



**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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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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from French avant-garde artists including Edgar Degas and Gustave Caillebotte—who were exploring the form and dynamics of the cityscape at just this time—with his own more commercially viable facture and detail, in order appeal to dealers and collectors.⁴ SL

PROVENANCE [Alexis Febvre, Paris, in 1876]; [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 31 Dec. 1925]; Robert Sterling Clark (1925–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS New York 1939a, no. 18, ill., as *Dans la rue Chauveau-Lagarde*; Williamstown–Hartford 1974, pp. 29–30, no. 10, ill., as *In the Rue Chauveau Lagarde*; Williamstown 1982a, no. 2, ill.; Williamstown 1982d, pp. 67, 71, no. 3, ill.; Ferrara–Williamstown 2009–10, pp. 38–39, 41, 42, 43, 106, 109, 203, no. 15, ill.

REFERENCES Claretie 1876b, p. 3; Breuning 1939, p. 35, ill.; Brooks 1981, pp. 72–73, no. 32, ill.; Steele 1985, p. 209, ill.; *Antiques* 1997, pp. 528–29, ill.; Doria 2000, vol. 1, no. 47, ill.; Hunter 2000, p. 401, ill.; Dini and Dini 2002, vol. 1, pp. 161, 259, pl. 33, vol. 3, pp. 137–38, no. 232, ill.; Panconi 2002, p. 151, ill.; Cahill 2005, p. 64, ill.; Copenhagen 2006–7, p. 176, 180, fig. 148; Montecatini Terme 2008, p. 50, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a lightweight (0.8 cm thick), light-colored wood, possibly mahogany, with wide, shallow chamfers along the back edges. The panel is not quite square. The plane is flat, the grain runs vertically, and the reverse has been stained dark brown. Four red wax seals on the reverse each have the initials “S.B.” The paint layer has age and traction cracks scattered throughout. Oozing of lower colors up through the cracks can be seen in several places, suggesting that color changes were made quickly while the lower layers were still wet. There is some solvent abrasion where thin dark strokes pass over thick brushwork. The picture was last cleaned in 1974 by Roland Cunningham Jr. in Hartford, Connecticut. Extensive secondary paint on the edges, covering the traction cracks on the awning and partially obscuring sections of the signature, suggests reworking by the artist, rather than a restoration. Natural resin residues can be seen on the carriage and the window behind it. The surface reflectance of the present synthetic resin varnish is somewhat dry, with gloss only on the thicker paint strokes.

There appears to be either no ground layer or only a slight wash of pale paint. The light-colored wood has been stained from bleeding of some of the finely ground colors. There is no detectable underdrawing or paint sketch. The paint is of paste consistency and was applied wet-into-wet, with additional drier color applications. Although the principal figure was painted first and the scene executed around her, the right female figure appears to have been added over the street colors. The brushes used were quite small in size, ranging up to 0.6 cm in width, at the largest.

1. See Ferrara–Williamstown 2009–10, pp. 36–37, 107, fig. 39, for a discussion and an illustration of *Place Pigalle*.
2. Jules Claretie, in his review of the annual Salon in 1876, recalled that “a painting by M. Baldini [*sic*] (of Ferrara), the *Place Clichy*, was on view for a long time at Févre [*sic*], on the rue Saint-Georges. . . . M. Baldini also showed a corner of the *Place Pigalle* there” (“Un tableau de M. Baldini [de Ferrare], la *Place Clichy*, fut longtemps exposé chez Févre, rue Saint-Georges. . . . M. Baldini exposait aussi là un coin de la *Place Pigalle*”). Claretie 1876b, p. 3. This reference suggests that the present painting may have been exhibited with the title *Place Pigalle* or otherwise identified as such. An identification of the location as the rue Chauveau Lagarde in the 8th arrondissement, proposed in 1939, has since been discounted.
3. *Ibid.*: “un gommeux regardant en se penchant à la portière d’un fiacre une *cocotte* qui passait, retroussant sa jupe et tenant à la main un bouquet.”
4. For more on Boldini’s characteristic combination of avant-garde and commercial approaches in his cityscapes of this period, see Ferrara–Williamstown 2009–10, pp. 36–42.

23 | Washerwomen 1874

Oil on panel, 13.7 x 20 cm

Lower left: Boldini / 74

1955.653

In addition to producing carefully painted studio compositions for art dealers and collectors in the early 1870s, Boldini also began not long after his arrival in France to travel to the suburbs of Paris to paint landscapes. These were often made in a very different style from his highly detailed interior scenes, inspired in part by the practices of the Macchiaioli, the group of Italian artists who advocated non-academic, plein-air painting with whom Boldini had associated prior to his move, and in part by French landscape artists. Such French models included earlier practitioners who had themselves inspired the Macchiaioli, as well as the emerging Impressionist group. Boldini’s choice of a riverbank location for *Washerwomen*, presumably along the Seine—where artists like Monet and Renoir regularly worked—may have been prompted largely by these sorts of French precedents and practices. The work is painted quite broadly, using thick strokes of color to indicate the grassy foreground and the trees



23

in the distance, and almost equally summary touches to delineate the figures, cart, and donkey. The small panel was probably painted outdoors in front of the scene, and despite its cursory execution, it is signed and dated, indicating that Boldini considered it a finished work. Nonetheless, it also appears to have served a more traditional purpose than its spontaneous style and early Impressionist-era context might initially indicate.

A larger, more finished painting, *The Laundresses* (fig. 23.1), which depicts essentially the same location and figures, suggests that Boldini considered *Washerwomen* both an independent work and, at the same time, a preparatory sketch. Such usage was historically accepted as part of the process of creating a landscape painting, since artists were trained to begin with drawings and oil sketches done on site that could be far more broadly executed than the final work. While Boldini may indeed have used the present sketch in this way, its relation to *The Laundresses* is not one-to-one, for he also introduced numerous changes. The tree line and the appearance of the opposite riverbank are almost the only elements shared by the two works aside from their subject matter; otherwise, the view in *The Laundresses* extends further to the left, the foreground has been changed from grass to rocks, and the figures have shifted positions and have in some cases been changed entirely, the donkey in the smaller work, for example, being replaced with a cow.

This pair demonstrates the artist's ability to work

in both a spontaneous, innovative manner and a more carefully studied way simultaneously. While the detailed works appealed to many established collectors of the time, including Boldini's important patron A. T. Stewart, the purchaser of *The Laundresses*, the less finished works appealed to a type of collector who did not necessarily belong to the first group. Indeed, his more spontaneous paintings may have a longer-term attraction to twentieth- and twenty-first-century tastes largely shaped by the now-established Impressionist artists. Sterling Clark appreciated both academic and Impressionist art, and his characteristic preferences may help to account for his purchase of several works by Boldini relatively early in his collecting career—this painting and *Recital* (cat. 27) being the first two by the artist to enter his collection, in May 1924. 51

PROVENANCE [Knoedler, Paris, sold to Clark, 6 May 1924, as *Laveuses*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1924–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS New York and others 1972–73, no. 8, ill., as *Laveuses*; Williamstown 1982d, pp. 66, 71, no. 7; Williamstown 1988–89, no cat.; Ferrara–Williamstown 2009–10, no. 40, ill.

REFERENCES Dini and Dini 2002, vol. 1, p. 258, vol. 3, p. 121, no. 201, ill.; Panconi 2002, p. 159, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel (0.5 cm thick) with the grain running vertically. The lower edge is roughly cut, with file marks and shattered ground



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.¹ 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,