



**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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EXHIBITIONS Chicago 1932, p. 24, no. 35; Williamstown 1956b, no. 143, pl. 8; New York 1967, no. 42; Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 27, 92–93, ill.; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 104–5, 262, fig. 95; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 35, 96, 114–16, no. 26, ill.

REFERENCES Vollard 1920, not listed in French ed. (English ed., p. 241); Fogg Art Museum 1934, p. 18; Barnes and de Mazia 1935, pp. 88, 455, no. 132; Jewell 1944, p. 112, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 103, ill.; Fezzi 1972, p. 114, no. 570, ill. (French ed., p. 111, no. 544, ill.); Huyghe 1974, p. 178, fig. 155; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 2, p. 32, no. 731, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a moderate-weave linen (22 threads/cm) that had its failing paste and gum elemi lining of heavy double-weave fabric (13 threads/cm) removed in 2005. The five-member pine stretcher is original. There are two fairly large repairs on the right side of the dish, which were known to be overpainted losses in the paint layer only, as a 1986 radiograph shows no disruption of the fabric or ground layers at this location. The painting was relined in 2005 with linen and Beva 371 after a moisture treatment to reduce the weave impression from the old lining fabric. The blue paint in the dish has an ongoing flaking problem, possibly caused in part by the slick surface of the white upper ground layer. Several small blows to the canvas have produced crack networks, including a bull's-eye crack system in the red apple on the table. There is an old diagonal handling crease through the lower left quadrant, which was induced from the back of the canvas. Some traction crack networks in the apples on the table and the tablecloth are more noticeable because they expose the ground layer; others are interlayer paint problems showing a lower red pigment oozing to the surface. The thick varnish layers that were removed in 2005 may have been contributing to the shearing stresses in the paint layer. The large losses in the dish were compensated using primarily acrylic colors over a synthetic resin varnish.

The lower ground is an off-white, commercially prepared layer. There is a heavier, pure white artist-applied ground layer, which extends unevenly to the front picture edges. Although no underdrawing was seen in infrared reflectography or under the microscope, there may be blue painted outlines for each element of the picture. The right side of the background has a series of blue vertical brush marks, which may have been the beginnings of a drapery element, but are now partially obscured by the upper paint layer. The vehicular paint is applied wet-into-wet in pure color strokes. The paint is quite thick in some areas, with some paint buildup on the fruit, and large high impastos in such details as the white knobs of the ceramic dish. Some background strokes were applied around the fruit, although the interlacing edges are well blended.

285 | Low Tide, Yport 1883

Oil on canvas, 54 x 65 cm

Lower right: Renoir. 83.

1955.607

Renoir traveled to Yport, a small town just west of Fécamp, on the northern coast of Normandy between Dieppe and Le Havre, during August 1883, to visit Alfred Nunès, mayor of the town and a relative of Camille Pissarro. There Renoir painted portraits of Nunès's two children; in a letter, he complained that he was "busy with two brats who make me furious" and that there were "a few too many parties, that's the weak point. . . . For at their place you spend the whole day at the table."¹ *Low Tide, Yport* served as the basis for the view in the background of one of these portraits, the one representing Alfred Nunès's son Robert in sailor-boy costume on the beach (fig. 285.1). The scene depicted in both paintings can be firmly identified as the view looking eastward from Yport toward Fécamp (fig. 285.2). For many years it was misidentified as a view of Guernsey (see cat. 286); Sterling Clark bought it in the belief that it represented Guernsey.²

By the late nineteenth century, the coast of Normandy had become highly developed as a destination for vacationers, and Yport, like many other towns, had a casino. A number of Parisians, particularly artists and writers, also owned villas in Yport,³ but it had not lost its original natural charm. Although the guidebooks of the period regularly denigrated the place for its rocky and unpleasant beach,⁴ seen in the foreground of Renoir's canvas, its cliffs were highly praised; in 1866, Eugène d'Auriac described the view that Renoir chose: "to the right the cliffs and waves extend as far as the eye can see; . . . the whole scene forms a picture that is gracious, imposing and full of poetry."⁵ As late as 1887, the place could still be recommended to painters: "The outsiders who live in Yport, the painters who like to paint the many varied aspects of the Bay of Fécamp, who find so many interesting motifs in the comings and goings of the fishermen and their boats, . . . praise the solitude of their retreat, and the beautiful appearance of the sea and the cliffs."⁶

Renoir's canvas gives no indication of the status of the place as a resort, though the artist does take some note of the activities of the local fishermen, with the small boat and the summary indications of figures out on the rocks. The primary focus is on the rocks them-



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selves, together with the sunlit panorama of the bay beyond. The motif is comparable to Monet's *Rocks at Low Tide* of 1882 (Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester),⁷ but Renoir was far less concerned than Monet with finding distinctive types of brush marks to suggest the varied textures of the scene in front of him. Instead, the rocks and the foreground sea alike are treated in relatively homogeneous, loosely parallel strokes running from upper left to lower right; the rocks are indicated by tone and color, rather than by texture, and enlivened by dappled patches of sunlight. Although the tonal contrasts in the foreground differentiate it clearly from the uniformly high-key tonality of the background, the continuation of the parallel brushstrokes through most of the sky lends an overall unity to the whole image.

This means of unifying a canvas through the direction of the brushstrokes can be compared with the system of parallel hatching (generally from lower left to upper right) that Paul Cézanne was evolving at about this time; over the next several years, Renoir's

Fig. 285.1. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Sailor Boy (Portrait of Robert Nunès)*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 130.2 x 80 cm. The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia



Fig. 285.2. View from Yport toward Fécamp, 2005

treatment of landscape subjects became tighter and dryer, and seemingly more closely indebted to Cézanne's example.

Although Renoir used the present canvas as the basis for the landscape in the background of the portrait of Robert Nunès, it is a fully finished picture in its own right, signed and dated. Renoir sold it to the dealer Durand-Ruel at an unknown date.⁸ The artist did sell a painting with the title *Low Tide, Yport* to the dealer in December 1883, a work that may correspond with another canvas, similarly dated 1883, showing the rocks at Yport at low tide and a view directly out to sea (The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg). It seems possible that Durand-Ruel acquired the Clark painting in the same period. JH

PROVENANCE The artist, sold to Durand-Ruel, Paris, before 1891; [Durand-Ruel, Paris and New York, before 1891–1941, sold to Clark, 5 Nov. 1941, as *Marine à Guernsey*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1941–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Probably Munich 1912, no. 14, as *Marée basse, Yport*; probably Berlin 1912, no. 14; Williamstown 1956b, no. 160, pl. 25; Williamstown 1996–97, pp. 80–81, 83, 85, 87, ill.; Chicago 2004, pp. 41, 227, no. 110, ill., as *Sunset on the English Channel*; London–Washington–Hartford 2007–8, pp. 140, 144–45, no. 65, ill.; Madrid 2010–11, pp. 93, 109–12, no. 24.

REFERENCES Coquiot 1925, p. 227; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 113, ill.; Fezzi 1972, p. 114, no. 577, ill. (French ed., p. 112, no. 549, ill.); Ivinski 1997, pp. 534–35, ill.; London–Ottawa–Philadelphia 2007–8, pp. 72–73, fig. 52; Dauberville and Dauberville 2007–10, vol. 2, p. 102, no. 852, ill.; Distel 2009, p. 225, fig. 209.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a fine-weave linen (24 threads/cm), glue/paste-lined to dark, slightly heavier weight linen. The original tacking margins survive, although the stretcher may be a restoration replacement. The lining was most likely done during the painting's years with Durand-Ruel. The ground and paint layers have scattered age cracks, and the dark reds and blues have prominent traction cracks. The dark reddish color has fractured with its own pattern of minute age cracks. Although the surface was varnished in 1980 after cleaning, the reflectance is matte and the surface is dry to the touch. There are a number of small inpainted, but unfilled, repairs in the surface, one just below the "o" of the signature and a few in the upper right corner. There is old, possibly original, debris in the surface at the lower left corner.

The ground layer is a visibly warm-toned off-white, tending toward both faint pink and yellow. There is no evidence of any underpainting either in infrared viewing or normal light. The painting technique is wet-into-wet, using large wide brushes to apply single strokes of color for the majority of the composition. Although some colors are applied in a paste consistency, the general luminosity appears to be the result of the presence of only one paint layer, the visibility of the ground, the particular pigments chosen, and the possible use of resins to increase the transparency of the colors. The impastos have minor flattening due to the lining process, and some have losses or abrasion along their top ridges. The zone between the sky and the water has an added veil of transparent pink scumbled across the horizon, which may have faded slightly.

1. Pierre-Auguste Renoir to Paul Berard, 21 August 1883; translation from White 1984, p. 133.
2. RSC Diary, 6 June 1934.
3. See the lists in Joanne 1866, p. 132; Joanne 1887, p. 144; and Conty 1896, p. 186.
4. Joanne 1866, p. 133; Conty 1876, p. 103.
5. Auriac 1866, p. 165.
6. Joanne 1887, p. 144: "Les étrangers qui habitent Yport, les peintres qui aiment à reproduire les aspects si variés de la baie de Fécamp, qui trouvent tant de motifs intéressants dans les va-et-vient des pêcheurs, de leurs bateaux . . . vantent la solitude de leur retraite, les beaux aspects de la mer et de ses falaises."
7. W 767.
8. Durand-Ruel Archives. See correspondence in the Clark's 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.