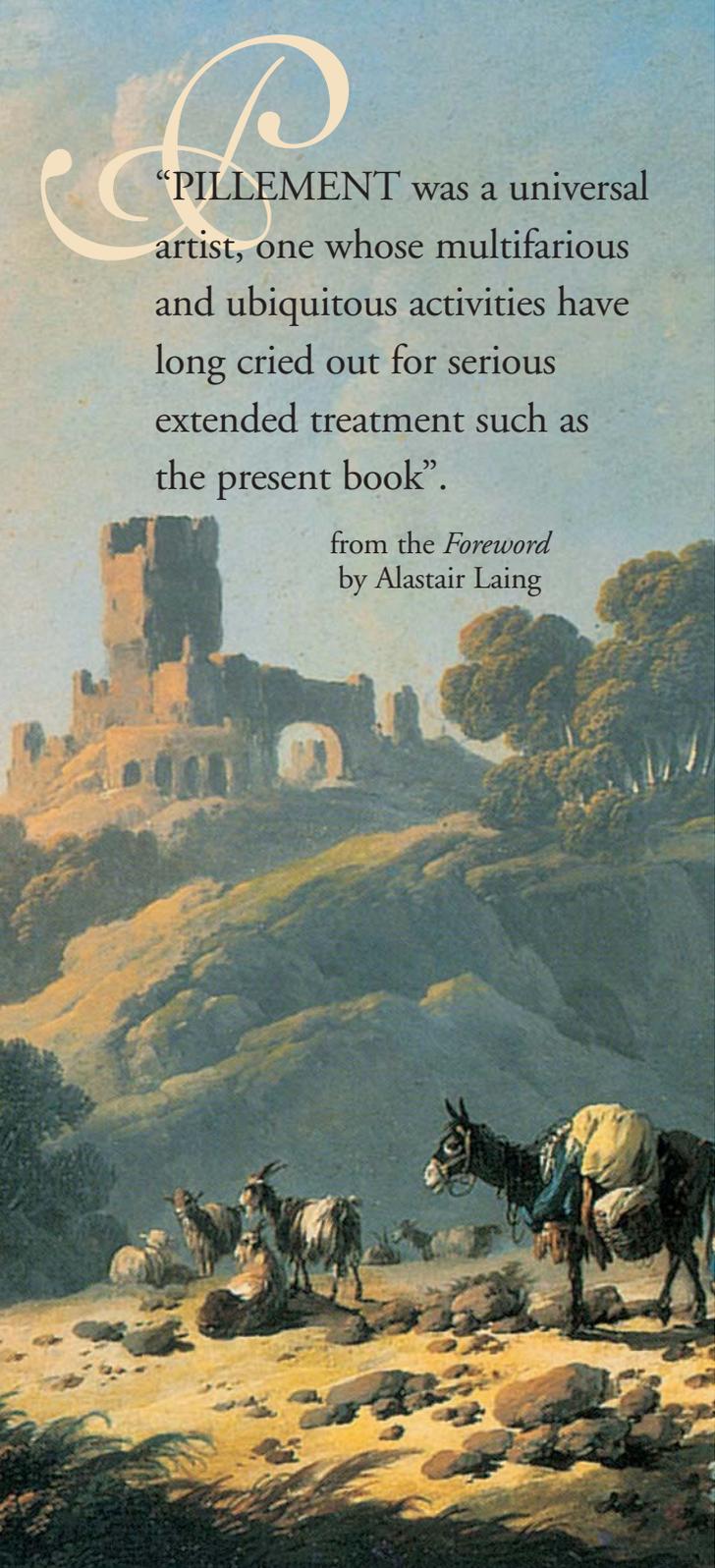
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www.irsa.com.pl
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