



**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,  
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, and Fronia E. Wissman

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1. The Boilvin attribution was proposed by Charles Cunningham in a letter of 6 Oct. 1975 and again in a memo of Jan. 1976, both of which are in the Clark's curatorial file.
2. See Sandra Webber's conservation report of Dec. 2004, in the Clark's curatorial file.
3. Georges Muller's ownership of this painting is tentatively suggested in the unpublished manuscript "List of Paintings in the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Sterling Clark," which was compiled about 1970. See the Clark's curatorial file.

## Artist unknown

French, 19th century

### 370 | Woman Seated at a Dressing Table

c. 1850–1900

Oil on panel, 21.4 x 17.2 cm

Lower left: G. Courbet.

1955.530

This small panel was purchased by Sterling Clark as a work by Gustave Courbet. Given the lack of historical information about it, its condition, the questions regarding the signature, and its relation to the rest of the artist's work, however, the attribution cannot be supported. Very little additional information can be determined concerning the names supplied by Knoedler's invoice to Clark for the provenance. A sale of works in the collection of a Madame Lederlin in 1933 did not include this painting, and while a Dr. Voillemot is known to have owned a work by Géricault in 1924, nothing further is known about him.<sup>1</sup> Since *Woman Seated at a Dressing Table* was reproduced twice, in publications of 1921 and 1925, it was presumably in a relatively well-known collection, and it is therefore conceivable, if unlikely, that "Beaumont" refers to Count Étienne de Beaumont (1883–1956), a costume designer, contemporary art supporter, and member of high society. The name is relatively common, however, and Étienne de Beaumont's tastes are unlikely to have encompassed this type of work.

Before the painting was acquired by Clark, its surface had been abraded during cleaning, and it still reveals extensive retouching in the figure as well as in the background. Most notably, the current signature

appears in an area that is clearly problematic, and examination reveals that it lies on top of previously damaged paint, indicating that it was added after the rest of the painting had been completed. Furthermore, in the only two sources to publish the work, André Fontainas's *Courbet* (1921) and Giorgio de Chirico's *Gustave Courbet* (1925), it is illustrated with an image that bears a very different signature, one that slants forward rather than the current backward-slanting script. This throws further doubt on the signature, supporting the idea that it was applied at a late date, presumably after the publication of the two books. Finally, while nearly all of Courbet's signatures are either upright or slanted backward to a greater or lesser degree, like the one now on the panel, it would be unusual for the artist to sign such a small and informally painted work at all. Taken together, the evidence suggests that the signature on the present work cannot be considered original.

Even if the issue of the signature is set aside, the subject matter and treatment of *Woman Seated* is still uncommon in Courbet's oeuvre. Most of the small-scale images of individuals published in Robert Fernier's 1977–78 catalogue raisonné are bust-length portraits or studies presented against neutral backgrounds, rather than the highly simplified setting and studio props seen here. One of the closest comparisons might be to a small portrait, also painted on panel, of *Marc Trapadoux* (c. 1849; Musée d'Art Moderne de Troyes), in which the sitter appears among objects that probably did belong to Courbet's own studio.<sup>2</sup> But this is explicitly a portrait rather than an anonymous genre scene, and the small size of the panel in Troyes, which at 40.5 x 30 cm is still much larger than the Clark panel, is the result of Courbet producing a reduced version of a work he had exhibited at the Salon of 1849 (private collection), presumably at the request of a collector.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the handling of the Trapadoux portrait appears to be somewhat more refined, with less visible brushstrokes and greater detail in the surroundings. Comparison might also be made between *Woman Seated* and some of Courbet's images of women of the 1860s, such as *Reflection* (1864; Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai) or *Woman with Jewels* (1867; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen), but these differ again in being larger, bust-length images that emphasize the sensuality of the sitter, a quality that is entirely absent from the Clark painting.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, *Woman Seated* might also recall numerous paintings by Camille Corot in which the sitter is shown at full length and dressed fairly elaborately, seated in an



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interior, absorbed in her own thoughts. These include paintings like *The Letter* (c. 1865; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), or *Corot's Studio: Young Woman Seated before an Easel* (1865–68; Musée du Louvre, Paris), and many similar depictions of women seated in the studio.<sup>5</sup> Once again, however, the Clark panel lacks the anecdotal element of letter-reading or artistic contemplation, and its broad-brush execution makes it unlikely to be by Corot, an artist whose style, like Courbet's, was frequently emulated, leading to many incorrect attributions.<sup>6</sup> SL

**PROVENANCE** Mme Lederlin; Beaumont; Dr. L. Voillemot;<sup>7</sup> [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, Nov. 7, 1950, as *Femme au chiffonnier*, by Gustave Courbet]; Robert Sterling Clark (1950–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1956a, no. 97, pl. 14, as *Femme au chiffonnier*, by Gustave Courbet.

**REFERENCES** Fontainas 1921, pl. 10, as *La dame au miroir*, by Courbet; De Chirico 1925, ill., as *Méditation*, by Courbet; Faison 1958, p. 171, ill., as *Woman at Dressing Table*, by Courbet; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 24, ill., as *Woman at Dressing Table*, by Courbet.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a mahogany panel 1 cm thick, with the grain running vertically. The edge chamfers, 1 cm wide, are all at different angles in the wood. The reverse has vertical planing marks, and the 1-cm-wide chamfers here, too, are all set at different angles into the wood. There are two pencil inscriptions on the reverse, one on top of the other. The upper, more visible one, reads: "Gve Courbet Portrait de Mme R. . . ." The lower fragment, visible only in infra-

red reflectography, seems to include the letters “leny gu ne.” There has been no treatment of the picture since it entered the collection. There is some frame abrasion, primarily along the top edge, and a scoring line along the lower edge. Many small cleaning abrasions are visible on the tops of the grainy surface texture, including the signature. A thin, slightly discolored layer of natural resin varnish stops short of the lower edge, probably indicating that the picture was varnished while framed. There is extensive retouching throughout. Odd white highlights on the dress are old retouches scumbled over cracks and old varnish trapped in the paint. Under ultraviolet light, there seems to be something else near the signature, although this is not visible under magnification or using infrared equipment. In reflected light, the gloss is uneven, and the grain of the panel is more visible due to the grouping of the extensive small paint losses.

The ground is a thin, off-white layer that follows the wood grain. Charcoal dust dispersed at the edges of forms suggests that an underdrawing was used, and some lines can still be seen in the dress folds. Infrared reflectography reveals the line for the sitter’s rounded hairstyle extending further into the background. A dark brown paint sketch is also visible in the head of the sitter and along the edges of forms. In general, the final paint is sketchy, and applied in fluid, paste-consistency strokes. The green costume detailing was added after the dress paint had set. The floor was painted after and around the chair, and the background was painted after the figure, possibly after the latter had dried. Some of the dark details may be executed in ink. Under low magnification, large particles of white pigment can be seen scattered in the dress and background. The signature sits partially on plowed-up paint in the lower left corner.

1. Lederlin sale, Galerie Jean Charpentier, Paris, 22–23 Mar. 1933. For the Géricault, see Bazin 1987–97, vol. 3, pp. 154–55, no. 744.
2. F 98. See Paris–New York–Montpellier 2007–8, pp. 150–51.
3. Paris–New York–Montpellier 2007–8, p. 151. The Salon painting is F 96. It has been suggested that there may have been two versions of *Woman Seated*, which might account for the different signatures, but there are essentially no discernible differences between the early twentieth-century reproductions in Fontainas and De Chirico and the present work, although the two books do not give the dimensions of the work reproduced, and the quality of their reproductions is not good.
4. F 430 and 626.
5. R 1426 and 1559.
6. An attribution to an Italian artist such as Silvestro Lega (1826–1895) has also been considered, but no convincing determination can be made. See correspondence in the Clark’s curatorial file.
7. The early provenance is from the Knoedler invoice of 1950. See the Clark’s curatorial file.

## Artist unknown

French, 19th century

### 371 | Artist in His Studio 1877

Oil on panel, 41.6 x 27.3 cm

Lower right: [an ankh-like symbol] / 1877  
1955.883

Identifying the subject, maker, and history of *Artist in His Studio* presents considerable challenges, as the picture raises more questions than it answers. Very little is known about the painting that Sterling Clark purchased as *In the Studio* by an unknown artist from the dealer Wallis & Son in 1931. Wallis & Son ran a franchise known as the French Gallery in London and in cities throughout Scotland. T. Wallis, Edward Silva White, and W. L. Peacock were the directors and sold modern nineteenth-century French art by artists such as Charles-François Daubigny, Gustave Courbet, and Théodore Rousseau. They also mounted exhibitions of young Scottish artists.<sup>1</sup> There is very little further information about the French Gallery or its records, and the history of the picture before 1931 cannot be traced.

Virtually all that is known about the painting are the identities of the bronze sculpture on the stool and two of the three plaster sculptures on the shelf above the men. In 1975, then-curator at the Louvre Pierre Rosenberg identified the sculpture on the stand as *Fisherman Dancing the Tarantella* from 1832 by Francisque-Joseph Duret (1804–1865), of which the Louvre has an example (fig. 371.1).<sup>2</sup> Anne Pingeot, another Louvre curator at the time, provided the early history of the statue. It was cast in bronze by Honoré Gonon and his sons, shown at the Salon of 1833, acquired for the king in the same year, and exhibited at the Musée du Luxembourg until December 1874, when it entered the Louvre. A subsequent letter from Pingeot mentioned that this famous sculpture by Duret probably inspired Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse as he later made a pair of sculpted figures in a similar pose, the *Neapolitan Dancers* (modeled c. 1855).<sup>3</sup> The popularity of *Fisherman Dancing the Tarantella* lasted for decades, as replicas of the piece were sold, and the artist showed the work again at the Exposition Universelle in 1855, winning a Medal of Honor for the sculpture.

The three plasters in the upper part of the picture have been identified as Hellenistic in origin. The left-