

The background of the cover is a detailed 19th-century painting of a storm at sea. The sky is filled with heavy, dark, and turbulent clouds, with some light breaking through near the horizon. The sea is dark and choppy, with white-capped waves crashing against a sandy beach in the foreground. Several large sailing ships with multiple masts and sails are visible on the horizon, some appearing to be struggling against the wind. The overall mood is one of intense natural power and maritime drama.

**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,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

Nineteenth-Century European Paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute is published with the assistance of the Getty Foundation and support from the National Endowment for the Arts.



The Getty Foundation



ART WORKS.
arts.gov

Produced by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute
225 South Street, Williamstown, Massachusetts 01267
www.clarkart.edu

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Whately, Massachusetts
Printed on 135 gsm Gardapat Kiara
Color separations and printing by Trifolio, Verona

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Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London
P. O. Box 209040, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-9040
www.yalebooks.com/art

Printed and bound in Italy
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

Nineteenth-century European paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute / 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, James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, Fronia E. Wissman.

volumes cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-935998-09-9 (clark hardcover : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-0-300-17965-1 (yale hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Painting, European—19th century—Catalogs. 2. Painting—Massachusetts—Williamstown—Catalogs. 3. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute—Catalogs. I. Lees, Sarah, editor of compilation. II. Rand, Richard. III. Webber, Sandra L. IV. Title. V. Title: 19th-century European paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

ND457.S74 2012

759.9409'0340747441—dc23

2012030510

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

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

3. For Lamothe and his self-portrait, see Rome 1984–85, pp. 32–33, and Loyrette 1991, pp. 40–44, 63–66. For the importance of Ingres, see Paris–Ottawa–New York 1988–89, pp. 61–62; Ingres’s 1804 *Portrait de l’artiste* is in the Musée Condé, Chantilly.
4. Several of the smaller self-portraits were painted on paper; less expected was the use of this support on the large *Self-Portrait* in the Musée d’Orsay.
5. For examples of youthful studies of various subjects on paper or card from this period, see L 9, 22, 24, 36, 39, 47–48.
6. See Reff 1976b, vol. 1, Notebook 2, pp. 58B, 84, and 85; Notebook 4, p. 6; BR 28.
7. See, for example, *Self-Portrait: Degas Lifting His Hat* (Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon; L 105); in Paris–Ottawa–New York 1988–89, p. 104, this work is accompanied by an associated photograph.
8. Boston–Philadelphia–London 1984–85, pp. 23–29, no. 8.
9. See *ibid.*, p. 25, no. 8a.
10. For a discussion of the date, see *ibid.*, p. 21, where the inscribed “1857” on some prints of this period is questioned. Degas remained in Rome until July 1858; see Paris–Ottawa–New York 1988–89, p. 51.
11. Boston–Philadelphia–London 1984, pp. 20–21, nos. 5 and 6.
12. The soft hat appears in just one other self-portrait, that in the Getty; see note 1 above.
13. See especially Reff 1976b, Notebooks 8 and 9; and BR 16–23.
14. The invoice is in the Clark’s curatorial file.
15. The invoice is dated 16 Apr. 1948; payment was received on 20 Apr. 1948.

111 | Portrait of a Man c. 1877

Oil on canvas, 79 x 59 cm
 Lower left: Degas [stamp]
 1955.44

Purchased by Robert Sterling Clark shortly after Degas’s death, at the fourth sale of the artist’s studio contents in 1919, *Portrait of a Man* has been curiously neglected in recent times.¹ When the Clark collection was first presented in its new premises at Williams-town, however, this canvas was singled out for special praise. Visiting critics from *The Connoisseur* and *Art News* noted it favorably in their dispatches,² and in Lane Faison’s 1958 *A Guide to the Art Museums of New England* it was described as “one of Degas’s finest oil

portraits.” Observing that “the girth of this man and the forceful structure of his skull are established with a minimum of effort,” Faison remarked that “the painting of the hands” was “especially remarkable . . . [and] the crisp linear accents about the eyes and at the neck are a transfer into painting of Degas’s great ability as a draftsman.”³ In the half century since this successful debut, *Portrait of a Man* has returned to undeserved obscurity, exhibited only once outside its home town and overlooked in the specialist literature.⁴

Portrait of a Man belongs with an ambitious series of male and female portraits begun in the 1860s and continued into the following decade, in which Degas explored several radical approaches to the depiction of his contemporaries. An early milestone in this process was a superb group of drawings and etchings of Degas’s new acquaintance, Édouard Manet, the most famous of which show him in three-quarter profile, seated casually in a studio.⁵ A less celebrated print from the same sequence portrays Manet’s head and shoulders, set against a plain, shadowed background, where the painter is apparently lost in thought or focused on a subject outside the frame. The combination of extreme spareness and gravity, which was later to inform *Portrait of a Man*, is less obviously innovative than the cluttered interiors and self-consciously modern behavior that Degas depicted in several large paintings of his peers, such as those of James Tissot, Edmond Duranty, and Diego Martelli.⁶ Although they seem somewhat more traditional in comparison, the etching of Manet and the Clark painting offer subtle resistance to other conventions of the portrait genre, notably the establishment of eye contact between sitter and viewer, and the suggestion of narrative. In both works, our implied relationship with Degas’s model is oblique and the circumstances of the encounter remain unknown, while the man’s demeanor makes him seem oblivious to social niceties. Ambiguity and self-absorption set the tone, as if we have intruded on a private event or a moment of unspecified concentration.

The subject of *Portrait of a Man*, also known as *The Man*, has never been convincingly identified, though Degas’s rare acceptance of commissions makes it likely that he belonged to the artist’s current milieu.⁷ After early experiments in portraiture based on himself (see cat. 110) and his extended family, Degas had gradually turned to the personalities of his new professional world: to fellow artists, such as Gustave Moreau, Evariste de Valernes, Victoria Dubourg, Henri Michel-Lévy, and Mary Cassatt; illustrators and print-

makers, such as Carlo Pellegrini and Marcellin Desboutin; writers and critics, such as Duranty, Martelli, and Paul Lafond; and a few friends close to this circle, such as Paul Valpinçon, Dr. and Mrs. Camus, and Yves Morisot. Despite his remote gaze, the figure in *Portrait of a Man* suggests something of the physical and social proximity of other colleagues represented by Degas, if not the same intimacy. The dark chair back and arm act as an initial barrier, oddly recalling the position of Degas's psychologically remote uncle in the *Bellelli Family* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), but many features of the model are more immediately sympathetic.⁸ His bulky form and confident bearing are acknowledged in the rounded shapes of head and shoulders, and in his well-groomed beard and hair, while detailed attention has been lavished on a deep-lobed ear, quizzical eyebrows, and a slightly retroussé nose. This is an intensely observed individual, whose idiosyncrasies have been translated into delicate washes of paint and some bravura passages of modeling, creating a forceful, solemn presence.

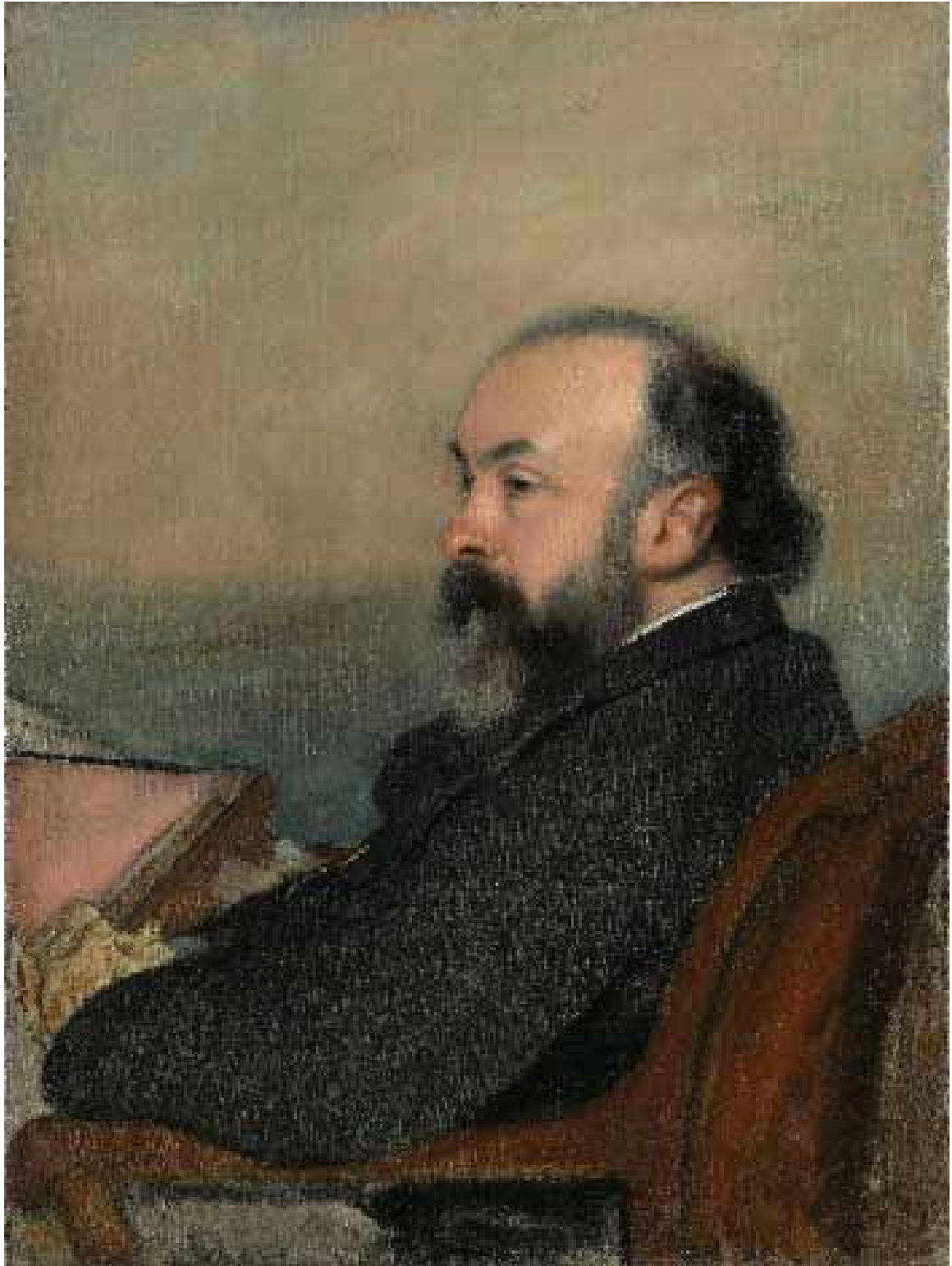
A distinctive quality of the canvas is its overall warm tonality, which unites the loosely brushed background with the man's pinkish brown complexion. In conjunction with his dark eyes and hair, this lends a touch of Spanish or Italian exoticism to the scene, extended into what can be seen as a stormy view of sea and sky beyond. A similar coral pink hue marks the abrupt triangle at left, apparently the corner of a book placed on a writing desk—the latter tilted upward in an earlier paint layer, still visible as a diagonal line intersecting the present surface—that was conceivably introduced as a clue to the pictorial conundrum. Two writers have been informally proposed as models: the bearded but physically slight poet, Paul Verlaine, with whom Degas has no documented association, and the novelist and critic Duranty, who must also be excluded on the basis of other known portraits.⁹ An intriguing resemblance is found, however, in a notebook used by Degas around 1877, where a drawing of a hirsute, balding, but anonymous male shares something of the broad body type and physiognomy of the sitter in *Portrait of a Man* (fig. 111.1).¹⁰ The notebook in question was kept for Degas's use in the home of his friend Ludovic Halévy, where the artist would make after-dinner sketches of remembered faces and scenes.¹¹ Various other candidates for the sitters in both drawing and painting are worthy of consideration, among them Paul Cézanne and Emmanuel Chabrier. Just three pages before the



Fig. 111.1 Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas, *Man in Profile*, c. 1877. Graphite on paper. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

portrait study in his notebook, Degas had drafted a figure taken from Cézanne's *Bathers at Rest* (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia), a painting included in the 1877 Impressionist exhibition, where Degas himself showed both bathers and portraits among his submissions.¹² Though legend has it that the two men were antipathetic to one another, the possibility that this moment of contact and shared preoccupation led to the painting of Cézanne's portrait cannot be entirely dismissed. The swarthy complexion of the Provençal plein-air artist, his dark beard streaked with silver, and the pronounced spherical form of his forehead seen in several self-portraits of the late 1870s and early 1880s, come remarkably close to the visage in the Clark canvas.¹³ Chabrier had already been included in miniature in Degas's celebrated canvas *The Orchestra of the Opera* of c. 1868–69 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris),¹⁴ and he continued to move in the artist's circle as a friend of both Édouard Manet (who painted him twice) and Berthe Morisot. Surviving photographs, like that by Wilhem Benque (c. 1900; Musée d'Orsay, Paris), record Chabrier's domed forehead, full beard, and receding hairline, though they do not share the three-quarters profile that is such a distinctive feature of *Portrait of a Man*.

Portrait of a Man was neither exhibited nor sold during Degas's career, and it bears a studio stamp, not a true signature. Thinly painted over much of its



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surface, it may have been regarded as unfinished, though other canvases in a similar state of development were signed and shown as completed works during his lifetime.¹⁵ Proposed dates have ranged from the mid-1870s to the early 1880s, but the unspecified subject, the absence of true preparatory drawings, and the lack of a documented or critical history have precluded further precision.¹⁶ The recent identification

of a stamp from an artists' supplier on the back of the canvas, indicating that it was bought from the shop of Degas's near neighbor in Montmartre, Jérôme Ottoz, appears to complicate matters further, since Ottoz is said to have left the business in the early 1870s.¹⁷ Paradoxically, Degas painted a portrait of Jérôme Ottoz around this time, adopting a more conventionally frontal composition, though this picture is also undated.¹⁸

Despite echoes of his earlier work and its relatively modest scale, however, the subtle inventiveness of *Portrait of a Man* and the link with his sketchbook drawing must now argue for a date close to 1877 for the Clark picture. As such, it is associated with one of the most distinguished phases of Degas's modern life portraiture, when his depictions of fellow professionals such as Cassatt, Duranty, and Halévy himself prompted new kinds of pictorial ingenuity. RK

PROVENANCE The artist (d. 1917, fourth studio sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 2–4 July 1919, no. 8, ill., sold to Knoedler, as agent for Clark); Robert Sterling Clark (1919–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1955, no. 44, pl. 29, as *L'Homme*; Williamstown 1958b, pl. 17, as *L'Homme*; Williamstown 1959c, no. 6, pl. 29, as *L'Homme*; New York 1967, no. 11; Williamstown 1970, no. 5; Williamstown 1987, pp. 48–49, no. 30, ill.

REFERENCES Lemoisne 1946–49, vol. 2, pp. 372–73, no. 660, ill.; Frankfurter 1955, p. 28, ill.; Comstock 1955, p. 305; Faison 1958, pp. 168–69, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 38, ill.; Minervino 1970, p. 114, no. 606, ill., as *Uomo barbuto, in profilo* (French ed., p. 114, no. 606, ill., as *Portrait d'homme*); Faison 1982, p. 324, fig. 261; Ganz 2004, p. 115; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, p. 58, fig. 61; Madrid 2010–11, p. 24, fig. 11.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is finely woven linen with grayish white commercial priming, stretched over a pine, five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. The canvas reverse has a stamp for the color merchant Jérôme Ottoz. The original canvas is somewhat brittle and had been tearing through some of the old tacks. In 2009, the stretcher creases, including a moderately severe pair of creases along the center horizontal crossbar, were treated locally with warm gelatin, heat, and weight, and the painting was strip-lined with linen and Beva 371. Paint areas that had begun cupping along unconnected diagonal cracks radiating out from the upper left corner were treated in the same manner. Two old, glossy yellow varnish coatings, the lower one possibly original, were removed or carefully thinned, and the surface was lightly revarnished with a non-yellowing synthetic varnish. The painting was restored by Madame Coince of Paris in July 1930, who may have added the second coating, perhaps after removing only surface grime from the first varnish layer.

The paint layer is so thin that the threads of the canvas are noticeable, despite the fine weave. The visible sketch lines are executed in thin black paint, and much of the lower half of the image is laid in with washes and scumbles of very dilute paint. The upper half of the painting has more paint layers and a change from the original background pale green-blue to an uneven application of a thicker, earthy yellowish

pink tone. This last color, applied with a palette knife, overlaps the top of the sitter's head.

1. The assertion in Lemoisne 1946–49, vol. 2, p. 372, that it passed through the Henders collection appears to be erroneous.
2. Comstock 1955, p. 305, and Frankfurter 1955, p. 28.
3. Faison 1958, p. 169. In the 1982 revised edition, Faison claimed that the picture was one of “two of the institute’s most outstanding portraits” (Faison 1982, p. 324).
4. The picture was not discussed in Boggs 1962 or included in Zurich–Tübingen 1994–95.
5. See Boston–Philadelphia–London 1984–85, pp. 46–59, nos. 17–19.
6. L 175, 517, and 519.
7. For the alternative title, see Williamstown 1955, Williamstown 1958b, and Williamstown 1959c.
8. L 79.
9. Correspondence in the Clark’s curatorial files records the proposed identification with Verlaine. Alexandra Murphy suggested the link with Duranty in Williamstown 1987, p. 48. Degas’s documented portraits of Duranty of 1879 (L 517–18), however, show that he had a shorter, coarser beard and more hair.
10. Ref 1976b, Notebook 28, p. 9: the entry in the 1976 edition proposes that the sitter was Degas himself, but in the 1985 revised edition this proposition is withdrawn.
11. Other drawings in this notebook and in the closely comparable Notebook 29 record figures from Halévy’s literary and musical circle, though neither the study in question nor the Clark painting seems to correspond to any of the author’s known acquaintances.
12. Ref 1976b, Notebook 28, p. 3. There has been some debate about the painting Cézanne exhibited, but Degas’s drawing helps to identify it as the work now in the Barnes Foundation (Rewald 1996, no. 261). For the relationship between the two artists, see Richard Kendall, “Degas and Cézanne: Savagery and Refinement,” in New York 1997–98, pp. 196–219. The pictures exhibited by Degas and Cézanne are listed in Berson 1996, vol. 2, pp. 70–74.
13. Examples are Rewald 1996, nos. 383, 416, 445, 482, and 535.
14. L 186.
15. See, for example, L 213, which was shown at the 1876 exhibition; see Berson 1996, vol. 2, p. 34.
16. It is dated “c. 1875–80” in Williamstown 1987, p. 48, and “vers 1881–85” in Lemoisne 1946–49, vol. 1, p. 373.
17. See Technical Report. For Ottoz, see London 1990–91b, p. 43, and Constantin 2001, pp. 57–58, 65–66. The Ottoz business was subsequently continued by other members of the family; Degas presumably used an old canvas purchased from Jérôme Ottoz, or bought one with the earlier stamp still on it.
18. L 378.