



**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  
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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](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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## Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French, 1841–1919

### 261 | Portrait of a Young Woman (L'Ingénue)

c. 1874

Oil on canvas, 55.7 x 46.4 cm

Upper right: Renoir.

1955.606

A bust-length image of a fashionably dressed young woman is set against an open-air background; her eyes look to her left, her right hand is raised to her breast, and the index finger of her left hand is poised beneath her lips. The background is almost entirely undefined, treated as little more than a backdrop of broadly brushed soft greens and blues; its very lack of definition, however, suggests that we should view the setting as open countryside, and perhaps as a hillside, rather than as a cultivated park or garden.

The figure is treated with great fluency. For the most part, the paint layers are thin and broadly brushed, but denser virtuoso dabs of color suggest her neck-scarf and bonnet, and a finer, more delicate touch defines the focal points of the composition: her face and raised left hand. Her hair seems to be golden-blond, but it is treated with a wide range of colors—greens and blues, as well as reds, oranges, and yellows—that suggest its curls and textures wholly without recourse to detail. The warm hues of her skin and hair are framed by the cool blues and greens that dominate the remainder of the picture, while the deep blue of her eyes and the red of her lips provide central pivots to the whole composition. The handling of the figure is closely comparable to that of *La Parisienne* (fig. 261.1), the full-length figure that Renoir exhibited at the first Impressionist group exhibition in 1874; this suggests that the present picture should be dated to c. 1874, rather than its traditional dating of c. 1876.

In subject, format, and treatment, the picture relates to French eighteenth-century genre painting. The fluent brushwork has evident affinities with the work of Jean-Honoré Fragonard, and especially to his freely brushed female half-lengths such as *A Young Girl Reading* (National Gallery of Art, Washington); the body language of the figure is closer to the work of Jean-Baptiste Greuze. It seems that Sterling Clark recognized this affinity with the eighteenth century; after buying the picture in 1940, he wrote in his diary:



Fig. 261.1 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *La Parisienne*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 163.2 x 108.3. Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Cymru, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

“I may have paid a bit high & of that I am not so sure but it surely is a ‘Fancy Picture’ as Scott says!!!! And always saleable.”<sup>1</sup>

As Renoir would have known well, nineteenth-century commentators regarded the whole body as a vehicle for the expression of moods and emotions. In this context, the hand gestures and directed gaze of this figure, combined with the outdoor setting, would immediately have invited some form of anecdotal or sentimental reading. The position of her hands hints at nervousness or uncertainty, while her attention, apparently focused on something outside the picture field, suggests the possibility of an encounter or an assignation. As always in Renoir’s genre paintings of the 1870s, however, there is no specific clue that allows the viewer to posit a single reading for the image.

The interpretation of the picture has been complicated by the titles that it has been given. When first exhibited publicly, in the retrospective of Renoir’s work at the Salon d’Automne in 1904, it bore the neutral title *Portrait de jeune femme*,<sup>2</sup> and it is this title that is pre-



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ferred here. It was published by Théodore Duret in 1906 as *Jeune parisienne*,<sup>3</sup> and then appeared in the Viau sale in 1907 as *L'Ingénue*,<sup>4</sup> a title that has stuck with the picture in more recent years. The earliest traced naming of the canvas is more informal, in the inventory by Paul Alexis of the collection of its first owner, Eugène Murer, published in 1887, in which it is listed as “*Blondinette, l'ingénue, la femme au doigt*” (Little blonde girl, the ingénue, the woman with the finger).<sup>5</sup>

Although it seems very likely that Alexis's text was the origin of the *Ingénue* title, all the existing evidence suggests that this is not a title that Renoir would have

sanctioned. There is no indication that he ever gave such evocative, even sentimental, titles to any of his works; they seem, rather, to have been applied to paintings in order to help them sell. Responding to the title *La Pensée* (Thought) that was given in an auction sale to a similar canvas showing a young woman with her finger to her lips (Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, UK), Renoir commented: “I was horrified when they baptized one of my canvases ‘la Pensée’”;<sup>6</sup> repeating the story to Jean Renoir, he commented: “Those picture-dealing scoundrels know perfectly well that the public is sentimental. They stuck a blasted

title on my poor girl, who can do no more about it than I can. They called her *La Pensée*. . . . My models don't think at all."<sup>7</sup> The changing titles of the Barber canvas are particularly revealing. It appeared as *La Pensée* in the Doria sale in Paris in 1899, but was then loaned by its next owner, Jules Strauss, to the 1900 Exposition Universelle with the neutral title *Portrait*; at the Strauss sale in 1902, however, it appeared once again as *La Pensée*; the "sentimental" title recurred precisely when the picture was for sale.

It seems likely that the model for the present canvas was the actress Henriette Henriot (born Marie Henriette Grossin, 1857–1944), who modeled for Renoir very frequently during the mid-1870s. Though identification of his models is notoriously difficult as a result of his tendency to make all his female figures look alike, the close resemblance that the present canvas bears to the face in *La Parisienne*, for which Henriot modeled, makes the identification plausible. As Colin Bailey has shown, Henriot was only beginning to establish a career at the time Renoir was closest to her; she became briefly celebrated as a leading actress in the productions of André Antoine from 1889 onward, but left the stage after her daughter Jane was killed in a fire at the Comédie Française in 1900.<sup>8</sup>

Eugène Murer (1846–1906), the first owner of the painting, was one of the more unusual early collectors of Impressionist paintings. Proprietor of a pastry-cook's shop in Paris, he also published a number of novels in the "naturalist" mode; after retiring to live at Auvers-sur-Oise in 1881, he also began to paint.<sup>9</sup> Around 1877, Renoir painted portraits of him (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), his son Paul (Museum Langmatt, Baden), and two of his half-sister Marie Murer (National Gallery of Art, Washington, and The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia); Eugène and Marie were also portrayed by Camille Pissarro.<sup>10</sup> JH

**PROVENANCE** Eugène Murer, Paris (by 1887, d. 1906); Georges Viau, Paris (until 1907, his sale, Durand-Ruel, Paris, 4 March 1907, no. 61, ill., sold to Bernheim-Jeune); [Bernheim-Jeune, Paris]; Jacob Goldschmidt, Berlin; Alphonse Kann, Paris (by 1911–until at least 1926); [Paul Rosenberg, Paris];<sup>11</sup> J. Horace Harding, New York (d. 1929); Charles B. Harding, New York, his son, by descent (1929–until at least 1937); [Carroll Carstairs, New York, sold to Clark, 28 Nov. 1940]; Robert Sterling Clark (1940–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Paris 1904b, Salle Renoir, no. 6, as *Portrait de jeune femme*; Paris 1912b, no. 169, as *Ingénue*; London 1914, no. 61, as *L'Ingénue*, lent by Alphonse Kann; New York 1926,

no. 19, as *L'Ingénue*, lent by Alphonse Kann; New York 1929d, no. 4, ill., as *L'Ingénue*, from the collection of the late J. Horace Harding; New York 1937, no. 19, ill., as *L'Ingénue*, lent by Charles B. Harding; Williamstown 1956b, no. 142, pl. 7; New York 1967, no. 31; New York 1968b, no. 17, ill.; Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 19, 24, 47–48, ill.; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 42–44, no. 1, ill.

**REFERENCES** Trublot 1887, p. 3, no. 37, as *Blondinette, l'ingénue, la femme au doigt*; Duret 1906, p. 139, ill., as *Jeune parisienne*; Duret 1923, p. 195, ill., as *Damenbildnis*; Geffroy 1909, p. 119, ill.; Meier-Graefe 1911, p. 91, ill. (French ed., p. 87, ill.); Alexandre 1912a, p. v, no. 10, ill. (installation view of Paris 1912a); Borgmeyer 1913, p. 411, ill.; Vollard 1918, p. 96, no. 385, ill.; Vollard 1920, pp. 52–53 (English ed., pp. 52, 237);<sup>12</sup> Fosca 1923, pp. 20, 22; Jamot 1923, pp. 272, 323; Coquiott 1925, pp. 148, 177, 225; Carstairs 1929, p. 34, ill.; Meier-Graefe 1929, p. 96, fig. 77; *Art News* 1929b, p. 16, ill.; Roberts 1929, p. 87, ill.; Barnes and de Mazia 1935, p. 448, no. 68; Allen 1937, p. 112, ill. on cover; *Magazine of Art* 1937, p. 418, ill.; Drucker 1944, pp. 39–40, 184, 195, pl. 32; Zahar 1948, pl. 25; Gachet 1956, p. 171; Comstock 1957, pp. 65–66, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 114, ill.; Polley 1967, p. 31; Daulte 1971, no. 225, ill.; Fezzi 1972, p. 101, no. 273, ill. (French ed., pp. 100–101, no. 269, ill.); Pach 1973, p. 51; Wadley 1987, p. 175, pl. 61; De Grada 1989, p. 54, pl. 32; Jeromack 1996, pp. 86–87; Jiminez 2001, pp. 329–30; Néret 2001, p. 90, ill.; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 1, pp. 372–73, no. 336, ill.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a tightly woven canvas (19 threads/cm), glue-lined to an uneven open-weave canvas (16 x 22 threads/cm). The five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher is original. There are wandering age cracks in some thicker paint strokes and traction cracks in the thick green pigment. A yellowed varnish and older resin residues were cleaned in 1979, when it was noted that the paint film looked abraded in the thinly painted passages; these can be seen in exposed thread tops in the background. While this may be solvent damage, it could also be the artist using a subtractive technique to soften the color intensity. In ultraviolet light, small recent retouches can be seen in the face. Under magnification, the paint layer seems to be in good condition. It is possible that the thinly painted picture has suffered an overall fading from a diminution of the purplish red pigment, leaving the image looking bluish. The surface is dry and matte, and looks almost unvarnished, except in the thick glossy paint strokes.

The ground is an off-white commercially applied layer, left exposed around the sketchy edges. There may be a few underdrawing lines for the lips and bridge of the nose. There are no important paint changes, with only a few dark background strokes hidden below paler paint. The thin and wispy paint is applied in dry scumbled layers. There are some thick paint strokes in the hat, forehead, and fingers. A few smooth passages have chatter marks as if a palette knife had been used.

1. RSC Diary, 16 Dec. 1940.
2. Despite this neutral title, the painting can be firmly identified as no. 6 in the Salle Renoir at the 1904 Salon d'Automne through a reference in the 1907 Viau Sale catalogue (Durand-Ruel 1907, p. 46, no. 61); it also appears in an installation photograph of the 1904 display in the Barnes Foundation Archives, Merion.
3. Duret 1906, p. 139.
4. Durand-Ruel 1907, p. 46, no. 61.
5. Trublot 1887, reprinted in Gachet 1956, p. 171.
6. André 1928, p. 32: "On m'a fait prendre en horreur une de mes toiles en la baptisant 'la Pensée.'" The painting is Daulte 1971, no. 227.
7. Renoir 1962, p. 66. The original French reads: "Ces bougres de marchands de tableaux savent bien que le public est sentimental. Et ils ont foutu un titre dégoûtant à ma pauvre fille qui n'y peut rien, ni moi non plus. Ils l'ont appelée *La Pensée*. . . . Mes modèles à moi ne pensent pas" (French ed., p. 71).
8. See Ottawa–Chicago–Fort Worth 1997–98, pp. 134–36, 284–85, where further details of her career are recorded.
9. On Murer, see Gachet 1956, pp. 145–88; Distel 1990, pp. 207–15; Ottawa–Chicago–Fort Worth 1997–98, pp. 152–54, 291.
10. PDR 582 and PV 1537–38.
11. The dates of ownership by Paul Rosenberg are uncertain. Daulte 1971 (vol. 1, no. 225) lists Rosenberg before Goldschmidt, but records in the Rosenberg Archives suggest that the painting was purchased after 1917, thus presumably sometime between 1926 and 1929, after Kann's ownership. An inventory card in the Archives also indicates that this painting was in the "collection Abdy," though no further evidence of ownership by a member of the Abdy family has been found. See The Paul Rosenberg Archives, a gift of Elaine and Alexandre Rosenberg. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
12. In the body of Vollard's text, he refers to a painting titled *Woman with a Finger on Her Lips* (*Femme qui a le doigt sur la bouche*), which could refer either to this picture or to *A Young Woman Seated* (*La Pensée*) (c. 1867–77; Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, UK), or to *The Dreamer* (*La Songeuse*) (1879; Saint Louis Art Museum). In Appendix II of the 1925 English edition, the painting is listed as *L'Ingénue*.

## 262 | Portrait of Madame Monet (Madame Claude Monet Reading) c. 1874

Oil on canvas, 61.7 x 50.3 cm

Lower left: A. Renoir.

1955.612

Camille Doncieux (1847–1879) married Claude Monet in 1870, three years after the birth of their first son, Jean. From 1866 onward, she appeared frequently in Monet's paintings, in portraits, genre subjects and outdoor scenes, and finally in his rapid sketch of her lifeless figure on her deathbed in 1879 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

In Renoir's canvas, Camille Monet is depicted seated on a sofa, reading a paper-covered book. Her body creates a virtually straight line, a shallow diagonal axis, as she leans back against two large cushions, while her feet rest on a third. Cushions and sofa alike are boldly patterned with flowers and leaves set against an off-white background, and a large bird, perhaps a crane, appears on the left cushion. Camille's dress is equally richly patterned, but on a smaller scale; its front panels pick up the soft pinks and greens of the sofa, but the surrounding blue fabric frames the figure and sets it apart from its setting, linking it visually to the blue wall behind the sofa. The figure creates a dominant pyramidal shape nearly central in the canvas, while the narrow blue band down the front of the dress anchors the figure within the composition and hints at the form of the sitter's body. The volume of her body and the space within the scene are further suggested by the side lighting, which creates shadows beneath the sofa and the cushions, and down the right side of the figure.

Beyond this, though, there is little conventional modeling: the technique acts to dissolve the forms rather than to suggest their solidity. Throughout the canvas, small, fleck-like touches animate the surface. These serve in part to suggest the textures of the surfaces represented and complement their patterning; but at the same time, though varied in shape and direction, they lend an overall vibrancy and liveliness to the whole picture.

Although the painting has usually been dated about 1872, its small-scale fragmented brushwork and richly interwoven color accents suggest a later date, perhaps the summer of 1874, when Renoir was working alongside Monet at Argenteuil, ten miles north-