

View of Dieppe Harbor by Antoine Vollon

A Gift in Memory of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander A. Forman III

Throughout the nineteenth century, the city of Dieppe attracted to its shores artists intent on depicting its pebbled beaches, vibrant harbor, and Renaissance château. Turner, Delacroix, Daubigny, Pissarro, and Whistler all spent time in the northern French city, a hub of transportation between Paris and London situated on the English Channel in Normandy. Henry Clay Frick acquired paintings of Dieppe by Daubigny and Turner in 1904 and 1914, respectively. This year, a third view of the city entered the collection: a splendid watercolor and graphite drawing by the French artist Antoine Vollon, the generous gift of the preeminent scholar of Vollon, Dr. Carol Forman Tabler. The work (opposite page) will be on view next summer with other landscape drawings from the Frick's permanent collection.

Having trained primarily as a printmaker in his native Lyon, Vollon launched a successful career as a painter and draftsman in Paris about 1859. Although known as a painter of still lifes, he dedicated himself as well, if more privately, to landscape. Like the Barbizon School painters who preceded him and the Impressionists who were his contemporaries, Vollon's interest lay with unpretentious subjects and the ephemeral qualities of nature.

Signed and dated 1873, *View of Dieppe Harbor* is among Vollon's earliest representa-

tions of the port city, which he visited intermittently between 1873 and 1876. During this period, he produced several works—sketches, finished drawings, and large-scale oil paintings—depicting Dieppe's landscape, architecture, and inhabitants. A longstanding center of the fishing industry and international trade and, beginning in the 1820s, a seaside resort known for its baths, casino, and theater, Dieppe was a cosmopolitan city that yet offered Vollon an abundance of rustic subjects.

This watercolor presents a panoramic vista of the city from the southern side of the port's inner harbor, looking north. At the center of a dense swath of land that spans the width of the sheet, beneath a large expanse of sky, lies the Gothic church of St. Jacques. Dieppe's white cliffs and château rise in the distance at left, obscuring the channel on the other side. This vantage point thus affords

a view not of scenic beaches and grand ships, but of rough-hewn buildings and small fishing boats. Masts rise throughout the composition and tiny figures—probably fishermen—appear on the shore. The two women in the foreground wear the head-dresses, billowing skirts, and clogs typical of the residents of Le Pollet, a fishing community on the harbor's eastern shore that was characterized in literature of the period as a simple, pre-industrialized society, timeless in its dress and customs. The women's presence in this calm scene is akin to that of the villagers and farmers in many landscapes of the Barbizon School and particularly to the laundresses in the rural views of Charles-François Daubigny, Vollon's close friend and mentor. They represent the quotidian life of the harbor and play an important, if subtle, role in the artist's overall evocation of the atmosphere of the place.



RIGHT
Charles-François Daubigny (1817–1878), *Dieppe*, 1877, oil on canvas, The Frick Collection

OPPOSITE PAGE
Antoine Vollon (1833–1900), *View of Dieppe Harbor*, 1873, watercolor and graphite on laid paper, The Frick Collection, gift of Carol Forman Tabler in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander A. Forman III



Although Vollon depicted the same view in a small oil painting (now lost), this large watercolor is an independent, finished drawing of the kind contemporary collectors eagerly sought. It contains a remarkable wealth of architectural and nautical details but remains, like many of the artist's canvases, deliberately sketchy in finish. The swift application of watercolor with a very wet brush across the laid paper leaves the depressions in the sheet clean. These and other untouched areas impart a subdued luminosity to the entire scene—as if bathed in the gray light of a sun filtered through thick cloud cover. The bold strokes of light blue in the sky suggest rapidly passing clouds and strong winds of salt air.

The work bears a dedication to Madame Dumas, née Nadezhda von Knorring, the wife of the celebrated French playwright

and novelist Alexandre Dumas *fils*. At their home in Puy, near Dieppe, the couple hosted various artists and writers, including Vollon. They became admiring patrons, acquiring no fewer than eighteen works by the artist. Vollon most likely presented this watercolor to Madame Dumas as a gift of thanks for her hospitality during his first visit to the region.

Three years later, in the summer of 1876, Vollon and Daubigny made overlapping trips to Dieppe. The older artist's painting of the harbor (opposite page) resulted from studies he made during this stay, and it shows the same view as Vollon's watercolor. These good friends, who held similar artistic interests and ambitions, may well have shared their various depictions of Dieppe with one another. Working in oil, Daubigny achieves a sense of immediacy and liveliness of execution similar to that of Vollon's watercolor, with loose,

largely unblended strokes of buttery paint, in some areas thinly applied, in others thick with impasto. Whereas Vollon opted for cool, silvery shades, Daubigny employed his preferred palette of warm tones of green and brown, with touches of yellow and red throughout. Here, the bright white reflections on the calm water, together with the haze over the horizon and the slight blur of the buildings in the background, suggest the heat of a blazing summer sun. Like Vollon, Daubigny presents a quiet moment, his scene animated only by the illusion of fleeting movements of light, water, and air, of rocking boats and swaying masts. Both artists aimed to capture the universal qualities of the natural world, as well as the distinctive atmosphere of the historic port city, in which they, and many artists before and after them, found continual inspiration.—*Joanna Sheers Seidenstein, Research Assistant*

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