



**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,
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Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications
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Designed by Susan Marsh
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Bibliography edited by Sophia Wagner-Serrano
Index by Kathleen M. Friello
Proofread by June Cuffner
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Jean-Louis Forain

French, 1852–1931

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Oil on panel, 22.3 x 15.8 cm

Lower right: jl forain

1955.736

With Forain one generally thinks of ballet dancers, belle époque scenes of Parisian life, women and men interacting in private quarters, and elegant receptions, while images of solitary women on the beach call to mind Claude Monet or Eugène Boudin. *Walk in the Sun* is a quickly executed oil sketch probably done sometime between 1880 and 1883 and purchased by Sterling Clark during the artist's lifetime. The nature of the subject—a leisurely day at the beach—as well as the striking looseness of the sketch implies a close tie to the Impressionists. In fact, Forain's impressionistic period began in the late 1870s and continued until around 1890, when he turned to a darker palette in order to paint subjects that were more political and religious in nature. He was part of the circle who regularly met at the Café de la Nouvelle Athènes in Paris (depicted by Forain in an etching of about 1876),¹ including artists such as Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Cézanne, and critics like Edmond Duranty and George Moore. Degas's influence on Forain's ballet subjects is well documented, but in the four Forain paintings in the Clark collection, his interest in the light and color of the Impressionists and subjects of everyday life is most directly represented in *Walk in the Sun*.

There are numerous indications that this picture was done rather quickly and almost certainly at the seashore. A dry brush technique has been used for the blue sky; the only cloud present is represented by a dash of white paint. The woman's face is rendered with little detail, and her figure is only somewhat more elaborated, with charcoal underdrawing in her arms and near the parasol. The people in the background were painted equally rapidly, with simple dots of pinkish red, for example, used to indicate an umbrella. Perhaps the clearest evidence that Forain painted this picture at the ocean is the presence of what are likely grains of sand caught in the paint or ground layer.

The intense light of the beach is emphasized in *Walk in the Sun* by the light-colored sand that takes

up the bottom two-thirds of the panel. By placing the shaded woman dressed in dark clothes against the light background, Forain creates a silhouette, her figure echoed only by the thinly painted gray-blue diagonal shadow that follows her as she walks down the beach. Forain often captured behind-the-scenes views of the ballet world, so one could almost imagine this woman as a dancer offstage, caught in a quiet and private moment. Even though the figure walks toward the viewer and stands parallel to the picture plane, she remains isolated, absorbed in reading a book whose contents we are not privy to. Although not much is known about the holiday Forain spent on the coast with his friend the Belgian painter Alfred Stevens around 1880, it probably had the biggest influence on Forain's beach scenes.² Both artists produced similar scenes featuring women silhouetted against the sand and water, most often in profile or three-quarter view, looking confidently or longingly out to sea. The usual accoutrements for these elegantly dressed women include umbrellas, hats, ruffled skirts, and jackets. In almost every instance, there is a group of beachgoers in the background; in Forain's case, his women are often accompanied by chairs as props. Like *Walk in the Sun*, these pictures date to the early 1880s, and are made up of simple compositions and settings of beach, sea, and sky in a limited range of colors, with brighter accents supplied by the figures' costumes. At times, the two artists might almost have been observing the same scene, as is evident in comparing Forain's *Elegant Woman on the Beach* (c. 1884; private collection) with Stevens's strikingly similar *Elegant Woman Watching a Steamboat Pull Away* (c. 1884; private collection).³ Both women are wearing slim ruffled or layered skirts and windswept scarves, accessorized with a furled parasol; both raise one hand in a gesture that is either protective or intended to aid vision; and both are accompanied by two fellow beachgoers in the right background. While this comparison highlights the similarities between the relatively simple compositions, it also brings to the fore Forain's loose handling and connection with the Impressionists, which is unlike Stevens's precise Realist style, especially in the central figures of the women. KAP

PROVENANCE [Knoedler, Paris, sold to Clark, 6 May 1924, as *La Promenade au soleil*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1924–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1959b, ill., as *Promenade au soleil*; Williamstown 1963, no. 3, ill., as *Promenade au soleil*



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(*Walk in the Sun*); Williamstown 1988a, no cat.; Williamstown 1988–89, no cat.

REFERENCES *Art News* 1963, pp. 43, 60, ill.; *Emporium* 1963, p. 89; Browse 1978, p. 104, as *Promenade sur la Plage*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a commercially prepared mahogany panel 1.1 cm thick, with a slight convex warp. The grain runs vertically, and the varnished reverse has chamfered edges 0.6 cm wide. The large, faint, oval French colorman's stamp on the back is only partially legible. In the beach area are a series of tiny domed eruptions, each with an X-shaped split at the top. The cause of these disturbances is unknown, but they may be the result of large particles, such as grains of sand, caught in the paint or ground layer. The paint seems to be brittle, having chipped off in several locations. The painting shows no signs of having been cleaned and presently has two varnish layers, with a grime layer trapped between them. The lower layer is a streaky yellowed natural resin, and the upper layer is a grayish reticulated synthetic resin. The lack of varnish on the top and bottom 1.3 cm of the image probably indicates that the picture was coated while framed.

The ground is a commercially applied off-white layer showing a pebbly surface texture. Charcoal underdrawing lines seen in normal viewing near the parasol and the woman's arms, and charcoal particles visible in the paint suggest that only the figure was sketched. A thin purplish paint sketch was detected on the parasol and along the jaw line, sleeves, and hat of the woman. The final paint layers are thinly applied wet-into-wet, especially in the black and sky passages. Areas of the figure look overly extended and dilute. There are a few impastos in details, such as the white sailboat. The background was painted around the figure. The signature appears to be done with blue-black ink.

1. See Faxon 1982, p. 85, no. 8.
2. Browse 1978, pp. 103–4.
3. For Forain's *Elegant Woman on the Beach*, see <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/full.php?ID=11193> (accessed 18 Mar. 2012). For Stevens's *Elegant Woman Watching a Steamboat Pull Away*, see Lefebvre 2006, pp. 156–57.