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ARHI 4916

### Library Research Award Submission

During the fall semester of 2016, I took an art history course structured around a small collection of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century paintings donated to the Palmer Museum of Art in University Park, PA. Although the Leven Collection is small in size, it features pieces of all different genres completed by American artists. Since little to no research had been conducted on these nine paintings, our instructor Dr. Alisa Luxenberg allowed each undergraduate to select one to research based on special interests. Then, for the final research paper, each student was asked to provide his or her original research regarding the painting, its exhibition history, and its provenance. Because of my strong background in ancient art and culture, I selected Francis Davis Millet's *A Pompeian Girl*, dated 1886 (Fig. 1).

I will begin by describing my process of gathering thematic research on Millet's *A Pompeian Girl*. When I received this assigned research topic, Dr. Luxenberg provided me with limited information surrounding the context and history of the painting. After identifying the artist's signature and date, using John Castagno's reference guide *American Artists: Signatures and Monograms, 1800-1989*, I could start researching. My initial instinct was to gather as much biographical information on the life and career of F.D. Millet so I could get a better idea of his artistic style. After consulting several biographies of the artist on JSTOR, I determined that I needed to locate primary texts written by the artist to fully comprehend his interests, which included travel, painting, and costume design. On the Archives of American Art website, I came across digital

scans of Millet's personal diaries and sketchbooks. *Greek Costume: Archaic, Doric, Ionic* and *The Tunic* were particularly useful, featuring Millet's notes and sketches of Classical costumes.

The main hurdle I encountered during my research was identifying the official title of my piece. Each source I consulted that referenced this painting, ranging from primary to secondary, assigned a different name to it—*A Handmaiden*, *A Handmaid*, *The Water Carrier*, *A Pompeian Girl*. In one instance, I received a scan of an archival document from the Metropolitan Museum of Art through Interlibrary Loan, which listed both *The Water Carrier* and *A Pompeian Girl* as works of Millet's. After discussing this issue with Dr. Luxenberg, we concluded that perhaps it was an error in counting. Unfortunately, I never uncovered this discrepancy, but there was no further evidence that suggested an alternate explanation. Ultimately, I decided that *A Pompeian Girl* was the most suitable option because it alluded to a specific geographical site and historical period.

In fact, until I encountered the title *A Pompeian Girl* within Mary Beth Kreiner's article *Francis Davis Millet's "Reading the Story of Oenone,"* I had been working arduously at dating the scene. After I found this additional clue, I began researching the art, architecture, and culture of ancient Pompeii. Before I got too deeply invested, I scheduled a meeting with the associate professor of Ancient Art, Dr. Mark Abbe, to request his professional input. He encouraged me to refer to some of the readings from the class he was teaching at the time, *Greek and Roman Painting*. The course's primary text, *Painting in the Classical World*, had an article that focused on the history of architecture and wall painting in ancient Pompeii. Interestingly enough, Millet's

interpretation of a Pompeian *domus* mimics Bragantini's scholarly description almost exactly. At this point, I felt comfortable asserting that Millet's historical accuracy in rendering an imaginative but carefully researched setting had to be a result of his travels throughout Italy and his study of ancient literature. The doric columns, tiled courtyard, marble imperial sculpture of Emperor Vespasian, terracotta hydria, and saturated wall colors are all believed to be traditional components of a Pompeian *domus*.

However, one aspect of the painting that I could not accept as authentically "Pompeian" was the figure's costume. After investigating the history of ancient fibers, textiles, and accessories in the *Ancient Textile Series*, I could confirm that the figure is wearing typical Classical dress. She wears a pale pink *chiton* overlapped by a cream *himation*. An intertwined leather *girdle* straps the *chiton* onto her frame. Furthermore, I discovered that ancient dyeing techniques yielded pale, natural hues like those Millet depicts.

Unfortunately, I could not solve the mysteries of the floral scarf and ornamented hairpin. Millet's conceived scarf closely resembles a Persian *pashmina*, perhaps in an attempt to symbolize Eastern trade and influence in Pompeii. Likewise, the hairpin retains little similarities to the simple, geometric hair accessories described and pictured in *Ancient Textile Series*. It is possible that he could be blending cultures to create a more attractive aesthetic. Nevertheless, Millet's expertise in ancient costume implies that he did have credible knowledge of ancient dress.

The second part of my research proved to be very tedious. I already knew that two people had owned the painting, Mr. and Mrs. David Leven and the Palmer Museum of Art. I began tracking the painting's provenance and exhibition history by observing the

back of the painting, which the Palmer Museum had photographed. There were five labels on the back; all of them were from different galleries and museums. Dr. Luxenberg urged my classmates and I to collectively contact each museum to confirm that they had records of our paintings and to inquire about any additional provenance. Unfortunately, the Greenville County Museum of Art did not have an accession number for the Millet, but I decided to include it in my exhibition history as a possibility. I came across the sixth exhibition in one of the readings.

Compiling the provenance of the painting stemmed from researching their exhibition history. Through Interlibrary Loan, I obtained a catalogue, *19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Paintings*, that detailed the provenance of my painting. I found one additional owner, A.J. Chisholm, through reference in an archival document. Although this assignment took months of calculated and engaged research, it truly expanded my understanding of the research process.

## Bibliography

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Provenance<sup>1</sup>:

George Ingraham Seney, by 1887  
A.J. Chisholm?, by 1912  
Roderick Henderson, by 1971  
Graham Williford, New York  
Mr. and Mrs. Haig Tashjian, New York  
Jordan-Volpe Gallery, New York  
Mr. and Mrs. David Leven  
Palmer Museum of Art, University Park, 2015.

Exhibitions:

The National Academy of Design, New York. *The Sixty-First Annual*. April 5-May 15, 1886, no. 343  
The Brooklyn Art Association, New York. *Mr. George Seney's Collection of Painting*. April 16-28, 1887, no.4, as *A Water Carrier*  
The Brooklyn Museum, New York. *The American Renaissance: 1876-1917*. October 13-December 30, 1979, p. 158, cat no. 217, illis. Fig. 126. Exhibition traveled to National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., February 22-April 20, 1980; M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, May 31-August 10, 1980; Denver Art Museum, September 24-November 30, 1980.  
The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York. *Paintings from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Haig Tashjian*. April 17-June 8, 1982. Not listed in exhibition catalogue. Exhibition traveled to The Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York, January 10-March 20, 1983.  
Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina. *American Realist and Impressionist Paintings from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Haig Tashjian*. March 10-April 12, 1984.  
Guild of Boston Artists, Boston. *The Easel Paintings of Francis Davis Millet*. April 7-April 14, 1999.

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<sup>1</sup> Provenance history a compilation of individual research and Mary Lublin. *19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Paintings* (New York: The Jordan-Volpe Gallery Inc, 1989), 22.



**Fig. 1** Francis Davis Millet, *A Pompeian Girl*, 1886.  
Oil on canvas. 27½ x 16½ inches. Palmer Museum of Art.