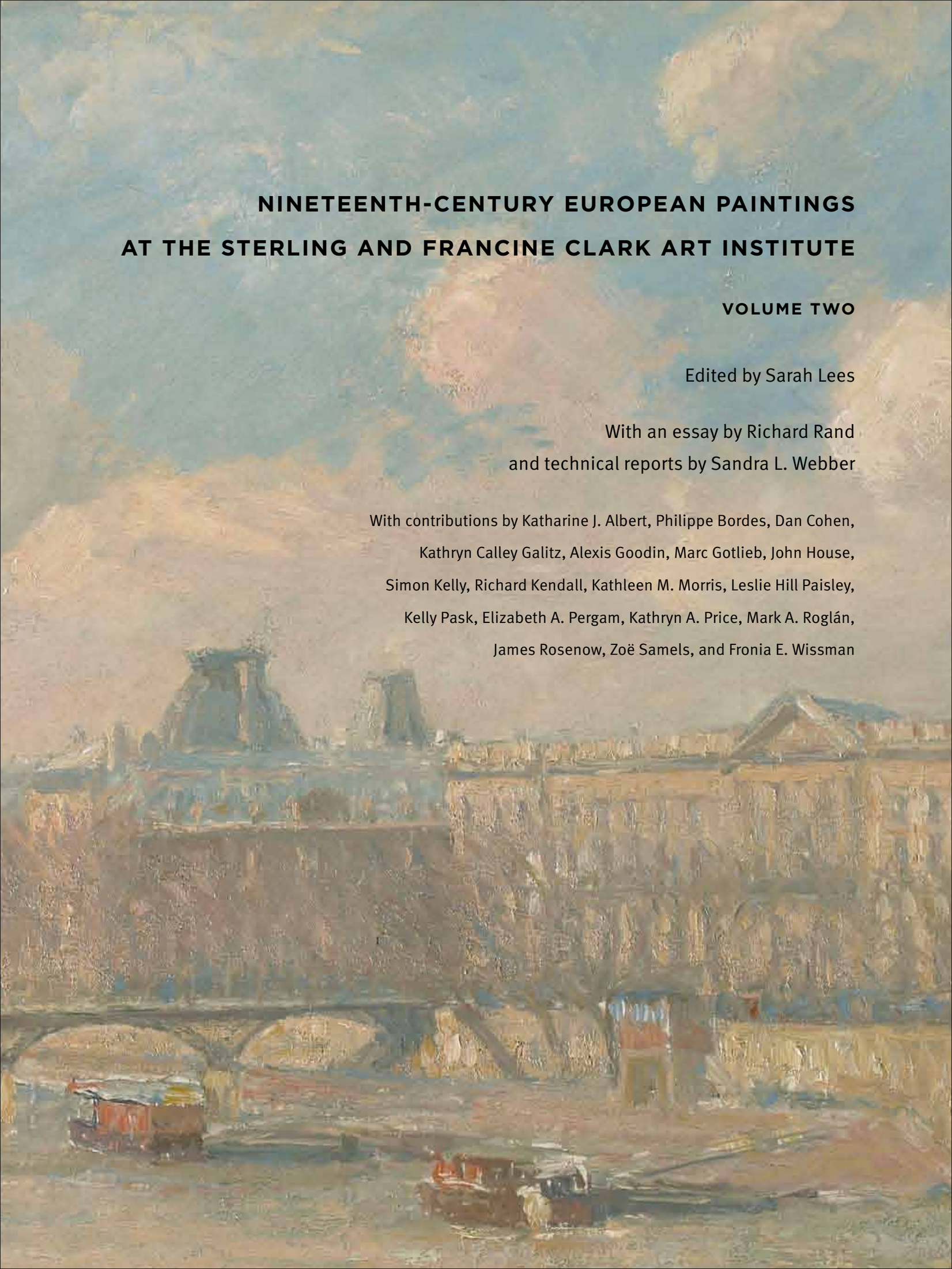

NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE

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


ART WORKS.
arts.gov

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,
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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. Roglán, James Rosenow, Zoë 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

Details:
TITLE PAGE: Camille Pissarro, *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* (cat. 253)
OPPOSITE COPYRIGHT PAGE: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Jane Avril* (cat. 331)
PRECEDING PAGE 474: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Onions* (cat. 280)
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Camille Pissarro

French, 1830–1903

245 | Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect 1870

Oil on canvas, 40 x 56.2 cm
Lower left: C. Pissarro 1870
1955.825

By the beginning of 1869, Camille Pissarro had moved with his family to the small town of Louveciennes, situated near the river Seine some fifteen miles west of Paris.[1] It was here that his earliest works in the Clark collection—*Route de Versailles, Louveciennes* (cat. 246) and *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect*—were painted, the latter within sight of the family's lodgings in a house at the left of the picture.[2] Pissarro had previously worked in Pontoise, where he produced increasingly confident scenes of local streets, farms, and countryside, two of which were exhibited at the Salon of 1868.[3] Several critics praised his submissions, the young Odilon Redon observing that he depicted nature "in an apparently very rudimentary manner, but this indicates above all his sincerity,"[4] and Émile Zola claiming that "the temperament of the painter has drawn a rare poem of life and force from ordinary truth."[5] Still lacking patrons and living meagerly, however, Pissarro was probably attracted to Louveciennes by mundane considerations: its nearness to the capital city, where picture-dealers, collectors, and fellow artists could be found; and the temporary presence of Monet and Renoir in the Louveciennes area.[6] Though he was to remain in the town less than two years, it was in this newly collaborative context that Pissarro's art changed "suddenly and dramatically,"[7] in the words of Richard Brettell, in a setting that has been called "the cradle of Impressionism."[8]

As a composition, *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect* is extraordinarily simple, even banal. The centrally receding highway had been a staple of the landscapist's art from at least the seventeenth century, when its combination of dramatic perspective, lucidly defined space, and implicit narrative were famously summarized in a work such as Meindert Hobbema's *Avenue at Middelharnis* (1689; The National Gallery, London). Pissarro often used this format in the 1860s, learning from Corot and others about its application to rural and modestly urban views, and to the simplest as well as the most subtle relationships of structure and light. After the move from Pontoise, one of his earliest creations may have been *View from Louveciennes* (c. 1869–70; The National Gallery, London), where the gentle diagonal of a country track leads us into a scene of Corot-like serenity, and the textures of earth, grass, and cottage walls are lovingly described.[9] Apparently painted soon afterwards, *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect* seems willfully coarse by comparison, its angular forms and gritty surface suggesting that the "rudimentary" qualities admired at the Salon were still among Pissarro's preoccupations.[10] The setting, too, has changed from the pastoral to the indeterminate, recording the outskirts of the unseen town of Louveciennes that was gradually being absorbed by the city of Paris. Now the emphasis is on contingency, as a scattering of passersby wander between miscellaneous housing, their random behavior loosely linked by the grays and browns of a shower that may or may not have ended.[11]

The interaction between Pissarro and his colleagues in the Louveciennes area between 1869 and 1870 is not documented in their letters or in other contemporary accounts. Their extraordinary creativity in the summer of 1869 at La Grenouillère, in nearby Bougival, however, has often been celebrated in discussions of the early Impressionist project.[12] Less spectacularly, perhaps, paintings such as *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect*, and comparable works by Monet, Renoir, and Sisley, document their month-by-month reassessment of technique and their changing apprehension of nature during this period. Apparently following the lead of Monet, a wide range of atmospheric effects and extremes of weather were added to the repertoire, from the brashness of sunlight on water and snow to the inflected dullness of mist, rain, and overcast skies. Such subjects depended on the inherently shifting character of the landscape, which at times presented an artistic challenge as engrossing as the motif itself. In response, their brushwork became more improvised and open, and a direct, decisive encounter with the scene in question was often preferred to slower reconstruction in the studio. Monet's earlier experience may have prompted Pissarro to experiment with plein air painting in Louveciennes, though the physical evidence remains ambiguous. A pastel loosely related to *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect* reminds

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us of his stubborn attachment to preparatory media, while the dense paint layers on the canvas itself indicate that more than one session was needed for its completion.[13] As in many current works by Pissarro, evidence of an earlier image beneath the one visible today adds further to its complex history.[14]

Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect was both the recapitulation of a subject type already established in Pissarro's circle and a step toward a new aesthetic. His affinity with the group is shown in their painted variations on the route between Versailles and Marly-le-Roi, which accounted for literally dozens of works during these years. Their reasons for choosing the road motif are unrecorded, though its sheer ordinariness—combined with a penetration into pictorial depth and a historical association with the passing of time—may provide the answer. An especially illuminating picture in the context of the Clark scene is Monet's *Road at Louveciennes, Snow Effect*, executed when the artist stayed with Pissarro in late 1869.[15] While including virtually every building, wall, and tree that was later painted by his host, Monet opted to stand further to the right, effectively in the center of the road. By using a high vanishing point, he also filled almost half his composition with a foreground of muddy, trampled snow, despite its uneventfulness in traditional terms. Each artist, we might argue, anchored his image in a convenient, if unremarkable locale, while exploring their individual experiences at a certain time and place: wintry cold and isolation, in Monet's case; the drab melancholy of rain, in Pissarro's. Both introduced human figures, but the literary temptations of the motif were largely resisted. In *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect*, for example, it is easy to miss the horse and carriage in the distance, and a barely discernible farm

cart in front of the right-hand cottage seems drained of significance: these paintings reveal much about the artists' sensations, little of life in the suburbs.

Though *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect* has often been cited and exhibited since its emergence from obscurity in the early twentieth century, nothing is known about the painting's early history or the circumstances in which it left Pissarro's possession. In 1941, after a brief flurry of activity that was noted in Sterling Clark's diaries, Clark bought the picture from the New York dealer Carroll Carstairs. On 14 December 1940, he wrote: "Carstairs showed me a tiny Seurat . . . and a really good early Pissarro of 'A wet country road with trees & houses 1870'—perfect—Could not criticize it in any respect but a trifle sad for subject. . . . I thought the Pissarro probably worth it although probably poor seller." Four days later, he added: "over to Carstairs—Francine liked the Pissarro as much as I did—Carstairs said I could have it at cost." On 19 December, the deal was struck: "saw Carstairs—Took his Pissarro at $5000—only fair to give him a 10% profit."[16] RK

PROVENANCE [Étienne Bignou, Paris, possibly by 1930, sold to Carstairs, Dec. 1940];[17] [Carroll Carstairs, New York, sold to Clark, 9 Jan. 1941, as *La Route*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1941–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1930b, no. 21, as *La route*; Glasgow 1930, no. 7, as *La Route de Louveciennes*; New York 1941a, no. 19, as *La route de Versailles à Louveciennes*, lent anonymously; Williamstown 1956a, pl. S-3, as *La Route*; New York 1967, no. 27; London–Paris–Boston 1980–81, no. 14, ill., as *The Versailles Road at Louveciennes (rain)*; Manchester and others 1991–92, pp. 204, 230, no. 98, ill.; London–Boston 1995–96, pp. 190–91, no. 63, ill., as *The Versailles Road at Louveciennes (Rain Effect)*.

REFERENCES Pissarro and Venturi 1939, vol. 1, p. 89, no. 76, vol. 2, pl. 14, no. 76, as *La Route de Versailles à Louveciennes (effet de pluie)*; Rewald 1961, p. 213, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 98, ill.; Coe 1963, p. 6, fig. 6, as *La Route de Versailles à Louveciennes (effet de pluie)*; Courthion 1972, p. 34, ill. (rev. ed., p. 34, ill.); Champa 1973, p. 79, fig. 112, as *The Road to Versailles at Louveciennes—Rain Effect*; Shikes and Harper 1980, p. 80, ill.; House 1981, p. 50; Marly-le-Roi 1984, p. 86, ill., as *La route de Versailles à Louveciennes, effet de pluie*; House 1986b, pp. 16, 20; Pissarro 1993, pp. 62, 72, fig. 52; Washington–San Francisco–Brooklyn 1998–99, p. 88, ill.; Pissarro and Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005, vol. 2, p. 139, no. 155, ill., as *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Effect of Rain*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The original support is linen of moderate weight and plain weave (16 threads/cm), with some very irregular threads. The cusping on all four edges may indicate that the fabric was stretched by hand before priming. It has a stiff glue and coarse linen lining of some age, and a few flattened impastos. The picture was partially and unevenly cleaned in 1940 by Murray, and its surface was cleaned and varnished in 1980. The uneven deposits of old varnish are still visible in ultraviolet light, where a vertical band runs along the lower left edge and covers the entire signature except the last letter. Slight solvent abrasion from the older cleaning was noted in earlier reports. Old repairs at the top edge and near the first branch of the right-most tree are visible in both ultraviolet and reflected light, where their smooth surface differs from the original paint. There is an old, fairly large loss in the final paint layer of the right female figure in the center. Running through her head and shoulders, this interlayer cleavage has exposed paint of a different color below.

The paint is thick and paste-like in appearance, applied in a somewhat dry manner with brushstrokes skipping over each other. Most colors contain some admixture of white. Large brushes alone were used to lay in the sky. The male figure at the right and the cart in front of the right building were painted over the completed landscape. A number of artist's changes, visible on the X-radiograph and as pentimenti in normal and raking light, can be seen in the spaces between the trees at both sides of the scene. A group of dense diagonal brush marks, roughly in the roadway, probably reflect the artist's initial placement of the road's highlights. Additional anomalous brush marks in the sky above the right building may indicate that the roofline was started several times, suggesting that there was a reduction in its scale. There also may have been a pile of hay against the side of this building. Scattered strokes in the lower right do not relate to this image. The signature was thinly applied over paint that was at least partially set.

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1. The move is estimated to have taken place between the fall 1868 and May 1869 in Los Angeles–Chicago–Paris 1984–85, p. 80.
2. The house was 22 route de Versailles, which is thought to be the pale structure near the center of the present painting, immediately to the left of the row of tall trees.
3. The works in question were *Jalais Hill, Pontoise* (1867; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; PDR 116) and *The Jardin de Maubuisson, Pontoise* (c. 1867; Narodni Galerie, Prague; PDR 115).
4. Redon 1868b; reprinted in Coustet 1987, p. 57.
5. Zola 1868; reprinted in Leduc-Adine 1991, p. 205: "La tempérament du peintre a tiré de la vérité ordinaire un rare poème de vie et de force."
6. For an account of the arrivals and departures of these artists, and the slightly later appearance of Sisley in

the vicinity, see Los Angeles–Chicago–Paris 1984–85, pp. 79–80.
7. Brettell 1990, p. 150.
8. Los Angeles–Chicago–Paris 1984–85, p. 79. The cause of Pissarro's first departure from Pontoise, in 1871, was the advance of the Prussian army toward Paris.
9. PDR 158.
10. The continuity between these two periods is also apparent in a vividly textured, diagonally receding street scene of c. 1866–68 from Pontoise, *Rue de l'Hermitage* (private collection; PDR 110), which has much in common with the present work.
11. Neither the behavior of the pedestrians nor Pissarro's brush marks indicate whether he intended to paint falling rain or its immediate aftermath. The artist's own title for the picture is not known.
12. For a summary of this period and the possibility that Pissarro was more directly involved in the activity at Bougival than has generally been understood, see London–Paris–Boston 1980–81, pp. 19–20.
13. PV 1514. The origin of marks in an earlier composition beneath the final paint layer (see note 14) or in an initial session that was interrupted by the rain he was recording should also be considered.
14. X-radiography reveals an earlier version of the present scene, or perhaps an entirely different landscape. Pissarro's limited finances at this period often prompted him to reuse abandoned or unsold canvases; see also cat. 246.
15. W 147. For a detailed analysis of this work and its links with Pissarro, see Los Angeles–Chicago–Paris 1984–85, p. 90. Richard Brettell asserts that Monet was staying with Pissarro when the picture was painted and that the snow in Monet's picture may have fallen in the severe winter of 1869. For Pissarro's own painting of the route de Versailles under snow in 1869, see fig. 246.1.
16. RSC Diary, 14, 18, and 19 Dec. 1940.
17. Sterling Clark, when he was considering the purchase of this painting, referred to it as the "Carstairs Pissarro which Bignou offered him [Carstairs]," indicating that Bignou owned it at the time. See RSC Diary, 18 Dec. 1940. Since Étienne Bignou was one of the organizers of the Paris 1930b exhibition, it is likely that the painting was in his possession by that date. Also note that Ludovic- Rodolphe Pissarro and Lionello Venturi, in their 1939 publication (vol. 1, p. 89), incorrectly stated that the painting was once owned by the Corporation Art Gallery, Glasgow. A letter of May 1966 to the Clark from the Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries confirms that they never owned or borrowed this work. See the Clark's curatorial file.

246 | Route de Versailles, Louveciennes 1870

Oil on canvas, 33 x 41.3 cm
Lower right: C. Pissarro. 1870
1955.828

Unusually for Sterling Clark, this picture was bought a year after he acquired another work by the same artist with an identical date and a closely related subject: Pissarro's *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect* (cat. 245). Clark's diaries shed no light on his choice, but he may have noted that the two canvases make an informal pair, their compositions and palettes almost mirroring each other. Both of them are constructed around the diagonal line of a highway, which in *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect* slants boldly up from the lower right, and in *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes*—like a virtual reflection—rises at the same angle from lower left. In their color and atmosphere, the former could be said to evoke the landscape at its grayest, while the latter is a celebration of sunshine, pale blue sky, and limpid shade. Even at the minuscule level, Pissarro chose to introduce into each scene a distant wagon or carriage, pulled by a single horse in *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes, Rain Effect* and by two in the present picture.[1] As paired images, such works provide an important insight into Pissarro's highly nuanced creativity at a formative moment of Impressionism, when technique and the role of the motif itself were in radical transition.

Both pictures can be tellingly compared with a slightly earlier depiction of this location, *The Corner of the Route de Versailles and the Chemin de l'Aqueduc, Louveciennes* (fig. 246.1).[2] Executed in late 1869, the Walters canvas was painted from effectively the same vantage point as the Clark *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes* of 1870, establishing the avenue of trees, assorted houses, and advancing horse and wagon that were to reappear in subsequent variants.[3] On this first occasion, however, the town was blanketed in snow, which Pissarro rendered in brilliant grays and silvers against a lilac and peach-tinted sky. The contrast with the greens, golds, and deep red-browns of the Williamstown version is almost startling, as if Pissarro was contemplating a suite of "Four Seasons" like the series he created on a larger scale in 1872.[4] Apart from such shifts in weather and tonality, these subtle restatements of a single panorama in the crucial