



**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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Antoine Vollon

French, 1833–1900

347 | Harbor Scene c. 1871

Oil on paper or laminate cardboard, mounted on canvas,
19.2 x 26.4 cm

Lower right: A. Vollon
1955.893

Antoine Vollon has been referred to as a “painter’s painter” for his meticulous technique—a high compliment, especially considering that he was largely self-taught.¹ The critics particularly admired his still-life paintings, leading his contemporaries to call him the Chardin of his day.² Like the eighteenth-century master of still life, Vollon demonstrated his ability to

evoke textures and surfaces through his paintings of flowers, vegetables, armor, fish, butter, and many other objects. Vollon drew inspiration from other artists with whom he was acquainted, such as his mentors Théodule Ribot (1823–1891) and Charles François Daubigny (1817–1878), as well as the seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings he saw at the Louvre and in the Netherlands.³ Vollon established himself as a still-life painter, but he also hoped to gain recognition as a landscape artist. He submitted a landscape to the Salon of 1863, but it was rejected and hung in the Salon de Refusés. Despite exhibiting regularly at the Salon in the 1870s, Vollon did not successfully contribute a landscape until 1886—twenty-three years after his first attempt.⁴ His landscapes, however, did not go completely unnoticed. Those who were familiar with Vollon’s efforts in the genre acknowledged his talent and praised his virtuosity as a painter.⁵

Vollon experimented more with his manner of painting in his landscapes than his still lifes.⁶ His sense of spontaneity can be seen in the Clark's *Harbor Scene*, although its original appearance has been considerably altered by improper treatment. Vollon depicted the elements of this coastal view by applying paint through a variety of means. A thin wash for the sky and water render them as muted tones of blue and gray. Thickly painted clouds hang heavily in the atmosphere. The trace of the artist's brush in the water gives the effect of ripples or gentle waves. The loose and abbreviated strokes of a well-laden brush compose ships and boats moored in the harbor. Two clusters of ships are featured in the middle ground, but as the space recedes, the boats become increasingly indistinguishable, turning the horizon into a forest of masts. Vollon's wide range of approaches was noted by one of his students, who commented on his teacher's unconventional methods of painting, such as using the handle of his paintbrush, his fingernails, and the palm of his hand, in order to achieve the desired effects.⁷

According to Carol Forman Tabler, the leading scholar on Vollon, *Harbor Scene* most likely shows a view of Antwerp on the River Scheldt. Vollon traveled to Belgium and the Netherlands in 1871 with fellow artist Eugène Louis Boudin in order to escape the Franco-Prussian War and Commune. Boudin and Vollon painted marine scenes together while in Antwerp. Boudin's influence is visible in *Harbor Scene* in its lack of architecture, land, or anything else that would distract from the focus on the seascape.⁸ Vollon's interest in marine painting may have emerged as early as 1860.⁹ Over the course of his career, he painted many coastal views in France, ranging in location from Dunkerque in the north to Marseilles in the south. The artist, who described himself as an *ouvrier*, or "worker," perhaps identified with the lives of fisherfolk.¹⁰ *Harbor Scene*, like his other seascapes, evidences the labor he put into manipulating his medium to capture the scene before him. KA

PROVENANCE Léon Tabourier, Paris (until 1898, his sale, Drouot, Paris, 20 June 1898, no. 55, as *Marine*); [F. & J. Tempelaere, Paris, sold to Clark, 28 Mar. 1936, as *Marine*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1936–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Williamstown–Hartford 1974, p. 103, no. 64, ill.; New York 1980b, no. 7; Williamstown 1988–89, no cat.; New York 2004–5, pp. 41, 109, no. 19, ill., as *Harbor Scene (Antwerp?)*.

REFERENCES Tabler 1995, p. 121, no. 59.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a smooth paper or light-weight cardboard, which has been glue-lined to a coarse linen (16 threads/cm) and a gauze interleaf. This treatment appears to have been done before Mr. Clark's purchase in 1936. The slightly twisted five-member stretcher is probably not original. Sharp-edged cracks and splits, typical of paper, can be detected in raking or reflected light in the left sky, and a repaired tear can be seen in the right sky. There are also scattered losses down to the ground in the left sky and along the horizon line. There is massive solvent damage in the center area above the horizon, among the ship masts, rigging, and the surrounding sky color. The signature is also skinned, with some letters partially missing. The extensive retouchings are splotchy compared with the original, more continuous, brushwork. White highlight impastos are moated from the lining pressure and bear residues of old varnish. The coatings are unevenly discolored with pools of brown resin along the left and right edges. Under ultraviolet light, the coatings fluoresce a bluish-green, which suggests there is some synthetic resin on the surface. The varnish is quite shiny with horizontal brush marks still visible.

The cream-colored ground layer, possibly applied by the artist, presents a very smooth surface, and may be more visible than was intended due to solvent abrasion of the paint layer. Although no image underdrawing was discovered, there is a fan of radiating perspective lines, possibly in graphite, in the lower left quadrant, some visible to the unaided eye. The paint is applied in light, vehicular strokes, wet-into-wet. The signature is executed in a thin brown paint in the lower right.

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1. See Cox 1883, p. 557, and New York 2004–5, pp. 12–13.
 2. See, for example, Vollon's obituary in *Le Journal* (28 Aug. 1900), in which the artist is described as "the Chardin of our time"; translation from New York 2004–5, p. 25.
 3. Bye 1921, p. 127.
 4. New York 2004–5, p. 16.
 5. Bergerat 1878, vol. 1, p. 13.
 6. See Tabler 1982, pp. 7–11, for a discussion of Vollon's stylistic experiments in his landscapes.
 7. New York 2004–5, p. 12.
 8. Tabler 1995, p. 121.
 9. Vollon's painting *Coast Scene with Fishing Boats* (Brooklyn Museum), for example, is dated 1860–65.
 10. New York 2004–5, p. 11.