



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME ONE

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications
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Designed by Susan Marsh
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Bibliography edited by Sophia Wagner-Serrano
Index by Kathleen M. Friello
Proofread by June Cuffner
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Details:

TITLE PAGE: John Constable, *Yarmouth Jetty* (cat. 73)

OPPOSITE COPYRIGHT PAGE: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Bathers of the Borromean Isles* (cat. 89)

PAGE VIII: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Woman Crocheting* (cat. 267)

PAGE X: Claude Monet, *Seascape, Storm* (cat. 222)

PAGE XII: Jacques-Louis David, *Comte Henri-Amédée-Mercure de Turenne-d'Aynac* (cat. 103)

PAGE XVI: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr* (cat. 33)

PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154)

be seen in the pale water at the right center. Using infrared reflectography, additional lines can be detected around the left trees and wall, the distant buildings, and the water's edge. A dark line running up the left edge may indicate that the picture was marked prior to stretching. The thin scumbles of paint skip across the threads, and the ground color shows through in many locations, especially in a broad area in the right center river. The fog at the left was made by dragging very dry whitish paint over previously painted trees. The tree tops were then repainted with a darker color. The thickest paint was used to indicate the sun. The entire surface was executed in coarse bristle brushes, which have left their marks in the paint.

1. For a brief, accessible discussion of Lecoq de Boisbaudran's teachings, see Cleveland and others 1980–82, p. 34.
2. Child 1890, p. 826.
3. Coffin 1898, p. 395.
4. Sale, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, 16 Mar. 1944, no. 84.
5. Bénédite 1901, pp. 99–100.
6. Child 1890, p. 828.

Théobald Chartran

French, 1849–1907

48 | Emma Calvé as Carmen 1894

Oil on canvas, 116.4 x 90.2 cm
Lower right: Chartran / 1894
1955.41

Emma Calvé (1858–1942) was a French soprano, famous in her day throughout Europe and America for her performances in the operas of Georges Bizet and Jules Massenet. Born in France to a French mother and a Spanish father, Calvé spent some years in Spain as a child, making her an ideal performer to take on the role of the feisty Spanish cigarette-factory worker in Bizet's *Carmen*. Although the role of Carmen was initially established by Célestine Galli-Marié in the inaugural performance of the opera in Paris in 1875, Calvé strived to make it her own when she first sang the role in 1892 at the Opéra-Comique in Paris. In her autobiography, Calvé gives herself credit for making changes in the costume, dance steps, and gestures from those used by Galli-Marié, basing her version upon a first-hand study of the gypsies of Grenada and her own

differences in personality and body type with those of her predecessor.¹ In 1893 *Carmen* was performed to much acclaim in London and then in New York, bringing great fame to Calvé. She later asserted that *Carmen* was not her favorite role, but one to which she had become a prisoner due to its popularity.² In 1904 she took part in the one-thousandth performance of *Carmen* at the Opéra-Comique, and she continued to sing well into the 1920s.

In the painting of the singer in her most famous role, Calvé, with a tilt of her head and her arms akimbo, emphasizes the forthright temperament of her character. She smiles beguilingly at the viewer, as if inviting an encounter. Equally dramatic is the vivid contrast between the singer's dark hair and creamy skin. Publicity photographs of Calvé as *Carmen* (fig. 48.1) indicate a similar theatricality and sauciness of character, while also showing the details of her costume. The singer wears a fringed shawl decorated with flowers at the décolletage and waistline, with more flowers tucked into her upswept hairdo. Many of these costume elements are carried over to the painting. The shawl is the most prominent element of Calvé's costume, but it is the fringe that seems of major interest to the painter, Théobald Chartran. He gives the fringe almost a life of its own with an implied movement of each strand.

Chartran trained with the academic painter Alexandre Cabanel (1823–1889) and at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, exhibited at the Salon beginning in 1872, and was awarded the Prix de Rome in 1877. Although he is little known today, his popularity rose in the late 1870s and early 1880s because of his illustrations of his contemporaries—including Pope Leo XIII and Victor Hugo—that he executed for the English periodical *Vanity Fair*. Typically signed with a single "T," these illustrations often evoke a timeless elegance; rarely could they be classified as caricatures. Chartran's works in oil ranged from history and religious paintings to landscapes and portraits. Not surprisingly, given his background in portrait illustration, it was the latter at which he excelled, so much so that by 1893, one critic classified Chartran as of the first rank of serious portraitists of the day.³ By 1902, he was prominent enough to be commissioned to paint official portraits of President Theodore Roosevelt and his wife, Edith Carow Roosevelt. Unfortunately, the president was so displeased by his portrait, supposedly on account of its lack of masculinity, that he reportedly asked for it to be destroyed and replaced by a portrait by John Singer Sargent, an artist more suited to the president's own



Fig. 48.1. Artist unknown, *Emma Calvé as Carmen*, c. 1894. Photograph. Location unknown (reproduced from Gallus 1902)

temperament. Chartran's portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt, still extant, is a rather light and charming oval showing the handsomely attired First Lady seated on a bench before the South Portico of the White House.⁴

The provenance of the portrait of Emma Calvé is a bit unclear, and it seems to have belonged to the soprano herself only sometime after 1922. It may have earlier been the personal property of the wife of the art dealer Roland Knoedler, who, under the stage name of Mme Théo, was herself a fairly successful soprano in Paris. A receipt signed by Calvé documents the sale of the picture, presumably to Sterling Clark, in November 1929. By that time, Calvé had retired from her musical career and may have wanted or needed to sell the painting. While it has not been documented, one suspects that Mrs. Clark, whose successful career as an actress in Paris coincided with Emma Calvé's own accomplishments on the stage, as well as those of Mme Théo, would have known either woman or both personally. Further, Sterling and Francine Clark probably were among the thousands of opera buffs who enjoyed Emma Calvé's rendition of the famous cigarette girl from Seville. KP

PROVENANCE Possibly Louise Théo (Mrs. Roland Knoedler), Paris (d. 1922);⁵ possibly Emma Calvé, Paris, possibly sold to Clark, 27 Nov. 1929; Robert Sterling Clark (possibly 1929–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS New York 1895a, no cat.; Williamstown 1955, no. 41, pl. 26; Williamstown 1958b, pl. 4; Washington 1971, no. 38, ill; Williamstown 1979b, no cat.; New York 2008–10, no cat.

REFERENCES Seidl 1895, vol. 2, p. x, ill. bet. pp. 174–75; Gallus 1902, ill. on cover; Calvé 1922, ill. on frontispiece; Frankfurter 1955, p. 2; Wood 1971, pp. 26, 27, 29, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a fine-weave canvas (31 x 25 threads/cm), glue-lined to a coarser fabric (16 x 19 threads/cm). The size may have been extended by inclusion of the original tacking margins onto the surface. The six-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher is probably a replacement. The picture was probably restored for Knoedler in the 1930s, with the tears or punctures near the signature providing the reason for lining. In 1992 the lining was consolidated where it was separating from the original canvas, the surface was selectively cleaned and revarnished, and minor over-paint was removed. There is an old drip line visible in the upper left quadrant, to the left of the sitter's head. The signature is very thin or abraded. Old repaint along the edges, especially on the left and right sides, extends 3.8 cm into the image. In ultraviolet light, varnish on the hair and background fluoresce fairly strongly, with a slightly hazy fluorescence over the face, showing the extent of the last partial cleaning. The surface reflectance is primarily matte with a few shinier old restorations in the background.

The ground is an off-white commercially applied layer. There was no evidence of an underdrawing. The paint consistency in the flowers, arms, and parts of the face is thick and paste-like, with a soft-focus blending on the flesh areas and broader individual strokes for the hair, flowers, and costume. The background appears to have been painted around the figure and is comprised of thin scumbles, except where the paint is heavier to correct outlines and changes in the hair ornaments.

1. Calvé 1922, pp. 81–82. She also notes with gratitude the praise for her interpretation that she received from Gallimarié herself.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
3. Enault 1893, p. 26.
4. See Kloss 1992, pp. 22–25 for both portraits.
5. A note in the Clark's curatorial file indicates it was in her estate.

