

Bracquemond (1833–1914) was a master etcher who was famous for his portrayal of birds. He played a key role in the revival of printmaking and encouraged artists such as Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and Camille Pissarro to use the technique. He was also instrumental in introducing Japonisme to France, becoming the first European artist to directly copy Japanese designs.



This etching is a political cartoon celebrating the Franco-Russian Alliance, which was formalised through an exchange of letters between 27 December 1893 and 4 January 1894, when both governments announced their ratification of the military convention. This marked a significant diplomatic shift, ending France's isolation following its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War.

#### The 'Russian Week' connection

The inscription on the print refers to 'Semaine Russe, 8 Octobre 1893' (Russian Week, 8 October 1893). This refers to a pivotal moment in Franco-Russian relations, known as Russian Week in October 1893. In 1891, the French fleet visited the Russian naval base at Kronstadt, where they were warmly welcomed by Tsar Alexander III.

This visit marked the first time that La Marseillaise had been played at an official event in Russia; playing it had previously been a criminal offence. In October 1893, the French fleet's visit to



#### THEN vs Now

In 1893, the magnificent French cock crowed 'Vive le Tsar!' as France and Russia joined forces against German expansion and the Triple Alliance. The cock symbolised France's delight in finding a powerful ally with whom to break its isolation and pose a crucial two-front threat to Germany.

Fast forward 130 years and France is part of the NATO and



Kronstadt was reciprocated with an equally cordial visit from the Russian fleet to Toulon.

### What does the gallic cock symbolise?

The Metropolitan Museum explains that the Gallic cock crows to celebrate France's recent alliance with Russia. France's national symbol appears magnificent and defiant, representing the country's newfound strength through its alliance with the Tsar. The inscription 'Vive le Tsar' makes the political message explicit.

### Historical significance

This alliance was revolutionary because, despite their ideological differences (France being a republic and Russia an autocracy) the two countries began to cooperate.

The strengthening of the German Empire, the formation of the Triple Alliance in 1882 and the intensification of Franco-German and Russo-German tensions towards the end of the 1880s resulted in France and Russia developing a shared foreign policy and mutual strategic military interests.

The alliance had a profound impact. France and Russia agreed that if the Triple Alliance mobilised, they would immediately and simultaneously mobilise all their forces. This would ensure that Germany would have to fight on two fronts: in the east and in the west.

Bracquemond's print captures the pivotal moment when, through its alliance with Russia, France could finally proclaim its triumph after decades of diplomatic isolation following its defeat by Prussia in 1871. The magnificent cock crowing represents France's restored confidence and power on the European stage.

EU coalition supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression, with Germany now an ally rather than a threat. The irony is striking. Russia, which was once France's salvation from German encirclement, is now the expansionist power that France (alongside Germany) is working to contain.

Bracquemond's *Cochin* has become a historical time capsule, demonstrating how dramatically European alliances can change. The proud, crowing cock celebrating Russian friendship would be utterly bewildered by today's geopolitical landscape, in which France is providing military assistance to Ukraine in its fight against the nation that it once embraced as a crucial ally.

It really demonstrates how the balance of power in politics, which Bracquemond commented on in 1893, continues to shape Europe, albeit with a rearranged set of players.

### Sources:

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*"Marianne and the northern bear" France's Marianne in bed with Russia.*





<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/343435>

Félix Bracquemond, French (1833-1914), The Old Rooster, 1882, etching on fine paper, 11 1/4"H x 9 3/4"W (plate), 20"H x 16"W (mat)  
<https://www.ripleyauctions.com/auction-lot/felix-bracquemond-french-1833-1914-the-old-ro E434811990>

**Some more of  
Bracquemond's work**







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<https://ccfjt.com/meiji150eme/japonisme-felix-bracquemond/>







<https://artvee.com/dl/birds-of-prey-devouring-their-prey-in-front-of-a-crowd-of-envious-birds/>