



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

VOLUME ONE

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,
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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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14 | Parisienne in a Red Dress c. 1900

Oil on panel, 33.3 x 26.7 cm

Lower right: Jean Béraud

1955.663

Béraud is best known for his Parisian street scenes. He regularly depicted fashionable ladies, lavishly accessorized, looking as if they had somewhere important to go. More often than not, they stare out of the picture plane, making eye contact with the viewer and enticing us into their busy lives, or if nothing else, into the busy street. *Parisienne in a Red Dress* is an unusually simplified work, but it can be seen nonetheless in the vein of his street scenes.

Béraud generally painted two kinds of street scenes—the first depicting numerous people busily going about their daily lives. These scenes demonstrate the cross-section of classes and types one might encounter during a stroll on a Paris street. Although they are crowded, these images usually center on one woman who looks out at the viewer, no matter how many others congregate around her. The other type of scene also focuses on a single woman but excludes other figures, setting her instead against the architecture of the street or other large-scale background. *Parisienne in a Red Dress* falls into this second category of Béraud's street scenes.

A woman wearing a red dress approaches the picture plane at a three-quarter angle, engaging the viewer with a stare and a smile. As Patrick Offenstadt notes in the catalogue raisonné of Béraud's works, one of the four columns of the pont Alexandre III, adorned with a gilt-bronze statue of *Fame*, can be seen in the distance to the right of the figure.¹ This elaborately ornate arch bridge over the Seine connects the Champs-Élysées area with the Invalides Esplanade, near the Eiffel Tower. Part of the dome of Louis XIV's Hôtel des Invalides is seen at the far right edge of the picture, suggesting that Béraud was situated across the Seine on the Right Bank near the Champs-Élysées. Named after Russian Tsar Alexander III (1845–1894) as a symbol of the Franco-Russian Alliance, the bridge was built between 1896 and 1900 and inaugurated at the Exposition Universelle of 1900 along with the nearby Grand Palais and Petit Palais. Given the construction dates of the bridge, it is likely that *Parisienne in a Red Dress* was not painted until after its completion in 1900.

Parisienne in a Red Dress is a remarkably sketch-like work, given that Béraud is best known for his finely detailed and highly finished paintings. The most unfinished passage is what appears to be the outline of a hatbox swinging from the woman's proper right arm, its handle tucked in her bent elbow, but the form can now barely be detected. It should be noted that there has been some abrasion of paint by a solvent in the hat, hair, and face (see Technical Report), which suggests that the painting may have been originally more detailed, at least in those areas. Very few of Béraud's works have this unfinished quality, and those that do are most often pictures of a woman against an indistinct backdrop with some sketchy architecture or horse-drawn carriages. A good comparison is Béraud's *Woman with Muff on the Grands Boulevards (sketch)* (1895; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tours).² This work is clearly labeled as a sketch, however, and it was not exhibited in Béraud's lifetime. It is possible that Béraud considered *Parisienne in a Red Dress* a finished work, because he exhibited it at the 1926 Salon, one of four works in total. We have no information about two of these paintings, but the third, *The Editorial Room* (before 1889; Musée Carnavalet, Paris),³ is a study for the setting of a large, complicated painting with the portraits of thirty-nine men called *The Journal des débats in 1889*, now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.⁴ Since Béraud chose to exhibit at least one study at this Salon, it is unclear whether he considered *Parisienne in a Red Dress* a sketch or a finished work.

The Clarks bought their three Béraud paintings later in life—*Parisienne in a Red Dress* and *Seaside Café* in 1939, and *Windy Day, Place de la Concorde* in 1945 (cats. 12–13)—all after Béraud had died in 1935. KAP

PROVENANCE [Carroll Carstairs, New York, sold to Clark, 1 Dec. 1939, as *Parisienne en robe rouge*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1939–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1926b, no. 94, as *La robe rouge*.

REFERENCES Offenstadt 1999, p. 141, no. 129, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 0.5 cm thick with the wood grain oriented vertically. There are chamfers 0.3 cm wide on all but the lower back edge, and the wood at the bottom edge is paler in color than the other three reverse edges. The paint is solvent abraded in the hat, hair, and face. Skips in the varnish above the signature form a rectangular pattern, as if a label had been removed from



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the front of the painting. Grime trapped underneath a thin layer of natural resin varnish fills the pores of the wood. The appearance suggests that the picture may have been partially cleaned prior to the last varnish application. The varnish is slightly yellowed and has a soft luster in reflected light.

The ground seems to be a grayish paint layer, which has been deeply abraded by either pumice or sandpaper to rough up the surface for better paint adhesion. Charcoal or dark graphite was used for the underdrawing, which is visible in normal light in some areas. In infrared reflectography, drawing lines for the column show that it was originally begun to the right of its final location. There is likely a gray paint

sketch or wash throughout, based on the unpainted, squarish hatbox carried by the woman. The thin paint is applied in mere washes in the background, with an especially brief flurry of strokes in the skirt. There are a few impastos in the white boa.

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1. Offenstadt 1999, p. 141.
 2. O 49.
 3. O 336.
 4. O 337.