

The background of the cover is a detailed 19th-century painting of a storm at sea. The sky is filled with heavy, dark, and turbulent clouds, with some light breaking through near the horizon. The sea is dark and choppy, with white-capped waves crashing against a sandy beach in the foreground. Several large sailing ships with multiple masts and sails are visible on the horizon, some appearing to be struggling against the wind. The overall mood is one of intense natural power and maritime drama.

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS  
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

**VOLUME ONE**

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,  
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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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**31 | Boats Returning to Port, Trouville** 1894

Oil on canvas, marouflaged to aluminum, 65.7 x 92.2 cm

Lower left: E. Boudin - 94 / Trouville

Bequest of Mildred Cox Howes, 1973

1973.7

Boudin was born and died on the Normandy coast, in Honfleur and Deauville respectively, so it is fitting that he is known primarily as a painter of the sea. It was where he felt most comfortable, and despite travels to other areas of France, Belgium, and Italy, Boudin always found himself back on the coast, painting his familiar subjects. It is striking that despite numerous winter trips in the 1860s to Paris to visit Claude Monet, Boudin never painted one view of the city.<sup>1</sup> Rather, he returned every summer to his home region and concentrated on a prolific output of seascapes.

In Trouville-sur-Mer, Boudin found a muse for his characteristic subject. Located approximately two hundred kilometers (124 miles) northwest of Paris, twelve kilometers (7 miles) southwest of his birthplace of Honfleur, and contiguous to Deauville, this

truly was Boudin's home turf. He painted the beach at Trouville from 1860 and particularly the port from 1885 to 1898. In the nineteenth century, artists were attracted to the Normandy coast because of its rugged and varied landscape, the picturesque fishing villages, and special qualities of light. Many leading artists, including Courbet, Whistler, Manet, Degas, Monet, and Caillebotte, often painted its shore and maritime activities. Normandy was also a popular tourist destination. Boudin probably first arrived in town in 1860, when Trouville was already a fashionable seaside resort. By 1890, Trouville was characterized by Baedeker's guide to Northern France as "the most fashionable watering-place on the coast of Normandy," as it was an exclusive and expensive place to summer.<sup>2</sup> From the 1860s onward, Boudin specialized in painting just these fashionably dressed men and women at the water's edge, with umbrellas and other beach-going accoutrements. He concentrated not on the landscape, but on capturing tourists at leisure—seeing and being seen.

Unlike this type of seaside scene, for which the artist is best known, *Boats Returning to Port, Trouville*, focuses on the natural elements of wind and

waves, and the comparatively small boats' efforts to withstand their force. Here several sailboats and a steamship plow through the encroaching waves, forming a wedge shape behind the central, foremost boat. Presumably all the vessels are heading for the same destination, the safe haven of port in the visibly rough weather. The subject of the port at Trouville was far rarer than Boudin's many depictions of the town's jetties and beaches. He also depicted landscapes in the area, including the River Touques, fish markets, and washerwomen. As Vivien Hamilton observes, however, "unlike the masters of Dutch seventeenth-century art, or contemporaries such as Monet, Boudin rarely painted ships out at sea."<sup>3</sup> This image thus represents a relatively unusual subject for Boudin, although he painted several similar seascapes in the same period, late in his career.

*The English Coal Ship in Sight of Trouville* (private collection) is a related view that also dates to 1894 and features a similar grouping of steamship and sailboats.<sup>4</sup> Although the calm waves and patches of bright blue sky indicate more pleasant weather, Boudin again handled the water, and to a lesser extent the sky and clouds, with diagonal, dynamic brushstrokes. This active, broken brushwork, which the artist began to employ near the end of his career, indicates his knowledge not only of the techniques developed by the Impressionist artists in the 1870s, a group to which he himself loosely belonged, but perhaps even of subsequent approaches pioneered by artists such as Georges Seurat (1851–1891) in the late 1880s and 1890s.

The source of the present work's title is unknown, although the artist's inscription clearly indicates the location from which he painted this view. Curiously, Schmit in his catalogue raisonné gives this and the related work the same designation as depicting an English coal ship—which must correspond to the steam-powered vessel—despite the greater prominence of this ship in the private collection work than in the Clark canvas. In the Clark scene, the apparent direction and convergence of the vessels toward a point that seems implicitly to represent Boudin's position at the entrance to the port of Trouville make the current descriptive title a logical one. KAP

**PROVENANCE** [Durand-Ruel, Paris]; [J. Eastman Chase, Boston, sold to Cox, 10 Sept. 1902]; W. E. Cox, Brookline, Mass. (from 1902); Mrs. Osborne Howes (Mildred Cox Howes), Chesnut Hill, Mass., by descent (d. 1973, bequeathed to the Clark); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1973.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1975, no cat.; Williamstown 1978, no cat.; Williamstown 1988a, no cat.

**REFERENCES** Schmit 1984, p. 78, no. 3831, ill., as *Le Charbonnier Anglais en Vue de Trouville*.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The original fabric support is a fine-weave linen (22–25 threads/cm). In 1970, Gustav Kliman of Boston marouflaged the painting to a 0.1-cm-thick sheet of aluminum with a coarse linen backing using wax-resin as an adhesive. The assemblage was then reattached to the original five-member stretcher. The artist's tacking margins, which remain in place, show evidence of fraying at the fold-over edges and corners, which may explain the secondary support, although it is not clear why such a stiff material was chosen. The image may be darkened by the wax infused into the fabric and ground layers, and patches of yellowed wax lie in the interstices of some brushwork. In general, the picture has lost much of its lively surface effects from the heat and pressure of the mounting. All the impastos are flattened, some thicker paint deposits are moated, and there is also a faint weave impression. Small age cracks are visible throughout, and there are a few traction cracks in the center boat and old stretcher creases from the vertical center crossbar. Thin paint passages have been skinned by a harsh cleaning down to the bare thread tops in places. It seems the painting was cleaned several times in the twentieth century, including once in 1902. The present coating is yellowed, with bits of undissolved natural resin embedded in the surface. Under ultraviolet light, scattered areas of faint fluorescence are visible from an earlier coating, as well as a few retouches in the dark colors of the boats.

The cool-toned, medium-gray ground appears to be a thin, uneven layer applied by the artist. The distortions caused from stretching an unprimed fabric are visible, especially along the left, where the ground layer stops short of the fold-over edge. Arc-shaped marks below the paint in the sky may indicate that a palette knife was used to apply the ground layer. The gray ground color contributes a dark undertone to the waves. Although no underdrawing was detected, changes in several boats are assumed due to smooth, blurred patches, as if paint had been removed or reworked with a palette knife. In general, boat details were applied over the sky paint, which was then readjusted around the sails. The thick paste-consistency paint is executed with brushes 0.6–1.9 cm wide, with more blended effects in the sky and loose, dry, scumbled technique in the waves.

1. Glasgow–London 1992–93, p. 12.
2. Baedeker 1889, p. 165.
3. Glasgow–London 1992–93, p. 91.
4. Schmit 1973, vol. 3, p. 250, no. 3258.