



**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

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### Artist unknown

French or American, 19th century

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#### 372 | **Head of a Child** 19th century

Oil on panel, 32.7 x 23.6 cm

1955.819

The history of attribution of this image of a child is intriguing, as well as problematic. It was purchased by the Clarks as *Head of a Child* by Berthe Morisot in 1926 from Scott and Fowles along with John Singer Sargent's *A Street in Venice*.<sup>1</sup> Sometime before March 1972, the attribution was changed to simply "nineteenth century

French." At this time a student doing research on Morisot suggested that the picture was very similar to one by the artist at the Brooklyn Museum, but also offered that it might be by Mary Cassatt or by Marie Bracquemond.<sup>2</sup> Clark director George Heard Hamilton wrote to Adelyn Breeskin, curator at the Smithsonian and an expert on Cassatt, to inquire as to its origins, although he himself voiced doubts that it was by Cassatt. Breeskin agreed that it was unlikely to be by the artist, given the difference in three-dimensional form from her usual handling.<sup>3</sup> Hamilton's next letter (written before he received Breeskin's reply) was to Louis Goldenberg, president of Wildenstein in New York, noting that this painting had not appeared in the catalogue raisonné of Morisot's work. This time Hamilton pos-

ited that the picture could be by an American artist, such as William Merritt Chase. Goldenberg responded that Wildenstein's Morisot experts had observed that the portrait "is not by this artist (Morisot) and, in all probability, it is not French. There is no record of it in our files."<sup>4</sup>

It remains difficult to identify this image of a little girl as either French or American. It was executed very quickly, evident in the thick (if now flattened) impastos, especially in the hat, and the broad, unblended brushstrokes that are each the width of a brush. The picture was painted on a black walnut wood panel, and since the species is primarily, though not exclusively, native to America, this may indicate the source of the painting. It is possible, however, that the wood was exported to Europe before being prepared for use as a painting support. This hypothesis is supported by the dimensions of the panel, which are close to those of a standard French #4 portrait size (33 x 24 cm). Further, on the back of the frame, there is a printed label from the artist's supply shop of Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet, which gives the business addresses as 19 rue Vavin and 2 rue Bréa, Paris. In 1902, Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet took over the art supply business his father had founded in the 1880s. The histories of a painting and its frame are often entirely independent, but this may at least indicate that this panel was in Paris at some point, and was framed there presumably after 1902 and before it was acquired by the New York firm of Scott and Fowles.<sup>5</sup> It might instead be a shipping or transport label rather than an art supply label, since Lefebvre-Foinet was also responsible for shipping hundreds of paintings between American and European galleries in the early part of the century. The Lefebvre-Foinets also acquired a large collection of paintings given to them by artists they dealt with, but since the label includes the shop addresses, it is less likely that they owned this work.<sup>6</sup> Finally, given that dealers far more often than artists themselves framed paintings, the identity of the author of this work remains open to question. KAP

**PROVENANCE** [Scott & Fowles, New York, sold to Clark, 24 Mar. 1926, as *Head of a Child*, by Berthe Morisot]; Robert Sterling Clark (1926–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1959b, ill., as *Child* by Berthe Morisot.

**REFERENCES** None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a black walnut panel 0.3 cm to 0.4 cm thick with a vertical wood grain and chamfers 1.3 cm wide on all four reverse edges. A slight convex warp may possibly be enhanced by the tape adhesive on the reverse. Flattened impastos in all the white brushstrokes may be the result of stacking the picture while it was still wet or carrying it in a paint-box lid. The painting was cleaned and revarnished, probably by Murray via Durand-Ruel, New York, in 1939. The paint layer has extensive solvent abrasion throughout the face and hat, and frame abrasion on all four edges. Accidental damage occurred on the right shoulder, and losses were retouched in the hat and right side of the feathers where an old scuff had occurred. Some areas where the coating is shearing away from the surface may also contain a colored glaze. The two layers of varnish are very yellow, somewhat streaky, and fluoresce densely in ultraviolet light. One layer stops short of the edges, suggesting it was applied while the picture was framed. Abrasions through the present coating reveal very white paint in the costume and hat. There is also grime trapped below the layers of varnish.

The ground is a pale gray layer, applied lightly enough to allow the wood grain to show in the more thinly painted passages. No underdrawing was discovered, and there were very few changes made in the broadly applied paint. The feathers in the left side of the hat were adjusted by the background paint, which was applied after the hat. There may be a thin brown paint sketch of the head. The face and background are thinly handled.

1. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 1955-575.
2. Note in the Clark's curatorial file from Bill Scott. The work in the Brooklyn Museum he refers to is *Portrait of Mme Boursier and Her Daughter*, c. 1873.
3. Letters in the Clark's curatorial file; Hamilton's dates to 12 May 1972 and Breeskin's reply to 19 May 1972.
4. Letters in the Clark's curatorial file; Hamilton's dates to 16 May 1972 and Goldenberg's reply to 13 June 1972.
5. The label almost certainly predates Sterling Clark's acquisition of the painting since he preferred to work almost exclusively with the dealers Knoedler, Durand-Ruel, and to a lesser extent Scott and Fowles, Carstairs, and Wildenstein.
6. For more information on the Lefebvre-Foinet firm see <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/33304/in-paris-a-colorful-collection-comes-to-auction/> and [http://www.mfordcreech.com/elisha\\_kent\\_wetherill\\_flower\\_market\\_paris.htm](http://www.mfordcreech.com/elisha_kent_wetherill_flower_market_paris.htm) (accessed 11 Feb. 2012). The family's private collection was sold at Christie's, Paris, on 1 Dec. 2009.