



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME ONE

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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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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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15

François-Auguste Biard

French, c. 1798–1882

15 | Sudden Squall at Sea 1860s

Oil on canvas, 80.5 x 99 cm

Lower left: Biard; lower right: Biard

1955.643

The unexpected pitching of a ship and its effects on her passengers' mealtime is the subject of this painting. It is the product of an inveterate traveler's firsthand knowledge and wry observation of life on the high seas. The painter, François-Auguste Biard, led a long life punctuated with trips to such far-flung places as the rain forests of Brazil and the Arctic island of Spitsbergen, as well as to the more typical Grand Tour destinations. Along the way, he sketched and painted what he saw, and once back home in his Parisian studio,

created paintings based upon his sketches, souvenirs, and memories of his travels. His works range from genre paintings such as this one to rather scientific studies of nature, albeit ones imbued with a Romantic sensibility.¹

Definitive biographical information on the artist is scant.² After abandoning an ecclesiastical career, Biard trained in his native Lyons with the painter Pierre-Henri Révoil (1776–1842). After relocating to the French capital, Biard debuted at the Salon of 1824 with a genre painting called *Interior of a Tavern Courtyard* (location unknown). He became friendly with the painter Camille Corot (cats. 83–91) and accompanied him to Rome in 1825, and was later portrayed by Corot in a portrait of 1830 (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva).³ A lengthy contemporary account of the artist's career appeared in 1842, where because of his comedic tendencies, he was called the Molière of French painting.⁴ In addition to his genre scenes and landscape studies, Biard painted portraits and history

paintings. His most prominent patron was King Louis-Philippe himself, who acquired several landscape paintings by the artist and also sat for a portrait by him. Although little known today, Biard was a popular figure in the Parisian artistic and intellectual communities. His studio, packed with artifacts and specimens from his travels, became a sort of natural history museum that attracted visitors from a wide spectrum of society, from scientists and statesmen to writers and painters. He exhibited his work regularly, received many awards, and was friendly with numerous artists.

Sudden Squall at Sea shows a dimly lit stateroom packed with nearly forty people, including well-dressed passengers of various ages, assorted servants, and even two nuns, reacting to some startling turbulence during their meal. A few diners at the upper right are being drenched with water pouring into the stateroom itself, while others are soaked by the spilled contents of a multitude of bottles, decanters, and glasses. The various characters lurch, lunge, and attempt to right themselves as chairs tip and dishes slide, all beneath a lantern that sways dramatically above the long table. As the rather shocked expressions and dramatic gestures of most of the voyagers indicate, nearly all the individuals react unfavorably to the circumstance, although at least one seemingly drunken woman on the far side of the table and the musicians to the left of the composition seem to be making the best of the situation. The chaos, variety of horrified expressions, and dramatic gestures in this painting are somewhat akin to Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819; Musée du Louvre, Paris), albeit in a far less serious manner. A bearded gentleman stands steadily near the center of the composition, his hand resting protectively on the shoulder of a seated woman, probably his wife, who examines her sullied skirt with dismay. That the standing man's features bear the painter's own likeness is not surprising, given what must have been Biard's own knowledge of such situations, and he included himself in at least one other painting with a maritime subject.⁵ Both of these works, and indeed others by Biard, such as *Passengers Irritated by Mosquitoes* (1869; location unknown), look at the unpredictable nature of travel in the nineteenth century. The Clark painting is not dated, but the clothing worn by the figures suggests that it was executed in the 1860s.

Sterling Clark first saw this painting at Durand-Ruel's in New York and noted that it was "most amusing with people in all positions and very well

painted."⁶ He later showed it to Francine, as her favorable opinion on his purchases was essential. She was delighted by it, and Clark eventually hung the painting in his office.⁷ KP

PROVENANCE [M. A. McDonald, New York, sold to Durand-Ruel, New York, 19 Sept. 1942, as agent for Clark]; Robert Sterling Clark (1942–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1979b, no cat.; Williamstown 1980c, not in cat.; Williamstown 1983b, no cat.; Williamstown 1986a, no cat.; Williamstown 1988a, no cat.

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a coarse open-weave fabric (13 x 16 threads/cm), glue-lined to a heavier weight fabric (14 x 19 threads/cm). The tacking margins have been removed, and a repaired tear runs from the floor into the body of the sailor at the far right. The six-member mahogany stretcher is a replacement. Traction cracks are visible in the white and pink details as well as in the suit of the man standing in the center. There are numerous round dents in the paint along the top edge, as if damaged when drying. This painting was probably last treated in 1942, by French restorer Gaston Levy in New York. There is a good deal of solvent abrasion through all the colors, some down to the canvas threads, which gives an indistinct quality to parts of the image. This is especially noticeable in the dark passages. There is likely more strengthening than is visible in ultraviolet light, as the yellow-brown varnish masks the surface with a dense fluorescence. There may be two layers of varnish with a substantial restoration between them dating from the time of the lining. Highlights on the hanging lamp appear to have been applied over earlier traction cracks and may be later additions. Cracks formed in the tear repair suggest that the restoration is quite old. The varnish has its own crack network and is fogged in many areas. Scattered fill residues or paint splatters were painted to match nearby colors. The dark shiny surface reflectance reveals the weave pattern and the lower right repair.

The off-white ground could have been applied by the artist as there is evidence of cusping in the canvas weave on all four sides. The ground, however, seems to have dark streaks and may suffer from the presence of excess lead acetate drier. Although no underdrawing was detected, there may be a black ink or brown paint monochrome wash sketch. Small holes throughout the surface may indicate that the image was transferred to the canvas using a cartoon or other transfer method. The paint is thin to moderate in thickness and was applied in a dry manner with no real impastos. There are two signatures: one in the lower right corner is in brown ink, and one in the base of the stairwell in the left corner is in damaged black ink.

1. The latter were studied by Barbara Matilsky in her 1983 doctoral dissertation; see also Matilsky 1985.
2. In an account published during Biard's own lifetime, he is called "Auguste-François" and his year of birth is given as 1800 (Boivin 1842, p. 3). Bénézit 2006, vol. 2, p. 428, lists his name as "François Auguste" and his year of birth as "perhaps 30 June 1799."
3. See Dieterle, Dieterle, and Le Bav 2002, pp. 26–27, no. 22, ill.
4. Boivin 1842, p. 71.
5. In that painting, called *Seasickness at the Ball, on Board an English Corvette* of 1857 (Dallas Museum of Art), the artist is suffering from seasickness.
6. RSC Diary, 15 Jan. 15 1942.
7. RSC Diary, 8 Apr. 1943. Clark referred to the painting as *Ship's Saloon on a Heavy Day*, but the painting bore its present title when sold to Clark.

Jacques-Émile Blanche

French, 1861–1942

16 | Portrait of a Woman 1890

Pastel on prepared canvas, 83 x 58.5 cm
Lower left: JEB [monogram] 90 / Paris
1983.48

This pastel portrait of a young woman demonstrates the proficiency of the artist Jacques-Émile Blanche that made him a popular portraitist at the turn of the century. The son of a preeminent nerve specialist, Blanche had a privileged upbringing that allowed him to circulate with ease among the cultural elite in both England and France. Blanche had associations with a wide range of prominent figures, including Edgar Degas, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, John Singer Sargent, and Paul Valéry. Blanche painted portraits of many of his illustrious friends and colleagues and also wrote articles and books about the artists and writers of his day.¹ He studied with Henri Gervex (1852–1929) and Ferdinand Humbert (1842–1934), but his rapport with a vast number of artists encouraged him to experiment beyond the confines of his formal education.

The woman in this half-length portrait commands the attention of the viewer with her confident and deliberate gaze. She sits in a wooden chair with a high backrest and a velvety green cushion. She rests

her elbow on the arm of the chair and gestures toward her face with a pair of opera glasses that she grips gently in her proper right hand. The tranquility of her face softens the severity of her long straight nose and small thin lips. Her carefully coiffed chestnut brown hair complements her pale skin. A fringe of short curls frames her forehead and accentuates her clear blue eyes. She wears a high-collared gray satin dress. A black lace vest coordinates with the belt, choker, and floral motifs on the lower third of her sleeves. Her jewelry adds to her refinement without ostentation. Though the identity of this woman is unknown, Blanche's skill as a portraitist reveals the reserved yet assertive character of his subject.

It has been suggested that the sitter may be Florence Pash (1862–1951), later Mrs. Humphrey and Mrs. Holland, who was an artist herself. Blanche is known to have made at least two portraits of her, one exhibited at the New English Art Club in spring 1891, about which little else is known, and another a full-length oil of 1890 (Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University).² A bust-length portrait by the English artist Walter Richard Sickert (1860–1942) of c. 1896–97 (private collection) also depicts Florence Pash.³ Based on the known images of her, Pash does appear to share a number of features—including a fairly long, narrow face and nose, center-parted hair, high, rounded eyebrows, and rather heavily lidded eyes—with the sitter in the Clark's pastel. Further, Pash was a member of the circle of artists that included Blanche and Sickert, and the portraits all date to roughly the same period, so the identification may indeed be correct.

Early in his career, Blanche executed a series of pastel portraits of elegant young women of good social standing. The Blanche portrait in the Clark collection exemplifies the muted tones and feathery effect of pastel that characterize these portraits. Large-scale pastel portraits were in vogue in the late nineteenth-century, and the pastels of Manet and Degas likely influenced Blanche.⁴ Blanche's wide circle of friends, as well as the practice of working in pastel that many of them shared, is demonstrated by Degas's 1885 pastel portrait *Six Friends at Dieppe* (Rhode Island School of Design, Museum of Art, Providence), which includes Blanche along with Gervex and Sickert. Though Blanche's pastels are often neglected as a significant part of his oeuvre, Blanche affirmed the importance of this medium through his participation in two exhibitions of pastels in 1889. In that year, he exhibited works in the annual Salon des pastellistes at the Gal-