

The background of the cover is a detailed 19th-century painting of a storm at sea. The sky is filled with heavy, dark, and turbulent clouds, with some light breaking through near the horizon. The sea is dark and choppy, with white-capped waves crashing against a sandy beach in the foreground. Several large sailing ships with multiple masts and sails are visible on the horizon, some appearing to be struggling against the wind. On the left side, a wooden pier or wharf extends into the water, with a few small figures of people on it. The overall mood is one of intense natural power and maritime drama.

**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,
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PROVENANCE The artist, given to Vivier;³ Philippe Gille (in 1889, possibly until d. 1901); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 9 Dec. 1940]; Robert Sterling Clark (1940–55);⁴ Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1956a, pl. S-8, as *Saules*.

REFERENCES Robaut 1905, vol. 3, pp. 22–23, no. 1300, ill. (a drawing by Robaut after the painting), as *Monthéry.—Prairie avec des Saules*; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 20, ill., as *Willows*; Morse 1979, p. 64.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a twill canvas, 22 x 28 threads/cm. There is a large irregular vertical thread in the left center sky. The picture is glue-lined to a coarse linen (13–16 threads/cm) and retains the artist's original tacking margins. The five-member stretcher, with horizontal crossbar, may be original and is now wax-coated. The paint layer is in poor condition, with abrasion to both dark and light areas. Although not visible through the dense coatings, the surface likely has several depths of extensive retouching. What can be seen between the coatings are extensive reinforcements of the tree trunks, foliage, signature, and edges, with a general muddiness of the foliage, possibly due to old varnish residues. In ultraviolet light, the varnish layers fluoresce a moderately dense green, and in normal light, the yellow discoloration neutralizes the purples in the foliage. Older varnish residues seem to be trapped in the canvas weave.

The commercially prepared ground is a thin, pale gray layer, which allows the canvas texture to show. Bare threads are visible in some areas of the sky, although it is unclear whether this is poor ground application or later solvent damage. No underdrawing was detected, although there may be a dark brown sketch for the trees. The green middle tones were painted around the tree trunks, but the upper tree branches were painted over the green foliage. The two animals were painted over the lower paint layers. Several brown brush hairs are embedded in the paint of the lower right quadrant. The paint film is composed of very thin washes, apparently underbound due to being thinned with diluent instead of medium.

1. Jeffrey L. Snedeker, "Vivier, Eugène," in Grove Music Online (accessed 6 June 2006), http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29552?q=Eugene+Vivier&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1; Christopher Smith, "Gille, Philippe," in Grove Music Online (accessed 6 June 2006), http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O90191?q=philippe+gille&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit.

2. Paris–Ottawa–New York 1996–97, pp. 309–10.

3. Robaut 1905, vol. 3, pp. 22–23, no. 1300, gives the name of the first owner in the provenance only as "Vivier" and recorded this work in the collection of a Philippe Gille in 1889. It is possible that Robaut's "Vivier" refers to Eugène Vivier. See commentary for further information.

4. The invoice from Knoedler of 1940 has a notation that this painting was returned and credited to Clark at the initial purchase price. Clark must, however, have bought the painting back again at some unspecified date.

88 | Apple Trees in a Field c. 1865–70

Oil on canvas, 40.7 x 60.8 cm

Lower right: COROT

1955.548

Unlike his friend Charles-François Daubigny, Corot seldom painted pictures of labor. Men in boats pole along in placid lakes, maybe pulling up a net, maybe not; women and children desultorily gather things from trees or streams, but it is never clear what is being collected. Therefore, the partially harvested field of grain to the left of *Apple Trees in a Field* populated with people bent over or with implement in hand is a rarity in Corot's oeuvre. Nor did he often place an identifiable tree at the center of a composition, as his friend Théodore Rousseau was wont to do. *Apple Trees in a Field*, probably painted in the late 1860s, shows the elderly artist once again trying something new.

The impetus for this singular subject matter may have come from Daubigny. Corot and Daubigny had met in 1852 and, despite the twenty-five-year difference in age, had become close friends by the end of the decade. Corot visited Daubigny almost every year in Auvers-sur-Oise, upstream from Pontoise, where Daubigny had bought property in 1860. In 1865, while staying with Daubigny, Corot and others painted panels to decorate Daubigny's house.¹ As a frequent visitor to Daubigny's home, Corot would have seen what the younger artist was painting. It would be surprising, therefore, if Corot were not aware of Daubigny's ongoing interest in scenes of orchards and harvests, beginning perhaps with *Spring*, which was commissioned by the minister of the interior in 1856 and shown at the Salon of 1857 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, on deposit at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Chartres).² In the 1860s, Daubigny juxtaposed apple trees and fields again in such pictures as *Apple Trees in Normandy* (c. 1867) and *Plowed Fields at Auvers* (1862; Sinebrychoff Art Museum, Helsinki).³

Corot may have seen the decorative qualities inherent in the shapely apple tree. Comparing an orchard scene by Daubigny, such as the slightly later *Apple Blossoms* of 1873 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,



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Fig. 88.1. Charles-François Daubigny (French, 1817–1878), *Apple Blossoms*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 58.7 x 84.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Collis P. Huntington, 1900 (25.110.3)

New York (fig. 88.1), with *Apple Trees in a Field* throws into relief the differences between the two artists. Where Daubigny is at pains to suggest the fecundity of nature, filling his canvas with myriad marks of different kinds to stand in for the various leaves of plants that

made up the scene, Corot smoothed his mark making to give the effect of a field, the impression of a tree in leaf. The feature that most distinguishes the two paintings is the central motif, the apple tree. Corot's tree, towering over the people in the field, is in fact impossibly tall; sensible French peasants would not have allowed a fruit-bearing tree to grow so high as to render the crop inaccessible, even with ladders and poles. Daubigny's trees, stubby in comparison, are of use to their owners. Corot's apple tree, like the tree in his famous *Souvenir of Mortefontaine* (1864; Musée du Louvre, Paris), is a confection the viewer accepts as real.⁴ Corot explained his approach to Frédéric Henriët:

*One can't copy nature literally, right? I can't paint all the branches, nor all the leaves of that tree. I content myself with giving it the general aspect in modeling the mass; I choose those of its branches that serve best to establish its anatomy. Later I will specify a few leaves, themselves also well chosen, which will give the impression of thousands of other leaves.*⁵

With these words Corot as much as said that, prompted by a tree in nature, he painted the idea of a tree, in this case an apple tree, rather than a specific tree. The branches of the apple tree reach outward,

as do those of the tree in *Souvenir of Mortefontaine*, carving out, under their length, a space where time is suspended. The crown of the apple tree merges with the foliage of the smaller trees to the right, eliminating the distance between the trees to form an arc of protected space. Corot exploited the space-defying aspect of this decorative sweep of foliage a few years later in *The Road to Sin-le-Noble, near Douai* (Musée du Louvre, Paris).⁶

The magical zone beneath the trees is populated by people ostensibly harvesting a field of grain. Commensurate with the confected setting, they do not truly toil, as do the workers in Daubigny's harvest scenes.⁷ Corot may have taken the idea of a harvest under apple trees from Daubigny, but he had no choice but to render the subject in his own terms. FEW

PROVENANCE Jaquette; Beugniet (in 1893); Jolly;⁸ Robert Sterling Clark (by 1930–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1956a, no. 87, pl. 4; Williamstown 1959b, ill.

REFERENCES Robaut 1905, vol. 3, pp. 278–79, no. 209, ill., as *Pommiers dans la campagne*; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 11, ill.; Morse 1979, p. 64.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a moderate-weight linen (14 threads/cm) whose threads are pulled out of square in the right third of the picture. The painting has an old glue lining onto a fabric of similar weight, and small bits of newspaper used in the lining process remain adhered to the original tacking margins. The painting was treated, probably a partial cleaning, by Chapuis and Coince of Paris in 1930. The stretcher, which is nailed together in the corners, is probably a replacement. All four edges of the image are repainted, perhaps to cover damage or incompleteness. There are scattered age cracks, some weave impression, and scattered solvent abrasion where thin dark colors were applied over light-colored impastos. A few retouches can be seen in the foreground abrasions. The natural resin varnish is moderately discolored and has its own crackle network, while the edge retouches on top of the coating now look cooler in tone.

The ground is a cream-colored commercial application that is not visible through the layers of paint. No underdrawing was detected with infrared reflectography, although occasional glimpses of charcoal may be located in the trees. There may have been some sketching of forms in a thin gray-green paint. The paint has a somewhat dry, paste consistency, with some scumbling, and some wet-into-wet brushwork. The small figures and trees were painted before the foreground field and the rather thickly applied sky. In reflected light, unrelated thick deposits of paint in the leftmost lower branches of the central tree may indicate a reworking of forms.

1. See Paris–Ottawa–New York 1996–97, p. 387, fig. 167; and Micucci 2001, p. 36.
2. H 956.
3. H 960 and 140.
4. R 1625.
5. Henriët 1891, p. 101. “On ne peut pas copier littéralement la nature, n’est-ce pas? Je ne puis peindre toutes les branches, ni toutes les feuilles de cet arbre? Je me borne à en donner l’aspect général en le modelant dans la masse; je choisis celles de ses branches qui servent le mieux à établir son anatomie. Je préciserai ensuite quelques feuilles qui, bien choisies elles aussi, donneront l’impression de milliers d’autres feuilles.”
6. R 2169.
7. For examples, see H 140–42, 983–86, or 998–1000.
8. Jaquette and Beugniet are listed as former owners in Robaut 1905, vol. 3, pp. 278. Beugniet is probably the artist’s supplier and dealer often associated with Barbizon; see Constantin 2001, p. 51. Jolly is listed in Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 11, but this picture has not been found associated with that name in any relevant sales or other records.

89 | **Bathers of the Borromean Isles** c. 1865–70

Oil on canvas, 79 x 61.7 cm

Lower left: COROT

1955-537

It can be argued that Corot's *Bathers of the Borromean Isles* is the best example of the artist's work in the collections of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Not only is it in a superb state of preservation (see Technical Report), but it also epitomizes Corot's late, great style, embodying as it does Corot's feelings for what Étienne Moreau-Nélaton called the artist's "second adopted country."¹ After Ville d'Avray, the location of the Corot family's country house just west of Paris, this region of Lombardy, in northern Italy, was the inspiration, according to Moreau-Nélaton, for Corot's goat-herds and idyllic nymphs in their setting of blue-toned mornings and golden evenings—in short, his *souvenirs*. The painting is magical, as are the artist's best works, and part of its power derives from its simplicity. A huge tree, its trunk sunk into the waters of a lake, fills up more than half the picture. Its limbs, thick with leaves, fan out from the trunk. Its erect fullness is accentuated by the slimness of a second trunk, sparsely graced with foliage, leaning to the left. Two women cool themselves