



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

VOLUME TWO

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,
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Details:

TITLE PAGE: Camille Pissarro, *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* (cat. 253)

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PRECEDING PAGE 474: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Onions* (cat. 280)

PAGES 890–91: Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Women of Amphisa* (cat. 3)

lines were detected using infrared reflectography. There is a slight change in the paint along the outline of the top of the woman's head. There may be a light brown paint sketch below the final colors. The paint reveals a fairly even texture throughout, with a slightly higher buildup of paint on the figures.

1. Wheelwright 1876, p. 266.
2. For a reproduction of the drawing, see Tokyo–Kyōto–Yamanashi 1991, p. 155, no. 80.
3. Robert L. Herbert, in Paris–London 1975–76, p. 110, lists these and others, including Millet's sole submission to the Salon of 1869 (now in the Saint Louis Art Museum).
4. For a reproduction of the etching, see Delteil 1906–26, vol. 1, pl. 9, or Melot 1980, p. 228.
5. Boston and others 1984–85, p. 91.
6. See Snoep-Reitsma 1973 for a full discussion of Chardin's focus on the middle class.
7. For an illustration of the print, and many other works inspired by Chardin, see Karlsruhe 1999, p. 408 and passim.
8. Strahan 1883–84, vol. 4, p. 52.
9. Wheelwright 1876, p. 275.
10. George Washington Vanderbilt placed this and a number of other works on long-term loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1886. The works were returned to his nephew in 1919.
11. Cornelius Vanderbilt III lent the picture to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1940–41.

**219 | Peasant Girl Returning from the Well
(Paysanne venant de puiser de l'eau)**

c. 1860

Oil on panel, 26.4 x 18.5 cm; original dimensions,

25.4 x 17.3 cm

Lower right: J. F. Millet

1955.551

Jean-François Millet and Charles-Émile Jacque moved their families from Paris to Barbizon in early 1849 to escape the cholera that was widespread in the city. Although both artists settled in and found subject matter for their art in the immediate surroundings, Millet quickly became identified with the place. Seemingly not comfortable in cities, Millet lived in Barbizon for more than twenty-five years, painting, drawing, and making prints of the people, animals, and countryside he saw around him at the northwestern edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau.

What Millet saw were the necessary quotidian tasks of rural life. In this small painting, only a little more than a hand's breadth high, a girl, perhaps twelve years old, carries two full buckets of water. In Barbizon there was no communal well. Edward Wheelwright, an early American visitor to the hamlet, wrote a valuable reminiscence of the time he spent there in the mid-1850s. Wheelwright notes that there was "no common centre of village life, no village tavern even," a statement that implies there was also no village well. Wheelwright confirms this supposition when he describes the interior courtyards of the houses lining the single street of Barbizon, where, along with a dung pile, "in one corner, perhaps, would be the well, with its stone curb and oaken bucket."¹ The shovel and fork leaning against the stone wall at the right also suggest a private rather than a public space.

The girl's delicate yet generalized features, functional, shapeless clothes, and apparently arrested motion transform her into a universal figure. Millet was interested in the business of daily living, the shapes and patterns that lives and bodies assume with repeated actions. He explained another painting of a water carrier to the critic Théophile Thoré in a letter of 18 February 1862: "I have avoided (as I always do with horror) anything that can verge on the sentimental. I wanted her [a similar water carrier] to do her work good-naturedly and simply, without thinking anything about it—as if it were a part of her daily labor, the habit of her life. I wanted to show the coolness of the well, and meant that its antique form should suggest that many before her had come there to draw water."²

Further on in the same letter Millet described a sense of inevitability surrounding his figures. "I try not to have things look as if chance had brought them together, but as if they had a necessary bond between them. I want the people I represent to look as if they belonged to their station, and as if their imaginations could not conceive of their ever being anything else. People and things should always be there with an object."³ The emphasis, importantly, is on the figures and their rightful place in the world around them. For, according to the artist, "their beauty is not in their faces; it is in the expression of their figures and their appropriate action."⁴

Drawing water was a necessary part of daily life. Millet made several versions of this scene of a woman carrying water, in each case varying the age of the figure and the size of the picture. The idea had been with the artist for some years. Wheelwright remem-



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bers seeing a picture with this motif during his time in Barbizon, October 1855 through the end of June 1856. Wheelwright described a larger version (“nearly half the size of life”),⁵ which must be the painting Millet exhibited at the Galerie Martinet in 1862 and which he explained to Thoré in the letter quoted above.⁶ Wheelwright characterized the woman as “Juno-like,” signifying a mature woman, not the young adolescent in the Clark’s painting.⁷ A drawing reproduced by Millet’s biographer, Alfred Sensier, shows a slightly older, or at least more developed, girl. Its medium of black

chalk allows for more detail; in it, the pulley in the well is visible, the overhang of the well looks to be thatched, and water is shown to be overflowing the buckets.⁸ The normalness of the task of drawing water may have prompted Millet to treat the motif as a theme with variations, intimating the countless trips made to this, and every, well before this one and those trips yet to be made.

Someone other than Millet has worked on the panel. It may once have had more detail in the background, in accord with the drawings and the larger

painting. “The coolness of the well,” evoked here in the murky browns, grays, and greens behind the figure, is a result of later intervention. Still, the painting retains a certain charm and exemplifies one of Millet’s ideas on a recurring theme. FEW

PROVENANCE Saulnier;⁹ Laurent-Richard, Paris (until 1878, his sale, Drouot, Paris, 23 May 1878, no. 54, as *Paysanne venant de puiser de l’eau*, sold to Brame; [Brame, Paris, from 1878]; possibly Paul Tesse;¹⁰ Ernest Secrétan, Paris (until 1889, his sale, Galerie Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris, 1 July 1889, no. 64, ill., as *Le Retour de la fontaine*, sold to Arnold); Arnold (from 1889); Alfred Corning Clark, New York and Cooperstown (d. 1896); Elizabeth Scriven Clark, his wife, by descent (1896–d. 1909); Robert Sterling Clark, her son, by descent (1909–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1956a, no. 113, pl. 30; Williamstown 1959b, ill.; Williamstown 1993c, no cat.

REFERENCES *Masters in Art* 1900–1909, vol. 1, pt. 8, p. 35; Soullié 1900a, p. 7; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 83, ill.; Reverdy 1973, p. 122; Paris–London 1975–76, p. 136 (French ed., p. 196); Williamstown 1996–97, p. 10, fig. 1; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, p. 118n15.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support appears to be a thin, or thinned, oak panel, whose grain runs vertically. It has been placed within a secondary oak panel tray, whose total depth measures 0.5 cm. The attached panel has a lip that surrounds the surface of the painting on all four edges, extending the dimensions slightly. The 0.5-cm-wide strips of the extension are unpainted. The painting also has a mahogany cradle, which was probably installed with the secondary panel sometime after 1889. A red wax seal on the back is stamped with Paul Tesse’s monogram, “PT.” There are scattered age cracks throughout, especially noticeable in the well wall at the left. The paint is extensively abraded along the top of the wood grain, revealing the ground layer. Solvent erosion has softened many features, including the face of the figure, while the tree foliage is the least affected area. The surface is cloudy in appearance due to thick, cracked varnish layers and extensive retouchings. The painting may have been cleaned and restored in 1935 by Madame Coince. The ultraviolet light fluorescence of the coatings is very dense with major repainting visible below the varnish in many areas. In reflected light, the wood grain is prominent, including some irregular surface areas located over smoother ray flecks of the oak.

The gray ground layer may be artist applied, as it is uneven and appears to extend to the original panel edges at the bottom and sides. No underdrawing or lower paint sketch was detected. The paint layer is a thin to moderately thick layer, with blurred blending of brushwork, which originally had more glazes. The signature in the lower right is blurred and partially hidden under a repair.

1. Wheelwright 1876, pp. 259–60. For a contemporary photograph of a similar well in the corner of a courtyard in Barbizon, see Munich 1996, p. 437, no. D31.
2. Jean-François Millet to Théophile Thoré, 18 Feb. 1862; translation from Sensier 1881, p. 141. The date of this letter is given in Moreau-Nélaton 1921, vol. 2, p. 106. In addition, the original French of the letter differs slightly between the version reproduced in Sensier 1881 (French ed., pp. 209–10) and the one in Moreau-Nélaton 1921, vol. 2, pp. 106–7.
3. Jean-François Millet to Théophile Thoré, 18 Feb. 1862; translation from Sensier 1881, p. 142.
4. See Sensier 1881, p. 124.
5. Wheelwright 1876, p. 271.
6. Formerly IBM Corporation collection. See Paris–London 1975–76, pp. 135–36, no. 83, which mentions several other versions. The IBM painting was subsequently sold at Sotheby’s, New York, 24 May 1995, no. 29.
7. Wheelwright 1876, p. 271.
8. Sensier 1881 (French ed., p. 207). Robert Herbert, in Paris–London 1975–76, p. 136, calls this drawing “preparatory.”
9. Soullié 1900a, p. 7, lists Saulnier as the first owner; this may indicate John Saulnier, who owned several other paintings by Millet.
10. The “PT” monogram on the reverse of this panel suggests that it was owned by Paul Tesse, but the dates of his ownership are unknown. See also cats. 84 and 220.

220 | Young Girl Guarding Her Sheep c. 1860–62

Oil on panel, 38.1 x 27.5 cm
 Lower right: J. F. Millet
 1955.532

Robert Sterling Clark favored the gentler side of Millet’s output. Eschewing depictions of heavy labor such as hoeing or cutting wood, Clark bought small paintings of women and girls engaged in easier tasks associated with the home, carrying water or making or mending clothes for the family. *Young Girl Guarding Her Sheep*, too, is a painting that, if only tangentially, is about textile production, joining the wool in its raw state on the backs of the sheep and its penultimate form as a sock or stocking on the needles. It is also a fine example of the kind of painting Millet began to make in the early 1860s that he hoped would appeal to a broad market. A girl in her early teens, not particularly pretty but not homely either, has been given