

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

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87

**87 | Meadow with Willows, Montlhéry** 1860s

Oil on canvas, 35.3 x 22.3 cm

Lower left: COROT

1955.689

If *Barnyard Scene* and *Marsh at Bove, near Amiens* (cats. 92, 93) can readily be seen as forgeries in Corot's style, the case for *Meadow with Willows, Montlhéry* is not so easily made. At one time taken away from Corot's oeuvre by the Clark and attributed to a follower, the painting—or one very like it—appears in Alfred Robaut's catalogue of the artist's works as no. 1300. Whenever Robaut could obtain a photograph of a catalogued work, he used it in these early twentieth-century volumes. When a photograph was not available, he made a careful drawing of the painting in question, and he did so in 1889, when he visited the owner of what would be his no. 1300, Philippe Gille. In the catalogue raisonné, Robaut noted that Corot had given the little painting to Vivier. It is not known when Gille acquired the work. Given Corot's well-known love of music and the theater, it is tempting to identify Vivier as Eugène Vivier (1817–1900), a celebrated performer of the French horn, and Gille as the art and music critic and librettist.<sup>1</sup> Corot often gave away small pictures as tokens of affection or as thank-you gifts.

Troubling is the poor quality of the picture. Its current surface is a mixture of abrasions and retouchings, with the result that the dark-light contrasts are far too strong. The figural elements—the woman seated on the ground at left and the two cows in the meadow at right—are more perfunctory than is usually the case, even with the most casually drawn of Corot's figures.

How to reconcile the provenance given by Robaut, who rarely if ever made a mistake in his attributions, and the present sorry state of the picture? The harsh treatment the painting has received, as recorded in the Technical Report, has significantly altered the appearance of the work. It is, in short, impossible to know what it looked like when Corot gave it to Vivier, probably sometime in the 1860s. The ghost of the tower at the left may be the hundred-foot dungeon of the thirteenth-century castle at Montlhéry, where Corot visited his friend Madame Castaignet in August 1859.<sup>2</sup> Rather than assigning this painting to a follower of Corot, it seems more judicious to admit its ruinous state of preservation and retain it as no. 1300 in Robaut's catalogue. FEW

3. Michael Pantazzi, in *Paris–Ottawa–New York 1996–97*, p. 178.
4. Translated and quoted in *Paris–Ottawa–New York 1996–97*, p. 180.
5. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes et de la Photographie, Yb3 949 III.
6. Taillason 1807, p. 49; quoted in *The Hague–Cambridge 1981–82*, p. 69.
7. Hannoosh 2006.
8. Silvestre 1857, p. 99, “Je crois néanmoins, et à son avantage, que Corot s'exagère parfois à lui-même la gaieté de son caractère, lorsque je vois la mélancolie si souvent présente dans ses ouvrages et l'accent de tristesse que par intervalles prennent ses traits”; translation partially taken from *Paris–Ottawa–New York 1996–97*, p. 152.
9. This sale took place in order to raise funds for the care of the painter Auguste Anastasi, who went blind in 1870.

**PROVENANCE** The artist, given to Vivier;<sup>3</sup> Philippe Gille (in 1889, possibly until d. 1901); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 9 Dec. 1940]; Robert Sterling Clark (1940–55);<sup>4</sup> Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1956a, pl. S-8, as *Saules*.

**REFERENCES** Robaut 1905, vol. 3, pp. 22–23, no. 1300, ill. (a drawing by Robaut after the painting), as *Monthléry.—Prairie avec des Saules*; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 20, ill., as *Willows*; Morse 1979, p. 64.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a twill canvas, 22 x 28 threads/cm. There is a large irregular vertical thread in the left center sky. The picture is glue-lined to a coarse linen (13–16 threads/cm) and retains the artist's original tacking margins. The five-member stretcher, with horizontal crossbar, may be original and is now wax-coated. The paint layer is in poor condition, with abrasion to both dark and light areas. Although not visible through the dense coatings, the surface likely has several depths of extensive retouching. What can be seen between the coatings are extensive reinforcements of the tree trunks, foliage, signature, and edges, with a general muddiness of the foliage, possibly due to old varnish residues. In ultraviolet light, the varnish layers fluoresce a moderately dense green, and in normal light, the yellow discoloration neutralizes the purples in the foliage. Older varnish residues seem to be trapped in the canvas weave.

The commercially prepared ground is a thin, pale gray layer, which allows the canvas texture to show. Bare threads are visible in some areas of the sky, although it is unclear whether this is poor ground application or later solvent damage. No underdrawing was detected, although there may be a dark brown sketch for the trees. The green middle tones were painted around the tree trunks, but the upper tree branches were painted over the green foliage. The two animals were painted over the lower paint layers. Several brown brush hairs are embedded in the paint of the lower right quadrant. The paint film is composed of very thin washes, apparently underbound due to being thinned with diluent instead of medium.

1. Jeffrey L. Snedeker, "Vivier, Eugène," in Grove Music Online (accessed 6 June 2006), [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29552?q=Eugene+Vivier&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29552?q=Eugene+Vivier&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1); Christopher Smith, "Gille, Philippe," in Grove Music Online (accessed 6 June 2006), [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O90191?q=philippe+gille&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O90191?q=philippe+gille&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit).

2. Paris–Ottawa–New York 1996–97, pp. 309–10.

3. Robaut 1905, vol. 3, pp. 22–23, no. 1300, gives the name of the first owner in the provenance only as "Vivier" and recorded this work in the collection of a Philippe Gille in 1889. It is possible that Robaut's "Vivier" refers to Eugène Vivier. See commentary for further information.

4. The invoice from Knoedler of 1940 has a notation that this painting was returned and credited to Clark at the initial purchase price. Clark must, however, have bought the painting back again at some unspecified date.

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## 88 | Apple Trees in a Field c. 1865–70

Oil on canvas, 40.7 x 60.8 cm

Lower right: COROT

1955.548

Unlike his friend Charles-François Daubigny, Corot seldom painted pictures of labor. Men in boats pole along in placid lakes, maybe pulling up a net, maybe not; women and children desultorily gather things from trees or streams, but it is never clear what is being collected. Therefore, the partially harvested field of grain to the left of *Apple Trees in a Field* populated with people bent over or with implement in hand is a rarity in Corot's oeuvre. Nor did he often place an identifiable tree at the center of a composition, as his friend Théodore Rousseau was wont to do. *Apple Trees in a Field*, probably painted in the late 1860s, shows the elderly artist once again trying something new.

The impetus for this singular subject matter may have come from Daubigny. Corot and Daubigny had met in 1852 and, despite the twenty-five-year difference in age, had become close friends by the end of the decade. Corot visited Daubigny almost every year in Auvers-sur-Oise, upstream from Pontoise, where Daubigny had bought property in 1860. In 1865, while staying with Daubigny, Corot and others painted panels to decorate Daubigny's house.<sup>1</sup> As a frequent visitor to Daubigny's home, Corot would have seen what the younger artist was painting. It would be surprising, therefore, if Corot were not aware of Daubigny's ongoing interest in scenes of orchards and harvests, beginning perhaps with *Spring*, which was commissioned by the minister of the interior in 1856 and shown at the Salon of 1857 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, on deposit at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Chartres).<sup>2</sup> In the 1860s, Daubigny juxtaposed apple trees and fields again in such pictures as *Apple Trees in Normandy* (c. 1867) and *Plowed Fields at Auvers* (1862; Sinebrychoff Art Museum, Helsinki).<sup>3</sup>

Corot may have seen the decorative qualities inherent in the shapely apple tree. Comparing an orchard scene by Daubigny, such as the slightly later *Apple Blossoms* of 1873 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,