



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

**VOLUME ONE**

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With an essay by Richard Rand  
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*Nineteenth-Century European Paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute* is published with the assistance of the Getty Foundation and support from the National Endowment for the Arts.



The Getty Foundation



Produced by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute  
225 South Street, Williamstown, Massachusetts 01267  
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Production by The Production Department,  
Whately, Massachusetts  
Printed on 135 gsm Gardapat Kiara  
Color separations and printing by Trifolio, Verona

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Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London  
P. O. Box 209040, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-9040  
[www.yalebooks.com/art](http://www.yalebooks.com/art)

Printed and bound in Italy  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

Nineteenth-century European paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute / 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, Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley, Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán, James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, Fronia E. Wissman.

volumes cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-935998-09-9 (clark hardcover : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-0-300-17965-1 (yale hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Painting, European—19th century—Catalogs. 2. Painting—Massachusetts—Williamstown—Catalogs. 3. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute—Catalogs. I. Lees, Sarah, editor of compilation. II. Rand, Richard. III. Webber, Sandra L. IV. Title. V. Title: 19th-century European paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

ND457.S74 2012

759.9409'0340747441—dc23

2012030510

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piano, and background. This looseness of the brushwork corresponds more closely to Madrazo's approach in the 1880s, when he ceased to meticulously elaborate the entire scene.

Reflecting his maturity and confidence as a painter, Madrazo made few changes while painting this composition. Another remarkable characteristic of the work is Madrazo's use of such a large panel as a support, which is unusual in his oeuvre. The narrowness of the panel does not restrict the artist's successful depiction of the entire figure, and, in fact, he achieved considerable depth to the composition by the angular placement of the piano. MR

**PROVENANCE** [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 1 Feb. 1934, as *The Singer*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1934–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** None

**REFERENCES** None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a mahogany panel 1.1 cm thick, with shallow chamfers 1.3 cm wide along the back edges. The wood grain runs vertically, and the panel plane is virtually flat. There are gold leaf deposits and frame abrasion on the top and bottom edges; at the top this damage appears 2.5 cm into the image. The condition of the paint layer is very good, with minor natural aging problems in the thinly painted hair. Several coats of varnish together exhibit a moderately dense ultraviolet light fluorescence. The condition of the paint suggests that the picture has never been cleaned, so the lower coating may be the original varnish. The upper layer of the varnish stops short of the top and bottom edges, indicating it was probably added while the picture was framed. The varnish is discolored, glassy, brittle, and fracturing into cracks.

The pink or flesh-colored ground layers are commercially applied, and are thin enough to follow the wood grain closely. No underdrawing was discovered, although several paint changes were detected through the use of infrared reflectography. The placement of the figure's proper right arm has alterations along both the upper and lower outlines, and the position of the hand over the keyboard may have been higher at first. A small alteration is visible in reflected light where the black background covers a flounce of the skirt at the extreme left. The paint handling is very quick and fluid wet-into-wet brushwork. The artist also employed sgraffito lines through the wet paint of the skirt. The paint consistency is primarily a thin paste, with an even thinner application for the face. The signature is executed in black ink.

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**203 | Woman in White** c. 1880

Oil on canvas, 72.1 x 59.8 cm

Lower left: R Madrazo

1955.1034

An anonymous young lady poses serenely with her head turned almost completely to her right, revealing her left profile. A wide-brimmed hat richly decorated with flowers and blue silk ribbons covers her golden hair. She wears a gauzy white dress with a low neckline and lightly gathered bodice.

On many occasions during his career, Madrazo painted this type of portrait in which the head of the model is prominently featured and where the representation of the ideal feminine beauty was far more important than the identity of the sitter. Further emphasizing this poetic approach, these creations bore romantic titles such as *The Bride*, *The Beautiful English Woman*,<sup>1</sup> or, as in this case, *Woman in White*. For Madrazo, portrait painting, a genre in which he excelled, was no longer a subject limited to the commission of a specific individual, but a pictorial motif or subject in and of itself.

The portrait of this elegant woman was likely done during the artist's later career, around 1880, in the years when Madrazo had abandoned the concise, methodical way of painting that once characterized his work and had adopted a looser technique. In this painting, Madrazo reproduced with long and fast brushstrokes the ornate hat, elaborated only with the use of white, blue, and red, as well as the flowing long hair and the delicate dress. The facial features show a more refined style of painting, with care paid to the lips, nose, eyes, and ear. The figure is depicted against a sober, neutral background consisting of various shades of blue that blend harmoniously with the cool white tones dominating the remainder of the composition. Unexpectedly, and possibly to avoid interfering with the image of the woman, Madrazo's signature on the canvas was added vertically along the lower-left edge.

There are documents that testify to the popularity of this kind of portrait on the international scene which date as early as 1873, the year Samuel P. Avery (1822–1904), the American businessman, art dealer, and collector, mentioned in his diaries the purchase in Paris of three of Madrazo's heads for 5,000 francs, and commissioned him to do another work for 3,000 francs.<sup>2</sup> The Goupil inventory lists the sale of half-a-dozen works of this type by Madrazo between 1875



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and 1881,<sup>3</sup> as well as by other colleagues, including, among the Spaniards, Vicente Palmaroli (1834–1896), Luis Ricardo Falero (1851–1896), Eduardo León Garrido (1856–1949), and the artist's brother Ricardo de Madrazo (1852–1917). MR

**PROVENANCE** [Probably N. Mitchell, London, sold to Clark, 19 Jan. 1935, as *Girl's portrait*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1935–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1981a, no cat.; Williamstown 1983a, no cat.; Williamstown 1984b, no cat.; Williamstown 1988b, no cat.

**REFERENCES** None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The original support is a very fine-weight linen (31 threads/cm). In 1978, an old glue lining and interleaf gauze were removed and replaced with a wax resin lining comprised of two layers of linen in a matching weight. The old stretcher was replaced with a four-member

ICA redwood stretcher with spring tension corners. The original tacking margins remain in place. The lining was redone to treat numerous blisters between the two ground layers. A slight pattern where these blisters used to be can be seen in reflected light in the hair, eyebrow, and background to the left of the sitter's face, and in many areas of the dress. Cracked paint in the eyebrow was caused when the blisters were set down. There is some moating and flattening of isolated impastos. During the 1978 removal of the thick, discolored varnish, previous abrasion was noted in the background color. There is presently no retouching on the surface, and the surface reflectance is somewhat matte.

There are two ground layers. The lower layer is a commercially applied off-white color, which extends onto the tacking margins. The upper layer, which extends only to the image edges, is a pinkish gray color, applied by the artist with pronounced brushwork. No underdrawing was detected on the surface. Infrared reflectography reveals a change in the paint of the sitter's hair at her proper right cheek, which is now painted out by the background color. There seem to be brown paint outlines visible at the hat's edge; these may indicate the presence of an overall sketch below the final



colors. Although the paint is applied wet-into-wet, the brushstrokes are stiff and somewhat dry in consistency. The background paint is considerably thinner in consistency than the paint of the figure. There is no evidence of the oil patination layer seen on the other Madrazo paintings.

1. The dates and locations of both paintings are unknown. *The Beautiful English Woman* is illustrated in Temple 1908, p. 58.
2. Avery 1979, pp. 172, 174. Three years later Avery commissioned his own portrait from Madrazo.
3. See Goupil Stock Books, book 7, p. 238, no. 9942; book 8, pp. 92, 142, nos. 10244, 10253, 10994; book 9, p. 61, no. 10994; book 10, p. 56, no. 13592.

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**204 | Woman with a Picnic Basket** c. 1890

Oil on panel, 65.4 x 48.5 cm  
Lower right: R. Madrazo  
1955.919

A smiling young lady sits on a marble bench in a garden, shielding her eyes from the sun's glare with her left hand in anticipation of an approaching visitor. On the ground next to her lies a wicker basket filled with picnic items and covered with a white cloth. She wears a long white satin dress covered by a pink dressing gown and a tight black ribbon around her throat. Her head is partially covered with a red ruffled hat. The background is filled with bushes and a winding sandy path that is partially hidden by the dense vegetation.

Although the subject of picnics had important precedents in the Spanish School, most notably in Goya's cartoons for tapestries such as *The Picnic* (*La Merienda*) (1776; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid) or *The Meadow of San Isidro* (*La Pradera de San Isidro*) (1788; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), it was not a common theme for Spanish painters during the nineteenth century. In France, however, parks were becoming an increasingly important part of modern urban life. As a result, scenes of parks with open-air concerts, promenading couples, frolicking children, and people enjoying refreshments in outdoor cafes were often painted by French artists. Among artists who were interested in this subject, including Monet, Pissarro, and Renoir, it was Édouard Manet who immortalized the picnic scene in one of the greatest

masterpieces of the nineteenth century, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863; Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

Likewise, painters in the Spanish colony in Paris, of which Madrazo was one of the leading figures, felt drawn to this popular subject. Artists such as Francisco Miralles (1848–1901), Emilio Sánchez Perrier (1855–1907), and even Madrazo's brother-in-law, Mariano Fortuny (1838–1874), painted scenes related to picnics. In the case of Madrazo, a painter who specialized in portrait painting and interior genre scenes, outdoor themes were rare. As in his interior scenes, these outdoor paintings depicted aspects of life among the most privileged social classes, to which Madrazo had belonged since birth. His favorite outdoor subjects included the masked ball, in which people dressed in luxurious costumes, as in his famous painting *Leaving the Masked Ball* (1876; private collection),<sup>1</sup> or night scenes related to costume balls such as another *Leaving a Masked Ball* (c. 1885; Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid)

As in most of Madrazo's interior genre paintings, the main character of the scene is a beautiful and fashionably dressed young lady. Madrazo was a traditional easel painter and it is doubtful that he created this scene *en plein air*. The model probably posed for the artist in his studio; the abundant vegetation that appears in the background was almost certainly invented as a romantic exercise by the artist. Madrazo was essentially a figurative painter, and landscape is rarely found in his work. In fact, this painting is one of the few examples, another being the canvas entitled *Woman Seated in a Garden* (c. 1875–1900; Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico), where vegetation plays a prominent role and comprises a significant portion of the scene. Despite the outdoor setting, the focus of the composition is on the depiction of the female figure and her attire. Madrazo perfectly balanced the detail and refinement of the lady's arms and visage with the freer brushstroke of her dress and of the still life in the lower left-hand corner. In the context of his oeuvre, this work testifies to the different ways in which Madrazo explored his favorite subject, the depiction of female beauty in a variety of modern surroundings. MR

**PROVENANCE** [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 2 Jan. 1934, as *The Rendezvous*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1934–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** None

**REFERENCES** None