

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

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EUGÈNE BOUDIN

1824 Honfleur - Deauville 1898

Marine au grand ciel

Pastel on paper, mounted on cardboard. Stamped with the monogram lower right in blue:

E. B (Lugt 828); dated lower left in black chalk: 1860.

213 x 287 mm

PROVENANCE: Galerie Motte, Geneva, 2 November 1971 – Dr. Gustav Rau, Stuttgart – Thence by descent

EXHIBITIONS: *Rétrospective Eugène Boudin* (travelling to museums in Osaka, Hiroshima, Kagoshima, Chiba and Shizuoka), Japan 1996, no. 3, pl. 114. – *Eugène Boudin: Antesala del impresionismo*, exhib. cat., Museo Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá and Suramericana de Seguro, Medellín 1998

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, coasts, beaches and cloud-laden skies.

Boudin produced pastels from the late 1850s onwards, working directly from nature [fig. 1]. The soft material of the medium allowed him to capture with great rapidity the fleeting appearance of the sky. The present pastel belongs to a series of seascapes executed between 1854 and 1860 in which a large expanse of sky dominates the composition. Only a small stretch of sea in the lower margin mirrors the colours of the sky.¹ In the present sheet a line of hills marks the horizon. Two small sailing boats and trails of smoke from a distant steamship and a chimney in the hills indicate the presence of human activity.

Boudin writes about his cloudscapes in a notebook entry dated 3 December 1856: *To swim in the open sky. To achieve a cloud's tenderness. To suspend those background masses, far off in the grey mist, and break up the azure. I feel it all coming, dawning in my intentions. What delight and what torment! If the bottom was still, perhaps I would never achieve those depths. Did they do better in the past? Did the Dutchmen achieve that poetry of clouds I seek? That tenderness of the sky which even extends to admiration, to worship: it's no exaggeration.*²

¹ For comparable pastels from this series see Anne-Marie Bergeret-Gourbin, *Eugène Boudin. Paintings and Drawings. Musée Eugène Boudin, Honfleur*, Paris 1996, p. 76-85, nos. 24-29.

² Cited after the English translation, in Anne-Marie Bergeret-Gourbin, op. cit., p. 80. – The unpublished notebook is quoted in G. Jean-Aubry, *La vie et l'oeuvre d'après les lettres et les documents inédits d'Eugène Boudin*, Neuchâtel 1968/1977, p. 22.

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Boudin was admired by many of the artists of his time. Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot called him *le roi des ciels*. Claude Monet, who had met Boudin in 1858, felt great affection for him and considered him as his 'master'. In a letter to Gustave Geffroy, he explains how Boudin encouraged him to paint with him outdoors directly from nature. He cites Boudin's words: *Do as I did - learn to draw well and admire the sea, the light, the blue sky*. Monet ends: *I owe everything to Boudin and I am grateful to him for my success*.³

Charles Baudelaire, on viewing Boudin's pastels in 1859, was also 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. I exaggerate nothing. I have seen. 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. It is rather curious, not once faced with all this liquid or aerial magic did I complain about the absence of man*.⁴

In terms of atmospheric impact, the work ranks as one of the masterpieces of Boudin's pastel studies 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.

Manuel Schmit has confirmed the authenticity of the present drawing in a statement dated 20 April 2013. The work is registered in his archive as no. Cl. B-P-7534. It will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of works on paper by Eugène Boudin.



Fig. 1: Anonymous photographer, *Eugène Boudin at Trouville or Deauville*, June 1896. Musée Eugène Boudin, Honfleur.

³ Letter from Monet to Geffroy of 8 May 1920. Cited in Vivien Hamilton, *Boudin at Trouville*, exhib. cat., The Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums, Glasgow and Courtauld Institute Galleries, University of London, 1992-3, p. 44.

⁴ Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités Esthétiques*, Salon de 1859, VII, *Le Paysage*. – The English translation is cited after Anne-Marie Bergeret-Gourbin, op. cit., p. 76. – Baudelaire's text is reprinted in G. Jean-Aubry, op. cit., p. 234.