

Colormen and their Marks

A survey of nineteenth-century European paintings in the Clark Art Institute

By Sandra Webber

Conservator of Paintings

Comprehensive examinations for the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute's *Nineteenth Century European Paintings* catalog provided an opportunity for comparative study of the artists' preparatory materials and techniques and their suppliers. For this survey, three hundred fifty oil paintings were selected, spanning the decades between 1790 and 1910. Two-thirds of the paintings are French, twenty percent are British, and the remaining are by various European artists, some working in France. About forty percent of the paintings date between 1870 and 1890, and many are quite small, due to Mr. Clark's preference for small pictures. There were two hundred eight canvas supports, one hundred four wood panels, and thirty-eight other cellulosic supports ranging from paper and cardboards to millboard.¹



Figure 1

Commercial purveyors had been manufacturing and selling artist materials and tools since at least the 1700s. The nineteenth century saw the invention and manufacture of many new supplies, including the largest expansion of the artist's palette in a single century. Some shops specialized in preparing the colors, hand- and machine-grinding the dry pigments into a workable paste, hence their trade name, "colormen." Commercially prepared paints became more prevalent after collapsible tin tubes were introduced in 1841, allowing for longer storage life. Many shops sold an array of materials besides paints, and a few also focused on manufacturing and preparing the painting supports. These suppliers maintained two addresses, the principle one being their salesroom, with a production workshop located in a second building. The larger firms may have provided smaller shops with such items as factory-primed canvas, which required considerable floor space to produce. These businesses were often passed down in families, with numerous name changes as in-laws took over older shops, companies were bought out, or mergers took place. During this period it was not unusual that the role of the colorman also encompass framing and even specialized restoration services, such as lining. All sixteen of the oils-on-paper in the survey had been lined onto stretched canvases, possibly by colormen, allowing them to be framed as paintings without mats and glazing. Some shops were also picture dealers, providing formal or informal exhibition space, which offered a method of extending credit to working artists. Relationships between individual artists or groups of artists sometimes centered around a particular colorman, especially if his wares had a consistent reputation for quality.²

Most of the materials seen in this survey were purchased in major metropolitan shops, primarily London and Paris. By the mid-nineteenth century London's colormen were fewer and larger in scale, relying more on marketing and distribution, while many small independent art suppliers could still be found in Paris.³ By the early twentieth century, several large firms had emerged in England and France, a few of which are still in the business of making artist colors. The English firm of Winsor and Newton, established in 1832, still maintains



a worldwide reputation for quality goods, as does the merged French company Lefranc and Bourgeois, which originated as a small shop in 1773.⁴

These companies sometimes marked the backs of their prepared supports, usually with a black stamp or stencil, displaying their name and address, and occasionally their available wares and services (Fig. 1). Most stamps were about 3-by-5 inches in size and often oval in shape, with the address and wares in smaller type surrounding the colorman's name. A few later stamps, such as Hardy-Alan's, appeared in the shape of an artist's palette and English colormen sometimes used printed-paper labels. Rarely the marks took other forms such as the small brand used by the Italian panel maker Giosi.

A total of fifty-three supplier's marks were recorded in the survey; twenty-four on canvases, twenty-five on wood panels, and four on the remaining supports. The central placement of most canvas stamps suggests that they were applied after the primed fabric had been stretched, probably by the shop selling the end product. However, some stamps may also reflect the actual preparer, a colorman with enough workshop space to size and ground rolls of fabric.⁵ Canvas had begun its use as an acceptable oil painting support during the fifteenth century and had overtaken wood as the favorite support by the second quarter of the seventeenth century. Artists from the early decades of the nineteenth century were using coarser, more open weave fabrics that they were often priming themselves. After 1840 the linens became finer and tighter in weave with the introduction of power looms, and most artists bought their canvases already primed and stretched, just as they do today. Various ground colors, opacities, and surface textures were available on the commercially prepared supports, with the majority being oil-based. About half of the surveyed canvases had the most commonly seen off-white ground color. Among the artists using other ground colors, John Constable was notable for his consistent use of various shades of pink. Considering that seventy percent of the two hundred eight canvases are lined, there are probably a considerable number of additional stamps hidden from view.

Wood panels prepared by specialized workshops

NAME OF SUPPLIER	CLARK PAINTING
—APRIN 43 Rue de (--val) Paris, (pein)dres & Toiles (oval stamp on stretcher) [colors and canvas]	JEAN BERAUD, <i>Seaside Café</i> , 1884, canvas with an unusual original stretcher design, accompanied by a second partial stamp "chass----erges", probably the stretcher maker
B or R (on a white paper label) The letter, buried under the white paint daub, likely indicates one initial of the supplier.	CAMILLE PISSARRO, <i>The Artist's Palette with a Landscape</i> , 1878-80, rectangular mahogany palette with thumb hole.
?--& PERE Rue---- 8, Paris tableaux (large stamp) [possibly a dealer]	JEAN-LOUIS FORAIN, <i>Walk in the Sun</i> , 1880-83, mahogany panel.
ALEXANDRE 146 Avenue de Neuilly bis (Seine) Paris broserie et plumeaux couleurs fines et vernis toiles a peindre encaderments (stamp) [colors, varnishes, canvas, brushes, frames]	FRANCISCO DOMINGO Y MARGUÉS, <i>Drinking Song</i> , 1890, mahogany panel.
BELOT No 3 Rue de L'Arbre Sec Paris (Oval stamp) [manufacturer and seller of varnish and colors at this address until 1834]	PIERRE JOSEPH, <i>Redouté Flowers</i> , 1820, canvas.
P. CONTET 34 Rue Lafayette Paris (Stamp) [colorman, framer, dealer, at this address 1887-?] [Contet took over Latouche's shop]	CAMILLE PISSARRO, <i>Port of Rouen: Unloading Wood</i> , 1898, canvas. Also a large "33" stamp. CAMILLE PISSARRO, <i>Le Pont Neuf</i> , 1902, canvas.
(1se?) CORNU 13 Rue Laffitte Paris Tableaux dessin (stamp) [colorman, art dealer or restorer?]	CONSTANT TROYON, <i>Going to Market on a Misty Morning</i> , 1851, mahogany panel. stamped across cradle bars
DEFORGE 8 Boulevard Montmartre, Atelier Rue Clichy No 7 Paris (Stamp) [Bertrand Deforge, Manufacturer & seller of varnish & colors, seller of curiosities, at this address 1841-1857.]	NARCISSE VIRGILE DIAZ DE LA PENA, <i>Two Great Oaks</i> , 1854, canvas.
DEFORGE-CARPENTIER 8 Boulevard Montmartre, Atelier Rue Clichy 7 Paris (stamp) [Marie-Charles-Edouard. Manufacturers and sellers of colors, painting dealers, framer, under this stamp at this address from 1858-1869]	CAMILLE PISSARRO, <i>Road de Versailles, Louveciennes</i> , 1870, canvas. CAROLUS-DURAN, <i>Spanish Woman</i> , 1876, mahogany panel.
DEFORGE-CARPENTIER 8 Montmartre, Atelier 62 Rue Legendre (Batignolles from 1868) Paris (large oval stamp) [maker and seller of colors, canvas under this name at this address 1866-69]	PAUL SEIGNAC, <i>The Sick Child</i> , 1870-76, mahogany panel. EDUARDO ZAMACOIS Y ZABALA, <i>Platonic Love</i> , 1870, mahogany panel. Also stamp for Beugniet 10 Rue Laffitte Paris (frame maker, dealer, restorer. Print publisher) at this address 1851-1891
DEFORGE-CARPENTIER, 6 Rue Halevy, Atelier (62) rue Legendre (Batignolles) Paris Couleurs fines et toiles peindre (Large oval stamp) [Colors, wood-gilding, framer, painting dealer, restorer, at this location from 1871-1879]	ALPHONSE DE NEUVILLE, <i>Champigny 2 Dec. 1870</i> , 1875-77, mahogany panel.
PAUL DENIS succr Maison Merlin 10 Rue de Médicis Paris Fabrique de coloueurs, toiles, articles de dessin. (stamps and brands) [manufacturer and seller of colors, canvas, drawing materials]	OLIVIER DE PENNE, <i>Hunting Hounds</i> , 1850-97, mahogany panel. (large oval stamp) OLIVIER DE PENNE, <i>Two Pointers</i> , 1850-97, canvas. (large oval stamp) OLIVIER DE PENNE, <i>End of the Hunt</i> , 1850-97, oak panel. (small brand impressed into end grain)
DUBUS 60 Blvd Malesherbes Paris Couleurs Fine toiles & Peindre..tableaux & Restauration (stamp) [Seller of colors, canvas, dealer?, and restoration services]	GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE, <i>Seine at Argentueil</i> , 1892, canvas.
E.DUPRÉ ---- Paris (Stamp)	DANIEL HERNANDEZ, <i>The Model</i> , 1900, canvas. (Accompanied by a smaller stamp "Modele Depose B" on stretcher from Bourgeois Aine, 1870s-1890s.
DURAND (Paris?) Broses, Pinceau, Etoiles et Couleurs (Oval stamp) [Seller of brushes, pencils (small brushes), canvas, colors]	DANIEL HERNANDEZ, <i>Woman in the Bois de Boulogne</i> , 1885, canvas. (Accompanied by smaller stamp "Modele Depose B" on stretcher)
F (stamp) [colorman? possibly Foinet? see below]	DANIEL HERNANDEZ, <i>Pierrette</i> , 1878, mahogany panel.
FG 415 (stamp) [Unknown if colorman]	EUGENE ISABEY, <i>Landing Stage on the Jetty</i> , 1860, mahogany panel.
PAUL FOINET (van Eyck) 54 Rue N.D. des Champs Paris toiles & couleurs fines (stamp) [seller of colors, canvas]	CAROLUS-DURAN, <i>The Artist's Gardener</i> , 1893, canvas.
A. Garcia (impressed mark) [Spanish photographer]	JOAQUIN SOROLLA Y BASTIDA, <i>Beach at Valencia</i> , 1904, portion of a standard grey cardboard photo mount.
GIOSI, Roma (Branded into wood) (panel maker or colorman)	JOSE GARCIA Y RAMOS, <i>Inside the Bullring, Seville</i> , c. 1880, hardwood panel
G & C (oval stamp with numerals) (panel maker, colorman, or dealer?)	JEAN-FRANCOIS MILLET, <i>Young Girl Guarding Her Sheep</i> , 1862, oak panel. Accompanied by numerals "9506" LUCIUS ROSSI, <i>Woman Reading</i> , 1875, mahogany panel. Accompanied by numerals "10014"



NAME OF SUPPLIER	CLARK PAINTING
HARDY-ALAN 56 Rue de Cherche Midi Paris (Dorure encadrements) , (sometimes a very large palette shaped stamp) [Framer, gilder, colorman, canvas preparer?, at this address by the dated paintings, from at least 1889-1904] [There was an E. Hardy & G. Milori colorshop first at 261-263 rue du Paradis from 1861-1889, then at 16 rue Bourg-Tibourg until at least 1899]	PIERRE BONNARD, <i>WOMEN WITH DOG</i> , 1891, canvas. (partial stamp on stretcher) VICTORIA DUBOURG, <i>ROSES</i> , 1875-1900, canvas. (large canvas stamp accompanied by "6" (portrait size), stretcher also marked "dorure encadrements".) Also dealer stamp: F. & J. Tempelaere 70 Blvd Malesherbes Paris. HENRI FANTIN-LATOURE, <i>BOWL OF ROSES ON A MARBLE TABLE</i> , 1885, canvas. (large palette-shaped stamp applied before stretching; may indicate the canvas preparer) Also dealer stamp: F. & J. Tempelaere 70 Blvd Malesherbes, Paris. PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR, <i>JACQUES FRAY</i> , 1904, canvas. (stamp on stretcher) PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR, <i>SELF PORTRAIT</i> , 1899, canvas. (canvas stamp)
LATOUCHE 34 Rue de Lafayette (Paris) toiles-encadrements (Stamp) [colors, frames, art dealer at this address 1870-1886.]	FERDINAND HEILBUTH, <i>A Lady with Flowers</i> , 1875-80, mahogany panel.
LUNIOT GANNE panneaux de chene Pre Oté a Barbizon (oval surround on stamp) [Victoire Ganne & Joseph-Bernard Luniot, (oak) panel makers?, also owners of a hostel in Barbizon area]	CHARLES EMILE JACQUE, <i>Interior</i> , 1852, oak panel. Also dealer stamp: F. & J. Tempelaere 70 Blvd Malesherbes Paris. Jean Francois Millet, <i>The Knitting Lesson</i> , 1860, oak panel.
MOIRINAT 4847 Faubourg St Honore Paris (Stamp)	JULES BRETON, <i>Jeanne Calvet</i> , 1865, millboard.
2 MULLER, Paris (red stencil) [colorman or dealer]	JULES BRETON, <i>Jeanne Calvet</i> , 1865, millboard.
NEWMAN, Soho Square London (round stamp with Newman crest) [James Newman & Co., 17 Gerrard St Soho London, manufacturer of colors, pencils and brushes, seller of supports, from 1785-1936, when merged with Reeves]	JOHN CONSTABLE, <i>Sketch of the Opening of Waterloo Bridge</i> , 1829, canvas fragment.
Ange OTTOZ 2 Rue de la Michodière Paris (Stamp) [manufacturer and seller of colors and varnishes at this address 1827-1856, and with workshop at 11 rue Helder from 1857-1869]	JOHAN BARTHOLD, <i>Jongkind Frigates</i> , 1855-60, canvas. Also stamp for dealer Gustave Tempelaere 23 Rue Laffitte Paris.
Alexis OTTOZ 46 Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Paris Couleurs Fines Etoiles --- & tableaux (arch-shaped stamp) [colors, canvas, paintings dealer, restorer, at this address 1867-1874]	PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR, <i>Tama, the Japanese Dog</i> , c. 1876, canvas. Also stamped "8", (portrait size).
Jerome OTTOZ 22 Rue Labruyère, Paris Md de Couleurs Fines (Stamp) [color maker and seller, at this address 1862-1870]	HILAIRE GERMAIN EDGAR DEGAS, <i>Portrait of a Man</i> , c.1875-80, canvas.
REY et CIE 51 Rue de Laroche foucauld, 64 Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Paris (stamp) [seller of colors and possibly canvas, at this address 1877-1880]	PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR, <i>Woman with a Fan</i> , 1879, canvas. (primed reverse of canvas suggests colorman preparation)
REY-PERROD 51 Rue de Laroche foucauld, 64 Rue Notre-Dame Paris-de-Lorette , (stamp) seller of colors, painting restorer. At this address c. 1882-c. 1885.	PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR, <i>Marie-Therese Duwand-Ruel Sewing</i> , 1882, canvas.
CHARLES ROBERSON AND CO. 99 Longacre Road London, manufacturer of water and oil colors materials for drawing & painting [In business from 1819 to 1975]	WILLIAM FETTES DOUGLAS, <i>Women in Church</i> , 1860s, composition board. (Stamp) EMILE FRIANT, <i>Madame Seymour</i> , 1889, mahogany panel. (stamped paper label)
ROWNEY MANUFACTURERS, London (stamp) [in business since 1783, merged with Daler in 1983]	FREDERICK GOODALL, <i>Mother and Children (The Picnic)</i> , 1851, mahogany panel.
ROWNEY AND CO. (impressed brand)	ADOLPHE-CHARLES-EDUARDO STEINHALL, <i>The Bibliophile</i> , 1890, mahogany panel.
P. THOMINET Cousin Freres Succr 100 Avenue Victor Hugo Paris Toiles à peindre et colours fines (stamp) [Colors, canvas]	PIERRE-GEORGES JEANNIOT, <i>The Coming Storm</i> , 1905, canvas. Accompanied by a stamp from the framer L. Prevotés, 167 Rue de Pompe, Paris.
VIEILLE 26 rue Breda Paris Md de Couleurs Re-entoile et Restaure les Tableaux (stamp) [H. Vieille, manufacturer and seller of colors, relining and restoration, at this address 1865-1872]	ALFRED STEVENS, <i>Woman in White</i> , 1872, laminate cardboard. (stamp reads 30 rue Breda)
VIEILLE 35 rue Laval Paris Md de Couleurs entoile et restaure les tableaux (oval stamp) [H. Vieille, son-in-law and successor to Ferrod, maker and seller of colors, canvas, restoration at this address 1873-1878]	ALPHONSE DE NEUVILLE, <i>Grenadier</i> , 1875-76, mahogany panel. Also stamp of Beugniet 10 Rue Laffite Paris, (frame maker, restorer, dealer, print publisher) ALFRED STEVENS, <i>Mother and Child</i> , 1875-80, mahogany panel. ALFRED STEVENS, <i>Fall</i> (one of 4 seasons), 1877, canvas. (seen during relining)
H. VIEILLE & E. TROISGROS rue de Lavel 35 (Paris) colours. toiles, panneaux (palette shaped stamp) [Sold colors, panels & canvas, under these names at this address from 1879-1883]	Giovanni Boldini, <i>Madame Celine Leclanche</i> , 1881, canvas.

continued in use by artists well into the nineteenth century, and were especially favored by the Barbizon painters.⁶ Panels were also particularly desirable for small, detailed cabinet paintings, such as those by Meissonier, as ground applications could be finished to a smoother surface than on canvas. Of the one hundred four wood panels surveyed, sixty-six were visually identified as mahogany, a more dimensionally stable wood than temperate climate species, due to the continuous tropical growing season. Although the majority of mahogany panels (sixty-one percent) were used by artists working in Paris, the earliest mahogany support in the Clark collection is a small John Constable from 1821.⁷ The mahogany panels also fell most often into the standardized sizes, suggesting mahogany may have been the wood favored by panel-making workshops in the second half of the century. While most of the surveyed panels had some type of ground layer, thirteen mahogany supports had no priming, with the warm wood color often used as part of the composition. Most commercially prepared panels had chamfers cut on all four reverse edges, varying in width from 1/4- to 3/4-inch, and the backs were factory coated with varnish or a red-brown or gray paint or stain.

Among the painters who employed wooden supports, Boldini, Forain, Goupil, de Jonge, Seignac, and Stevens seemed to have preferred mahogany. All four Millet paintings were done on oak panels, one stamped G & C, and another marked Luniot Ganne, the name of a fabricator and supplier in the Barbizon area. Three dePenne paintings all bear the same Paul Denis colorman's mark, although they include one mahogany and one oak panel, and a canvas. It is also fair to assume that several wood panels have had their stamps removed during major restorations. About twenty percent of the panels had been thinned and either backed with a secondary panel and/or cradled as part of a restoration. A few cradles were installed as part of the original commercial production as a built-in protection against warping.⁸

The backs of the supports might also be marked with a black numeral designating a

standard size. Thirteen of the paintings in this survey had such numbers, although not all accompanied a colorman's shop stamp. French and English supports had been sold for many years in a number of standardized proportions and sizes. For example, the popular English portrait dimensions were known by names, such as the 30-by-25-inch bust length, the 36-by-28-inch "Kit-Kat" (a portrait including the hands but less than half-length), and the 50-by-40-inch half-length. The French sold their supports in three categories with a common height measurement and different widths designated for three painting genres, portrait, landscape, and marine. The distribution of surveyed pictures on standard French sizes suggests the portrait widths were the most popular, regardless of subject. The French centimeter measurements were often close to an English equivalent, for example the French portrait size #25 was similar to the English 30-by-25-inch bust length, suggesting the standards may have been universal.⁹ Many of these proportions are still commercially prepared and employed by artists today.

Many colormen's addresses and marks are datable due to business directories and historical reference publications. This can be of use in placing an undated painting into the right period of an artist's body of work. The accompanying appendix cites the artists and paintings found with each listed supplier's mark. In the listing, the bold type indicates the actual text of the colorman mark recorded during the survey. With so many French paintings in the collection, it is not surprising that most of the stamps cite Parisian establishments.

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1. Data collected and analyzed by the author. Robert Sterling Clark Day Diaries 1919-1945, 3 transcribed volumes, Clark Art Institute Curatorial Dept.
 2. Stéphanie Constantin, "The Barbizon Painters: A Guide to their Suppliers", *Studies in Conservation*, Vol 46, (IIC, London (2001), 49-56. Iris Shaefer, Caroline von Saint-George and Katja Lewerentz, *Painting Light: The Hidden Techniques of the Impressionists*, (Skira, Milan, 2008), p. 47-48, 65-66.
 3. On a London map dated 1791, about ten colorman shop locations were cited, some not surviving far into the nineteenth century. Those that did survive consolidated and merged to form a handful of firms, some of which are still in business. By contrast, a Paris directory for 1850 listed two hundred seventy-six paint dealers, and later in the century there were still many small colorman shops in business. Don Pavey, with Peter J. Staples, *The Colormen's Story*, (Rickett and Colman Leisure Ltd, Whealdstone, 1984), p. 27. Schaefer, et al, *1 Painting Light*, p 43. Constantin, "Barbizon Painters Suppliers", p. 49-56.
 4. Constantin, *The Barbizon Painters: Suppliers*. Pavey, *The Colormen's Story*, p.18.
 5. Alexander W. Katlan, *American Artists' Materials Vol II: A Guide to Stretches, Panels, Millboards, and Stencil Marks*, (Sound View Press, Madison CT, 1992), p. 296. Schaefer, et al, *Painting Light*, p 45.
 6. Schaefer, et al, *Painting Light*, p 53.
 7. The wood identifications were made by the author, with the assistance of Hugh Glover of Williamstown Art Conservation Center's Furniture Department, and Alexander Carlisle, formerly of the same department.
 8. Mahogany panels in the late nineteenth century could be purchased unprimed, primed, or cradled from Bourgeois Ainé., for example. Schaefer, et al, *Painting Light*, p. 53-55.
 9. Winsor and Newton 1853 advertisement, in Henry Mogford, *Instructions for Cleaning, Repairing, Lining and Restoring Oil Paintings*, (Schultze and Co for Winsor and Newton, London, 1853), appendix pp 2-3. Kurt Wehlte, *The Materials and Techniques of Painting*, translated by Ursus Dix, (van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1982), p. 344-45.
- Addresses and colormen information: S. Constantin "The Barbizon Painters: A Guide to Their Suppliers", *Studies in Conservation*, 46 (2001) 49-67. Sally A. Woodcock, "The Roberson Archive: Content and Significance," *Historical Painting Techniques, Materials, and Studio Practice*, University of Leiden, Netherlands, 1995, publisher: Getty Conservation Institute. Peter J. Staples, *The Artist's Colorman's Story*, Rechitt Colman Leisure Ltd, London, 1984.

Part one of a two-part series. Next: Underdrawings.



Sandra Webber has been a paintings conservator with the Williamstown Art Conservation Center for more than thirty-four years. From 2001 to 2012, she worked with a team of art historians on the two-volume *Catalog of Nineteenth Century European Paintings in the Clark Art Institute* (Yale, 2013). Every painting was thoroughly examined from the support to the varnish, using ultraviolet light, infrared reflectography, microscopy, and, where necessary, X-radiography. Her technical reports, which accompany each of the three hundred sixty-six oil painting catalog entries, were the basis for the data compiled and analyzed in this article.