

LAURITS TUXEN

1853–1927

123. *Collecting Mussels at Low Tide at Le Portel, France, 1888*

(*Muslingesamlere ved ebbe i Le Portel, Frankrig. 1888*)

Oil on canvas on wood, 20⁹/₁₀ x 37¹/₃ in. (53 x 74 cm)

Signed and dated bottom left: L.T. 88.

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 175, 1965, lot 203, ill. p. 45; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 510, 1988, lot 76, ill. p. 65; Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 721, 2003, lot 1126, ill.

EXHIBITED: Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen 1897 (no catalogue); Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen, France, *Peintres du nord en voyage dans l'ouest, modernité et impressionisme 1860–1900*, 2001; Ateneum, Helsinki, *Landet bortom havet*, 2001; Bruce Museum of Art and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut, and The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, New York, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 2005, no. 18, ill.; Scandinavia House, New York, *Danish Paintings from the Golden Age to the Modern Breakthrough, Selections from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 2013, no. 35; Skagens Museum and Fuglsang Kunstmuseum, *Tuxen, Color, Countryside and Crown*, 2014–2015, no. 25, ill. p. 164.

LITERATURE: Lise Svanholm, *Laurits Tuxen, den sidste fyrstemaler*, Copenhagen 1990, work no. 309, ill. p. 75 (the information that the painting was exhibited at Charlottenborg and the indicated catalogue number [450] applies to the related painting discussed below); Éric Eydoux and others (eds.), *Peintres du nord en voyage dans l'ouest, modernité et impressionisme 1860–1900*, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen 2001, p. 68, ill. p. 67; *Landet bortom havet*, Ateneum, Helsinki, 2001, p. 68, ill. p. 67; Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light: Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 2007, p. 163, ill.

The northern coast of France overlooking the English Channel immediately attracted Tuxen's interest when, as a young man, he visited Saint Malo in Brittany. At that time it was his ambition to become a marine artist, and before this first visit abroad he had painted several different stretches of the Danish coast: the cliffs of Bornholm, the dune landscapes at Skagen, and the west coast of Jutland, with its violent breakers. His first picture to be shown in the Charlottenborg exhibition in 1875 was of a lifeboat going out in a strong gale. While Tuxen was training in Paris during the following years, concentrating on the prestigious academic figure painting, he pursued his interest in plein air painting at the coast during the summer. In 1877 he again painted at Saint Malo in the company of P. S. Krøyer. In 1878 and 1880, he was at Cayeux-sur-Mer.

The whole of the north French coast, where cliffs alternate with sandy beaches, provides a grandiose natural landscape marked by huge tides of more than 33 feet (10 metres) and very changeable weather, with gales and rain. Despite the difficult natural conditions, the coasts of Brittany and Normandy and the area farther north contain a number of harbors of historical importance. The coastal population has lived on fishing and the large stocks of shellfish, especially oysters and mussels. For the painters, the extensive north coast offered rich possibilities for both figure and plein air painting. At the end of the 19th century, increasing numbers of painters went there from the towns, and coastal tourism led to the emergence of holiday resorts like Dieppe and Trouville. Among the French artists who worked on the north coast, Eugène Boudin (1825–1898) and Claude Monet (1840–1926) deserve special mention. Tuxen was by no means the only Scandinavian painter who felt attracted by the north coast of France; the most productive of the Scandinavians was the Swede August Hagborg (1852–1921).

Tuxen was already known for his major commissions for European royal families when he married a Belgian woman, Ursule de Baisieux, in 1886. The couple had a permanent address in Paris and went to the

coast with their children in the summer. In 1886 and 1887 they chose Le Portel, just south of Boulogne-sur-Mer, where Tuxen executed both figure paintings and also paintings of the coast and the sea. Numerous studies are known, but there are also some larger paintings intended to be shown in exhibitions. A large composition with returning fishermen on the shore was exhibited in Copenhagen in 1887. In the background of that painting we see the fort of l'Heurt, which played a part when Napoleon was gathering his troops at Le Portel in 1803 with a view to attacking England.

The painting in the Loeb collection is an informal portrayal of the coast at Le Portel at low tide in dramatic moonlight. The main feature is the wide, sandy beach in the foreground, which is underwater for half the day. The moon is reflected so intensely in the wet sand that it looks almost like sunlight. We see the shore at a time when the never-ending cycle means that the tide is out, leaving seaweed and mussels in the sand. It is these latter the fishermen's families are gathering. Above them the unbroken row of houses in the town stands in shadow like a diffuse, dark-blue silhouette in contrast to both the shore and the bright sky.

This unusual picture of nature with its dramatic disposition of elements was painted with a broad brush in a sketchlike idiom showing how Tuxen had adopted the technique of the Impressionists. He has tried to capture the color and the quite unusual light.

Standing on the same spot, he also painted a rather larger picture of the motif, with a cart and a fisherman's wife with a child in the foreground (Fig. A). This was the painting, and not the one in the Loeb collection, that was on show at the Charlottenborg Exhibition in 1890.¹ Later this related painting appeared several times at Charlottenborg: at the auction of the artist and his sister Nicoline held there. November 18.-19, 1920 (no. 144, *Ved Ebbetid i nærheden af Boulogne [At Low Tide Near Boulogne]*), and at Tuxen's memorial exhibition in 1929 (cat. no.109).²

E.F.



FIG. A Laurits Tuxen
At Low Tide on the Coast of France, 1888
(*Ved ebbetid på kysten af Frankrig*)
Oil, 26 x 34³/₅ in. (66.3 x 88 cm)
Inscribed: L. Tuxen 1888
Owner unknown

¹Lise Svanholm 1990, no. 303. The Charlottenborg catalogue number indicated, no. 90, is wrong; the correct number is 450.

²Also in Viggo Jastrau, *Laurits Tuxen*, Copenhagen 1929, p. 34.