



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

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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)



179

179 | Poultry c. 1855–60

Oil on canvas, 21.4 x 34 cm

Lower left: ch. Jacque

1955-779

Charles-Émile Jacque may be better known today by people who study prints than by those who study paintings. Trained by a maker of maps, Jacque made his first print at age seventeen. A copy of a head of a woman by Rembrandt, it announced his interest in seventeenth-century Dutch art and his ambition in pitting himself against a master printmaker. After serving in the military for five years, from 1831 to 1836, Jacque went to London, where he made illustrations for novels and plays by, among others, Charles Dickens, Oliver Goldsmith, and Shakespeare. Back in France, Jacque continued to make illustrations and caricatures, along with copies after Old Master prints, both Dutch and Italian.¹

The cholera outbreak in Paris in 1848 prompted Jacque to move his family to Barbizon. He and Jean-François Millet had been neighbors in Paris since 1846, and the two families settled in Barbizon in June 1849. Jacque quickly adopted the rural life, with a city dweller's sense of opportunity. About 1854, he began to raise chickens, developed a special kind of chicken house, sold fertilized eggs by mail order, and, later, in the mid-1860s, raised asparagus for the Paris market. He bought up plots of land and houses in Barbizon but had to sell them in the mid-1860s when he needed money.

Seemingly unafraid of work and seeking out chal-

lenges, Jacque, born and raised in Paris, quickly learned about chickens. It was not enough for him to raise the birds and paint them; he proselytized his views through articles in magazines and a 350-page book. First published in 1858, *Le Poulailleur* was an authority in its field for decades, enjoying an eighth edition in 1899.² A comprehensive book, *Le Poulailleur* discusses suitable enclosures for the birds, proper care of the eggs and the just-hatched birds, food, the different breeds of chickens, diseases, how to kill the birds for market, and even helpfully offers some recipes. Jacque provided the drawings for the book's many detailed illustrations.³ Despite the plethora of illustrations in *Le Poulailleur* (many breeds are represented only by a feather, not a view of the whole bird or even the head), the breed of the rooster in *Poultry*, with his distinctive wattle—rising up at the rear, its sides forming a trough shape—cannot at present be identified.⁴

The Goncourt brothers were acquainted with Jacque, visiting him in Barbizon in 1853 and using his experience for local color in their novel *Manette Salomon* (1867).⁵ The Crescent family in the novel raised chickens, and the birds were cared for by Madame Crescent. “Madame Crescent had a taste, a passion, for poultry, spread and popularized throughout all of Barbizon by the ‘chicken mania’ of Jacque, the painter-etcher. At the bottom of the garden, in the field, she created a little park divided into four compartments,”⁶ just like the one Jacque built.

Jacque was a successful chicken farmer, and his mail-order business of shipping fertilized eggs was among the first of its kind. But his paintings reflected

conventional practice, not his experience. These are not Jacque's own chickens that lived in the houses he had purpose-built for them.⁷ The hay crib at the upper left signals that these birds are in a barn meant for larger animals. Jacque's interiors of barns with sheep often include chickens in the foreground.⁸ On a traditional farm, chickens were not confined, as they were under Jacque's regimen, and wandered where they would. The artist would not have approved of the water dish set out at lower right. In his book, he recommends a zinc container with a basin near the bottom that filled with water as the chickens drank from it, a system that assures clean water.⁹ Terra-cotta basins, like the one seen here, are acceptable as long as they are placed in the shade and away from where the chickens walk. The water in this one, between a doorway, a hay crib, and either a window or a door, at right, would be rendered impotable almost as soon as the basin was put on the floor. Conventional, too, is the number of chickens, ten, to one rooster. Jacque recommended a four-to-one ratio.¹⁰ The artist's monoculture of chickens may have been profitable, but it was not picturesque.

Toward the end of the 1850s, Jacque's interest in poultry waned, and by the early 1860s, he had sold his stock. In 1863 and 1864, he also sold the property in Barbizon on which he had raised the chickens. Although he continued to paint chickens for several decades, this painting, with its fine detail and careful attention to light, probably dates to the mid- to late 1850s. The red of combs and wattles enlivens the overall tawny tonalities, and the rich colors are an analogue for the inherent earthiness of the subject. His approach was appreciated by contemporaries. René Ménard, writing in 1875, explained why:

If the word pittoresque did not exist in the French language, one would have to invent it for the works of Charles Jacque; and what is the picturesque, if not the sentiment of life in its most familiar form? . . . the expression [of a farm] conveys the charm of a rustic scene by giving us the illusion of reality. Why have Charles Jacque's works such a powerful charm? It is because they always show us things or persons such as they are in nature: because he studies them in the course of their usual life and avocations; and because this sincerity carries us without effort to the scene that he chooses to represent. . . . [H]is barns, with

*cobwebs hanging from their ceilings, charm us precisely because the painter has not recourse to any tricks, but merely tells us, in his plastic language, the things that he saw, observed, and studied in the country.*¹¹

When Robert Sterling Clark saw this picture on 7 October 1940, at Carroll Carstairs's gallery, he thought it a "nice small Jacques [*sic*] of 'Chickens'" and bought it, paying \$200, half the asking price.¹² FEW

PROVENANCE [Carroll Carstairs, New York, sold to Clark, 2 Nov. 1940]; Robert Sterling Clark (1940–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1958a, ill.; Williamstown 1959b, ill.; Williamstown 1979b, no cat.; Williamstown 1984a, p. 64, no. 86.

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 73, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a very fine weight linen (31 threads/cm) with an old, pre-1940 glue lining onto a heavier fabric (19 threads/cm). The present replaced stretcher has five members with a vertical crossbar. At the time of lining, some of the artist's tacking margins were flattened out and incorporated into the picture, making the present dimension larger than the original in both directions. The tacking margins are visible on the surface on three sides, but the right one was apparently cut away. Old diagonal stress cracks are found in the paint layer in the lower right and in both upper corners. There are scattered traction cracks and long, widely spaced and darkened age cracks throughout, some beginning to open laterally. All four edges have fills and oil retouchings, with the left, top, and bottom edges repainted 1.9 cm into the image and extending onto original paint. The painting was superficially cleaned and revarnished shortly after purchase in 1940, by Murray (Beers Brothers) via Durand-Ruel. There are two discolored natural resin varnish layers, the upper one applied while the picture was framed. The surface gloss is uneven in reflected light, with matte areas in the upper half of the picture.

The lower ground is comprised of thick white layers, which effectively hide the fabric's texture. There is a thinner blue-gray layer atop the white, which the artist may have applied. No underdrawing was detected using the infrared equipment, although there may be a brown ink sketch below the paint. The paint layer is very vehicular in consistency and was applied with wet-into-wet brushstrokes. Both brown and black inks were used for detailing in the birds' eyes and feathers, with ink sometimes found between paint layers. The signature was also executed in brown ink.



180

1. Georgel 1987. For a list of works illustrated by Jacque, see "Livres illustrés par Charles Jacque," in Fanica 1995, p. 284.
2. See Fanica 1995, p. 284, for a list of some of Jacque's writings on poultry raising.
3. I consulted, on microfilm, a later edition, Jacque 1887.
4. See Jacque 1887 and Périquet 1994.
5. Ricatte 1989, vol. 1, pp. 80–81, undated entry, sometime in August 1853.
6. Goncourt and Goncourt 1868, vol. 2, p. 68: "Madame Crescent avait pour la volaille, le goût, la passion, répandus et vulgarisés dans tout Barbison par la *poulo-manie* de Jacque, le peintre graveur. Au bout du jardin, dans le champ, elle avait créé un petit parc divisé en quatre compartiments."
7. See Fanica 1995, p. 66, for an illustration of these special houses.
8. See the etching *La Grande Bergerie* (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 1955-2079) and the painting, *The Sheepfold* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).
9. See Jacque 1887, p. 30.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
11. Ménard, *The Portfolio*, Sept. 1875, quoted in Clement and Hutton 1883, vol. 2, p. 5.
12. RSC Diary, 7 Oct. 1940.

180 | Landscape with Sheep c. 1855–94

Oil on panel, 21 x 37.6 cm

Lower left: ch. Jacque

1955-780

In the late 1850s, when Jacque's interest in poultry diminished, sheep replaced chickens as the primary motif in his paintings. When he pictured sheep in barns or farmyards, chickens are often in the foreground (see cat. 179). A cow, as in this panel, rather than chickens, sometimes accompanies the sheep when the weather permitted grazing out of doors.¹

Unlike his other paintings of sheep at pasture, in which all the animals are, if not individualized, at least detailed,² the sheep in the background here are rendered as rounded, light-colored shapes, hardly animals. The cow and her herder are likewise summarily indicated, as is the woman at the base of the tree. The exception to this indefiniteness is the sheep third from the left in the foreground, facing into the picture at a slight angle to the right. A sheep in this position appears in several of Jacque's pictures, suggesting that, rather than painting on the spot, Jacque reused motifs throughout his oeuvre.

That said, the brushwork is not consistent with other paintings by him. Here the trees are dabbed on, and strokes of green paint to the right seem hastily applied, divorced from descriptive function. Jacque was a successful printmaker for many years before