

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



ALFRED STEVENS

1823 Brussels – Paris 1906

*Effet de lumière au large d'Honfleur*

Oil on panel; 1891.

Signed and dated lower left: *A Stevens 91*; on the verso inscribed and dated: *Honfleur août 1891*.

46 x 37 cm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, France

Alfred Stevens spent most of his artistic career in France. In 1844, he moved to Paris to train as a painter. At the École des Beaux-Arts one of his teachers was Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. Stevens went back to Brussels long enough to make his artistic debut at the Brussels Salon in 1851, but returned to Paris the following year, remaining there for the rest of his life.

Stevens became during the 1860s an immensely successful painter and was acclaimed for his paintings of elegant modern women. His exhibits at the Salons in Paris and Brussels attracted favourable critical attention and were sought after by collectors.

Jacques Foucart stated: "The artist fared better when he tackled - belatedly - other subjects such as seascapes and the effects of the sky by the sea, which he multiplied to good effect in the 1880s-1890s. The affected manner of the worldly genre suddenly gave way to violence of paste, crescendos of clouds and lighting, agitations of writing linked to the evocation of necessarily agitated seas which allowed him to be another Stevens, or rather a truer and more authentic Stevens in his pictorial complication, a Stevens in a way liberated and saved, just as refined and virtuoso. He even becomes a great painter of the elusive sailor, who cannot be confused with Boudin or Guillemet - he is far too violent and unbridled for them!"<sup>1</sup>

In the 1880s, Stevens's work underwent a temporary change of style. For health reasons, he was obliged to spend his summers by the sea. From August to October 1881, Georges Petit took charge of Alfred Stevens' stay in Le Havre, allocating him a sum of more than thirty thousand francs, in exchange for eleven paintings that the artist would deliver to him on his return. And here is Stevens, anxious to freely paint "what he sees", that is to say the sea in all its states, in all weathers and under all light effects.<sup>2</sup> The experience markedly influenced his work and coastal subjects came to represent an important part of his repertoire of motifs. He painted hundreds of views of popular resorts; many of them in a sketchy style that shows the direct influence of Impressionism.

At the end of August 1891 and until mid-October, it was in Honfleur that the artist was to meet up with his family with great joy. This family stay did not exempt Stevens from working or selling. His

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Foucart, *Alfred Stevens, vrai peintre et non imagier de mode par nostalgie*, in: in: Christian Lefebvre, *Alfred Stevens -1823-1906*, Paris, 2006, p. 16 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Mers du Nord et Côte d'Azur*, in: Op. cit., p. 156 ff.

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paintings are maritime landscapes with steamers and sailing boats animating the Bay of Honfleur [Fig.1].

The weather is hardly clement that summer and the general tone of the palette is rather gloomy – all this lends our beautiful painting of the sea off the coast of Honfleur a slightly melancholic mood.



Fig.1: *La Baie de Honfleur*  
oil on panel, 1891  
31.5 x 40.5 cm  
Kunsthalle Bremen  
(Inv. no. 1055-1972/4)