



**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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la femme. Le vœu du roi, leur propriétaire, a empêché Alfred Stevens d'achever logiquement son œuvre; il a plu à Léopold II de n'avoir sur les murs de son palais que la grâce jeune et fraîche, et la trilogie s'est forcément arrêtée à l'*Automne*, cette incarnation dernière de la jeunesse. L'*Hiver* eût été pourtant, pour le peintre de la beauté moderne, l'occasion de se renouveler [*sic*] dans cette chose extraordinaire: la femme vieille." See note 2 for the dating of Lemonnier's essay.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 151–52: "la première espère, la seconde aime, la troisième regrette, la quatrième a l'espèce de virginité vague, indéfinie de l'hiver."
8. RW vol. 1, 372, 393.
9. Proust 1897, pp. 202–3 (1988 ed., p. 45); see House 2004, p. 23.
10. Madame Arthur Warocqué died in 1909, but her son Raoul, and not she, is listed as the lender to the Brussels–Antwerp 1907 exhibition, suggesting that the ownership of the paintings went to him before her death. The Allard invoice prepared for Clark does not include Madame Warocqué as an owner, but this may be an oversight.
11. From the Allard invoice.
12. From the Allard invoice. This exhibition is known only through secondary sources. See Derrey-Capon 2009, p. 223.

323 | Moonlight (Au clair de la lune) c. 1885

Oil on panel, 27.3 x 21.8 cm
 Lower left: AStevens [AS in monogram]
 1955.864

A young woman, lavishly dressed in an evening gown adorned with French jet or something similar, and with a scarf around her neck, stands at an open window, looking out over the sea, her right hand resting on the padded upper rail of a decorative metal railing. It is night, the sky is spangled with stars, and the moon can be seen at the left edge of the picture, its cool light illuminating the woman's face. The sea is enlivened by sailing boats and one small dark steamship, but the shoreline is not visible; nothing comes between the woman at her window and the vast space outside. She might have just risen from the chair behind her; as she turns her face to the moonlight, she seems absorbed in contemplating the spectacle before her, but, beyond this, there is no suggestion of the nature of her emotions in front of the scene.



Fig. 323.1 Alfred Stevens, *The Milky Way (La voie lactée)*, c. 1884–86. Oil on canvas, 67.7 x 52.7 cm. Private collection

In his collection of aphorisms on painting, *Impressions sur la peinture*, written in 1885–86 and published in 1886, Stevens wrote: "The moon beautifies everything. It lends accent to sterile landscapes that the sun itself is powerless to animate, because it suppresses details and gives value only to the mass."¹ From the style of the dress, it seems likely that *Moonlight* was painted around this date, though the light effect here clearly does not suppress the details of the scene.

The first traced owner of the painting was the American painter William Merritt Chase, who initially made Stevens's acquaintance around 1881, and bought at least a dozen paintings by him over the years.² When Chase loaned the present painting to an exhibition in New York in 1911, it bore the title *Moonlight*; in the catalogue of the auction of pictures from Chase's collection the following year, it was given the title *On the Balcony*. Which title, if either, Stevens himself gave to the picture is not known; the earliest recorded title is adopted here. The preface to the 1912 sale catalogue, by Dana H. Carroll, highlighted the exceptional nature of the pictures, as an artist's collection, none of them bought for profit: "It may almost be said—of those not themselves artists—that to like a painting in the Chase collection is to be a connoisseur. . . . Some of the canvases in the collection are of museum importance.



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Some are distinguished examples for lesser galleries. All are 'painter's pictures,' and few but would adorn any home made theirs. Some there be so specifically artistic that one would create an environment for them."³ The vivid description of this picture in the catalogue concludes: "Her face is brightly lighted, and she seems contentedly interested in some part of the outdoor scene below. Her lips are all but parted, as though she would momentarily speak."⁴ A larger variant version of the subject, showing the female figure leaning more intently toward the moonlight, with her left hand on the railing, carries the title *The Milky Way* (fig. 323.1); again, whether or not this title came from the artist is not known. JH

PROVENANCE William Merritt Chase, New York (by 1911–12, his sale, American Art Association Galleries, New York, 7 Mar. 1912, no. 12, as *On the Balcony*, sold to Vose); [Robert C. Vose, Boston, from 1912]; sale, American Art Association, New York, 23 Jan. 1924, no. 35, as *On the Balcony*; [Scott & Fowles, New York, sold to Clark, 18 Feb. 1930, as *The Balcony–Night*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1930–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS New York 1911, no. 12, as *Moonlight*, lent by Chase; Williamstown–Hartford 1974, p. 97, no. 60, ill.; Williamstown 1992–93, no cat.; Williamstown, 2000–2001, no cat.

REFERENCES None

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a mahogany panel (0.3 cm thick) with what may be an original manufacturer's cradle. The panel's dimensions are a bit irregular in both directions, creating a slightly off-square measure. There is a small horizontal dent in the wood in the center sky, and in reflected light, vertical wood-planing marks are faintly visible. The painting was cleaned in 1994 when grime and some of the thick varnish were removed together with old edge overpaint. It was noted at that time that the painting had been previously cleaned. This may be the Stevens panel cleaned by Murray in 1939. Tests indicated the red, dark brown, and black colors were sensitive to prolonged solvent exposure, so a thin layer of the old natural resin was left in place. This can be seen under ultraviolet light as a thin fluorescing veil over the entire surface. The old frame abrasion was re-inpainted, as were small losses near the proper right hand and one small spot on the skirt.

The ground is a grayish off-white commercial layer obscured by the thick paint. Evidence of sanding prior to painting can be detected only along the edges. There may be a faint charcoal underdrawing, visible in the profile, neck, and hair strands of the model and possibly in the architectural elements. One straight vertical line in the iron scrollwork was apparently not used. The bridge of the woman's nose was adjusted with a small last minute sky stroke, visible in ultraviolet light. There may also be a reddish-brown under-sketch in paint, which is hidden below the final paint in most places but contributes to the upper lip on the figure. Most of the paint is laid on the surface wet-into-wet using small, nervous strokes that vary from thin scumbles to low-level impastos. The paint itself is vehicular in consistency, although somewhat dry in application, with brushstrokes skipping across one another. Parts of the iron grill were applied over the water, apparently reinforcing sketch lines below.



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1. Stevens 1886, p. 21, no. XCIX. The original French reads: "La lune embellit tout. Elle prête un accent aux sites ingrats que le soleil lui-même est impuissant à animer, parce qu'elle supprime les détails et ne donne de valeur qu'à la masse" (French ed., p. 30, no. XCIX).
2. Lefebvre 2006, p. 208.
3. American Art Association 1912, introduction, "Mr. Chase's Pictures."
4. *Ibid.*, no. 12.

324 | The Parisian Sphinx c. 1880

Oil on panel, 27.3 x 17 cm
 Upper right: AS [monogram]
 1955.863

Several works painted at different periods by Stevens have been given the title *Le Sphinx Parisien*. He exhibited one at the Vienna Welt-Ausstellung that opened in May 1873; this has been identified as the canvas now in Antwerp (fig. 324.1).¹ The present canvas, a variant on this composition and probably painted about 1880, was titled *Le Sphinx Parisien* when it was first exhibited in 1900.

Responding to the version of the subject exhibited in 1873, the playwright Alexandre Dumas fils wrote to Stevens: "Now there are two of us who have painted