



Claude Monet

The Beach at Sainte-Adresse

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Cat. 13

*The Beach at Sainte-Adresse*¹

1867

Oil on canvas; 75.8 × 102.5 cm (29 13/16 × 40 5/16 in.)

Signed and dated: *Claude Monet 67* (lower right, name in dark-brown paint, year in reddish-purple paint)

The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection, 1933.439

Monet and Normandy

In the mid-1860s, Claude Monet returned to the coast of Normandy—a place whose picturesque sites, villages, and vantage points he knew well, having spent much of his childhood in the coastal town of Le Havre (see fig. 13.1). The area had changed dramatically over the course of the nineteenth century, however, due in large part to the expanding rail network and the proliferation of travel guidebooks and illustrated publications. The small, rural fishing villages of the beginning of the century were rapidly transformed into seaside resorts for tourists and vacationers, altering the physical and social landscape in dramatic ways.²

Not only did the coastline and geological sites of Normandy become popular with tourists, they were also favorite subjects of many nineteenth-century artists, especially Monet, who painted the region's natural and man-made attractions hundreds of times during his career and is considered by many to be the “greatest visual poet of Normandy.”³ Monet's seascapes of the 1860s—the decade before he emerged as the leader of the Impressionist movement—most often feature the coasts of Le Havre (on the northern bank of the estuary of the Seine), Honfleur (on the southern bank across from Le Havre), and, as in the present picture, Sainte-Adresse, a coastal suburb just northwest of Le Havre where the artist's aunt owned a villa. Scholars have



fig. 13.1 Map featuring Paris and the region of Normandy.

noted that public opinion at this time was divided on the condition of Sainte-Adresse: some writers commented that “all the seductions of solitude, silence and oceanic contemplation still reign there,”⁴ while others complained that it had “lost most of the rustic appearance which gave it its charm.”⁵ In any event, Sainte-Adresse had certainly arrived in the public imagination by the mid-1860s, popularized in the writings of the French critic Alphonse Karr⁶ and documented by artists including painters Frédéric Bazille,⁷ Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot,⁸ and Johan Barthold Jongkind,⁹ as well as photographer Gustave Le Gray (see fig. 13.2 and fig. 13.3).¹⁰ It is through this complex lens that one must read Monet’s *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse*.

Monet’s Early Paintings of Sainte-Adresse and the Coast of Normandy

The Beach at Sainte-Adresse was executed in the summer of 1867, an extraordinarily challenging time for Monet personally. Earlier in the year, upon learning that his companion, Camille Doncieux, was pregnant, Monet had moved into his aunt’s home in Sainte-Adresse. In order to shield his disapproving family from the situation, he discreetly shuttled back and forth to Paris, where he had arranged for Camille to be cared for. Despite (or perhaps because of) his complicated personal life, Monet was productive during this period: by the end of June, he wrote from Sainte-Adresse to the painter Bazille that he had “twenty or so canvases well under way, stunning seascapes, figures, and gardens, something of everything in fact.”¹¹ It was not the first time Monet had painted the coast of Normandy, or specifically Sainte-Adresse, however. Just two years earlier, he had made his debut at the 1865 Paris Salon with two large, ambitious seascapes of the region—the Kimbell Art Museum’s *La Pointe de la Hève at Low Tide* (fig. 13.4 [W52]), a picture depicting the Sainte-Adresse beach looking northward; and the Norton Simon Museum’s *Mouth of the Seine at Honfleur* (fig. 13.5 [W51]), which portrays Honfleur, situated at the mouth of the Seine across from Le Havre.¹² These two works—largely praised by Salon critics—were painted in Monet’s studio and based on smaller oil studies on canvas that he had previously made on location.¹³ Notably, in the Salon compositions as well as other paintings he made around this time, the artist downplayed the ongoing resort development in Normandy. With their rather muted, gray-and-brown-infused palettes, Monet’s early seascapes predominantly depict brooding natural environments and feature Normandy’s beaches and terrain as the workplaces of its local inhabitants and fishermen.¹⁴

Monet’s seascapes from the summer of 1867, however, proved to be markedly different from those he had painted only a couple of years earlier. *Beach* exemplifies his evolving painting technique at this time and foreshadows some of the qualities that would later become characteristic of the Impressionist movement; indeed, the fact that Monet was represented by the painting at the second Impressionist exhibition in 1876—nearly ten years after it was executed—is a testament to this. Perhaps the most striking change apparent in Monet’s work from the summer of 1867 is that, unlike his earlier coastal landscapes, he painted *Beach* en plein air. Complaining of the difficulty of painting in this way, he wrote to Bazille in July: “I am losing my sight. . . . I can barely see after working for half an hour; the doctor told me that I had to stop painting out of doors.”¹⁵ The severe glare and changing weather conditions Monet experienced undoubtedly contributed to the choices of colors he used in creating these pictures. Indeed, the palette of *Beach* is blonder and brighter than those of his 1865 Salon seascapes. This is in large part the result of the artist’s use of a lighter and cooler palette and his incorporation of more colorful elements into the composition (see technical report).



fig. 13.2 Gustave Le Gray (French, 1820–1884). *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse*, from the album *Vistas del mar*, 1856/57. Albumen print; 31.3 × 38.7 cm (12 5/16 × 15 3/16 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Hugh Edwards Fund, 1971.577.15.



fig. 13.3 Gustave Le Gray (French, 1820–1884). *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse, with the Dumont Baths*, from the album *Vistas del mar*, 1856/57. Albumen print; 31.7 × 41 cm (12 1/2 × 16 1/8). The Art Institute of Chicago, Hugh Edwards Fund, 1971.577.8.



fig. 13.4 Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926). *La Pointe de la Hève at Low Tide*, 1865. Oil on canvas; 90.2 × 150.5 cm (35 1/2 × 59 1/4 in.). Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, AP 1968.07.



fig. 13.5 Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926). *Mouth of the Seine at Honfleur*, 1865. Oil on canvas; 89.5 × 150.5 cm (35 1/4 × 59 1/4 in.). The Norton Simon Foundation, F.1973.33.2.P. Image courtesy of The Norton Simon Foundation.

The paintings Monet executed in Sainte-Adresse in the summer of 1867 also differ from his earlier depictions in terms of their subject matter, for these pictures comprise the artist's "first sustained campaign of painting that involved tourism."¹⁶ The viewer is immediately drawn to the visible aspects of local life in *Beach*—dark-sailed fishing boats drift in the water, and other beached crafts are surrounded by fishermen and their equipment. The two groups of boats frame two figures sitting on the shoreline: a man in a dark hat and suit looking out through his telescope, accompanied by a woman wearing a yellow hat with a red ribbon (fig. 13.6). The woman's dress—perhaps the composition's brightest element—further captures the viewer's gaze; in this, one of the few areas of notable impasto in the painting, Monet constructed the garment out of a few strokes of almost pure lead white paint. Upon recognizing the couple—undoubtedly vacationers, given their attire—our view of the painting's narrative changes. As aptly noted by Robert L. Herbert, "We are obliged to convert a traditional seacoast scene to one that has been invaded by modern life."¹⁷

New Observations

The Beach at Sainte-Adresse is often considered to be a pendant to Monet's *Regatta at Sainte-Adresse* (fig. 13.7 [W91]), also executed during the summer of 1867 and now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.¹⁸ Although there is no evidence that the artist wanted to exhibit or sell these paintings as a pair, *Regatta* was painted on a canvas very close in size to the Art Institute's work, and both depict the same portion of the Sainte-Adresse beach and include signs—notably a new villa atop the hill at left and the presence of vacationers—of the physical and social transformations taking place at the resort destination.¹⁹ Although many scholars have noted the complementary nature of these two paintings and the fact that each picture references the coexistence of local and tourist life at Sainte-Adresse, *Beach* is dominated by fishermen and dark-sailed ketches, while *Regatta* is populated with urban tourists and white-sailed leisure yachts.²⁰ Furthermore, the former has a slightly sketchier paint quality and depicts the water at low tide with an overcast sky; in contrast, the compositional elements of *Regatta* seem more finished, and it portrays a sunny day at high tide.



fig. 13.6 Detail of Monet's *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* (1867). The Art Institute of Chicago, 1933.439.



fig. 13.7 Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926). *Regatta at Sainte-Adresse*, 1867. Oil on canvas; 75.2 × 101.6 cm (29 5/8 × 40 in.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, bequest of William Church Osborn, 1951 (51.30.4). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.

Recent technical analysis has revealed, however, that Monet did not always intend for local life to dominate *Beach*; in fact, there are a number of indications that the Art Institute's composition was originally closer to that of the Metropolitan Museum's painting than has been previously recognized. Infrared imaging reveals that in an earlier stage of the Art Institute's canvas there was a group of four or five figures on the shoreline at the right side of the painting: furthest to the right were a man and woman, to their left were two men (one standing and one possibly seated), and to their left was perhaps another seated figure (fig. 13.8). Although it is difficult to determine the specific details of their clothing, it is clear that they represent a group of city-dwelling vacationers: the woman, located second from the right, wears a long dress, and three of the accompanying figures clearly sport hats, the silhouettes of which resemble those of the tourists in *Regatta*. Moreover, these figures face the water much the same way that the tourists depicted in the Metropolitan Museum's picture look out onto the English Channel to watch the regatta. These well-dressed figures were clearly the prominent human element in the original composition and were painted on a scale similar to or slightly larger than the three fishermen at left, which were late additions to *Beach*. It is notable that traces of charcoal were identified near the heads of these fishermen, suggesting a possible underdrawing and bringing to mind Monet's graphic works—like *Cliffs and Sea, Sainte-Adresse* (fig. 13.9, cat. 12)—of the same period.



fig. 13.8 Infrared reflectogram (Surface Optics, 1646 nm) and transmitted-infrared (Fuji, 1.0–1.1 μm) details of Monet's *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* (1867). The Art Institute of Chicago, 1933.439. Interactive image.



fig. 13.9 Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926). *Cliffs and Sea, Sainte-Adresse*, c. 1865. Black chalk on ivory laid paper; 206 × 314 mm (8 1/8 × 12 3/8 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1987.56.

Infrared imaging and X-radiography of *Beach* reveal other compositional changes as well. At an earlier stage of the composition Monet included an additional cluster of boats in the water along the right side of the canvas (fig. 13.10). Although subsequently painted out, these earlier crafts had sails that were similar in form and scale to those of the small- and medium-size leisure yachts in *Regatta*, although none equaled the size of the largest boat in the foreground of the Metropolitan Museum's painting. More importantly, however, the sails on the earlier boats in *Beach* were white, indicating that they were pleasure boats, not dark-sailed fishing boats like those that appear in the final composition. By painting out these original white-sailed boats and replacing them with working boats, Monet changed the narrative of the painting from one that foregrounded the leisure class to one that features local life at Sainte-Adresse.

When Monet wrote to Bazille in June 1867, he described that “among my seascapes, I’m painting the regattas at Le Havre with lots of people on the beach and the ship lane covered with small sails.”²¹ While the Metropolitan Museum's *Regatta* fits neatly into this characterization, it has always been difficult to reconcile the subject matter of *Beach* with Monet's description, since the painting's subject has little to do with regattas or the tourist population that gathered to watch them. The presence of vacationers and white-sailed boats in an earlier stage of the painting, however, suggests that Monet began the Art Institute's picture within the framework that he outlined to Bazille and did not originally intend *Beach* and *Regatta* to vary to such a significant degree. It was only at a later stage in his painting process that Monet deliberately complicated the meaning of *Beach* and, more significantly, the dialogue it shares with the Metropolitan Museum's picture.

Gloria Groom and Jill Shaw



fig. 13.10 X-ray and infrared reflectogram (Surface Optics, 1646 nm) details of Monet's *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* (1867). The Art Institute of Chicago, 1933.439. Interactive image.

Notes

1

The Beach at Sainte-Adresse (W92) corresponds to Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet: Catalogue raisonné/Werkverzeichnis*, vol. 2, Nos. 1–968 (Taschen/Wildenstein Institute, 1996), p. 49, cat. 92 (ill.). The Art Institute currently uses the title that was given to the painting when it was exhibited at the second Impressionist exhibition. The painting had the following titles during the lifetime of the artist:

Feb. 28, 1873: *Marine, temps gris* (Durand-Ruel, Paris, stock book for 1868–73 [no. 2585]; see Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel Archives, to the Art Institute of Chicago, Oct. 5, 2010, curatorial object file, Art Institute of Chicago).

Possibly spring 1874: *Ste Adresse near Havre* (Durand-Ruel, London, *Eighth Exhibition of the Society of French Artists*, exh. cat. [Durand-Ruel, 1874], p. 11, cat. 142; according to Henri Loyrette and Gary Tinterow, *Impressionisme: Les origines, 1859–1869*, exh. cat. [Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994], p. 430, cat. 136, translated as Gary Tinterow and Henri Loyrette, *Origins of Impressionism*, exh. cat. [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/Abrams, 1994], p. 433, cat. 136).

Apr. 1876: *La Plage à Sainte-Adresse*. (*Catalogue de la 2e exposition de peinture* [second Impressionist exhibition], exh. cat. [Alcan-Lévy, 1876], cat. 151).

June 21, 1889: *Sainte-Adresse. 1867*. (Galerie Georges Petit, *Claude Monet; A. Rodin*, exh. cat. [Imp. de l'Art, E. Ménard, 1889], p. 27, cat. 5; reprinted in Theodore Reff, ed., *Miscellaneous Group Exhibitions*, *Modern Art in Paris 34* [Garland, 1981], n.pag.).

Jan. 9, 1893: *Sainte-Adresse* (Durand-Ruel, Paris, stock book for 1891 [no. 2585]; see Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel Archives, to the Art Institute of Chicago, Oct. 5, 2010, curatorial object file, Art Institute of Chicago).

Feb. 1–2, 1897: *Sainte-Adresse*. (Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, *Collection H. V.: Catalogue de tableaux modernes de premier ordre: Pastels, aquarelles, dessins*, sale cat. [Galerie Georges Petit, Feb. 1–2, 1897], p. 109, lot 79).

June 11, 1920: *Sainte-Adresse, 1867* (Durand-Ruel, Paris, stock book for 1921 [no. 11701]; see Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel Archives, to the Art Institute of Chicago, Oct. 5, 2010, curatorial object file, Art Institute of Chicago).

Feb. 8, 1923: *Sainte-Adresse, 1867* (Durand-Ruel, New York, deposit book for 1894–1925 [no. 8044]; see Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel Archives, to the Art Institute of Chicago, Oct. 5, 2010, curatorial object file, Art Institute of Chicago).

2

The following texts were extremely beneficial in understanding the changing landscape of Normandy and the way in which Monet and other Impressionists treated its sites and subjects: Robert L. Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867–1886* (Yale University Press, 1994); Richard Brettell's essays in Heather Lemonedes, Lynn Federle Orr, and David Steel, *Monet in Normandy*, exh. cat. (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco/North Carolina Museum of Art/Cleveland Museum of Art, 2006); and John House and David M. Hopkin, *Impressionists by the Sea*, exh. cat. (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2007). For a detailed chronology of Monet's life, see Charles F. Stuckey, with the assistance of Sophia Shaw, *Claude Monet, 1840–1926*, exh. cat. (Art Institute of Chicago/Thames & Hudson, 1995).

3 Richard R. Brettell, "Monet's Normandy before Monet," in Heather Lemonedes, Lynn Federle Orr, and David Steel, *Monet in Normandy*, exh. cat. (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco/North Carolina Museum of Art/Cleveland Museum of Art, 2006), p. 15.

4 Eugène Chapus, *De Paris à Rouen et au Havre* (L. Hachette, 1862), p. 244; quoted in John House and David M. Hopkin, *Impressionists by the Sea*, exh. cat. (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2007), p. 125.

5 Eugène d'Auriac, *Guide pratique, historique et descriptif aux bains de mer de la manche et de l'océan* (Garnier Frères, 1866), p. 200; quoted in John House and David M. Hopkin, *Impressionists by the Sea*, exh. cat. (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2007), p. 125.

6 John House and David M. Hopkin, *Impressionists by the Sea*, exh. cat. (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2007), pp. 15–16. Alphonse Karr's 1836 novel *Le chemin le plus court*, which tells the story of a young painter from Le Havre, references numerous local sites. Karr also published *Les soirées de Sainte-Adresse* in 1853.

7 Michel Schulman, Frédéric Bazille, 1841–1870: *Catalogue raisonné, peintures, dessins, pastels, aquarelles* (Éd. de l'Amateur/Éd. des Catalogues Raisonnés, 1995), cat. 18 (1865).

8 Alfred Robaut, *L'oeuvre de Corot: Catalogue raisonné et illustré, précédé de l'histoire de Corot et de ses oeuvres*, vol. 2 (1905; repr., Laget, 1965), nos. 230, 235, and 238–39. All of these works are dated to the period 1830–40.

9 Adolphe Stein et al., *Jongkind: Catalogue critique de l'oeuvre* (Brame & Lorenceau, 2003), nos. 50 (1847), 116 (1853), 216 (1858), 271 (1862), 272 (1862), 273 (1862), 274 (1862), 309 (1863), and 430 (1866).

10 As early as 1850, photographic studios began to be established in towns along the coast of Normandy. Among the numerous photographers documenting the region was Gustave Le Gray, who made a series of photographs there during the summers of 1856 and 1858. Many of Le Gray's views documented the transformation of the coastline. He was pioneering in his technical skill and creation of atmospheric photographs that presented little or no narrative context. Le Gray's sea views were acclaimed in London and Paris, and it has been argued that Monet certainly would have known about these photographs, which may have played a role in his (and other Impressionists') treatment of their subjects and interest in capturing the momentary. See Carole McNamara, "Painting and Photography in Normandy: The Aesthetic of the Instant," in *The Lens of Impressionism: Photography and Painting along the Normandy Coast, 1850–1874*, exh. cat. (University of Michigan Museum of Art/Hudson Hills, 2009), pp. 15–33. Indeed, there is a certain affinity between Le Gray's photograph *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* (fig. 13.2) and Monet's painting.

11 Monet to Bazille, June 25, [1867]; quoted in Richard Kendall, ed., *Monet by Himself: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels, Letters*, trans. Bridget Strevens Romer (Macdonald Orbis, 1989), p. 24; original French in Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné*, vol. 1, *Peintures, 1840–1881* (Bibliothèque des Arts, 1974), pp. 423–24, letter 33.

12 The number preceded by a W refers to the Monet catalogue raisonné; see Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet: Catalogue raisonné/Werkverzeichnis*, vols. 1–4 (Taschen/Wildenstein Institute, 1996).

13 See Richard R. Brettell and Stephen Eisenman, *Nineteenth-Century Art in the Norton Simon Museum* (Norton Simon Art Foundation/Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 316–20, cat. 84. According to Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet: Catalogue raisonné/Werkverzeichnis*, vol. 2, Nos. 1–968 (Taschen/Wildenstein Institute, 1996), p. 24, cat. 40, *Horses at the Pointe de La Hève* (1864; private collection [W40]) is the study for the Kimbell painting; and cat. 38, *The Lighthouse by the Hospice* (1864; Kunsthaus Zürich [W38]), is the study for the Norton Simon painting. The number preceded by a W refers to the Monet catalogue raisonné; see Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet: Catalogue raisonné/Werkverzeichnis*, vols. 1–4 (Taschen/Wildenstein Institute, 1996).

14 Richard R. Brettell, "Monet and Normandy," in Heather Lemonedes, Lynn Federle Orr, and David Steel, *Monet in Normandy*, exh. cat. (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco/North Carolina Museum of Art/Cleveland Museum of Art, 2006), pp. 42–43.

15 Monet to Bazille, July 3, [1867]; quoted in Gary Tinterow, "Regatta at Sainte-Adresse," in *Masterpieces of European Painting, 1800–1920*, in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/Yale University Press, 2007), p. 136; original French in Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné*, vol. 1, *Peintures, 1840–1881* (Bibliothèque des Arts, 1974), p. 424, letter 34.

16 Robert L. Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867–1886* (Yale University Press, 1994), p. 9.

17 Robert L. Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867–1886* (Yale University Press, 1994), p. 11.

18 The number preceded by a W refers to the Monet catalogue raisonné; see Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet: Catalogue raisonné/Werkverzeichnis*, vols. 1–4 (Taschen/Wildenstein Institute, 1996).

19 These details have been noted in a number of texts, including Robert L. Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867–1886* (Yale University Press, 1994); Heather Lemonedes, Lynn Federle Orr, and David Steel, *Monet in Normandy*, exh. cat. (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco/North Carolina Museum of Art/Cleveland Museum of Art, 2006); Gary Tinterow, "Regatta at Sainte-Adresse," in *Masterpieces of European Painting, 1800–1920*, in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/Yale University Press, 2007), p. 136; John House and David M. Hopkin, *Impressionists by the Sea*, exh. cat. (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2007), pp. 130–31; and Joseph Baillio, "Monet à Sainte-Adresse en 1867," in *Réunion des Musées Nationaux*, Claude Monet, 1840–1926, exh. cat. (Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Abrams, 2010), p. 54.

20 The only reference to the local fisherfolk in *Regatta* is the small, dark-sailed boat in the center of the composition. Robert L. Herbert pointed out that yachts could be distinguished from fishing boats by the color of their sails: fishing boats typically had brown sails, and yachts, which were more expensive, had white sails. See Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (Yale University Press, 1988), p. 292.

21 Monet to Bazille, June 25, [1867], quoted in Richard Kendall, ed., *Monet by Himself: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels, Letters*, trans. Bridget Strevens Romer (Macdonald Orbis, 1989), p. 24; original French in Daniel Wildenstein, vol. 1, *Peintures, 1840–1881* (Bibliothèque des Arts, 1974), pp. 423–24, letter 33.