



**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)



169

169 | Landscape with a River 1892

Oil on canvas, 38 x 46.4 cm

Lower left: hⁱ harpignies 92.

1955-759

When Harpignies bought his summer house, La Trémellerie, at Saint-Privé in 1878, he chose to spend the summer months in an area characterized by rivers. La Trémellerie was near the River Loing, and the Yonne and the Loire were not far away. It is not surprising, therefore, that the artist increasingly turned to riverine imagery in his art. Adeline Cacan, writing in 1973 from the Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, stated that the picture “very certainly” is a view of the Loire River, noting that Harpignies painted that river often.¹ While it is true that the Loire was frequently named in the titles of Harpignies’s exhibited paintings, his views of rivers more often than not are generic, that is, they contain no place markers such as identifiable church towers or skylines of towns. Rather, pictures like *Landscape with a River* offer the viewer a glimpse of an entirely typical French scene, one whose place of inspiration remains unknown. It is, in fact, the anonymity of much of Harpignies’s art that constitutes his celebration of

the French countryside: beauty and charm can be found anywhere.

Landscape with a River is a view from one bank of a river to the other. Close to the near bank is a small island, which forms a subsidiary channel. Cows are grazing on the island, with no need of fence or cowherd; they cannot stray. Small boats are tied up so that people can make the longer trip to the far bank. The painting is artfully constructed so that the eye is drawn from the relative darkness of the foreground, where the bank is enlivened by the linear arabesques of spindly branches and weeds, to the full sunlight on the water and far bank, where forms are more broadly and fluently painted.

Harpignies’s insistence on firm drawing is evident in this small painting, which he made in his eighth decade. “Drawing is the basis of everything,” he wrote in an unpublished manuscript.² At another time he wrote: “As soon as the design is well in place and well constructed, one can say that my landscape is finished; color comes later and it sometimes happens that it looks superfluous.”³ The primacy given to draftsmanship was appreciated. In summing up the artist’s life on the occasion of his death, one critic wrote: “Harpignies cannot be called a colourist in the true meaning of the word; colour only serves him to

bring out the shape of the objects he depicts, to give them their proper value in the scheme he has evolved in his mind, which the true precision of his unflinching hand puts before our eye.”⁴

If his interest in line and structure set Harpignies apart from trends in French painting that emphasized flux and evanescence, it did not prevent him from enjoying a successful career. He received honors and commissions, taught many students, including wealthy amateurs with whom he wintered on the Riviera after 1885, and profited from brisk sales, particularly of his watercolors.

Robert Sterling Clark first saw this painting at a sale at Parke-Bernet in March 1942; he called it “an excellent early Harpignies.” It did not sell, and Clark was able to buy it after the auction. The picture “improved a lot” after a tinted varnish was removed, Clark noted in his diary.⁵ Confusing the matter, however, is the double layer of varnish currently on the painting, the top layer of which has yellowed. This raises the question whether the cleaning recorded by Clark actually took place. The fact that Clark wildly misdated the picture would not have bothered him; the details of biography and other art-historical niceties were of no account to a man who prided himself on his discrimination and taste.

The picture looks much like one with the French Gallery, New York, in 1909, entitled *L'Isle de Sable, Loire*.⁶ FEW

PROVENANCE Private collection, Pittsburgh; sale, Parke-Bernet, New York, 5 Mar. 1942, no. 16, as *River Landscape*, sold to Clark; Robert Sterling Clark (1942–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1959b, ill.

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 72, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The original support is a moderate-weave linen (approximately 16 threads/cm), glue-lined to linen of similar weight. The replaced, twentieth-century stretcher is a traditional five-member mortise-and-tenon design, made from what looks like a light-colored mahogany. The stretcher itself is slightly torqued from the lower right to the upper left corners and is therefore slightly out of plane. The picture was lined in the mid-twentieth century and possibly cleaned by Murray in 1942. The present surface has two layers of discolored varnish; the upper one was applied while the picture was framed. There is minor traction crackle in the green areas. The varnish has streaking in the sky, short fractures throughout, and some physical shattering. There are

dark brush hairs embedded in the varnish on the right edge. The surface reflectance is shiny.

The ground is an off-white layer. Infrared light examination reveals the black sketch outlines of shrubs and their reflections in the water's surface. These details may be visible due to the thinner paint application in this area. The brushwork is very lively, especially in the trees. The consistency of the paint is vehicular with complex layering of wet paint strokes and a dry scumbling technique. There is a possible use of a water-based medium for some of the brown details in the upper layer.

1. Correspondence from 3 May 1973 in the Clark's curatorial file: “très certainement.”
2. Miquel 1975, vol. 3, p. 772: “Le dessin est la base de tout.”
3. Gosset 1982, pp. 43–44: “Dès que mon dessin est bien en place et bien construit, déjà on peut dire que mon paysage est fait; le couleur vient après et il arrive parfois qu'elle apparaît comme superflue.”
4. *Burlington Magazine* 1916, p. 268.
5. RSC Diary, 4 and 27 Mar. 1942.
6. Photograph in the Frick Art Reference Library, New York.

Ferdinand Heilbuth

French, born Germany, 1826–1889

170 | Woman with Flowers c. 1875–80

Oil on panel, 33 x 20.2 cm

Lower left: FHeilbuth [FH in monogram]

1955.762

A young woman walks through a field thick with wildflowers at the edge of a wood, carrying an armful of freshly picked blooms. The roof of a house in the background shows that this is not the open countryside. Yet, despite the imagery of lavish natural growth, the tone of the picture is not festive. The woman's black cape and dark brown skirt stand out against the flowers, and her tightly enclosed form and sideways glance seem to suggest some inner sorrow, in contrast to the natural plenty around her. Unfortunately, the original title of the picture is unknown, and we have no further clue to help interpret the image.

Heilbuth, born in Hamburg, the son of a rabbi, was trained in Düsseldorf and Rome before coming to Paris to study with Charles Gleyre (1806–1874). He gained a reputation during the 1860s for both historical genre scenes and subjects from contemporary life. Paintings