



**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  
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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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**PROVENANCE** Ichabod T. Williams, New York (d. 1899, his sale, American Art Association Galleries, New York, 3–4 Feb. 1915, no. 12); [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 30 Apr. 1926]; Robert Sterling Clark (1926–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1992–93, no cat.; Williamstown 2000–2001, no cat.

**REFERENCES** None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a gray multiple-ply cardboard, whose reverse is painted brown in imitation of a wood panel. The cardboard's planar distortions are mainly convex in form and especially strong around the edges, with a concavity in the center of the upper half of the image. A small pinhole in the top edge suggests that the board was pinned to something, perhaps while being painted. The ground layer is chipped around the lower edge and corners, and scattered raised crack arrays in the surface have been stabilized. It is assumed these areas are related to the embrittlement of the support, and many of these old crack locations show overlapping paint. Traction cracks have formed in all the deep red passages. The painting was cleaned in 2000, leaving a thin layer of old resin in the upper left corner and over dark passages in the sofa and background. The surface reflectance is somewhat uneven due to a more matte appearance where the ground is exposed.

The ground layers are off-white and probably commercially applied. There appears to be a loose and broadly applied charcoal sketch, with some lines in the background having no relation to the final image. In many areas, such as the face, any charcoal that was there was obliterated during the painting process. Many lines in the costume can be seen with the naked eye, and some seem to indicate that changes were made between the drawing and painting stages. The proper left sleeve or possibly the entire pose may have been shifted toward the left. The proper right hand was initially sketched resting on the sofa. The paint is applied in very quick loose strokes, wet-into-wet, using brushes and a palette knife. Some smooth wide knife strokes have their edges feathered out by a brush.

1. Personal communication from Professor Aileen Ribeiro, July 2009.
2. According to Stéphanie Constantin, *Vieille* moved to an address on the rue Laval in 1873. See Constantin 2001, p. 53.
3. American Art Association 1915, no. 12.

### 317 | Memories and Regrets c. 1874

Oil on canvas, 61.4 x 46.4 cm

Lower left: AStevens. [AS in monogram]

1955.860

A woman with a semitransparent peignoir loosely draped around her shoulders is seated on a chair, looking downward toward a letter in her right hand, her left elbow resting on the arm of the chair, and her left hand supporting her head. Her lavish gown lies across a stool beside her, together with a fan, a bouquet, and a parasol, while her elaborate undergarments with low-cut décolletage reveal her right nipple. No rings are visible on her left hand. On the dresser beyond her are brushes, perfume bottles, and a small jar decorated with a Japanese-style figure, together with a mirror, in which her downcast face is partly reflected.

The picture's title, *Memories and Regrets*, invites the viewer to construct a narrative around the image. The items on the stool beside her suggest that she has recently returned to the privacy of her home and discarded her outer garments. The shallow open drawer in the dresser may hint that the letter she holds has not been newly received, but has been retrieved from a hiding place, so that she can contemplate her regretful memories of a past relationship, rather than a new sorrow. Moreover, there is no sign of an envelope—



Fig. 317.1 Alfred Stevens, *The Bath (Le Bain)*, c. 1867. Oil on canvas, 74 x 93 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris



the stock signal of a newly received letter, as in, for example, *A Duchess* (cat. 314). The clues, though, are not so clear-cut that this is the only possible interpretation; the viewer is left free to speculate on other possible scenarios.

Two other aspects of the picture complement the suggested narrative and invoke echoes of traditional symbolic sign language. The mirror and luxury items on the dresser are characteristic elements in the *vani-tas* imagery so widespread in seventeenth-century Netherlandish genre painting, while the model's pose is clearly reminiscent of the generic image of melancholy, and perhaps directly echoes Albrecht Dürer's celebrated *Melencolia* print.

The model's physiognomy adds a further dimension to the potential meanings of the picture: her face is somewhat fleshy, her features not delicate. By the conventions of contemporary genre painting, facial features were a standard way of indicating character and moral status; the contrast between the model's face here and the finely chiselled profile of *A Duchess* is very marked. The present model evidently posed for at least one other painting, *The Bath* (fig. 317.1),<sup>1</sup> in which the imagery makes it quite clear that the figure should be viewed as a demimondaine. It has been suggested that this model should be identified as Victorine Meurent, celebrated as the woman who posed for many canvases by Édouard Manet, including *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*, both painted in 1863 (both Musée d'Orsay, Paris).<sup>2</sup> Meurent posed again for Manet in 1873, for *The Railway* (National Gallery of Art, Washington), around the date at which Stevens painted *The Bath* and *Memories and Regrets*; however, the resemblance of the model in *Memories and Regrets* to Meurent is not persuasive.

When *Memories and Regrets* was auctioned in New York in 1898 as part of the collection of William H. Stewart, the painting's first recorded owner, it was described in the following terms: "It represents a beautiful *Parisienne du Haute Monde*, exquisitely gowned in white. . . . The face, full of thoughtful tenderness, is troubled, and at a glance one may read the story as conveyed in the title."<sup>3</sup> It is not clear whether the picture's risqué content passed unnoticed by the cataloguer or was glossed over for its American viewers. Two years later, in 1900, it was described in far more observant and revealing terms by Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac in an account that demonstrates the specificity and complexity of the signs through which pictures such as this were interpreted:

*Memories and Regrets*, a title that gives a strong sense of its age and its fruit. For this abundant beauty is a late-season fruit. Embraced by the armchair that she fills with her overflowing fullness, it is less through the lines of the note open in her hand than through the lines of her ripening form that she evokes the autumnal title of her image. . . . Her heavy face weighs on her neck. Her lowered gaze that slips towards the letter brushes across her breasts which spill out of the blue corset of a semi-virtuous bourgeoisie. Her foot, too small for her weight, is shod with an elegant shoe, but one that does not come from a leading manufacturer, while her ribbed lisle thread stocking is of the same gray striped with blue as her parasol—a somewhat provincial attempt at refinement. There is nothing here of Stevens's truly fashionable women. . . . No, this one is a forty-year-old woman from Stevens's human comedy. And a poignant and striking anomaly arises from looking at this canvas, which smells of patchouli, not eau de Portugal, and in which the somewhat licentious good-heartedness of the model is at one and the same time in conflict and in accord with the exquisite and lofty distinction that it derives from the hand of the master.<sup>4</sup>

By the time that Montesquiou wrote this text, *Memories and Regrets* was owned by Gabriel de Yturri, Montesquiou's secretary and presumed lover; it passed into Montesquiou's hands after Yturri's death in 1905.

Despite its complex details, *Memories and Regrets* is more freely executed, with a more visible touch, than *A Duchess*, with its meticulous brushwork. Montesquiou noted its distinctive handling: "It is a rare and perhaps unique canvas in Stevens's oeuvre through the breadth of its treatment and the softness of its touch, of which the former makes it relate to Degas, in its brilliantly truthful handling and the latter to Manet, in the ivory-like treatment of the flesh, of which Olympia is the archetype."<sup>5</sup> The delicate color harmonies, with the dominant beige and gray tones animated by smaller accents of red and blue, are comparable to the color schemes adopted by Edgar Degas in the same years. The picture's subject, however, emphatically anecdotal—even if the anecdote is in some ways ambiguous—sets it apart from the much more elusive and illegible vision of the modern world presented by Degas and especially by Manet. JH

**PROVENANCE** William H. Stewart, Paris (until 1898, his sale, American Art Association, 3–4 Feb. 1898, no. 93, ill., as *Remembrance and Regrets*, sold to Knoedler); [Knoedler, New York and Paris, from 1898]; Gabriel de Yturri, Paris (by 1900–d. 1905, bequeathed to Montesquiou); Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, Paris (1905–d. 1921); probably Robert Ochsé, Paris;<sup>6</sup> [Galerie Brame, Paris, until 1933, sold to Durand-Ruel]; [Durand-Ruel, New York, on deposit from Durand-Ruel, Paris, 8 May 1933, sold to Clark, 22 May 1933];<sup>7</sup> Robert Sterling Clark (1933–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Paris 1900c, no. 183, as *Souvenirs et Regrets*, lent by Yturri; Brussels 1905, no. 967, as *Souvenirs et regrets*, lent by Yturri; Brussels–Antwerp 1907, p. 18, no. 63, ill. opp. p. 14, as *Souvenirs et regrets*, lent by Montesquiou-Fezensac; Williamstown 1960b, ill.; Ann Arbor–Baltimore–Montreal 1977–78, p. 64, no. 29, ill.; Williamstown 1982d, pp. 36–37, no. 36, ill.; Williamstown 1992–93, no cat.; New York 1995–96, pp. 139–40, fig. 109; Williamstown 2000–2001, no cat.; Mobile–West Palm Beach 2002–3, p. 110, no. 46, ill.; Brussels–Amsterdam 2009–10, pp. 35–36, 65, 199, no. 7, ill.

**REFERENCES** Montesquiou 1900, pp. 112–14; Lemonnier 1906a, p. 25, pl. 19; Lemonnier 1906b, p. 111, ill.; Monod 1909, pp. 7–8, 20; Vaudoyer 1924, p. 94, ill.; Boucher 1930, pp. 37, 43, 49, fig. 45; Vanzype 1936, p. 18, 107, no. 183, ill.; Isaacson 1978, p. 47, fig. 52; Brooks 1981, pp. 44–45, no. 18, ill.; Lefebvre 1998, pp. 57–59, fig. 3; Mitchell 2001; Kihara 2002, pp. 274, 318, pl. 7.21; Lefebvre 2006, pp. 94, 154–55, fig. 183; Derrey-Capon 2009, pp. 65, 103–4, ill. (installation view of Brussels–Antwerp 1907) (Dutch ed., pp. 68, 103–4, ill.).

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a moderate-weave linen (19 x 22 threads/cm), glue-lined to a more open weave fabric (17 threads/cm). The lining is very taut, and the stretcher is a replaced mahogany five-member design with traditional mortise-and-tenon corners. The lining probably dates to some time around the 1933 sale and appears to be American. There is some weave enhancement from the lining process. Old cracks, possibly from contact or impact, radiate out through objects on the dressing table, and there are drying cracks in the thicker white strokes. An old, discolored, and heavily cracked varnish layer and oil retouching were removed in 2010. A few areas of lifted paint in the reflection of the sitter's hair were set down. Old solvent damages in the face, hair, and thinly painted dark details were inpainted. The present varnish has a soft even luster.

The ground is a commercially applied off-white layer, visible along the edges of forms and in thin passages of the dress. No underdrawing was seen with infrared viewing equipment, but some charcoal was detected in the floor shadow. Possible small changes in the dressing table can be seen in reflected light, where different brushwork extends beneath the visible details. There may be a broadly applied brown sketch below the image, possibly in ink, and the dress

may be sketched in gray paint. The paint is applied in strokes of thin to moderate paste consistency and scumbles. The low impastos are slightly moated by the lining. There are large particles of white pigment scattered in most paint mixtures, which are visible in low magnification.

1. Montesquiou 1900, p. 112.
2. In the exhibition material for Williamstown 2000–2001, Griselda Pollock proposed this identification.
3. American Art Association 1898, no. 93.
4. Montesquiou 1900, pp. 112–14: “*Souvenirs et Regrets*, titre qui sent bien son époque et son fruit. Car c’est un fruit d’arrière-saison que cette beauté abondante. Au bras du fauteuil qu’elle emplit de ses rondeurs épanchées, c’est moins entre les lignes du billet ouvert dans sa main qu’entre les lignes de ses formes mûrissantes qu’elle épelle elle-même le titre automnal de son effigie. . . . Le visage épaissi pèse sur le col. Le regard baissé qui glisse vers la lettre effleure les seins, épanchés hors d’un corset bleu de bourgeoise semi-vertueuse. Le pied trop petit de *boulotte* est chaussé d’un soulier élégant, mais qui ne vient pas du tout premier faiseur, et le bas de fil d’Écosse à côtes est du même gris rayé de bleu qui s’assortit au parasol, en un essai de raffinement un peu provincial. Plus rien là des vraies dames du monde de Stevens. . . . Non: celle-ci, c’est la femme de quarante ans de la comédie féminine d’Alfred Stevens. . . . Et c’est une poignante, une prenante anomalie qu’offre la contemplation de cette toile, qui ne sent pas l’eau de Portugal, mais le patchouly, et dans laquelle la bonhomie un peu grivoise qui vient du modèle est à la fois en lutte et en accord avec l’exquise et haute distinction qu’elle tient de l’art du maître.”
5. Montesquiou 1900, pp. 112–13: “Toile rare, peut-être unique dans l’oeuvre de Stevens par l’élargissement de la manière et l’assouplissement de la matière, qui la font, l’une s’apparenter à M. Degas et son rendu génialement véridique, l’autre à Manet, en ce faire ivoiré des chairs dont l’*Olympia* est le type.”
6. Vanzype 1936 illustrates this painting and notes it as “à M. Ochsé, Paris.” There is no other source for this provenance. Objects belonging to Robert Ochsé appeared in Paris sales in 1928 and 1937; he is the likely owner.
7. According to the Durand-Ruel Archives, their New York branch bought this painting from Galerie Brame on 1 June 1933, later, that is, than the date Durand-Ruel New York sold it to Clark. The painting was, however, deposited with the New York branch by the Paris branch on 8 May, possibly on behalf of Galerie Brame, though the records are unclear on this point. See correspondence of 24 Apr. 2001 in the Clark’s curatorial file.