



**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

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Seignac's paintings are somewhat softer in handling and more sentimental in mood. The spatial arrangement of the picture is clearly indebted to the interiors of the Netherlandish seventeenth century; in particular, the vista through to a background room and the effect of sunlight shining through the window carry echoes of the work of Pieter de Hooch (1629–1684).

A stamp on the reverse of this panel for the paint manufacturer Carpentier, Successeur, gives a shop address at 8 boulevard Montmartre, and a workshop address at 62 rue Legendre. Although the business changed a number of times over the years, this particular stamp was probably used only between 1870 and 1871.<sup>1</sup> The painting thus probably dates to some time during or shortly after this period. Although much of its subsequent history is not known, it appears to have been given various titles, including *Amusing a Sick Child*, and simply *The Young Mother*, the title with which it was sold to Clark. JH

**PROVENANCE** [N. Mitchell, London, sold to Clark, 12 Apr. 1935, as *The Young Mother*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1935–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** None

**REFERENCES** None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a mahogany panel 1 cm thick with chamfers 1.9 cm wide on the back edges. The panel is still in plane, with the grain running vertically. There is a red wash over the back and a partially obscured stamp of the colorman Carpentier. The paint is plowed up around the perimeter from framing pressure, and there is frame abrasion on all four sides. Edge retouching between varnishes indicates that this is repeat frame damage. Age and traction crack networks run throughout the paint, and there is some solvent abrasion in thinly painted dark details. Repairs of a scratch loss on the stool seat and damages in the upper background can be seen in both ultraviolet and infrared light. The retouches are visibly darkened in the woman's bodice and the varnish is yellowed. The ultraviolet light fluorescence of the coatings is moderately dense, and in low magnification, deposits of an earlier yellowed resin can be seen scattered in the paint layer. Reflected light reveals the pebbly surface texture and the recessed traction cracks in the woman's bodice and the upper portion of the standing girl.

The ground, which can be seen only at the extreme edges of the panel, is an off-white color and probably commercially applied. There is probably more of an underdrawing for the image than is detectable. In low magnification, charcoal lines can be seen outlining the woman's face. Using the infrared equipment, the same lines are visible, along with a slight change in the woman's scarf along the top of her head.

Below the final paint there seems to be a broadly applied black and possibly brown wash, visible in at least some areas as a separate brushwork pattern. This is occasionally left as the final layer in some less finished areas, such as the fireplace opening. The handling of the upper paint is light and feathery, with scumbles passing over and defining many details. The picture is signed in what may be brown ink.

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1. See Constantin 2001, pp. 52–53 and 62–63. The partnership of Deforge Carpentier had existed earlier, under different names and with shops and workshops at several different addresses, but Carpentier used the designation "successeur" only after 1870, and the shop moved from 8, boulevard Montmartre to 6 rue Halévy in 1871.

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### 303 | **Woman and Child before a Mirror** 1870s

Oil on panel, 46.4 x 38.1 cm

Lower right: Seignac

1955.854

Although this panel has been titled *Mother and Child before a Mirror*, the standing figure appears so young that she can more readily be interpreted as the child's elder sister, not her mother. As in *The Sick Child* (cat. 302), the scene takes place in a modest but decent rural cottage interior; the basket containing sewing materials and the pair of scissors are further indications that this is a well-kept household. The relative prosperity of the home is indicated by the comparative elaboration of the mirror frame and the chest of drawers, and by the decorated slipper of the older girl. The configuration of the space is clearly reminiscent of Netherlandish seventeenth-century interiors.

The older figure is seemingly encouraging the child's absorption with its image in the mirror. In the iconography of the period, mirrors might be used as a warning against the dangers of vanity or narcissistic self-absorption, but the mood here seems more playful than admonitory. Unlike *A Sick Child*, the picture does not seem to include any religious imagery; the sheet pinned to the wall by the window seems to be printed in columns and thus probably represents a calendar or an almanac. Yet, despite the absence of any overtly ethical dimension, this vision of happy cottage life would have served, like *A Sick Child*, as a reassuring image of the state of the French countryside. The painting was



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sold in 1935 with the title *A Good Reflection*, but there is no evidence that this was its original title. The later designation of mother and child, while it may not be accurate, further underscores the wholesome, traditional image projected by the work.

Paintings of this type gained very widespread success through commercial art dealers throughout Europe and North America. JH

**PROVENANCE** [N. Mitchell, London, sold to Clark, 29 Apr. 1935, as *A Good Reflection*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1935–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** None

**REFERENCES** None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a mahogany panel 1.3 cm thick with shallow, chamfered back edges 1.6 cm wide. The grain runs vertically and has a very slight convex warp. The reverse is coated with a clear layer of resin or oil, which is detectable in both reflected and ultraviolet light. There are small traction/drying cracks in all the light colors. Very wide traction cracks in the mirror frame are partially disguised by the yellow varnish. An old scratch through the gathers near

the waistband of the woman's skirt appears to have happened when the paint was still soft. There are frame abrasions on the top, right, and lower edges, and small retouches in the chair seat and the more open traction cracks. The varnish is quite yellow and probably consists of more than one layer. It is possible the picture has never been cleaned and only had varnish added over a minor restoration. The thinner dark passages present a slightly more matte surface than the shiny figures.

The ground is comprised of one or two commercially applied off-white layers, which show through some broadly painted background areas. In thinly painted sections, a slight diagonal texture, running in two directions, is detectable in reflected light. This suggests that the ground layer was deliberately impressed with this pattern. There is a charcoal underdrawing, visible in infrared reflectography, along the woman's profile and possibly between or over paint layers on the floor tiling. As on the other Seignac, there is evidence of dark brown or black substrate paint strokes, left in some places as the final color. The image is created in soft, built-up layers, with thicker paint used for the lighter passages and scumbles employed over the thick paint to indicate some details.