



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

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## Eugène Isabey

French, 1803–1886

### 175 | Cliffs of Normandy (Falaises normandes)

c. 1850

Oil on wood-pulp board, mounted on Masonite, 38.4 x 31.2 cm

Lower right: EI [monogram]

Gift of the Joseph F. McCrindle Collection

2009.12.2

Eugène Isabey looked to the sea and its surrounding landscape for inspiration throughout his long career as a painter. The cliffs of Normandy appear frequently in his oeuvre. His more dramatic works feature smugglers just off the steep striated coasts of this region, battling rock-strewn waters and surging waves as they try to find safe harbor for their cargo, as in *The Smugglers* (location unknown).<sup>1</sup> In other pieces, such as the Clark's *Cliffs of Normandy*, the artist celebrates the geographical complexity and verdant beauty of the north coast of France.

In the present work, Isabey depicts, from a high vantage point, undulating and jagged rocks that rise above a portion of the coast. A patchwork quilt of green and red pigment in the center of the picture indicates a fertile, welcoming area of this landscape, and contrasts with the barren, unforgiving rock face composed of dark browns and slate grays. A calm blue sea at left further emphasizes the jagged, uneven surface of the cliffs. From the sandy shore far below, several natural jetties of rock extend into the water. A series of houses, closely clustered together, sit on the plateau of the cliff at far right, near the top of the picture.

*Cliffs of Normandy* exhibits a much flatter but no less immediate manner of painting than the later *Landing Stage on the Jetty* (cat. 176). Painted *en plein air*, Isabey worked quickly to capture the scene before him with a minimal amount of paint. In the upper portion of the painting, for example, the blue sky and clouds are painted so sparingly and swiftly that much of the support is visible. The individual bristles of Isabey's brush create areas of variety and visual interest in the sky and elsewhere, while a palette knife is responsible for smooth patches of paint in the green grass just left of center at the bottom of the picture.

*Cliffs of Normandy* shares its subject and palette of brilliant green, rusty brown, and pale blue with a



Fig. 175.1 Eugène Isabey, *Cliffs of Normandy*, c. 1850. Oil on canvas, 29 x 40 cm. Musée du Château, Dieppe

canvas in the Château-Musée de Dieppe (fig. 175.1). The location depicted in the Dieppe picture has been identified as the cliffs near Varengeville-sur-Mer, an area Isabey visited often.<sup>2</sup> The landscape depicted in the Clark piece may also be near Varengeville, although the jagged, more gradual slope of the cliffs differs from the sheer vertical drop that characterizes the cliffs of the Varengeville/Dieppe area. Although it is unlikely Isabey painted these two works on the same day, given the difference in terrain and media, he probably made a walking tour of the coast the day he painted the Clark picture, executing more than one view of the spectacular cliffs. Indeed, the Clark work, executed on wood-pulp board, is similar in size to other works on paper that feature the Norman cliffs, such as *Study of Cliffs* (location unknown).<sup>3</sup> It would have been relatively easy for him to transport a paint box, a handful of papers, and a mout of some sort: three tack holes along the top edge of the Clark picture reveal that he secured this sheet to an easel or board while he worked. The support was subsequently mounted on Masonite.

This work was part of the collection of the late Joseph F. McCrindle (d. 2008), an avid art collector and founder of *Transatlantic Review* and later of a philanthropic foundation that bears his name. Mr. McCrindle probably acquired the work at auction in 1951; in October of that year, the Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, offered this work. The sale catalogue does not indicate from which collection this work came, but it



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does list the work as once belonging to a Paul Lemarettes and then a Camille Lemarettes. This information undoubtedly came from the label affixed to the reverse of the painting, upon which is inscribed a note that the *Cliffs of Normandy* was bequeathed to Camille Lemarettes, the heir of Paul Lemarettes, who died in Quimper, France in the late nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> AG

**PROVENANCE** Paul Lemarettes, Quimper (probably d. 1890); Camille Lemarettes, by descent (probably from 1890); sale, Parke-Bernet, New York, 11 Oct. 1951, no. 7, probably sold to McCrindle; Joseph F. McCrindle (probably 1951–d. 2008);

Joseph F. McCrindle Estate (2008–9, given to the Clark, as *Cliffs off Falaise*); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2009.

**EXHIBITIONS** None

**REFERENCES** Miquel 1980, vol. 2, p. 158, no. 732, as *Falaises normandes*.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The primary support is a thin wood-pulp board, approximately 0.1 cm, which has been glued to a piece of 0.6-cm-thick Masonite. The reverse of the Masonite has gray paper adhered overall, as well as a cardboard laminate label (25 x 15 cm) faced with blue paper. The label has water

stains and some fading, and the inscription is in iron gall ink and reads more easily in ultraviolet light. Old creases and breaks in the thin original support, especially at the edges and corners, were consolidated in 2011. A small piece of the pulp board is missing from the top edge, and there is circular damage in the upper left sky. There are scattered small dents and embedded debris from the mounting. Layers of blackish brown grime and brown varnish, dating from the time of the mounting, were removed during the 2011 treatment.

There appears to be no ground layer, only a possible size layer applied against the fibrous surface. The ungrounded pulp board shows in thinner passages, and has turned a warm orangey brown. No underdrawing was detected. The paint handling is paste consistency throughout, applied wet-into-wet. There may be some smooth palette-knife work in the central foreground. Thin passages in the sky, where the brown support showed, were glazed to match the pale tone of the surrounding paint. The monogram is in brown paint.

1. M 534. A print was made after this work by Rouargue frères and published by Baillieu in 1838 in *Album Maritime*. The National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England, owns this print (PAD7319; T.33.337).
2. For example, in 1853, because of his wife's ill health, Isabey took up residence in Varengeville for the summer; see Klein 1996, p. 48.
3. M 400. The Clark work measures 38.4 x 31.2 cm, while *Study of Cliffs* measures 29 x 40 cm.
4. The inscription reads: "Falaises Normandes; peinture par/ E. Isabey/ Donné en heritage, comme part. a monsieur Camille/Lemarettes, heritier de Monsieur Paul Lemarettes, mort le 18 Fevrier 1890 a Quimper" (Cliffs of Normandy; painting by/ E. Isabey/ given as a share of inheritance to Monsieur Camille/ Lemarettes, the heir of Monsieur Paul Lemarettes, who died on 18 February 1890 in Quimper). The last digit of the date is difficult to read, but it seems to be a zero.

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**176 | Landing Stage on the Jetty** c. 1860

Oil on panel, 28.6 x 46 cm

Lower right: E. Isabey

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hirschl

1990.62

Eugène Isabey is well known for his marine paintings of the Normandy coast, which he first began making in the 1820s. Throughout his life he returned to the seaside many times, sketching and painting *en plein air* the rocky cliffs of the coasts at Étretat and Varengeville

as well as activity of the ports at Le Havre, Dieppe, and Trouville. His more dramatic works celebrate the ruthlessness of the sea and the human struggle against it, as in *The Storm (Shipwreck)* (Musée Fabre, Montpellier). The Clark painting, while revealing something of the power of the sea, also celebrates the charm of northern France's small fishing towns.

Isabey studied painting with his father, the miniaturist Jean-Baptiste Isabey (1767–1855). The younger Isabey furthered his skills by copying paintings in the Louvre. His Salon debut in 1824 included seascapes and landscapes; his efforts were rewarded with a first-class medal.

In *Landing Stage on the Jetty*, the artist pictures the return of three small fishing boats to a wood and brick pier. In the foreground, the boat furthest right has already taken down its sails and mast; those on board disembark and proceed to climb the stairs to the jetty. Sailors on the second fishing boat prepare to dock by lowering sails; seamen on the third boat navigate toward the stairs. Two additional boats, sails full, move around the end of the pier, perhaps intending to head out to sea. The wooden-railed jetty, which extends from the right side of the work, neatly bisects the panel, separating the cloud-strewn sky and the choppy ocean. The pier itself is scattered with people who observe the activity around them.

Throughout *Landing Stage on the Jetty* Isabey exhibits confident, loose brushwork. He applied paint quickly, layer upon layer, wet pigment upon wet. The sea itself is composed of various colors: thin strokes of blue paint reveal a white ground layer below. Brown pigment applied over blue gives depth to the waves, and small daubs of white, dotted around the sea to suggest the foam of waves, provide texture. The fluid movement of Isabey's hand captures the intensity of the wind, the power of the crashing waves, the flurry of commercial and leisure activity at this port.

This painting has long been known as *The Pier at Dieppe*. When the London branch of the firm of Christie, Manson and Woods auctioned this work and other stock from the art dealers Hollender and Cremetti in 1906, this panel was listed as "Dieppe Pier."<sup>1</sup> In 1985, Christie's, London, again offered this painting, this time with the title *The Pier at Dieppe*.<sup>2</sup> The jetty and lighthouse are the only physical clues to the location of this work; no coastal landscape or view of the town is relayed by the artist to securely locate the scene.

In the nineteenth century, Dieppe's harbor was reached by sailing between two piers that stretched