



**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,
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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Details:

TITLE PAGE: John Constable, *Yarmouth Jetty* (cat. 73)

OPPOSITE COPYRIGHT PAGE: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Bathers of the Borromean Isles* (cat. 89)

PAGE VIII: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Woman Crocheting* (cat. 267)

PAGE X: Claude Monet, *Seascape, Storm* (cat. 222)

PAGE XII: Jacques-Louis David, *Comte Henri-Amédée-Mercure de Turenne-d'Aynac* (cat. 103)

PAGE XVI: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr* (cat. 33)

PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154)

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1963, no. 1, ill., as *Danseuse dans sa loge*; Tokyo–Kagawa–Nara 1992–93, no. 34, ill.; Memphis 2002–3, no cat.; Portland 2008, pp. 87, 124–25, pls. 73, 107.

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 57, ill; *Emporium* 1963, p. 89, ill.; Browse 1978, pp. 107, 146, no. 30, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 1.1 cm thick with a slight convex warp, and chamfers 0.6 cm wide along the back edges. The grain runs horizontally and the back of the panel is varnished. The reverse bears the numeral “5,” signifying the standard French portrait size 35 x 27 cm. The partial oval colorman’s stamp “Moirinat” is more legible in infrared viewing. There are traction cracks on the upper left wall, and some age cracks in the white tabletop and scattered throughout the surface. The pale band in the hair above the dancer’s ear is a loss in the lower paint, revealing the ground layer. The radiograph shows a loss in the dancer’s foot near the lower edge of the picture. It is likely that the picture was treated by Madame Coince of Paris in 1935, and restored in 1949 by Charles De Wild of New York. It was cleaned again in 1992 to remove nicotine and grime and to thin the discolored varnish. Residues of a natural resin coating were left in the dark background and floor area due to solvent sensitivities. The present synthetic resin varnish is shinier where it covers the old varnish.

The off-white ground may be a commercially applied layer. No underdrawing was seen. There are incongruous vertical and diagonal strokes, primarily on the right half of the image, which stop 0.3 cm short of the panel’s edges. The X-radiograph suggests that these strokes were ridges left during the artist’s application with a palette knife of additional ground. Other anomalies are a line down the left edge, beneath the lampshades, and possible changes to the image in the lower right area. Much of the upper paint surface seems to be applied wet-into-wet, in a sketchy, paste-consistency manner, with very dry final scumbling. Sgraffito lines define the lower edge of the lampshade and the edge of the glass on the tray. Paint was also subtracted by the artist from the lower left corner. Thin purple and brown paint lines were added to outline the arms, hands, and legs.

1. Framingham 1979, p. 6.
2. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 1955.1773.
3. Browse 1978, p. 36.
4. *New York Times* 1919, p. 3; <http://www.themonitor.ca/Arts/Cultural-activities/2010-02-04/article-965255/Love,-inspiration-and-all-that-jazz!/1> (accessed 18 Dec. 2011).

142 | Reception at an Exhibition (Réception artistique) 1890s

Oil on canvas, 61 x 50.2 cm

Lower right: forain

1955-737

Forain was perhaps best known as a satirist. His earliest etchings date from about 1875 or 1876, and his successful career as an illustrator made him a fortune. Forain’s Impressionist style began about 1879, when he exhibited in the fourth Impressionist exhibition, and it lasted until about 1900, when he turned to a darker palette and more serious subjects. Forain continued his involvement with the Impressionists, participating in subsequent Impressionist exhibitions in 1880, 1881, and 1886. He mainly exhibited vigorous gouaches and watercolors in the first three Impressionist shows. After his first submission was rejected from the official Salon in 1874, he did not show there until 1884, a year in which there was no Impressionist exhibition. A favorite of the critics, including Joris-Karl



Fig. 142.1 Jean-Louis Forain, *The Ball (Madame Forain)*, c. 1880–1900. Ink, watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper, 39.7 x 30 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts (1955.1761)



142

Huysmans, Diego Martelli, and Félix Fénéon, Forain was especially supported by Huysmans, who said that Forain was one of the most incisive painters of modern life, and that Parisian women had found their true painter in him.¹

Forain's scenes of modern life often dealt with interactions between women and men, whether it was at the racetrack, backstage at the ballet, or at an evening soirée. Sometimes his satirical work borders on the risqué because of the uncomfortable positions he puts his female subjects in—their close proximity to men and the obvious nature of the advances toward them. *Reception at an Exhibition* has the usual elements Forain employed—fashionably dressed Parisian

ladies at an evening soirée, with at least one man among them. The composition is also one favored by Forain, with its off-center groupings and light-colored figures emerging from a darker background.

The two women at right are engaged in conversation. The woman at far right facing the viewer, in a pinkish gray dress and long gloves, has an almost mask-like appearance as she smiles. Forain used various shades of green throughout the picture—vertical strokes of green in and around the hair of the woman in the black dress; large areas of peacock green in the right background that create shadows under the curtains separating the rooms; touches in the picture the man is looking at; and parallel diagonal lines of grays

and light green in the feather boa and mint green in the fancy dress of the left-most woman.

Perhaps unusually for Forain, there is only one male currently visible in *Reception at an Exhibition*. Instead of staring intently at or leaning in to talk to a woman, this man has other things on his mind. He is depicted in profile, his arms folded in front of him and his gaze focused on the picture on the easel, like a true aesthete. Although he appears to be accompanied by the woman to his right, who is close enough to touch him, he pays no attention to her. Instead he is fully absorbed in the painting and removed from the lively scene happening around him.

A similar gathering by Forain, also in the Clark collection, is the ink and watercolor *The Ball (Madame Forain)* (fig. 142.1), which depicts a more familiar dynamic. Several groups of men and women stand or sit in conversation, each woman accompanied by one or even two very attentive men who lean solicitously toward them. The main focus is the group of two men with a woman at left. This woman is particularly highlighted since her dress is the lightest area of the image and its bustle takes up a good portion of the picture's center. She is Forain's wife, Jeanne Bosc, also a painter, whom he married in 1891. In the background hangs a large vertical landscape, with a smaller oval portrait of a woman to its left. This watercolor contrasts in both subject and form to *Reception at an Exhibition*, in which nearly every element is indistinct. None of the figures is fully individualized, and Forain has blurred the subjects of the works they have come to see, so that the viewer cannot read them. They are, however, clearly paintings, as the one at left is presented in a gold frame and sits on an easel, and those hanging on the reddish brown wall in the background also have gold frames. Even the space in which the figures stand is difficult to discern, although it is probably similar to that seen in *The Ball (Madame Forain)*, with one gallery or room leading back into the next.

Although it was always fairly freely painted, some of the indistinctness of *Reception at an Exhibition* may be due to its present condition, as it has suffered from damage during treatment over the years. Furthermore, underdrawing reveals that the black shape in the center of the canvas was originally intended to be a man, his face turned toward the woman at left, though it is unclear why the artist did not fully resolve or cover over this passage in the paint layer.

Reception at an Exhibition, then, seems to present a sort of reversal from Forain's more typical scenes.

There is little interaction between the sexes, as the one man present directs his attention to the art on view, rather than to his female companions. Indeed, the two women at right seem happily engaged in conversation with each other, with no men evident at all. Rather than serving as objects of attention, the women here are clearly more independent. KAP

PROVENANCE [Possibly Durand-Ruel, New York, in 1936]; [Clyfford Trevor, New York, sold to Clark, 27 Oct. 1943, as *Reception Artistique*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1943–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS New York 1936c, no. 8; Williamstown 1963, no. 2, ill.; Framingham 1979, no. 4; Williamstown 1998–2000, no cat.

REFERENCES *Art News* 1963, p. 60; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 58, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a fairly coarse weave linen (19 threads/cm), lined to a finer weight linen (25 threads/cm) possibly with glue. The tacking edges are gone, and the stretcher is a six-member, mahogany mortise-and-tenon design of the twentieth century. The lining, probably applied about the time of purchase in 1943, has enhanced the weave texture on the surface. In 1943 and 1944, both Gaston Levy and De Wild appear to have worked on this painting, including the removal of the old varnish. There are short, branched age cracks throughout the paint. The picture has suffered considerable damage from cleaning solvents; even the thickest paint strokes have a pitted surface. The ground layer in the upper right is eroded, and there is extensive retouching of the background. The paint layer is embedded in thick varnish that has short diagonal cracks. A massive restoration is seen in many vertical strokes in the man, the woman in black, and in the upper right corner. William Suhr merely grime cleaned and revarnished the painting in 1959 due to solubility problems and earlier damages. The picture was again revarnished in 1979.

The ground is a very thin, possibly artist-applied layer, which reveals the tops of the bare canvas threads. The underdrawing, possibly in charcoal, is visible in the dress of the woman at the right. In the drawing stage, the centrally located black shape appears to be a man, with his face turned toward the woman on the left. In the original conception, the woman at the far left appears to be holding a palm-shaped fan by its edge. The image seems to be composed of a number of thin, underbound washes or resin-based glaze layers. There are a few local impastos in the candle flames. In low magnification, many areas look like bare canvas stained with colors.

1. See Huysmans 1883, pp. 73, 110.