



**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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Details:

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PROVENANCE [Vander Donckt frères, Paris, in 1878, probably sold to Vanderbilt]; William H. Vanderbilt, New York (1878–d. 1885); George Washington Vanderbilt, his son, by descent (1885–d. 1914);³ Cornelius Vanderbilt III, his nephew, by descent (1914–d. 1942); Grace Wilson Vanderbilt, his wife, by descent (1942–45, her sale, Parke-Bernet, New York, 18 Apr. 1945, no. 148, ill., as *The Morning Call*); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 20 April 1945]; Robert Sterling Clark (1945–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1878b, Belgian section, no. 223, as *Les mondaines*, lent by Vanderdonckt [*sic*] frères; Williamstown 1960b, ill.; Williamstown 1981b, pp. 38, 48, no. 28, ill.; Williamstown 1992–93, no cat.; Williamstown 2000–2001, no cat.

REFERENCES Duval 1878, p. 84; Strahan 1879–80, vol. 3, pt. 12, p. 108, as *The Morning Call*; Pesquidoux 1881, vol. 1, p. 340, as *Les Visiteuses*; Strahan 1883–84, vol. 4, pp. 59–60, ill., as *The Morning Call*; Vanderbilt 1884, p. 44, no. 82; Vanderbilt 1886, p. 36, no. 100, as *The Morning Call*; *Collector* 1890, p. 86; Metropolitan Museum of Art 1905, p. 215, no. 65; Burroughs 1916, p. 274; Boucher 1930, fig. 39; Vanzype 1936, p. 108, no. 211; Mitchell 1973, pp. 17, 27, fig. 5, as *Les Visiteuses*; Lucie-Smith and Dars 1976, pl. 3; Ann Arbor–Baltimore–Montreal 1977, pp. xiii, 43, 51, 57, 65, 71, 75; Norman 1977, p. 21, pl. 26; Hartmann 1978, p. 83, ill.; Rosenblum and Janson 1984, p. 290, fig. 229; Palm Beach 1988, p. 25, ill.; Feist 1993, pp. 61–62, ill.; Boston 2002, p. 10, fig. 1; Lefebvre 2006, pp. 131, 135, 207, fig. 155, as *Les Mondaines*; Brussels–Amsterdam 2009–10, p. 36; Derrey-Capon 2009, pp. 67, 70 (Dutch ed., pp. 68, 71).

TECHNICAL REPORT The support appears to be a two-layer, mahogany panel system 0.8 cm thick, with the grain running vertically. The original main central board has extensions on all four edges, ranging in width from 2.5 to 3.2 cm. There are invisible wood inserts carefully applied behind cracks running up from the lower edge, and the lower left corner also seems to be spliced with a new piece of mahogany, which may indicate that the panel suffered an accident. The entire reverse is also glued down to a secondary mahogany panel that hides the repairs and is heavily cradled. The panel reverse and the entire cradle are heavily varnished. This major restoration by De Wild dates from 1945. All the extensions appear to be in the front wood layer, as confirmed by the X-radiograph. There is extensive overpaint on the left, right, and bottom edges, and the lower left corner. A band of dark repaint (2.9 cm wide) runs along the lower edge and extends under the signature, which may suggest that the artist was involved in the additions. There are also small nails or nail holes running inward from all four panel edges. An intermediate layer, perhaps the adhesive used in the panel restoration, is blurring the radiograph, preventing a clear view of the paint surface.

Most of the longer panel cracks are in the lower third of the image. Shorter lines of tenting can be seen along the top edge. There are traction cracks in some of the thickly painted areas, primarily in the red and gold colors. Several dents occur in the right background, and the older overpaint is discolored and fairly extensive, with much strengthening of the faces, the floor, and some background areas. There are several periods of retouching visible in ultraviolet light, with at least one under the present varnish, and several above it, including remedial stabilization in 1985 and 2005. Although the varnish presents a moderately thin and even ultraviolet light fluorescence, the coatings are extremely fogged. The surface reflectance is quite shiny, except for a few retouched areas.

The ground in the central area is a commercially prepared off-white layer. There was no underdrawing detected in infrared viewing. Several paint changes were seen in the upper right background, where a framed portrait of a woman was painted out, and the fan seems to have been first placed just below this now-missing painting. There is also a curved pentimento below the proper left arm of the seated woman. The paint handling is wet-into-wet, with added scumbles.

1. Lefebvre 2006, p. 133.
2. Duval 1878, p. 84: “une élégante visiteuse reçue par une amie, une artiste en négligé et la palette en main.”
3. George Washington Vanderbilt placed this and a number of other works on long-term loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1886. The works were returned to his nephew in 1919.

316 | **Woman in White** c. 1872

Oil on laminate cardboard, 32.4 x 24.5 cm

Upper left: AS [monogram]

1955.1028

Although the cardboard support is small and the painting rapidly sketched, the monogrammed signature shows that Stevens considered *Woman in White* to be a complete work on its own terms. The painting has historically been dated 1884, based on the evidence of an inscription on the reverse: “Je déclare que ce tableau est peint par Alfred Stevens Paris 1884” (“I state that this painting was made by Alfred Stevens Paris 1884”). The costume, however, an informal yet fashionable summer dress made of semitransparent muslin, suggests a date during the 1870s;¹ it is possible that the 1884 date refers to the inscription itself, rather than to the execution of the painting. Further,



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a stamp, also on the reverse, of the color merchant Vieille, indicates an address on the rue Breda. Vieille operated at this address only until 1872 or 1873, a fact that further supports an 1870s date for the painting.²

In contrast to the meticulous detailing and complex background of earlier works, such as *The Visit* (cat. 315), the sketch-like treatment of this painting places prime emphasis on the pose and expression of the figure and the lighting. The picture was vividly described in the Williams sale catalogue in 1915: "A young woman in a diaphanous white gown with flowing skirts is seated facing the spectator on a sofa covered with glowing crimson drapery. Her hair, slightly disheveled, hangs in loose curls. She has turned her head toward her right, whence comes a strong light falling full upon that side of her face and causing the left side to appear in transparent shadow."³

Additional observations are pertinent. The slightly unstable pose of the figure and her pensive, perhaps

melancholy, expression invite the viewer to imagine the causes of her unhappiness, though the title by which the picture is known gives no clue to the reasons for this; whether this was the painting's original title is not known. In addition, the small crucifix fastened to the choker around her neck adds further suggestiveness to the potential narratives that could be attached to the image, perhaps hinting either that the girl is pious and has been betrayed or that she has betrayed her own faith. The sharp contrast between the lit and shadowed sides of her face heightens the sense of psychological tension, but without making the reasons for it any clearer. Nevertheless, despite the uncertainties, the pose and facial expression of the figure give far clearer clues to the painting's potential meanings than are found, for instance, in comparable single-figure canvases by Manet (such as *Plum Brandy*, c. 1877; National Gallery of Art, Washington). JH

PROVENANCE Ichabod T. Williams, New York (d. 1899, his sale, American Art Association Galleries, New York, 3–4 Feb. 1915, no. 12); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 30 Apr. 1926]; Robert Sterling Clark (1926–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1992–93, no cat.; Williamstown 2000–2001, no cat.

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a gray multiple-ply cardboard, whose reverse is painted brown in imitation of a wood panel. The cardboard's planar distortions are mainly convex in form and especially strong around the edges, with a concavity in the center of the upper half of the image. A small pinhole in the top edge suggests that the board was pinned to something, perhaps while being painted. The ground layer is chipped around the lower edge and corners, and scattered raised crack arrays in the surface have been stabilized. It is assumed these areas are related to the embrittlement of the support, and many of these old crack locations show overlapping paint. Traction cracks have formed in all the deep red passages. The painting was cleaned in 2000, leaving a thin layer of old resin in the upper left corner and over dark passages in the sofa and background. The surface reflectance is somewhat uneven due to a more matte appearance where the ground is exposed.

The ground layers are off-white and probably commercially applied. There appears to be a loose and broadly applied charcoal sketch, with some lines in the background having no relation to the final image. In many areas, such as the face, any charcoal that was there was obliterated during the painting process. Many lines in the costume can be seen with the naked eye, and some seem to indicate that changes were made between the drawing and painting stages. The proper left sleeve or possibly the entire pose may have been shifted toward the left. The proper right hand was initially sketched resting on the sofa. The paint is applied in very quick loose strokes, wet-into-wet, using brushes and a palette knife. Some smooth wide knife strokes have their edges feathered out by a brush.

1. Personal communication from Professor Aileen Ribeiro, July 2009.
2. According to Stéphanie Constantin, *Vieille* moved to an address on the rue Laval in 1873. See Constantin 2001, p. 53.
3. American Art Association 1915, no. 12.

317 | Memories and Regrets c. 1874

Oil on canvas, 61.4 x 46.4 cm

Lower left: AStevens. [AS in monogram]

1955.860

A woman with a semitransparent peignoir loosely draped around her shoulders is seated on a chair, looking downward toward a letter in her right hand, her left elbow resting on the arm of the chair, and her left hand supporting her head. Her lavish gown lies across a stool beside her, together with a fan, a bouquet, and a parasol, while her elaborate undergarments with low-cut décolletage reveal her right nipple. No rings are visible on her left hand. On the dresser beyond her are brushes, perfume bottles, and a small jar decorated with a Japanese-style figure, together with a mirror, in which her downcast face is partly reflected.

The picture's title, *Memories and Regrets*, invites the viewer to construct a narrative around the image. The items on the stool beside her suggest that she has recently returned to the privacy of her home and discarded her outer garments. The shallow open drawer in the dresser may hint that the letter she holds has not been newly received, but has been retrieved from a hiding place, so that she can contemplate her regretful memories of a past relationship, rather than a new sorrow. Moreover, there is no sign of an envelope—



Fig. 317.1 Alfred Stevens, *The Bath (Le Bain)*, c. 1867. Oil on canvas, 74 x 93 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris