



**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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entlehnt ihre Reize keiner antiken Skulptur. Sie erweist ihre Herkunft glaubhafter für unsere Begriffe. Sie ist wirklich die Schaumgeborene. Renoir läßt ihr liches Email aus dem Farbenzauber der Umgebung hervorgehen und vermeidet so die unbewegliche Isoliertheit gemalter Plastik.”

3. See Vollard 1938, pp. 216–17.

4. Ibid.: “la peinture à l’huile doit être faite avec de l’huile.”

5. Daulte 1971 gives the date of sale to Clark as 26 April 1949; the invoice in the Clark’s curatorial file, however, shows that Clark bought the painting on 4 Oct. 1937, paid in installments, and completed payment on 22 Nov. 1938.

288 | Standing Bather c. 1885

Oil on canvas, 43.2 x 27.3

Lower left: Renoir.

1955.605

In theme and treatment, *Standing Bather* clearly belongs with *Bather Arranging Her Hair* (cat. 287) as one of the outdoor nudes that Renoir executed during the period in the mid-1880s when he was reassessing his painting technique, in the aftermath of his visit to Italy. Indeed, in its subject it can be seen as a pair to *Bather Arranging Her Hair*, showing a similar model with long brown hair, now standing, and located in a very similar setting, looking out across a wide bay toward distant mountains.

The small scale of the canvas, however, makes it clear that it cannot be viewed as a work of similar status and ambition to *Bather Arranging Her Hair*. It seems possible that it was originally meant to serve as a study or preparation for a larger and more ambitious picture, and a drawing of a figure similarly posed suggests that it was a project to which Renoir devoted some attention;¹ but there is no evidence that he ever undertook a larger canvas, and the present picture was signed and sold soon after its execution.

The pose of the figure can be seen as a fusion between the theme of the Venus Pudica, shielding herself from the viewer’s gaze, and the surprised nymph, whose gesture suggests that she has been caught unawares; quite unlike the static and detached poses of the 1881 *Blonde Bather* (cat. 279) and *Bather Arranging Her Hair*, the model here makes direct eye contact with the viewer, placing us in the role of the intruder who has disturbed her in her nakedness. Moreover, as in *Bather Arranging Her Hair*, the garment appears to be contemporary—something like a shift—rather than a nonspecific towel or drapery, though there are no signs of contemporaneity in the surroundings.²

The figure stands out sharply from the background, the pink flesh contrasting with the rich blues beyond and the edges of her body being crisply demarcated from the background; though there are no actual outlines, fine blue contours separate arm from torso. The brushwork is less ordered than in *Bather Arranging Her Hair* and runs in various directions, but throughout the canvas it is relatively stiff, with none of the supple fluency that characterized Renoir’s earlier work. JH

PROVENANCE Boskowitz, Paris, sold to Durand-Ruel, Paris, 4 May 1892; [Durand-Ruel, Paris and New York, 1892–1919, sold to Henderson, 15 Dec. 1919]; Hunt Henderson, New Orleans (from 1919); [Jacques Seligmann, New York, sold to Durand-Ruel, New York, 3 Mar. 1937]; [Durand-Ruel, New York, sold to Clark, 10 Nov. 1938]; Robert Sterling Clark (1938–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1956b, no. 157, pl. 22; Toronto 1975, p. 105, no. 48, ill.; Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 50, 53–54, ill.; Rome 2008, pp. 99, 170–71, no. 24, ill.; Tokyo–Osaka 2010, pp. 100–101, no. 33, ill.; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 120–21, no. 28, ill.

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 119, ill.; Daulte 1971, no. 520, ill.; Taylor 1976, p. 5, ill.; Christie's 1997a, p. 81, fig. 2, under no. 119; Garb 1998, pp. 170, 173, fig. 125; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 2, p. 428, no. 1368, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a moderate-weight linen (22 threads/cm), glue-lined to a coarser bleached double-weave linen (13 double threads/cm). The five-member pine mortise-and-tenon stretcher appears to be original, and the tacking margins are preserved. The lining probably dates to around 1938, just before purchase by Clark, and was probably done by Beers Brothers. Large age cracks appear throughout the surface, and drying traction cracks are scattered in the blue-green foreground color. In 1984, the painting was cleaned to remove discolored restoration varnish and over-paint on the right and top edges and on the model's arm. There are presently no appreciable residues of old varnish and no retouchings. A crease is beginning along the stretcher's horizontal crossbar. A line of earlier, now covered, paint strokes runs diagonally from behind the figure toward the lower right.

The initial, commercially applied ground layer appears to be a grayish color. Thin paint deposits on the upper left and top tacking margins suggest that there may be an earlier sketch or image below the present one. A white paint layer seems to separate the upper and lower images, acting as the new upper ground layer. Although no continuous underdrawing was found, small lines on the proper right foot and along the arm were detected using infrared reflectography. These suggest that there may be a more substantive drawing buried below the thick paint. A number of changes were made to the final image, as revealed in the pink and green colors below the left sky. The diagonal paint strokes running from the back of the model toward the grass may indicate a change in the drapery position. The paint is applied in a vehicular paste consistency, in thick direct strokes. White has been mixed with all the colors. There are moderate-level impastos throughout, with more pronounced brushwork in the drapery and background colors. The flesh is smoother, and the face is blurry and flat. The final sky colors and the grass were added after the figure was completed.

1. See Rewald 1958, pl. 31.
2. See Williamstown 1996–97, p. 50.

289 | *Woman Reading* c. 1895

Oil on canvas, 41.6 x 32.7
Upper right: Renoir.
1955.908

Woman Reading takes up the theme of *Woman Crocheting* (cat. 267), depicting a model who is not formally posed but is seated, absorbed in her own activity, seemingly unaware that she is being painted, though of course this arrangement is just as carefully planned as the most conventionally configured composition. As in the earlier picture, too, she is informally dressed and the strap of her shift has slipped from her shoulder; the viewpoint here offers the viewer a particularly voyeuristic glimpse of her breasts. Indeed, it is clear that her shoulder strap was originally placed somewhat further up her arm. The papers that she is reading are not bound together like a book; the suggestion is that this is a long letter, written on multiple sheets, which adds a further dimension to the voyeurism implied by the picture, as the viewer imagines who might have written to her at such length.

The execution of the canvas heightens this sense of voyeurism. Its central focus is the cascade of rich, fluid white brushstrokes that represent the loosened top of her shift, framing our view of her breasts. In comparison, the brushwork in the remainder of the canvas is less assertive, and even the figure's head is paid no special attention; the brush loosely follows the forms of head, hair, body, clothing, and curtains without creating any distinctive points of emphasis. The color scheme of the canvas is dominated by soft pinks, browns, and warm grays, set off by the muted blue-greens of the wall in the right background. In sharp contrast to Renoir's work of the 1870s, blue is not used to model the figure or to suggest the play of shadow. Although the canvas has often been dated to c. 1891, it seems more likely that it was painted in the mid-1890s, during the phase when Renoir was using blue so sparingly.

Woman Reading has clear affinities with the genre painting of the French eighteenth century. In both subject and technique it is reminiscent of the work of Jean-