Pierre Duval Le Camus
French, 1790–1854

The Drawing Lesson  c. 1826
Oil on canvas, 32.8 x 24.7 cm
Lower left: Duval. Le Camus 182[6?]
1955.728

Pierre Duval Le Camus, who entered the atelier of Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) at the age of sixteen, exhibited regularly in the Salons between 1819 and 1853, as well as in various provincial exhibitions. Although trained by the leading history painter of his day, he specialized in small-scale, full-length portraits and domestic interiors rendered in naturalistic detail that recalled seventeenth-century Dutch prototypes. In 1822, a Salon critic praised Duval Le Camus as “another Drölling,” a reference to the recently deceased artist Martin Drölling (1752–1817), who popularized similar Dutch-influenced genre imagery. In his review of the Salon of 1833, Charles Lenormant admired the “accuracy of pose and effect, always with a natural touch” of his portraits, while the reviewer for Le Moniteur universel in 1831 praised the “perfect observation of nature and above all of domestic customs” characteristic of his genre scenes.

Two other versions of this painting, both unsigned and nearly identical in scale to the present work, are known. Technical examination of the Clark painting reveals underdrawing below the figures, as well as a modification in the background, where trees were once painted in the lower portion of the window in the area now covered by the dark curtain (see Technical Report). These factors point to the Clark’s picture as the original; the other two paintings were possibly executed by Duval Le Camus’s students, who might have seen the present work in his studio. KCG

PROVENANCE  [Vicars Brothers, London]; [Knoedler, London, sold to Clark, 31 July 1939, as The Drawing Lesson]; Robert Sterling Clark (1939–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.


REFERENCES  Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 52, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT  The support is a coarsely woven linen (possibly 16 threads/cm), glue-lined to a coarser weave linen (13 threads/cm). The reverse of the lining fabric is quite dark and may be deliberately stained. The five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher may be original. The artist’s tacking margins are gone, and the remaining original canvas dimension is slightly smaller than the stretcher size. The lining presumably predates the 1939 purchase. A slight bulge in the lower left corner and a shallow deformation in the upper left are both due to the stretcher’s joinery design. Long shallow age cracks appear throughout, with more prominent radiating cracks in the sky associated with an old repainted damage. There are fine aperture stress cracks across the two lower corners, physical abrasion from the frame rebate along all the edges, and a dent in the surface on the left. The painting had varnish removed and reapplied in 1940 by Beers Brothers via Durand-Ruel in New York. Some solvent abrasion occurs in the dark passages, and there is retouching in the sky in the left half of the window and in the left background. Ultraviolet light examination reveals that the thin natural resin varnish
was applied in horizontal streaky brushstrokes while the picture was framed, leaving pools of resin along the sight edges. The painting has an irregular sheen in reflected light, with the sky being shinier than the rest of the surface.

The off-white ground appears to have been applied in two thick layers, possibly by the artist, presenting a smooth surface. There is an underdrawing below the figures, possibly done with graphite, which is visible using infrared reflectography. Also visible is an apparent alteration in the image, where trees were initially painted in the lower third of the window frame, now covered by the dark window blind. The drawing hanging on the upper left wall is also more readable using infrared light. There is a brown layer below the final paint, discernible at the edges of various forms, and in the hair of the two women. The upper paint is vehicular in consistency and thin to moderately thick in brushwork.

1. On the artist, see Hamel 1979, pp. 21–27.
4. Chaudonneret 1999, p. 141. The Clark painting does not appear among the works by Duval Le Camus included in the catalogue of her collection (Berry 1822), nor does it figure in the catalogues of the three sales of her collection, which took place between 1830 and 1837 (Paris, 8 Dec. 1830 [Lugt 12508]; Paris, 22 Feb.–15 Mar. 1836 [Lugt 14225], and Paris, 4–6 Apr. 1837 [Lugt 14643]).
5. Gabet 1831, p. 250.
6. One, unsigned but attributed to Duval Le Camus, is in the collection of the Kurpfälzisches Museum, Heidelberg, inv. 42.21.14 G2058; this information was confirmed by Dr. Annette Frese, Leiterin der Abt. Gemälde und Graphik, in an e-mail of 20 Dec. 2004. The other, attributed to Léon Mathieu Cochereau (1793–1817) or, alternatively, to Antoinette Cécile Hortense Haudebourt-Lescot (1784–1845), was sold at Christie’s, London, on 27 Oct. 2004, no. 77: I am grateful to Asher Miller of the Department of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for noting the work sold at Christie’s.