



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

**VOLUME ONE**

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,  
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Details:

TITLE PAGE: John Constable, *Yarmouth Jetty* (cat. 73)

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lower design appears to be a walled cityscape with a large windowed building on the left and an arched entrance gate to the right of the visible center trees. This image may exist only as a brown paint sketch, as bare ground is still visible in some areas. Small deposits of charcoal along the lower painting's architecture are visible under magnification. In the radiograph, anomalous strokes in the lower right quadrant are visible; approximately where the distant trees are placed, there seems to be a female figure facing outward, larger in scale than the rest of the image. Remnants of black paint running diagonally in the center lower edge may relate to an earlier signature. The paint technique is wet-into-wet using thin to moderately thick vehicular paint, unlike that seen on most Corots.

Cat. 93: The support is a twill-weave linen (22 vertical warp and 25 weft threads), paste- or glue-lined to a coarse double-weave fabric (13 threads/cm). The five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher is probably original. There are remnants of two old red wax seals at the vertical crossbar joins. The paint is abraded and quite heavily retouched; the painting may have been cleaned through Durand-Ruel, New York, in 1939. In ultraviolet light, there are patchy retouches in the sky and trees, with heavier strengthening in the building outlines, foreground foliage, and figure. The fluorescence of the varnish is moderately dense, and the signature looks like a later addition. Some of the many retouches in the sky look matte in reflected light. There may be grime or older varnish trapped in the interstices of the accentuated canvas weave.

The ground is a thin application, barely covering some areas of the support threads. There was no underdrawing detected. The paint layer is excessively thin with much abrasion by solvents. The surface is soft and poorly defined, especially in the bull standing at the right, which appears semitransparent due to the thin quality of the paint. The paint handling is lacking the depth of layering and the richness of glazes and scumbles found on true Corot landscapes.

1. Huyghe 1936, p. 73; translation from Paris–Ottawa–New York 1996–97, p. 383.

2. Robinson 1896, p. 109.

3. Schoeller and Dieterle 1948; Schoeller and Dieterle 1956; Dieterle 1974; and Dieterle and Pacitti 1992.

4. Vincent Pomarède, "Corot Forgeries: Is the Artist Responsible?" in Paris–Ottawa–New York 1996–97, pp. 383–96.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 383, 395.

6. The first two entries in the provenance come from the Knoedler invoice, which states that "for about 40 years the picture was in the possession of A. Goderis of Antwerp. He bought it of a Paris dealer P. L. Everard in 1870 when on account of the siege, many valuable things were removed from Paris to Brussels." The following name, R. Horace Gallatin—a collector who owned numerous Barbizon paintings and gave his collection to the National Gallery of Art on his death in 1948—is mentioned only in a note in the Clark's curatorial file.

## Gustave Courbet

French, 1819–1877

### 94 | **Laundresses at Low Tide, Étretat** 1866 or 1869

Oil on canvas, 54.3 x 65.7 cm

Lower left: G. Courbet

1955.527

For much of its history this work has been known by fairly generic titles. It first appeared in the 1878 sale of Gustave Arosa's collection as *Rising Tide (Marée montante)*, and when Wildenstein sold it to Clark in 1944, it was titled *The Seaweed Gatherers*, to acknowledge the small figures along the shore in the foreground. But in 1995, Robert Herbert convincingly argued that the image in fact depicts a specific location and identifiable figures, those of laundresses who frequently worked on the beach at Étretat, on the northern coast of France, at low tide.<sup>1</sup> Although Courbet has omitted the characteristic arched cliffs that usually appear in depictions of the location, the actions of the figures, some of whom clearly hold white cloth between them, and the fact that Courbet is known to have visited Étretat suggest that Herbert's identification is accurate. Nonetheless, it is difficult to determine a precise date for this painting, since Courbet made at least two trips to the site, one in 1866, when he was staying in the nearby town of Deauville, and another more extended trip in 1869. Fernier in his catalogue raisonné placed this painting among works from the artist's three-month visit to Trouville and Deauville in 1865, prior to his trip to Étretat, a dating that can now be considered less likely.<sup>2</sup>

By the 1860s, when Courbet visited, Étretat had long been a popular tourist destination, and it was quickly becoming a favorite subject for artists. As Adolphe Joanne noted in the 1866 edition of his guide to Normandy, "from one season to the next, the crowd of artists, strollers, and bathers grew."<sup>3</sup> Both types of travelers were drawn to the unusual cliff formations that stand at the northern and southern ends of the bay, known as the Porte d'Amont ("upstream gateway"), the Porte d'Aval ("downstream gateway"), the Manneporte, and l'Aiguille ("the needle"). In the early nineteenth century, artists including Eugène Isabey and Eugène Delacroix depicted the site, and in the early 1860s, Louis-Alphonse Davanne made a series of photographs of the cliffs and the beach



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(c. 1862–63, Bibliothèque Nationale de France),<sup>4</sup> demonstrating the value of the location as a subject for a variety of artists. Courbet was perhaps among the first to repeat the subject of the shore at Étretat in a group of paintings, beginning with such works as *The Rocks of Étretat* (1866; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) and *Étretat* (1866; location unknown),<sup>5</sup> and continuing through the *Cliffs of Étretat after a Storm* (1870; Musée d'Orsay, Paris)<sup>6</sup> and several later paintings. Slightly later, Claude Monet also took Étretat as a frequent subject. Monet had met Courbet in 1866 and began to paint seascapes (such as *Seascape, Storm* [cat. 222]) that were clearly indebted to Courbet's heavily brushed style. In the 1880s, he returned to his native Normandy and painted numerous views of Étretat's famous cliffs, including the Clark's *Cliffs at Étretat* (cat. 226).

The salient feature of *Laundresses at Low Tide, Étretat*, however, is not the cliffs, which must lie outside the frame of the image, but the sea and sky,

together taking up virtually all of the canvas. If it were not for the small figures on the beach, in fact, the work could be categorized as one of Courbet's numerous paintings that partially or completely eliminate both specific landmarks and any human presence, depicting only calm seas or rolling waves. The artist employed a similar strategy in another canvas from about the same period, *Normandy Landscape* (1866; Musée Eugène Boudin, Honfleur), which shares a very similar composition, with spits of sand reaching into the ocean from the left of the canvas, and tiny figures working on the beach at low tide, although neither the landscape nor the figures are fully identifiable.<sup>7</sup>

The author Guy de Maupassant visited Courbet at Étretat in 1869 and described the artist at work: "[Courbet] was living in a little house that looked out entirely on the sea, and leaned against the upstream cliff. . . . From time to time, he put his face up to the window and watched the storm. The sea came so close that it seemed to batter the house, enveloped in spray and

noise.”<sup>8</sup> While this situation clearly helped Courbet create his images of crashing waves free of any reference to the shoreline, such a position might also account for the lack of identifiable landmarks in calmer scenes such as *Laundresses at Low Tide*, neither fully given over to a view of the sea nor turned toward land. Although Courbet surely did not always paint from this house, its location, presumably backed up against the foot of the Falaise d’Aval, would have precluded the cliff’s inclusion in a painting and could have produced a slightly elevated vantage looking out over the beach and the ocean, much like that in the present work.

This painting was acquired by Mary Cassatt after the 1878 Gustave Arosa sale, though it is not certain that she bought it directly from the sale. It then passed to Cassatt’s niece, Ellen Mary Cassatt (later Mrs. Horace Binney Hare), and in 1944, it was at the Wildenstein Gallery in New York, where Sterling Clark purchased it. His description of the painting, in a letter to his friend, the artist Paul Clemens, indicates that he valued it for what he saw as its uncharacteristically clear colors: “You know I am not an enthusiast on Courbet. Well, I bought one recently of the shore and looking out to sea which I think is the finest one I have ever seen. I never thought Courbet could do so well. None of your muddy waves but beautiful clear water and fine clouds. It is comparable with an extra fine Corot in quality so you can imagine what it is like for beautiful green grays.”<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the painting’s present appearance has been affected by several treatments for flaking paint; its flattened impastos and highly uniform surface, already noted in 1963, are likely the result of an initial lining process. SL

**PROVENANCE** Gustave Arosa, Paris (until 1878, his sale, Drouot, Paris, 25 Feb. 1878, no. 19, as *Marée montante*);<sup>10</sup> Mary Cassatt, Paris (possibly from 1878; d. 1926);<sup>11</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Horace Binney Hare, Philadelphia (probably from 1926);<sup>12</sup> [Wildenstein, New York, sold to Clark, 12 June 1944, as *The Seaweed Gatherers*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1944–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1956a, no. 98, pl. 15, as *The Seaweed Gatherers*; Glens Falls 2000–2001, no cat.

**REFERENCES** Faison 1958, p. 171; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 23, ill., as *Seaweed Gatherers*; Rich 1969, pp. 212–13, ill.; Fernier 1977–78, vol. 1, pp. 274–75, no. 521, ill., as *Les Ramasseurs de goémon, marée montante*; Herbert 1995, pp. 83–85, 107, ill., as *Laundresses at Low Tide, Etretat*; Chicago–Boston–Washington 1998–99, pp. 179–80, fig. 3; Ganz 2000, p. 25, fig. 5.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The original linen support is a very damaged and thinned remnant, as the picture was nearly transferred in 1963 by William Suhr during the replacement of an earlier glue lining, in an effort to stop ongoing flaking. The heat and pressure of the earlier lining probably caused delaminations and flattened impastos. Treatment in 1945 by De Wild appears not to have included relining. Due to continued flaking, an additional wax lining was applied to Suhr’s in 1982, and in 1988, local consolidation was again necessary. The decision was made in 1997 to replace the numerous linings, revealing the standard French size number “15” stamped on the original canvas reverse. The present lining consists of an inter-layer of polyester mesh, backed with a layer of French woven polyester fabric, adhered with Beva 371. There is again, however, a small area of delamination 2.5 cm down from the center top edge. This repeating problem suggests an inherent vice in the artist’s material or techniques. Numerous dark age cracks of two sizes are quite visible, probably due to the dark imprimatura layer below the paint. Old corner stress cracks in all four corners radiate diagonally into the center of the picture. There is a large retouch in the upper center sky, and other restorations scattered in the sky, along the top and bottom edges, and throughout the dark foreground. The right tacking edge has been flattened out and overpainted as part of the image area. There are natural resin residues from an earlier varnish in the flattened impastos, and the present 1997 spray-applied coating is quite matte.

The ground is a coarse, off-white, artist-applied layer with a blackish-brown imprimatura layer, which is quite visible in the foreground. The paint was applied using stiff brushes combined with a palette knife; figures were inserted into wet knife strokes using a brush. The sky color may have been applied first with a brush, then smoothed with a knife. There are areas of a smeared, finely divided blue pigment, possibly indigo or Prussian blue, in the sky paint mixture. Gentle sweeping impastos and some skid or chatter marks can be seen at the edges of knife strokes. The palette knife picked up and spread gritty black particles from the imprimatura layer throughout the final colors, suggesting that the lower layer may have been underbound.

1. Herbert 1995, pp. 83–85.
2. Fernier 1977–78, vol. 1, pp. 274–75.
3. Joanne 1866, p. 118: “de saison en saison, la foule des artistes, des promeneurs et des baigneurs augmenta.”
4. See Le Havre 2004, pp. 81–82, nos. 18–21.
5. F 590 and 593.
6. F 745.
7. The painting is reproduced in Le Havre 2004, pp. 84–85, no. 22; the figures are described as *équilleurs*, fishermen searching for *équilles*, or sand eels, at low tide.
8. Maupassant 1886; quoted in Le Havre 2004, p. 13: “Il habitait une petite maison donnant en plein sur la mer, et appuyée à la falaise d’aval. . . . De temps en temps,

il allait appuyer son visage à la vitre et regardait la tempête. La mer venait si près qu'elle semblait battre la maison, enveloppée d'écume et de bruit."

9. Robert Sterling Clark to Paul Lewis Clemens, 20 July 1944, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Archives, Williamstown.
10. The dimensions in the sale catalogue are given as 33 x 65 cm. An unpublished album of the Arosa sale in the Frick Art Reference Library, however, clearly illustrates this painting, suggesting that the dimensions were printed incorrectly.
11. Erica E. Hirshler, in *Chicago–Boston–Washington 1998–99*, p. 179, states that Cassatt bought this picture from the Galerie Georges Petit in February 1878. If this is the case, Georges Petit, who was one of the organizers of the Arosa sale, might have acquired it from the sale on behalf of Cassatt. There is no annotation in the copy of the sale catalogue at the Frick indicating a buyer.
12. Mrs. Horace Binney Hare was the former Ellen Mary Cassatt, niece of Mary Cassatt. She and her two siblings were the primary beneficiaries of Cassatt's will; it therefore seems likely that she inherited this painting directly from her aunt.

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**95 | The Sailboat (Seascape) c. 1869**

Oil on canvas, 53.3 x 64.3 cm

Lower left: G. Courbet.

1955.690

The composition of *The Sailboat (Seascape)*, depicting one large and one small vessel on a rough sea, is almost identical to that of another canvas, *The Sailboat* (location unknown).<sup>1</sup> In the first, the uniformly cloudy sky takes up about a third of the image, and the small boat appears to the left of the larger one. In the second painting, the horizon line divides the image nearly in half, and the thickly clouded sky darkens near the water, while the small boat appears in the distance at right. Both paintings probably depict the sea at Normandy, a region Courbet first visited in 1859, returning in 1865 and 1866, and in 1869 for a more extended period. Although it is often difficult to determine the exact date of many of the artist's seascapes, he seems to have painted agitated seas more often during and after his last visit to Normandy. As Sarah Faunce has suggested, the foaming waves in both *Sailboat* paintings, thickly brushed and worked with a palette knife, might therefore more likely date

the works to about 1869.<sup>2</sup> Robert Fernier, in his 1977–78 catalogue raisonné, however, dated *The Sailboat* (F 508) to 1865. While such a date is quite possible, his suggestion that the present work (F 912) dates to 1873 and represents “a replica” of F 508, “executed by Courbet during his stay in Switzerland,” seems more problematic.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his career, Courbet regularly repeated subjects in one or more canvases. Finished versions of the same subject appear as early as 1844, in paintings such as *Lovers in the Countryside* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, and Musée du Petit Palais, Paris).<sup>4</sup> From the 1860s onward, when he began increasingly to depict landscapes, Courbet painted numerous versions of such sites as the Puits Noir, the source of the Loue River, and the cliffs of Étretat. While many of these are individual approaches to a particular site, other paintings clearly share the same composition and execution, with little or no significant variation. In addition to the present work, such repetitions include *The Covered Stream* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris),<sup>5</sup> a painting Courbet explicitly stated that he would copy more than a year later, to produce *Solitude* for his patron Alfred Bruyas (Musée Fabre, Montpellier),<sup>6</sup> and *The Wave or The Stormy Sea* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, and Musée Malraux, Le Havre),<sup>7</sup> as well as two other versions (location unknown and private collection).<sup>8</sup>

Questions concerning the relation of one version to another, their dating, and even their attribution to Courbet can at times be difficult to resolve. The situation becomes even more complex concerning works dated after 1871, when Courbet painted familiar scenes from memory in part because his ability to travel became limited due not only to illness but also to his prosecution by the French government, which charged him with the destruction of the Vendôme column during the Commune of 1871, resulting in his exile in Switzerland. Given the marked similarities between the appearance and orientation of the central boat and the configuration of the waves in both *Sailboat* paintings, however, there is little reason to think that the Clark work was painted in 1873, at a different period from the other version. Indeed, during the 1860s, Courbet more than once executed multiple seascapes in relatively short periods of time, probably inspired by his own desire to experiment with slight variations in format, as in the present work, as well as by the specific requests of patrons such as Bruyas, and by the popularity of such subjects with the art-buying public.<sup>9</sup> Courbet himself commented in a letter