



**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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S.A.P.O.R., sold to Durand-Ruel, New York, 17 May 1934;⁸ [Durand-Ruel, New York, sold to Clark, 17 May 1934, as *Buste de femme, Mary Laurent*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1934–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1956a, no. 109, pl. 26; Williamstown 1982a, no. 15, ill.; Williamstown, 2005–6b, no cat.; Williamstown 2007b, no cat.; Ferrara–Williamstown 2009–10, not in cat. (exhibited in Williamstown only).

REFERENCES Duret 1902, p. 286, no. 27, as *Méry Laurent à la Toque* (not listed in 2nd ed.; 3rd ed., p. 290, no. 27; 4th ed., p. 290, no. 27); Duret 1910, p. 268, no. 27, as *Méry Laurent in the Toque* (2nd ed., p. 250, no. 27); Blanche 1919–28, vol. 1, pp. 146–47; Tabarant 1931, pp. 498–99, no. 69; Jamot and Wildenstein 1932, p. 183, no. 539; Rewald 1947, pp. 50, 58, no. 18, fig. 18, as *The Fur Toque (Méry Laurent)*; Tabarant 1947, pp. 444–45, 548, 619, no. 524, ill.; Raoul-Duval 1961, p. 35, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 77, ill.; Orienti 1967, p. 118, no. 379 (French ed., p. 118, no. 385; English ed., p. 118, no. 379, ill.); Rouart and Wildenstein 1975, vol. 2, pp. 28–29, no. 74, ill., as *Méry Laurent à la toque*; Daix 1983, p. 294; Monnier 1984, p. 69, ill.; Martigny 1996, pp. 210, 249; Nancy 2005, p. 15.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a thin, coarsely woven canvas of approximately 26 threads per cm, stretched and tacked around a wooden strainer. There is some distortion of the fabric, which may relate to lap joints at the corners of the strainer. The portrait is executed in an unfixed, soft, powdery pastel which is weakly bound. The canvas appears to be pre-primed, probably with an oil-based primer, as the priming extends around the tacking edge. Some areas of the ground may have been abraded by the artist to provide greater tooth prior to execution of the portrait. Throughout the composition there are smudged pastel passages that are due to the artist's manipulation of the medium, possibly with a brush, the side of the pastel stick, or the fingertips. One area in the foreground shoulder of the sitter has minute dark dots of media, most likely an indication of displaced brown pastel from above. The primed canvas shows through some areas of the portrait. These areas of grayish white are most apparent at the edges and in the dark areas of the composition. The minute losses of media may be caused by movement of the fabric support due to humidity or handling, as in the shoulder of the sitter and the gray background to the left of the sitter's head. Small fractures occur in the thickly applied media and some areas of tenting. The signature in the right center appears somewhat diminished and may have been reworked by the artist. LP

1. See Martigny 1996, p. 249. The pastels in which she is explicitly named are RW vol. 2, 51–53, 72–74, 76. The oil painting she posed for is *Autumn* of 1881 (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy; RW vol. 1, 393).

2. *Laundry (Le Ligne)* (The Barnes Foundation, Philadel-

phia; RW vol. 1, 237) and *The Artist* (Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo; RW vol. 1, 244).

3. The identification is given in Paris–New York 1983, pp. 432–33. The pastels are RW vol. 2, 22–25.

4. See Martigny 1996, p. 249.

5. Proust 1897, p. 311; translation from Paris–New York 1983, p. 489. Manet had already based the blue flowered background of *Autumn* on a Japanese robe belonging to Proust. See Paris–New York 1983, p. 491. For *Autumn*, see note 1.

6. RW vol. 2, 52.

7. Blanche 1919–28, vol. 1, p. 146–47: “Manet riait de me voir emporter une tête au pastel, Méry Laurent coiffée d’une toque pe [sic, for de] lophophore, vetue d’une jaquette grise garnie de skungs; comme j’avais obtenue que mon père achetât pour moi cette jolie chose.”

8. According to their records, Durand-Ruel bought this work from S.A.P.O.R. for \$14,450.00, but the seller cannot be identified further. See correspondence in the Clark’s curatorial file with Caroline Godfroy of 24 Apr. and 3 May 2001.

207 | Moss Roses in a Vase 1882

Oil on canvas, 55.9 x 34.6 cm

Lower right: Manet.

1955.556

Still lifes were an important component of Manet's work, whether within larger compositions or as stand-alone images. Several paintings from 1864 present closely framed views of single vases of flowers or even just one or two stems, while in the following years Manet painted more elaborate tabletop scenes inspired by the Dutch tradition; and he included small vignettes in broader scenes ranging from *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863; Musée d'Orsay, Paris), to several full-length portraits of friends of the 1860s, to the *Bar at the Folies Bergères* (1881–82; The Courtauld Gallery, London).¹ Late in his life, however, his deteriorating health limited his ability to paint large-scale works, and still lifes and small portraits dominated his output. The flowers were usually brought by friends, including Méry Laurent (see cat. 206), and the paintings of them often given as gifts, so the images are significant not only for their inherent beauty, but also as emblems of his friendships. *Moss Roses* belongs to this late period, one of about twenty still lifes painted between summer 1882 and March or possibly April 1883.² The Clark canvas may well have been among



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the early works in this group, perhaps painted in the summer of 1882 when Manet and his family rented a house in Rueil, a suburb just west of Paris. While many of the late still lifes repeat certain elements like an identifiable vase or type of flower, the present canvas is the only one to use this particular container and compact bloom, perhaps because both the flowers and the vase were found at the Rueil house, rather than in Manet's Paris studio.

The format of the work is very simple, showing just a white surface—probably a cloth-covered or marble-topped table—a nebulous blue-gray background,

and the unadorned carafe-shaped glass vase, with a bunch of pink roses gathered casually into it. The slight leftward tilt of the vase helps to call attention to the single stem lying on the tabletop next to it. Such a simple image serves to highlight the artist's means of creating it, with thick, visible strokes of green for the leaves, smooth touches of various shades of pink for the rose petals, and dark outlines defining the vase. It also thus explores the process of painting itself, demonstrating Manet's mastery of illusionistic image-making even with such limited means.

The self-referential nature of *Moss Roses*, along

with its light palette and evident brushstrokes, clearly mark it as an avant-garde work, one without the overtones celebrating wealth and plenty or reminding viewers of the transitory nature of material things found in traditional still-life images. Because it is so closely tied to Manet's personal situation, however, it nonetheless seems inextricably linked to his impending death despite the freshness of the flowers and the liveliness of the paint handling, a *memento mori* of a different, almost paradoxical, sort. In this sense, even the simplicity of the image might be read as alluding to the limited means available to the artist. As Edmond Bazire commented of the last still lifes from this group, in a biography published just a year after the artist's death, "it was to paint [these flowers] that Manet took up his brush for the last time. . . . Having finished, he returned to his room, and never left it again."³ Yet the tension between form and content that frequently characterizes Manet's work appears in *Moss Roses* too, so that Bazire's rather dramatic reading of the biographical circumstances surrounding the creation of this group of works is balanced by the sheer presence of the roses themselves, and by Manet's evident pleasure in his subject and in his ability to capture it in paint. SL

PROVENANCE [Georges Bernheim, Paris]; [Paul Rosenberg, Paris, by 1917–until at least 1922];⁴ [Knoedler, Paris, sold to Clark, 28 May 1923]; Robert Sterling Clark (1923–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1922a, no. 54; Paris 1924d, no. 44; Williamstown 1956a, no. 111, pl. 28; Tokyo–Osaka–Fukuoka 1986, no. 32, ill.; Williamstown 1991a, no cat.; Paris–Baltimore 2000–2001, p. 176, pl. 83, as *Moss and Roses in a Vase*; London–Amsterdam–Williamstown 2000–2001, p. 102, fig. 59 (exhibited in Williamstown only); Washington–Boston 2001–2, pp. 144, 211, pl. 63; Madrid 2003–4, pp. 344–46, 348, 491–93, no. 109, ill., as *Rosas mugosas en un jarrón de cristal*; Montgomery and others 2005–7, no cat.; Montpellier–Grenoble 2007–8, pp. 90–91, 99, ill.

REFERENCES *American Art News* 1922, p. 7; Tabarant 1931, p. 429, no. 394; Jamot and Wildenstein 1932, p. 181, no. 514, fig. 391; Tabarant 1947, pp. 455, 544, 616, no. 423, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 78, ill.; Orienti 1967, p. 120, no. 405, ill. (French ed., p. 120, no. 411, ill.; English ed., p. 120, no. 405, ill.); Rouart and Wildenstein 1975, vol. 1, pp. 306–307, no. 425, ill.; Brooks 1981, pp. 52–53, no. 22, ill.; Gordon and Forge 1986, pp. 24–25, ill.; Whelan 1998, p. 54, ill.; Wilkin 2001, p. 447; Thompson 2001, pp. 51, 79, ill.; Armstrong 2002, p. 276; Savannah–Howland–Augusta 2004–5, pp. 32–33, fig. 19; Cahill 2005, p. 16, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is an uneven twill-weave fabric (31 x 20 threads/cm). The picture has an old glue lining to a coarse open-weave fabric (13 x 17 threads/cm), which was probably applied before 1923. The six-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher is a replacement. The lining canvas is very grimy, and the lining process has caused a weave impression in the paint surface from the lower fabric, resulting in a few paint strokes that look slightly melted. The painting was cleaned and revarnished before 1985, and during a 1985 cleaning, several layers of brownish varnish were removed. There are some old losses down to the vertical canvas threads, and drying cracks appear in the thick, transparent red strokes. There are a few old varnish residues in the impasto recesses, and in ultraviolet light, new inpainting can be seen in the thin background and along the top and right edges. The background color may retain a thin layer of the previous restoration varnish. In general, the paint layer is in very good condition, although the blended pinks may be somewhat faded. In reflected light, the green leaves and vase outline display more gloss, possibly from a higher oil or resin component in one of the pigments.

The ground is a thin, commercially applied off-white layer which shows through the white areas of the roses and the table. Infrared inspection showed no evidence of underdrawing, but a thin paint sketch may have been used to locate the vase and flowers. The first gray background application left reserves for the vase and bouquet. The vehicular paint was applied wet-into-wet for the most part, in a very sure and direct manner, with little blending or alteration, including some higher impasto accents. The paint layering of the water in the vase is a bit thicker and more complex than the rest of the paint film. In the upper half of the image, a second darker gray background color covers the edges of the already dried paint of the plant forms. The thicker outline of the vase was repainted after the background color was in place. The broad, dry-brush signature was applied after the lower paint had set firmly.

1. RW vol. 1, 67 and 388.

2. See Madrid 2003–4, p. 492, where it is noted that while Manet last worked in his studio on 1 March 1883, he may have continued to paint in his home until 6 April. He died on 30 April 1883.

3. Bazire 1884, p. 127: "C'est pour les peindre que Manet prit une dernière fois le pinceau. . . . Ayant fini, il rentra dans son appartement et n'en descendit plus."

4. According to information in the Paul Rosenberg Archives, this painting had been acquired by 1917, based on a list of works photographed. See The Paul Rosenberg Archives, a gift of Elaine and Alexandre Rosenberg. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.