

A 21st Century word on Pierrot
By Galaudet Gallery curators Michael Milewski and Vicki Milewski

**A 21st Century word on Pierrot and Artistic Reaction to
Overconsumption Alienating Love
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One of the inspirations in working with art is learning its background, its own inspirations and any stories or histories connected to certain pieces. The story of Pierrot and his evolution from a 17th Century foil for Harlequin's love interest in Columbine to a soul-searching artist who is just now beginning to see unrequited love in a different light has been a delight for Galaudet Gallery curators as we learn more about him with each piece that passes through our galleries. One might have been able to forecast Pierrot's evolution from sad clown to soul searcher since Pierrot came up alongside Harlequin who is a character based on Medieval Italian morality plays where Harlequin works with demons to chase damned souls into hell. The symbolism of Columbine, the spirit guide for the United States, falling in love with Harlequin is either a statement on the souls of Americans or the triumph of a good woman taming a bad man. Both Harlequin and Pierrot are shades of a similar type of clown, a trickster, the historical court jester contemporarily seen as the sage distractor found in virtual worlds, politicians and of course comedians.

A mention of the four-fold character of Columbine is provides a further understanding of Pierrot as pantomime, clown, poet and artist. First Columbina is a woman, the love interest of Pierrot, the pantomime, sometimes represented as his unfaithful wife other times as the unrequited love which spurns Pierrot into soul searching. Second is the Columbine as a flower which in later costumes for Pierrot, the clown, was ever present as a reminder of what has created Pierrot's philosophical mode but also as the attachment he has with the earth—as if the flower could keep him from flying off into the sky, the flower keeps Pierrot grounded.

Then Columbia is associated with the moon who Pierrot, the poet, is inspired by, drinks with, personifies and then falls in love with or falls into a remembrance of love through gazing at the moon. It is through the poet Pierrot that the moon is often conflated as a blooming flower (referencing both the literal flower and the woman Columbia) and the moon is later seen as disguising the night sky from Pierrot since its light makes the stars harder to see.



Lastly Pierrot, as artist, has a love interest in Columbia who symbolizes the United States as a spirit many American artists have lifted from Greek and Roman attributions of Columbia in the goddesses Nike and Victoria respectively. That Pierrot, a 17th century Italian created pantomime then 18th century French portrayed clown turned poet, is in love with Columbia, a representation of the “New World” as seen in America has double symbolic functions. First

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showing a European recognition of seeking modernity and newness outside their borders possibly because of remembrances of times past when their lands were open and “free” for the usage of resources. The beginnings of many empires had promise as salvations on earth and other grandiose ideas which only became perpetuated in the demise of the very ideals first articulated. Second Pierrot’s unrequited love of Columbia personifying a distinct country as seen in America that at the time, of the truly popular Pierrot, was still an upstart on the world stage is a bit of visionary work which supports ideas of artists being able to foretell the future through visionary practices in that even in this fragmented 21st century the “American way of life” and the currently unattainable “American Dream” are still gold rings the carousel riders of the world still try to grab at and attain. ¹ Something a writer or artist in the mid 1800’s would not have been able to see if not for some artistic powers at work.

When we noticed the deep blues used for both the posters of Pierrot in our current archive, we knew it was a good way to bring the pantomime sometimes called clown, Pierrot, into an exhibit. Pierrot began as a character from Italian performing groups of the 17th Century usually characterized as a sad clown, often pining for love of Columbine, who is usually represented by the U.S., and who usually breaks his heart and leaves him for Harlequin. Interesting is that Pierrot was never developed as the opposite of Harlequin but instead he was developed with his own distinct personality and vision even though throughout the next few centuries he was usually played as one corner of the romantic triangle also including Harlequin and Columbine.

The two artworks we have included in our **Bohemian Blues and Wild Hearts** exhibit show Pierrot toasting the stars in one and a first quarter moon in another—both symbols of distance and possible inspiration from the heavens.

The latter poster was commissioned by Vermouth Distiller Claudius Comoz who commissioned artist Joseph Dallion to do a “Moonstruck Pierrot” which was subsequently featured on the label which is the art on offer here. The wonderful crescent moon hanging behind a church steeple is a symbol that in the early 1900’s France would have been a part of the continuing story of Pierrot.

Pierrot is seen toasting the crescent moon in the dark blue sky with his guitar slung over his back. His exaggerated clothing and historical ruff collar² around his neck (a commentary on the fashion of the last century’s clothing choices) depict this Pierrot as a thoughtful clown, instead of reading as a sad clown, this Pierrot is seen more reflective and the upward turned moon smiles down on him showing some possible happiness is around. The placement of Pierrot’s free hand makes it seem that he is singing to the moon and as the story for Pierrot goes, he may be lamenting his love for Columbine. Pierrot also seems to be floating in a blue space that could be the ground or the beginnings of the

¹ As a marketing ploy to urge riders onto the new carousels of the past, gold rings would be placed near the center of the carousel and riders were told they would gain a prize if they could catch hold of the ring and pull it to them. Of course there was a certain danger of falling when trying to grab the ring which many artists and writers saw as the risk one must take when trying to attain a dream.

² A ruff collar is a high standing pleated collar popular in the renaissance period made of starched linen or lace, or a similar fashion popular late seventeenth century and again in the early nineteenth century.

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sky. Taken in symbolic terms this poster art from the early 1900's may also be a visionary aside of the dominance Columbine, representing the United States, would have over French cultural thought and through historical connections Italian culture where Pierrot is originally from.

The other symbolism in this artwork is of course that wonderful upturned crescent moon setting behind a church steeple. The sliver of moon has been used in Christian art for many centuries in depictions of the Virgin Mary since this sliver would be the new moon which symbolized fertility. It is also one of the oldest icons in human history, having been used in graphic depictions as different female deities since at least as early as the Babylonian period in Mesopotamia. Later, the moon became a symbol of the goddesses Artemis and Diana, who were celebrated as moon-goddesses in Greek and Roman times. Artemis held a bow and arrow which resembled the first sighting of the new moon. She is often pictured holding this new moon bow high above her head as if she held the very moon itself. As a celibate goddess she also informs a historical view of independent women who lived alone or with a group of other women, who hunted, danced and lived their lives without men. These characteristics are found in Pierrot's love of Columbine who in some forms of the Pierrot tales leaves the city to live on her own. The distance between Pierrot and the crescent moon also give a sense that Pierrot pines for someone he may never be with.



Today NASA has called its next stage of space travel the “Artemis Project” and included in the NASA Mission Patch is A crescent moon also representing Artemis’ bow. The “A” symbol also symbolizes the quiver of Artemis’ arrow and the trajectory of our path to Mars after establishing a base at the moon where we can launch a Mars Mission. NASA also hopes the first woman will walk on the moon through the Artemis Project. All this gives the 21st Century Pierrot something to sing about.



The Roman Goddess Diana has many of the same qualities of Artemis especially her connection with the new moon. Diana is often depicted with a crescent moon crown or headband suggesting she is one with this moon.

“In Latin, Diana’s name means ‘goddess of light and of the moon.’ It stems from the words for ‘shining,’ ‘divine,’ ‘the open sky,’ and dies or ‘daylight.’ This may seem contradictive for a

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goddess of the night and the underworld, but as Cicero explains, ‘she was called Diana because she made it like day during the night’³ Diana was not only a moon goddess; she was worshipped as the moon⁴. She was the moon. Ovid portrays her as such in his *Metamorphoses*, often using the word ‘moon’ in place of her name.”⁵

Islam may have been introduced to the crescent moon via the Seljuk Turks who dominated Anatolia in the 12th century, and was widely used by their successors, the Ottoman Turks, who eventually became the principal Islamic nation, and whose Sultan held the title of Caliph until 1922. In the late 19th century, the Pan-Islamic movement sponsored by the Sultan Abdul Hamid II used the crescent and star on a green flag as part of its propaganda, and from this were derived the flags of Egypt and Pakistan and many other Islamic states.⁶ The use of the crescent moon on steeples in Islamic countries today may also be a bit of visionary work done by the artist Joseph Dallon.

So Pierrot singing to this crescent moon is heavy with symbolism for a French public who knew Pierrot and the centuries of stories surrounding him. None of the symbolism points to Pierrot gaining the true attention of any of these historical women. The unrequited love Pierrot lives with is a part of his narrative and drives his story forward as he searches again and again for happiness in relationships—never giving up hope that one day he may prevail and be with his love interest. One can never know when dealing in the Pierrot saga.

It is also thought that Comoz commissioned Pierrot for his Vermouth advertising campaign because of the influence of a group of poems called *Pierrot lunaire (Moonstruck Pierrot)* by the Belgian poet Albert Giraud published in 1884. Comoz also used a few lines from another Moonstruck poem on the Vermouth’s bottle’s label.

The J. Spring artwork is also thought to be inspired by the group of poems by Albert Giraud called *Moonstruck Pierrot*.⁷ One of the poems has been set to music by Arnold Schoenberg who used lines explaining how Pierrot is toasting the stars in the sky after the moon has set which gives this artwork the title “Pierrot Toasting the Stars” The raised gold glass in Spring’s artwork joins the gold stars in the dark night sky. The blue-green oversized shirt and pants is another signal that this is the clown Pierrot. Spring creates a

³ C.M.C. Green, *Roman Religion and the Cult of Diana at Aricia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Translated by Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983)

⁵ The entire paragraph from Mount Holyoke blog posting “Diana the Moon Goddess” by Rachel A. Diana whose blog “The Phases of Diana, Goddess in Flux” has many other interesting ideas on Diana.
<https://commons.mtholyoke.edu/arth310rdiana/the-moon/>

⁶ William G Crampton, Director of the Flag Institute, Chester “There are stories that the Ottomans adopted the crescent to symbolize their conquest of Constantinople but this is probably mere legend since the crescent moon used as a symbol by the Turks considerably predates 1453.”
<https://www.theguardian.com/notesandqueries/query/0,5753,-1411,00.html#:~:text=The%20emblem%20has%20been%20used,the%20Babylonian%20period%20in%20Mesopotamia.>

⁷ *Pierrot lunaire: rondels bergamasques (Moonstruck Pierrot: bergamask rondels)* is a cycle of fifty poems published in 1884 by the Belgian poet Albert Giraud who is usually associated with the Symbolist Movement.

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wide spread white lapel collar falling onto Pierrot's shoulders making another point toward the fashion choices of the past as this collar is a modified Van Dyke collar popular during the 17th century and in the United States worn in the 1880's. All this shows that the reveler is none other than Pierrot the pantomime with his hand more dramatically raised than in Joseph Dallon's "Moonstruck Pierrot". While both Pierrot's seem to be singing and this time to the stars which appear to be in the Columb constellation that has fallen out of popularity but was quite popular to find in the night skies of the 17th century. The glass this Pierrot raises is a traditional Cognac glass versus the bottle the Vermouth Pierrot drinks from.

Spring captures the very white skin of Pierrot that was documented to be a symbol of the moon. Pierrot pantomimes and clowns would dust on white powder that sometimes held shimmering mica or other shinning material to mimic how white skin might

look under moonlight. As in the case with Spring's artwork the whiteness of this Pierrot is as a stand in for the moon. Even the Van Dyke collar is shaped like a half-moon. The text for Shoenberg's Pierrot lunaire (a translation by Otto Erich Hartleben) speaks of Pierrot taking on the moonlight's rays, making himself up in them in an attempt to make the moon one with him.

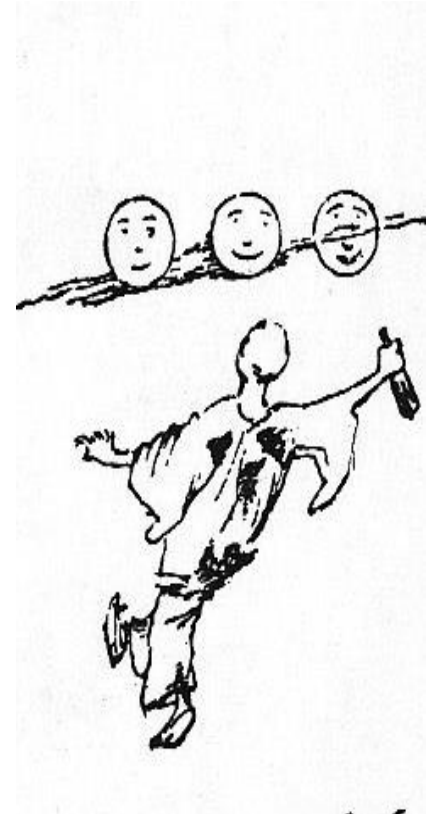
The use of blue in both of these works is something to note. Spring's work shows Pierrot as if a part of the night sky. Pierrot also leans back in a gravity defying way as if he is fashioning himself into a constellation. His outstretched hand with the Cognac glass also become a part of a different blue for a different part of the sky. Spring's Pierrot stands in a much deeper almost indigo blue while his glass raised hand touches on a lighter part of the sky perhaps signaling the coming of dawn as the sky shifts from its deepest blues into a much lighter spectrum. Joseph Dallon's "Moonstruck Pierrot" is more grounded with the cityscape behind him and the crescent moon setting behind the church steeple and other buildings all in a deep hue of blue. However, this Pierrot also stands in what seems to be a space fully connected with the sky just slightly lighter in color perhaps also suggesting that dawn is approaching as also seen in the shadow he casts into the foreground created by the light of the setting moon.

That both artworks were inspired by Giraud's group of Moonstruck Pierrot poems is not surprising given that this poetry collection has inspired many artists for centuries. It is this grouping of poems which evolved Pierrot into an alter-ego of the artist first used by Symbolists and Surrealists artists and then by Modern artists. Pierrot is seen particularly as a poète maudit (cursed Poet)—a poet living a life outside or against society. Poets like Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Verlaine all found inspiration from Pierrot. Many composers

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also set these poems to music as varied as Schoenberg's atonal orchestrations ⁸ and folk singers from the 1960's. "No doubt that Schoenberg found a soul mate in the character Pierrot, who, at the end of the nineteenth century was a symbol of the sensitive, lonely artist estranged from his surroundings, poorly appreciated or ridiculed by his contemporaries. His only friend is the mysterious night wanderer, the Moon, who follows Pierrot everywhere into the night looking for joy and adventure and finally turning sentimentally towards his homeland." ⁹ Pierrot decides to go home when the moon sets revealing the sky crowded with stars that remind him of his home and show him the way home is a common theme in the staged stories of Pierrot from the 17th century onward. "The poems draw their inspiration from the inner (often the darkest) depths of the human soul; they are poetic images creating associations with emotions such as desire, hopeless love, ecstasy, hatred, sorrow and sentimentalism." ¹⁰ In creating a free-floating allegory of Pierrot moving from night to night, Giraud may have given a new life for Pierrot and in doing so worked with the visionary magic attributed to him to release any constraints of time—making Pierrot timeless and possibly a futurist.

Giraud's collection is remarkable for the number of themes which artists have found inspiration in. Some of Giraud's themes use Pierrot as a narrative device to examine "The growing materialism and vulgarity of late-19th-century life, and the artist's flight into an interior world." ¹¹ because of this vulgarity which stood as the antithesis to artistic creation. Written in the mid 1800's Giraud's visionary view could possibly see into the 21st Century since we are still grappling with both these qualities. It is interesting to see how the vulgarity of materialism is seen differently between these centuries since in the 1800's it was literally the over consumption of material items which was seen as vulgar in many cultural circles. Now in the 21st Century the vulgarity of materialism is seen more in how such overconsumption is damaging this planet as well as concerns about how certain peoples are forced to live and work in order to allow the machine creating the consumables to continue on a path most can see as destructive to our environment and ourselves. People like William Morris quoted from Giraud's "Moonstruck Pierrot" poems to explain why his Arts and Crafts Movement was important—Morris wanted to create quality items that would last throughout the ages and be cherished and taken care of instead of the disposable goods he was seeing being produced at the beginning of the Industrial Age in England. What would Morris,



⁸ "Pierrot Lunaire was written in the freely atonal period of Schoenberg's career. It was commissioned by the actress-singer Albertine Zehme, who intended to perform a German translation of the poem collection Pierrot lunaire: rondels bergamasques authored by the Belgian symbolist poet Albert Giraud." Tibor Kovács' blog <https://tiboresque.wordpress.com/2012/10/07/arnold-schoenberg-three-times-seven-poems-from-albert-girauds-pierrot-lunaire/>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierrot_lunaire_\(book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierrot_lunaire_(book)) primarily from Palacio Lehmann's Storey (1985)

Giraud or even Pierrot think of the now “planned obsolescence”¹² and the high-octane disposal culture currently in place around the world?

Following are some lines from Giraud’s “Moonstruck Pierrot” poems translated by Paul Amrod¹³

CROWDED WHITENESSES

XL.

The whiteness of the snow and the swans,
The whiteness of the Moon and the Lily,
You were, at the time abolished,
by Pierrot's Pale Panels!

It is dedicated to beautiful signs
with the buried fairies.
The whiteness of the snow and the swans,
The whiteness of the Moon and the Lily!

I have contempt for unworthy things.
You do not like softened hearts
are the precepts that I read
in the triumph of your lines.
Snow, Wounds and Swans.

The preceding speaks of the artist’s quest for purity in a free soul, “often through a derangement of the senses (advocated most famously by Arthur Rimbaud) that in the late 1800’s and 1900’s meant an ecstasy of music or drugs like alcohol”¹⁴ but that in the 21st Century is seen more in the virtual worlds and as a person who seeks to changed society by alteration of identities, partnering or purpose of life.

As in one of Giraud’s poems also translated by Paul Amrod which deals with the need to be seen as “clean” or in a “certain way” but sometimes we are trying to clean something that is not what it seems. Sometimes we are trying to affect change that is not what is needed.

¹² Bernard London is credited with coining the term "planned obsolescence" in his 1932 paper Ending the Depression Through Planned Obsolescence. However, Alfred P. Sloan, the CEO of General Motors, is credited with introducing the practice in the automobile industry in the 1920s and 1930s. Sloan's idea was to introduce cosmetic changes to cars each year to create the illusion of newness and drive sales. Research from a variety of sources like Wikipeda, GM's own history and "The Birth of Planned Obsolescence--Before WWII, American businesses began embracing "creative waste"—the idea that throwing things away and buying new ones could fuel a strong economy" by Livia Gershon April 10, 2017 on JSTOR Daily <https://daily.jstor.org/the-birth-of-planned-obsolence/>

¹³ <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/pierrot-lunaire-from-albert-giraud-translated-by-paul-amrod/>

¹⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierrot_lunaire_\(book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierrot_lunaire_(book)) primarily from Palacio Lehmann’s Storey (1985)

THE FLECK ON THE MOON

XXXVIII.

A white fleck from the bright moonlight
on the back of his black coat.
Thus Pierrot wanders on a balmy evening
searching for adventure and good fortune.

Abruptly he was bothered by something upon his clothing
He inspected himself all over and promptly found
a white fleck from the bright moonlight
on the back of his black coat.

He thinks that it is a stain from plaster
and wipes and cleans but it doesn't disappear.
So he continues to walk swollen with a venomous anger.
He scrubs and rubs until the lark announces morning.
A white fleck from the bright moonlight.

"The deconstruction of romantic love, inspired in part by a skepticism"¹⁵ and most astutely described by Arthur Schopenhauer that a growing interest in the scientific method for arriving at conclusions or deciphering solutions which uncouples the intuition of love in favor of a rational approach. Now in the 21st Century we still have these two poles of science vs. intuition at work in our romantic considerations most notably in procreation which science has evolved so that romantic partners are not even needed in order to produce children which use to be the main reason people decided to be romantic with certain people. The archaic idea of "courting" a potential love interest has been replaced by other scientific means of coupling as in internet dating, virtual love affairs and the potential of robotics to be employed in companionship.

Another poem from Giraud's collection using the "knitting needle" as the parody for romantic love. Still using Paul Amrod's translation.

PARODY

XLII.

Knitting needles
in her old gray wig,
The duenna, in her cherry casaquin
doesn't get tired of the marmot.

¹⁵ ibid

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She waits in the vineyard,
She is painfully in love with Pierrot
Knitting needles
in her old gray wig.

Suddenly, he intends to burst
pointing at the whistle in the breeze.
The Moon is a spiteful mocker
and its rays seem to imitate
knitting needles that glitter and gleam.

"The transmutation of art into a hermeticism (via Stéphane Mallarmé, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Rainer Maria Rilke) through which it can be enriched with sacred value, spared the gaze of the masses, and engaged with the dissonant incongruities of modern life"¹⁶-- all things the 21st Century artist still utilizes in order to create.

THE MIRROR

XLVII.

From a growing crescent of the moon
imagine the blue sky of the evening,
and by the balcony of the boudoir
it enters with its wandering light.

Opposite, in vibrant peace
the limpid and deep mirror,
from a growing crescent of the moon
unties the blue sky of the evening.

Pierrot, in a conquering way
reflects and unanticipatedly appears in the dark
laughing in smugness in silence to see,
separated by his white relationship,
a growing crescent of the moon!

Giraud explores all these themes in his Moonstruck Pierrot poems which are symbolic fragments shored against Pierrot's ruins. Artists today have found an inspiration in Pierrot. In contemporary popular culture—in poetry, fiction, and the visual arts, as well as works for the stage, screen, and concert hall—Pierrot may be seen as a sad clown who is able to bring laughter from audiences because of his “failures” or pranks he pulls on himself, but it is his distraction that really causes these often seen as misfortunes. Pierrot

¹⁶ ibid

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is of course distracted by love and in the 21st Century he begins pursuing the idea of love in trying to understand why he was not able to be with the one he loves.

Just as we here at Galaudet Gallery see a new way of bringing the Arts and Crafts movement into the 21st Century we include a newly evolved Pierrot—who may still not win the heart of Columbine but who is learning that there may be love elsewhere. Some may say that reading so much from an artwork may obstruct the enjoyment of a piece but we believe that utilizing artwork for understanding our lives is one of its purest opportunities for enjoyment and that such knowledge can assist in having a more meaningful aesthetic experience. These Pierrot pieces clearly have something to say about life as lived in the past and as we are living it today. Knowing that artists are often in conversation with alternative realities and varieties in ways of being and other such dimensional attributes also means they may have connections with ways of representing time in a less linear fashion and in releasing time from the constraints of its usual flow from past to present to future. These artists may be visionaries who can see into the future because instead of it being at some far-flung point on a linear scale it is right there beside them as they work.

BOHEMIAN CRYSTAL

L.

A moon beam enclosed
in a beautiful bottle from Bohemia.
Such is the fairylike poem
that, in these rounds, I answered.

I'm dressed like Pierrot,
to offer what I like.
A moon beam enclosed
in a beautiful bottle from Bohemia.

By this symbol all is expressed.
O my very dear, all of myself
like Pierrot, in his pale head,
senses that under my thin mask
a beam of the moon is enclosed.

Paul Amrod Friday, September 1, 2017

Galaudet Gallery encloses “a beam of the moon” to you in these artworks depicting Pierrot and the others found in our Bohemian Blues and Wild Hearts art exhibit. See you soon!