

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 drama and historical significance.

**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,
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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: John Constable, *Yarmouth Jetty* (cat. 73)

OPPOSITE COPYRIGHT PAGE: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Bathers of the Borromean Isles* (cat. 89)

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PAGE XVI: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr* (cat. 33)

PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154)

There is no obvious ground layer between the paper and paint, although there may be an invisible glue-size layer. A very sketchy but complete underdrawing, possibly in graphite, is detectible only with infrared light. Small loops and zigzag lines indicate the foliage closest to the ruin, which seems to have several smaller arch shapes drawn inside the main arch. The taller trees to the left and right do not seem to have much, if any, underdrawing. The image is painted using very thin washes and rounded vehicular strokes with small brushes. Although the sky may have been set before the scene was painted, there is evidence of wet-into-wet brushwork in the lower half of the image.

1. See, for example, Rosenblum 1967.
2. See Morfeý 1986 for an overview of his paintings.

William Collins

English 1788–1847

52 | *Children on the Beach* c. 1815–20

Oil on canvas, 23.2 x 30.8 cm
1955.682

Children on the Beach displays two features for which William Collins was renowned in the nineteenth century: a group of children and a seaside setting. The winning combination of a charming anecdote of resourceful children examining their catch or preparing their fishing equipment provided Collins with a theme that brought him popular success, leading to the *Art Journal's* praise that he was the “foremost among . . . sunshine painters.”¹ Taking as his primary subject children in outdoor settings, Collins’s paintings are distinguished by their light palettes, in contrast to the dark and often depressing Scottish interiors of his contemporary Sir David Wilkie. Although the Clark painting is not dated and does not appear in either Collins’s incomplete account book² or the listing of his pictures in his son’s memoir,³ it is likely that it was painted in the second phase of Collins’s early career.

The son of a struggling picture-dealer, Collins was exposed early to the world of art. First taught by his father’s friend, the dissipated but prolific painter of shipwrecks and rustic life, George Morland (1763–1804), he entered the Royal Academy schools in 1807 and began exhibiting at the annual exhibition just four years later. His reliance upon public displays at the

Academy, as well as the British Institution, to develop a popular reputation was paired with support from important patrons of contemporary British painting, including William Wells of Redleaf, Sir John Leicesters (later Lord de Tabley), Sir Robert Peel, and Henry Pelham-Clinton, the fourth Duke of Newcastle.

A year after being elected an Associate of the Royal Academy, Collins visited the Norfolk shore at Cromer (1815). His sketches from this summer provided the basis for numerous pictures that depicted the East Anglia coast, including, most likely, *Children on the Beach*. Collins’s conscious response to the perennial artistic need for economic, as well as popular, success is described vividly in the *Art Journal's* 1855 article, in which his decision to specialize in sea coast scenes is dated to 1816. Noting his father’s death and the low prices his early works received, the writer commented that Collins “began to consider whether a class of pictures hitherto comparatively unknown to the public might not find greater popularity than that he had as yet attempted.”⁴

Although the *Art Journal* went on to discuss his larger pictures, such as *Scene on the Coast of Norfolk*, purchased by the Prince Regent (later George IV) at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1818, *Children on the Beach* represents an equally important strand of Collins’s output—works on a small scale with infinitely variable elements. Thus, the elder boy, standing with his left hand in his pocket and a fishing rod and net in his right, is recognizable from other similar works by Collins, as is the girl seen from behind bending over a basket.⁵ The grouping and pose of the three children together is also seen in *Figures on the Seashore* (Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth). In this case, the smallest boy leans over the basket of fish and the girl kneels between the two boys. This repetition of a pleasing vignette can be seen as one response by Collins to his time-consuming method of painting.

This process is described in detail in the biography written by his son, published in 1848, a year after the artist’s death. Wilkie Collins, who later made his reputation as a writer with the hugely popular *Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), emphasizes in the first volume of this panegyric the care with which his father approached his paintings.⁶ The son extends his praise for his father’s attention to nature and his portrayal of children: “Under his pencil, children retained their play-ground clothes, preserved their play-ground occupations, and were connected visibly



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and pleasingly with the landscape.”⁷⁷ As we see from *Children on the Beach*, Collins mastered the depiction of curiosity, nonchalance, and playfulness of youth, as well as the infinite possibilities presented by a beach and the seemingly limitless ocean and sky. EP

PROVENANCE Robert Sterling Clark (until 1955); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS None

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a moderate weave linen (16 threads/cm), glue-lined sometime in the twentieth century to a slightly heavier linen (13 threads/cm). The edges are sealed with brown paper tape, and it is assumed that the tacking margins are missing. The stretcher is a replaced Honduras mahogany, mortise-and-tenon design. There are dark age cracks throughout, some wrinkling of the paint in the sky, and considerable repaint in the left portion of the sky and along the horizon. On close inspection, a tear can be detected in the upper left sky along with a loss to the left and above the boy’s hat. All the thinly painted areas show severe solvent abrasion. Some fuzzy material came into contact with the basket area while the paint was still wet, leaving fibers adhered to the surface. The varnish is very yellowed, although not terribly thick. While some of the retouches are revealed by their usual purplish non-fluorescence, some repainted spots fluoresce yellow along the cliff, far right horizon, and portions of the sky, suggesting that the restorer was using a zinc-based white

or yellow pigment. The tear and other repairs in the upper left sky are more matte in reflected light.

The ground is a cream color, visible through the abrasion, particularly in the boy’s shoes. Using infrared reflectography, light underdrawing lines, possibly of graphite, can be seen in the costumes of the children, especially in the shirt of the left-most boy. The paint is applied in thin, glaze-like applications in some areas, including the girl’s shawl and the beach sand. The repaint in the sky has a gritty appearance under magnification.

1. *Art Journal* 1855b, p. 141.
2. Collins 1846. As the title of this account book (“Account of Pictures Painted by William Collins from Exhibition to Exhibition”) suggests, it is a record of Collins’s paintings that were exhibited at the Royal Academy and, therefore, not complete.
3. This listing gives the date, title, place of exhibition, commissioner or purchaser, and price of Collins’s painting; again, the emphasis is on exhibited paintings. See Collins 1848, vol. 2, pp. 339–52.
4. *Art Journal* 1855b, p. 142.
5. For the boy, see also *Preparing the Tackle* (sold Sotheby’s, London, 1 Aug. 1979, no. 307) as well as *Shrimpers* (sold Sotheby’s, Belgravia, 9 July 1974, no. 57, sold with *Gleaners*). For the girl, see also *Youthful Shrimpers* (sold Christie’s, London, 12 June 1992, no. 214).
6. Collins 1848, vol. 1, pp. 217–21.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 234.