



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME ONE

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With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Paintings by Lépine often show men, horses, cranes, and carts on the banks and quais of the Seine, emblems of a modern economy. By showing instead a quiet stretch of narrow river, indistinct buildings in the middle ground and far distance on the left, and a trio of ducks in the foreground, Lépine evokes, if not the past, at least not the active present. When landscapists paint a specific locale, they may do so not to record the visible landmarks—a particular bend in the river, the outline of a hill against the sky—so much as to use the stable elements as a foil against which ephemeral effects can be better studied and recorded. This may be the case with this small picture painted on paperboard. By making the forms broad and not needing to delineate details of boats, Lépine was free to concentrate on the sun coming through the tree near the end of the spit of land, skimming over and burnishing the surface of the water, and highlighting angles of buildings that catch the light. In sensibility this work resembles much of Charles-François Daubigny's work, with its dual emphasis on light and rural France untouched by modern-day life.

Lépine signed this picture, indicating that he considered it a finished work. He included views of this area in a sale he held of his pictures at the Hôtel Drouot on 14 February 1881.² The one illustrated in the catalogue raisonné (no. 382), although smaller than the work under discussion, nonetheless appears to be more carefully painted. The trees look as if they were scrubbed and dabbed on, with the result that the foliage appears as an amorphous mass. Indistinct, too, are the buildings on the far shore; they are only barely articulated. Such paint handling, although resulting in an unattractive surface, nonetheless points to the artist's willingness to experiment to achieve a desired effect. FEW

PROVENANCE [M. Newman, London, sold to Clark, 29 Nov. 1937]; Robert Sterling Clark (1937–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS London 1926, no cat.³

REFERENCES Schmit and Schmit 1993, p. 161, no. 384, ill., as *La Seine à Conflans-Sainte-Honorine*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a moderately thick paper or thin wood-pulp board mounted on a fairly old glue lining. The surface is dished, and a cut through the left edge is now lifting. The six-member stretcher is warped, with the lower right corner turned forward. There is a label on the reverse for the framer and restorer William Marchant, London, who may

have treated or possibly lined the work in the 1930s. There is severe frame rabbit abrasion and framing nail damage, as well as a furrow along the lower edge made when the paint was young. Traction cracks appear where thin paint runs over very thick applications, and drying and age cracks show in all the pale colors. The paint is abraded by solvents and heavily repainted. The surface coatings are shiny, extremely yellow, and uneven in appearance. The ultraviolet fluorescence is dense, with small upper retouches visible in the sky, and broad reworking below the varnish in most dark passages.

The ground is a thin off-white layer. The coarse texture of the surface seems to stem more from the painting technique than the ground application. Although there is no trace of any underdrawing, infrared examination indicates that the buildings on the left were originally larger in scale and were painted out to make them smaller. At present, these changes can be seen with the unaided eye, where abrasion reveals darker colors below. Other dark areas in the skyline and buildings may also indicate changes by the artist. The paint is applied with dry strokes of dark paint over light-colored impastos. There is some wet-into-wet work in the middle ground, but most of the trees and water shadows are built up using dry scumbled brushwork over heavier strokes.

1. Robert Schmit to author, 18 May 2004, reported that Lépine worked in the area in the years 1878 to 1880 but gave no corroborating evidence.
2. SS 379 and 382.
3. A printed label on the back of the work, numbered 129, states that it was exhibited at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1926, but no further information has been found.

Attributed to Stanislas Lépine

191 | Les Champs-Élysées 19th century

Oil on canvas, 21.6 x 27 cm

Lower right: S. Lépine

1955-788

Of the four paintings in the Clark collection with Stanislas Lépine's signature, this canvas exhibits the loosest, sketchiest technique. The execution here of a view up the Champs-Élysées toward the Arc de Triomphe, the Place de la Concorde at the viewer's back, is so free as to verge on formlessness. Robert Schmit and Manuel Schmit did not include it in the catalogue raisonné they compiled of the artist's works.¹



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Lépine often painted the parks of Paris and people at their leisure strolling through them. In the nineteenth century, as now, the Champs-Élysées was a place to stroll, to see and be seen, just as the less trafficked gardens and parks were. And even though Lépine depicted the commerce on the River Seine and the canals of Paris, he did not paint the bustle of contemporary street life, as did his contemporaries Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet.

The subtlety that characterizes Lépine's other paintings in the Clark collection is missing here. Unlike the tonal gradations in the other paintings that create a suffusing atmosphere, here harsh contrasts of dark and light jar the eye. The vermilion of the sunset and the red and white of the dress in the foreground stand out starkly. The clumsy, nonorganic brushwork does not correspond to the structure of the objects being depicted.

Although Lépine sold his works to dedicated collectors, a few dealers, and through public sales, he was never well off and left his widow with debts. It is thus hard to explain this painting purporting to be by the modest Lépine, as it conforms in neither technique nor subject matter to his known works. The painting is notable, however, as one of the few purchased by Francine Clary before her marriage to Robert Sterling Clark, though their relationship had already begun.

She was perhaps motivated by the location depicted, as it was not far from Clark's Paris residence. FEW

PROVENANCE [A. Gassot, Paris, sold to Clary, 12 July 1917]; Francine Clary, later Mrs. Robert Sterling Clark (1917–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown 1958a, ill.; Williamstown 1959b, ill.; Williamstown 1980a, no cat.; Williamstown 1987–88, no cat.

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 75, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a coarse canvas (13 threads/cm), glue-lined onto a slightly finer canvas (19 threads/cm). The threads of the original fabric are out of square and the corners damaged, which suggests that it may not have been stretched at the time of painting. The stretcher is probably a replacement. Small square cracks follow the weave, and larger age cracks are scattered in the surface. Along the right edge are a bulge and a group of dents and losses. Shattered paint occurs in the lower left corner and the upper left tree, and there is abrasion in the thinly painted dark colors, especially the brown under-sketch color. The painting was cleaned in 1976 by Barbara Beardsley. There is presently no inpainting, although there is some indication of artist's reworking in the sky around the trees and in the roadway. The surface coating is uneven in distribution and gloss.

The ground layer is off-white in color and thin enough

Attributed to Lépine

to allow the canvas weave to show. Cusping in the threads along only the top edge suggests that the support may have been cut from a larger stretched canvas; the remaining three edges show no such weave distortion. No underdrawing was detected, although there may be a black and brown painted sketch or full-covering imprimatura layer below the final colors. The paint is applied wet-into-wet in some areas. The entire lower edge has been repainted, possibly by the artist, as have reworked areas in the sky.

1. Galerie Schmit to Martha Asher, 11 Mar. 1999; in the Clark's curatorial file.

Philippe-Jacques Linder

French, active 1857–1880

192 | Spring 1870s

Oil on canvas, 32.7 x 22.5 cm

Lower left: P. Linder

1955.792

193 | Autumn 1870s

Oil on canvas, 32.7 x 22.3 cm

Lower left: P. Linder.

1955.793

These two small canvases, evidently a pair, fall into the same category as Alfred Stevens's *The Four Seasons* (cats. 319–22), in presenting the imagery of the seasons in contemporary terms, rather than through traditional allegory. Linder, though, rather than focusing on a single female figure, presents spring and autumn in terms of happy and unhappy lovers, and, implicitly, the beginning and end of a relationship, as the happy togetherness of the poses and expressions in *Spring* gives way to the distanced, distracted figures in *Autumn*. The tonality of the figures' clothing and of the background woodland landscapes complements their expressions.

It is not clear whether we are meant to see the two pictures as representing the same couple in two stages of their relationship. The man's informal dress in *Spring*—consisting of a boater, pale suit, and casually knotted tie—contrasts with the more formal, and



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seemingly higher class, apparel of cutaway jacket and pocket square in *Autumn*. While this might suggest that two different couples are represented, the contrast is more pointed if they are understood to be the same figures in both. It might suggest that their relationship, carefree when on vacation in springtime, could not survive the resumption of more formal roles and the pressures of everyday propriety later in the year. Conversely, one of the focuses of moral anxiety in these years was people—both men and women—who dressed above their status, and thus were not what they appeared to be.¹ In this interpretation, the suggestion might be that when this couple abandoned their “true” informal or lower-class identities in order to seek advancement, their relationship was thrown into turmoil.

The free brushy handling of these two paintings is very different from the technique and teachings of Linder's teacher, the Swiss Neoclassical painter Charles Gleyre (1806–1874), with whom he studied after leaving his native Saarland for Paris. This treat-