



**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

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
www.clarkart.edu

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Production by The Production Department,
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

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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336 | Cattle and Sheep in a Landscape c. 1855

Oil on canvas, 98.4 x 134.3 cm

Lower left: C. TROYON

Gift of the children of Mrs. E. Parmalee Prentice

1962.152

Troyon's pictures offered prospective buyers peaceful scenes of a prosperous countryside. Cows, sheep, geese, goats, chickens, turkeys, and hounds trained to hunt assure the city dweller that rural areas of the country are productive and unchanging in their traditions. *Cattle and Sheep in a Landscape* is one such painting. Despite its unstable and grimy condition (see Technical Report), the canvas hints at the freshness and candor that made Troyon's paintings popular. Part of the appeal of these animal paintings lies in their direct address. The white cow being milked and the black cow next to her gaze calmly at the viewer. But that is all they do. In taking note of the human presence outside their world, they simultaneously disregard it, because their world is sufficient unto itself.

The meadow in which these cows and sheep are pictured may be in Normandy. Troyon began visit-

ing the province as early as 1842 and returned there often through the early 1860s.¹ The place-names "Normandie" and "vallée de La Touque" often appeared in the titles of Troyon's exhibition pictures of the mid-1850s.² Troyon chose a large canvas, more than one meter wide, to show the extent of this landscape. Beyond the cows, sheep, and goat in the foreground stretches a meadow. It is broken on the left by a sinuous body of water and in the middle ground by four tall trees and is terminated by a low hill. The animals are picturesquely clumped together, mimicking the copse of trees to the right, although more may be visible at the base of the trees in the middle ground.

Almost all discussions of Troyon's paintings of cows and bulls evoke the precedent of the short-lived seventeenth-century Dutch painter Paulus Potter (1625–1654). Troyon must have wanted to deflect such a comparison, for he explained to his friend Henri Dumesnil that, although on his travels through Holland and Belgium in 1847 he had certainly seen paintings by Potter, he did not find them inspiring. "In his opinion," Dumesnil wrote, "[Potter] was above all a man of *pieces*, not having all the necessary qualities that constitute the ensemble and unity of a work."³ The American painter Earl Shinn, writing as Edward

Strahan, expressed this idea more positively. “Troyon (1810–1865) was hardly so much an animal-painter as a landscape painter interested in animals. It is not his close knowledge of anatomy and movement that gives such charm to his cattle or sheep, but the way in which the sunshine plays upon and colors them, and the perfect relation they have to the atmosphere and landscape which environ them.”⁴ Although it is true that Troyon had included animals in his paintings before his trip to the Lowlands, it is equally true that after he returned, his pictures bore more than a superficial resemblance in motif and even composition to those of Potter. As Strahan suggests, Troyon’s secret ingredient was the convincing landscape, which allowed the animals to function not as trophies or specimens, but as workaday contributors to the rural economy.

To meet the demand for his paintings, Troyon reused the same animal in several works. The central group of reclining cow and cow and milkmaid reappear, for example, in *Landscape with Cattle and Sheep* (c. 1852–58; Minneapolis Institute of Arts), a similarly sized painting with fewer animals, set in a forest interior. Slightly smaller is a variant with sheep in the lower left, which was in New York by 1880.⁵ The close similarity of these and doubtless other pictures not identified today gives credence to Troyon’s claim of finishing as many as eighteen pictures of cattle in a month’s time.⁶

Troyon’s success with these bovine subjects can be explained in part because he, too, was susceptible to the ineffable benefits of the country. He wrote to a friend in 1857: “I lived for four or five months in a delightful countryside where I worked a lot. . . . I will confess to you that there I almost forgot the miseries of the city and that I found in this good nature, so calm, so sweet, all possible pleasures.”⁷ Pictures like *Cattle and Sheep in a Landscape* provide a substitute for “the miseries of the city” that Troyon and his clients were trying to forget. FEW

PROVENANCE John D. Rockefeller Sr., New York (1892–1918, given to Prentice);⁸ Alta Rockefeller Prentice (Mrs. E. Parmalee Prentice), his daughter, New York and Williamstown (1918–d. 1962); Prentice heirs, by descent, given to the Clark; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1962.

EXHIBITIONS None

REFERENCES Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 148, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a fine-weave canvas (25 threads/cm), paste-lined to a coarser, possibly bleached, fabric (19 thread/cm). The six-member panel-back stretcher

may be a replacement, as the existing crossbar creases are a narrower width. The left upper tack margin is tearing away from the stretcher, causing draws and bulges in the two upper corners. The same area shows that the lining is delaminating from the original canvas. There are old framing furrows in the paint 1.3 cm inside the present lines of frame rebate debris and bronze paint. The edges of the picture are overpainted blank borders or tacking margins, suggesting that the picture’s dimensions were altered at the time of lining. There are deep age cracks in the heavier white impastos of the animals. Abrasion is visible in the dark scumbles of the tree foliage, and there are small retouches scattered in the image, now difficult to assess due to the thick, aged varnish layers. The coatings are extremely yellowed, with dark older varnish residues trapped in the impastos. The surface tension of the very thick varnish may be causing paint-film cracks to increase in number and worsen in condition. There is presently lifted paint at crack intersections in the lower left quadrant, and possibly elsewhere. The varnish is crinkled, dull, and cracked and displays a dense ultraviolet light fluorescence. The reflectance is very uneven and reveals a weave enhancement from the lining process.

The ground is a thin, off-white, commercially applied layer, possibly glue-based and water sensitive. No underdrawing was detected using infrared reflectography, although some is likely present. A sketchy dark brown imprimatura appears below the trees, and the animals may have been sketched in paint. The final colors are applied in paste-consistency paint, with added glazes and scumbles. The brushstrokes are rather dry in appearance, with heavy paint build-ups in the white areas and animal fur. The paint film in the grass and trees is slightly less thick, and the sky application is the thinnest and smoothest area of the picture.

1. Miquel 1975, vol. 2, pp. 326–45.

2. Dumesnil 1888, pp. 186–87. Touques is the present-day spelling of this small city close to Trouville and Deauville.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 54: “A son avis, c’était surtout un homme *de morceau*, n’ayant pas toutes les qualités nécessaires qui constituent l’ensemble et l’unité d’une oeuvre.”

4. Strahan 1883–84, vol. 4, pp. 61–62.

5. This variant was sold by Knoedler as *Cattle and Sheep* to T. R. Butler of New York in 1880. The painting measures 83.8 x 116.8 cm. See the Troyon photo file in the Frick Art Reference Library, New York.

6. New York 1895b, p. 12.

7. Soullié 1900b, p. vii: “J’ai habité pendant quatre ou cinq mois un pays ravissant où j’ai beaucoup travaillé. . . . Je vous avouerai que j’ai presque oublié là les misères de la ville et que j’ai trouvé devant cette bonne nature si calme, si douce, toutes les jouissances possible.”

8. Dates of ownership are noted in a letter of 18 Nov. 1964 in the Clark’s curatorial file.