



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

**VOLUME TWO**

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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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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Details:

TITLE PAGE: Camille Pissarro, *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* (cat. 253)

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**PROVENANCE** [Neuville & Vivien, Paris, sold to Clark, 23 Aug. 1935, as *Les Fenêtres*, by Monnier]; Robert Sterling Clark (1935–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1958a, ill.; Williamstown 1959b, ill., as by Monnier; Williamstown 1979a, no cat.; Williamstown 1982b, no. 30, as by Monnier; Williamstown 1988–89, no cat.

**REFERENCES** None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The original canvas is somewhat coarse commercially primed linen (10 threads/cm). In 1982, the painting was cleaned and wax-resin lined to a single layer of glass fabric to correct split fold-over edges and cockles and bulges in the surface. It was remounted to the original strainer, with an interlayer of Plexiglas adhered only to the wood. The name “Monnier” appears several times on the strainer. There may be an old repaired puncture over the center window frame. There are age cracks throughout the picture, and in reflected light several concentric cracks are beginning to pull forward. There is also a fine hairline network, and most cracks are partially abraded, revealing the off-white ground color. There is scattered traction crackle, most noticeable in the face of the brunette in the lower right window. Several small retouches are visible over the center window and along the edges.

The off-white ground layer is visible on much of the surface due to the thin paint application. Underdrawing can be seen with infrared reflectography or in normal light at low magnification. The medium appears to be graphite, based on its slightly metallic reflectance. In infrared light, a sketch for what may be another window opening is visible in the lower left quadrant of the image, now masked by a dark gray paint application on the wall. Very small brushes were employed, up to 0.6 cm for the largest brushstrokes in the wall. A few impastos can be seen in the pale colors and white details.

1. It was sold to Clark as by Monnier in 1935, and this attribution stood until 1984.

## Artist unknown

French, 19th century

**368 | An Artist** c. 1820

Oil on canvas

81.5 x 65 cm

1955.50

*An Artist* is an arresting portrait of a young painter leaning his arm on a canvas and holding a double-ended chalk holder. While it is slightly formulaic in the subject's pose and the nondescript dark background, close inspection reveals that this portrait was executed by a highly skilled craftsman. The eye contact, slightly confrontational pose, and the fact that the sitter is holding an artist's tool all suggest that the image is a self-portrait. The identity of the painter and the exact nature of this portrait, however, have long been a source of contention and remain a mystery.

When the painting was first exhibited at the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, it bore a false signature reading “Th. Géricault,” and was assumed to be a self-portrait of the Romantic painter Théodore Géricault (see cats. 149–51). This attribution is particularly alluring considering that the painting's first known owner was the playwright and novelist Alexandre Dumas fils, whose father knew Géricault personally. It is difficult, however, to reconcile the current portrait with any of the portraits firmly attributed to Géricault. As early as 1960, just five years after the Clark put the painting on display, the Géricault attribution was challenged, and by 1970 the Clark had officially catalogued the work as by an unknown artist.<sup>1</sup> In 2008, moreover, technical investigation of the painting demonstrated that the signature on the painting was spurious, and it was removed (see Technical Report). In sum, there is little remaining evidence, stylistic or otherwise, that would support the previous attribution.

While the Géricault authorship has been dismissed, scholars have yet to agree on an alternative proposal. Both E. P. Richardson and Lorenz Eitner have suggested an attribution to Baron Antoine-Jean Gros (1771–1835).<sup>2</sup> While portraits of Gros seem to rule out the possibility that the Clark painting would be a self-portrait, Gros was known to paint portraits of acquaintances in his artistic circle, such as his pupil the Count Alcide de la Rivallière (Musée du Louvre, Paris).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the practice among Jacques-Louis



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David's students, including Gros, and among the subsequent pupils of those artists of making portraits of themselves and each other complicates attribution efforts in many cases.

Another intriguing possibility is Alexandre-Marie Colin (1798–1875). Colin was a student of Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson and counted among his good friends Géricault, Eugène Delacroix, and Richard Parkes Bonington, often traveling with these artists. While Colin exhibited at the Salons throughout his career, and his oeuvre encompasses a wide array of subjects

including Shakespearean themes, landscapes, genre, and history paintings, his greatest strength seems to have been portraiture. In fact, *An Artist* does share some stylistic similarities with what is now believed to be Colin's self-portrait in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.<sup>4</sup> In addition to portraiture, however, Colin was also renowned for his prowess as a copyist. Géricault himself is said to have remarked that Colin's copies are "extremely faithful in sentiment and in color. They express, in a summary and reduced form, the master that they reproduce, with his temperament, his charac-

ter, his individual flavor. For those who have seen [the original], it is a fine reminder, for those who have not, an accurate notation, a sure indication."<sup>5</sup> While Colin certainly practiced his copyist's art with Old Masters, he was also known to copy more contemporary pieces, including, for example, Horace Vernet's celebrated portrait of Géricault.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore possible that the waters could become even murkier in the search for the author of *An Artist* if it were perhaps a copy made by Colin of someone else's original composition.

For all the mystery surrounding the author of *An Artist*, the work is almost as notable for its provenance as for its artistic merit. After it was owned by Dumas fils, it was purchased by Jean Dollfus, whose vast collection included masterpieces ranging from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century, including Géricault's much lauded oil sketch *The Race of the Riderless Horses* of 1817 (Musée du Louvre, Paris).<sup>7</sup> At the 1912 sale of the Dollfus collection, *An Artist* changed hands for the last time. While auction records indicate that the decorating firm of Schültz and Leclerc purchased the painting for 8,000 francs, they were acting under instructions from a young Sterling Clark. *An Artist* is, in fact, the first painting that Clark ever bought. This picture was a fairly conservative first addition to his small inherited collection. Not only is it conventional in style and subject, but the idea of buying a painting by Géricault might have had a certain nostalgic pull on the young collector, as his mother had owned the *Trumpeter of the Hussars* (cat. 149). Although *An Artist* is a far more modest picture than Piero della Francesca's *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Four Angels*,<sup>8</sup> acquired by Clark almost exactly a year later, and shows little of the painterly daring of Clark's magisterial Impressionist holdings, which he began collecting in 1916, Clark maintained a fondness for the picture throughout his life. Nearly four decades after he acquired the painting, Clark compared *An Artist* to a portrait by Degas he had recently seen, and wrote that "the Degas is really good but I have a Géricault portrait quite as good of another artist. Amusing enough it is the first picture I bought."<sup>9</sup> As this statement makes clear, Clark himself never questioned the attribution to Géricault. He even personally chose *An Artist* as one of a series of portraits that were displayed at the opening of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. DC

**PROVENANCE** Alexandre Dumas fils, Paris (by 1878–d. 1895, his sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 2 Mar. 1896, no. 23, as *Son portrait*, by Théodore Géricault);<sup>10</sup> Jean Dollfus, Paris

(until d. 1911, sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 2 Mar. 1912, no. 39, as *Portrait d'un artiste*, by Géricault, sold to Schültz and Leclerc as agent for Clark); Robert Sterling Clark (1912–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Paris 1878b, section 6, Portraits nationaux, no. 821, as *Jean-Louis-André-Théodore Géricault*, by Géricault, lent by Dumas; possibly Paris 1883b, no. 106, as *Son portrait*, by Géricault, lent by Dumas;<sup>11</sup> London 1923, no. 19, as *Portrait d'un artiste* by Géricault; Williamstown 1955, no. 50, pl. 35, as by Géricault; Williamstown 1959b, ill., as by Géricault.

**REFERENCES** Jouin 1886, p. 74, as a self-portrait by Géricault; *Arts Magazine* 1955, p. 15; Frankfurter 1955, p. 28, ill., as *Portrait of an Artist*, by Géricault; Faison 1958, p. 169, as *Portrait of an Artist*, by Géricault; Daulte 1960b, p. 26, as by Géricault; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 62, ill., as by Géricault; Grunchev 1978, p. 143, no. A146, ill., as by an unknown artist (French ed., p. 142, no. A146, ill.); Bazin 1987–97, vol. 1, pp. 214–15, vol. 2, p. 330, no. 13., ill. as by an unknown artist; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 43, 303, fig. 45.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The original canvas is inaccessible, but it may be similar in weave to the moderately heavy, commercially primed lining fabric (19 threads/cm). The glue and bleached-linen lining and the replaced six-member stretcher may date to 1950, when the painting was treated through Knoedler. A V-shaped repair in the sitter's proper left shoulder and another one in the proper right arm may explain why the picture is lined. The top right corner of the canvas seems to have been creased, and there is evidence of formerly lifted paint in the face. The edges may have been extended using portions of the original tacking margins, although the present size is close to a standard French portrait size.

The thin paint layer has age cracks and has been abraded by the cleaning done to remove a very dark coating, residues of which can be seen in the weave pattern in the light colors of the face. In 2008, the painting was cleaned of two very discolored varnish layers, the upper one being a reddish-yellow color, possibly deliberately toned. The lower, more intractable layer, appeared to be an oil-containing varnish, which in ultraviolet light masked a considerable amount of repaint, some quite broadly applied. There were retouchings in the face, replaced hair strands, strengthened costume details, and spray-painted edges. An inscription reading "Th Gericault" in black in the lower right corner was seen under low magnification to be floating on top of abraded paint, and it disappeared in infrared light, demonstrating that it was made with a different type of black paint than that found in the rest of the work. This signature was therefore removed, along with the overpaint floating in the lower varnish. Four types of fill were found buried in different levels of varnish or in different locations, suggesting that several restorations may have occurred. During the 2008 treatment,

the picture was varnished, the tears filled, and extensive inpainting was done to visually pull together the old cleaning damages. Some of the lower layer of old varnish was left in place on the hair of the sitter. The flesh areas had been more solidly painted and remain in better condition.

The white ground layer was applied after the canvas was stretched, as evidenced by the fabric cusping seen around the edges, so the canvas may have been primed by the artist. Although bold outlining paint strokes are visible in the jacket, no separate underdrawing was detected in infrared light. An obvious change in the image appears in the final color of the waistcoat, which was painted a buff color after it had been painted black.

1. See correspondence in the Clark's curatorial file. While the painting maintained the attribution to Géricault in Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, it was published as French School in Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1970, and this attribution has remained to the present.
2. See correspondence in the Clark's curatorial file.
3. For Gros's self-portraits, see paintings at the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse (inv. 109) and the Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon (inv. 5081). Coincidentally, in Gros's portrait of Count Alcide de la Rivallière, the sitter holds a similar double-ended chalk holder.
4. Musée du Louvre, inv. 2182. The canvas at the Louvre is one of a number of similar works, including the present painting, that for many years were attributed to Géricault. See Bazin 1987–97, vol. 2, pp. 329–31, nos. 10–14.
5. See Drouot 1876a, pp. xi–xii: “d’une extrême fidélité de sentiment et de couleur. Elles expriment, sous une forme sommaire et réduite, la maîtresse qu’elles reproduisent, avec son tempérament, son cachet, sa saveur individuelle. Pour qui a vu, c’est une fleur de souvenir; pour qui n’a pas vu, une note juste, une indication certaine.”
6. For Colin's copy of Vernet, see Paris 1993, pp. 10–11, no. 12.
7. Bazin 1987–97, vol. 4, pp. 202–3, no. 1368. On Dollfus and his collection of Impressionist paintings, see Distel 1990, pp. 151–55.
8. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 1955.948.
9. Robert Sterling Clark to Paul Lewis Clemens, 7 Dec. 1950, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Archives, Williamstown.
10. The painting was offered for sale at Drouot, Paris, 12–13 May 1892, no. 56, as *Son Portrait par lui-même*, by Géricault, but was bought in.
11. The dimensions are given as 26 x 21 cm. As noted in Bazin 1987–97, vol. 2, p. 330, it is not clear whether this is an error or refers to a different painting.

## Artist unknown

French, 19th century

**369 | Cocottes** c. 1850–70

Oil on panel, 16.7 x 12.3 cm

1955.881

*Cocottes* is an alluring picture of two ladies in a theater box. They are fashionably dressed and adorned with fancy necklaces and earrings, which are shown to advantage thanks to both women's upswept hair. Everything about their manner, from their clothing to their position at the very front of the box, indicates that they have gone out more to be seen than to enjoy a theatrical performance. This notion is further supported by the direct eye contact and provocatively suggestive pose of the woman on the right. Though her gloved hand rests on a pair of opera glasses, these are presumably used more often to discern members of the audience than the action on the stage. Likewise, it is not hard to imagine that the oblique gaze of the woman on the left is directed at the gathered crowd.

While the author of *Cocottes* is unknown, the artist Émile Boilvin (1845–1899) has been proposed.<sup>1</sup> Although he is more famous for his later output as a printmaker and illustrator of works by Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880) and Rabelais (c. 1490–1553), Boilvin began his career as a genre painter. In his paintings, Boilvin was especially fond of light pastel blue costumes similar to the dress worn by the woman on the left in the present picture. Furthermore, there is a damaged and unreadable signature in the lower right corner of *Cocottes* in which one can discern an “o” followed later by “in.”<sup>2</sup>

Sterling Clark appreciated small genre paintings and might have been particularly drawn to *Cocottes* for its theatrical setting. Clark's wife Francine was a former actress, who had been a member of the prestigious Comédie Française for six years. It is unknown exactly when Clark acquired the painting, as the first record of its existence in his collection is a bill from Knoedler for reframing the painting in 1949. It is telling, however, that even at this point, when he had already amassed the majority of his collection of Impressionist masterpieces, he was still fond enough of a small genre scene such as *Cocottes* to have it put in a new frame. DC