

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 historical 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,  
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,  
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,  
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Infrared reflectography revealed some underdrawing in the figures, perhaps with thin dark paint. There are also changes in the painted position of the shoulders of the left foreground figure, as well as in the posture of the man behind him. The paint is multilayered, with light passages built up thickly between already applied dark colors. Glazes are used to tone light areas and to detail such items as costume folds.

1. Thoré 1846, p. 279: “sa peinture est, d’ailleurs, partout”; “on ne saurait commencer une collection sans un Decamps.”
2. Silvestre 1856, pp. 152–53: “la dure vie des champs”; “apprentissage rustique.”
3. Mantz 1862, p. 103: “Les sites sont empruntés au nord de la France, et plus particulièrement à la Picardie, dont Decamps se souvient toujours.”
4. See Mosby 1977, vol. 1, pp. 65–68. He identifies at least four works in this series: *Gamekeeper with his Dogs* (Hôtel de Ville, Fontainebleau); *Duck Shooting* (New York Historical Society); *Snipe Shooting* (New York Historical Society); and *The Fox Chase* (New York Historical Society).
5. On the dating of the work, see Moreau 1869, p. 181. The other two hunt scenes are *Ferretting Hare*, 1830 (private collection) and *Deer Hunting*, c. 1830 (private collection); see London–Minneapolis–New York 2003–4, p. 174.
6. Moreau 1869, p. 176. On p. 181, Moreau dates the Clark painting, the largest of the three, to 1830; another, dated 1849, is cited on p. 176, while a third, undated work, appears on p. 179.
7. Conches 1831, p. 316: “À la chasse aux alouettes, par un temps brumeux d’octobre, il trouve le sujet de l’une de ses plus jolies peintures.”
8. See “Chasseurs au miroir (Les) ou la Chasse aux alouettes,” in Larousse 1866–90, vol. 3, p. 1059.
9. Mosby 1977, vol. 1, pp. 71–72.
10. Silvestre 1856, p. 167: “ce qu’il a fait trop souvent et trop librement peut-être.”
11. See, for example, “Salon de 1833. Decamps,” in *L’Artiste* 1833, p. 105.
12. Mantz 1862, p. 103: “la manière dont la couleur, très-chargée d’huile, est étendue sur la toile, fait songer aux procédés des aquarellistes.” On Decamps’s technique, see also London–Minneapolis–New York 2003–4, p. 174.
13. According to the Durand-Ruel Archives, the painting was transferred several times between the galleries in Paris and New York: it was sold from Paris to New York on 19 Apr. 1893; from New York to Paris on 25 June 1896; and from Paris to New York on 20 Aug. 1898. See correspondence of 24 Apr. 2001 in the Clark’s curatorial file.

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Oil on canvas, 24.1 x 34.3 cm  
 Lower left: DECAMPS / 1836  
 1955.699

One of the leading painters of the Romantic generation, Decamps essayed a variety of genres, from Orientalist subjects to landscapes and hunting scenes, but later lamented that he was reduced to painting easel pictures, never realizing his aspiration to succeed on a grander scale as a history painter.<sup>1</sup> This painting of 1836 reflects Decamps’s self-avowed “mania for animals,” which found expression in a body of paintings, drawings, and prints illustrating the *Fables* of Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695), dating from the 1830s and 1840s at the peak of his popularity as an artist.<sup>2</sup> During the nineteenth century, La Fontaine’s *Fables* attracted a diverse range of artists, from Carle and Horace Vernet, whose lithographs illustrated an 1818 edition of *Fables choisies de La Fontaine*, to Gustave Moreau (1826–1898), who exhibited sixty-four watercolor illustrations of the *Fables* in 1886. Drawings by J. J. Grandville (1803–1847) after La Fontaine—one hundred twenty in all—were engraved in a two-volume edition of 1838, whose enormous success led to the publication of a third volume in 1840.<sup>3</sup> Given the currency of La Fontaine in Decamps’s lifetime, it is tempting to speculate as to which edition of the author’s *Fables* was reported to be a fixture on the artist’s desk.<sup>4</sup>

Animal subjects were not new in Decamps’s art; by the mid-1830s, he had made a name for himself with his celebrated *singeries*, in which monkeys parody human behavior.<sup>5</sup> Grandville, in his contemporaneous illustrations after La Fontaine, similarly humanized his animal subjects. Decamps, however, presented La Fontaine’s animal protagonists in appropriate outdoor settings and omitted explicitly humanizing traits. In response, contemporary commentators treated his paintings after La Fontaine as either landscapes or animal subjects, despite their narrative content. A critic wrote of Decamps’s painting of “The Heron” (Book 7, Fable 5), “the figures and animals are completely minor; but these noble landscapes, truly conceived in *Poussinesque* style, are among the most severe and grandiose that have been dreamed up in our time,”<sup>6</sup> while an 1869 catalogue of Decamps’s work listed his illustrations after La Fontaine under animal subjects.<sup>7</sup> The cat that hungrily eyes the unsuspecting rabbit and





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weasel in the present work, set in a darkened forest clearing, bears little resemblance to his counterpart in Grandville's interpretation of the same fable, who presides over an interior scene ensconced in a throne-like armchair (fig. 105.1). "The Cat, the Weasel, and the Little Rabbit" (Book 7, Fable 16), which tells the story of a rabbit and a weasel asking a cat to settle a dispute over a burrow, only to be devoured by their wily arbiter, ends with the moral: "This brings to mind the fate / Of little kings before the great."<sup>8</sup>

One of the artist's biographers speculated that the "mocking and popular" aspects of the *Fables* appealed to Decamps's sensibility and also posited that La Fontaine's subjects lent themselves to the compositional effects that the artist favored, especially his predilection for dramatic lighting.<sup>9</sup> The somber palette of the Clark painting, dominated by brown and ochre tones, is typical of the artist. His choice of colors as well as the strong contrasts of light and dark that he favored might represent his attempt to emulate Rembrandt, whom Decamps admired as "the most extraordinary of painters."<sup>10</sup> The critic Théophile Silvestre, who found Decamps's limited palette "monotonous," compared the rows of Decamps's paintings on view in his 1855 retrospective to "two streams of nicotine full of scum."<sup>11</sup>

Decamps did not exhibit any of his painted "Fables" in the Salons or in his 1855 retrospective.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 105.1 J. J. Grandville (French, 1803–1847), *Le Chat, le Belette, et le Petit Lapin*. From Jean de La Fontaine's *Fables* (Paris, 1842–43)

His images after La Fontaine in other media, however, were more widely known. An article published in *L'Artiste* in 1831 cited Decamps's ink drawings after La Fontaine, then in the collection of Félix Feuillet, as among those "that connoisseurs class among the best of this precious and truly *unique* collection."<sup>13</sup> Five additional drawings by Decamps after La Fontaine, belonging to Paul Casimir-Périer, were reproduced as engravings by Louis Marvy (1815–1850) and Alphonse Charles Masson (1814–1898) and exhibited at the Salon of 1846.<sup>14</sup> These engravings were later published in *L'Artiste* between 1850 and 1853, attesting to the popular appeal of Decamps's "charming series" of drawings after La Fontaine.<sup>15</sup> KCG

**PROVENANCE** Salomon Goldschmidt (until 1888, his sale, Georges Petit, Paris, 17 May 1888, no. 7, as *Le Chat, Le Lapin et La Belette*); George I. Seney, New York (until 1891, his sale, American Art Association, New York, 11–13 Feb. 1891, no. 237, sold to Knoedler); [Knoedler, New York, from 1891]; William Albert Slater, Washington (by 1894, d. 1919); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 1 June 1922]; Robert Sterling Clark (1922–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Norwich 1894, no cat., lent by Slater; Williamstown 1956a, pl. S-16, ill.; Williamstown 1984a, pp. 18, 39, no. 5, ill.

**REFERENCES** Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 31, ill.; Mosby 1977, vol. 1, p. 144, vol. 2, p. 617, no. 468, pl. 42-A.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The linen support appears to be a moderate weave (19 x 23 threads/cm). The picture has an old paste lining with a heavy, double-weave, bleached fabric, but has retained its original tacking margins and five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. The painting was cleaned in 1929 by Rougeron, and in 1939 it was cleaned, lined, and had the cracks repaired by Beers Brothers. A stretcher crease is visible along the vertical crossbar, and there is slight dish-ing of the surface in the upper right corner due to a stretcher defect. Wood strips have been nailed to all four sides to center the painting in its frame. There are deep and winding age cracks in the paint and ground layers throughout the surface, and stress cracks in both lower corners. The fractured edges of the picture reveal a number of paint layers as well as colors inconsistent with the visible image, suggesting the presence of a lower painting. The X-radiograph confirms another image, possibly an unfinished landscape with architectural elements. Scattered old losses are visible under magnification between the two paint films, probably caused by a poor bond between them. Other small losses in the foliage have occurred between the resinous layers that make up the upper image alone. The yellowed varnish was thinned in 1983; its

residues are still detectable in ultraviolet light as patches of aged natural resin in the sky and the left side foliage. The signature had also suffered solvent abrasion. The present varnish is even in gloss and saturation, and there are small, scattered retouches.

The ground layer is cream color, and there appears to be a red-brown imprimatura layer applied overall. The rabbit takes its coloration from this sketch layer. There is no visible underdrawing, although lines, possibly in paint, can be detected in infrared reflectography. A pale space reserved for the rabbit is also seen with infrared, which may only be the result of the forest being painted after the animals. The paint layering is very complex and resinous in appearance. Despite some low impasto work, the surface is fairly level.

1. Silvestre 1856, p. 156.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 156: "La manie des animaux, qui m'a possédé et me tient encore un peu . . . m'a poussé à fabriquer des tableaux."
3. On the illustrations of La Fontaine in the nineteenth century, see Lesage 1995, pp. 182–203.
4. Mosby 1977, vol. 1, p. 216.
5. See, for example, *The Monkey-Artist* (c. 1833; Musée du Louvre, Paris), exhibited at the Salon of 1833.
6. Mantz 1862, p. 126: "Les figures et les animaux sont tout à fait épisodiques; mais ces nobles paysages, vraiment conçus sur le mode poussinesque, sont au nombre de plus sévères, des plus grandioses qui aient été rêvés de notre temps." See also Clément 1886, p. 46, who identifies the landscapes as those of Provence and Italy.
7. Moreau 1869, pp. 183–88.
8. Cited in Gréverand 2002, p. 157: "Ceci ressemble fort aux débats qu'ont parfois / Les petits souverains se rapportant aux rois."
9. Du Colombier 1928, p. 35: "narquoise et populaire."
10. Mosby 1977, vol. 1, p. 87: "le plus extraordinaire des peintres."
11. Silvestre 1856, pp. 168–69: "deux ruisseaux de nicotine chargés d'écume."
12. See Moreau 1869, pp. 151–69, for a list of works shown in public exhibitions during the artist's lifetime.
13. Conches 1831, p. 318: "que les connoisseurs classent au nombre des meilleurs de cette collection précieuse et vraiment *unique*." On the illustrations of La Fontaine in Feuillet's collection, see also Du Colombier 1928, p. 35.
14. Moreau 1869, pp. 82–85; the works are: *The Thieves and the Ass*; *The Wolf and the Shepherds*; *The Frog and the Ox*; *The Miller, His Son, and the Ass*; *The Heron*. On Marvy and Masson, see Dugnat and Sanchez 2001, pp. 1730, 1739. The engravings were exhibited under numbers 2346 and 2348 at the Salon of 1846 and figured in the sale of the collection of the widow of Paul Casimir-Périer, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 10 Nov. 1898, under no. 898.
15. Moreau 1869, pp. v and 85: "la suite charmante."