



**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,  
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,  
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Details:

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363

### Artist unknown

British, 19th century

#### 363 | River Scene 19th century

Oil on panel, 9 x 11.6 cm

1955.654

#### 364 | River Scene 19th century

Oil on panel, 9 x 11.7 cm

1955.655

Although usually grouped as a pair with the same size work of the same title, only one of these paintings (cat. 363) appeared in the 1872 sale of the collection of the Baron Michel de Tretaigne, as *La Seine à Rouen*. The two were together, however, by 1890, when they were sold to Durand-Ruel by Barre. The history of these paintings is further complicated by the fact that a roundel of the same composition as cat. 364 was sold in Paris in 1931 with the generic title of *Le port*.<sup>1</sup> In fact, there is little to suggest the identification of these works as located in Rouen on the Seine. Unlike Clark's *Rouen* (cat. 365), where the cathedral is clearly visible, these works give only the slightest suggestion of a cityscape.

Loosely painted with more sky than river, both works concentrate on a sailboat as it approaches the dock. Both works, too, place a smaller rowboat closer to the picture plane to establish a sense of scale. The economy of Rouen, the capital of the province of Normandy, was dependent on shipping from its access to the English Channel and to the River Seine. Moreover, its geographic location made it a stopping point for British artists.<sup>2</sup>

Like many scenes of this genre, these have been attributed to Richard Parkes Bonington (1802–1828), the short-lived but innovative Anglo-French artist, who often took Rouen as his subject.<sup>3</sup> Bonington, however, rarely painted on panel and more usually chose mill-board as his preferred support. Furthermore, Bonington more usually depicted Rouen in watercolor, delineating the landmarks of the city with greater detail. EP

**PROVENANCE** Cat. 363: Baron Michel de Tretaigne, France (his sale, Drouot, Paris, 19 Feb. 1872, no. 4, as *La Seine à*



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*Rouen*, by Bonington [*sic*]; Barre, probably Paris (until 1890, sold to Durand-Ruel, 30 Oct. 1890); [Durand-Ruel, Paris, 1890–95, transferred to Durand-Ruel, New York, 4 Mar. 1895]; [Durand-Ruel, New York, 1895–1903, sold to Page, 16 Jan. 1903]; O. O. Page (Jan.–Oct. 1903, sold to Durand-Ruel, 5 Oct. 1903); [Durand-Ruel, New York, 1903–41, sold to Clark, 5 Nov. 1941, as *Marine*, by Bonington]; Robert Sterling Clark (1941–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

Cat. 364: Barre, probably Paris (until 1890, sold to Durand-Ruel, 30 Oct. 1890); [Durand-Ruel, Paris, 1890–95, transferred to Durand-Ruel, New York, 4 Mar. 1895]; [Durand-Ruel, New York, 1895–1903, sold to Page, 16 Jan. 1903]; O. O. Page (Jan.–Oct. 1903, sold to Durand-Ruel, 5 Oct. 1903); [Durand-Ruel, New York, 1903–41, sold to Clark, 5 Nov. 1941, as *Marine*, by Bonington]; Robert Sterling Clark (1941–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1958a, ill., as by Bonington.

**REFERENCES** Cat. 363: Shirley 1940, p. 144.

Cat. 364: None

**TECHNICAL REPORT** Cats. 363–64: Both paintings are executed on oak panels 0.5 cm thick that have slightly thinner left and right edges. The wood grain is oriented vertically, which is unusual for horizontal landscapes. Both panels may be from the same board and may have been cut out by the artist, as neither is square. Although cat. 364 is fairly flat, cat. 363 has a slightly twisted convex warp. Among the other labels on the reverse of cat. 363 is the black ink inscription “R.P. Bonington.” Vertical age cracks appear on both pictures following the wood grain, while cat. 364 also has traction crackle throughout its paint layer, much of it inpainted. Cotton fibers embedded in the varnish and solvent abrasion point to at least one cleaning sometime before Clark’s 1941 purchase. Small dark details, such as figures and boat masts, are severely abraded from cleaning. Both paintings have very yellow varnish coatings with separate crack networks. The ultraviolet light fluorescence on cat. 363 is denser, possibly due to more than one layer of varnish, applied over a sloppy cleaning which left residues of grime and old varnish in recesses of the paint. Retouchings are visible below the varnish in the boat sails on cat. 364 and along the left and right edges of both pictures.

Edge roughness may indicate that the oak support was prepared with ground layers before being cut. Charcoal lines running along the left and lower edges of cat. 363 may have acted as cutting guides. Both paintings seem to have the same ground applications; the lower layer is a thick off-white and the upper layer is a thin, warm, sand color. The width and diagonal direction of the ground brushwork is visible beneath the paint in reflected light. No underdrawing can be seen on either picture. The paint technique for both is rather thin, with a few round impastos in light passages and in upper details of thin dark areas. The traction crackle on

cat. 364 may suggest that the artist painted areas of the surface over paint that was still tacky. On the same image, there may be a line of vertical letters in the lower left corner.

1. *Le port* was paired with a scene entitled *La route*. See Drouot 1931, no. 9. The pair had been bought just three years previously at the sale of “M. E . . . C . . .” whose collection also included seventeen watercolors attributed to Bonington and twelve additional oils. See Drouot 1928.
2. For a recent survey of nineteenth-century treatments of the city, see Lespinasse 2003.
3. See Noon 2008.

## Artist unknown

British, 19th century

### 365 | Rouen 19th century

Oil on canvas, 30 x 38 cm  
1955.656

Claude Monet’s series of Rouen Cathedral paintings (c. 1892–94) has immortalized the architectural centerpiece of the Norman city as a modernist icon. Before Monet employed his distinctive style to record the effects of light on the Gothic structure, Rouen and its buildings were the subject of the equally innovative artistic experimentation of early nineteenth-century plein-air painting. On the Channel coast, Rouen was a stopping place for British artists en route to Paris or on their way home from a Continental tour. Its geographical position, therefore, reflected the flow of artistic exchange between France and England in the first part of the nineteenth century.

Richard Parkes Bonington (1802–1828), an English-born, French-trained artist, was at the center of a group of French and British painters whose small-scale oils and watercolors, despite their size, drew wide attention at the Paris Salon in the 1820s. The popularity of his landscapes was compounded by Bonington’s early death, and numerous imitators took advantage of the high prices his works fetched at his posthumous sale in 1829. As early as 1833, the *Magazine of the Fine Arts* warned: “The cupidity of dealers has been so great that caution and perception are now necessary in purchasing a Bonington, either in oils or water colours.”<sup>1</sup>