



**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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PROVENANCE Robert Sterling Clark (by 1935–55);² Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS None

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 1 cm thick, with the grain running horizontally. The reverse edges have narrow chamfers of irregular width, and there is a very slight convex warp to the front surface. It is assumed that this is a commercially prepared support. The paint along three edges is plowed up by an early tight framing, and newer frame abrasion occurs along the lower edge. There is an old small dent in the right sky. Minor solvent abrasion is seen in the front donkey's bridle and in a few other thin dark passages. The picture was cleaned, together with four other paintings, in early 1935 by Madame Coince of the firm Charles Chapuis and Marcel Coince of Paris. The present varnish is moderately yellow, with an even ultraviolet fluorescence. The surface coating has some fogginess and is slightly uneven in gloss.

The ground, white in color and probably containing two layers, can be seen below thinly painted dark passages and the sky. Underdrawing, which is detectable with the unaided eye in the buildings and animals, may be graphite. Using infrared reflectography, more lines are visible in the buildings; some seem to be sketched shading lines, while others were details left unpainted. The chimney was originally drawn to the right of its final placement. There seems to be a thin wash of brown paint that reinforces the drawing lines. The paint is thin to moderately thick, applied in fluid strokes wet-into-wet, with the sky painted last. Reserves were left for the donkeys when the dark stable interior was laid in, but the chickens were painted very freely over the foreground paint. Small red accents were the last color accents applied.

1. A painting with this title (*Les Ânes d'Espagne*) appeared in the Landais sale, Drouot, Paris, 2 Mar. 1874, no. 2, but it is larger (33 x 44 cm).
2. The purchase date is unknown, although an invoice to Sterling Clark's account in the museum's curatorial files indicates that the conservators Chapuis and Coince, Paris, worked on this picture in Feb. 1935.

Alfred Eduard Agenor van Bylandt

Belgian, 1829–1890

38 | Boats 19th century

Oil on panel, 21 x 31 cm

Lower right: A de Bylandt

1955.698

So little is known about the painter of the Clark's *Boats* that even his name is the subject of doubt. The Dutch landscape and marine painter Alfred Eduard Agenor van Bylandt (also known as Edouard Agenout van Bylandt) is often confused with A. de Bylant, an artist who painted similar subjects and who exhibited at the Royal Academy between the dates of 1853 and 1874 and the British Institution between 1862 and 1867.¹ Although Robert Sterling Clark's spelling was never consistent, he, too, displays confusion when he related finding a work by "Jan Jacob Bylaerd or 'Bylard'" who he believed was "probably the father of the A. de Bylard of the little beach scene I bought for \$8."²

The small scene of fishing boats at the edge of the shore, their half-raised sails indicating either a return from a day of fishing or preparations to begin a day of work, fits solidly into one strand of the Anglo-Dutch tradition of marine painting. While the majestic, historical works of the Van de Velde family of the seventeenth century documented the rivalry of the Dutch and English marine empires, Bylandt's small-scale work shows the far humbler aspect of river and sea life.

This depiction of the quotidian elevated to the subject of fine art is more closely related to the work of the Hague School painters, who were, in turn, influenced by the Barbizon circle of Corot, Rousseau, Daubigny, and Diaz. Bylandt translates the watery location into an atmospheric, impressionistic scene where the boats and water dominate and the fishermen resemble the piers that punctuate the lower left foreground. Although ostensibly a depiction of labor, the artist reduces the human element to a few figures marked by red vests and anonymous brown dots for heads.

Paintings such as *Boats*, with their anecdotal treatment of life outside of the urban uproar of London, Paris, or Amsterdam, found a ready market in the denizens of those very same cities. EP

PROVENANCE Robert Sterling Clark (by 1941–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.



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EXHIBITIONS None

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is an oak panel 1 cm thick. The oxidized reverse shows hand-planed marks and chamfers 2.9 cm wide on three edges. The top edge has no chamfer, suggesting that the panel was cut from a larger board along that side. The panel plane is flat except for a slight waviness along the lower edge. There is a splinter (3.2 cm long) missing in the lower right corner and a check in the wood running parallel to this loss. Other damage includes a dent down to the ground layer in the right sky, chipped paint and ground along the lower edge, and a scratch in the varnish through the front-most boat, with a loss of paint in the prow. The condition of the paint layer is difficult to assess, however, due to the extremely thick, severely discolored varnish. The surface is scattered with bits of undissolved natural resin, and the varnish is starting to chip on account of its thickness. The ultraviolet light fluorescence shows possible retouches above the distant boat at the left and in other scattered locations.

The ground has the visual appearance of a glue gesso but seems to be oil-based; it is comprised of two gray-white layers, the lower one being grittier in texture than the upper. There are vertical underdrawing lines for the masts and some horizontal lines in the boats. Diagonal elements showing in the cloud formations under infrared light may represent a lower paint layer. The lumpy, patchy paint application in the sky has a different surface topography than the lower half of the image and may indicate that the entire sky was repainted at an unknown date. This upper sky layer follows around the masts, covering small details in some areas.

1. Bénézit 2006, vol. 3, p. 119 (French ed., vol. 3, p. 66). Neither artist is listed in Thieme-Becker. In the Union List of Artist Names, the second spelling is given.
2. RSC Diary, 2 Oct. 1941.