



**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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possesses it, alive, strong, and for the rest has never sought any other goal.”³ The responses to the present small work are varied, suggesting that, except for the full sunlight of noon or the complete darkness of night, the quality of natural light is elusive to the point of indeterminacy. When *The Creek* was sold in 1891, the cataloguer felt that it showed “the harmonizing light of a morning sky.”⁴ The cataloguer for the 1923 sale, by contrast, wrote that “on the low horizon rises an early evening sky.”⁵ Then in 1929, when Robert Sterling Clark saw the painting at the dealer Scott and Fowles, he thought it depicted early afternoon. Francine liked the picture—Clark seems not to have bought without her approval—and he purchased it at the reduced price of \$4,000.⁶ Twelve days later he bought a much smaller woodland scene (cat. 100) for \$500. The discrepancy in price is not easily explained. It may have been due to the fact that *The Creek* is larger than *Woodland Scene*, or it could be attributable to Clark’s willingness to buy a painting that moved him at a high price. FEW

PROVENANCE George I. Seney (his sale, American Art Association, New York, 11–13 Feb. 1891, no. 288); Joseph Eastman, New York; sale, American Art Association, New York, 16 Jan. 1923, no. 17, ill.; [Scott & Fowles, New York, sold to Clark, 10 Apr. 1929]; Robert Sterling Clark (1929–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1956a, pl. S-18, ill.

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 27, ill.; Fidell-Beaufort and Bailly-Herzberg 1975, p. 153, no. 84, ill., as *La Petite rivière / Landscape*; Hellebranth 1976, p. 256, no. 771, ill., as *Barque sur la rivière*; Hayward 2008, p. 118, fig. 5.3.

TECHNICAL REPORT The original support is a light-colored hardwood panel, possibly oak, probably thinned and leveled to its present 0.3–0.4-cm thickness to remove any chamfers. The grain, which is very widely spaced, and pronounced in reflected light, runs horizontally. The secondary support, already in place by 1891, is an attached mahogany panel (0.5 cm thick) and a cradle that extends past the original panel edges. Small inlaid mahogany borders bring the attachments up to the paint level, creating the appearance that the picture is painted on mahogany. There are a number of old checks and splits in the panel. These include a check in the upper right, a crack (10.2 cm) starting on the lower left edge, and a split (17.8 cm) along the irregular grain in the lower center, possibly surrounding a knot in the wood. There may also be a second knot near the bottom center edge, seen as a circular crack. The brown paint in the trees

displays some traction crackle, as do a few areas of sky. Age cracks follow the wood grain, except in the whites where the cracks run perpendicular to the grain. In 1978, the darker passages were partially cleaned due to solvent sensitivity, and these still fluoresce slightly in ultraviolet light. There are a few new retouches in the lower left corner, the right edge, and the left tree group. Older oil paint retouches along the edges may be the work of the artist. The translucent appearance of the sky may be an original aging phenomenon related to some pigment or medium used by the artist.

The ground is a thin cream-colored layer, with a strong multidirectional array of wide brush marks scattered below the paint, suggesting the panel was primed by the artist. Solvent abrasion to the paint layer could have increased the visibility of this ground texture. No underdrawing was discovered, although in infrared viewing there seem to be paint changes where additional foliage was covered over with sky in the final layers. There may be a warm dark-brown sketch below the paint, which remains partially visible in the thinner passages. The final paint layers are vehicular in consistency and were applied in wispy strokes, sometimes two and three levels deep. The thicker, more opaque pale colors were often applied in and around the dark details. There is very little impasto work.

1. Adolphe Appian, quoted in Fidell-Beaufort and Bailly-Herzberg 1975, p. 48, from the Appian papers.
2. Henriët 1857, p. 197: “La grande hardiesse de Daubigny, c’est d’être simple; sa nouveauté, c’est d’avoir renoncé à tous les moyens usés et faciles d’arriver à l’effet.”
3. Redon 1868; reprinted with translation from Fidell-Beaufort and Bailly-Herzberg 1975, p. 60.
4. American Art Association 1891, p. 281.
5. American Art Association 1923, no. 17.
6. RSC Diary, 11 Apr. 1929; asking price was \$5,000.

99 | The Bridge between Persan and Beaumont-sur-Oise 1867

Oil on panel, 38.4 x 67.1 cm
Lower right: Daubigny 1867
1955.694

Charles-François Daubigny had an affinity for the rivers of France. His early childhood was spent in the village of Valmondois, near Pontoise. The area around Pontoise, about twenty-two miles northwest of Paris on the Oise River, had special resonance for Daubigny. He began visiting Auvers, a town between Pontoise and



99

Valmondois (see cat. 100), in the summer of 1835 and bought property there in 1860. In 1857, he converted a ferry into a floating studio, which he called the *Bottin*. Fitted with a covered painting room and supplied with staples such as onions, the *Bottin* afforded Daubigny unprecedented views of water and shore.¹ Studying the river, the life of the people who lived along its banks, and the ever-changing relation of sky and water became close to an obsession with Daubigny, whether his vantage was on the water itself or on dry land. Frédéric Henriet, his good friend and biographer, claimed that, beginning about 1857, collectors and dealers were so intent on buying Daubigny's riverine views that they were not interested in any other motif from him.² This may have suited Daubigny, for he wrote to Henriet that "it is from the banks of the rivers that one sees the most beautiful landscapes."³

In addition to providing subject matter, Daubigny's summers on the rivers Oise, Seine, and less often on the Marne also convinced him that painting while looking at the motif was the only responsible approach to recording the vagaries of the natural world. As early as 1857, Daubigny's habit of painting outdoors was recorded—and praised—by Henriet. With allowances made for personal bias and advocacy on the writer's part, Henriet's assessment gives us the basis of Daubigny's method. "Daubigny's entire aesthetic is contained in a word and that word is sincerity! He knows that the landscapist is nothing except through

nature, and that he returns to nothing as soon as he is away from it. . . . The model is before his eyes, but it is in his heart that he finds the exquisite sentiment with which he impregnates his work without even knowing it and the kind of indefinable emotion that shivers on his canvas. . . . Daubigny is original because he proceeds directly from nature."⁴

Beaumont, still farther up the Oise than Auvers, was marked by its thirteenth-century church, a ruined tower, part of an old castle, and a stone bridge. Having undergone many renovations since its construction, the bridge had spanned the river at this point since the twelfth century. The version of the bridge Daubigny painted was the last to be built entirely of stone, for it was partially destroyed by the Prussians in 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. When it was rebuilt, in 1890, all that was usable was the large arch to the right and the solid stonework leading to the shore. The rest, reaching to the opposite bank, was constructed of metal.⁵ The bridge led across the river to Persan, an industrial village served by a rail line.

Daubigny only rarely included in his paintings and prints signs of contemporary life, such as trains, steamboats, and the smokestacks of factories.⁶ He preferred to depict the countryside as if the nineteenth century did not exist. Robert L. Herbert is one of the few art historians to write specifically of this painting: "Avoiding the rail line along the bank to the left, and the small industrial centre of Persan,

he [Daubigny] painted the old road bridge and the village of Beaumont, precisely because they were unaltered.”⁷ Daubigny may have painted the largely unchanged village of Beaumont (its population in 1873 was 2,560⁸), yet it was unusual for him to paint a town of any vintage. This is the only view of Beaumont included in Robert Hellebranth’s catalogue raisonné of Daubigny’s paintings and one of the very few paintings to show in such detail a town or city.⁹ If a structure appears in a painting by Daubigny, it is a modest house, but even houses figure rarely in an oeuvre that concentrates on rivers, fields, orchards, and sea-coasts. Therefore, the emphasis in this painting on man-made structures makes it a rarity in Daubigny’s work. It suggests that other towns along the Oise were more immediately contemporary than Beaumont, and that the bridges were not as old-fashioned, even if this bridge was in place by the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ The obvious comparison, the bridge downstream at Pontoise, was rebuilt in 1843 with higher and wider arches to accommodate the town’s active traffic in barges transporting agricultural goods.¹¹ Upstream, at Beaumont, it was possible to stand on the right bank of the Oise, facing downstream toward Auvers, Pontoise, and the river’s confluence with the Seine, with the growing and increasingly industrialized town of Persan at one’s back, and see old France.

Henriet’s statement that Daubigny “proceeds directly from nature” is borne out in this painting. There may be a sketch below the final paint layer in thin gray wash, but there is certainly no underdrawing. Daubigny thinned his paints to make the colors more luminous, and perhaps also to allow him to paint more quickly. Silhouettes of trees and rooflines were softened and generalized by drawing the sky color over already painted contours. The composition is tightly fitted together both geometrically, with a series of bands and wedges, and coloristically, with closely toned greens, light blues, grays, and browns.

The location of this painting, the village of Beaumont, was linked to the work only in the early twentieth century. When it was shown at the Galerie Georges Petit in 1892, it was titled simply *Le Pont (The Bridge)*.¹² FEW

PROVENANCE Delagarde (in 1892); [Georges Petit, Paris, sold to Knoedler, 26 Apr. 1927]; [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 9 June 1927, as *Le Pont de Persan-Beaumont*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1927–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1892c, p. 159, no. 53, ill. opp. p. 122, as *Le Pont*, lent by Delagarde; Williamstown 1956a, pl. S-7, ill. as *Le Pont de Persan-Beaumont*.

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 25, ill., as *The Bridge of Persan-Beaumont*; Fidell-Beaufort and Bailly-Herzberg 1975, p. 168, no. 107, ill., as *Pont sur l’Oise entre Persan et Beaumont*; Hellebranth 1976, p. 103, no. 300, as *Le Pont de Persan, Beaumont*; Herbert 1982, p. 147, pl. 6; Lassalle 1990, p. 45, ill.; Birmingham–Glasgow 1990, p. 29, fig. 27; Deleau 1992, p. 40, ill.; Beaumont-sur-Oise 2000, p. 179, ill.; Défossez 2000, p. 26, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 0.5 cm thick with the grain running horizontally. The panel’s mahogany cradle may be original. The paint is in exceptionally good condition, considering that the artist used extended media and glazing throughout. The picture was carefully cleaned in 1978, when an upper layer of synthetic resin coating was removed and the remnants of the original natural resin layer were thinned. In ultraviolet light, some old varnish residues are visible in the dark passages. There are dark cross-grain cracks visible in the left sky. The present varnish saturates the paint layer extremely well and has an even surface reflection.

The thin medium-gray ground layer can be seen in skips in the sky color. There are pumicing, sanding, or palette knife abrasion marks in the surface of the ground layer, visible in the water area above the signature. No underdrawing was found using either magnification or infrared viewing, although there may be a thin gray wash sketch below the final paint. There are several dark anomalies in the river: one to the left of the tower’s reflection and a group of others extending from the standing woman over to the group of ducks. The rightmost arch in the bridge also appears to have been started further to the right, where a shadow of an arch can be seen in infrared reflectography. Several roofs and trees along the skyline were adjusted by the later sky color. The entire paint layer, even the thicker whites, appears to contain media or extenders to render the colors more translucent and luminous. Small brushes were used, except for the 1.3-cm brush employed in the sky. There is no prominent impasto work, only slightly raised rounded deposits in the foliage.

1. Grad 1980.
2. Henriet 1874, p. 264.
3. Charles-François Daubigny to Frédéric Henriet, 27 Sept. 1867, quoted in Moreau-Nélaton 1925, p. 97: “car c’est bien au bord des rivières qu’on voit les plus beaux paysages.”
4. Henriet 1857, p. 197: “Toute l’esthétique de Daubigny tient dans un mot, et ce mot est SINCERITÉ! Il sait que le paysagiste n’est rien que par la nature, et qu’il rentre profondément dans son néant aussitôt qu’il s’en éloigne. . . . Le modèle est sous ses yeux, mais c’est

dans son coeur qu'il trouve le sentiment exquis dont il imprègne son oeuvre à son insu, et l'espèce d'émotion indéfinissable qui frissonne sur sa toile. . . . Daubigny est original, car il procède directement de la nature."

5. Information on the history of the bridge courtesy of an e-mail from *tourismebeaumont.95@wanadoo.fr*, 27 Aug. 2003. A painting by Edmond Petitjean (1844–1925) shows the reconstructed bridge (Mairie de Beaumont-sur-Oise); see Deleau 1992, p. 40, ill.
6. See the painting *The River Seine at Mantes* of 1856 (Brooklyn Museum; H 65), and the etching *The Steamboats (Watch Out for the Steamers)* (Delteil 1906–26, vol. 13, no. 112).
7. Herbert 1982, p. 147.
8. Murray 1873, p. 28.
9. Hellebranth 1976; see also Hellebranth and Hellebranth 1996.
10. E-mail from *tourismebeaumont.95@wanadoo.fr*, 27 Aug. 2003.
11. Brettell 1990, p. 18, figs. 11, 12.
12. Paris 1892c, no. 53, ill. opp. p. 122, described on p. 159.

100 | Woodland Scene c. 1873

Oil on panel, 23 x 17.8 cm
 Lower right: Daubigny 187[]
 1955.695

Charles-François Daubigny was drawn again and again to the area where he had spent his earliest years. Valmondois, a village near the right bank of the Oise River a bit upstream from Auvers, was the home of Mère Bazot, the artist's wet nurse with whom he stayed until he was nine in the hopes that the country air would strengthen his weak constitution.¹ Whether the therapy worked cannot be known, but it is clear that Valmondois held an abiding attraction, for Daubigny began picturing Valmondois as early as 1835 and continued to do so until the end of his life.² Victor Geoffroy-Dechaume, a lifelong friend of the artist, recalled their early excursions to the Oise. "Slightly before the railroads, towards 1834, we would go with my young friends, several times every year, either by foot or by coach, to the charming region of Valmondois, there where friend Daubigny had been nursed at the home of father and mother Bazot. . . . We were happy—we called it getting new vigor."³ This small, vibrant picture dates from the 1870s, perhaps 1873.

Daubigny painted almost forty views of the region

around Valmondois, and almost half are of the type the French call *sous-bois*, or woodland interior, and of these, the vast majority (seventeen) feature a brook, as in this quickly brushed example. Even when not on his floating studio, Daubigny took advantage of every opportunity to paint water.

These pictures of a stream in the middle of the composition bordered by closely growing trees contain an inherent contradiction. Their freshness and immediacy are both supported and belied by their point of view. Some of the woodland pictures are bisected by a path rather than a stream. In them, it is easy to imagine the artist setting up his easel on the path and painting the tunnel of green in front of him. More problematic is his position in the pictures with a stream. The water spreads out to fill the entire bottom edge of the painting, leaving no space for the artist and his easel. Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña and Théodore Rousseau also painted pictures of unkempt undergrowth, often contained by arching trees and with a view to a luminous distance, as here. Their pictures, however, are horizontal in format and are grounded with a strip of land along the bottom edge. Daubigny's scenes, by contrast, are vertically oriented. The combination of the visual attraction to the light in the distance and the sense of height generated by the spindly tree trunks shooting up draws attention away from the bottom of the picture. The viewer, like the artist, is suspended, improbably but convincingly, over the water.

Because Daubigny returned to this motif over the course of almost four decades, his treatment of it can stand for the development of his career as a whole. In general, that progression began with scenes enlivened by anecdotal detail, stemming from his early work as an illustrator.⁴ For example, in the Salon of 1847 he showed a painting dated to 1844 similar to this one but with two children and an older girl on the bank of a stream.⁵ Other paintings variously included cattle or, in a work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *Landscape with a Sunlit Stream* (c. 1877), a cluster of farm buildings. By the 1870s, the artist concentrated on painting the effect of backlit foliage. The tiny figure of what may be a fisherman just to the right of center in the Clark picture is distinguished by the ruddiness of his face, hands, and legs, the color opposite of the fresh green surrounding him.

Daubigny painted as often on panel as he did on canvas for these works at Valmondois. The paint, mostly a very bright green, was applied freely in long,