

LAURITS TUXEN

1853–1927

122. *Preparatory study for “Digging for Worms on the Beach”
from 1880, Cayeux-sur-Mer*

(Forarbejde til “Ormegravere på stranden”)



Oil on panel, 7¾ x 12½ in. (20 x 32 cm)

Signed bottom right: LT. 80

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Børge Nielsen, Vejle, Auction 7, 1991, lot 719, ill. p. 12 (described as *Muslingesamler fra Bretagne*).

EXHIBITED: Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, 1994, no. 28; Skagens Museum and Fuglsang Kunstmuseum, *Tuxen, Color, Countryside and Crown*, 2014–2015, no. 19, ill. pp. 162–163.

LITERATURE: Lise Svanholm, *Laurits Tuxen*, 1990, oeuvre no. 174, titled *Muslingesamlere fra Bretagne (Mussel Collectors from Brittany)*; Peter Nisbet, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1994, ill. and discussed pp. 11–12; on the motif, Laurits Tuxen: *En Malers Arbejde gennem tredsindstyve Aar fortalt af ham selv*, Copenhagen 1928, p. 97; Bo Wingren, *Tillbaka till Normandie, nordiska konstnärer i Normandie 1850–1900*, Stockholm 1992, pp. 219–223.

During his youth Tuxen frequently painted the sea and the shore, and in the 1870s he made repeated visits to the coasts of northern France. Here, the plein air artists had found motifs which at that time

were particularly popular among the French, English, American, and Scandinavian artists of the day. In 1875 and 1877, Tuxen worked at St. Malo in Brittany. He made this sketch at Cayeux-sur-Mer in Picardy in 1880 as a preparatory work for a painting of people digging for worms on the shore which, as far as is known, was first exhibited in the memorial exhibition of Tuxen's work in 1929. The flat landscape around Cayeux had only recently been discovered by artists.

Tuxen himself says the following about the motif in his memoirs: *At the end of May, I went with Rosenstand to Cayeux s. mer, a fishing village and bathing resort at the mouth of the Somme. It was a cold, wet June, and it started with my sitting wrapped up in the hotel reading Dumas' "Le chevalier de la maison rouge."* When the weather brightened up I went out on the beach to look at motifs, of which there were plenty. Women and girls spent a lot of time at low water on the flat sandy beach, partly to fish for prawn and partly to dig for worms for bait. Their dresses were good, and so were the types. When they came home from catching prawn, dressed in trousers and rags, with the great prawn nets over their shoulders, in groups of 4 or 5, that certainly awoke my urge to paint. I ended by settling for a motif: two women digging for worms on the beach, and I finished it during the course of the summer.

In the sketch, Tuxen has concentrated on the two figures digging for worms. Their reflections in the water left on the beach by the tide is crucial to an understanding of the motif and the characterization of the place. The weather is generally overcast. In the finished picture the girl and boy digging for worms are certainly the central feature, but the other figures in the group also attract our attention, especially the fisher girl standing with her back to us. And on the right of the group, other fishermen are emptying a boat that has been drawn up on the beach. The boat, which in the sketch is seen at the water's edge on the right, has in the finished picture been placed far out on the left in the limited area where the sun is lighting up the water, the sand, and the sails of the boats. The contrasting effect is typical of these coasts, well known from classical Dutch seascapes and landscapes.

Tuxen's painting is reminiscent, not only in the sense of motif, of works by the Swedish artist August Hagborg (1852–1921), who enjoyed great success with his motifs of fisherfolk from Cayeux, but there is nothing to indicate any contact between the two. The same summer in Cayeux, Tuxen painted a wave, which is not known today.

E. F.



FIG. A Laurits Tuxen *Digging for Worms on the Beach*, 1880
22²/₅ x 81¹/₂ in. (57 x 81.5 cm), signed L. Tuxen 1880, private collection. (Lise Svanholm 1990, no. 178, described as *Franske fiskere* [French Fishermen], ill. p. 37).