



**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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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



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

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Production by The Production Department,
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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. Rogl an, James Rosenow, Zo  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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287 | Bather Arranging Her Hair 1885

Oil on canvas, 91.9 x 73 cm

Lower left: Renoir. 85.

1955-589

Bather Arranging Her Hair is one of the most crisply defined and harshly contoured of all Renoir's figures painted during his period of technical experimentation in the mid-1880s. Along with *Bathers* (Philadelphia Museum of Art), completed in 1887, it makes the extreme point of his rejection of the Impressionist technique of absorbing figures into their surroundings and into the ambient atmosphere.

The figure is sharply differentiated from the background. In the main, this is achieved by contrasts of color and paint texture; only around the model's buttocks, belly, and thigh is a soft blue line used to demarcate it. Strongly lit from the front, the model's skin is treated in simple, relatively flatly painted planes of dense impasto, mostly in soft pinks and creams, with only slight color modulations suggesting the play of light across her form. The simplicity of her coloring, with dark hair set against light skin, sets the figure decisively apart from the background.

The model is shown seated on a grassy area amid an irregular and partly rocky terrain, with some hint of waves on a shoreline at lower left; but the space in the right foreground is quite unclear, and the figure is not depicted in a credible three-dimensional relationship to her immediate surroundings. Beyond, we see distant cliffs across a wide bay, but these, too, seem to be generic; they cannot be identified as representing any specific site, and they closely resemble the background in the second version of *Blonde Bather*, painted in 1882 (fig. 279.1). The entire setting is treated in clear and variegated light-toned color, with the addition of much white, forming a kaleidoscopic backdrop beyond the figure. In contrast to the softly brushed background of the 1881 *Blonde Bather* (cat. 279), the handling here is crisper and stiffer, with areas where sequences of parallel brushstrokes are reminiscent of the recent work of Paul Cézanne. They are less rigorously parallel than Cézanne's, however, and Renoir, unlike Cézanne, did not use these strokes to evoke colored modeling, but rather to create a set of textures that act as a foil to the figure.

The fabric around the figure's legs appears to represent an item of clothing rather than a towel or generic drapery, since what seems to be an elastic

waistband can be seen running across her thigh. This garment may be contrasted with the far less clearly defined material across the legs of the 1881 *Blonde Bather*; together with the hint of underarm hair, it gives the present canvas a degree of specificity that contrasts with the wholly inexplicit context and setting in which the figure is placed. Moreover, the figure's gesture, as she tends her hair, and the tiny detail of her eyelashes, indicated with almost a miniaturist's precision, suggest a trace of coquettishness wholly absent from the 1881 *Blonde Bather*.

Bather Arranging Her Hair belongs to a lineage of images of seated naked women seen from behind. It carries echoes of both Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's "Valpinçon" *Bather* of 1808 (Musée du Louvre, Paris), placed in an "Oriental" interior, and Gustave Courbet's *La Source* of 1868 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), which shows a precisely modeled, full-bodied figure beside a stream in deep woodland. Renoir noted his admiration for Ingres's oil paintings in a letter from Italy in 1881, and Ingres was clearly an example that he had in view as he sought to reintroduce draftsmanship into his art.¹ He would have renewed his knowledge of Courbet's art at the retrospective of his work held at the École des Beaux-Arts in May 1882, in which *La Source* was included, under the title *Baigneuse vue de dos*. In some ways Renoir's canvas is also comparable to Pierre Puvis de Chavannes's *Young Girls by the Sea*, shown at the 1879 Salon (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), in which no extraneous details detract from the semi-clad female figures beside the sea; Renoir and Puvis shared a model in these years—the future painter Suzanne Valadon.

Renoir's figure, nevertheless, is quite unlike these precedents in the synthesis, in some ways disconcerting, of a tautly contoured figure in a seemingly timeless setting with luminous, high-key color. The painting was analyzed with great sympathy by Julius Meier-Graefe in 1911, in the first monograph published on Renoir; a drawing after this picture even appeared on the cover of the book. Meier-Graefe characterized the figure as a modern Venus: "This Venus Anadyomene does not borrow her charms from any antique sculpture. She testifies to her origins in a way more credible to our modern ideas; she is truly woman born from the waves. Renoir draws her brilliant enamel out from the colored beauty of the atmosphere that surrounds her, and thus avoids the immobile isolation of painted modeling."²

The visible cracking in the paint surface of the figure, and particularly in her hair, suggests that this was



one of the canvases in which Renoir tried to reduce the quantity of medium that he added to his color;³ certainly the dense superimposed paint layers here did not fully bond together. The somewhat chalky tonality of the canvas also suggests his interest in the visual qualities of fresco painting, something that Puvis de Chavannes was exploring in his use of oil paint in these years. The sleekness and fullness of finish on Renoir's figure, however, creates an effect quite unlike the dryness of painting on plaster; comparisons with painting on enamel or porcelain (Renoir's trade in his youth) may be more relevant. Soon afterward, as Renoir told Vollard, he realized that "oil painting must be done with oil";⁴ from around 1888, he never had similar problems with the bonding of his materials. JH

PROVENANCE [Durand-Ruel, Paris, on deposit from the artist, Apr. 1885, bought from the artist, 3 Feb. 1892, sold to Clark, 4 Oct. 1937, as *Baigneuse (La Brune)*];⁵ Robert Sterling Clark (1937–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Possibly New York 1886, no. 211; possibly Paris 1892b, no. 77; Munich 1912, no. 16, ill. on cover (a print after the painting), as *La Coiffure*; Berlin 1912, no. 16; Chicago 1921, no cat.; Paris 1922a, no. 80.; New York 1932a, no. 15 or 16; Chicago 1933, p. 48, no. 338, ill.; Toronto 1934, no. 4, ill.; New York 1935, no. 4, ill.; New York 1940b, no. 17, ill.; Williamstown 1956b, no. 138, pl. 3; New York 1967, no. 43; London–Paris–Boston 1985–86, pp. 122, 246, no. 75, ill. (French ed., pp. 242–43, no. 74, ill.) (exhibited in Boston only); Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 15, 17, 50, 52, 54, ill.; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 101, 116–20, no. 27, ill.

REFERENCES Meier-Graefe 1904a, vol. 3, p. 88, ill. (English ed., vol. 1, p. 294, ill. bet. pp. 294–95); Geffroy 1909, ill. p. 118; Meier-Graefe 1911, pp. 115–19, 167, ill. on cover and p. 119 (French ed., pp. 111–15, 163, ill.); Vollard 1920, not listed in French ed. (English ed., p. 242, as *Bather Seated*); Fosca 1921, p. 102; Fosca 1923, p. 36 (English ed., p. 38); Jamot 1923, pp. 331–32; Régnier 1923, pl. 7; Coquiott 1925, p. 216, ill. opp. p. 16; André 1928, pl. 31; Meier-Graefe 1929, pp. 186–87, fig. 172; Barnes and de Mazia 1935, pp. 93, 204, 413, 456, no. 152; Francastel 1937, p. 112; Besson 1938, ill. frontispiece; Rewald 1946, p. 360, ill.; Zahar 1948, pl. 52, as *Girl Fixing Her Hair*; Gaunt 1952, pl. 53; Ozenfant 1952, p. 275, ill.; Drucker 1944, pp. 74, 78, 187, 205, pl. 78, as *La Coiffure*; Turique n.d., pl. 53; Faison 1958, pp. 173–74, fig. 15; Bünemann 1959, pp. 75–76, ill.; Serullaz 1959, pp. 59, 93, ill.; Daulte 1960b, p. 31, fig. 8; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 105, ill.; Wilenski 1963, p. 341, as *Baigneuse se coiffant (de dos)*; Peruchot 1964, p. 205; White 1965, pp. 64–69, fig. 28, as *La Coiffure*; Polley 1967, p. 31; Hanson 1968, p. 219; White 1969, p. 344, fig. 6; Cabanne 1970, pp. 186–87, ill.; Clay 1971, p. 122, fig. 2; Daulte 1971, pp. 28, 50, no. 492, ill., as *La Coiffure*;

Fezzi 1972, p. 116, no. 619, ill. (French ed., p. 113, no. 581, ill.); White 1972, pp. 173–75, ill.; Pach 1973, pp. 28, 53, ill.; White 1973, pp. 111, 113, fig. 20; Fouchet 1974, p. 48, ill.; Callen 1978, p. 87, no. 69, ill.; Kelder 1980, pp. 236, 438, 438, ill. (2nd ed., pp. 211, 438, fig. 208); Brooks 1981, pp. 70–71, no. 31, ill.; Lucie-Smith 1981, pp. 94–95, ill.; White 1984, pp. 10, 150–51, 174, 184, ill.; Shimada 1985, pl. 8; Wadley 1987, p. 189, ill.; Eitner 1988, vol. 1, pp. 383, 385, vol. 2, fig. 356 (rev. ed., p. 395, fig. 363); De Grada 1989, pp. 8, 78, pl. 55; Lucie-Smith 1989, p. 13, pl. 5; Monneret 1989, p. 102, 158, ill.; Distel 1993, pp. 90–91, ill.; Kostenevich 1995, p. 110, fig. 1; White 1996, p. 234, ill.; Ottawa–Chicago–Fort Worth 1997–98, pp. 214, 216, 321n9; Kern 1997, p. 58, fig. 13; Sotheby's 1997, p. 68, ill.; Garb 1998, pp. 170, 172, fig. 124; Jiménez 2001, p. 537; Néret 2001, p. 306, ill.; Okamura 2001a, p. 31, ill.; Cahill 2005, p. 11, ill.; Cuzin and Salmon 2006, p. 139, ill.; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 2, p. 401, no. 1329, ill.; Rome 2008, p. 60, fig. 5; Distel 2009, pp. 242–43, fig. 223; Goetz 2009, pp. 140–41, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a coarse fabric (16 x 19 threads/cm), glue-lined to one or two bleached, open-weave fabrics (14 threads/cm) with very irregular threads. The replacement six-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher is nailed together at the joins. The lining, which is grimy on the reverse, may have been done by Murray in New York in 1937, when the picture was cleaned and lightly varnished through Durand-Ruel. The stiffness of the painting may be the result of the excessively thick paint layers, coupled with the lining. Long deep age cracks running in both directions, some with old pronounced tenting, are visible in the center of the image. Each corner has a set of stress cracks from the weight of the paint on the original canvas, with the upper right network being the most extensive. Wide traction cracks in the model's dark hair reveal orange paint beneath, now oozing up to the surface. This same orange color is seen in cracks in the sky above the model's head. There are furrows along the picture's top edge, where the drying paint was pressed by an early framing. The edges are all heavily repainted, and there are more recent, small, scattered retouches along cracks in the arm, hip, and back of the model. The varnish is yellow with older brown residues in the deeper paint recesses. Reflected light accentuates scattered dimpling in the surface.

The ground is a thin, commercially applied off-white layer. No underdrawing was found, although the blue outline seen in the upper paint layer of the figure may signal the use of a blue-painted undersketch, as recorded on other Renoirs. The paint layer is extremely thick. The background was clearly completed around the figure after the figure's paint had set, and the number of paint layers decreases as they approach the picture's edges.

1. Pierre-Auguste Renoir to Paul Durand-Ruel, 21 Nov. 1881, in Venturi 1939, vol. 1, pp. 116–17.
2. Meier-Graefe 1911, p. 118: "Diese Venus Anadyomene



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entlehnt ihre Reize keiner antiken Skulptur. Sie erweist ihre Herkunft glaubhafter für unsere Begriffe. Sie ist wirklich die Schaumgeborene. Renoir läßt ihr liches Email aus dem Farbenzauber der Umgebung hervorgehen und vermeidet so die unbewegliche Isoliertheit gemalter Plastik.”

3. See Vollard 1938, pp. 216–17.

4. Ibid.: “la peinture à l’huile doit être faite avec de l’huile.”

5. Daulte 1971 gives the date of sale to Clark as 26 April 1949; the invoice in the Clark’s curatorial file, however, shows that Clark bought the painting on 4 Oct. 1937, paid in installments, and completed payment on 22 Nov. 1938.

288 | Standing Bather c. 1885

Oil on canvas, 43.2 x 27.3

Lower left: Renoir.

1955.605

In theme and treatment, *Standing Bather* clearly belongs with *Bather Arranging Her Hair* (cat. 287) as one of the outdoor nudes that Renoir executed during the period in the mid-1880s when he was reassessing his painting technique, in the aftermath of his visit to Italy. Indeed, in its subject it can be seen as a pair to *Bather Arranging Her Hair*, showing a similar model with long brown hair, now standing, and located in a very similar setting, looking out across a wide bay toward distant mountains.

The small scale of the canvas, however, makes it clear that it cannot be viewed as a work of similar status and ambition to *Bather Arranging Her Hair*. It seems possible that it was originally meant to serve as a study or preparation for a larger and more ambitious picture, and a drawing of a figure similarly posed suggests that it was a project to which Renoir devoted some attention;¹ but there is no evidence that he ever undertook a larger canvas, and the present picture was signed and sold soon after its execution.

The pose of the figure can be seen as a fusion between the theme of the Venus Pudica, shielding herself from the viewer’s gaze, and the surprised nymph, whose gesture suggests that she has been caught unawares; quite unlike the static and detached poses of the 1881 *Blonde Bather* (cat. 279) and *Bather Arranging Her Hair*, the model here makes direct eye contact with the viewer, placing us in the role of the intruder who has disturbed her in her nakedness. Moreover, as in *Bather Arranging Her Hair*, the garment appears to be contemporary—something like a shift—rather than a nonspecific towel or drapery, though there are no signs of contemporaneity in the surroundings.²

The figure stands out sharply from the background, the pink flesh contrasting with the rich blues beyond and the edges of her body being crisply demarcated from the background; though there are no actual outlines, fine blue contours separate arm from torso. The brushwork is less ordered than in *Bather Arranging Her Hair* and runs in various directions, but throughout the canvas it is relatively stiff, with none of the supple fluency that characterized Renoir’s earlier work. JH