



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

**VOLUME ONE**

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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**140 | Woman on a Yacht** c. 1883

Oil on panel, 46 x 36 cm  
1955.882

Sterling Clark bought dozens of works by Forain. These include four oil paintings, more than one dozen drawings and watercolors, and several prints including Forain's risqué, and ultimately rejected, frontispiece for *Marthe*, the novel by Joris-Karl Huysmans. Clark also owned about ten books illustrated by Forain, now in the Clark Rare Book Collection. Clark was so fond of the artist that he even bought reproductions after Forain that focused on depictions of World War I. Clark purchased his first Forain in 1915 and his last in 1943, buying two paintings during Forain's lifetime. There is no invoice, however, for his purchase of *Woman on a Yacht*, so its date of acquisition is unknown.

In *Woman on a Yacht*, a fashionable young lady sits on a bench along a boat's stern railing. She stares out at the viewer, wide-eyed and alert, with parted pink-red lips. She wears a double-breasted purple-tinted gray coat that emphasizes her small waist, and a long black layered skirt, a black hat tilted to one side, and black shoes. Her creamy yellow, mid-forearm-length gloves delicately clasp an umbrella, with one end resting on her lap and the other on the top part of the bench. Forain's interest in fashion is evident in his frequent depictions of well-dressed women like this one, often accompanied by accoutrements like feather fans, one of which was originally drawn in the woman's proper right hand (see Technical Report).

Above and around the woman are colorful lanterns—orange, green, yellow, and blue—that hang on strings. A natural-colored fabric canopy billows over her. In the background a number of boats sit in the harbor, perhaps in preparation for a festival, with their lights—very quickly delineated in yellowish white paint—twinkling against the night sky. At the right, a flurry of reddish strokes and their reflections in the water below describe what could be fireworks or lights coming from one of the distant ships. The red is echoed in the flowers pinned at the woman's chest, in her slightly tinted coat, and in the stockings of another woman who appears to lean out over the side of the boat, at the right edge of the picture.

Perhaps the strangest part of the composition is this second woman's presence at right. Her red stockings, black shoes, and long olive green skirt with white

ruffles are all we can see, since the rest of her figure is cut off by the edge of the panel. This area of the picture has been painted in thin washes of paint, echoing the thin application of strokes that makes up the bench on which the woman leans. This figure may have been intended to provide a formal balance to the young woman who is the focus of the scene. It is more likely, however, that the original composition was cut down on the right side, as the panel on which the image was painted does not adhere to any standard French dimensions, the right edge is rough and uneven, and there is no signature.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, given Forain's fondness for humor and satire, the viewer is left to ponder whether the truncated figure was indeed intentional, or was perhaps originally depicted twisting around to converse with another person, or simply leaning on the boat railing, observing the night sky. KAP

**PROVENANCE** Robert Sterling Clark (by 1955); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1988a, no cat.

**REFERENCES** Browse 1978, p. 100, no. 12, ill.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a commercially prepared mahogany panel 1.1 cm thick, with chamfered edges 1.3 cm wide on all but the right side. The wood grain runs vertically, the panel is quite flat, and the back is varnished. The reverse is covered with penciled numbers and straight blade marks, as if the board had been used for some studio purpose. There is also a small hole on the center of the back top edge. The roughly cut, off-square right edge and the picture's non-standard dimensions suggest that it was altered from its original size, while the shattered condition of the ground and paint layers along the right edge suggests that the picture was cut down after the paint was applied. There are frame abrasion and powdering paint on the left and right edges, a dent in the surface between the feet of the two women, and a new dent to the left of the woman's elbow. Cracks in the boat's deck follow the vertical wood grain, while those in the sky run horizontally. The natural resin varnish layers are yellowed, with thick pools collected at the edges. The coatings have their own crack network and have a moderately dense fluorescence in ultraviolet light. There are retouchings along the edges below the upper varnish layer, which may indicate the picture was revarnished without removing the original coating. There are several scratches in the varnish in the upper left. In reflected light, the upper varnish looks reticulated and the panel grain is evident in some locations.

The commercially applied off-white ground is fairly thick. Charcoal underdrawing is visible using infrared reflectography, which shows lines around the woman's jaw and the costumes of the main figures. Underdrawing lines over the



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white ground constitute the entire corsage depiction. Artist's changes revealed in infrared include the shape of the boat's stern railing and a feather fan originally in the young woman's proper right hand. Black deposits to the left of her hat may be indications of hat feathers. The paint is variously applied in thin washes on the awning up to quite thick paint on the Japanese lanterns, although there are no high impastos. Dark sky paint was removed with a knife from the lantern spaces before the final lantern colors were laid in. There is no signature present, which may lend further credence to the possibility that some portion of the right side of the panel is missing.

1. If the panel was in fact a standard size originally, it may have been cut down by as little as two to three or as many as nineteen to twenty centimeters, since the next largest standard sizes are 46 x 38 and 46 x 55 cm.