



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

VOLUME TWO

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,
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

Nineteenth-Century European Paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute is published with the assistance of the Getty Foundation and support from the National Endowment for the Arts.



The Getty Foundation



Produced by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute
225 South Street, Williamstown, Massachusetts 01267
www.clarkart.edu

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Production by The Production Department,
Whately, Massachusetts
Printed on 135 gsm Gardapat Kiara
Color separations and printing by Trifolio, Verona

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Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London
P. O. Box 209040, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-9040
www.yalebooks.com/art

Printed and bound in Italy
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

Nineteenth-century European paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute / 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, Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley, Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Rogl an, James Rosenow, Zo  Samels, Fronia E. Wissman.

volumes cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-935998-09-9 (clark hardcover : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-0-300-17965-1 (yale hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Painting, European—19th century—Catalogs. 2. Painting—Massachusetts—Williamstown—Catalogs. 3. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute—Catalogs. I. Lees, Sarah, editor of compilation. II. Rand, Richard. III. Webber, Sandra L. IV. Title. V. Title: 19th-century European paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

ND457.S74 2012

759.9409'0340747441—dc23

2012030510

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209 | View of a Dutch Town 1873

Oil on canvas, 37 x 56.8 cm

Lower right: J. Maris fc [fecit] 73

1955.803

The Dutch painter Jacob Hendricus Maris established himself as a preeminent figure in The Hague School through his finely rendered landscapes. Maris showed talent in painting both rural and urban scenes that bore an indelible mark of the artist's homeland. He received most of his art education in the Netherlands, through apprenticeships and from teachers at the Academies in The Hague and Antwerp, but he also spent time in Germany, Switzerland, and France. Despite his international travel, however, Maris most frequently chose quintessentially Dutch geography and architecture, whether it was a windmill, the coast, or a drawbridge on a canal.

Maris's painting *View of a Dutch Town* in the Clark collection shows a town in the Netherlands from a viewpoint looking down the length of a canal. The banks of the waterway support buildings and trees, whose rich colors contrast with the pale blue and gray of the sky. In the foreground, a lone figure in a boat glides toward the right, where red brick buildings with white trim border the waterway. The man uses a long paddle to guide his boat and its bulky blue cargo slowly along. The calm water reflects the sky and the surrounding town. The sun's reflections

create a luminous path in the water toward the two bridges in the distance. The bridges visually separate the sky and water as they also physically connect the two sides of the canal. The drawbridge mechanism on one of the bridges tilts up to the left, pointing toward a conical roof that looks too small for the stone building on which it sits.

View of a Dutch Town resembles a number of towns in the Netherlands. Indeed, several different proposals for the identification of the site have been suggested, including the cities of Enkhuizen and Dordrecht. Enkhuizen has a monument that bears some similarities to the building with the steeped roof, but close examination of the painting reveals that the two are not the same. Likewise, the buildings seen in *View of a Dutch Town* do resemble those of Dordrecht, a city whose architecture is known to have inspired other paintings by Maris.¹ This would explain why *View of a Dutch Town* was called *View of Dordrecht* in the early twentieth century. It is most likely, however, that the city of Amsterdam served as the primary source for *View of a Dutch Town*. The unusual conical roof on the rounded building near the drawbridge appears to be based on the iconic Schreierstoren, a fifteenth-century fortress in Amsterdam. The Schreierstoren still stands today, but its situation within the city, particularly in the present day, is considerably different from that seen in the painting, making it unlikely that Maris meant *View of a Dutch Town* to be a faithful representation of Amsterdam. Maris often composed his townscapes from his imagination while still incorpo-

rating elements from existing locations.² This lends his paintings an air of specificity even when the image is not a precise record of an actual site.

In composing works like *View of a Dutch Town* from both real and imagined sources, Maris reused certain elements numerous times. He made the Schreierstoren the subject of many other paintings after 1872, such as his *The Schreierstoren, Amsterdam* of 1882, in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Another work in Sterling Clark's collection, entitled *Harbor Scene* (cat. 208) also features the telltale rooftop of the Schreierstoren among the buildings along the water's edge. If both of Clark's paintings are indeed based on the buildings of Amsterdam, *Harbor Scene* shows the opposite side of the Schreierstoren from that seen in *View of a Dutch Town*—as if Maris had sketched *Harbor Scene* from the bridge that is farthest from the viewer in *View of a Dutch Town*. Maris more often painted townscapes that include the Schreierstoren from the perspective depicted in *Harbor Scene*. It is possible that Clark purchased the more unusual viewpoint found in *View of a Dutch Town* to complement the Maris painting he already had in his possession.

Maris's ability to capture the essence of Dutch town- and landscapes won him admiration from his countrymen. Like many other European countries, the Netherlands experienced a renewed sense of nationalism in the nineteenth century. During the eighteenth century, landscapes had fallen out of favor, but Dutch scenes became a matter of national pride during Maris's lifetime. Artists like Maris painted scenes that harkened back to the Golden Age of Dutch painting in order to display patriotism and to take advantage of the market for this kind of work.³ Maris, however, did not fully devote himself to painting landscapes until the 1870s. His first efforts as an artist were genre scenes in the manner of his seventeenth-century Dutch predecessors.⁴ It was not until he moved to France in 1865 and came under the influence of the Barbizon School that he began to paint landscapes. When Maris left Paris in 1871 because of political unrest and returned to The Hague, his style as a landscape artist continued to develop and mature. Painted in 1873, *View of a Dutch Town* exemplifies the kind of landscape for which Maris is now praised. KA

PROVENANCE [Obach, London, in 1908]; S. von Denvies; James G. Shepherd, Scranton and New York (by 1913–d. 1935); Mrs. James G. Shepherd, New York, his wife, by

inheritance (in 1935, her sale, American Art Association, New York, 7 Nov. 1935, no. 70, ill., sold to Woods); W. H. Woods (from 1935); [Parish-Watson, New York, consigned to Knoedler, Nov. 1938]; [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 5 Jan. 1939]; Robert Sterling Clark (1939–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Brooklyn 1913, no cat.; New York 1917, no. 11, as *View of Dordrecht*; New York 1918, no. 22, as *View of Dordrecht*; Southampton–New York 1986, p. 163, no. 49, ill.; Williamstown 1990a, no cat.; Williamstown 1993a, no cat.

REFERENCES Sutton 1986a, p. 341; The Hague 1997, pp. 18–19, fig. 10.

TECHNICAL REPORT The original support is a moderate-weave linen (19–23 threads/cm), which was wax-resin lined to a very lightweight linen in 1981, due to numerous planar distortions, cupped paint, and embrittled fabric. The replaced stretcher is a four-member redwood ICA spring corner design. The pattern of old cupped cracks is visible as light lines on the reverse, although the cupping is being held flat by the lining. There is branching fine aperture crackle throughout the painting and longer branched stress cracks scattered in the surface. Small old losses are visible along the previously raised cupped cracks. There are some traction cracks in the foreground below the boat, and some old cracks are still visible in the flat brushwork of the clouds. Fracturing or crystallization of the new varnish has occurred, possibly due to a bond failure between the paint layer, which may bear some wax, and the varnish layer. This has caused some patches of whiteness in the surface where the light is being scattered by these disruptions in the varnish. In ultraviolet light, there is a small amount of old natural resin varnish remaining in dark passages, and no retouching is visible.

The ground is a warm pinkish-gray commercially applied layer. There was no underdrawing seen, although there were several detectable changes in the painted forms. In the center skyline, below the bridge crane, there were vertical lines now painted out. The paint technique uses a moderate thickness paste application with active brushwork. Some strokes are executed in the wet-into-wet technique, coupled with thick, dry scumbles and thin washes of dark colors over thicker pale colors. The sky was painted after the buildings, using a brush 1.3 cm wide, and brush hairs are deposited in several locations.

1. Paris–London–The Hague 1983, p. 207.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

4. For more on the trajectory of Maris's education and career, see the entry for *Harbor Scene* (cat. 208).