



**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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Sir William Fettes Douglas

Scottish, 1822–1891

126 | Women in Church 1860s

Oil on wood-pulp composition board, 20.3 x 25.4 cm
1955.717

In this small but evocative work, the Scottish artist Sir William Fettes Douglas endows a church scene with an air of mystery characteristic of his genre paintings such as *The Spell* (1864; National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh). Dominating the image are two female subjects of strikingly different temperament. The heavily draped woman, probably a widow, sits with her hands clasped, her eyes downcast, and her mouth set sternly. Her melancholic meditation and dark clothing contrast with the wide-eyed glance of the younger girl who sits close behind her in a bright peacock green dress. With a white kerchief and bobbed hair framing her heart-shaped face, the widow's younger companion looks expectantly to her right, beyond the frame of the painting. Although she holds her rosary beads conspicuously, this girl is clearly not engaged in the serious contemplation befitting her surroundings.

In the same way as they engage the viewer's curiosity, this contrasting pair forms the object of the hooded monk's attention. Douglas disturbs scale and distance, making it hard to determine whether this kneeling monk, cast in deep shadow, is near or far from the women whom the artist places right up against the picture plane. The procession of hooded and tonsured monks into the sanctuary from the door in the far right background further emphasizes Douglas's compression of the church space. Painted with minimum detail, the monks form a ghostly presence, barely distinguishable from the dark wall.

An exercise in the mysteriousness and solemnity evoked by stark contrasts of light and dark, *Women in Church* demonstrates Douglas's familiarity with the tenebrist painters of the seventeenth century. Born in Edinburgh, Douglas followed his father into business at the Commercial Bank of Scotland at the age of fourteen. After ten years as a bank clerk, and without any formal training, he became a professional painter. Douglas first traveled to Italy in 1857, three years after being elected a full member of the Royal Scottish Academy. While in Italy, he became interested in antiquities and began to collect coins, Renaissance medals, manuscripts, and other objets d'art.¹ Stopping in London on his return from this first

trip, Douglas wrote to the Scottish connoisseur David Laing, “if I do not flatter myself that I am an antiquary I am at least a collector.”²

Not only did objects from his personal collection appear in his paintings, but his antiquarian interests also prepared him for his election in 1877 as Curator of the National Gallery of Scotland. Douglas held that position until 1882 when he became President of the Royal Scottish Academy and was knighted. Throughout his career Douglas exhibited regularly at the Royal Scottish Academy exhibitions, as well as those at the Royal Academy in London. In contrast to many Scottish artists of his generation, however, he did not settle in the capital. EP

PROVENANCE [Wallis & Son (The French Gallery), London, sold to Clark, 23 Mar. 1931, as *In a Church*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1931–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS None

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a commercially supplied composition board with a pronounced convex warp. A paper label on the reverse for the colorman Charles Roberson & Co. indicates the source of the panel. The upper right corner of the support has crushed fibers, and the upper left shows the repair of a small broken section. There are old losses in the support in the lower right and a newer loss in the lower left. In general, the support is very brittle and fragile. There are traction cracks in the gray paint in the background and floor areas, and scattered age cracks in the paler colors. Frame abrasion occurs on all edges, including damage to the signature, and some wrinkling is due to an excess of either diluent or medium in the paint. The picture was cleaned and restored in 1935 by Chapuis and Coince in Paris and was “regenerated” (probably only surface cleaned and/or revarnished) in 1956 at the Clark by a Miss Testut (possibly an employee of William Suhr). Speckles of brown residue, perhaps an earlier coating, dot the surface and are especially visible in the lighter passages. In ultraviolet light, the present varnish application is seen as moderately fluorescing vertical brushstrokes, with pools of resin in some areas. The coating also has scattered cracks, separate from the paint film. There are a few retouches in the monk’s hood and along the edges of the picture, and possibly in the woman’s black dress. The surface coating is even and quite glossy in reflected light.

The ground is comprised of gritty, white, commercially applied layers. The paint technique is very vehicular with an orange-peel effect on the surface, perhaps from a slow drying medium. Under the microscope, the entire image has a blurred appearance, with very few defined edges. Although

small brushes were used to build up the flesh areas, the flowing quality of the medium has rendered most brushstrokes invisible.

1. Sales of his collection were held on two occasions: in 1865, before one of his Continental trips, and over the course of six days after his death in 1891. For the 1865 sales, see Chapman 1865a and 1865b. For the 1891 sales, see Dowell’s 1891a and Dowell’s 1891b.
2. Sir William Fettes Douglas to David Laing, 21 Feb. 1858, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections, La.iv.17, f. 2705.

Martin Drölling

French, 1752–1817

127 | Young Woman in an English Garden c. 1795

Oil on canvas or paper, 45.4 x 37.5 cm

Lower left: Drölling f.

1955-725

Martin Drölling, a native of Alsace, studied painting in the studio of an obscure artist in Sélestat before his arrival in Paris in 1780, when he enrolled in the *École des Beaux-Arts*.¹ The following year, he was represented by two genre paintings in the exhibition of the Salon de la Correspondance, scenes of village life recalling seventeenth-century Dutch precedents, which became his specialty.² Following the opening of the state-sponsored Salon to all artists in 1791, Drölling exhibited his works there on a regular basis from 1793 until 1817, attracting critical acclaim as well as popular success. Most of his known works date from after 1790.

At the Salon of 1795, Drölling’s submissions included a pair of paintings, described in the *livret* as “a young woman in an English garden, holding a letter and ready to cross a stream” and “a young woman near a rosebush on which she has pricked her finger attempting to pick a rose.”³ The same young woman appears in both paintings, establishing their narrative continuum. In the Clark painting, the letter, evoking an absent lover, creates a mood of romantic reverie; its pendant, *The Pricked Finger* (private collection), depicts the lovesick protagonist, her bodice now suggestively unlaced, contemplating the unhappy denoue-