

CHARLES-FRANÇOIS DAUBIGNY

1817 - Paris - 1878

Soleil couchant sur la mer

Oil on panel.

Inscribed on the verso by another hand: *Acheté à Lemore ferme Saint-Siméon / Daubigny père*

15.7 x 24.4 cm

PROVENANCE: Paul LeMore (Caen, 1831-1915) – Private collection, France

Daubigny's work occupies something of a unique position, straddling the dividing line between the Barbizon School and Impressionism. He is to some extent responsible for the emergence of Impressionism, through his penchant for *plein-air* painting, his highly original approach and his choice of landscape motifs. He was one of the first painters to study – on a systematic basis – the effects of light on water and the properties of light in the lower atmosphere. This he did in an extensive body of sketches produced directly before the motif.

This small oil sketch is a striking example of Daubigny's interest in the influence of changing weather and light conditions on a landscape and particularly, a landscape in a coastal area. He began to explore the Normandy coast in the 1870s, returning frequently to the small village of Villerville on the coast between Trouville and Honfleur. Here, he was to produce a large number of marine paintings. Two fine examples of his mastery of the genre are *Plage, soleil couchant, Villerville*, now in the Museum Gouda in Holland and *La Plage de Villerville-sur-mer, coucher de soleil* now in the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia. It is possible that the present sketch was executed on the shore at Villerville. In terms of format, and in its vigorous brushwork the work is closely related to an oil sketch depicting a similar shoreline, titled *Bord de mer au clair de lune*. This is now in the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki [Fig. 1]. Both these sketches are fine examples of the poetic qualities of Daubigny's painting. Zola, reviewing his work at an exhibition in 1878, noted: *C'est l'âme de la nature qui vous parle [Here, nature's soul addresses you]*.¹

Annotations by a former owner on the verso of the sketch suggest that it at one time belonged to Paul LeMore, a genre painter, watercolourist and pupil of Thomas Couture. LeMore specialized in the depiction of horses and exhibited at the Paris Salon over a very lengthy period, namely from 1863 to 1913. He also worked as a teacher at the school attached to the 'domaine du Pin', a stud farm. The 'ferme Saint-Siméon' mentioned in the annotation was a traditional country *auberge* set in a unique position on the heights of the coastal city of Honfleur. Renowned for its cuisine, it also went by the name of 'La Ferme Toutain', after its owner Pierre-Louis Toutain. It was the painter Eugène Boudin who was the first artist to discover Saint-Siméon. A native of Honfleur, he had moved with his family to Le Havre on the opposite side of the Seine estuary in 1835. In 1854, attracted by Saint-Siméon's peaceful and bucolic setting, he took to spending his summers as a guest at the *auberge*, where he studied nature, observing the ever-changing Normandy skies and painting *en plein air*. A group of like-

¹ F. W. J. Hemmings and Robert J. Niess (ed.), *Emile Zola: Salons*, Geneva/Paris 1959, p. 203.

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minded friends soon gathered around him and poets, musicians and painters began flocking to Saint-Siméon, among them Monet, Jongkind, Courbet, Bazille, Isabey and of course Daubigny. As Jacques-Sylvain Klein has noted: *The 'Rencontres de Saint-Siméon' [are a] dazzling prelude to Impressionism.*²



Fig. 1: *Bord de mer au clair de lune*, oil on panel, 18.5 x 30.5 cm.
Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki

² Jacques-Sylvain Klein, *Lumières normandes, les hauts-lieux de l'impressionnisme*, éditions Point de vues, 2013. *La Normandie berceau de l'impressionnisme*, Ouest-France 1996/2007.