



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME TWO

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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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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239 | Bugler of the Light Infantry 1876

Oil on panel, 34.3 x 24.2

Lower left: A de Neuville / 1876

1955.707

Acquired by Robert Sterling Clark in 1935, Alphonse de Neuville's *Bugler of the Light Infantry* forms one of a large suite of single-figure military portraits, typically officers but also, as in this case, enlisted personnel. Thanks to his gift for episodic narrative, dramatic pictorial staging, and authenticity of locale, de Neuville emerged as one of the leading specialists in patriotic and military subjects associated with the Franco-Prussian War, next to Édouard Detaille (1848–1912) and the much older Ernest Meissonier (1815–1891). De Neuville's career was cut short by his death in 1885 at

the age of fifty, but in his lifetime and the decades that followed his pictures were eagerly sought by European and American collectors.

Signed and dated 1876, the subject of the Clark's *Bugler* sports almost identical dress and more than a passing resemblance to de Neuville's much larger *Bugler of the Infantry Marine* (fig. 239.1), variously dated to 1875 and 1877, and now in the Musée de l'Armée, Paris.¹ The Clark picture probably precedes its larger cousin, and its narrative is less developed. But we should not think of the Clark's *Bugler* merely as a study, even if de Neuville drew on this composition when staging his more ambitious treatment of the same figure. In the Paris picture, the bugler has been set within a narrative: the soldier bends to adjust his gaiter as he marches along a rutted road within a winter landscape, de Neuville's choice of season and additional details evoking the disastrous contests of the winter of

1870–71. By contrast, the Clark's *Bugler* stands against a sunny wall, not at all caught in action but seeming rather to hold pose. Between this sense of the infantryman standing before us, the scaled-back narrative, and the picture's small size, the Clark's *Bugler* conveys an immediacy and directness distinct from the more anecdotal character of the picture's larger cousin.

That is not to say this *Bugler* is any less staged. On the contrary, beneath the veneer of immediacy lies a carefully constructed naturalist rhetoric that puts this sense of immediacy firmly into place. The bugler stands posing before a stone wall, his face protected from the sun by his cap. He sports a studied informality, attributable in part to a tiny micro-narrative that promotes this effect even as we must understand it as wholly deliberate. The soldier has looked up, momentarily, seeming to meet our gaze, although perhaps lost in thought and not seeing us at all. Just as quickly, however, he will glance down at his hands and finish filling his pipe. The fiction produced by this tiny narrative is that this bugler does not merely pose. Rather, he stands unself-consciously before us. He is at once aware of our presence but not affected by it. Note in this regard that he idly chews on a straw, another marker of habit designed to signal how naturally and sincerely he stands before us.

The Clark picture, as in the case of similar single-figure military subjects by the artist, might seem like a portrait. And yet the artist identifies no sitter, nor are we tempted to seek out such a sitter. Even as he portrays his subjects as individuals, even as he endows them with subtle markers of place and time, de Neuville also treats them as types within a larger collective entity. And in that collective, individuality matters less than role—who the person is matters less than the uniform he dons. The image operates as both individual and type, a subtle dynamic that recurs in his oeuvre and that was crucial to his artistic success. We may think of de Neuville, along with other French military painters of his era, as assembling for his audiences a panorama of modern military experience. Within that panorama, emphasis would fall not only on heroic conduct in the field—battlefield contests, skirmishes, and decisive turning points—but on the fabric of military life, daily routine, and wartime experience. The Clark's *Bugler* is a representative example of this democratizing impulse. On the one hand, the sense that this bugler stands at the wall, briefly holding an informal pose, underscored the precision and authenticity of de Neuville's naturalism. The details of dress and equipment, the strong light that falls partially on the



Fig. 239.1. Alphonse de Neuville, *Bugler of the Infantry Marine*, c. 1870. Oil on canvas, 127 x 80 cm. Musée de l'Armée, Paris

bugler's face, and, most of all, the subtle movement of his face and hands, all helped convey to audiences that the artist was on the scene, immersed in the routines that he in turn captured and reproduced. On the other hand, by declining to name his sitters, by resisting the temptation to give them psychological depth, by refusing to treat these single-figure subjects as portraits in the classic sense, de Neuville facilitates for his audience a broader identification. Because they know the figure only as a type, defined essentially by his uniform, viewers could imaginatively project themselves into the bugler's world. Across this panorama of types, spectators could seem imaginatively to participate in the same patriotic enterprise that united audience, sitter, and painter alike. MG

PROVENANCE Possibly sale Drouot, Paris, 21 May 1884, no. 169, as *Clairon de chasseurs à pied*; [Georges Muller, Paris, sold to Clark, 13 Nov. 1935, as *Le Clairon des Chasseurs à Pied*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1935–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown–Hartford 1974, pp. 86–87, no. 53, ill.; Williamstown 1981–82, no cat.

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 1 cm thick with chamfered edges 1.2–1.9 cm wide on the reverse. There are two oval stamps on the back, one for the color-man Vieille and the other for the framer Beugniet, both in Paris. A third blurred stamp indicates that the restorer Henri Helfer apparently treated the picture in March 1938, following a 1936 treatment by Madame Coince. The panel has a very slight convex warp, and the reverse is coated with what appears to be wax. There is frame abrasion along the top edge. The upper shadow of the gun and horn shows cleaning abrasion, which has also accentuated a pentimento of the lower placement of the gun's shadow on the wall. Despite the abrasion seen in some thin passages, much of the surface seems to have its original varnish intact. The coating has vertical cracks following the wood grain, deposits of undissolved resin, and caches of resin in the impastos. The coatings are slightly yellow, with more discolored bands at the edges. In ultraviolet light, brown drip residues, running from top to bottom, are revealed below the figure's hands, in the proper right pant leg, and to the right of the date. These appear to be from something splashed on the painting.

The ground is most likely commercially applied. It is pale gray with large white particles visible at low magnification, and the wood grain shows through in the left background. Under low magnification, coarse underdrawing lines of either charcoal or graphite, as well as some black ink, are seen at the edges of forms. The drawing comprises part of the final image in many areas. There are a number of unused lines to the left of the figure's torso, which are also visible to the unaided eye. There may be a brown wash sketch layer between the drawing and the final colors. The position of the proper right elbow was moved slightly. Vehicular paint was freely applied wet-into-wet in most areas to achieve delicate impastos in the details. The pants were executed with flat strokes and the background was painted after the figure. Short, dark brush bristles are scattered in the paint.

1. Several different titles and dates have been associated with the larger *Bugler*. For this work, see Chabert 1979, p. 72, no. 21 and Saint-Omer 1978, p. 52 for a related study of the trumpet and other accessories, dated to 1876. For present purposes, I use the title and date noted in Robichon 2010, p. 61.

Sir William Orpen

Irish, 1878–1931

240 | Robert Sterling Clark 1921–22

Oil on canvas, 101.9 x 76.2 cm

Upper left: ORPEN

1955.824

241 | Francine J. M. Clark 1921–22

Oil on canvas, 101.9 x 76.2 cm

Upper left: ORPEN

1955.823

This pair of portraits exhibits the features that made Sir William Orpen the popular choice for the representation of society figures. The bold colors, simple settings, and facility with paint that characterize Orpen's work are essential elements in this portrayal of the recently married couple.

Although he represented them on separate canvases, Orpen links the pair most dramatically through the use of complementary colors of the background curtain. The bright red behind Sterling not only picks up the pattern of the American collector's tie, but also provides a chromatic complement to the green-gray watered silk backdrop of his wife's portrait. Offsetting Sterling's gray wool suit with the bold red and softening the bright pink of Francine's flirtatious dress with the iridescent curtain, Orpen employs his colors to create compositional coherence across the divide of the frame.

Notwithstanding the flamboyant purple shirt peeking out below his bright, starched white collar and extending beyond his jacket sleeves, Sterling poses as a serious man of leisure. Looking directly out from behind near-invisible eyeglass lenses, the heir to the Singer sewing machine fortune places his elegant hands in full view. Orpen's signature highlights delineate the lines of Sterling's long face and fingers, emphasizing his strong nose and unoccupied hands. Only the golden cushion, which makes the simple, slightly battered armchair more comfortable, is handled with a similar attention.

In contrast, Orpen gives full play to the folds and shimmer of Francine's elaborate pink confection. The left panel of her dress, closest to the picture plane, best displays Orpen's dramatic use of dark shadows and bright white highlights. Unlike her husband with his direct gaze, Mrs. Clark looks dreamily