



**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

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286 | View at Guernsey 1883

Oil on canvas, 46 x 55.7 cm

Lower right: Renoir. 83.

1955.601

Renoir spent a little over a month on Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands off the west coast of Normandy, from the beginning of September to early October 1883. All the canvases that he executed there represent Moulin Huet Bay, on the southeastern tip of the island and an easy walk from the principal town Saint Peter Port, where he was lodging. He made a number of studies of figures on the beach, seemingly in preparation for ambitious figure subjects that he planned to execute in the studio on his return to Paris, but none of these was brought to completion at the time of his visit. By contrast, he completed four landscapes of views over the bay, which he signed and dated, and sold to the dealer Durand-Ruel in December 1883.¹

Guernsey was well known in France as the site of Victor Hugo's exile between 1855 and 1870 and as the setting for his novel *Les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866), but it seems not to have been a regular port of call for French visitors. Moulin Huet Bay was renowned as the island's finest scenic attraction. *Black's Guide to the Channel Islands*, a guidebook frequently reprinted in

the period of Renoir's visit, described its attractions in terms that would have appealed to an Impressionist landscapist: "The real source of the beauty of this spot lies, no doubt, in the ever-changing effects at all times and seasons; the freshness and life derived from the running stream; and the exquisite and sudden shifting of the scene, by the occasional introduction of the sea, with its numerous rocks and islets and the enclosing cliff."²

Renoir's four landscapes all depict the bay from viewpoints on or very near the main path that leads down to the bay; characteristically, and quite unlike Monet, Renoir did not leave the beaten track in his search for landscape motifs. *View at Guernsey* shows the panorama of the bay from a spot about halfway down the path, near a present-day tearoom, and includes the Cradle Rock, one of the distinctive features of the bay, and beyond it, the Pea Stacks, the set of rocks at the end of the far promontory. Apart from the loosely brushed suggestion of the track entering the picture at lower right, there is no sign of human presence; the focus is on the play of light and color across foliage, rocks, sea, and sky.

There is a distinct contrast between the formal organization of the picture and its execution. Renoir's chosen viewpoint generated a composition that is relatively conventional in terms of academic landscape practice. The eye is led down the path and then out

to the headland, with the darker forms of the bush on the left and the shadowed cliff face on the right framing the scene, and a tree punctuating the vista in approximately the same position as the trees in so many landscapes by Claude Lorrain (1604/5–1682). The orderliness of this composition makes a contrast to the informal arrangement of many of Renoir's landscapes of the 1870s.

At the same time, the painting is executed with a variegated and lively touch throughout. The brushwork is informal and seemingly impromptu, seeking appropriate marks to convey the diverse textures of the scene, and with an emphasis on the energetic strokes throughout that suggest the effect of a windy day. Much of the canvas was executed quite rapidly, wet-on-wet and presumably on site. There is absolutely no trace here of the greater systematization, with sequences of parallel strokes, that Renoir had begun to introduce into his landscapes over the previous two years, as seen in *The Bay of Naples, Evening* of 1881 (cat. 281) and *Low Tide, Yport* (cat. 285), painted very shortly before his visit to Guernsey. The shadows throughout the present picture are modeled in clear blue—light and high key on the far cliffs, but somewhat darker in the foreground, where they act also as a tonal structure to the scene without detracting from the richly colored overall effect of the canvas. Deeper crimson tones also enrich some of the darker areas of the canvas, picking up the hot salmon and orange hues in the foreground, emphasizing Renoir's determination that the whole image should be viewed in terms of harmonies and contrasts of color.

Unlike many of Renoir's landscapes, *View at Guernsey* reveals clear traces in the sky that some of the white clouds were painted with a palette knife; this is especially evident in the larger white cloud half-way up the sky area near the right margin, where the edges of the knife-stroke have been delicately worked over with a brush. JH

PROVENANCE The artist, sold to Durand-Ruel, before 1891;³ [Durand-Ruel, Paris and New York, before 1891–1933, sold to Clark, 3 Mar. 1933]; Robert Sterling Clark (1933–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Possibly Paris 1892b, no. 16, as *Côtes de Guernesey*, lent by M. J. D.; London 1905a, no. 246; probably Munich 1912, no. 13, as *Marine, Guernsey*; probably Berlin 1912, no. 13; Williamstown 1956b, no. 149, pl. 14; Guernsey 1988, pp. 18, 21, no. 1, ill.; Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 80–81, 83–84, 87, ill.; Chicago 2004, pp. 64, 277, no. 111, ill.; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 93, 112–14, no. 25, ill.

REFERENCES Coquiott 1925, p. 227; Drucker 1944, pp. 186, 203; Kooning 1956, pp. 43–44, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 133, ill.; Fezzi 1972, p. 114, no. 575, ill. (French ed., 1985, pp. 111–12, no. 547, ill.); Pach 1973, pp. 52–53, ill.; Stevens 1977, p. 1293, fig. 3; Nagoya–Hiroshima–Nara 1988, p. 231; Brisbane–Melbourne–Sydney 1994–95, p. 21, fig. 6; Jeromack 1996, p. 84, ill.; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, p. 77; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 2, p. 102, no. 851, ill.; London–Ottawa–Philadelphia 2007–8, pp. 73–74, fig. 53.

TECHNICAL REPORT The original canvas is a commercially primed, tightly woven medium-weight linen. It was glue-lined to a coarser, slightly heavier linen sometime prior to Clark's 1933 purchase, and attached to a keyable, five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher. The original tacking margins are intact. The early lining has prevented an extensive network of age crackle from developing, although there are a few disconnected areas of dark cracks. The pale pink, oil-based ground color is visible in all areas of the picture except the ocean, where the paint seems to have been reworked by the artist. Inpainting extends onto all four edges. This may indicate that the painting was executed while attached to a board, then stretched after it was completed.

The brushwork is lively, with low to moderately high impasto, and only a very few peaks slightly flattened due to the lining. The paint is moderately vehicular, somewhat glossy, and executed wet-into-wet with pure colors. Many strokes are single pigments quickly swirled together on the surface, with the exception of those colors mixed with white. There is selective traction crackle in colors overlying the bright yellow passages, probably due to a slower drying time of the yellow pigment. Fractures in thicker strokes of the pure blue and purplish red may indicate a resin-based medium. A horizontal streak 25.4 cm long in the lower left is probably the result of the edge of something leaning against the image while it was wet. This seems to have been adjusted by the artist shortly after it happened. The brush marks evident on the surface range in size from a small sable, possibly 0.3 cm long, to a flat bristle brush, 1.3 cm long, with a few palette knife applications in the sky. The surface is in excellent condition. The painting was cleaned in 1980 and is presently varnished with Acryloid B-72 resin.

1. For a more extended discussion of the Guernsey trip and its place in Renoir's career, see Guernsey 1988.
2. Anstead 1868, p. 129.
3. Renoir sold four highly finished views of Guernsey to Durand-Ruel soon after his return to Paris. See Guernsey 1988, pp. 8, 16n12. According to the Durand-Ruel Archives, none of the four seems to be the Clark painting, although the dealer may have acquired the Clark painting in the same period. See correspondence in the Clark curatorial file of 28 Sept. 2011. The painting was re-entered as part of Durand-Ruel's stock on 25 Aug. 1891, indicating that it had been purchased earlier.