

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 waves. The overall mood is one of intense natural power and 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,  
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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[www.clarkart.edu](http://www.clarkart.edu)

Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications  
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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  
Production by The Production Department,  
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Fig. 23.1. Giovanni Boldini, *The Laundresses*, 1874. Oil on panel, 32.3 x 51.6 cm. Private collection, courtesy of David Nisinson Fine Art

material at the edge. The panel may have been cut from a larger board. There are no chamfers on the back edges, and the panel presently carries a mahogany cradle. There is a slight twisted warp to the surface plane. A small old crack appears in the lower right corner, and minute old losses can be seen along the vertical age cracks following the wood grain. The tops of the higher impastos are flattened. The picture was surface cleaned and had the varnish regenerated through the Knoedler Gallery in 1952, and it was cleaned again in 1978, when discolored natural resin varnish was removed. At that time, a previous cleaning was noted along with retouchings in the sky due to old interlayer cleavage. New retouchings now appear in the upper sky, and along the top, right, and lower edges.

The ground is a pinkish white color with a pebbly texture. Charcoal underdrawing can be seen where the paint skips over the ground. Some lines are visible in normal light, while additional lines are visible, using infrared reflectography, in the figures, the donkey, and the cart; these indicate that the cart was originally slightly larger. There seem to be unused lines through the center sky, now visible to the unaided eye. A brown ink or paint sketch appears below the paint; it remains as part of the donkey's coloration and is also visible in several costumes. The paint is applied in moderate to thick paste-consistency strokes using small brushes. The colors are laid on directly, with no glazing. The painting is signed twice; the first signature was scratched into the wet paint in forward-slanted letters, and the second was applied over the first, using brown ink and backward-slanted lettering.

## 24 | *Young Woman Crocheting* 1875

Oil on canvas, 36.2 x 27.4 cm

Lower left: Boldini / 75

1955.648

This is one of numerous works Boldini painted in the 1870s depicting young women engaged in leisurely pastimes such as needlework, reading, or strolling. Like *Young Woman Crocheting*, these works tend to be small, brightly colored, and handled with relatively thick yet descriptive brushstrokes, with considerable attention given to details of clothing and decorative settings. The present painting probably centers on the artist's favorite model at the time, Berthe (only her first name is known), who seems to appear in many of these works, since many of the figures have the same doll-like facial features. Boldini had become involved with Berthe both personally and professionally just a few weeks after his arrival in Paris in October 1871, as he noted in a letter to a friend.<sup>1</sup> Based on the evidence of his paintings, they maintained their relationship for the next six or seven years.

The casual attitudes and ordinary pursuits of the figures in *Young Woman Crocheting* suggest that the painting depicts a more or less spontaneous scene of everyday life, but—particularly when considered in conjunction with similar works—it is clearly a carefully constructed imaginative composition, likely situated in the artist's studio and filled with studio props. The recurring appearance of Berthe in this and other scenes as a model adaptable to a wide variety of situations is one indication of their constructed nature, and the slightly unusual inclusion of the boy's fencing foil and the cello seems similarly the result of a deliberate choice to enhance the decorative, even whimsical appeal of the image. In comparison to a work such as Renoir's *Woman Crocheting* (cat. 267), probably painted in the same year and likewise featuring an attractive young woman absorbed in needlework, Boldini's painting emphasizes the material contents of the image, including the richly patterned rug, the woman's abundantly ruffled skirt, and her dainty satin shoes, rather than purely formal, painterly qualities such as the innovative Impressionist color and brushwork found in Renoir's canvas.

Boldini most likely chose the traditional, content-driven approach of *Young Woman Crocheting* to appeal to the active market of the time, and indeed,

the painting must have entered the collection of the dealer Charles Sedelmeyer not long after it was completed, since Sedelmeyer then sold it only two years later. It has long been known that Boldini sold a number of works through the dealer Adolphe Goupil during the early part of his career in Paris. This was presumably a more reliable means of making a living for an artist newly arrived in a foreign country than seeking critical acclaim at public exhibitions like the Paris Salon. As recent research has indicated, however, Boldini did not rely solely on Goupil, but also sold many paintings through other dealers or directly to collectors.<sup>2</sup> One of the most in-demand genres was the detailed depiction of well-appointed rooms or gardens populated with elegantly attired figures, whether set in the eighteenth century—as was a series of images Boldini painted in Versailles—or in foreign locales, or in contemporary salons like that seen in *Young Woman Crocheting*.

This work has been given a number of different titles, from *Peaceful Days*, the slightly fanciful designation assigned at its sale in New York in 1893, to *The Music Lesson* (no doubt to account for the cello), to *Young Woman Doing Needlepoint*. The simple descriptive title *Young Woman Crocheting*, however, as Sedelmeyer first labeled it two years after it was painted, is likely the one closest to the artist's preferences. SL

**PROVENANCE** [Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris, his sale, Drouot, Paris, 30 Apr.–2 May 1877, no. 112, as *Jeune femme faisant du crochet*]; Pedro Eugénio Daupias, Lisbon (his sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 16–17 May 1892, no. 79, as *Jeune femme faisant de la tapisserie*); [A. Foinard, Paris]; Henry M. Johnston, New York (his sale, Fifth Avenue Art Galleries, New York, 28 Feb. 1893, no. 45, as *Peaceful Days*, sold to Bradley); Edson Bradley, New York and Washington (1893–1917, sale, American Art Association, New York, 17 Jan. 1917, no. 88, ill., as *Peaceful Days*, sold to R. H. Lorenz);<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Henry Walters (Sarah Green Jones), Baltimore (probably 1917–41, her sale, Parke-Bernet, New York, 30 Apr. 1941, no. 968, ill., as *Peaceful Days*, sold to Carstairs); [Carroll Carstairs, New York, sold to Clark, 4 June 1941, as *Peaceful Days*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1941–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** New York and others 1972–73, no. 7, ill., as *The Music Lesson*; Williamstown–Hartford 1974, pp. 26–27, no. 8, ill., as *Peaceful Days (formerly The Music Lesson)*; New York 1984, no. 2, as *Giornate tranquille—La lezione di musica (Peaceful days—The music lesson)*; Williamstown 1988c, no cat.; Ferrara–Williamstown 2009–10, pp. 16–17, 32, 76, 105, 203, no. 14, ill.

**REFERENCES** *Art News* 1917, p. 6; Cardona, De Grada, and Piceni 1966; Amaya 1973, p. 60, ill.; Lucie-Smith and Dars 1976, fig. 31, as *The Music Lesson*; Williamstown 1982d, p. 79; Dini and Dini 2002, vol. 1, p. 259, pl. 30, vol. 3, pp. 131–32, no. 223, ill.; Panconi 2002, p. 171, ill.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a moderate-weight linen (thread count inaccessible), glue-lined to a linen layer (16 thread/cm). The six-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher appears to be original. The painting was probably cleaned in 1941 by Gaston Levy, as there is solvent abrasion in the thinly painted details. The lining, probably applied in order to secure flaking paint, may have taken place at an earlier date. There are several moated impastos from the lining pressure. In 2003, the picture was consolidated due to several areas of lifted and flaking paint. At the same time, grime and two very discolored varnish layers were removed. Needle holes scattered in the center upper wall and parts of the woman's gray costume point to an earlier attempt to treat lifting paint. During cleaning, overpaint and numerous retouched losses were discovered, including several large losses in the back of the sofa and the woman's lap. During treatment, the losses were filled and inpainted.

The ground is comprised of several commercially applied off-white layers. In low magnification, charcoal or very dark graphite underdrawing remains on part of the wall molding design. Using infrared reflectography, additional lines are seen at the left end of the sofa, where the pillow outlines originally extended higher into the background. There also seems to be a thin brown paint sketch visible on the rug and furniture. The final paint was applied in quick, fluid, wet-into-wet strokes. Some areas, such as the wall and sofa, are very thin, with low to medium height impastos in more decorated items such as the rug, pillows, and costumes. There is a melted brownish yellow color on the left-most pillow, suggesting the presence of the pigment gamboge, probably affected by the heat used in the lining process. The artist employed sgraffito work to subtract or soften paint in several passages in the rug and the robe tossed over the chair.

1. Giovanni Boldini to Cristiano Banti, 17 [Nov.] 1871, in Dini and Dini 2002, vol. 2, p. 38.
2. See Ferrara–Williamstown 2009–10, p. 25.
3. An annotated copy of the sale catalogue indicates that Lorenz was acting as an agent, presumably for Walters.



