



**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,  
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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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201 | **Reverie—The Letter (The Bouquet)** 1870s

Oil on panel, 67.5 x 48.5 cm

Lower right: R. Madrazo

1955.918

In the interior of an elegant music room, a fashionable young woman reflects on the news she has just received from a letter, probably from an admirer or a lover, which came accompanied by a beautiful bouquet of flowers that now rests on the piano stool. The lady is depicted in full length, gently leaning against the piano. She still holds the note in her left hand and thoughtfully rests her cheek in her right hand. She is wearing a satin dress with a long, full skirt and her upper body is wrapped in a yellow-fringed shawl. There are numerous musical scores on top of the piano as well as an ornate glass vase filled with flowers and feathers. Beside the piano is a table holding musical scores, and next to it appears to be the edge of a mantelpiece. On the floor facing the young lady lies the torn envelope that held the letter.

The pensive and somewhat melancholic young woman posing in the painting is Aline Masson, daughter of the doorman for the Marquises of Casa Riera, a Spanish aristocratic family that maintained a residence in Paris, and whom the painter visited frequently with other artist friends. Masson served as the artist's favorite model for several years and is depicted in many of his paintings. In some cases, the artist reproduced only her head or the upper part of the body, as seen in the paintings *The Model Aline Masson* (c. 1876; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), or *The Model, Aline Masson with a White Mantilla* (c. 1875; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). At other times, the model is depicted in a more narrative context, as in the Clark's painting, as well as in *Birthday Wishes* (c. 1885; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), *The Playful Model* (c. 1885; Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid), and another work closely resembling the Clark's painting, *Reading (Aline Masson)* (fig. 201.1).

This work testifies to Madrazo's involvement in some of the most popular artistic trends in Europe, such as genre painting and the depiction of modern life, subjects that, with portraiture, typified the artist's work throughout his career. The artist painted all the elements that comprise the composition with a refined and meticulous technique and also succeeded in capturing the emotional atmosphere of the scene.

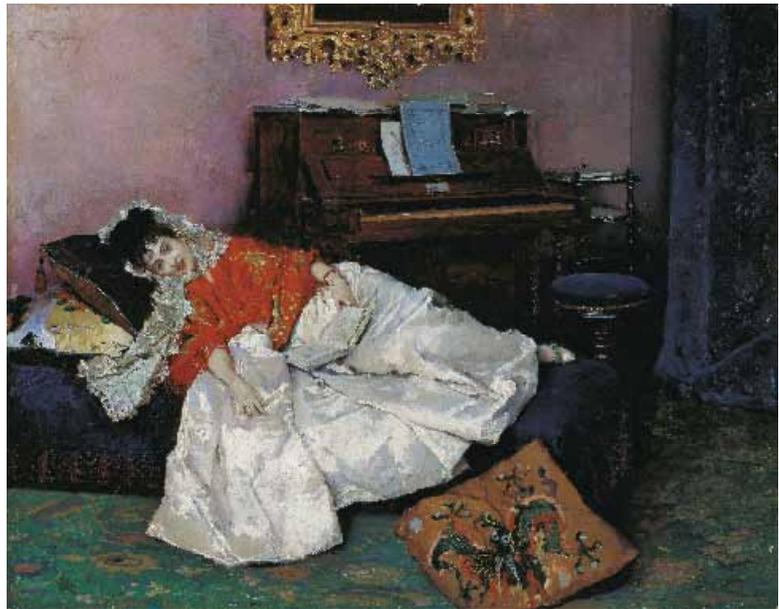


Fig. 201.1 Raimundo de Madrazo, *Reading (Aline Masson)*, c. 1880–85. Oil on panel, 45 x 56 cm. Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga

This attention to detail and facture is also found in the work of other important artists of his time, exemplified in the Clark's collection by the Belgian painter Alfred Stevens (cats. 314–25), the Frenchman Jules-Adolphe Goupil (cats. 158–59), and the Italian Giovanni Boldini (cats. 21–27), among others. Madrazo paints with superb delicacy the shadows in the pleats and wrinkles of the skirt, the elegant fringe of the shawl, the reflections on the furniture and ornaments, the bouquet of flowers, and even the jewelry. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples reflecting this extraordinary interest in detail is the musical score that is open on the piano, in which the painter delighted in reproducing all the musical notes, as well as the inscription of the piano maker that is located on the interior of the keyboard cover, which clearly reads "RINALDI."

Many of the elements that appear in this painting, such as the piano and the glass vase, are also present in other works by Madrazo. In the previously mentioned painting, *Reading (Aline Masson)*, for example, the artist depicted his favorite model in a similar setting, utilizing the same piano, its accompanying stool, and the tiered table next to the musical instrument. The glass vase on top of the piano was used in an earlier work entitled *Music Lesson* (private collection).<sup>1</sup> The appearance of the same objects in different paintings executed by Madrazo indicates that the painter probably owned these objects and, like many other artists of his time, used them in different scenes. MR

**PROVENANCE** Robert L. Cutting, New York (by 1879—until 1892, his sale, Fifth Avenue Art Galleries, New York, 22 Mar. 1892, no. 47, as *Reverie—The Letter*); private collection; sale, American Art Association, New York, 24 Jan. 1929, no. 99,



sold to Scott & Fowles, as agent for Clark; [Scott & Fowles, New York, sold to Clark, 28 Jan. 1929]; Robert Sterling Clark (1929–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown–Hartford 1974, pp. 73–74, no. 44; Williamstown 1979b, no cat.; Williamstown 1981a, no cat.; Williamstown 1982b, no. 27; Williamstown 1988b, no cat.; Albuquerque–Dallas 2005–6, pp. 122–23, no. 12, ill.

**REFERENCES** Strahan 1879–80, vol. 2, pt. 5, p. 36.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a mahogany panel 1.3 cm thick, with shallow chamfers 1.9 cm wide on all but the right side. The grain runs vertically, and the panel has a slight diagonal twist from the lower left to the upper right corner. Chunks of wood are missing from the reverse edges, probably from framing nails, and there is a screw hole in the center top edge. Fine aperture age cracks appear throughout the paint film, and traction cracks are located on the left side, primarily where the wall moldings are painted over the pink background color. The wall color around the head and shoulders of the figure appears discolored and dense, and seems to be the result of the artist reworking that area. The picture was cleaned in 1929 by M. J. Rougeron, New York, through Scott and Fowles. It appears that Rougeron may have been dealing with a previous restoration on the surface. The X-radiograph shows a pale halo around the head, probably recording more than one paint layer, and does not reveal any obvious reason why the picture was altered in this area. The picture was cleaned again in 1980 to remove a very brown varnish layer and to treat lifted paint in the reworked area of the pink background. In ultraviolet light, the picture appears coated on all but the figure with a densely fluorescing layer, possibly oil, which masks the underlying paint film except in several skips over the dark colors. This seems to be an original layer that has cracked and yellowed. The turned piano leg at the extreme right edge was painted after the coating was applied. New retouchings can be seen in the pink background above the loose sheets of music on top of the piano, as well as in a halo around the edges of the reworked area behind the figure. The surface reflectance has a soft luster, probably enhanced by the unusual surface patination layer.

The ground is comprised of two off-white layers with a smooth surface. Using infrared reflectography, several loose underdrawing lines, possibly in black ink, are visible in the shoulder and shawl area, on the legs of the piano stool, and scattered in the woman's skirt. Lines below the vase atop the piano suggest that the shape of the vase was altered between the drawing and painting stages. There seems to be a thin polychrome sketch laid in beneath the bouquet. The painting technique is wet-into-wet, with fluid, deft brushwork. There is also some dry scumbling of color in the shawl.

1. This painting is reproduced in González and Martí 1989, p. 162.

202 | **The Singer (Pierrette at the Piano)** c. 1880

Oil on panel, 88.3 x 40 cm

Lower left: R. Madrazo

1955-797

In this full-length portrait, a young lady stands next to a piano holding a musical score with the partially visible title "Pluie" (Rain) in her elegantly gloved left hand while gently tapping the keys of the piano with her other hand. She wears a two-piece satin dress consisting of a snug top and a full, calf-length tiered skirt. The bodice has a diamond pattern of pale pink, yellow, and blue, a style of dress that recalls the costume of the harlequin character of the time. She wears a corsage on her left shoulder that matches the flowers in her hair.

This painting is a testament to one of Madrazo's most characteristic subjects, the representation of charming and elegant young ladies dressed in fash-



Fig. 202.1 Raimundo de Madrazo, *Masqueraders*, c. 1875–78. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 64.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1233)