



**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,
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Details:

TITLE PAGE: Camille Pissarro, *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* (cat. 253)

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PAGES 890–91: Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Women of Amphis* (cat. 3)

Rouen, by Bonington [*sic*]; Barre, probably Paris (until 1890, sold to Durand-Ruel, 30 Oct. 1890); [Durand-Ruel, Paris, 1890–95, transferred to Durand-Ruel, New York, 4 Mar. 1895]; [Durand-Ruel, New York, 1895–1903, sold to Page, 16 Jan. 1903]; O. O. Page (Jan.–Oct. 1903, sold to Durand-Ruel, 5 Oct. 1903); [Durand-Ruel, New York, 1903–41, sold to Clark, 5 Nov. 1941, as *Marine*, by Bonington]; Robert Sterling Clark (1941–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

Cat. 364: Barre, probably Paris (until 1890, sold to Durand-Ruel, 30 Oct. 1890); [Durand-Ruel, Paris, 1890–95, transferred to Durand-Ruel, New York, 4 Mar. 1895]; [Durand-Ruel, New York, 1895–1903, sold to Page, 16 Jan. 1903]; O. O. Page (Jan.–Oct. 1903, sold to Durand-Ruel, 5 Oct. 1903); [Durand-Ruel, New York, 1903–41, sold to Clark, 5 Nov. 1941, as *Marine*, by Bonington]; Robert Sterling Clark (1941–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1958a, ill., as by Bonington.

REFERENCES Cat. 363: Shirley 1940, p. 144.

Cat. 364: None

TECHNICAL REPORT Cats. 363–64: Both paintings are executed on oak panels 0.5 cm thick that have slightly thinner left and right edges. The wood grain is oriented vertically, which is unusual for horizontal landscapes. Both panels may be from the same board and may have been cut out by the artist, as neither is square. Although cat. 364 is fairly flat, cat. 363 has a slightly twisted convex warp. Among the other labels on the reverse of cat. 363 is the black ink inscription “R.P. Bonington.” Vertical age cracks appear on both pictures following the wood grain, while cat. 364 also has traction crackle throughout its paint layer, much of it inpainted. Cotton fibers embedded in the varnish and solvent abrasion point to at least one cleaning sometime before Clark’s 1941 purchase. Small dark details, such as figures and boat masts, are severely abraded from cleaning. Both paintings have very yellow varnish coatings with separate crack networks. The ultraviolet light fluorescence on cat. 363 is denser, possibly due to more than one layer of varnish, applied over a sloppy cleaning which left residues of grime and old varnish in recesses of the paint. Retouchings are visible below the varnish in the boat sails on cat. 364 and along the left and right edges of both pictures.

Edge roughness may indicate that the oak support was prepared with ground layers before being cut. Charcoal lines running along the left and lower edges of cat. 363 may have acted as cutting guides. Both paintings seem to have the same ground applications; the lower layer is a thick off-white and the upper layer is a thin, warm, sand color. The width and diagonal direction of the ground brushwork is visible beneath the paint in reflected light. No underdrawing can be seen on either picture. The paint technique for both is rather thin, with a few round impastos in light passages and in upper details of thin dark areas. The traction crackle on

cat. 364 may suggest that the artist painted areas of the surface over paint that was still tacky. On the same image, there may be a line of vertical letters in the lower left corner.

1. *Le port* was paired with a scene entitled *La route*. See Drouot 1931, no. 9. The pair had been bought just three years previously at the sale of “M. E . . . C . . .” whose collection also included seventeen watercolors attributed to Bonington and twelve additional oils. See Drouot 1928.
2. For a recent survey of nineteenth-century treatments of the city, see Lespinasse 2003.
3. See Noon 2008.

Artist unknown

British, 19th century

365 | Rouen 19th century

Oil on canvas, 30 x 38 cm
1955.656

Claude Monet’s series of Rouen Cathedral paintings (c. 1892–94) has immortalized the architectural centerpiece of the Norman city as a modernist icon. Before Monet employed his distinctive style to record the effects of light on the Gothic structure, Rouen and its buildings were the subject of the equally innovative artistic experimentation of early nineteenth-century plein-air painting. On the Channel coast, Rouen was a stopping place for British artists en route to Paris or on their way home from a Continental tour. Its geographical position, therefore, reflected the flow of artistic exchange between France and England in the first part of the nineteenth century.

Richard Parkes Bonington (1802–1828), an English-born, French-trained artist, was at the center of a group of French and British painters whose small-scale oils and watercolors, despite their size, drew wide attention at the Paris Salon in the 1820s. The popularity of his landscapes was compounded by Bonington’s early death, and numerous imitators took advantage of the high prices his works fetched at his posthumous sale in 1829. As early as 1833, the *Magazine of the Fine Arts* warned: “The cupidity of dealers has been so great that caution and perception are now necessary in purchasing a Bonington, either in oils or water colours.”¹



365

The association of Bonington with Rouen stems, in large part, from his commission from the publisher Jean-Frédéric d'Ostervald for his *Excursions sur les côtes et dans les ports de France de Dunkerque au Havre*.² The artist produced two watercolors, subsequently engraved for the publication. To conform to the nature of the publication, however, Bonington's viewpoint is farther along the river to give a greater sense of the city as a whole. The artist's mastery of composition, his ability to capture great expanses within sheets and canvases of small dimensions, is altogether missing from the Clark's awkwardly composed and rendered view of the city. Bought by Sterling Clark as a Bonington because "F[rancine] liked it so much,"³ this view of Rouen looks toward the cathedral from the Seine. Although the towers and transept of the cathedral dominate the skyline, the artist devotes his attention to the activity on the river and the clutter of ramshackle houses that border its banks. Chromatic contrasts express not only physical distance but also

spiritual distinctions. The dark colors that dominate the foreground contrast with and enhance the bright aura the artist confers on the religious heart of the city.

While the timeless cathedral rises amidst the cloudy sky, the encounter of two boats, narrowly missing each other, gives the small work the sense of immediacy characteristic of the work of Bonington and his circle. Smoke rising from a chimney signals the rough, gritty life associated with the closely packed riverside houses. Thinly applied horizontal strokes of paint depicting the water provide a reflective surface for the boats and piers in the foreground. The small work, therefore, becomes a study of the temporal, the eternal, the evanescent, and the transcendent. EP

PROVENANCE Alexander Kellock Brown, Glasgow (in 1922); Victor Rienaecker, London (by 1923); [Knoedler, London, in 1928];⁴ Marsden J. Perry; [Scott & Fowles, New York, sold to Clark, 28 Jan. 1929, as by Bonington]; Robert Sterling Clark (1929–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Oxford 1924, no cat.;⁵ Williamstown 1990b, no cat.

REFERENCES *Connoisseur* 1923, pp. 103, 117–18, ill.; Dubuisson 1924, ill. opp. p. 41.

TECHNICAL REPORT The linen support, of moderate weight (16 threads/cm), has an old lining glued to a slightly coarser fabric, work that may have been done by the mid-1920s. The stretcher may be original, and there seems to be a remnant of the artist's tacking margin along the lower edge. There are small areas of disturbed paint in the building façade above the men in the principal boat and in the boat's sail, probably the reasons for the lining. Some impastos have been flattened by the lining process. There are stretcher creases on three sides, and dark age cracks and a sub-network of hairline fractures scattered throughout the surface. Some feather cracks run vertically through the right sky, probably the result of old handling damage. Pale retouchings in the sky and over details in the foreground and water are now pitted by solvents and have a slightly melted appearance under magnification. The fact that original delicate glazes are in good condition suggests that the rather broadly applied overpaint only masks the dark cracks. In ultraviolet light, a slight natural resin varnish residue fluoresces in the water area only, and new inpainting runs along the top stretcher crease. There is some minor solvent damage on the tops of the pebbly ground texture. Older retouches left in place during a 1989 cleaning are slightly visible in the sky as dark smudges along the vertical feather cracks, but in general the picture is in good condition.

The gray ground layer is probably a commercially applied priming and has a pebbly surface, possibly created by the inclusion of fine quartz or sand particles. Although no underdrawing is revealed in infrared examination, the dark clouds in the left sky were originally laid-in with a dark, more dramatic sweep of paint. A close inspection shows pale paint thinly applied over these dark streaks to soften the contrast. The band of buildings in the center seems to have a warm brown underpaint layer. This may constitute a sketch or wash tone on the ground's surface, which may explain the pinkish cast seen in the sky colors. In general, the paint technique is quite thin, with soft, fluid impastos.

1. *Magazine of the Fine Arts* 1833, p. 148.

2. See Noon 2008, pp. 118–23.

3. RSC Diary, 26 Jan. 1929.

4. The early history comes from information accompanying a photograph of this painting in the Witt Library of the Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

5. *Ibid.*

Artist unknown

French, 19th century

366 | The Gleaners 19th century

Oil on canvas, 32.7 x 41.2 cm

Lower right: HUGUES-MERLE

1955.809

This painting was almost certainly not made by Hugues Merle, a determination supported by Sandra Webber's examination. As she explains in her report, the technique of this frankly unattractive picture bears no relation to the carefully crafted, smooth surfaces achieved by Merle. The painting raises questions that cannot be answered at this time.

The range of Merle's subject matter can best be assessed from the titles of the paintings he supplied for the *livrets* (catalogues) when exhibiting at the Salon, which he did from 1847 to 1880, and from Edward Strahan's survey of American art collections of the 1870s. Merle usually painted narrative and genre scenes, with their subjects frequently drawn from literature, including Shakespeare (*Benedict and Beatrice; Hamlet and Ophelia*), Goethe (several versions of Marguerite), and Sir Walter Scott (Rebecca and Lady Rowena from *Ivanhoe*), or sentimentalizing scenes of childhood. There are very few recorded pictures of harvest themes. In 1850, Merle showed at the Salon a work he entitled *Vendangeurs dauphinois (environs de Saint-Marcellin)*, a scene of grape harvesters. A *Return from the Fields* was in Thomas Wigglesworth's collection in Boston. The title is promising, but its size (3 by 5 feet) and Strahan's description are not. According to the critic, Wigglesworth's picture "shows an ideally fair country maiden, with her apron full of clover, leading a little girl who trails a leafy branch."¹

As early as 1882, a year after the artist died, the Clark's picture was sold from the Truax collection as attributed to Merle. Since Merle's work was well known in this country at the time, such an attribution cannot be explained. FEW

PROVENANCE [Williams, Stevens & Williams, New York, from 1853 or 1854, sold to Truax];² Charles H. Truax, New York (until 1882, his sale, Leavitt & Co., New York, 5 Dec. 1882, no. 70, as by Merle); Jay Gould, New York (1882–d. 1892);³ Helen Miller Gould Shepard, New York, his daughter, by descent (1892–d. 1938); Finley Johnson Shepard, New York, her husband, by descent (1938–d. 1942, his sale, Kende