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

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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

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Jean Béraud

French, 1849–1935

12 | Seaside Café (Femme au bord de la mer)
1884

Oil on canvas, 54.9 x 33.3 cm
Lower left: Jean Béraud 84
1955.641

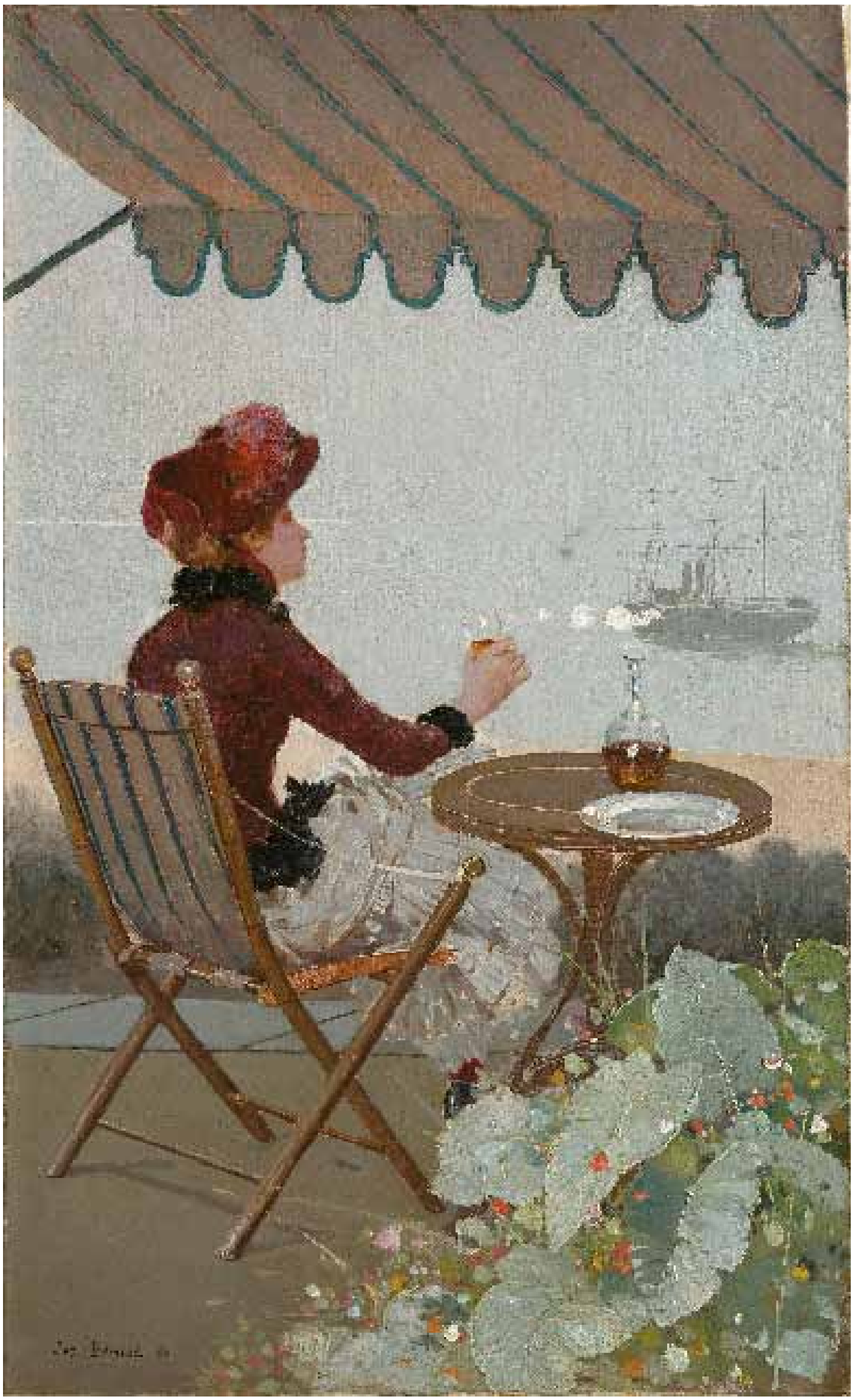
Jean Béraud was, in a sense, the quintessential painter of modern Paris. Always seeking out new models, subjects, and anecdotes, he canvassed the city streets painting from the cab of a horse-drawn carriage. In his highly finished, realist style, Béraud recorded fashionable Paris—its boulevards, cafes, theaters, music halls, and salons. He was perhaps most at home in the *grands boulevards*, painting hundreds of pictures of the people who frequented them, especially the well-dressed women of the upper classes. How, then, should *Seaside Café* be understood? Even though Béraud painted a few pictures of women on hillsides, relaxing at river's edge, or daydreaming in the countryside, *Seaside Café* remains an anomalous picture within Béraud's oeuvre. Its subject and style recall pictures of leisure by James Tissot—who, besides depicting fashionable interiors in London and Paris, also painted images such as *Seaside (July: Specimen of a Portrait)* (c. 1878; Cleveland Museum of Art)—more than images by the artist best known for his Parisian street scenes.

Removed from the crowds and noise of the city, a woman sits facing a body of water in which a ship comes into port. She holds a drink in her right hand above a circular table on which a plate and decanter rest. Both the glass and decanter hold a dark liquid of some kind, perhaps wine or brandy. A teal and red striped awning echoes the stripes of the folding chair in which the woman sits. Foliage of varying types takes up most of the lower right corner of the picture. The woman is dressed in a layered white skirt and burgundy-colored coat trimmed with dark ruffles at the neck, wrist, and hem. The color of her coat is echoed in the ornamentation on her hat. A brief glimpse of her stockings above a black shoe shows that they are the same dark red found in the rest of her outfit.

Béraud's women in Paris are often shown looking directly out of the canvas, thereby acknowledging that they are being observed both by other figures in the image and by the viewer of the painting. The woman in *Seaside Café*, in contrast, is turned away from the viewer and instead clearly absorbed in her own thoughts, gazing toward but probably not at the ship. She has an introspective, perhaps even wistful, air and appears to be entirely isolated. Aside from the ship in the distance, there is no other human presence. She is, moreover, drinking alone, as the single chair at a table empty of other place settings indicates. Her status is thus uncertain; as Robert Herbert has noted, "men could patronize cafés without the ambiguity or insecurity attaching to unaccompanied women, who ran the risk of attracting admirers whether they wished to or not."[1] The woman here is fashionably and fairly soberly dressed, and she does not seem to make any effort to attract admirers, nor does she appear to be waiting for a companion, so her presence at what is presumably a seaside resort, generally frequented by vacationing families, remains open to question.

It is difficult to speculate about *Seaside Café*'s precise location since Béraud painted no other pictures like it. He depicted the port of Marseille but otherwise no other references to the sea exist in his oeuvre.[2] The dark, muted colors of Seaside Café, however, seem to be more in line with a northern location rather than the Mediterranean coast. *Seaside Café* is also unusual in Béraud's oeuvre because of the decorative nature of some of the elements. Rather than presenting a wide-angle view of a recognizable location, the scene is tightly cropped around the figure. The slightly ambiguous location and orientation of the striped awning at the top serves to flatten the space of the image and emphasize the surface of the painting. The abundant, brightly colored foliage in the foreground, painted in lime green, orange, pink, red, teal, and whitish gray, serves a similar function. These areas contrast with the relatively indistinct background of the picture, keeping attention focused on the highly detailed foreground of seaside patio. They also heighten the sense of enclosure around the woman, who is effectively hemmed in at all sides. In keeping with many of Béraud's other images, the woman's isolation also gives this image a certain sense of implied voyeurism, as if the viewer were peering over the foreground leaves into a space from which he or she was otherwise excluded. KAP

PROVENANCE [Carroll Carstairs, New York, sold to Clark, 1 Dec. 1939, as *Femme au bord de la mer*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1939–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.



EXHIBITIONS Williamstown–Hartford 1974, no. 4, ill.; Osaka and others 1994, no. 9, ill.

REFERENCES Lucie-Smith and Dars 1976, fig. 53; Offenstadt 1999, pp. 234–35, no. 304, ill., as *Café by the Sea*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is an unlined, very finely woven linen (28 thread/cm). The reverse is marked at the top with a partially legible colorman's stamp, possibly "[. . .] APRIN Paris," and on the lower stretcher bar with a partially covered "CHASS [. . .] ERGES." The original stretcher is a very unusual design, having four principal members, with keyable wood cross-braces in each corner. The slight cockling of the canvas along the top edge is probably due to the inability of the stretcher to provide proper and even tension. There are some drying cracks in the awning, as well as old scrapes made when the paint was still wet. When a discolored varnish was reduced in 1993, older, very brown varnish residues were noted, and deposits of yellowed varnish remain in the impasto recesses. A layer of older natural resin is found over the black and red areas, the costume, and the awning. The surface reflectance is very shiny over areas of the older varnish, and the discoloration of oldest varnish residues is visible in the blue-gray leaves at the lower right.

The commercially applied ground is a smoothly textured cool white or pale gray layer. There is a pencil line along the cut-back edge of the lower tacking margin. Gray paint wash can be seen below the graphite underdrawing. The sparkly drawing lines, which are not visible using infrared equipment, follow the forms exactly. The vehicular paint is applied in thin washes and low impastos, and is worked wet-into-wet within the bounds of individual forms. The highest sharp impastos occur in the veins of the leaves in the lower right and the white smoke from the distant ship. The red costume elements are painted in a thin, transparent glaze pigment.

1. Herbert 1988, p. 76.
2. Offenstadt 1999, p. 236, no. 307.

13 | **Windy Day, Place de la Concorde** c. 1890

Oil on panel, 56 x 37.6 cm
Lower right: Jean Béraud
1955.642

"I find everything but Paris wearisome," wrote Jean Béraud to his friend the artist Alfred Roll (1846–1919).[1] He painted his city in every imaginable condition: day, night, inside, outside, sunny, rainy, and windy. No subject went unnoticed with Béraud, no person was too rich or too poor to be painted, no street corner could hide from his brush. As artists had done before him, Béraud designed a movable studio, one that would allow him to work in the comfort of a horse-drawn carriage. Rather ironically, in the case of *Windy Day, Place de la Concorde*, it shielded Béraud from Paris's wind and rain, making for a much more efficient and productive working process. Journalist Paul Hourie described his practice in 1880: "When you paint scenes from everyday life, you have to place them in their context and give them their authentic setting. This means that, in order to be sincere, you have to photograph them on the spot, and forget about the conventions of the studio. As a result, Jean Béraud has the strangest life imaginable. He spends all his time in carriages. It is not unusual to see a cab parked at the corner of a street for hours on end, with an artist sitting inside, firing off rapid sketches. That's Jean Béraud, in search of a scene, drawing a small fragment of Paris. Almost all the cab drivers in the city know him. He's one of their favourite passengers, because he at least doesn't wear their horses out."[2]

The fashionably dressed young woman in *Windy Day, Place de la Concorde* carries her purple hatbox across the square, all the while clutching her beautifully appointed hat. The hat has feathers that are purple, red, teal, and blue, with a bright green ribbon in front. She wears a mutton-leg sleeved jacket, popular in the 1890s, but still somewhat slim compared to the blousy mutton-leg styles that appeared at the end of the century. Her double-breasted coat with its turquoise-colored buttons is open. She wears a navy dress underneath and black boots with little white buttons. Her reddish-blond hair matches her gold gloves as well as the gold lining decoration on her hat. Béraud was fond of depicting women in profile or in a three-quarter pose to show off the silhouette of their dresses, and thus their small waists. He often painted the typical Parisienne, with her fashionable attire and wistful gaze, and sometimes included a man observing her from a distance, a modern *flâneur* out for his daily stroll. In *Windy Day*, the focus is instead on the young woman alone, absorbed in her struggle against the elements.

Windy Day, Place de la Concorde centers on what many guidebooks noted as the most expansive and impressive square in Paris. Karl Baedeker described it in 1888 as the "most beautiful and extensive *place* in Paris, and one of the finest in the world."[3] John Murray's handbook for visitors to Paris stated in 1870: "This is without doubt one of the grandest and most