French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945
The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor
Eugène Boudin, *The Port of Deauville*, ca. 1884, and *Boats Decorated with Flags in the Port of Deauville, 1895*

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<tr>
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Catalogue Entry

**Citation**

**Chicago:**


**MLA:**

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art | French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945
Eugène Boudin’s (1824–1898) fabled attachment to the sea has long been part of his mythology as an artist. At Boudin’s funeral services, French bureaucrat Albert Kaempfen delivered a poietic eulogy about the artist’s experience growing up on the coast: “His childhood was cradled by the wave, by the gust of wind . . . and the sky and the sea were his first loves, to which he always remained faithful.”

Perhaps most telling, the frontispiece to Gustave Cahen’s early monograph on Boudin depicts the artist seated on a shore, intently sketching a sailboat run aground (Fig. 1). Dressed in a sailor’s cap and striped cravat, Boudin appears quite at home in this environment and oblivious to anything but the vessel before him. Such images contributed to Boudin’s reputation as “without doubt the greatest of French marine painters,” as famed art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel pronounced him at a posthumous retrospective.

It is certainly true that Boudin was surrounded by boats from a young age. His father, Léonard-Sébastien Boudin, came from a long line of seamens and oversaw the steamboat service between Le Havre and Honfleur for over two decades. His mother, Marie-Félicité Boudin (née Buffet), served as a chambermaid aboard various ships. Boudin himself worked as a mousse (sailor’s apprentice) beginning at age ten. However, when Boudin took up painting in 1847, he did not immediately gravitate toward maritime subjects. Instead, he tried his hand at portraiture and still lifes, depicted Breton religious ceremonies known as pardivs, and, above all, captured the bourgeois beachgoers at Trouville and Deauville.

Boating scenes remained a marginal portion of Boudin’s production during the 1850s and 1860s. It was only in 1869, as Laurent Manœuvre has noted, when Belgian dealer Léon Gauchez commissioned Boudin to paint several maritime pictures, that the artist turned his attention in earnest to the sea in the hope of building an international clientele.

As Boudin continued in this genre, his seascapes also attracted French tourists, who were vacationing at the shore in ever-greater numbers.

The Boudin harbor scenes at the Nelson-Atkins both portray Deauville, a fashionable resort town for the beau monde (high society) of Paris. Once a quiet hamlet known primarily for its fish market and thatched roofs, Deauville was redeveloped in the 1860s by Charles-Auguste-Louis-Joseph, duke de Morny, who built a racetrack, casino, and railway station to lure the upper classes. Boudin witnessed these changes firsthand, attending the inaugural horse races at the hippodrome and the opening concerts at the casino. A regular visitor to Deauville during July and August, he built himself a Neo-Norman-style summer residence on the rue Olliffe in 1884, when he had at last achieved some material success.

During Boudin’s final two decades, he painted Deauville’s busy harbor incessantly, determined to preserve “the appearance, riggings, and state of our ports in our age.” After Boudin was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 1895, he moved to Deauville full time to live out his remaining years in his favorite seaside locale. He became so associated with the town that when Deauville celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2010, it designated August 8 “Eugène Boudin Day” in honor of its most famous former resident.

Port of Deauville, the earlier of the Kansas City boating scenes, was probably painted the same year that Boudin purchased a home in Deauville. Moored beneath an overcast sky are several empty sailboats and dinghies; the only sign of human activity is the rowboat carrying three figures in the foreground. The banality of this scene represented a radical departure from the Romantic maritime pictures of the previous
generation. Artists like Théodore Gudin (1802–1880) had specialized in tumultuous paintings of shipwrecks, naval battles, and stormy waters. Even less action-packed seascapes, like Gudin’s *La flotte française se rendant de Cherbourg à Brest, 1858* (*The French Fleet Heading from Cherbourg to Brest, 1858*), were made theatrical by their lighting, composition, and monumentality (Fig. 2). In Gudin’s work, the sun sits low in the sky, casting strong shadows on the water, and the central ship’s mast forms the apex of a pyramidal arrangement. By contrast, *Port of Deauville* is deliberately undramatic. Its even illumination (consistent with being painted en plein air), loose structure, and absence of narrative are the antithesis of the Romantic style. Boudin sought to record daily life at the port, not to recreate grand nautical events.

Many of the compositional elements in *Port of Deauville* reappear in other harbor scenes by Boudin. The canoe and smokestack were among his stock motifs, and he experimented ad infinitum with furled and unfurled sails. Some twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have accused Boudin of monotony or self-plagiarism, but his contemporary Philippe Burty assured the French public that the opposite was true. In his review of Boudin’s solo show at the Galerie Durand-Ruel in 1883, Burty praised the artist for approaching the same subjects with fresh eyes each time, such that his paintings “awaken specific, heightened memories of strolls we would have taken in these parts, on these varied coasts.” A comparison of the Nelson-Atkins panel to another rendering of Deauville’s harbor by Boudin from the early 1880s makes the artist’s originality manifest (Fig. 3). Both works have a low horizon line punctuated by sailboats, which dwarf the diminutive oarsmen in the foreground and increase in stature from left to right. Both paintings contain a diagonal trail of smoke that serves as a visual link between the ships. However, their atmospheric conditions and palettes are quite different. Shades of gray dominate the cloud-filled Kansas City seascape, while patches of blue enliven its counterpart, clearly painted on a sunnier day. One can understand how each work might stir recollections of separate outings in Deauville, as Burty suggested.

While the majority of Boudin’s Deauville harbor scenes document the routine comings and goings of sailboats, a few portray those crafts outfitted for special occasions. *Boats Decorated with Flags in the Port of Deauville* is one such picture. Painted in August 1895, most likely on the sixth day of a regatta (as discussed below), it features half a dozen vessels whose assorted pennants wave jauntily in the breeze. Yacht races were part of a burgeoning leisure culture for the European well-to-do. Beginning in the 1850s, French *plaisanciers* (pleasure boaters) participated in sailing contests at popular seaside resorts in imitation of their British peers, who already had a well-established tradition of regattas on the River Thames. Most did not pilot their vessels themselves, instead hiring professional sailors to staff them. The *Cercle de la Voile de Paris*, a prominent yacht club founded in the French capital in 1858, collaborated with regional associations to organize annual events that became important fixtures on the summer social calendar.

Deauville began welcoming yachts in 1866, when its wet dock—a special enclosure that maintains the level of
high tide, allowing boats to remain afloat—was inaugurated. Yacht traffic increased during the Third Republic, particularly after 1891, when a second dock tailored to racing vessels was constructed.\textsuperscript{18} When in town for a regatta, yacht owners would often adorn their ships with signal flags, as seen in a twentieth-century photograph of Deauville’s harbor by the Agence Meurisse (Fig. 4). Normally used to communicate with other vessels during navigation, these flags could also serve more ornamental purposes. In the Agence Meurisse photo, the foremost sailboat is close enough to discern individual flags. The pennant with an X-shaped motif, for example, ordinarily indicates that the sailor requires assistance, while the white flag with a square at center usually warns that the boat will be moving astern. Here, however, they reveal only that a regatta is underway in Normandy.

Boudin’s interest in yachting and seaside galas dates to early in his career, as evidenced by \textit{Festival in the Harbor of Honfleur} of 1858 (Fig. 5). Painted in the artist’s hometown, this seascape captures the joy of summertime and the excitement of a swimming competition. Men in bathing caps race to shore, watched by some nearby mallards and numerous spectators crammed into rowboats. Overhead, pennants flutter merrily in the wind and cast colorful shadows on the water. Though the subject is similar to that of \textit{Boats Decorated with Flags}, the handling is much more meticulous. The intricate mesh of ropes required to operate the \textit{trois-mâts} (three-masted ship) is painstakingly delineated, almost as if Boudin used a straightedge, and the rowboat passengers are distinguished from one another by their clothing and umbrellas. By contrast, the Nelson-Atkins panel is freer and more confident in its execution. Boudin painted most of the flags in three strokes or fewer, and he condensed the oarsmen to a few dots of pigment, imbuing the Kansas City picture with a greater sense of immediacy than its predecessor.

}\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image4}
\caption{Fig. 4. Agence Meurisse, \textit{Deauville: Le port}, 1935, photographic negative on glass, 5 1/8 x 7 1/16 in. (13 x 18 cm), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, EI-13 (MEU 5081 B-36 9 60/13)}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image5}
\caption{Fig. 5. Eugène Boudin, \textit{Festival in the Harbor of Honfleur, 1858}, oil on panel, 16 1/8 x 23 3/8 in (41 x 59.4 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image6}
\caption{Fig. 6. Eugène Boudin, \textit{Study of Flags Raised on a Ship}, undated, black chalk and pastel on yellow paper, 6 x 7 11/16 in. (15.3 x 19.5 cm), Musée d’Orsay, Paris, RF16193-recto. Photo: Thierry Le Mage © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY}
\end{figure}

Despite their divergent brushwork, however, both paintings derive visual power and a sense of cohesion from the flags scattered across their picture space. Boudin made careful study of these pennants, as attested by three extant pastel drawings and a related oil painting at the Musée d’Orsay. One is a preparatory
sketch for the 1858 painting; two others have close-ups of the Union Jack, the American flag, and several maritime signals; and a third, pictured here, features two masts with crisscrossing strings of pennants (Fig. 6). These works demonstrate Boudin’s fascination with the flags’ aesthetic and spatial properties. He sought to capture not only their vibrant hues and diverse shapes but also their behavior on blustery days and their relationship to neighboring pennants. We see these concerns play out in the Nelson-Atkins panel: the motley flags overlap, dance in the salty air, and draw the viewer’s eye across the scene.

Like other paintings in Boudin’s vast oeuvre, Boat Decorated with Flags is inscribed with the city, month, and year of its creation: “Deauville Aout 95.” Though this date is already quite precise, new information may allow us to pinpoint the exact day on which Boudin painted the seascape. On August 20, 1895, French journalist Jehan Soudan de Pierrefitte published a detailed account of a weeklong celebration in Deauville. On the fifth evening of the festival, yachts bedecked with Bengal lights paraded through the harbor, treating revelers to a stunning display that remained illuminated until daybreak. The following morning, August 19, people took strolls along the beachfront, admiring “the cheerful pennants and flags floating before the row of red parasols.” Some lunched al fresco on the casino’s terrace and then caught an opera matinee. That afternoon, large crowds enjoyed a regatta organized by Count Jean Alfred Octave de Chabannes la Palice, a French sailor and nobleman who later represented France at the 1900 Olympics in Paris. Many also amused themselves by watching the duck races, dog contests, and swimming competitions.

While those sporting events were taking place, Soudan de Pierrefitte happened upon “the master E. Boudin, painting this aquatic fair from the quay; the painter Jules Lefebvre, a habitué of Benerville-sur-Mer, [was] also there.” During Boudin’s lifetime, he completed only five paintings of sailing vessels embellished with pennants in Deauville’s harbor. Three date to 1896 or 1897; one is undated; and one—the Nelson-Atkins panel—dates to 1895. We can thus be fairly certain that Boats Decorated with Flags was on Boudin’s easel when Soudan de Pierrefitte bumped into him and Lefebvre on August 19, 1895. Like other festivalgoers, Boudin was taking in the sights, sounds, and smells of summer merriment: the pageantry of the yachts, the boom of salvos from the nearby Le Havre squadron, the aroma of fresh seafood served at the casino, and much more. The regatta and its associated diversions had a transformative effect on the port that Boudin knew so well, and he was determined to capture this annual spectacle for posterity.

Brigid M. Boyle
July 2020

Notes

1. Quoted in Gustave Cahun, Eugène Boudin: Sa vie et son œuvre (Paris: H. Flory, 1900), 148. “Son enfance fut bercée sur la vague, au souffle du vent... et le ciel et la mer furent ses premières amours, auxquelles il demeura toujours fidèle.” All translations are by Brigid M. Boyle.


3. Exposition of Paintings by the Late Louis Eugène Boudin, exh. cat. (New York: Durand-Ruel Galleries, 1898), unpaginated. Of course, Durand-Ruel had a vested interest in building Boudin’s renown.


5. Boudin later claimed to have abandoned portraiture because the vogue for daguerreotypes reduced the demand for painted portraits. See Paul Leroi, “Salon de 1887 (suite),” L’Art: Revue bimensuelle illustrée, no. 556 (July 15, 1887): 32.


7. See Anna Bowman Dodd, Up the Seine to the Battlefields (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1920), 34-36; and Suzanne Cassidy, “The Thoroughbred Called Deauville,” New York Times, July 23, 1989. Some scholars argue that the duke’s role in transforming Deauville has been overstated; see

8. Carla Gottlieb, “Boudin’s Drawings,” Master Drawings 6, no. 4 (Winter 1968): 401. Boudin lived in relative poverty for much of his life. It was not until the early 1880s, when Durand-Ruel took notice of his work, that Boudin became financially secure.


11. A Durand-Ruel label on the stretcher reads “Boudin No. 448 / Port de Deauville / 1884.” Durand-Ruel purchased Port of Deauville directly from Boudin in 1888.

12. For more on this subject, see Laurent Manœuvre, “Peinture de marines française, 1820–1905,” in Anne-Marie Bergeret-Gourbin and Dominique Lobstein, Honfleur entre tradition et modernité, 1820–1900, exh. cat. (Honfleur: Musée Eugène Boudin, 2010), 35–52.


14. Quoted in Jean-Aubry, Eugène Boudin, 183. Boudin’s works “évellent les souvenirs précis, accentués, de promenades que nous aurions faites dans ces contrées, sur ces côtes diverses.”

15. Interestingly, Boudin painted the trail of smoke in the Nelson-Atkins picture before adding the sky. See technical notes by Mary Schafer, Nelson-Atkins paintings conservator, August 24, 2011, NAMA conservation files, 33-14/1.

16. Jean-Louis Lenhof, “Régates et navigation de plaisance en baie de Seine au XIXe siècle,” in Dominique Barjot, Eric Anceau, and Nicolas Stokoskop, eds., Morny et l’invention de Deauville (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 381–406. As Lenhof explains, yachting took two forms in nineteenth-century France: yachting de croisière and yachting de course, or cruising and racing. When used as cruise ships, yachts were essentially “travelling private mansions” that allowed their owners to sightsee while still enjoying the comforts of home. They offered a novel place to entertain guests and conduct business. When used as racing vessels, yachts were equally luxurious but differently equipped: they did not rely on steam propulsion, and their sails could adapt more easily to variable winds.

17. For example, in 1892 the Cercle de la Voile de Paris joined forces with a company in Trouville to host a three-day regatta in late July. See Henri Philippe, “Yachting-Gazette: Revue des régates à la voile en 1892,” Le Sport, no. 18 (March 3, 1893): 284–85.


19. See RF 16785, RF 16794, RF 3350, and RF 16793 at the Musée d’Orsay. Another pastel drawing of a boat with flags was sold at Tableaux modernes et contemporains, Rémy Le Fur et Associés, Paris, December 3, 2012, lot 21 (Bateau pavisé).


21. Soudan [de Pierrefitte], “À Trouville,” 2. “Surpris le maître E. Boudin, peignant du quoi cette kermesse aquatique; le peintre Jules Lefebvre, un fidèle de Bennerville, est là aussi.”


Boudin, The Port of Deauville, 33-14/1

Technical Entry

Technical entry forthcoming.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art | French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945
**Citation**

**Chicago:**


**MLA:**


**Provenance**

Purchased from the artist by Durand-Ruel et Cie, Paris, stock no. 448, as Le Port de d’Eauville, March 30, 1888–February 10, 1933 [1];


**Notes**

[1] The painting was transferred from Durand-Ruel’s Paris branch to their New York branch in October 1888. See email from Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel et Cie, to Nicole Myers, NAMA, January 11, 2016, NAMA curatorial files. Durand-Ruel photo no. A. 4; see photo stock card, Eugène Boudin, Landscapes and Marines: Ch–De, Durand-Ruel NY Archives, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. See also pink label on verso of panel that says: “Boudin No. 448 / Port [de d’] Eauville/ 1884.”


**Related Works**

Eugène Boudin, *Port of Deauville*, 1884, oil on panel, 18 1/2 x 15 in. (46.8 x 38.1 cm), location unknown, cited in Impressionist and Modern Art Day Sale (London: Sotheby’s, June 20, 2019), 287.


Eugène Boudin, *Port of Deauville*, 1884, oil on panel, 9 x 12 5/8 in. (23 x 32 cm), Musée des Beaux-Arts de Liège, Belgium.

Eugène Boudin, *Port of Deauville*, 1884, oil on panel, 9 1/4 x 13 in. (23.5 x 32.9 cm.), location unknown, cited in Impressionist and Modern Art: Works on Paper and Day Sale (London: Christie’s, June 21, 2018), 340.


**Exhibitions**


**References**

“The William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art Special Number,” Art Digest 8, no. 5 (December 1, 1933): 21, as Port of Deauville [sic].


Ruth L. Benjamin, *Eugène Boudin* (New York: Raymond and Raymond, 1937), 188, as *Port of Deauville*.


MLA:


Provenance

With Galerie Allard et Noël, Paris;

With Stephen Hahn, New York, by November 12, 1968 [1];

Eugene B. (1917–2003) and Lucy (née Harvey, 1921–2006) Sydnor, Jr., Richmond, VA, by May 7, 1972–April 1, 1993 [2];


Notes

[1] November 12, 1968 is the opening date of XIX and XX Century French Paintings: Recent Acquisitions, an exhibition held at Stephen Hahn Gallery, New York, that included Boats Decorated with Flags in the Port of Deauville. According to a Hahn family representative, Stephen Hahn’s business records do not survive. See email from Janey Campbell, Music Academy of the West, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, June 3, 2020, NAMA curatorial files.

[2] May 7, 1972 is the opening date of European and American Art from Princeton Alumni Collections, an exhibition to which the Syndors lent Boats Decorated with Flags in the Port of Deauville. After Eugene B. and Lucy Sydnor, Jr., divorced in 1986, it is unclear if they retained joint ownership of the painting or if one of them assumed full ownership.


Related Works

Eugène Boudin, Le Havre, the Regatta Festival, 1869, oil on panel, 8 1/2 x 15 in. (21.5 x 38 cm), location unknown, cited in Impressionist and Nineteenth Century Art (New York: Christie’s, November 18, 1998), 10–11.


Eugène Boudin, Festival in the Harbor of Honfleur, 1858, oil on panel, 16 1/8 x 23 3/8 in (41 x 59.4 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.

Eugène Boudin, Yacht Basin at Trouville-Deauville, ca. 1895–1896, oil on panel, 18 x 14 1/2 in. (45.7 x 37.2 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection.


Eugène Boudin, Deauville, Flag-Decked Ships in the Inner Harbor, 1896, oil on panel, 12 3/4 x 16 3/16 in. (32.4 x 41.1 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Eugène Boudin, Yachts in the Port of Deauville, 1897, oil on panel, 12 1/2 x 16 in. (32 x 40.6 cm), location unknown, cited in Robert Schmit, Eugène Boudin, 1824–1898 (Paris: Galerie Schmit, 1973), no. 3621, p. 3:382.


Eugène Boudin, Three-Master Decorated with Flags, undated, charcoal and pastel on paper, 7 3/8 x 11 5/16 in. (18.8 x 28.7 cm), Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Eugène Boudin, Study of Flags Raised on a Ship, undated, pencil and pastel on paper, 6 x 7 11/16 in. (15.3 x 19.5 cm), Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Eugène Boudin, Study of Raised Flags, undated, pastel on paper, 5 11/16 x 8 3/16 in. (14.4 x 20.8 cm), Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Eugène Boudin, Flags, undated, oil on paper, 6 x 9 7/16 in. (15.3 x 23.9 cm), Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Exhibitions

XIX and XX Century French Paintings: Recent Acquisitions, Stephen Hahn Gallery, New York, November 12–December 14, 1968, unnumbered, as Deauville.


References


Rebecca Dimling Cochran and Bobbie Leigh, “100 Top Collectors who have made a difference,” Art and Antiques 28, no. 3 (March 2006): 90.


Richard R. Brettell and Joachim Pissarro, Manet to Matisse: Impressionist Masters from the Marion and Henry Bloch Collection, exh. cat. (Kansas City, MO: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2007), 14, 38, 44–46, 156, (repro.), as Boats Decorated with Flags in the Port of Deauville (Bateaux pavoisiers dans le bassin, Deauville).


Nancy Staab, “Van Gogh is a Go!” 435: Kansas City’s Magazine (September 2015): 76.


Hampton Stevens, “(Not Actually) 12 Things To Do During The Big 12 Tournament,” *Flatland: KCPT’s Digital Magazine* (March 9, 2017): http://www.flatlandkc.org/arts-culture/sports/not-actually-12-big-12-tournament/


Claire Selvin, “Henry Wollman Bloch, Collector and Prominent Benefactor of Nelson-Atkins Museum of
Art, Is Dead at 96,” ArtNews (April 23, 2019):


Eric Adler, “Sold for $3.25 million, Bloch’s home in Mission Hills may be torn down,” Kansas City Star 141, no. 90 (December 16, 2020): 2A.