



**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,  
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Details:

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and no glazes. There is an overall pebbly texture probably due to the canvas weave. The black signature is soft and fuzzy looking, and may have been painted into the varnish.

1. Bénézit 2006, vol. 6, p. 889.
2. RSC Diary, 29 July 1928.
3. Ibid.
4. Letter from Marcelle Guinard to Sterling and Francine Clark, 21 June 1947. See the Clark's curatorial file.
5. Ibid.: "le charme et la vie des portraits de Fra Angelico, toujours coupés aux genoux . . . venait de ce que les figures étaient toujours faite entièrement d'abord, puis coupées, ensuite, il reste une intensité bien plus grande dans la fragment gardé." A more recent letter from Nicole Guinard to Richard Rand, dated 14 May 2012, provided an approximate date for the picture and confirmed that she is the young girl depicted. With her letter she included a copy of a photograph on which the larger painting was based, showing the two sisters playing a board game, with Nicole dressed in the same white smock or dress over a dark top and wearing the same braids as in the present painting. See the Clark's curatorial file.

## Dudley Hardy

English, 1867–1922

### 167 | Sarah Bernhardt 1889

Oil on panel, 24.1 x 16.5 cm

Upper right: SARAH. BERNHARDT. / DUDLEY. HARDY / PARIS / 1889.

1955.760

Inscribed and signed prominently on the diminutive panel, Dudley Hardy's 1889 portrait of Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) stands at the intersection of the artist's graphic work, for which he was best known, and his paintings. His characterization of the most famous female actress of the day as a mannequin for a particularly dramatic couture confection links this work to his contributions to the illustrated magazines and posters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The nearly monochromatic palette reinforces this connection to Hardy's black-and-white oeuvre, while his stylized rendition of a well-recognized celebrity places him within the Art Nouveau movement of European design at this period.

Hardy himself argued that while graphic work and painting were by all accounts inimical, he believed

that their competing goals could be overcome. Conceding to Arthur Lawrence in the *Art Journal* of 1897 that "in persistently doing black-and-white work you may, perhaps, momentarily lose sense of colour," he counters that "if you really possess the instinct, you can get back to colour-work almost at once."<sup>1</sup> Hardy's self-confidence in his ability to control color is shown in his masterly handling of a limited range of hues to create a depiction at once ethereal and commanding of the Divine Sarah.

Seated on a cloudlike chaise, the actress twists her torso to face the viewer and to display her impeccable posture. Her extended left arm, resting theatrically on a polar-bear skin, draws attention to the artist's inscription, as well as to her elegant white above-the-elbow gloves. The frothy white jabot frames the delicate features of her face, which is crowned by her red hair. Shadowed by this dramatic chignon, her eyes barely peek out from the fringe, surrounded by a mysterious pool of darkness that contrasts with the cool lavender-tinted gray tones of her elegant dress. The gown's cascading train fans out at the lower edge of the image, elongating Bernhardt's famously slender frame even further. In a respectful way, therefore, Hardy highlights the features that were the source of parody in the numerous caricatures published in the French press.<sup>2</sup>

Although it is painted on a considerably smaller scale and shows her seated in isolation, Hardy's depiction of the actress positioned as if enthroned on a heavenly cloud calls to mind one of the most famous portraits of an actress, *Sarah Siddons as a Tragic Muse* by Sir Joshua Reynolds (The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino). The connection goes beyond composition as Sarah Bernhardt was in many ways the nineteenth-century equivalent of the eighteenth-century tragedienne.<sup>3</sup> As Mary Louise Roberts has observed in her study of women in late nineteenth-century France, "More than a brilliant actress, Bernhardt was a spectacle herself."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the 2005–6 exhibition held at the Jewish Museum brought together not only a large selection of portraits of the actress in all media but also the costumes and accessories—even furniture—that enabled her to construct an opulent and exotic stage set for her life.<sup>5</sup> Hardy, too, painted the actress a number of times. In an undated, more conventional three-quarter-view, bust-length portrait (Graves Gallery, Museums Sheffield), the actress's trademark red hair is covered by a broad-brimmed hat. Hardy once again sets the actress in a luxurious environment in a colorful full-length profile portrait (with the dealer

Lowell Libson, London, 2011). In this case, the actress is depicted holding a remarkably long quill pen in her right hand with a large document made conspicuous by a red wax seal near her left.

Although her autobiographical *Ma Double Vie*, first published in 1907, lacks specifics and ends in 1881, her matter-of-fact description of the coffin “where I frequently installed myself to study my parts”<sup>6</sup> gives some sense of her dramatic gestures off stage as well as on. Bernhardt debuted at the Comédie Française in 1862, and stayed with the premier company less than a year, although she returned ten years later. Her first triumph came in Victor Hugo’s *Ruy Blas* in 1872, but her signature role was the courtesan in *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils. She toured extensively, going to North America for the first time in 1880–81. The year Hardy painted this portrait, she performed in Egypt and Turkey. EP

**PROVENANCE** Galerie Thomas Knorr, Munich (by 1901, possibly until c. 1918); Madame P., Paris;<sup>7</sup> [Knoedler, Paris, sold to Clark, Nov. 1935]; Robert Sterling Clark (1935–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Munich 1893, p. 32, no. 581; Williamstown 1976a, no cat.; Williamstown 1980a, no cat.; Williamstown 1982a, no. 12; New York 1984b, pp. 47, 153, ill.; Williamstown 1988–89, no cat.; Williamstown 1991b, no cat.; Williamstown 1998–2000, no cat.; New York 2005–6, pp. 14–15, 180, no. 5, fig. 16.

**REFERENCES** Ostini 1901, pp. 134–37, ill.; Seemann 1927, p. 374, no. 3256, ill.<sup>8</sup>

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a mahogany panel 0.5 cm thick; its grain runs vertically. Three of the reverse edges are chamfered, and the left edge is roughly cut, even through the paint layers, suggesting that the artist may have trimmed the picture after it was painted. Incongruous patches of color below several areas of the image suggest the possibility that the panel was reused, although a radiograph was not helpful in detecting a lower image. A row of raised dots that do not appear to be connected to the portrait runs horizontally through the center right. Widely spaced age and traction cracks form a square pavement pattern across the surface, which may be the result of drying problems between two layers of paint. The color of two round areas of rouge on the sitter’s cheeks may have faded somewhat. The edges are inpainted, and the 1982 synthetic resin surface coating has a low, even gloss.

The pinkish cream-colored ground may have been unevenly applied by the artist, as there is none along the right edge. The X-radiograph shows horizontal ground strokes, possibly suggesting that the panel orientation was



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originally in the other direction. No underdrawing was found. Using infrared reflectography, unrelated swirling shapes are visible to the right of the sitter’s head, drawn in black below the final paint, along with dark red paint below the lower portion of the gray dress. The paint is applied in a dry, sketchy manner, and there are pale brown brush hairs, perhaps sable, embedded in the surface.

1. Lawrence 1897, p. 355.
2. Some of these *portraits charges* are reproduced in Gilbert 2000.
3. For the most recent analysis of the phenomenon of the actress in eighteenth-century Britain, see Asleson 2003.
4. Roberts 2002, p. 171.
5. See New York 2005–6.
6. Bernhardt 1977, p. 258.
7. The invoice from Knoedler to Clark quotes a letter from a Madame P., who they call a former owner of the painting; her letter describes some of the painting’s provenance.
8. Listed erroneously as in the collection of the Galerie Knorr.