



**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,  
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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](http://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](http://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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## Maxime Maufra

French, 1861–1918

### 210 | The Loir at Poncé, Sarthe 1918

Oil on canvas, 54.3 x 62.5 cm

Lower right: Maufra 1918.

1955.805

This is the one of the last works made by the landscape painter and printmaker Maxime Maufra, who died very soon after its completion. It shows a river called the Loir (not to be confused with the Loire) in the Sarthe department of the Pays-de-la-Loire region west of Paris, near the village of Poncé.<sup>1</sup> Maufra spent extended periods of time in the area in 1917 and 1918, capping off years of traveling and painting throughout his native land. Nestled along the bend in the river, and occupying the center of the canvas, is an unassuming house. The house and trees along the banks, together with their reflections in the river, are the main focus of the composition. In fact, water in its many forms is almost ubiquitous in the paintings of Maufra. Although he also painted a number of townscapes, very few of his paintings show the human form, and if they do, it is always subsidiary to the landscape.

Maufra was born and raised in Brittany, in the lively city of Nantes, not far from the Atlantic coast. Early on he showed a penchant for both drawing and nature. A family friend, the artist Charles Le Roux (1841–1895), introduced him to painting *en plein air*. At the age of twenty, Maufra traveled to the United Kingdom, ostensibly to gain some experience in the business world. In England he discovered the paintings of John Constable and J. M. W. Turner, whose landscapes and seascapes were the catalysts for him to consider abandoning his earlier professional interests in favor of a career as an artist. Maufra later reminisced, “In my naïveté, I said to myself, I can paint like that!”<sup>2</sup> After returning to Nantes in 1884, he focused on his painting, and by 1889, he had given up his business pursuits. At first Maufra exhibited locally, and then in 1886, he showed in Paris at the Salon for the first time. He immediately attracted the attention of the Salon critics, and thereafter enjoyed a successful career, working mostly in Brittany, Normandy, and Paris and its surroundings.

Maufra is sometimes described as a “disciple of the Impressionists,”<sup>3</sup> but he did not really share the Impressionists’ interests in the immediate effects of color and light. Rather, Maufra’s approach was more a straightforward recording of nature that he rendered with varied brushstrokes. The paint application in

the present example ranges from sections of thick impasto, especially in the trees and clouds, to areas in which the prepared ground of the canvas shows through, most evident in the center of the composition. While Maufra was certainly friendly with some of the Impressionists, it was another acquaintance who had a more profound impact on the painter, and that was Paul Gauguin, whom Maufra met in 1890 in Brittany. Maufra returned to Brittany annually for many years and became associated with the Pont-Aven school there, but it was his friends' lifestyles and interest in printmaking, rather than any stylistic approach, that influenced him most.

Maufra exhibited at Galerie Durand-Ruel for the first time in 1896, and remained under contract to the gallery until the end of his life. His relationship with Paul Durand-Ruel afforded Maufra not only a steady income and a reliable venue for showing his work, but also a continuous appraisal of his style and approach. Durand-Ruel acquired this painting from Maufra just twelve days before the artist's death. Maufra was said to have died from cardiac arrest before his easel while painting in the countryside of Poncé. Sterling Clark bought the picture from Durand-Ruel some twenty years later, by which time Maufra had become fairly well known in the United States as well as in France.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that the present painting is the one exhibited in the retrospective exhibition held in the artist's hometown in 1937 (just before its purchase by Clark) as one of two paintings dating from the last year of the artist's life. KP

**PROVENANCE** The artist, sold to Durand-Ruel, 11 May 1918; [Durand-Ruel, 1918–38 Paris, sold to Clark, 30 June 1938]; Robert Sterling Clark (1938–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Probably Nantes 1937, no. 47, as *Le Loir à Poncé*.

**REFERENCES** Alexandre 1926, p. 191, ill.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is an unlined, commercially primed linen on a five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. There is a large canvas stamp on the reverse for the supplier Blanchet. The ground color is a slightly yellowish off-white, with no priming on the right tack edge. The left tack edge is especially grimy, as if the painting stood unframed with this edge uppermost for an extended period. The picture has never been treated and retains its original yellowed varnish.

The off-white ground constitutes a major part of this sketchy painting, contributing its yellowish tone to the entire

composition. The ground's thinness also emphasizes the weave of the medium-weight canvas (22 threads/cm). The paint layer is comprised of an open network of wet-into-wet strokes above a few wash areas in the trees. The brushes used were quite small, up to 0.64 cm in width, and most strokes are of a similar size, except in the lower washes and the sky where a larger brush was employed. There are some very high paint impastos, several crushed and grimy and others with broken upper edges. The coating is somewhat discolored, with bits of undissolved resin scattered over the surface. A scratch near the upper edge may have occurred prior to the hardening of the paint.

1. This location is identified in an inscription in pencil on the reverse of the canvas, which reads "Coin du Loir à Poncé, Sarthe."
2. Ramade 1988, p. 13: "dans ma naïveté, de me dire [*sic*]: mais je puis peindre comme cela!"
3. As by Michelet 1908, p. 33: "un disciple des Impressionnistes."
4. Maufra's work was shown by Durand-Ruel in New York in 1896 and again in 1924.

## Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier

French, 1815–1891

### 211 | Man Reading 1851

Oil on panel, 17.3 x 13 cm

Lower right: EMeissonier [EM in monogram] 1851  
1955.812

Completed in 1851 at the height of his career, *Man Reading* is the second of two fine, single-figure genre paintings by Ernest Meissonier purchased by Robert Sterling Clark. Even for an artist who specialized in small pictures, *Man Reading* is small. Painted on panel and measuring only 17.3 x 13 cm, the Clark picture stands as among the smallest of Meissonier's figure paintings. The smallness of the artist's pictures was at once part of their aura and a source of amusement. Honoré Daumier, among other caricaturists, depicted visitors to the Salon crushed together as they struggled to view Meissonier's pictures, as if they were contemplating a precious jewel. The subject of reading was taken up by Meissonier on several occasions. Many of his pictures were variations on a theme, particularly in the 1850s and 1860s, before the