



**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

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Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications
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Designed by Susan Marsh
Composed in Meta by Matt Mayerchak
Copyedited by Sharon Herson
Bibliography edited by Sophia Wagner-Serrano
Index by Kathleen M. Friello
Proofread by June Cuffner
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128 | The Messenger 1815

Oil on canvas, 45.5 x 55.8 cm

Lower left: Drölling, f. 1815

1955.724

By the end of the Empire, Drölling had become one of the leading genre painters in France. Sale catalogues from the period attest to his successes at public exhibitions as well as the popularity of his paintings among collectors.¹ Contemporary critics commented that the appeal of his works lay not only in his subjects, drawn from everyday life, but also in his meticulously detailed technique, as seen in *The Messenger* of 1815.² Its epistolary subject echoes two of the artist's earlier Salon successes, *The Messenger, or Good News* (private collection) and *The Errand Boy* (location unknown) exhibited in 1806 and 1808, respectively, both variations of the same theme. Similarly, *The Let-*

ter of 1816 (cat. 129) offers a rustic counterpart to this scene of middle-class domestic life.

It has been suggested that the artist's daughter, Louise-Adéone (1797–1831), modeled for the young woman reading the letter.³ A figure nearly identical in pose and dress to the model in *The Messenger* appears in a slightly earlier genre painting, *A Peddler*, on view at the Salons of 1812 and 1814 (Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai). Although the young woman in both paintings resembles the artist's daughter, whose portrait Drölling painted in 1812 and exhibited in the Salon of the same year (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg), no contemporary source documents Louise-Adéone as modeling for her father's genre scenes.⁴

Drölling's domestic interior evokes seventeenth-century Dutch genre imagery. The quiet mood of the scene is reminiscent of interior scenes by Delft-school artist Pieter de Hooch (1629–1684), whose works entered the collection of the Louvre at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵ The use of an oblique light

source, characteristic of Dutch genre painting, defines the space of the composition and recurs in Drölling's works, including *A Peddler*. The work's intimate quality is underscored by the compositional focus on the figure of the young woman.

The canvas has the smoothly polished surface and precise handling typical of Drölling's style. There is no evidence of an ink underdrawing, as in his *Letter* (cat. 129), while traces of a graphite underdrawing, notably below the floor tiles, are barely visible (see Technical Report). The painting likely figured in the 1903 Deleuze estate sale in Paris; the description of its composition in the sale catalogue corresponds to that of the present work, which Clark acquired in 1922.⁶ KCG

PROVENANCE Probably Deleuze collection (until 1903, his sale Drouot, Paris, 12 Jan. 1903, no. 4, as *Le Messager ou l'heureuse nouvelle*); [Knoedler, Paris, sold to Clark, 3 Feb. 1922, as *The Messenger*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1922–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown–Hartford 1974, pp. 44–45, no. 21, ill.; Williamstown 1982b, p. 26, no. 16, ill.

REFERENCES Berrall 1968, p. 63, fig. 68; Sydney–Melbourne 1980–81, p. 79.

TECHNICAL REPORT The medium-weight (16 threads/cm) linen support is glue-lined to fabric similar in weight. The original tacking margins are still in place, but the mortise-and-tenon stretcher may be a replacement. The paint film has areas of fine traction crackle scattered throughout. The cupped age cracks in the center probably developed from small old handling damages to a brittle ground layer. There may be some fading of the pale pink used in the roses near the window. Various indications suggest that a previous cleaning was done with great care, leaving the paint film in excellent condition. The present coating is a brush-applied natural resin with a separate crack network and a moderate fluorescence level in ultraviolet light.

The ground layers appear to have been applied by the artist over a size layer, and were leveled to a high degree to create the extremely smooth surface. The ground may also have been toned a warm golden brown prior to painting. The underdrawing is not very visible and shows no use of pen and ink. With infrared reflectography several areas of underdrawing are clearer, and a few minor changes can be seen. A floor grid can be made out, along with lines for the chair rails, bed draperies, and the red fabric draped over the left chair. The oval escutcheons on the bureau against the right rear wall were originally drawn to the left of their final location. The outlines of the hexagonal tile pattern were frequently adjusted as the artist proceeded with the floor. The diagonal line of the shaded dormer wall in the upper left was inscribed

into the paint using a straight edge. The image was built up using small fluid strokes reminiscent of miniature portrait work, and the upper-layer line reinforcements are executed in thinly applied paint rather than ink.

1. See Livry sale, Paris, 2–5 Feb. 1814 (Lugt 8473), under no. 168: "This painting deserved and obtained great success on public exhibition" ("Ce tableau méritait et a obtenu beaucoup de succès à l'exposition publique"); and sale, Paris, 8 June 1814 (Lugt 8537), under no. 8: "This series of canvases by Mr. Drölling deserves to capture the attention of art lovers, who have for a long time appreciated his talents." ("Cette suite de tableaux, par M. Drölling, mérite de fixer l'attention des amateurs, qui depuis long-temps savent apprécier ses talents.")
2. See, for example, remarks on the work Drölling exhibited at the Salon of 1814 in Landon 1814, p. 22: "Mr. Drölling should be congratulated as much for his choice of subject as for the manner in which he has rendered it." ("M. Drölling n'a pas moins à se féliciter du choix de son sujet que de la manière dont il l'a rendu.")
3. See the letter of 6 Apr. 1967 from S. Dagnaud of the Musée du Louvre in the Clark's curatorial file; Dagnaud also identifies Louise-Adéone as the model for *Interior of a Kitchen* (1815; Musée du Louvre, Paris). On Louise-Adéone Drölling, see Gabet 1831, pp. 224–25.
4. On the portrait of Drölling's daughter, see Beyer 1972, pp. 481–82.
5. Musée du Louvre 1979–86, vol. 1, p. 72, inv. 1372 and inv. 1373.
6. Drouot 1903, no. 4: "The Messenger or the good news. Interior scene: young woman reading a letter that a young man brought her. (Appeared in the Salon of 1808.)" ("Le Messager ou l'heureuse nouvelle. Scène d'intérieur: jeune femme lisant une lettre qu'un jeune homme lui apporte. [A figuré au Salon de 1808.]") The reference to the Salon of 1808 is erroneous: Drölling did not exhibit a work depicting such a scene in 1808, and the Clark painting is dated 1815.

129 | The Letter 1816

Oil on panel, 28.4 x 36.7 cm

Lower left: Drölling / 1816

1955-723

Drölling's domestic interiors, which he exhibited at the Salons beginning in 1793 until his final, posthumous exhibition in 1817, established his reputation in post-Revolutionary France. Their popularity contributed to