

The background of the cover is a detailed 19th-century painting of a storm at sea. The sky is filled with heavy, dark, and turbulent clouds, with some light breaking through. The sea is dark and choppy, with white-capped waves crashing against a sandy beach in the foreground. Several large sailing ships with multiple masts and sails are visible on the horizon, some appearing to be struggling against the wind. On the left side, a wooden pier or wharf extends into the water, with a few small figures of people on it. The overall mood is one of intense natural power and maritime drama.

**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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## Henri-Joseph Harpignies

French, 1819–1916

### 168 | Landscape with a Church (The Church of Saint-Privé from a Distance) 1891

Oil on canvas, 32 x 44.3 cm

Lower left: h<sup>i</sup> harpignies 91.

1955.758

Henri-Joseph Harpignies counted two factors as instrumental to his career: the model offered by the work of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and the memories of Italy, which he visited first in the early 1850s. As was the case with Corot, Harpignies's family wanted him to go into business, and from 1839 until 1846 he worked as a sales agent for the family's sugar beet business. Also like Corot, Harpignies benefited from the largesse of his middle-class family. Following study with the painter Jean-Alexis Achard (1807–1884), Harpignies traveled for several years: to Belgium and Holland with Achard in 1848; to Germany in 1849; and the same year to Italy, where he stayed through 1852.

Harpignies was equally comfortable working in oils and watercolors. His watercolors (of which the Clark owns four), in fact, sold well and afforded him a steady income throughout his life. In 1878, he purchased a house called La Trémellerie, just outside the

village of Saint-Privé, about ninety miles southeast of Paris. Saint-Privé was a tiny town, near the slightly larger town of Bléneau, on the Loing River. In 1997, only 458 people lived there;<sup>1</sup> Paul Gosset, author of the most complete biography of the artist, suggests that twice that number lived in Saint-Privé in Harpignies's time.<sup>2</sup> There Harpignies summered the rest of his life, for almost forty years.

This picture, like one in the Brooklyn Museum, was done on fairly coarse canvas and has been lined to a canvas of finer weave, whose edges have been covered with paper tape.<sup>3</sup> This configuration, in conjunction with the pinholes at the corners of the canvas, strongly suggests that Harpignies painted this view of the little village on the spot and either lined it himself or had it lined professionally at a later date. The brushwork is somewhat dry and patchy; especially in the foreground, areas of canvas are visible. There is, however, even in this small painting, a feeling of monumentality, produced in part by the simplified forms. Houses and church look almost cubic, appearing as swaths of unmodulated creamy white with brown and gray roofs. This concentration on mass and volume is generally explained by the artist's gradually failing eyesight beginning in the late 1880s.

The artist's own avowed influences are evident in *Landscape with a Church*. During his years of travel at mid-century, Rome made the deepest impression on him. Harpignies described for a visitor in 1914,



late in his long life, the effect of Rome: "Rome made an immense impression on me and it is that which I see always. She formed me, she created me, she sustained me, she sustains me still; and it is to her that I owe, not only my most noble emotions, but my best inspirations."<sup>4</sup> He spent an additional two years in Italy, from early 1864 through mid-1865. Discernible in *Landscape with a Church* is the sense of clear light that sharply defines forms, particularly the architectural solids of church and houses, not unlike the keenness of edge familiar from the plein-air work that Corot produced during his three years in Rome in the mid-1820s.

Harpignies admired Corot's works tremendously, calling him "the greatest artist of modern times!" as early as 1850, when he reached Italy.<sup>5</sup> The two artists are often linked; similar are the calm mood and the compositions focused on a motif. They were acquainted, though perhaps not enjoying as close an association as Harpignies would have liked. Corot sent the younger painter a photograph of himself, thanking Harpignies for an invitation to dinner. On it, Harpignies wrote out Corot's words: "In the career of an artist it is necessary [to have]: conscience, confidence in oneself, and perseverance. Thus armed, the two things in my eyes of the most importance are: the study of design and of values." Harpignies added to this artistic credo: "Admirably said. Everything is there!"<sup>6</sup> FEW

**PROVENANCE** [Barbizon House, London, sold in 1938, possibly to Clark]; Robert Sterling Clark (by 1955); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Probably London 1938, no cat.; Williamstown 1958a, ill.; Williamstown 1959b, ill.; Memphis 1978–79, pp. 28, 34–35, no. 13, ill.; Tokyo and others 1980, no. T45, ill., as *The Church of Saint Privé from a Distance*.

**REFERENCES** Barbizon House 1938, no. 6, ill., as *Saint Privé*, a work sold from Barbizon House in 1938; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 71, ill.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a moderate-weight linen (19 threads/cm), aqueous-lined to linen and mounted on a stretcher. The painting may have been executed while tacked to a board, then lined at the artist's request prior to his retouching some areas. This theory is supported by small pin marks found in several corners. Further, old reworkings, possibly by the artist, scattered on the picture were done in the same manner as paint seen on the liner's paper edge-tape. A label on the reverse for Beugniet, Paris, may record the studio that performed the lining. In addition, there seems

to be a small three-corner tear near the center below the church, which could provide a reason for the early lining. There may be some abrasion in the dark colors, although it could also be a sketchy painting technique. The varnish appears thicker on the green areas and overlaps onto the paper edges, suggesting either that the varnish was applied after the lining or that the sky may have been cleaned later and revarnished. In reflected light, the paint surface presents a curious enamel-like appearance in the sky area.

The ground is an off-white color, which in some thinly painted areas seems to be rubbed down to the thread tops. While there was no underdrawing media detected, there may be a black paint sketch to lay in some forms. The surface is unusual, with dry brushwork skipping over the canvas thread tops followed by impastos with flowing, vehicular consistency. Some upper layer brown details may be applied in ink. A slightly paler and pinker area in the left sky may be reworked, possibly by the artist. In general, the odd texture of the sky suggests that a major repainting took place. There are small round pits or skips in the thicker paint, whose origin is inexplicable. The picture was signed after the paint dried. The X-radiograph presents an odd high-contrast image, with location changes in the building rooflines in the lower right sky, the trees on the left, and the roadway in the lower right, along with dark skips in the paint of the foreground and the upper left tree, possibly indicating losses in the ground layer. These support the idea that the artist reworked this painting.

1. *Dictionnaire national* 1997, p. 1056.

2. Gosset 1982, p. 39n1.

3. Letter from Joseph Ruzicka to Steven Kern, 2 Aug. 1989, in the Clark's curatorial file.

4. Labusquière 1914, pp. 161, 164: "Rome a fait sur moi une impression immense et c'est sur celle-là que je vis toujours. Elle m'a formé, elle m'a créé, elle m'a soutenu, elle me soutient encore; et c'est à elle que je dois, non seulement mes plus nobles émotions, mais mes meilleures inspirations."

5. Gosset 1982, p. 25: "le plus grand peintre des temps modernes!"

6. Labusquière 1914, p. 167: "Dans la carrière d'artiste, il faut: conscience, confiance en soi et persévérance. Ainsi armé, les deux choses à mes yeux de la dernière importance, sont: L'étude du dessin et des valeurs" [Corot]; and "Admirablement pensé. Tout est là!" [Harpignies].