



**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,
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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Jean-Augustin Franquelin

French, 1798–1839

143 | Reading to the Convalescent c. 1827

Oil on canvas, 61.3 x 50.4 cm

Lower left: Franquelin

1955.740

Jean-Augustin Franquelin is one of a multitude of technically accomplished minor masters of the first half of the nineteenth century who is little known today. The

artist's short life span adds to the relative rarity of his works. A lifelong resident of Paris, Franquelin began his artistic training in 1812 at the *École des Beaux-Arts* under the tutelage of Jean-Baptiste Regnault (1754–1829), a Neoclassical painter whose popularity once rivaled that of Jacques-Louis David. In Regnault's studio, Franquelin undoubtedly received the essential grounding in draftsmanship typical of the academic tradition, but the elder artist's interest in the Baroque art of Italy and the Low Countries was probably also influential. Franquelin exhibited regularly at the Salon, first showing there in 1819. He received a second-class medal at the Salon in 1827 and continued to exhibit

through 1839, the year of his death. Franquelin painted miniatures, history, and religious works, but genre paintings, particularly those featuring young women, became his specialty.

In this work, a couple sits within a salon comfortably appointed with typical accoutrements of the bourgeoisie, including artwork and fine woven rugs. The man reads from a small book and tenderly holds the hand of the woman, presumably his wife, who leans against her husband's shoulder and gently clasps his hand and arm with both of her own hands. They are closely watched over by an older woman draped in black, who is probably the widowed mother of the wife. The younger woman's infirmity is made apparent not only by her slumped posture and exhausted expression, but by a pillow supporting her back, a blanket on her lap, and even a teacup on the side table ready for the patient's refreshment. Despite her illness, the woman seems quietly content and her husband appears calm and tolerant as he tries to distract his wife from dwelling upon her ailment. She may be enduring the early symptoms of cholera, which spread at an alarming rate in the nineteenth century.¹ The painter has precisely delineated the details of the figures and their setting, and the work has a smooth, polished surface. The coloring is cool and restrained, save for a spare use of jewel-like tones of yellow and blue for the convalescent's skirt and blanket.

Reading to the Convalescent indicates that Franquelin was familiar with the genre paintings of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish artists such as Gerard ter Borch the younger or Gabriel Metsu, both of whom specialized in intimate scenes of domestic interiors. The earlier works became fashionable in Parisian art circles in the years prior to the Revolution, and the desire for northern genre pictures on the part of dealers and collectors continued well into the nineteenth century.² It is not only the subject matter of these works, but also their style, with a generally polished and meticulous application of paint, which appealed to modern tastes. Franquelin followed artists such as Louis-Léopold Boilly (cats. 18–20) in incorporating and updating the style and subject of seventeenth-century genre painting. Boilly, nearly forty years Franquelin's senior yet outliving him by several years, was supremely successful and was undoubtedly a primary inspiration to Franquelin. While Boilly's paintings, especially earlier in his career, sometimes offered the viewer some degree of titillation, Franquelin's canvas suggests a more

straightforward morality. Certainly in other paintings by Franquelin, such as *The Response to the Letter* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), also shown at the Salon of 1827, the follies of love are more obviously presented. *Reading to the Convalescent* seems to have directly inspired a work with an extremely similar theme and composition by Jean Gigoux (1806–1894), shown at the Salon of 1835.³

Reading to the Convalescent was once owned by the famous collector Alexandre du Sommerard, a French civil servant and amateur art historian best known for amassing a collection of medieval art that he displayed in his Parisian home, the Hôtel de Cluny. His collection became the impetus for his writing *Les Arts du Moyen-Age*, and later became the nucleus of the well-known Musée de Cluny. Before devoting himself to earlier art, Du Sommerard collected works by his contemporaries, most of which he sold before 1832 to finance further purchases. Du Sommerard lent *Reading to the Convalescent*, along with another painting by Franquelin and works by numerous other artists, to the Salon of 1827, probably in part to increase their eventual salability. The painting then passed into the hands of a French dealer and publisher of prints called Moyon, about whom little is known, but who seemed to specialize in the paintings of Franquelin. Moyon liquidated his stock at auction in 1838, and offered twenty-six paintings by Franquelin, along with works by other minor painters, such as Jules Coignet (another specialty of the dealer), as well as paintings by better-known masters, including Théodore Géricault and Anne-Louis Girodet de Roucy-Trioson. The present painting is clearly described in the sale catalogue: "In the interior of a salon, a young man is seated next to his sick wife; he seeks to distract her with his reading; the mother, resting against the armchair of her daughter, contemplates her children."⁴ KP

PROVENANCE Alexandre du Sommerard, Paris (by 1827); [Moyon, Paris, by 1837, his sale, Pierret, Paris, 16–20 Jan. 1838, no. 364]; [Neuville & Vivien, Paris, sold to Clark, 10 Mar. 1931, as *La lecture à la convalescente*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1931–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1827, no. 414, as *La convalescente*, lent by Du Sommerard.

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The original support is a moderately heavy linen with an old, possibly nineteenth-century, glue/

paste-linen lining and a five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. The thread count of the primary fabric is inaccessible, but it seems about the same weight as the lining canvas (16 thread/cm). An old tear repair runs through the young woman's knee area, slightly visible in raking or reflected light. There is also an old area of disturbed paint between the heads of the couple. In many areas, age and traction cracks are combined into one network, with brown staining of the ground layer from the lining adhesive. There are several concentric crack systems in the young woman's skirt, some pulling forward slightly, and patches of fine diagonal cracks which may indicate the presence of a twill weave canvas. The varnish is thick and yellow, and has a glassy sheen with its own crack network. The ultraviolet light fluorescence is very dense, as if an early resin layer remained over most of the picture; this is confirmed by a 1935 invoice stating that Madame Coincé only resaturated the surface, probably adding more varnish. The fluorescence is deep enough to mask the extent of the old retouching. Some traction cracks in the older woman's clothing and the background are retouched, as are the dark outlines and folds of the man's coat, and his proper right hand. There is solvent abrasion in the man's dark hair, the black costume elements of the old woman, and several areas of the younger woman's skirt.

The white ground layers are quite thick, creating a smooth, level surface on this fairly coarse fabric. A little underdrawing can be seen with infrared viewing, such as changes in the line of the man's collar. A few lines in the faces can be detected using low magnification. There are also some artist's changes or anomalies in the paint structure visible in infrared reflectography: light patches in the area above the table where the screen now appears, and the changed angle of the draped curtain in the background door opening. There may be a brown-toned wash drawing beneath the upper colors, and many pigments, when scanned with a microscope, have the coarse look typical of hand-ground preparation. The brushwork is clean, minute, vehicular, and fluid. Wet-into-wet brushwork was used only within the confines of individual forms, such as the heavy nap weave of the oriental carpet covering the table.

1. As explored by Weisberg 2004.
2. See Chu 1974.
3. Location unknown; reproduced in Rosenthal 1913, p. 309. Although the mother is absent, all other details, including the book on the floor, pillow, side table, and even a similar screen and painting, appear in Gigoux's painting.
4. Pierret 1838, p. 31: "Dans l'intérieur d'un salon, un jeune homme est assis à côté de son épouse malade; il cherche à la distraire par la lecture; la mère, appuyée sur le fauteuil de sa fille, contemple ses enfants."

Émile Friant

French, 1863–1932

144 | Madame Seymour 1889

Oil on panel, 28.5 x 19 cm

Upper right: E. Friant / 89

1955.741

Born in the small town of Dieuze in the Moselle region of France, Émile Friant received his initial artistic training in the nearby city of Nancy, to which he moved as a child. His first teacher was the painter Louis Théodore Devilly (1818–1886), who had been a pupil of Eugène Delacroix in Paris. Thus, despite his provincial background, Friant had ties to the Parisian art world from an early age; an interplay between the capital and his adopted town remained a constant throughout his life. Friant distinguished himself at the local Salon (*La Société Lorraine des amis des arts*) in 1878, which led to a scholarship to further his studies in Paris. He was accepted into the atelier of the well-known painter Alexandre Cabanel (1823–1889) and studied with the master for one year. In Paris he eventually came to favor a more naturalistic style than that promoted by Cabanel. Friant debuted at the Salon in Paris in 1882, and rapidly gained prominence. The year 1889 proved especially noteworthy for Friant, who collected the grand prize at the Salon that year for what is probably today his best known painting, *La Toussaint (All Saints' Day)* (Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts). That same year he also won a gold medal at the Exposition Universelle, decided to exhibit with the newly formed Société nationale des beaux-arts (Champ de Mars) as an alternative to the official Salon, was made *chevalier* of the Legion of Honor, and executed the portrait seen here.

In this small painting on panel, a fashionably dressed woman shown in three-quarter view gazes directly at the viewer with a calm and confident expression. She sits erectly in a simple armchair with her gloved hands resting lightly in her lap, and wears a dark teal-colored dress and an elaborate black hat. The sitter's identity has not yet been ascertained, and the current title comes from an old label attached by Sterling Clark to the back of the panel that indicates the sitter is "Madame Seymour." She seems to be the same "Madame S." seen in a portrait that Friant exhibited at the Champ de Mars in 1891.¹ Given the English surname attached to the sitter as well as the