

ELLIOTT FINE ART

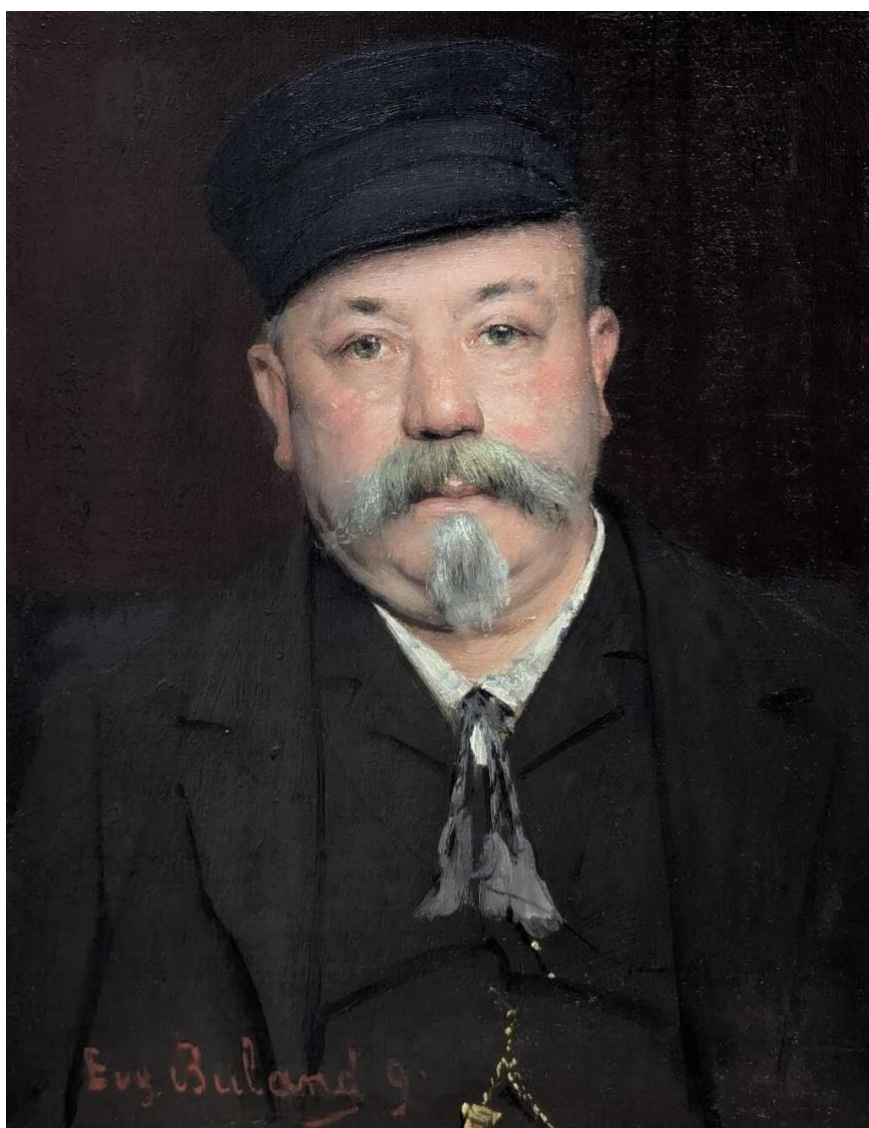
Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

Jean-Eugène Buland
(Paris 1852 – 1926 Charly-sur-Marne)

Bust length portrait of a man in a cap

Signed and dated lower left: *Eug. Buland 1893*
Inscribed on the reverse: *Portrait de / Pierre Perrin*
Oil on panel
27 x 21 cm. (10 ½ x 8 ¼ in.)

Provenance:
Private Collection, Paris, until 2025.



This engaging portrait, rich in character, is in its directness entirely typical of the naturalist painter Jean-Eugène Buland. However, in technique it is more loosely painted than the highly polished, minutely detailed canvases for which he is best known—works that have led many to view him as a precursor to hyperrealism.¹

The burly sitter, wearing a working-class cap and seemingly lifted straight from the pages of an Émile Zola novel, is recognizable as the travelling salesman featured in *The Propagandist* of 1889 (fig. 1). There, dressed in a similar cap, jacket, and cravat, he is seen offering prints in a poor family's home, his tricolour rosette betraying his political motivations. He likely worked as an occasional model for Buland—and perhaps for other artists—alongside more regular employment. This portrait, then, was almost certainly not a commissioned work or intended for public exhibition, but rather something Buland painted for his own satisfaction, which would explain the freer, more expressive brushwork.



Fig. 1, Jean-Eugène Buland, *The Propagandist*, 1889, oil on canvas, 182 x 191 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Buland's socially conscious paintings often feature such earthy, working-class figures. These compositions brought him significant acclaim in his lifetime: medals at the Universal Exhibition in Barcelona (1888), the Exposition Universelle in Paris (1889 and 1900), the International Exhibition in London (1890), and the Légion d'honneur in 1894.

¹ Paul Gilbert, *Eugène Buland, peintre réaliste par tradition*, Paris, 2007, p. 23-35.

The son of an engraver, Buland trained at the École des Beaux-Arts and in the studio of Alexandre Cabanel. After winning the Grand Prix de Rome two years in a row, in 1878 and 1879, he spent five years at the Villa Medici, where he studied Renaissance masters and refined his technique. Upon his return to France in 1884, Buland abandoned classical and allegorical subjects in favour of Naturalism, working closely with Jules Bastien-Lepage.

In 1886, Buland left Paris to settle in Charly-sur-Marne, a small village in the Aisne département near Château-Thierry. There, he painted scenes drawn from everyday life—often with a clear social or political undertone—with extraordinary precision and care (fig. 2). He made extensive use of photography to capture the expressions and gestures of his subjects, giving his compositions a quality that sometimes suggests collage.



Fig. 2, Jean-Eugène Buland, *The Apprentice*, 1888, oil on canvas, 102 x 82 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

Given his many prestigious state commissions and his presence in museum and institutional collections throughout France and Europe, it is surprising that Buland's work remains relatively little-known today.