



**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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Designed by Susan Marsh
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Bibliography edited by Sophia Wagner-Serrano
Index by Kathleen M. Friello
Proofread by June Cuffner
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277 | Sketches of Heads (The Berard Children)

1881

Oil on canvas, 62.6 x 81.9 cm

Lower right: Renoir. 81.

1955-590

Between 1879 and 1884, Renoir painted a long sequence of canvases for Paul Berard, a diplomat and banker, and brother of Édouard Berard, whose daughter Thérèse he had painted in 1879 (see cat. 271). For his first commission for Paul, a portrait of his eldest daughter Marthe (1879; Museu de Arte, São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand), Renoir chose a relatively restrained palette, just as he did in the portrait of Thérèse, painted the same year.¹ Paul and his family liked the painting, and Renoir quickly became a close family friend and a regular guest at their country home, the Château de Wargemont, outside Dieppe. At Wargemont, Renoir entered enthusiastically into the life of the household, establishing cordial relationships with the chief servants and joining their Saturday trip to market day in Dieppe, where he appeared in a canoeist's hat.²

Sketches of Heads (The Berard Children) is one of the liveliest and most unusual of Renoir's child portraits. It shows all four of Paul Berard's children: André (born 1868) at bottom left; Marthe (born 1870) at bottom center and in profile at bottom right; Marguérite

(born 1874) at top right and in profile at top center; and Lucie (born 1880) twice at upper left, and probably again as the third head along the top row. This was not the first occasion on which Renoir had juxtaposed multiple heads in a single painting. In 1876, he had painted a canvas for his patron Victor Chocquet with multiple small images based on photographs of Chocquet's daughter Marie-Sophie, who had died in 1865.³ Nor was an image of this sort unprecedented; as Colin Bailey has shown, one of Jean-Antoine Watteau's most celebrated drawings of multiple heads (1717–18; Petit Palais, Paris) had been included in the exhibition *Les Dessins des maîtres anciens* at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1879; since this show was organized by Renoir's friend and patron Charles Ephrussi, it seems very likely that Renoir would have seen it.⁴ The arrangement of heads in Renoir's *Sketches of Heads (The Berard Children)* is closely comparable to Watteau's drawing.

This format allowed Renoir to view the children informally from many angles instead of building a composition from a single pose. The contrast between the highly finished faces and the sketchy background ensures that the figures are seen as separate vignettes and not read as existing in a single, coherent space. Perhaps, too, the lively informality of the composition gave some idea of the experience of the Berard household; as Jacques-Émile Blanche remembered, "the Berard girls, unruly savages who refused to learn to write or spell, their hair wind-tossed, slipped away

into the fields to milk the cows.”⁵ Indeed, the picture sets up a contrast between the animation of the heads of the three girls in the right half of the picture and the studied detachment of their older brother at lower left.

For all its apparent informality the picture is carefully organized. The pivotal red book and frontal figure at bottom center are flanked by two figures in profile looking inward, with faces looking outward at the two top corners. Color, too, is used to structure the image, with the dominant blue tones set off against smaller accents of red, particularly in the flesh and hair, that link up with the foreground red book, and yellow and orange tones in the children’s hair. Seen from up close, the color is constantly varied, with blues, yellows, and even reds used to model the shaded areas of their skin; their hair is treated in a wide range of colors—blues and purples as well as reds and yellows—that give the viewer no clear sense of the actual color of their hair. The faces are treated with great finesse, and the faces seen in profile are crisply set off against the background. Some of the features, particularly the eyes, are picked out with the skill of a miniaturist. Yet there is no sign of the preoccupation with line and contour that overtook Renoir’s art within the next year.

In later years, Renoir frequently juxtaposed sequences of heads on a single canvas or sheet of paper, but these were generally studies that were not intended for public display; in 1892, he showed some of these to an interviewer, pointing out the freedom that such sketches allowed him, but insisting that he did not exhibit them because he did not regard them as “complete pieces.”⁶ Nevertheless, he regarded the present picture as complete in its own terms and exhibited it in 1883 with the title *Croquis de têtes*; the heads in it are far more highly finished than in most of his pictures containing multiple images. JH

PROVENANCE Paul Berard, father of the sitters, Wargemont and Paris (1881–1905; his sale, Georges Petit, Paris, 8 May 1905, no. 16, ill., as *Les Enfants*, sold to Pra); Albert Pra, Paris (1905–38; his sale, Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 17 June 1938, no. 52, ill., as *Têtes d’enfants*, sold to Knoedler); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 30 June 1938, as *Têtes d’enfants*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1938–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1883a, no. 11, as *Croquis de têtes*; Saint Petersburg 1912, no. 540, as *Têtes d’enfants*, lent by Pra; Williamstown 1956b, no. 166, pl. 31; New York 1967, no. 39; London–Paris–Boston 1985–86, pp. 102, 230, no. 60, ill. (French ed., pp. 200–201, no. 59, ill.); Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 61–62, 64, ill.; Ottawa–Chicago–Fort Worth 1997–98,

pp. 184–85, no. 39, ill.; Baltimore–Houston–Cleveland 1999–2000, p. 153, no. 57, ill.; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, p. 259, fig. 191; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 88–90, no. 17, ill.

REFERENCES Duret 1906, p. 144 (rev. ed., p. 92; 3rd ed., p. 101); Duret 1923, p. 181; Berard 1937, fig. 33; Berard 1938, p. 319; Berard 1939, p. 12, ill.; Duret 1939, p. 112; Berard 1956, p. 6; Heisenberg 1957, p. 3, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 128, ill.; Young 1967, p. 381, ill.; Daulte 1971, p. 46, no. 365, ill.; Daulte 1972, p. 91, fig. 25; Fezzi 1972, pp. 109–10, no. 476, ill. (French ed., pp. 107–8, no. 455, ill.); White 1984, p. 107, ill.; Philadelphia 1985, p. 52, fig. 11a; Rosenblum 1988b, p. 50, fig. 45; Monneret 1989, p. 153, fig. 14 (in reverse); Distel 1990, p. 165; Adler 1995, p. 38, fig. 4; Druick 1997, p. 59, fig. 23; Néret 2001, pp. 358–59, ill.; Williamstown–Dallas–Paris 2003–4, p. 95, fig. 104; Columbus 2005–6, pp. 42, 46, 50, fig. 27; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 1, pp. 327–28, no. 282, ill.; Distel 2009, pp. 176–77, fig. 163; Goetz 2009, p. 204, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a lightweight, fine-weave canvas (25 threads/cm), which was lined in 1980 due to a severely cupped center vertical stretcher crease. The contact adhesive is “PVA hot melt” (AYAA and AYAC with a small amount of wax), and the lining fabric is a stiff Dacron polyester mesh, presized with Rhoplex adhesive. The five-member pine mortise-and-tenon stretcher was replaced with a four-member ICA redwood stretcher with spring tension corners. The painting was cleaned in 1980, and the paint film is generally in good condition, but it has lost some red-purple tonality due to light fading. There are minor retouches on several figures, the left edge, and the old stretcher crease. Slight cupping of some of the scattered age cracks remains, including some in the lower right corner.

The thin wash of ground was irregularly applied by the artist with a palette knife. Raw canvas at the edges and corners, now oxidized to a brown color, contributes to the sketch quality of the final image. The ground layer, and possibly the image, may have been applied while the canvas was tacked to a different surface, such as a wall or board. The top edge was also roughly extended, probably by the artist, with paint applied to the raw linen. Although no underdrawing was found, there may be a pale blue or purple paint sketch as part of each head. The sketches were done with layers of thin washes, with some strokes quite fluid, and others scumbled onto the surface. The radiograph shows white marks in front of the face of the child in the lower right, which may indicate some reworking in that area.

1. Duret 1924, p. 63.
2. Blanche 1937, pp. 55–58.
3. See Ottawa–Chicago–Fort Worth 1997–98, pp. 22, 25.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 308.
5. Blanche 1937, pp. 37–38.
6. *L’Éclair* 1892: “des morceaux complets.”