

LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

EUGÈNE BOUDIN
1824 Honfleur - Deauville 1898

Promeneurs sur la plage de Deauville

Pastel on paper; early 1890s.
Stamped with the monogram lower right [the artist's estate sale (Lugt 828)].
251 x 375 mm

Eugène Boudin was the son of a ship's captain. He was born and grew up in Honfleur, where he experienced at first hand the life, local colour and maritime climate of a seaport. The sea was to be the centre of his artistic interest. In 1847, he went to Paris but continued to travel regularly to his favourite places on the coasts of Normandy and Brittany. In 1884, he was able to buy a plot of land near the dunes to the west of Deauville. Here, he built the *Villa des Ajoncs* or as he called it, the *Villa Marinette*, working there until his death. His artistic renown is based on his views of harbours, shipping, rivers, estuaries and coasts. Although he also ventured inland to paint landscapes and produced a number of still lifes, his fame rests on his important series of beach scenes.

Boudin produced pastels from the late 1850s onwards, working directly from nature. In his acute and highly subtle awareness of the effects of changing light and weather conditions, coupled with particular emphasis on the effects of wind on cloud and the surface of the sea, Boudin prefigured Impressionism. Baudelaire, on viewing Boudin's pastels in 1859, was captivated by them, writing: *These studies, so swiftly and accurately sketched, after what, in terms of force and colour, are the most inconstant, the most fleeting of the things, after waves and clouds, always have written in their margins the date, the hour and the wind: thus, for example, 8 October, noon, wind from the north-west. If you have occasionally had leisure to acquaint yourself with these meteorological beauties, you could verify from memory the exactitude of M. Boudin's observations. Hiding the caption with your hand, you would guess the season, the hour and the wind. . . . At the end, all these clouds, with their fantastic, luminous shapes, these chaotic shadows, these green and pink immensities suspended and added one on top of the other, these yawning ovens, these firmaments made from black or violet satin, crumpled, rolled or torn, these horizons in mourning or streaming with molten metal, all these depths, all these splendours, went to my head like an intoxicating drink or the eloquence of opium.*¹

Boudin's paintings of the beaches at Trouville and Deauville, particularly the paintings of the 1860s, helped to bring him public recognition.² During the Second Empire, Trouville developed into one of the highly popular summer resorts patronized by Parisian high society. Boudin captured the beauty and elegance of the fashionable figures on the beach and the brilliance of the light playing on the sea beyond them. The scenes he depicted at this stage of his career proved very popular. They are frequently filled with crowds gathered in frieze-like arrangement, punctuated by groups of standing and seated figures, children playing in the sand, fallen chairs, inquisitive dogs and wheeled bathing machines. Although Boudin's stylistic development was neither radical nor dramatic, in the last

¹ Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités Esthétiques*, Salon de 1859, VII, *Le Paysage*. – For an English translation, see Anne-Marie Bergeret-Gourbin, *Eugène Boudin. Paintings and Drawings. Musée Eugène Boudin, Honfleur*, Paris 1996, p.76. – Baudelaire's text is reprinted in G. Jean-Aubry, *La vie et l'oeuvre d'après les lettres et les documents inédits d'Eugène Boudin*, Neuchâtel 1968/1977, p.234.

² See Vivien Hamilton, *Boudin at Trouville*, exhib. cat., The Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums, Glasgow, and Courtauld Institute Galleries, University of London, 1992-3.

LE CLAIRE

KUNST

SEIT 1982

decade of his life his work shows a growing tendency towards impressions of emptiness coupled with a display of technical exuberance. His handling of paint grew increasingly uninhibited and his brushwork cursory, while achieving extraordinary formal austerity.³

The present pastel was executed in the early 1890s. It is one of a remarkable series of panoramic views of the beaches of Deauville depicted almost empty of human figures. A large expanse of sky occupies almost two-thirds of the composition. A dark line of hills and a stretch of sea mark the distant horizon. In the immediate foreground a broad expanse of sand is left empty of incident, only two pairs of figures are seen strolling along the beach. The cool, silvery lighting and sandy tone are enlivened with a few touches of brilliant colour on the figures.⁴

This pastel can be regarded as a finished work in its own right and not as a preparatory study for a painting. In terms of atmospheric impact and compositional spaciousness it ranks as one of the masterpieces of Boudin's late period.

Manuel Schmit, Paris, has confirmed the authenticity of the present pastel.

³ Harley Preston, in *The Dictionary of Art*, edited by Jane Turner, London and New York 1996, IV, p.524.

⁴ For comparable paintings with similar compositions see *Deauville. La plage à marée montante*, oil on canvas, 55 x 80 cm, dated: *Octobre 94*. Musée de la Province de Québec, Québec (R. Schmit, *Eugène Boudin 1824-1898. Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint*, Paris 1973, no. 3320). – *Rivage a Trouville*, oil on canvas, 35.5 x 58 cm, dated: *7 aout*, executed 1892-6. The National Gallery, London (R. Schmit, op. cit., no. 3016). – *La Plage de Tourgeville*, oil on canvas, 50 x 71 cm, dated: *93*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen (R. Schmit, op. cit., no. 3139). – *The Beach at Deauville, Low Tide*, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 103.2 cm, dated: *93*. Courtauld Institute Galleries, London. (V. Hamilton, op. cit., no. 46).