



**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,  
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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## Imitator of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

### 92 | **Barnyard Scene** 19th century

Oil on canvas, 34.2 x 24 cm

Lower left: COROT

1955.538

### 93 | **Marsh at Bove, near Amiens (Landscape with Cow)** 19th century

Oil on canvas, 24 x 35.3 cm

Lower left: COROT

1955.546

“Corot painted three thousand canvases, ten thousand of which have been sold in America.”<sup>1</sup> This often-repeated quip points to the ubiquity of paintings attributed to Corot that are in fact not by him. Made in

1936, it summarizes a situation that arose while the artist was still alive. The kind of pictures that brought him fame—soft veils of color, convincing if unnaturalistic drawings, simple scenes—were also ones that were easily replicated. “He finally formed a manner of expression,” explained the American painter Theodore Robinson, “that can be copied in a way to deceive the very elect, as [Paul Désiré] Trouillebert and others have proved.”<sup>2</sup> Robert Sterling Clark was among “the very elect” who bought paintings thinking they were by Corot but who were deceived.

Clark was not alone in his mistake. He bought *Barnyard Scene* and *Marsh at Bove, near Amiens* from the reputable dealer M. Knoedler & Co., from whom he acquired many works over the decades of his collecting career. These two paintings can be easily removed from Corot’s oeuvre on the basis of their aspiring but inept handling. *Barnyard Scene*, in particular, lacks Corot’s sure sense of the form of trees. Paint hastily applied in the foreground remains as visible patches; they do not cohere into a credible ground plane. The pigs, though, are the giveaway. Pigs appear in none of the more than three thousand pictures listed by Alfred Robaut, Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, and subsequent cataloguers of Corot’s art.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps in an effort not to hew too closely to Corot’s manner, the painter of *Barnyard Scene* introduced a jarring, false note.

*Marsh at Bove, near Amiens* is superficially more akin to countless of Corot’s marsh scenes, with its cow standing knee-deep in water. Usually, though, a human figure will be in a boat, not inexplicably pulling on a long, waterlogged branch. The more one looks at this picture, the more puzzling it becomes. What is the rectangular structure at the far left? Where is the cow’s neck? Where does the wall of the house stop and the roof start? Where exactly is the water’s edge? Corot’s drawing is not always very precise, but true pictures by him do not raise such questions. The technical examination of this work revealed that the paint is both abraded and heavily retouched, suggesting that many hands have tried and failed to make this into a convincing simulacrum of a painting by Corot.

Vincent Pomarède has summarized the state of the question of Corot forgeries in his essay “Corot Forgeries: Is the Artist Responsible?”<sup>4</sup> His provocative title points to the larger question of the artist’s “astonishing conception of artistic property,” which Pomarède considers to have been particularly unproprietary. Corot, thinking he was helping less talented artists or those who needed ready money, “signed copies of his





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works and retouched forgeries and pastiches made from his paintings.” What he cannot be blamed for, though, was “the phenomenal popularity of his misty landscapes from the 1860s, which perfectly matched the tastes of the provincial middle class of the late nineteenth century, buyers who could not easily tell the difference between an authentic Corot and the work of an imitator.”<sup>5</sup>

Robert Sterling Clark, a man who took great pride in his acute eye, would no doubt be distressed to find that these two paintings are not what he had thought they were. FEW

**PROVENANCE** Cat. 92: Margaret Eaton Burnside, Toronto; [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 5 July 1944]; Robert Sterling Clark (1944–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

Cat. 93: [P. L. Everard, Paris, sold to Goderis, 1870]; A. Goderis, Antwerp (1870–c. 1910);<sup>6</sup> possibly R. Horace Gallatin, New York; [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 24 Jan. 1924, as *Marais de Boves, near Amiens*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1924–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Cat. 92: Williamstown 1956a, no. 89, pl. 6, as by Corot; Williamstown 1959b.

Cat. 93: Williamstown 1956a, no. 92, pl. 9, as *Marais de Bois, près d'Amiens*, by Corot; Williamstown 1959b.

**REFERENCES** Cat. 92: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 12, ill.

Cat. 93: None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** Cat. 92: The support is a moderate-weight linen (thread count inaccessible), glue-lined to a moderately fine canvas (22 threads/cm). The tacking margins have been removed, and the stretcher may be a replacement. There are some weave impressions from the lining process, a few flattened impastos, scattered age cracks, and an old scratch at the left edge in the barn roof. The varnish layer is moderately discolored, with streaky vertical deposits along the canvas weave and its own short, unconnected diagonal crack network. The ultraviolet light fluorescence is even and moderately dense, and the surface reflection is quite glossy. There are retouches in the corners and possible overpaint on the barn roof. The painting was probably treated in 1949 by De Wild.

The ground layers, which are off-white and probably commercially applied, appear as a very even layer in the X-radiograph. Also visible are the cut edges of the canvas, 0.3–0.5 cm all around. There are pinholes in the corners of the support. Using infrared reflectography, an entirely different image can be seen through the upper paint. This

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