

An impressionist painting of a man with a dark beard and a dark beret, wearing a dark coat, looking out over a vast, blue sea. The sea is rendered with visible brushstrokes, showing waves and a small sailboat in the distance. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall style is characteristic of Impressionism, with a focus on light and color over fine detail.

# IMPRESSIONISTS BY THE SEA

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Sackler Wing of Galleries  
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AN INTRODUCTION  
TO THE EXHIBITION  
FOR TEACHERS  
AND STUDENTS

Written by Greg Harris  
For the Education Department  
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COVER  
Cat. 40 (detail)  
Edouard Manet  
*On the Beach: Suzanne and  
Eugène Manet at Berck*, 1873

Oil on canvas  
60 × 73.5 cm

Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Donation Jean-Edouard  
du Brujeaud sous réserve d'usufruit, 1953  
Photo RMN / Hervé Lewandowski

## INTRODUCTION

Opening the travel section of a Sunday newspaper you may encounter an article on 'The twelve most deserted beaches', or 'Little known country inns.' 'Not for long' may be your natural reaction, for the paradox of travel writing is that it often undermines the uniqueness that it reveals. In mid-nineteenth-century France, when holidays were the preserve of a wealthy elite able to afford horse-drawn carriages, it was frequently the novelist or the painter who inspired interest in little-known regions of the country, through their exploration and discovery of more distant parts. The growth of the railway network from 1840 to 1870 opened up the possibilities of travel to broader sections of society. With them came the development of resorts that served the increasing fashion for seaside vacations, followed by the guide books, full of literary quotations and often illustrated by those very painters who had first brought the coasts to public attention.

This exhibition explores the ways in which artists portrayed, and reacted to, the rapidly changing environment of the Channel coast of France. No painting is made without a whole host of decisions and cultural assumptions. What to put in, what to leave out; what is of interest to the painters, what might interest their largely Parisian audience and potential buyers.

The enormous popularity of the Impressionists has overshadowed the landscapes of their acknowledged predecessors, and of painters who worked in more conventional modes, yet who produced images of great relevance to their contemporaries. In placing their work alongside the Impressionists, this exhibition shows how different kinds of images of the sea, the coast, the local inhabitants or the new visitors appealed to their urban audience.

## THE SEA

The most important influences for French marine painting of the 1830s and 1840s were the stormy seascapes and beach scenes of seventeenth-century Dutch painters who worked in a country under continual threat from flooding. The danger inherent in the

'Sainte-Adresse ... there reigns here still all the seductions of solitude, of silence, and of contemplation of the ocean, although for a few years now the little houses, the taverns, the kiosks, and the pavilions multiply themselves in this delicious valley, preparing somehow, thanks to brick and stone, the hour of its imminent transformation.'

EUGÈNE CHAPUS, 1855



Oil on canvas  
71.4 × 102.2 cm

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art,  
Hartford, CT. The Ella Gallup Sumner  
and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection  
Fund.

sea, expressed in a romantic masterpiece like Théodore Géricault's (1791–1824) *The Raft of the 'Medusa'* would inspire his admirer Eugène Isabey (1803–1886) who, along with other artists, painted a series of storms and shipwrecks as well as constructing a picturesque view of the coastal inhabitants. His *Low Tide* (cat. 1) contrasts the calm of a harbour with the storm-tossed sea, while fishermen seek to secure a beached boat.

Images of maritime destruction were exploited by Victor Hugo (1802–1885) in his novel *Toilers of the Sea*, 1866, which pits his hero against a sinister and untrustworthy force. In contrast, Alphonse Karr's (1808–1890) popular novel *Le Chemin le plus court* of 1836 gave Parisians a lyrical description of the seaside village of Etretat, which had already attracted the attention of artists, and portrayed the lives of the inhabitants of the coast in terms of simplicity and virtue, compared to the moral corruption of the city. In 1861, the historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874) published his book *The Sea*, glorifying the ocean as a force for rejuvenation, an almost maternal symbol that could lead to new self-awareness and a sense of freedom.

Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) was an avowed realist, a painter who could never paint an angel because he had never seen one. Coming from the rocky valleys of Franche-Comté in Eastern France, a landscape he painted frequently, his first experience of the sea came at the age of 22 on a visit to Le Havre. Expressing a sense of liberation, he wrote to his parents, 'We have at last seen the horizonless sea; how strange it is for a valley dweller. You feel as if you are carried away; you want to take and see the whole world.'

Apart from some Mediterranean seascapes, including the famous picture of the artist greeting the 'ocean', Courbet did not engage with what he called 'landscapes of the sea' until his visits to Trouville and Deauville in 1865 and 1866. Here he painted a series of seascapes, adopting a frontal viewpoint with a low horizon, allowing the sky a dominant role in the painting.

**Cat. 19** (SHOWN ON PREVIOUS PAGES) Courbet worked on a dark-primed canvas and claimed that he acted as light does, bringing illumination to the subject. Using both palette knife and brush he creates an image that combines both solidity and atmosphere. We

are confronted by glistening black rocks that emerge from the sandy beach, their surface enlivened by touches of colour. As we move into the picture, across lines of rock and rippling waves, the setting sun takes centre stage. The only sense of human presence in the painting is a single sail silhouetted against the pink glow. The delicate nuances of colour as pink fades into white of cloud, broken by patches of blue gives the enormous sky its sense of presence and tranquillity.

**What relationship with the sea has Courbet created for the viewer?**

**What do the three small birds in the centre of the painting suggest?**

In a large number of such pictures, many painted in the studio, Courbet varied the atmospheric conditions, capturing the drama of a water spout (cat. 21) or the serene beauty of a calm sea (cat. 20). In the last, we sense the influence of his friend the American artist James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), who painted alongside Courbet at Trouville in 1865. One of Whistler's paintings shows the older man in solitary confrontation with the sea, and *Sea and Rain* (cat. 23) has an anonymous figure isolated against an expanse of beach, sea and sky, its atmosphere suggested in broad sweeps of thinly applied paint.

Courbet returned to the Normandy coast in 1869, spending a month at the famous resort of Etretat. Here he painted the distinctive cliff formations (cat. 25) with a sense of solidity and grandeur that would set a precedent for future painters, which Claude Monet (1840–1926) was quick to acknowledge when he approached the same subject in a very different manner. Courbet's painting of *The Wave* (cat. 26) one of a series, has both a romantic feel and the sense of a painter conjuring up a frozen moment in which we can palpably feel the weight of water tumbling towards us. Again, Monet's solution would prove to be very different.

Courbet was a keen swimmer and enjoyed the facilities and attractions developed for the visitors, yet there is not the slightest hint of any of this in his paintings. Instead he presents the engagement of the artist with elemental forces of a timeless nature.

'O Man, so long as you are free you will cherish the sea! The sea is your looking glass; you contemplate your own soul in the infinite unfolding of its waves, while your mind is a no less bitter gulf.'

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE,  
1852

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

The seaside vacation had its origins in the presumed recuperative and restorative value of salt water. Originally, inland spas such as Vichy would have cured the physical or mental ailments of stressed city dwellers. Now immersion in seawater was felt to be equally beneficial, and as the railways opened up access to the Channel coast, more and more Parisians flocked to the growing number of resorts. In their mind's eye they brought images of the sea or of the native inhabitants provided by painters who had explored the locality many years before. Their arrival changed the environment drastically as hotels, villas and casinos were built to cater for their needs. The casino offered not only the opportunity to gamble, but provided dance halls and theatres, rooms for other games, for reading, for dining and areas for children.

For the local inhabitants, who earned their living from the sea, this influx provided both problems and opportunities. In an area with few natural harbours fishermen used the beaches to store their boats and equipment. Their wives washed clothes in fresh-water streams, harvested shellfish or sorted the fish for market. Guide books described native costumes, or exotic religious practices to counter the dangers of the sea, and tourists were encouraged to observe the picturesque before returning to the safety of their hotels or villas. While sensing that they were 'on view', and in some cases actively encouraged to maintain local traditions, the native inhabitants found opportunities for employment on the beach as attendants and life guards or in the hotels and casinos.

## PAINTING THE TOURISTS

**Cat. 4.** Isabey, who had played a major role in the development of the Romantic seascape, here turns his hand to portraying the new breed of sea-bathers. His command of characterisation shows in his handling of the figures, as they battle with sea and wind. The dramatic sweep of the beach at Granville, with its cliffs and rocky promontory topped by the old town and its church spire, provides an ideal backdrop for a romantic view of bathing. Omitting the casino, which stood beneath the rock, preserves the naturalness of



the setting. Offshore, a four-master sailing ship adds a nostalgic echo of past glories. Red in the flags is echoed in the edging of bathing costumes or a shawl and scarf. Blustery winds whip up the waves, bend the flag poles, and set the dresses streaming and give the activity on the beach or in the water a heroic dimension.

**What sensation do you feel when you read the picture in the normal left to right direction?**

**Why are there only women bathers?**

The phenomenon of French bathing attracted the attention of English journalists. The popular magazine *Once a Week* included a gently satirical article in November 1861. The writer describes the hiring of a costume, the wait to use a bathing machine in which to change, and 'the novelty of seeing ladies of all builds, from Mrs Gamp to Ophelia, paddling down in scanty bloomers, without shoes or stockings.' He concluded that 'when I felt that these gentlemen in check shorts were neither acrobats nor clowns, but sober, steady men of business who bathed on principle ... I decided in favour of the French fashion over the English.' The visit was to a non-segregated bathing establishment, and was probably at the weekend when husbands came down from Paris to join their wives and children, returning to work during the week.

The development of non-segregated bathing added the element of pleasure to the therapeutic benefits of the sea, with opportunities

**Cat. 4**  
Eugène Louis Gabriel  
Isabey  
*The Beach at Granville*, 1863

Oil on canvas  
83 × 124 cm

Musée du Vieux-Château, Laval

'Some come to bathe, others to admire the rise and fall of the waves, where, at high tide, elegant and gracious sirens are swimming.'

CONY GUIDE TO ETRETAT

for flirtation and observation that reminded men of the image of Venus rising from the sea.

In comparison to Isabey, a completely different view of Parisian tourists is to be found in the paintings of Eugène Boudin (1824–1898). The son of a sea captain from Honfleur, the whole of his artistic life was essentially devoted to the ports, the beaches and the landscapes of the Normandy coast. He was much influenced by Isabey, drawing from him a sense of atmosphere and of wind-blown cloud, which he developed through greater effects of subtlety and nuance.

His pastel cloud studies were praised by the poet and critic Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) who, describing ‘their fantastic and luminous forms’ concluded: ‘all these depths and all these splendours rose to my brain like a heady drink or like the eloquence of opium.’

We know Boudin best from his generally small, horizontal pictures of fashionably dressed tourists promenading on the beach. With the figures arranged in a frieze-like fashion, the eye moves across, picking out the different groups, the flash of colour of a brilliant dress, sometimes an isolated individual. There is, however, no anecdotal content. The socialising and opportunity for display are contained within the groupings, and the bathing and sea are generally relegated to the background.

**Cat. 17** While following his usual format, this picture is unusual in having a named individual as its subject. The Emperor Napoléon III and his wife Eugénie were keen bathers and regular visitors to the seaside resorts, and it would have been perfectly possible for



Boudin to have seen the Empress and her retinue striding out along the promenade.

It is a bright, not too breezy day, and, judging by the shadows, late afternoon when the heat has cooled somewhat. The Empress in white is preceded by attendants in brightly coloured dresses, the red and yellow providing a sharp focus for the eye and attracting the attention of a small white dog. Other groups, whether dogs or humans, seem less interested in the event. The blue parasols connect the main grouping with the hazy blue sky and its wispy low-lying cloud. The distant people on the beach, the occasional sail and bather are treated with the most abbreviated of brushmarks. Little flecks of red and yellow pick up those dominating colours, and closer there is a sense of freshness and spontaneity in the depiction of the billowing fabrics of the women’s clothing.

**How has Boudin used the verticals of hotel and lamp-post?**

**How do the clouds high up in the sky relate to the groupings on the ground?**

**Cat. 17**  
Eugène Louis Boudin  
*The Empress Eugénie on the Beach at Trouville, 1863*

Oil on panel  
34.3 × 57.8 cm

Glasgow City Council (Museums)  
Photo © Glasgow City Council (Museums)

‘Spending the summer season by the sea is a wholly new craze ... M. Boudin is the first to have captured and preserved for us this piquant aspect of modern life, and has done it artistically, without being distracted by small details ...’

ERNEST CHESNEAU, 1867

Boudin had a slightly ambivalent attitude to the tourist influx. In 1867 he wrote to a friend: 'This band of gilded parasites who look so triumphant, one pities them a little, and feels a certain shame in painting their idle laziness.' But a year later he relented, writing to the same correspondent: 'Don't the bourgeois, who stroll on the jetty towards the sunset, have the right to be fixed on canvas, to be brought to the light?' Nevertheless, by the end of the decade Boudin returned to more traditional subjects associated with the native population who wrested a hard-earned living from the sea.

The overall bright, almost blond tonality of Boudin's beach paintings of this period was known as *peinture claire* and was an important influence on Claude Monet. Of all the Impressionists, Monet had the most intense and long-lasting relationship with the Normandy coast. Brought up in Le Havre, he had met Boudin in 1858, the older painter encouraging him to work from nature. Boudin never went as far in the Impressionist analysis of colour or experimentation with brushstroke, but he kept in touch with Monet, whose influence can be felt in a late work such as cat. 48.

Another important influence on Monet was the Dutch painter Johan Barthold Jongkind (1819–1891), who had studied with Isabey and brought with him an intimate knowledge of seventeenth-

century Dutch seascape painting. Monet met him in 1862 while Jongkind was working on cat. 10 (fig. 1). What distinguishes him from his Dutch predecessors is a greater concern for specific light and weather effects. The beach is the province of fishermen, their boats and wives, with no sign of tourist development. The sun, hidden by clouds, illuminates their edges with a loose, broadly brushed, glowing light. Despite his interest in these effects, Jongkind's oil paintings were all done in the studio. Monet said of his meeting that the painter became 'from that moment, my true master, and it is to him that I owe the definitive education of my eye.'

**Cat. 32** (SHOWN OVERLEAF) Monet's aunt had a villa at Sainte-Adresse and he spent part of the summer of 1867 working on paintings that broke new ground in his representation of the coast. In this picture of the beach at low tide we see fishermen and their beached boats, but also the sense of intrusion of the tourists with a bourgeois couple seated on the foreshore looking out to sea. No doubt they have come down from the large new building that looms over the beach. In a companion piece (cat. 33) the tide is high and it is the tourist regatta that dominates, with only a couple of fishing boats visible. In this combination of subject matter Monet suggests the processes of change.

Although the sky is overcast, the light has a bright, if somewhat flat, feel to it. The organisation of space is indicative of conflicting viewpoints, with our movement through the framing boats to the distant village blocked by the tourists, whose own view is encircled by the brown sails of fishing boats at sea. Light pushing through the clouds allows Monet to create a texture of white and grey which is reflected more subtly on the beach.

**How has Monet tried to enliven the smooth quality of the sea?**

**His use of colour is extremely economical. What effect does it have on the painting?**

Sainte-Adresse was at an earlier stage of development than other resorts, and their success was often related to the kind of people

'It was in 1867; my style had become definite, but it was still not really revolutionary in character. I was still a long way off adopting the principle of the subdivision of colour that set so many against me, but I was experimenting with effects of light and colour that flouted convention.'

MONET, INTERVIEWED IN 1900

**Cat. 32** OVERLEAF

Claude Monet  
*The Beach at Sainte-Adresse*,  
1867

Oil on canvas  
75.8 × 102.5 cm

The Art Institute of Chicago.  
Mr and Mrs Lewis Larned Coburn  
Memorial Collection, 1933-1939  
Photo © The Art Institute  
of Chicago

**Fig. 1**  
**Cat. 10**  
Johan Barthold Jongkind  
*On the Beach at Sainte-Adresse*,  
1862

Oil on canvas  
27 × 41 cm

Collection of Phoenix Art Museum.  
Mrs Oliver B. James Bequest





**Fig. 2**  
**Cat. 35**  
 Claude Monet  
*The Hôtel des Roches Noires,*  
*Trouville, 1870*

Oil on canvas  
 81 × 58 cm

Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Donation Jacques Laroche, 1947  
 Photo RMN / Hervé Lewandowski



they could attract. As evidence of a resort's popularity the larger hotels and casinos would publish guest lists to stake a claim in the social ranking. The Trouville casino, in 1865, boasted the presence of three dukes and their wives, five princes and princesses, and a similar number of marquis, not forgetting any leading Parisian socialites whose name was worth a mention.

Monet and his wife Camille, recently married in June 1870, found a humble back-street hotel in Trouville to spend the summer. The hotel Monet actually painted, L'Hôtel des Roches noires (cat. 35) (fig. 2) was one of the newest and smartest. Its splendid facade looked out over the promenade and sea front, and visitors could view the sea, which hardly figures in the painting, from balcony or terrace. The brisk breeze animates a collection of flags that suggest an international clientele, and hats are raised to new acquaintances, all painted with a masterful fluency and a bright tonality which reminds us of Boudin. Eight of the nine pictures Monet painted on this

trip deal with the life of the visitors, and were the closest he came to exploring the modernity of seaside resorts.

## SALON PAINTERS

The Paris Salon was the annual (from 1863) exhibition organised by the State. It attracted up to 500,000 visitors during the six weeks in which thousands of paintings and sculptures vied for the attention of critics and the public. Its rigid hierarchy of genres placed history painting at the top followed by portraiture, genre, landscape and still life. But during the 1860s the growing popularity of landscape painting and changes to the Salon jury system allowed landscape painters greater opportunities. Salon landscapes tended to be large (and thus more visible), deeply conservative views of an unchanging French countryside, images to reassure a bourgeois, urban audience of a world unaltered by modern life.

*A Spring by the Sea* (cat. 3) by Jules Breton (1827–1906) depicts an idealised vision of women returning from washing clothes in a

freshwater spring. The figures, influenced by Italian Renaissance painting, have a statuesque solidity as they move across the rocky foreshore. A similar processional motif can be seen in Jules Héreau's (1839–1879) image of shrimp pickers returning across the beach (cat. 30). Treated more sketchily, the women take second place to the play of light through drifting clouds. In canvases by Jules Dupré (1811–1889), Jean-Charles Cazin (1841–1901) and Antoine Guillemet (1843–1918) (cats. 27, 44 and 45), the predominant mood is of sombre, storm-tossed, cloudy skies and a sense of hostility emanating from the sea. Critics who accused the Impressionists of catching merely ephemeral sensations found here 'the aspects of nature best suited to nurture moral life'.

Charles Daubigny (1817–1878) was a leading member of the group of painters who gathered at the village of Barbizon in the forest of Fontainebleau to the south-east of Paris, and whose approach to *plein-air* painting provided a powerful example to the Impressionists. Daubigny exhibited regularly at the Salon, where his interest in the changing aspects of nature, captured with light and fluent brushstrokes, was criticised for its lack of finish and detail. The critic Théophile Gautier (1811–1872) wrote in 1861: 'it is really a pity that this landscape artist having so true, so apt and so natural a feeling for his subject, should content himself with an 'impression' and should neglect detail to such an extent. His pictures are no more than sketches barely begun.' Yet four years later he added, 'the impression obtained by these most perfunctory means is nonetheless great and profound for all that.'

**Cat. 43** Daubigny painted this beach scene at the lesser resort of Villerville, a bathing station with few developments to attract the wealthy tourist. He showed it at the 1873 Salon where it was praised for its sense of space. Perched on a small hill, we look out over a rocky foreshore, a single cottage creating a sense of isolation. The contrast of rock and water indicates that it is low tide and the women returning from the beach have been searching for shellfish or shrimps. The light of the setting sun creates a richly orchestrated sky with touches of pink, orange and yellow, and reflections in pools

'It was the usual opening-day rout, with everybody looking for his own picture and running round to see everyone else's, bursting with resentment, and with voices raised in furious and apparently unending complaints – they were hung too high, the light was bad, their effect was killed by the pictures on either side, they had a good mind to remove their pictures altogether.'

*The Masterpiece*, EMILE ZOLA

'Trouville ... it is the meeting-place of the sick who are perfectly healthy, it is Paris transported for two or three months to the sea coast, with its qualities, its absurdities and its vices... It is sad to say that most of the women go there to parade a senseless luxury.'

ADOLPHE JOANNE, 1866



**Cat. 43**  
 Charles-François  
 Daubigny  
*The Beach at Villerville-sur-mer*  
*(Calvados), Sunset, 1873*  
 Oil on canvas  
 76.8 × 143.5 cm  
 Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA.  
 Gift of Walter P. Chrysler Jr. 71.635

and over rocks allows Daubigny to build a satisfying texture of brushmarks.

**How has Daubigny created a sense of tension in the lines of direction that animate this painting?**

**If your response to this painting is different, in comparison to the Courbet (cat. 19) what elements in both pictures contribute to this?**

## IMPRESSIONISM

Impressionism can be distinguished by its anti-academic approach to the hierarchy of subject matter and its interest in modern life and everyday subjects. In the city this included the leisure activities of the middle classes and the changing environment of Paris, or, in the suburban landscape, the modernity of railway bridges and

encroaching industry, and a preference for the un-picturesque.

Under the influence of scientific studies of colour and light and the evidence of their own eyes, the Impressionists began to abandon the tonal modelling of objects from dark to light in favour of the representation of objects and space through the juxtaposition and variation of colour. This emphasis on the separation of coloured marks, rather than their smooth blending, gave prime importance to the brushstroke, which gained in independence, spontaneity and expressive effect.

Their interest in a direct response to nature, the capturing of ephemeral effects of light and weather that was involved in *plein-air* painting led to a preference for smaller paintings that could be finished more quickly, though it should be said that much work was done in the studio. Their compositions were more relaxed and casual in their general feeling and sometimes influenced by

Japanese woodcut prints with their cropping of figures, abrupt dislocations of space and flattened perspective.

Although the Impressionists exhibited their early works in the Salon, the mature development of their style led to increasing rejection and they began to rely on private clients, public auctions and the new dealers to provide outlets for their work. In 1874 they held their first independent exhibition, and there were to be a further seven, the last in 1886.

Edouard Manet (1832–1883), who was much admired by the Impressionists for his painting of modern life, believed that the Salon, despite his early rejections, was the proper arena for a serious painter. Although he came closer to the Impressionists in the 1870s, he never participated in any of their group exhibitions. One aspect of his technique, which linked him with them, was his rapid, gestural brushstrokes and lack of concern for accepted conventions of finish.

As a non-academic adolescent, the sixteen-year-old Manet sailed from Le Havre to Rio de Janeiro to explore a potential career in the French Navy. His skills as a draughtsman may have developed more successfully than his abilities as a seaman, but he came away from the experience with a feeling for the lives of mariners and their struggle with the elements.

The Manet family made three trips to the Channel coast, to Boulogne in 1864 and 1868, and to nearby Berck in 1873. His pictures of Boulogne harbour take in both the lives of the native fishermen as well as the activity of tourists waiting for the ferry boat to England. A frequent motif was the open sea, peopled by moving boats, expressed in rapidly drawn, incisive marks. *Low Tide at Berck* (cat. 42) lacks this sense of movement, but shows how Manet's feeling for the expanse of beach and sea combined with the apparently simple delineation of a few boats and a piece of driftwood can make a satisfying composition.

**Cat. 40** Unlike Monet's pictures of his wife Camille on the beach at Trouville, Manet is less interested in light and atmosphere than in the formal relationship of his figures. His models were his wife



**Cat. 40**  
Edouard Manet  
*On the Beach: Suzanne and Eugène Manet at Berck*, 1873

Oil on canvas  
60 × 73.5 cm

Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Donation Jean-Edouard du Brujeaud sous réserve d'usufruit, 1953  
Photo RMN / Hervé Lewandowski

Suzanne and his brother Eugène, shown relaxing on the sandy beach that was one of Berck's distinctive qualities. Suzanne, closer to us, dominates the foreground as she reads a book. Her leg stretches out to reveal the red decoration on her shoe. The subtle greys of her coat are shaped by darker strokes, which mark its volume with deceptive simplicity. A more intense contrast is made with the white hat and its black straps and bow. The black matches Eugène's strong, solid presence, lightened only by the stripe of his shirt at collar and cuff. His sense of preoccupation may be linked to family discussions about the possibility of his marriage to the painter Berthe Morisot (1841–1895) which was first discussed on this holiday. Grains of sand in the paint indicate that Manet worked on the beach for the painting of the figures, though probably finishing the sea and boats in the studio.

**How has Manet related the white foam of the wave and the position of the boats to the figures on the beach?**

**How do the shapes of the boats contrast with the figures?**

Berthe Morisot was that rare figure, a successful woman painter, admired by other artists and seen as a valued member of the Impressionist group, contributing to nearly every one of their exhibitions. She and her sister Edma showed such application and talent that their teacher, J.B. Guichard, felt bound to warn their mother of his fear that they might become professional artists. 'In the upper class milieu to which you belong, this will be revolutionary, I might almost say catastrophic.' The mother was undeterred and sent the sisters for further training with Camille Corot (1796–1875).

'There is also a woman in the group, as is the case with all famous gangs. Her name is Berthe Morisot, and she is interesting to behold. In her, feminine grace is preserved amidst the frenzy of a mind in delirium.'

ALBERT WOLFF,  
1876



Berthe Morisot  
*On the Terrace*, 1874

Oil on canvas  
45 × 54 cm

Tokyo Fuji Art Museum  
Photo © Tokyo Fuji Art Museum,  
Tokyo, Japan/The Bridgeman Art  
Library, London

[Morisot] 'always painted standing up, walking back and forth before her canvas. She would stare at her subject for a long time (and her look was piercing), her hand ready to place her brushstrokes just where she wanted them.'

MONIQUE ANGOULVENT

Morisot met Edouard Manet in 1868 and appeared in his painting *The Balcony*, which was followed by a large number of single-figure studies, until her marriage to Eugène in December 1874. While never a pupil of his, Morisot was influenced by Manet's approach to painting and she was to make him more aware of the Impressionist understanding of colour and the practice of *plein-air* painting.

As an upper-class woman Morisot led a protected life without access to the contemporary urban subjects that attracted many of her fellow artists. Her preference for domestic subjects was reinforced by critics who tended to ignore her harbour scenes or boatyards in which her brushmarks show an astonishing independence and vitality.

*On the Terrace* (NOT SHOWN IN THE EXHIBITION) was painted during a visit to the villa of Morisot's aunt at Fécamp in 1874, and portrays her aunt with her back turned on the view of sea and cliffs that drops away from the terrace wall. The chair beside her also faces inwards, its little, coloured sewing basket and white garment

suggesting the interruption of domestic activity. In the distance, fashionably dressed women have climbed the hillside to get a better view of the fishing boats out at sea. The sharp separation between foreground and background has its origins in Japanese prints with their high angled viewpoints and flattened space. A companion piece, *In a Villa by the Seaside*, provides a more explicable view of the space by showing the stairs that lead up to the terrace from the lower ground. Although the subject of the painting may be turned inwards, the siting of the villa shows the desire for a commanding view of the sea. In contrast to the local inhabitants who built their houses with windows facing away from the potentially hostile sea, tourists demanded the appropriate framing of the view of sea or beach.

How has Morisot enlivened her aunt's grey dress?

What would happen if you reversed this composition? Or if Morisot's aunt was sitting on the left?

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) was largely a painter of the human figure, but landscape played an important role in his work, providing opportunity for experimentation in brushmark and colour, and frequently showing his awareness of the work of other artists. His admiration for Courbet's wave paintings led him to take on the same theme, but with a tumbling, energetic application of paint that threatens to engulf the viewer and demonstrates his understanding of Monet's sea paintings.

**Cat. 66** In 1883, Renoir spent a month on the Channel island of Guernsey, off the Normandy coast. The rocks and landscape in this picture are based on the particularly beautiful Moulin Huet bay, and Renoir wrote to his dealer that he was painting 'documents for making pictures in Paris'. There is little doubt that this work was painted in the studio, using a discarded canvas whose colour sometimes shows through, and was never finally completed. A smaller horizontal version of the subject was also unfinished.

Nevertheless, Renoir has employed all his seductive charm in this painting of young people on the beach. Two older girls look after

'Nothing is more attractive than the mixture of men and women crowded on these rocks. One would think oneself in a landscape by Watteau rather than in the real world.'

AUGUSTE RENOIR, 1883

**Cat. 66**  
 Pierre Auguste Renoir  
*Children on the Seashore,*  
*Guernsey, c. 1883*

Oil on canvas  
 91.4 × 66.4 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of  
 John T. Spaulding  
 Photo © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts,  
 Boston



the young children. Fully clothed, they come from their hotel to watch the swimmers in the water. Their delicately modelled faces contrast with the splashing exuberance of the loosely drawn figures tumbling in the green and blue water. Comparing the size of the foreground figures with the bathers, we can see that Renoir has taken enormous liberties with the space of the picture, pulling even the distant cliffs of the bay closer to the picture plane.

**This may seem like a riot of colour, but how has Renoir orchestrated the white, pink, red and blue of the children's costumes?**

**How has he related foreground to background?**

**What colour sings out most strongly?**

## MONET'S RETURN TO THE COAST

Monet had moved to the fast growing town of Argenteuil to the east of Paris in 1872 and would paint subjects drawn from there for the next six years. Two short trips to Le Havre were his only contact with the coast, and his interest in images of Parisian modernity overrode his attachment to the sea. But in 1878 Monet moved further away from Paris to Vétheuil and hardly painted the city again. The growing success of his work, and the support of his dealer, Durand-Ruel, enabled him to travel, and the canvases he painted at Fécamp, Pourville, Varengeville and Etretat between 1881 and 1886 came to form a major part of his output.

Although he arrived with guidebooks to help him find suitable locations, his approach would be different from the tourist-orientated paintings of Trouville. Now he positioned himself as the solitary explorer, face to face with the elements, his canvases devoid of the presence of tourists or evidence of the changes that had occurred to the coastline. The Impressionists themselves were now less interested in modern subjects, and Monet was becoming increasingly preoccupied with the fleeting effects of weather and atmosphere. Many of his visits were out of season enabling him to record more hostile weather conditions and rougher seas. It was a change that would also suit the urban purchasers of his work, who came to the coast to find that solitary communion with sea or landscape, undisturbed by the presence of other tourists.

Whether high up on cliffs or down in the water, the viewer experiences abrupt juxtapositions of land and sea, sometimes of a precarious nature. *The Sea at Fécamp*, (fig. 3) (cat. 51) places us dangerously close to overhanging rock faces where the sea has pounded the cliff and torn the rock from its base. Curving brushstrokes of blue, green and white build to form the lines of waves moving towards the cliff. The spray is a flurry of lighter, more tangled marks as the water breaks over the more densely painted rock. The solidity of Courbet's waves have been shot through with an airy sense of movement and a feeling of spontaneity.

That sense of spontaneous freedom was not achieved without careful preparation and much hard work. Changing tide levels,

'The true lovers of the sea who, when the Parisians have long since packed their bags, remain in deserted Etretat to see the equinoctial tides battering against the cliff, will tell you that, on the November mornings when the sea-spray was thicker than a rain shower, they saw Claude Monet on the beach, water streaming down under his cape, painting the tempest while spattered with salt water.'

HUGUES LE ROUX, 1889

**Fig. 3**  
**Cat. 51**  
 Claude Monet  
*The Sea at Fécamp*, 1881

Oil on canvas  
 65.5 × 82 cm

Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart





**Cat. 57**  
 Claude Monet  
*Shadows on the Sea, Pourville,*  
 1882

Oil on canvas  
 57 × 80 cm

Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen  
 Photo © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek/Ole Haupt

shifting light and different cloud conditions meant that Monet often worked on half a dozen canvases each day, moving from subject to subject. 'Most of my studies have had ten or twelve sessions, and several of them, twenty', he wrote to his future second wife Alice Hoschedé in 1882. If a picture was unfinished in front of the subject, he had no qualms about completing it in the studio.

**Cat. 57** Positioned at the foot of a large cliff, whose shadow reaches out over the water, our feet are in the water, or possibly on a rock, which allows us to look out over the bay at Pourville with the small houses of the village roughly sketched and no sign of recent development. In the distance we ought to sense the presence of the port and large resort of Dieppe, but do not.

Close to, light plays on the water with delicate yellow dabs of paint and the darker contrast formed by the cliff shadow allows Monet to intensify his colour and increase the strength of the curving brushmarks, creating a lilting effect of water rippled by the wind. Further out the sea dissolves into horizontal streaks of green which allow the vertical strokes of the cliff face to assert themselves.

**How does the painting of the sky contrast with and relate to the sea?**

**Compare Monet's use of colour and brushmark, in his treatment of the sea, with cat. 32.**

## CONCLUSION

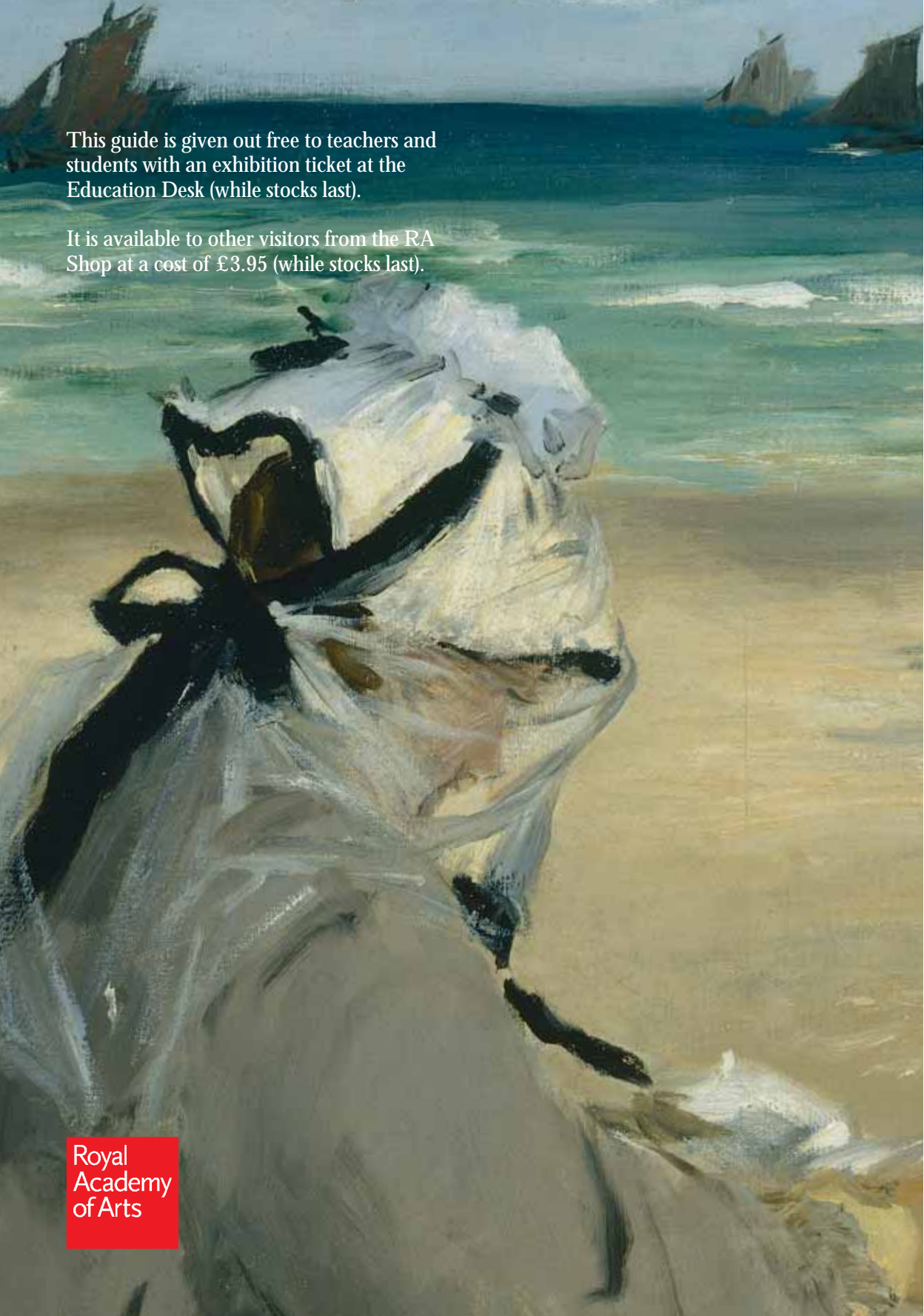
A view represents a viewpoint, and all the artists in this exhibition chose what to represent and what to ignore in an environment undergoing rapid change. Some, like Courbet, established a particular vision and stuck to it. Others changed their subject matter or their ways of depicting it. For the last twenty years of his life Boudin reclaimed the coast for its native inhabitants. In Monet's later visits the solitary view expressed with the utmost freedom predominates. Some artists moved to the less developed coast of Brittany. Tourists themselves wished to 'frame' the experience through the siting of villas or hotels, and their desire for particular representations of the seaside would always be present in the minds of the artists working on the coast.

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The background of the page is a painting of a beach scene. In the foreground, a large, crumpled white plastic bag is the central focus, rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes. The bag is tied with dark, possibly black, straps. The beach is a mix of light and dark tones, suggesting sand and shadows. In the background, the ocean is a deep blue-green, with white foam from waves breaking. On the far left and right, dark, jagged rock formations or cliffs rise from the water. The overall style is expressive and somewhat somber.

This guide is given out free to teachers and students with an exhibition ticket at the Education Desk (while stocks last).

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