



**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](http://www.clarkart.edu)

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Production by The Production Department,  
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](http://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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**278 | Venice, the Doge's Palace** 1881

Oil on canvas, 54.5 x 65.7 cm

Lower right: Renoir. 81.

1955-596

Renoir's primary motive in traveling to Italy in 1881–82 was to study the work of the Old Masters, and notably to see the work of Raphael<sup>1</sup>—an unexpected interest for an Impressionist painter, and one that stands as a clear marker of his dissatisfaction with the informality and lack of draftsmanship in his own recent work. His first major stop in Italy was in Venice, in late October

and early November 1881. The fluent painterly qualities of Venetian sixteenth-century painting, notably of Titian and Veronese, would have been far closer than Raphael to his own previous interests, but neither his letters from Venice nor his later reminiscences suggest that his experience of their paintings in Venice was a revelation to him, for he had studied their work closely in the Louvre. In Venice, it was the art of Tiepolo and Carpaccio that aroused his interest.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, the paintings that he executed in Venice show little sign of any engagement with the art of the past. His main focus was the place itself, and he painted a sequence of canvases of the standard tourist sites—the Grand Canal, the Lagoon, the gondolas.

*Venice, the Doge's Palace* is one of the two most highly finished of these canvases; the other represents the Grand Canal (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Together, these two canvases present the most stereotypical view of Venice, sites that had been represented by the city's most celebrated painters, including Canaletto, Turner, and many others. As Renoir jokingly wrote to Deudon, "I have painted the Doge's Palace seen from San Giorgio; that has never been done before, I think. There were at least six of us queuing up to paint it."<sup>3</sup>

*Venice, the Doge's Palace* is a fascinating attempt to combine topographical specificity with Impressionist facture. The brushwork is busy and variegated throughout, and the forms of the buildings are suggested by colored touches rather than linear contours. Their shadowed sides are richly colored, predominantly in a full blue, picking up the color of the sky, and set off against the dominant cream, yellow, and soft orange hues that define their sunlit façades. The same colors are repeated in the water, with the addition of rich green strokes. At the center of the composition, the green, white, and red flag acts as a pivot around which the predominant blue-orange contrast of the rest of the composition revolves (the house in *Bridge at Chatou* [cat. 265] fulfills a very similar function). The darker tones of the shadowed sides of the buildings also help to structure the composition. As in other works by Renoir, the reflections in the water are only approximately indicated—the reflection of the Campanile, for instance, is wider than the tower itself; unlike Monet, Renoir never notated such effects precisely.

Within this array of colored touches, a remarkable amount of information is conveyed about the details of the buildings. Though not precisely defined, the superimposed arcading of the Doge's Palace and the fenestration of the Zecca to the left are indicated in considerable detail; the upper level of arcading on the Palace façade appears even to have the correct number of arches (thirty-four), and the orb and cross that top the principal dome of San Marco can be clearly seen above the palace roof.

It seems very likely that this and *Grand Canal, Venice* were the two Venetian views that Durand-Ruel included in the seventh Impressionist group exhibition in March 1882 since all the Renoirs exhibited came from the dealer's stock, and these were the only Venice views in his hands by this date. Durand-Ruel registered two Venetian views, one of them subtitled "G. Canal," in his stock book on 30 November 1881; this entry was erased and the pictures re-entered in

the stock book on 12 May 1882, presumably when the purchase was completed.<sup>4</sup> The "G. Canal" can be securely identified as the painting now in Boston. For many reasons, it is highly probable that the other canvas was *The Doge's Palace*: the two are the same size; they are very similar in execution, and markedly different from Renoir's other Venice views; the reviewers consistently discussed them as a pair; and in a letter to Charles Deudon from Venice, Renoir mentioned that he had sent two canvases to Paris, intended for Durand-Ruel, immediately following this by describing the view of the Doge's Palace, implying that it was one of the two.<sup>5</sup>

Critical response to the Venice canvases at the 1882 exhibition was largely negative. Several reviewers compared them to the work of Félix Ziem, renowned for his endlessly repeated hot-toned Venetian views; Jacques de Biez described them as "the ugliest fireworks,"<sup>6</sup> while Paul Leroi saw them as "the most outrageous series of ferocious daubs that a calumniator of Venice could possibly imagine."<sup>7</sup> Louis Leroy was particularly critical of the treatment of the water: "The painter has posed himself this problem: to create water that is . . . solid, on which gondolas on wheels can roll, without it being possible to interpret this hatched, striped, spotty surface as any sort of dry land. He has admirably mastered this difficulty. It resembles nothing in the known world."<sup>8</sup> JH

**PROVENANCE** The artist, probably sold to Durand-Ruel, 12 May 1882, as *Vue de Venise*;<sup>9</sup> [probably Durand-Ruel, Paris, from 1882]; E. Oppenheim (until 1897, his sale, Drouot, Paris, 11 May 1897, no. 21, as *Vue de Venise*, sold to Durand-Ruel);<sup>10</sup> [Durand-Ruel, Paris and New York, 1897–1933, sold to Clark, 3 March 1933]; Robert Sterling Clark (1933–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Probably Paris 1882, no. 147, as *Vue de Venise*;<sup>11</sup> possibly Paris 1883a, no. 60, as *Venise*; Paris 1904b, Salle Renoir, no. 18, as *Venise*; London 1905a, no. 259, as *Venise*; possibly Paris 1925a, no. 22, as *Venise*; Williamstown 1956b, no. 156, pl. 21; Sydney–Melbourne–New York 1975, p. 44, ill.; Williamstown 1982c, pp. 33, 44–45, no. 84, ill.; Nagoya–Hiroshima–Nara 1988–89, pp. 80–81, 231, 240, no. 23, ill.; Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 77–78, 80, 83, ill.; London–Ottawa–Philadelphia 2007–8, pp. 15, 48, 240–42, 246, 249, no. 62, ill.; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 53, 81–85, 90–93, 96.

**REFERENCES** Probably Biez 1882, p. 2; probably Burty 1882, p. 3; probably Flor 1882, p. 2; probably Hepp 1882, p. 1; probably Hustin 1882a, p. 3; probably Hustin 1882b, p. 1; prob-

ably La Fare 1882, p. 2; probably Leroi 1882, p. 98; probably Leroy 1882, p. 2; probably Michel 1882, p. 3; probably Nivelles 1882; probably Robert 1882, p. 1; probably Silvestre 1882; probably Wolff 1882, p. 1; Morrison 1906, p. 204, ill., as *Le Grand Canal à Venise*; Pica 1908, p. 96, ill.; Vollard 1920, pp. 113–14 (English ed., p. 100); Jamot 1923, p. 327; Coquirot 1925, p. 82; Meier-Graefe 1929, p. 156, fig. 141; Barnes and de Mazia 1935, pp. 77, 81, 100, 454, no. 121; Vollard 1938, p. 201; Florisoone 1942, p. 123, 167, ill.; Rouart 1950, p. 104 (English ed., p. 106); Kooning 1956, pp. 43, 66, ill.; Wilenski 1963, pp. 62–63; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 131, ill.; Hanson 1968, p. 200; Tominaga 1969, p. 129, pl. 48; White 1969, pp. 337–39, 341–43, 345–47, no. 4, fig. 12; Daulte 1971, p. 70, ill. (installation view of London 1905); Fezzi 1972, p. 110, no. 483, ill. (French ed., p. 108, no. 461, ill.); Pach 1973, p. 52, ill.; Huyghe 1974, pl. 148; Yoshikado 1976, p. 28; Callen 1978, p. 74, no. 56, ill.; Mukherjee 1982, p. 43, ill.; White 1984, pp. 112, 114, 121, ill.; London–Paris–Boston 1985–86, p. 231 (French ed., p. 202); Washington–San Francisco 1986, pp. 395, 415; Rouart 1987, p. 120; Denvir 1993, p. 124, ill.; Berson 1996, vol. 1, pp. 381, 388, 394–96, 400–402, 405–6, 410, 413, 416, vol. 2, pp. 211, 230, no. VII-147, ill.; Christie's 1996, p. 23, fig. 2; Fort Worth–Brooklyn 1997, p. 48, fig. 20; Kern 1997, p. 57, fig. 11; Christie's 1998b, p. 83, fig. 6; Rome 1999, pp. 28, 40, ill.; Néret 2001, p. 154, ill.; Cros 2003, pp. 94, 98–99, ill.; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, p. 77; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 1, p. 217, no. 161, ill.; Rome 2008, p. 63, fig. 8; Arcuri et al. 2009, p. 46, ill.; Distel 2009, pp. 200–203, fig. 187.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is an unlined moderate-weave linen (22 threads/cm), tacked over a pine, six-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. The “15 W” oval stamp on the stretcher probably indicates the standard French canvas size. The canvas reverse has patches of oil-stained threads, primarily in the lower left quadrant (as viewed from the front), probably the result of oil leaching through the glue-based ground layer. There are prominent vertical threads, especially visible in the paint of the lower left quadrant. Vertical age cracks follow the warp direction of the weave and are grouped in the left third of the image and near the sky's horizon on the extreme right. Cracks in the left sky and central water areas are cupping forward and had chips of lifting paint at their intersections, which were treated locally with Beva 371 in 2006. Stretcher creases are beginning to form on the left edge and along the center vertical cross bar. Small traction cracks occur in the mustard yellow and green areas, along with minor oozing of the bright red-orange color and scattered drying stress fractures in the thick white strokes. Small retouches are visible in the upper left corner and along all four edges, possibly done by the artist in an attempt to mask raw canvas revealed after framing. The thin varnish appears to be a slightly yellowed natural resin layer, with an additional layer of wax, both probably applied before 1933. Under low magnification, thicker dark deposits of varnish can be seen trapped around the impastos.

The canvas is somewhat off-square in its stretching, and the ground layer seems to be a thin, artist applied, water-sensitive wash of grayish white, possibly glue-based, which does not fully extend to the fold-over edges. There may be a second whiter ground in some areas of the sky. No underdrawing was seen either with transmitted light or with infrared reflectography. The paint is a vehicular paste consistency, applied in short strokes running in all directions, with some smooth, bright white patches that may have been applied by palette knife. The roofline of the campanile appears to have been reworked to get it correct. The yellow color is more coarse and gritty than the other pigments. The signature was applied after the image's paint had set.

1. See Pierre-Auguste Renoir to Madame Charpentier, fall 1881, from Venice, in White 1969, p. 346.
2. *Ibid.*, for mention of his discovery of Tiepolo; Vollard 1938, p. 201, for his discovery of Carpaccio.
3. Pierre-Auguste Renoir to Charles Deudon, fall 1881, from Venice, in White 1969, p. 347: “J’ai fait le palais des Doges vu de Saint-Georges en face, ça ne s’était jamais fait, je crois. Nous étions au moins six à la queue leu leu.”
4. Durand-Ruel Archives.
5. Pierre-Auguste Renoir to Charles Deudon, fall 1881, from Venice, in White 1969, p. 347.
6. Biez 1882; reprinted in Berson 1996, vol. 1, p. 381: “le plus laid des feux d’artifice.”
7. Leroi 1882, p. 98; reprinted in Berson 1996, vol. 1, p. 401: “la série la plus inouïe de barbouillages féroces que puisse imaginer un calomniateur de Venise.”
8. Leroy 1882, p. 98; reprinted in Berson 1996, vol. 1, p. 402: “Le peintre s’est posé ce problème: faire de l’eau . . . solide, sur laquelle des gondoles à roulettes pourraient évoluer, sans que cependant cette surface hachée, zébrée, tachée, puisse être prise pour un terrain quelconque. Il a admirablement vaincu la difficulté. Cela ne ressemble à rien de connu.”
9. According to the Durand-Ruel Archives, the painting in this transaction cannot be firmly identified; further, there is no label on the reverse of the Clark painting with a stock number corresponding to this sale.
10. Florisoone 1942, p. 167, states that this painting was formerly in the collection of Dr. Hirschmann; White 1969, p. 345, cites this information, and adds that the Hirschmann collection was in Amsterdam. Hirschmann's name, however, may have been erroneously associated with this painting.
11. There has been some debate about whether no. 147 in Paris 1882 was the Clark picture or a similar picture now in the Kreeger Museum, Washington, though the Clark canvas now seems more likely. See London–Paris–Boston 1985–86, p. 231; Washington–San Francisco 1986, pp. 394–95, 415; and Berson 1996, vol. 2, p. 211.