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Jay A. Clarke, ed., *The Impressionist Line from Degas to Toulouse-Lautrec: Drawings and Prints from the Clark*. With essays by Mary Weaver Chapin, Jay A. Clarke, Anne Higonnet, Richard Kendall, and Alastair Wright. Williamstown, Mass: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2013. 148 pp. 103 color illustrations, director's foreword, preface and acknowledgments, notes, exhibition checklist, further reading, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (pb with flaps). ISBN 9780300191936.

Review by Anne Leonard, University of Chicago.

During the Clark Art Institute's recent closure for renovation and expansion, a traveling exhibition of its renowned nineteenth-century French paintings went on world tour. Audiences at eleven successive venues covering Europe, Asia, and elsewhere in the United States were treated to a special selection of paintings normally housed in Williamstown, Massachusetts. A corresponding works-on-paper exhibition chosen from the Clark's holdings, though devised for the same reason (gallery closure), made one stop only: the Frick Collection in New York, in spring 2013. *The Impressionist Line*, edited by Jay A. Clarke and featuring essays by her and four other authors, is the catalogue of that show.

While the decision to limit the exhibition of drawings and prints to a single venue reflects prudent care for those light-sensitive objects, director Michael Conforti's foreword makes clear that not just any venue would have done. The Frick Collection and the Clark Art Institute have much in common: both serve dual missions as museums and research centers, and both boast important art libraries. The choice of the Frick also acknowledges a deeper historical connection between the two institutions, and between their founders, Henry Clay Frick and Robert Sterling Clark. In the 1940s, Clark considered establishing his own museum just north of the Frick Collection on Fifth Avenue. Even after he abandoned this idea in favor of an institute in Williamstown, the Frick remained "a constant touchstone" (p. 9) for him--influencing his domestic-scale architectural plans, his institutional vision, and his own collecting.

As Jay Clarke notes in her preface, Sterling Clark began acquiring art in 1913 and opened the doors of his eponymous institute in 1955. The French focus of the collection reflects Sterling and his wife Francine's long residence in Paris and their sustained patronage of Knoedler and Co.'s Parisian branch. According to Clarke, the couple quite simply "bought what they liked" (p. 11), and the catalogue wisely avoids trying to draw a portrait of Clark as a collector. While more than a third of the works in the exhibition were indeed purchased by him, the remainder entered the collection in later years. Still, Francophile tastes continued to be a hallmark of the Institute's acquisitions, as attested by the four artists whose works predominate in the exhibition catalogue: Degas, Gauguin, Manet, and Toulouse-Lautrec. Each of these artists receives an individual essay, with Clarke's lead essay offering an overview of the exhibition along with a foray into the thickets of intermediality.

Even at first glance, the title "The Impressionist Line" registers as something of a provocation, teasing the (general) reader as if to say, "Aha! So you thought Impressionism was all about color, did you? Well, here's another thing coming." And sure enough, the cover image, a vigorous Toulouse-Lautrec color lithograph of a pair of jockeys seen from the rear, exhibits that artist's nimbleness and economy of line in describing contours even while conveying a sense of the horses' great speed. Yet there is a considerable "fudge factor" here, of which all the catalogue's authors are no doubt well aware. Two of

the four artists given top billing never exhibited with the Impressionists (Manet and Toulouse-Lautrec); the same is true of most other names on the checklist (Bonvin, Bouguereau, Courbet, Daubigny, Daumier, Lhermitte, J.-F. Millet, and Puvis de Chavannes).^[1] In other words, the “Impressionist” label of the title applies, strictly speaking, only to a minority of the artists and works included in the exhibition. Is this just a straightforward attempt to translate the fail-safe Impressionist brand into box-office gold (neither the first nor last instance of such a gambit)? That is undoubtedly too cynical and too simple, given the caliber of the authors and their scholarship. All the same, the claim for an Impressionist “line”—whether in reference to a species of mark-making or, even more audaciously, to an implied lineage connecting the disparate artists chosen for exhibition—requires clarification.

Clarke provides some in her essay, citing the period writings of Charles Blanc and Charles Baudelaire to justify a valorization of prints and drawings at the level of painting. “Although it has been treated as such in the past, the ‘Impressionist line’ was no second-class citizen to painting. It was, in fact, far more mobile, visible, and, one could argue, modern” (p. 19).^[2] Clarke wishes to bring photography, caricature, and the popular illustrated press into the expanded media dialogue as well (although examples of these did not figure in the exhibition). The interconnectedness of all these media demonstrates—much more powerfully than Impressionist painting on its own, she believes—the ways that tradition was joined to innovation. Clarke’s examples of the collapsing of media categories run the gamut: Monet’s early *portraits-charges*, “no doubt inspired by Daumier’s example” (p. 24); Courbet’s drawing after his 1868 Salon painting *Alms from a Beggar at Ornans*, which was intended for publication and itself prompted a half dozen caricatures; Degas’s “pastelized monotypes”; Cézanne’s and Renoir’s color lithographs after drawings; and much more. In covering such a wide and heterogeneous artistic terrain, Clarke has a harder task than the other authors, who enjoy the luxury of a single-artist focus. These other essays vary in the degree to which they follow Clarke’s intermedial lead, however.

Richard Kendall concentrates on Degas’s role as a draftsman, emphasizing the artist’s quasi-obsessive observation of others and his tendency to merge these “acts of vision . . . with acts of drawing” (p. 63). He characterizes Degas as a “famously prevaricating artist” whose penchant for reworking compositions over decades can be read as a resistance to “finality” (p. 71). Most of all, Kendall brings to the fore the dynamism and vigor of Degas’s subjects, often engaged in demanding professional activities, which in turn demanded the artist’s most exacting perceptual acuity in order to capture them on paper. The Clark’s distinguished holdings range from Degas’s very early career (a mid-1850s sheet of studies of the Borghese Gladiator, an etched self-portrait, and two portrait studies of a man) to his mature years (two charcoal drawings of bathers from the early 1890s). In between, treasures abound: a drawing of the Etruscan sarcophagus at the Louvre (preparatory to Degas’s famous etching of Mary Cassatt and her sister Lydia) and a charcoal study for the violinist in *The Rehearsal*, a ballet painting that has been in the Frick’s collection for more than a century.

Among the most remarkable Degas drawings presented here are the hunting and equestrian subjects, whose allure for Sterling Clark rested in part on his own passion for horses. A fine, tautly confident study of mounted jockeys for what became *At the Races: The Start* (Harvard Art Museums) includes Degas’s own paper additions at the edges; the “extra” horse’s leg at the bottom, extending beyond the original sheet, stands as evidence for the artist’s repeated use of his drawn studies for later versions of his paintings. Likewise, a study for the arresting *Scene from the Steeplechase: The Fallen Jockey* (National Gallery of Art) illuminates Degas’s working process for the first modern-life painting he is known to have exhibited, which he reworked in 1880–81 and evidently still did not consider finished when he returned to it again in the late 1890s. In the drawing, the fallen jockey is only sketched in, bearing no hint of the glorious costume with which the artist would eventually attire him. Conversely, the clear delineation of the horse (with an array of repeating rear legs to suggest motion) in no way foreshadows the indecision over its exact contours that would later beset Degas. The visible pentimenti around the horse’s body are one of the most distinctive aspects of the stunning “final” painting.

The Gauguin portion of the *Impressionist Line* checklist includes five zincographs from the *Volpini Suite* (1889) and four color woodcuts from *Noa Noa* (1893–94). In his essay, Alastair Wright describes both series as representing a “vain search for a terrestrial paradise” (p. 85). While underscoring the relation of the prints to other media, most particularly their intended role in promoting Gauguin’s paintings, Wright plays down the technical and aesthetic differences between the *Volpini Suite* and *Noa Noa* in order to emphasize their iconographic link. Material evidence for the artist’s own “marrying” of the two suites lies in the printing of some early impressions of *Noa Noa* on spare *Volpini* sheet versos.

Whereas the *Volpini Suite* prints mirror the artist’s travels over the prior three years—depicting scenes from Brittany, the Caribbean island of Martinique, and Arles—*Noa Noa* draws exclusively from Gauguin’s first Tahitian sojourn (1891–93). Wright argues that the theme of paradise lost, resonating in both suites, comes through more forcefully in the prints than in their source paintings: that in fact, it is the comparison with the related paintings that unlocks the true poignancy of this loss. He notes of the *Volpini Suite* prints that they “tend to strip away the sensuousness of the paintings upon which they are based, emptying their sources of the pleasurable visual qualities by which they evoked their various idylls” (p. 94). A strong example of this is the *Joys of Brittany* zincograph, which strikes the viewer as ironically titled by comparison with the more carefree *Breton Girls Dancing* (National Gallery of Art).

In similar fashion, Wright sees the *Noa Noa* paintings as holding out a promise of Tahitian pleasure that the prints only serve to stamp out with references to “a darkly threatening nether world” (p. 96). Unlike the *Volpini Suite* zincographs, whose bright yellow background hue remains their most salient feature almost regardless of iconography, the *Noa Noa* scenes emerge—“tenuously,” as Wright puts it (p. 88)—from a default black woodblock ground. The “savage” glow of added colors (predominantly red, yellow, and orange) can be associated variously with the supernatural beliefs of Tahitian culture; Gauguin’s angry disillusionment at French colonialist disruptions of native Polynesian ways; or indeed the sense of disharmony and endangerment at finding oneself expelled from Paradise.

Anne Higonnet’s essay on Manet is the one that most vigorously takes up Clarke’s intermedial challenge. Arguing that Manet “was never more modern than in his prints” (p. 103)—of which he made about one hundred between 1860 and 1882—Higonnet urges us to situate these works within a rapidly shifting landscape of “new media” technologies. Many Manet paintings include images of prints and photographs, and certainly his knowledge of the history of art was largely mediated through printed reproductions—notably in Charles Blanc’s *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, founded in 1859. Manet’s art-historical references in prints such as *The Urchin* and *The Toilette* (both 1862, both in the Clark’s collection) speak to a roving, pick-and-choose approach to sources that was itself enabled by the proliferation of reproductive imagery. Moreover, in contrast to many of his peers in the Société des Aquafortistes, of which Manet was an inaugural member, he did not see printmaking as a domain that had to be cordoned off from the incursions of photography. Having fewer complexes about the “artistic, authored print” (p. 110), Manet routinely turned to others for technical advice and help in executing his printed works. He also incorporated photomechanical transfer processes into his prints, not just to increase the efficiency of production (as others did), but in the service of artistic experimentation.

An album at the Morgan Library containing photographs of Manet’s paintings offers special evidence for the artist’s incorporation of photography into his working process as early as the 1860s. Although it is not clear who actually took the photographs, Higonnet speculates that Manet used them as an intermediary step to test how a painting might look as a print. The Clark’s *Execution of Maximilian* print, based on a photograph of the Kunsthalle Mannheim version of the painting, is one such example. While much remains uncertain about the purpose and authorship of the Morgan album photographs, Higonnet argues here for their “significant conceptual impact on his art” (p. 113). Perhaps even more discomfiting, to those who have been accustomed to locate Manet’s modernity in his painting practice and fine-art print enterprises, will be his apparent use of gillotage and other photomechanical transfer techniques in a number of commercially driven print projects, particularly later in his career. Higonnet

calls for a reevaluation of prints such as *At the Café* and *Jeanne (Spring)*, both in the Clark's collection, in light of these newer criteria.

In the final essay, Mary Weaver Chapin discusses Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's images of fin-de-siècle Paris, underscoring their quality of immediacy that allows the viewer to "see the world through his eyes" (p. 121). Both his short stature and his habit of sitting in the front row for theater and cabaret performances help account for the unusual, close-up view from below found in many of Lautrec's depictions of actresses, notably the eight-color lithograph of *Marcelle Lender*. Other standouts in the Clark's holdings include a complete *Elles* suite (many were broken up to be sold individually) and the quasi-abstract *Miss Loïe Fuller*. In this lithograph, "one of the most experimental prints in his oeuvre" (p. 125), the artist introduced slight color variations from one impression to another and dusted each with gold and silver powder.

As interested as Toulouse-Lautrec was in portraying celebrated actresses, dancers, and courtesans, Chapin justly remarks that his subjects often walk a line between portrait and type. Such is the case in *The Englishman at the Moulin Rouge*: the names of all three figures in the densely packed lithograph are known, but they could equally stand in as types enacting a routine scene of sexual propositioning at the notorious club. Other works featured here range from the familiar--such as *The Seated Clowness (Miss Cha-U-Kao)* from *Elles*--to the quite rare, including the beautiful *Box in the Grand Tier*, printed (according to the notation on the sheet) in an edition of just twelve. Within an adventurous cropped composition, the contrast between the scornful, world-weary gaze of the smartly clad woman in black and the lumpishness of her pursed-lip companion evokes more pathos than humor.

Pathos would gain ground in Lautrec's art as he slipped further into alcoholism and mental breakdown. In 1899, he found himself hospitalized against his will, reduced to sketching circus animals with chalks and paper that friends brought to him. Because of what we know of Lautrec's biography, these ostensibly lighthearted images come across as among the artist's most harrowing. As Chapin points out, they have an air of confinement and dread, contrary to the free spontaneity often associated with drawings. With these works, we seem to have come full circle from Degas. Rather than being generative tools for creations in other media, drawings are now a dead end: desperate gestures that mark their own endpoint (and that of the artist).

In all, the treatment of different media in a single catalogue is refreshing and enables the authors to address essential questions of style, technique, and process in the work of four highly distinct artists. The four authors, a mix of academics and scholar-curators, have all published previously on their respective topics, and Clarke is to be commended for bringing together such top-notch expertise in a single volume.[3] This is not the only approach that could have been taken, however. When one thinks of the Clark's research mission and its proximity to other institutions dedicated to training the next generation of art historians, one wonders if there were not bright and eager students who would have leapt at the chance to contribute to the catalogue. One hopes that those students regularly have access to these splendid examples (now in a newly refurbished print room), with the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge of more seasoned scholars. Only in that way will the "line" of study, appreciation, pedagogy, and connoisseurship of these works--which all the authors so rightly celebrate--continue to be extended forward into a future even Sterling Clark could never have imagined.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Jay A. Clarke, "The Impressionist Line"

Richard Kendall, "Lifelines: Degas as a Draftsman"

Alastair Wright, "Search for Paradise: The Prints of Paul Gauguin"

Anne Higonnet, "Manet and the Picture of Modern Life"

Mary Weaver Chapin, "The Life and Line of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec"

NOTES

[1] The checklist itself is a wonderfully thorough resource featuring full object information and provenance details. The rest of the useful back matter includes further reading and an index.

[2] Clarke notes that the catalogue of the Paris Salon included a separate drawings section for the first time in 1864, and that prints and drawings accounted for almost fifty percent of the works displayed in the eight Impressionist exhibitions.

[3] For Toulouse-Lautrec, see Mary Weaver Chapin's multiple contributions to *Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre*, an exhibition catalogue that she co-edited with Richard Thomson and Phillip Dennis Cate (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); and her essay in *The Dancer: Degas, Forain, Toulouse-Lautrec*, edited by Annette Dixon (Portland, Ore.: Portland Art Museum, 2008). For Manet, see Anne Higonnet, "Manet and the Multiple," *Grey Room* 48 (Summer 2012): 102–16. For Gauguin, see Alastair Wright's essay in *Gauguin's Paradise Remembered: The Noa Noa Prints* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Art Museum, 2010). For Degas, see especially Richard Kendall, *Degas: Beyond Impressionism* (London: National Gallery Publications; Chicago, Ill.: Art Institute of Chicago, 1996).

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