

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 wind. The overall mood is one of intense natural power and maritime 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,
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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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26 | Madame Céline Leclanché 1881

Oil on canvas, 61 x 41 cm

Upper left: Boldini / 1881

1955.649

This modest portrait dates to the period when Boldini was beginning largely to turn away from the genre scenes, cityscapes, and landscapes that had characterized his output for most of the previous decade. It is a bust-length profile view of the sitter against a neutral background, a format with traditional associations reaching back at least to Italian Renaissance models, if not earlier ones. Boldini described her features and the details of her costume with considerable precision, reserving a few painterly flourishes for the ruff at her collar and the roses in her corsage. While it bears little relation to most of his work of the 1870s, its facture and subject matter recall the portraits he had made in Florence as a means of earning a living prior to arriving in Paris in 1871. Like those works, this painting's relatively small scale and restrained execution suggest that it was made on commission for a client without any particular personal ties to the artist or any especially noteworthy position in high society.

In fact, the woman depicted was identified presumably at the time of Sterling Clark's purchase in 1938 as Madame Leclanché, and some time later the work was described as having belonged to the collection of Maurice Leclanché.¹ While these identifications are therefore not thoroughly documented, they are entirely plausible. Maurice Leclanché (1847–1923) befriended and collected the works of a number of artists in the Impressionist group, including Degas, Monet, and Pissarro, among others. His brother Georges (1839–1882), an electrochemist and engineer, had gained some renown with his invention of the battery cell. When Georges died prematurely in 1882, his wife, Céline, remarried his brother Maurice. Thus Céline Leclanché may have sat for Boldini while she was married to Georges, and the portrait presumably passed to Maurice's collection either at the death of Georges the following year, or at Céline's, which occurred at an unknown date. While the Leclanchés were clearly well-to-do, they probably did not belong to the portion of Parisian society that had a certain celebrity status, on which Boldini focused much of his attention from the later 1880s onward. Indeed, the appearance of the portrait itself might imply that the

sitter had relatively conservative taste, and was seeking simply a pleasing, faithful likeness rather than a major work of art to exhibit or display.

The nature of *Madame Céline Leclanché* makes it fairly unusual in Boldini's post-1871 oeuvre. Most of his portraits of around 1880 depict friends or favorite models, and are often larger and painted more broadly and casually, like *Countess Gabrielle de Rasty* (1879; Gallerie d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Museo Giovanni Boldini, Ferrara).² Others depict well-known figures such as journalist and famous escaped exile Henri Rochefort (c. 1882; Musée d'Orsay, Paris).³ Boldini had begun to exhibit in the annual Paris Salon only in 1879, but as the decade progressed, his reputation as a portraitist grew thanks to increased exposure, and clients from France and abroad began to seek him out. By the end of the 1880s, he had developed a style of very large, rapidly executed works that represented his sitters with almost exaggerated elegance, an approach that established Boldini's fame. But the present work predates that period and suggests that once he decided to return to the genre of portraiture, he sought out clients he presumably did not know, or—since the details in this instance are unknown—perhaps they sought him out on the advice of a dealer or simply having seen one of his paintings. This work also marks a moment before the artist had developed his signature style, when he instead looked back to an earlier approach that he had all but abandoned for many years. SL

PROVENANCE Maurice Leclanché, Paris (d. 1923); [Galerie Lorenceau, Paris, sold to Clark, 14 Feb. 1938, as *Portrait*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1938–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown–Hartford 1974, pp. 25–26, no. 7, ill., as *Portrait of the First Madame Maurice Leclanché*; Memphis 1986, pp. 5, 31, 71, no. 9, ill.; Ferrara–Williamstown 2009–10, no. 74, ill.

REFERENCES Williamstown 1982d, p. 79; Dini and Dini 2002, vol. 1, pp. 172, 261, pl. 48, vol. 3, p. 187, no. 332, ill.; Panconi 2002, p. 213, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a fine-weave canvas (24 threads/cm), which was wax-resin lined to extremely fine weave linen and restretched on an ICA spring-design stretcher in 1979. At that time a partially legible colorman's stamp for Vieille and Troisgros was recorded on the original canvas. Multiple layers of discolored varnish were also removed. A stamp of the Paris restorer Henri Helfer, dated March 1938, prob-



ably records the previous varnish removal. The painting had a surface cleaning and varnish regeneration through Knoedler Gallery in 1952, which probably involved adding rather than replacing coatings. There is a grid-like pattern of narrow traction cracks in the dress and hair, and wider traction cracks in the dark red flowers. Stretcher creases and old planar distortions show stress cracking. In ultraviolet light, there is an uneven fluorescence, with natural resin remaining over the solvent-sensitive dark colors and the edges. The present surface reflectance is slightly matte. Retouchings fill some of the wider traction cracks in the hair and dress, although in bright light the crack pattern is still visible.

The ground is a commercially prepared off-white layer, with an artist-applied warm dark-brown wash over the entire surface. A few lines in the head were seen using infrared reflectography. Brush marks below the bodice paint, extending onto the left background, may indicate a change of costume. Some of the flower outlines were adjusted when the background color was applied. Paint handling ranges from thick, opaque strokes to transparent glazes, with veils of opaque color drawn over the lower dark wash on the face. High impastos were seen only on the jewelry. The paint layering is quite complex, with considerable scraping through to the ground to achieve transparency and vibrancy of light effects.

1. On the purchase receipt from the Galerie Lorenceau, a note written in Sterling Clark's hand incorrectly states that the sitter was "the first Mme. Leclanché." See the Clark's curatorial file. In fact, it was Céline Leclanché who remarried, not her husband. See the entry for Georges-Lionel Leclanché by G. Emptoz in *Dictionnaire de biographie française 1933-*, vol. 20, pp. 432-35, for information on the Leclanché family. Maurice Leclanché may not have been identified as the first owner of this painting until 1974.
2. DD 285.
3. DD 330.

27 | Recital c. 1884

Oil on panel, 22 x 16.4 cm
 Upper left: [5?]6
 1955.652

This small panel is one of several works treating the subject of a woman in a salon, either performing or listening to a performance. The first of this group may be a small pencil sketch, *Figures in a Salon* (Museo Giovanni Boldini, Ferrara), showing a woman kneeling on a sofa and leaning against its back, holding an



Fig. 27.1. Giovanni Boldini, *The Singer (La Cantante Mondana)*, c. 1884. Oil on canvas, 61 x 46 cm. Collezione Fondazione Carife, on deposit at the Gallerie d'Arte Moderna Contemporanea di Ferrara

open fan behind her.¹ Boldini presumably made this drawing on the spot, and while the setting is largely undefined, the figure seems to be observing rather than actively participating in any action that may be occurring outside the frame. Perhaps inspired by the woman's pose, Boldini seems to have developed the composition further in the present painting, retaining both the woman's gesture of holding an open fan and her elegantly arched back. In the panel, the figure is set more explicitly in the context of a performance, as she leans toward a piano with her mouth apparently open as if singing and has a cello or bass at her feet. The work's title similarly supports the identification of the situation, though given the lack of any early sources that record this painting, it is difficult to know when the title was first associated with it. The woman's head and bodice are fairly carefully defined, while the lower half of her figure is more summarily painted, further strengthening the connection between this painting and the drawing, in which the woman's lower body is similarly undefined.

Recital may itself have served as preparation for at least two other paintings. There is a related and