



**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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Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications
and Information Resources
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Designed by Susan Marsh
Composed in Meta by Matt Mayerchak
Copyedited by Sharon Herson
Bibliography edited by Sophia Wagner-Serrano
Index by Kathleen M. Friello
Proofread by June Cuffner
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318 | Mother and Child c. 1875–80

Oil on panel, 43.7 x 35 cm

Lower right: AStevens. [AS in monogram]

1955.862

Stevens had for many years included images of mothers and babies among his paintings of fashionable Parisian life, notably *Tous les bonheurs* (Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels), shown at the Paris Salon in 1861. However, *Mother and Child* does not follow the conventions of these genre paintings. Rather than presenting figures in a fashionable interior as a lavish world set apart from the viewer, as in *A Duchess* (cat. 314), it is, an unusual combination of formality and informality. The format of the picture,

with the figures presented frontally and the front edge of the table acting as a barrier between them and the viewer, is closely comparable to the compositions of many images of the Madonna and Child, presented behind a low wall, by artists such as Giovanni Bellini. The direct eye contact of the mother with the viewer, too, is reminiscent of Madonna and Child imagery. The figures themselves, though, appear to be representations of specific individuals, rather than generic types, and the baby's pose, seemingly feeling for the mother's breast with the right hand while the left hand holds a rattle, adds a degree of informality to the image.

The blonde tonality and relative looseness of the brushwork suggest that the painting was executed during the mid- to later 1870s, which precludes it from being an image of Stevens's wife Marie, whose young-

est child was born in 1871. Given the date of the canvas, the subject could represent Eliza, second wife of Stevens's brother, the art dealer Arthur Stevens, with their second child Suzanne, born in 1874;¹ from the choker and jewel around the baby's neck, the child would seem to be a girl. No evidence, however, has come to light to confirm the identification of the models.

The clear color, with the flesh tints set off against the dominant contrast between blue and golden yellow, is quite unlike the more tonal, chiaroscuro treatment of Stevens's earlier work. It seems likely that this change reflected his awareness of the heightened color schemes in the work of his Parisian contemporaries, and especially those of his friend Édouard Manet, whose own paintings had become lighter and brighter in the early to mid-1870s. JH

PROVENANCE George Campbell Cooper, New York (by 1883–d. 1895); [F. Schnittjer and Son, New York, sold to Knoedler, 1940]; [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 9 Nov. 1940]; Robert Sterling Clark (1940–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS New York 1883, no. 82, as *Mother and Child*, lent by Cooper; Williamstown 1960b, ill.; Williamstown–Hartford 1974, pp. 100–101, no. 62, ill.; Williamstown 2000–2001, no cat.

REFERENCES Southampton–New York 1986, p. 33.²

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel 1 cm thick with the grain running vertically. The reverse is varnished except along the chamfered edges (1.3 cm in width). The reverse bears a number of labels, among which is the colorman's stamp of Vieille, Paris. There are mahogany additions 0.4 cm wide nailed and glued to all four edges, presumably to facilitate a frame fitting. The plane of the support is quite badly twisted from the lower left to the upper right, with a severe arch in the lower right corner. There is scattered frame abrasion due to the warping. Narrow aperture traction cracks in the yellow background run primarily in a horizontal direction. The woman's face and neck have suffered solvent abrasion, which appears to have revealed the tops of small white paint inclusions. The painting was cleaned in 1940, in New York, by Murray. An old scratch goes through the signature. The previous cleaning left some older varnish residues, now cracked, in the hair of the woman and the lower right signature area. Smaller deposits of the very yellow earlier coating remain in paint recesses. The surface reflectance is uneven and rather matte, with old patches of resin causing shinier spots.

The ground is probably commercially applied, and is comprised of two layers, gray over white. No underdrawing was detected using the infrared viewing equipment, although there may be thin dark paint lines, and there is a gray paint

sketch for the woman's dress. Several changes in the child's hat and clothing are visible in the right background. A leaf at the lower right of the bouquet is now covered by the wall color, and red paint below the flowers and leaves seems to indicate some alteration. The paint is applied in scumbles mixed with vehicular impastos, with quite high peaks in some white strokes. The thickness of the paint and anomalous brushwork in the background suggest that changes were made in this area. In general, the pigments seem unevenly ground, resulting in some pebbly textured surface areas. The woman's face is more nebulous in appearance than the child's, though this may be partially the fault of overcleaning. Ink lines may have been used for occasional dark details. The signature is applied in brown paint.

1. Lefebvre 2006, p. 206.

2. In Southampton–New York 1986, p. 33, Maureen C. O'Brien does not identify the painting Cooper lent to New York 1883 as the Clark painting, since she seemingly was unaware of its Cooper provenance, and suggested it was the *Young Mother* now in the Worcester Art Museum.

319 | Spring 1877

Oil on canvas, 118.6 x 59.8 cm
Lower right: Alfred Stevens
1955.868

320 | Summer 1877

Oil on canvas, 118.4 x 59.6 cm
Lower left: Alfred Stevens
1955.869

321 | Fall 1877

Oil on canvas, 118.9 x 59.6 cm
Lower left: Alfred Stevens
1955.870

322 | Winter 1877

Oil on canvas, 118 x 59.4 cm
Lower left: Alfred Stevens
1955.867