

VOLUME ONE

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With an essay by Richard Rand and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

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Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
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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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Details:

(cat. 154)

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 PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, Snake Charmer

REFERENCES Schmit and Schmit 1993, p. 237, no. 591, ill., as Les Bords de la Somme, effet de lune.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is an unlined, coarsely woven fabric (13–16 threads/cm) mounted on a five-member stretcher. Paper tape around the edges gives the appearance of a lining, but the support appears to be only one layer. The fabric is darkened and oxidized, and appears to be waterstained on the reverse. A draw running diagonally from the lower left to the upper right across most of the surface may be caused by the twisted stretcher, which has forced the lower left corner to turn out of plane. There are several small gouges near the signature, made when the paint was still wet, and small fills along the upper left corner edge. The painting was cleaned in 1976 by Barbara Beardsley. There are residues of the original varnish in the dark trees at the left. Some of the paler foliage and the moon fluoresce yellow in ultraviolet light, probably indicating the use of zinc white for these details. The surface has a low gloss sheen with the brushwork texture clearly readable. Generally, the condition of the paint is very good.

The ground is a thin off-white layer. Cusping around the sides of the support suggest that the artist applied the priming after the canvas was stretched. There was no evident underpainting, although there is a reddish imprimatura layer and possibly a thin black sketch for the architectural elements. The brushwork varies from thin to moderate paste consistency and was applied wet-into-wet. The pale passages of the reflection were scumbled over thin dark shadows, and the largest moon reflection was painted before the surrounding water. Paint may have been scraped away from the surface before the thickly painted moon was completed with either a yellow glaze or a yellow admixture with white. This deliberate abrasion also reveals that the sky color was changed several times using thin layers.

- 1. S 590 and S 592.
- 2. Robert Schmit to author, 18 May 2004, wrote that Lépine worked in the area of the Somme in the late 1860s.
- 3. Only with the Schmits' cataloguing of Lépine's oeuvre has the locale been identified. In 1893 and again in 1899, that is, not long after the artist's death, the picture was sold under the generic titles of *Bords de rivière* and *Clair de lune*.
- 4. Lépine listed himself as a pupil of Corot in the Salon *livrets*, first in 1866 and the last time in 1889.
- 5. Blanc 1861–76, vol. 10, p. 15: "le souffle du nord nous a porté ces vagues et romantiques émotions."
- 6. Distel 1990, pp. 40-41.
- 7. See Berson 1996, vol. 2, pp. 8-9.
- 8. Distel 1990, pp. 171-74.
- The invoice lists it only as "1 painting by Lepine," but this probably corresponds to this picture.

189 | Montmartre, the rue Cortot c. 1872-76

Oil on canvas, 45.8 x 37.6 cm Lower left: S. Lepine 1955.791

Stanislas Lépine first went to Paris from Caen, where he was born, in 1852 to attend the *Lycée* Chaptal. Convalescing from an illness, he decided to become a painter. Evidently self-taught (there are no records of his studying with any particular artist), he made copies in the Musée du Louvre and visited the studios of various artists. He made rapid progress. Despite his lack of formal training or a sponsor, his painting *Caen Harbor: Moonlight Effect* (location unknown) was accepted at the Salon of 1859. That same year he settled in Montmartre, where he lived for the rest of his life.

Any investigation into the life and career of Lépine is hampered by a sorry lack of documentation. This lack stands in stark contrast to the lives of his near contemporaries, the much better known Claude Monet and Edgar Degas, for example. Lépine was not the innovator that Monet and Degas were; his output concentrated on views of Paris, its parks and waterways, his hometown of Caen, and the Normandy coast, all painted in a conservative, but highly nuanced, style derived in large measure from that of Camille Corot. He enjoyed the patronage of a select group of collectors that included Comte Doria and Henri Rouart and of the dealer Pierre-Firmin Martin (see cats. 89, 186, and 188). He explored various options of marketing his paintings, among them dealers, the annual Salonswhere he showed a total of thirty-seven paintings between 1859 and 1892—and public sales held at the Hôtel Drouot in the 1870s and 1880s. Despite these efforts, his works did not sell well, and he died poor, leaving his family in debt.1

Described this way, Lépine's career seems of little import, but his modest success and the charm of his paintings argue for a careful reassessment. This street scene in Montmartre is a case in point. The Butte Montmartre, at 129 meters (423 feet) above sea level and 102 meters (335 feet) above the Seine,² loomed over the city of Paris. Incorporated into the city only in 1860, it was still decidedly rural in character a decade later, as Lépine's painting shows it to be. Montmartre as a whole was so off the beaten track that it barely figures in guidebooks even a decade later.³ Earlier in the century Georges Michel had painted the quarries



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and working windmills of Montmartre. Later in the century the few windmills that remained had been co-opted as tourist attractions, most famously at the dance hall the Moulin de la Galette. Lépine, who lived toward the bottom of the hill on the side facing the city, preferred to show Montmartre from the vantage of its residents, a world removed from the cafés just a little to the south painted by Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas. It would be difficult to imagine a stronger contrast than the one between Lépine's painting and the gas streetlights, shiny zinc counters and glass mirrors, seductive clothes, and the frisson of extramarital sex that constitute the subject matter of many

of Manet's and Degas's works. Lépine's Montmartre is characterized by unpaved streets, buildings constructed by necessity rather than design, trees and vegetation asserting a presence at least equal to that of the built environment, and, on the part of the people portrayed, a rhythm of life exempt from timetables and appointments.

The street pictured is the rue Cortot, created in the seventeenth century, which ends at the rue du Mont Cenis, which in turn now runs along the west side of the complex of the basilica of the Sacré-Coeur (not yet built when Lépine painted this picture). At the end of the rue Cortot is a hill with untended trees; this

augments the sense that this is a street in a rural village, not in the capital of France. Lépine painted this street, and this end of the street, several times in the early 1870s, suggesting that in it the artist had found a salable motif.⁴ He made slight changes each time he painted it. In one version he removed the trees and bushes to the right and left and, instead of two women conversing on their way home from market, inserted a figural group of a mother and child and another woman shown crouching down to talk to the child.⁵ A snow scene renders the street desolate,⁶ whereas a view taken a bit farther back is enlivened with two groups of boys, who look to be taunting one another rather than playing together.⁷

Another street scene, also identified as the rue Cortot in the catalogue raisonné,8 is said by the cataloguers, on the basis of provenance, to have been in the first of the exhibitions organized by the painters who came to be called the Impressionists. It is important to remember that this first exhibition was conceived as a marketing strategy in an attempt to find outlets other than the increasingly restrictive venue of the Salon. Thus it happened that the first show included, in addition to Degas, Monet, Camille Pissarro, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, artists not now known by that label, such as Zacharie Astruc, Félix Bracquemond, Auguste de Molins, Stanislas-Henri Rouart, and Lépine. In 1874, Lépine showed three canvases with the Société anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc., two water views and La rue Cortot (private collection). The street scene was mentioned in reviews, if briefly, more often than were the water views. Léon de Lora called it "among the most excellent landscapes," and Étienne Carjat wrote that "the Rue Cortot is an admirable thing that Corot and Daubigny would be envious of."10 Lépine's association with the group was limited to this single occasion; perhaps his continued success at the Salon and with dealers, primarily Martin, made an alliance with the more controversial painters unappealing. Yet his participation in 1874 indicates both the catholicity of approaches represented in the first show and the regard the organizers had for him.

Both Corot and Daubigny were alive in 1874 and at the end of their very successful careers. By this time their names, as Carjat's review suggests, had become shorthand for a particular kind of landscape painting: if not actually painted outdoors, at least resembling pictures that were. Critics meant by this a straightforward approach that dispensed with obvious picture-making

conventions such as framing trees or a foreground cast in shadow; a palette based largely on earth tones of browns and greens, and, in the case of Corot, one tending toward the paler browns and ochers, even blond colors; and unpretentious, everyday subject matter. Corot was often evoked in contemporary discussions of Lépine's paintings. Meant as a compliment, this type of commentary from critics was only following Lépine's lead: beginning in 1866 he listed himself in the Salon catalogue as "pupil of Corot." If Lépine's light-hued palette resembles Corot's, his brushwork is softer, and the underlying structure of his works less rigorous. The overall effect is nonetheless ingratiating in its evocation of country life, which paradoxically is situated within the Parisian city limits. FEW

PROVENANCE [Durand-Ruel, Paris, possibly sold to Hill, 1891]; possibly James J. Hill, Saint Paul (1891–d. 1916);¹² [Wildenstein, New York, sold to Clark, 22 Dec. 1942]; Robert Sterling Clark (1942–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS None

REFERENCES Couper 1969, no. 39, ill.; Schmit and Schmit 1993, p. 88, no. 212, ill., as *Montmartre. La Rue Cortot*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a coarse-weave linen (12 threads/cm), glue-lined to a finer weight canvas with a gauze interleaf, and attached to a replaced five-member stretcher. The tacking margins are still in place, although they are fracturing at the fold-over edges. Gaston Levy of New York probably treated the work in 1943. Age and traction cracks appear in the sky, and corner stress cracks in the upper left radiate into the center of the painting. Some age cracks are beginning to lift forward, and there is paint and ground loss in the basket at the women's feet. There is no evidence of any previous solvent cleaning. There may be a water-based gum or egg-white coating on the paint. There is little, if any, resin varnish, and no saturation of the surface except for a few shiny areas in the dark colors. A small repair in the upper left sky and some of the cracks are retouched.

The texture of the canvas is visible through the ground in thinly painted areas. While no underdrawing was detected, the painted rooflines at the right were lowered and the earlier outline can be seen in normal and infrared light. Examination with ultraviolet light reveals artist's alterations containing zinc around the two women and the birds in the foreground. The paint is a dry, paste consistency with very little wet-into wet brushwork, except within individual forms. Judging from the differential shine, resin content is probable in some thin dark colors. The surface is comprised of low- to moderate-height soft impastos. The few higher impastos have been modified by the lining heat and pressure.



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- Schmit and Schmit 1993 includes a detailed biography and helpful lists of dealers and collectors.
- 2. Blue Guides 1977, p. 158.
- 3. Herbert 1988, p. 133, cites "three scattered mentions" in Baedeker's 1881 guide to Paris and its environs.
- 4. Schmit and Schmit 1993 lists more than sixty paintings Lépine did in Montmartre (nos. 201–66).
- 5. SS 211.
- 6. SS 213.
- 7. SS 214.
- 8. SS 215.
- 9. See Berson 1996, vol. 1, pp. 3–43; and Paul Tucker, "The First Impressionist Exhibition in Context," pp. 93–117, in Washington–San Francisco 1986.
- 10. Berson 1996, vol. 2, p. 8, for list of Lépine's three paintings; vol. 1, p. 27, for de Lora's quotation ("Parmi les plus excellent paysages"); and vol. 1, p. 14, for Carjat's opinion ("La Rue Cortot est une admirable chose qu'envieraient Corot et Daubigny").
- 11. Couper 1969.
- 12. According to information in the James J. Hill archives, Hill purchased two landscape paintings by Lépine from Durand-Ruel, Paris, on 28 Feb. 1891. No further information about the paintings is available, and the subsequent history of their ownership is not known. See correspondence of Nov.—Dec. 2011 in the Clark's curatorial file.

190 | River Scene with Ducks (La Seine à Conflans-Sainte-Honorine) c. 1878-80

Oil on paper or wood-pulp board, mounted on canvas, 24.2 x 37 cm
Lower right: S. Lepine 1955.790

Robert Schmit and Manuel Schmit, compilers of the catalogue raisonné of Stanlislas Lépine's work, locate this riverine scene at Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, in the angle formed by the confluence of the Oise and Seine Rivers. Of the nine paintings of this area they list, all but one are dated to the late 1870s, as is this one. The group does not form a series, however, because Lépine chose different views to paint. Most include a variety of boats, making the point that the Oise and Seine were parts of a modern transportation system, carrying goods and people to the capital upstream to the east and to the coast of the English Channel downstream to the west. The inclusion of signs of commerce allies these other views of the area both with Lépine's many scenes of the river and canals of Paris and with paintings by such contemporaries as Johan Barthold Jongkind and Eugène Boudin that similarly portray shipping.