



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

**VOLUME TWO**

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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: Camille Pissarro, *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* (cat. 253)

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PRECEDING PAGE 474: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Onions* (cat. 280)

PAGES 890–91: Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Women of Amphisa* (cat. 3)

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown–Hartford 1974, pp. 86–87, no. 53, ill.; Williamstown 1981–82, no cat.

**REFERENCES** None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a mahogany panel 1 cm thick with chamfered edges 1.2–1.9 cm wide on the reverse. There are two oval stamps on the back, one for the color-man Vieille and the other for the framer Beugniet, both in Paris. A third blurred stamp indicates that the restorer Henri Helfer apparently treated the picture in March 1938, following a 1936 treatment by Madame Coince. The panel has a very slight convex warp, and the reverse is coated with what appears to be wax. There is frame abrasion along the top edge. The upper shadow of the gun and horn shows cleaning abrasion, which has also accentuated a pentimento of the lower placement of the gun's shadow on the wall. Despite the abrasion seen in some thin passages, much of the surface seems to have its original varnish intact. The coating has vertical cracks following the wood grain, deposits of undissolved resin, and caches of resin in the impastos. The coatings are slightly yellow, with more discolored bands at the edges. In ultraviolet light, brown drip residues, running from top to bottom, are revealed below the figure's hands, in the proper right pant leg, and to the right of the date. These appear to be from something splashed on the painting.

The ground is most likely commercially applied. It is pale gray with large white particles visible at low magnification, and the wood grain shows through in the left background. Under low magnification, coarse underdrawing lines of either charcoal or graphite, as well as some black ink, are seen at the edges of forms. The drawing comprises part of the final image in many areas. There are a number of unused lines to the left of the figure's torso, which are also visible to the unaided eye. There may be a brown wash sketch layer between the drawing and the final colors. The position of the proper right elbow was moved slightly. Vehicular paint was freely applied wet-into-wet in most areas to achieve delicate impastos in the details. The pants were executed with flat strokes and the background was painted after the figure. Short, dark brush bristles are scattered in the paint.

1. Several different titles and dates have been associated with the larger *Bugler*. For this work, see Chabert 1979, p. 72, no. 21 and Saint-Omer 1978, p. 52 for a related study of the trumpet and other accessories, dated to 1876. For present purposes, I use the title and date noted in Robichon 2010, p. 61.

## Sir William Orpen

Irish, 1878–1931

### 240 | Robert Sterling Clark 1921–22

Oil on canvas, 101.9 x 76.2 cm

Upper left: ORPEN

1955.824

### 241 | Francine J. M. Clark 1921–22

Oil on canvas, 101.9 x 76.2 cm

Upper left: ORPEN

1955.823

This pair of portraits exhibits the features that made Sir William Orpen the popular choice for the representation of society figures. The bold colors, simple settings, and facility with paint that characterize Orpen's work are essential elements in this portrayal of the recently married couple.

Although he represented them on separate canvases, Orpen links the pair most dramatically through the use of complementary colors of the background curtain. The bright red behind Sterling not only picks up the pattern of the American collector's tie, but also provides a chromatic complement to the green-gray watered silk backdrop of his wife's portrait. Offsetting Sterling's gray wool suit with the bold red and softening the bright pink of Francine's flirtatious dress with the iridescent curtain, Orpen employs his colors to create compositional coherence across the divide of the frame.

Notwithstanding the flamboyant purple shirt peeking out below his bright, starched white collar and extending beyond his jacket sleeves, Sterling poses as a serious man of leisure. Looking directly out from behind near-invisible eyeglass lenses, the heir to the Singer sewing machine fortune places his elegant hands in full view. Orpen's signature highlights delineate the lines of Sterling's long face and fingers, emphasizing his strong nose and unoccupied hands. Only the golden cushion, which makes the simple, slightly battered armchair more comfortable, is handled with a similar attention.

In contrast, Orpen gives full play to the folds and shimmer of Francine's elaborate pink confection. The left panel of her dress, closest to the picture plane, best displays Orpen's dramatic use of dark shadows and bright white highlights. Unlike her husband with his direct gaze, Mrs. Clark looks dreamily





into the distance, her lips hinting at a smile. Just as Sterling's knotted tie and buttoned jacket lead to his prominently displayed hands, the blue and red buds along the frill of Francine's bodice lead to her loosely clasped hands. Her ladylike demeanor is clear as she sits upright without the aid of a chair back.

The couple had met in Paris, where Sterling had settled in 1911. Francine Juliette Modzelewska, who had assumed the stage name Francine Clary, had been an actress with the Comédie Française from 1904 to 1910. Sterling and Francine married in 1919 and just a few years later sat for these portraits.<sup>1</sup> At about the same time, Orpen painted the portraits of Sterling's brother Stephen and his wife Susan (Jane Forbes Clark collection).<sup>2</sup> Having gone to France in January 1917 as an Official War Artist, Orpen was knighted the following year for his work depicting soldiers in trenches on the front. Orpen stayed in France after the war as the artist to the British Peace Delegation. With the Hotel Majestic as his base in Paris, Orpen was also able to pursue his highly successful career as a portrait painter.

First trained at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, where he enrolled at the age of thirteen, Orpen came to London to study at the Slade School in 1897. These were the years of the Slade's greatest reputation, and with Augustus John (1878–1961), Orpen was among the star pupils. Although Orpen's biographers often regret his reliance on portraiture, they all praise his "grasp of character."<sup>3</sup> Sterling himself repeatedly recorded his appreciation of Orpen, whom he preferred over Augustus John and even John Singer Sargent.<sup>4</sup> EP

**PROVENANCE** Robert Sterling Clark (probably 1922–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Cat. 240: Williamstown 1993c, no cat.; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 34–35, fig. 36.

Cat. 241: Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 36–37, fig. 38.

**REFERENCES** Romberg 1991, p. 36, ill.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** Cat. 240: The support is a heavy-weight linen (13 x 16 threads/cm) lined to a dark-colored linen with a similar weave (13 x 19 threads/cm). The tacking edges have been cut off, but the six-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher is probably original. Some paint impastos are melted and crushed, others are moated from the lining pressure. Areas of the face near the hairline and the red curtain on the right are pitted, possibly by heat. Frame and nail abrasion and gold leaf deposits dot the edges, and there is some flaking around the edges. The surface coatings display several colors of ultraviolet fluorescence, indicating that both synthetic and

natural resin coatings are present. The varnish in the lower right area and the hands has a separate crack network. The varnish application was very uneven, especially in the curtain, although some irregularities in the gloss may be the result of heat damage to either the varnish or the paint layer.

The ground appears to be the same gray over white layering as on the companion portrait. The upper gray layer is visible only along the lower edge of the picture. No underdrawing was detected. The paste-consistency paint was more densely applied than on Mrs. Clark's portrait, although the less lively surface may be due in part to flattening and blistering from the heat of the lining. Many areas of the suit look as if they are painted over a red underlayer. A strong green color used to outline shadows on the nose and eyes may be traces of a green under-sketch on the face.

Cat. 241: The support is a strong, unlined, coarse-weave linen (13 x 16 threads/cm), the same fabric used for the companion. The warp threads create a horizontal weave pattern that is clearly visible on this more thinly painted surface. The fabric folds around to the back of the six-member stretcher. There are a few cracks below the sitter's proper left eye and short drying traction cracks around the hair and in the heavily applied dress paint in the lap. There is a small area of shattered paint in the dress at the lower left. Frame abrasion appears on the edges and paint and ground loss on the right top edge. The varnish is a thin, slightly yellowed natural resin layer, with undissolved resin deposits and slight grime scattered throughout. There are retouches in the dress traction cracks, and the small retouches in the neck have turned white. The varnish reflectance is uneven and primarily glossy.

The ground is commercially applied in two layers, gray over white. The gray layer is very thin and extends to most fabric edges. There was little color blending, except in the flesh, and the gray ground forms the shadows in the dress and face. No underdrawing was detected. In infrared reflectography, small paint adjustments were noted in the proper right arm, the sleeve ruffles, and the back line of the skirt. The paint was applied in a stiff paste consistency throughout, using the canvas texture to accentuate the impastoed brushwork. The signature may be executed in black ink.

1. For more on Francine's acting career, her relationship with Sterling, and her influence on the collection, see Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 35–38, 80, 83, 89, 112–13, 266.
2. For a list of the portraits Orpen painted in 1921 and 1922, see Dark and Konody 1932, pp. 271–72.
3. R. P. 1923, p. 25.
4. In a diary entry of 19 Apr. 1923, Clark wrote: "I question whether [Augustus John] has ever done anything as fine as Orpen." The following year, after seeing an exhibition of works by Sargent on 26 Feb., he noted: "I was struck to discover that most of the portraits were not as fine as Orpen's." On 11 Dec. of that year, on the occasion of a portrait exhibition at Seligmann's, he wrote that "[Francine] thought with me the Orpens were the best."