



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME TWO

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,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Martín Rico y Ortega

Spanish, 1833–1908

293 | Venice, House on the Canal c.1900

Oil on panel, 15.2 x 11.6 cm

Lower left: RICO

1955.842

Next to a Venetian canal, a fisherman appears to be repairing a net or mending a sail under the watchful eye of a dog. A boat is anchored to the shore and the oars rest on the ground and against the wall of a house. Beside a water pole, another boat carrying two people approaches the turn of the canal. In the background, a church steeple is visible against the clear sky, as is the recognizable Baroque dome of the church of Santa Maria della Salute.

During the last third of the nineteenth century, Martín Rico became one of Spain's most important, innovative, and internationally admired landscape painters. Beginning in the 1850s, he practiced plein-air painting, making frequent excursions to the Guadarrama Mountains on the outskirts of Madrid and to other places in Spain. This interest in working outside the studio ran counter to many of the standards taught at the Royal Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, where Rico studied during his youth and which was still teaching a more idealized approach to landscape painting. Rico obtained a grant to travel to Paris in 1862 to learn more modern approaches to landscape painting. In the summer of the same year he also traveled to Switzerland, where he studied with the Swiss painter Alexandre Calame (1810–1864). During his sojourn in France, Rico was deeply influenced by the Barbizon School and especially by Charles-François Daubigny (1817–1878).

From the 1860s until his death in Venice in 1908,

Rico was very active, mainly working outside of Spain, a country he rarely returned to during his lifetime. For many years, Rico's work was sold by Adolphe Goupil, one of the most important art dealers of the second half of the nineteenth century. Rico also befriended many of the other artists represented by Goupil, including Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) and Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), and the successful Spanish painters Eduardo Zamacois y Zabala (1841–1871), Mariano Fortuny (1838–1874), and Raimundo de Madrazo (1841–1920). Rico presented his works in the Salons and the Expositions Universelles, and his paintings were acquired by some of the most prominent art collectors in the world. Although he painted beautiful urban landscapes of historical Spanish cities such as Toledo, Seville, Granada, and Madrid, as well as languid scenes of the Seine and the Marne Rivers and outstanding panoramic views of Paris, such as his *View of Paris* at the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, he is best known for his depictions of Venice.

In fact, this picturesque city, which inspired many nineteenth-century artists, also provided a unique stage for Rico to fully implement his skills as a painter. The rich Baroque architecture and busy urban life presented an enormous quantity of information that permitted Rico to represent the façades of buildings in meticulous detail and depict different figures laboring or just strolling in the city. The clear skies and brilliant light that inundates Venice provided a plethora of effects for Rico to paint. It is this combination of an academic technique and an appreciation for capturing the effects of light that characterizes Rico's singular way of painting.

When comparing the Clark's work to some of Rico's larger and more ambitious *veduti* paintings such as *A Canal in Venice* (c. 1875; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) or *Venice* (before 1875; The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore), there is a notable difference between the precise method in which these works have been elaborated and the looser way in which the Clark's painting has been executed. This difference can also be seen when compared with panel paintings of smaller format such as *A Canal in Venice* (c. 1875–1900; Brooklyn Museum of Art), a painting that depicts Santa Fosca in Cannaregio and measures twice the size of the Clark's. Although Rico has painted some elements of *Venice, House on the Canal* with more detail, such as the man laboring, the dog sitting next to him, and the architecture in the background of the scene, in general the painting is quite sketchy,

a characteristic that is not in accord with the technical perfection that typifies Rico's work. This panel is, in effect, an elaborate study that the artist probably made during one of his frequent excursions to paint *en plein air* from his boat. Like the similarly sketchy *The Grand Canal from the Artist's Window* (1881; The Baltimore Museum of Art), which depicts a closer view of the church of Santa Maria della Salute, the Clark panel represents a fine example of the sort of small-format painting which the artist enjoyed making throughout his career for commissions or gifts.

The exact date of the painting is hard to determine. The looseness and vibrancy of the brushstrokes, however, suggest that it was most likely made during the later years of Rico's life, a period when he abandoned the more refined brushstrokes that defined his work and fully embraced a more Impressionist technique. Furthermore, the Clark's small painting is closely related in theme to another late work entitled *Rio San Trovaso, Venice* (c. 1900; Meadows Museum, Dallas). Both paintings depict the active life of Venice, where the people and bustling city life have a greater presence than the architecture. MR

PROVENANCE Robert Sterling Clark (until 1955); Sterling and Francine Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1979b, no cat.; Williamstown 1982c, p. 29, no. 37; Williamstown 1988b, no cat.; Williamstown 1988–89, no cat.

REFERENCES Sullivan 1979, pp. 141–42, fig. 17.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 0.8 cm thick with the grain running horizontally. The right edge is rougher, suggesting that the support may have been cut from a larger panel, possibly a standard 16 x 22 cm size. The thick gray paint on the reverse is chipping away, due to old tape and label removals, and there are no chamfers on the back edges. The complex warp, with a horizontal dip across the center, may be the result of early framing hardware placement. There are two splits on the left edge, both 2.5 cm in length. The paint film displays no cracks. The thin foliage of the trees against the building may be abraded by solvents. The picture was cleaned of grime and varnish in 1982, although under magnification flakes of yellow resin can still be seen throughout the surface. There is gold leaf embedded around the edges, and the old oil overpaint remaining on all four edges has now darkened. The present synthetic resin coating is thin.

The ground layer is off-white in color and contributes to the brightness of the image. There are charcoal lines running within 0.2 cm of the perimeter of the panel, marking where the artist's paint originally stopped. There is also a

charcoal line at the right edge of the panel, which may mark the cutting line. Roughness in the ground layer along this edge reinforces the possibility that the support is a section of a larger pre-primed panel. No underdrawing lines were seen, although there are thin reddish brown paint outlines discernible between the upper paint strokes. The image was executed with wet-into-wet paint, with no reworking. The tree leaves seem to be the only details added after the lower paint had set. The green pigment is grittier in particle size than the other colors.

Adolphe-Eugène-Gabriel Roehn

French, 1780–1867

294 | Country Fair 1821

Oil on canvas, 32.4 x 41 cm

Lower left: Roehn / 1821.

1955.844

The pleasures of country living are shown in this charming painting of a village fair. A large group of people is gathered together in an outdoor area surrounded by several makeshift tents and stages near a church. The occasion is likely a harvest festival, given the produce-laden covered wagon at the far right of the composition. Near the wagon is a small stage on which a red-coated fiddler performs, entertaining the men drinking at a table set directly in front of the musician. A young couple, the girl wearing a pale blue dress, dances in the center of the scene, watched over by a heavysset man seated with a young child on his lap and another young woman seemingly waiting her turn to dance. Young lovers, seated on the ground near the stage at the right, seem oblivious to the activities surrounding them. At the far left of the scene, two actors are on stage in the guise of characters, likely Harlequin and Pierrot (or Gilles), from the *commedia dell'arte*. Nearby, a man sniffs a melon, while a young boy with a dog reaches into his pocket to pay for some apples offered by a woman holding a tray. Dozens of other figures cram the open space, some watching a puppet show while others observe two men onstage in the midst of some other kind of presentation. This is a painting that rewards close inspection by offering myriad details to enjoy.

Despite the contemporary aspect of the subject, the composition of this painting is rather classical,

with *repoussoir* elements at either side of the canvas, and the horizontal sea of people punctuated by several vertical elements, including the trees, some crosses, and a couple of men on horseback who rise above the crowd. The surface of the painting is smooth and rather slick, with little brushwork visible. The details of the scene are all carefully articulated, and the coloring of the picture is well balanced.

The painter of *Country Fair* is Adolphe Roehn, who was born in Paris and trained there as a painter and lithographer. His own father, a painter and a distinguished art restorer, served as his first master. Extremely long-lived, Roehn appears in the Salon records from 1799 (aged 19) through 1866 (aged 87, less than one year before his death). Roehn is best known today for nine scenes from contemporary history, several painted under commission directly from Napoleon Bonaparte, now at the Château de Versailles.¹ These paintings, such as the *Entry of Napoleon I and the French Army into Danzig, May 27, 1807* (painted 1812), most often were multfigured panoramic views not too dissimilar in composition to the Clark picture, despite their disparate subjects. Roehn's success afforded him an opportunity to travel extensively, and to collect early Dutch, Flemish, and Italian paintings and a variety of exotic objects, books, prints, and photographs.² Roehn was a notable drawing instructor at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, as was his son, Jean-Alphonse Roehn, who painted in a style similar to that of his father.

The early history of the painting, dated 1821, is unclear. Roehn did exhibit a painting of a village fair at the Salon of 1822, along with nine other paintings.³ Although the timing is right, it is unknown if the Salon painting is the same as the present picture, which may be a bit small in scale to have been shown at the Salon. It is likely that Roehn kept this picture until his death, as a painting whose description closely matches this one appears in the posthumous sale of the artist's possessions.⁴ When, where, and how the Clarks acquired the painting is uncertain, as there are no records of its purchase, nor is it mentioned in Sterling Clark's diary entries. κΡ

PROVENANCE Probably the artist's sale, Drouot, Paris, 2–6 Mar. 1868, no. 97, as *Une fête de village*; possibly Henri Perce, Montpellier; Robert Sterling Clark (until 1955); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Possibly Paris 1822, no. 1114, as *Une foire de village; vue prise dans les montagnes des Vosges*.