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, 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 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.





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Jules Chéret

French, 1836–1932

49 | Feeding the Clowns Before 1890

Pastel on beige wove paper, 56.5 x 33 cm Lower right: JCheret [JC in monogram] 1955.676

In this pastel, a woman sits underneath a flowering tree in a secluded park with four children. She has one hand on her ample hips while she reaches out with the other to place a spoon in the mouth of a child kneeling in front of her. The next child waits his turn with his mouth open wide in eager anticipation. The third child in the row is harder to make out because of his position and lack of defining qualities. The first two children are dressed as clowns: the first child wears a loose-fitting white tunic, a black skullcap, and red boots, while the bright red-orange strokes on top of the second child's head suggest the pointed hat of a fool or jester. The fourth child, lying on his back between the other three children and the woman, looks up at her with bright blue eyes. With her plunging décolletage and narrow waist, the woman is representative of the so-called "Cherettes" that the artist, Jules Chéret, frequently included in his work. Her pale pink dress is barely distinguishable from her pearlescent flesh. Two doves flutter in the green grass in the foreground, adding to the sense of playfulness that infuses this scene.

Chéret, best known for lithograph posters that promoted the spectacles of Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, mastered colored lithography, manipulating its formerly heavy quality so that it appeared to have the same ethereal touch as pastel.¹ He regularly worked with pastel to create preparatory models for his lithograph posters, but he also employed pastels for composing independent works of art. Though no known poster relates to this picture, Feeding the Clowns maintains the vertical composition that Chéret used for his advertisements. According to Chéret's contemporary, Camille Mauclair, the artist's disdain for both impasto and the "licked" shine of academic painting led him to value the flatness of pastel and lithography. Mauclair added that Chéret preferred pastel over other media because of the instantaneity of application and the purity of tones.²

A label on the back of the mount gives the title of the pastel as "La Becquée des Pierrots." The French



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had adopted the figure of Pierrot from the Italian theater in the seventeenth century and, over time, "Pierrot" became synonymous with "clown." Pierrot was a stock character in the commedia dell'arte and often appeared in art and literature at the end of the century.³ The child who is actively being fed in Chéret's pastel has the characteristic alabaster complexion and loose-fitting white tunic of the original Pierrot. In his youth, Chéret frequently went to the Louvre to see paintings by Jean-Antoine Watteau, making it likely that he saw Watteau's large painting of Pierrot (c. 1718–19) after it was acquired in 1869.⁴ Chéret's evident admiration for the Rococo artist caused the critic Roger Marx to consider him a modern Watteau.⁵

The initial owner of *Feeding the Clowns*, Madame Champsaur, received the pastel from Chéret a year or two after he had designed two posters for her husband, the novelist Félicien Champsaur. Likewise, it may have been feminine taste that persuaded Sterling Clark to purchase this pastel in 1938. Clark valued the opinion of his wife Francine and consulted her before making new acquisitions for their collection.⁶ Francine had worked as an actress in Paris after Chéret had already firmly established his career, and nostalgia may have attracted her to this pastel.⁷ KA

PROVENANCE The artist, given to Madame Félicien Champsaur, Paris; [Gustave Pellet, Paris, sold 22 Apr. 1891];⁸ André le Breton, Rouen (his sale, Drouot, Paris, 9 May 1938, no. 5, as *La Becquée des Pierrots*, sold to Paul Prouté, as agent for Clark); Robert Sterling Clark (1938–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1979b, no cat.

REFERENCES Haverkamp-Begemann et al. 1964, vol. 1, pp. 63–64, no. 88.

TECHNICAL REPORT The sheet's edges are ragged and irregular and appear to have been split from a previous mount where the paper was glued around its perimeter, causing slight skinning of the verso edges. The artist's use of an inexpensive, short-fibered paper support affects its condition. The artist appears to have primed the paper with a greenish gray ground. The ground layer was brushed onto the smooth paper to create more of a tooth for the pastel application. It also protected the inherently acidic paper from discoloring on the recto. Pastel application was carried out with pure color using the thin and thick sides of the pastel stick. Some blending of the color was carried out in passages. On the recto, o.6 cm of the edges of pastel was skinned when a previous window mat was removed dry. The paper is somewhat distorted in the center where it may have expanded under tension. The verso has some areas of mildew stain, and the recto has several spots of black mildew stain in the areas of blue sky and on the back of the child in the foreground. An old black-and-white photograph of the pastel indicates some previous damage to the medium from something having been dragged across the surface from the lower right to the upper left corner. This appears to have been touched out at some point. LP

Thomas Churchyard

English, 1798–1865

50 | River Valley (recto); Wooded Landscape (verso) After 1830

Oil on wood-pulp board, 17.7 x 22.9 cm Gift of the Manton Foundation in memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton 2007.8.8

Although the 1899 John Constable exhibition organized by Leggatt's Gallery is notable as a principal source of confusion concerning works by the Royal Academician and his youngest son, Lionel, additional misidentifications from that time exist. Such is the case with this double-sided oil on board, which Ernest Leggatt gave to Percy Johnson, then a partner at Leggatt Brothers, in 1899.¹ The painting then passed to his son, Oscar, and subsequently to his grandson, Peter, both dealers from whom Sir Edwin acquired a number of the works in his collection. Indeed, he purchased this painting from Peter Johnson in 1979 as by John Constable, an attribution that may have been passed down, like the painting itself, through the Johnson family. Leslie Parris and Ian Fleming-Williams cite this work as one of the rare occasions in which the work of the amateur artist Thomas Churchyard was mistaken for that of Constable.²

The recto of this oil sketch, which depicts a river valley, does indeed display affinities with those works in which Constable depicts a herdsman setting out for the day or returning across the fields and valleys of Dedham. But the awkwardness of the figures and the lack of compositional coherence point to the hand of an amateur. Further, the dabs and flecks Churchyard applies to depict foliage in the trees of the *Wooded Landscape* on the reverse are unlike Constable's treatment of similar subjects.

Churchyard, a lawyer by profession who lived and worked in the Suffolk towns of Melton and Woodbridge, was an avid collector of Constable and other East Anglian artists, including Gainsborough and John Crome. In fact, there is a possibility that he once owned the early John Constable painting of *Stratford Saint Mary from the Coombs* (cat. 53). Churchyard, however, had artistic ambitions of his own. Having exhibited at the Norwich Society of Artists and then at the Society of British Artists in London, he abandoned

^{1.} Mauclair 1930, p. 22.

^{2.} lbid., p. 37.

^{3.} Chéret may have been influenced by Alexandre Dumas's fairytale "La Jeunesse de Pierrot" (1860) for its recurring theme of eating, and for the character, the fairy of the lake, who take cares of Pierrot.

^{4.} Mauclair 1930, p. 6.

^{5.} Rouen–Brescia 1997–98, p. 102.

^{6.} Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 80, 83.

^{7.} lbid., pp. 35, 83.

^{8.} Provenance from inscriptions on reverse of mount.