



**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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Details:

TITLE PAGE: John Constable, *Yarmouth Jetty* (cat. 73)

OPPOSITE COPYRIGHT PAGE: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Bathers of the Borromean Isles* (cat. 89)

PAGE VIII: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Woman Crocheting* (cat. 267)

PAGE X: Claude Monet, *Seascape, Storm* (cat. 222)

PAGE XII: Jacques-Louis David, *Comte Henri-Amédée-Mercure de Turenne-d'Aynac* (cat. 103)

PAGE XVI: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr* (cat. 33)

PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154)

141 | **Dancer in Her Dressing Room** c. 1890

Oil on panel, 26.7 x 35.1 cm

Lower right: j. l. forain

1955.738

The subject of *Dancer in Her Dressing Room* is the kind for which Forain is most famous. A lone ballerina lifts her right leg onto a table, stretching out and over her leg to adjust her slipper. Her arms appear as long as her legs due to the similarity of the shapes and the fact that they are the same pink shade as her legs and shoes. The pink shoe she fiddles with melds into her leg and is given the same kind of treatment as her arms. The colors Forain uses here are typical of ballet scenes, with the pink lampshades at left, the dancer's pink tutu, and a generally peachy pink tone over the lower two-thirds of the painting. The reverberation of forms and colors continues in the two A-shaped lampshades at the extreme left side of the picture. Although they seem to float, they balance the billowing form of the dancer's tutu, echoing the shape and color of the dress.

The dancer is not alone but is accompanied by an older woman with gray hair who is dressed in black with a black hat. Seated in the right background, she holds a tray with a glass and a straw or stirrer to present to the ballerina. She appears smiling or ready to speak to the young woman, leaning slightly forward but waiting patiently until the dancer finishes her adjustments and can relax with the drink. Another work in the Clark collection with a more risqué subject, *Dancer and Patron* (fig. 141.1), also has an older woman waiting to present a tray of drinks, perhaps tea, to the dancer and her *abonné*, one of the wealthy male patrons who frequented the Paris Opera and often formed relationships with the dancers.

Forain's *Dancer in Her Dressing Room* is a cramped, claustrophobic picture. The dancer herself is penned in—at left by the table and lampshades; above by the strongly patterned wallpaper that does not recede into space and instead seems to rain down on her; at right by the older woman and by what is perhaps a dresser and picture hanging above it, and a crinoline resting on a yellow patterned ottoman; from below by the corner of the ottoman that angles into her space, mirroring the packet of blue flowers that juts off the table at the left. The overall color scheme adds to the feeling of a confined space, as the dark areas predominate, surrounding the small pool of light from the lamps that



Fig. 141.1 Jean-Louis Forain, *Dancer and Patron*, c. 1880–1900. Gouache over pencil on paper, 31.4 x 38.9 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts (1955.1765)

illuminates the table and parts of the ballerina, which are the brightest areas of the picture. Adding to this effect is the slightly elevated viewpoint, which flattens the image so that there is almost no recession into space. The staccato painting technique evident in the patterns on the wall, floor, and ottoman also creates a sense that there is a nearly palpable atmosphere surrounding the dancer. This work is almost pastel-like in its daubs of paint and patterns of color, perhaps showing Forain's indebtedness to Edgar Degas, not only in the subject matter but also in the technique.

This work can most likely be dated to about 1890, just before Forain married in 1891 and had a son. After that time, he gradually turned away from impressionistic and satirical scenes to more serious political or religious subjects, or those focused on legal issues. Forain became more attached to his faith in Catholicism, and by the turn of the century, he had retreated from the brighter colors and freer techniques of Impressionism toward an increasingly dark palette.

Of all the paintings by Forain in the Clark collection, *Dancer in Her Dressing Room* best exemplifies the artist's close friendship with Degas. Degas was fond of recording moments before or after a performance. Forain often took a similar approach, although he did not usually surround the dancer with other



141

ballerinas as Degas was apt to do. Whereas Degas was “interested in fugitive appearances, movement and purity of line, . . . Forain concentrated more on character-revealing gestures, social situations, and the conversations and expressions of his subjects.”¹ This is a fitting description for this picture, since Forain has not depicted a dancer on stage performing for an audience or backstage being persuaded by an *abonné*, or even practicing her craft as he did in the Clark’s sketch of a *Ballet Dancer Seen from the Back*,² but rather has chosen an intimate, private moment.

Forain scholar Lillian Browse has said that Forain, unlike Degas, “had no respect for the dancer.”³ *Dancer in Her Dressing Room*, however, is a sympathetic view of the ballerina, not as a public figure or as an object of affection for the opposite sex, but as a hard-working professional at the end of a long day. The gesture of leaning over to adjust her slipper is clearly a habitual and often-repeated one. Shown backstage in private dressing quarters, she is most likely about to retire after a performance. Evidence of this is found not only in the woman presenting her tea, but also in the flowers on the table at left, perhaps sent by admirers wishing her well.

Dancer in Her Dressing Room was purchased by Sterling Clark when he was living in Paris in 1919, the year he and Francine were married, and while Forain was still active as a painter. Sir George Alexander Drummond (1829–1910) of Montreal owned the picture before Clark bought it from Knoedler. Drummond, a Scottish émigré to Canada, ran the Redpath Sugar Company after marrying the owner’s daughter, and later served as senator and head of the Bank of Montreal. Drummond was president of the Art Association of Montreal, which would later become the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Drummond’s large mansion housed his renowned collection of Old Masters and nineteenth-century European art, including significant works by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Charles-François Daubigny, and Degas, among many others, and he was one of the rare North American collectors of Pre-Raphaelite work.⁴ KAP

PROVENANCE Sir George Alexander Drummond, Montreal (d. 1910, his sale, Christie’s, London, 26 June 1919, no. 36, as *A Ballet Girl*, sold to Knoedler); [Knoedler, London, sold to Clark, 30 June 1919, as *A Ballet Girl*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1919–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1963, no. 1, ill., as *Danseuse dans sa loge*; Tokyo–Kagawa–Nara 1992–93, no. 34, ill.; Memphis 2002–3, no cat.; Portland 2008, pp. 87, 124–25, pls. 73, 107.

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 57, ill; *Emporium* 1963, p. 89, ill.; Browse 1978, pp. 107, 146, no. 30, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 1.1 cm thick with a slight convex warp, and chamfers 0.6 cm wide along the back edges. The grain runs horizontally and the back of the panel is varnished. The reverse bears the numeral “5,” signifying the standard French portrait size 35 x 27 cm. The partial oval colorman’s stamp “Moirinat” is more legible in infrared viewing. There are traction cracks on the upper left wall, and some age cracks in the white tabletop and scattered throughout the surface. The pale band in the hair above the dancer’s ear is a loss in the lower paint, revealing the ground layer. The radiograph shows a loss in the dancer’s foot near the lower edge of the picture. It is likely that the picture was treated by Madame Coince of Paris in 1935, and restored in 1949 by Charles De Wild of New York. It was cleaned again in 1992 to remove nicotine and grime and to thin the discolored varnish. Residues of a natural resin coating were left in the dark background and floor area due to solvent sensitivities. The present synthetic resin varnish is shinier where it covers the old varnish.

The off-white ground may be a commercially applied layer. No underdrawing was seen. There are incongruous vertical and diagonal strokes, primarily on the right half of the image, which stop 0.3 cm short of the panel’s edges. The X-radiograph suggests that these strokes were ridges left during the artist’s application with a palette knife of additional ground. Other anomalies are a line down the left edge, beneath the lampshades, and possible changes to the image in the lower right area. Much of the upper paint surface seems to be applied wet-into-wet, in a sketchy, paste-consistency manner, with very dry final scumbling. Sgraffito lines define the lower edge of the lampshade and the edge of the glass on the tray. Paint was also subtracted by the artist from the lower left corner. Thin purple and brown paint lines were added to outline the arms, hands, and legs.

1. Framingham 1979, p. 6.
2. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 1955.1773.
3. Browse 1978, p. 36.
4. *New York Times* 1919, p. 3; <http://www.themonitor.ca/Arts/Cultural-activities/2010-02-04/article-965255/Love,-inspiration-and-all-that-jazz!/1> (accessed 18 Dec. 2011).

142 | Reception at an Exhibition (*Réception artistique*) 1890s

Oil on canvas, 61 x 50.2 cm

Lower right: forain

1955-737

Forain was perhaps best known as a satirist. His earliest etchings date from about 1875 or 1876, and his successful career as an illustrator made him a fortune. Forain’s Impressionist style began about 1879, when he exhibited in the fourth Impressionist exhibition, and it lasted until about 1900, when he turned to a darker palette and more serious subjects. Forain continued his involvement with the Impressionists, participating in subsequent Impressionist exhibitions in 1880, 1881, and 1886. He mainly exhibited vigorous gouaches and watercolors in the first three Impressionist shows. After his first submission was rejected from the official Salon in 1874, he did not show there until 1884, a year in which there was no Impressionist exhibition. A favorite of the critics, including Joris-Karl



Fig. 142.1 Jean-Louis Forain, *The Ball (Madame Forain)*, c. 1880–1900. Ink, watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper, 39.7 x 30 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts (1955.1761)