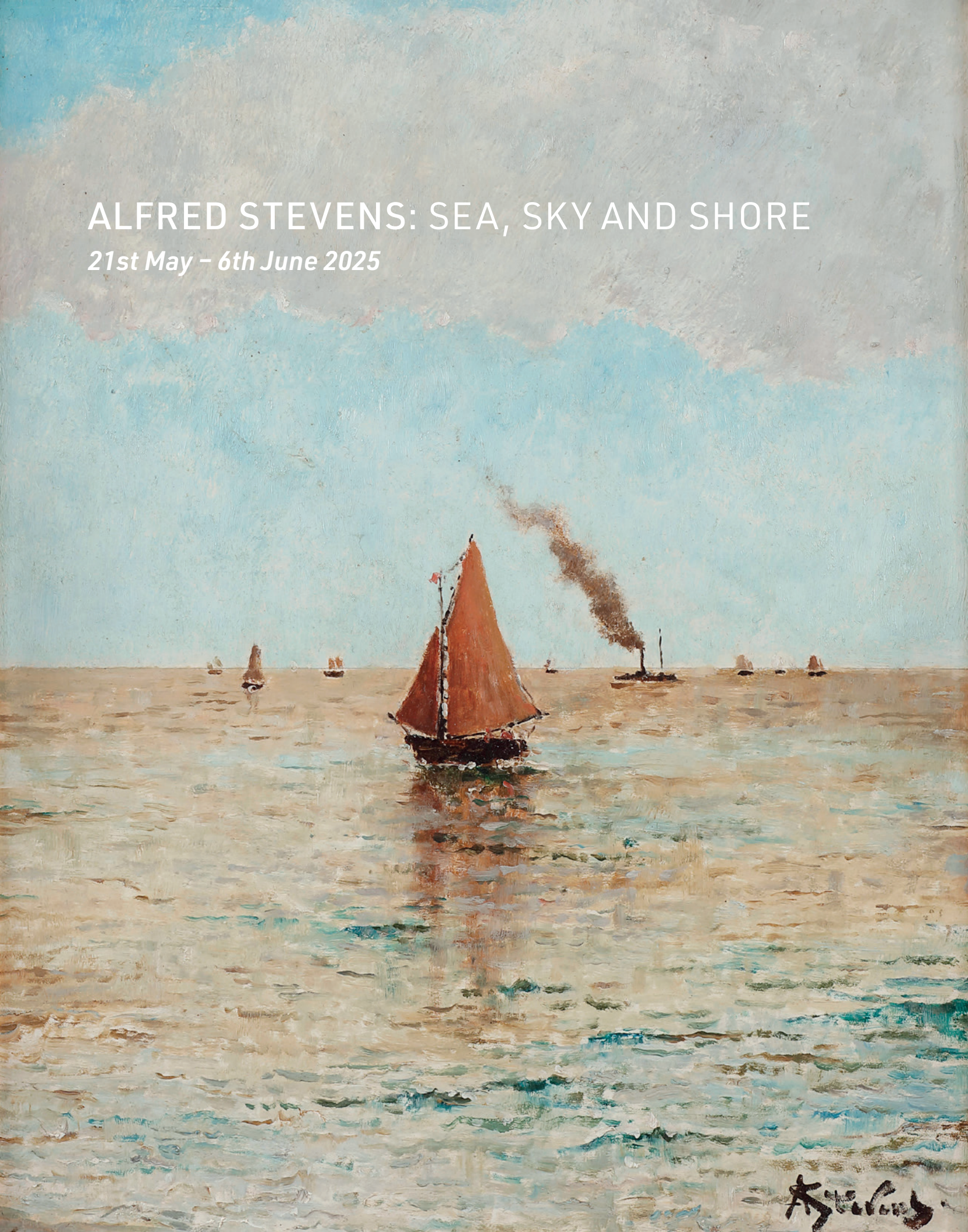


ALFRED STEVENS: SEA, SKY AND SHORE

21st May – 6th June 2025



Alfred Stevens

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The life and work of the Belgian painter Alfred Stevens (1823-1906) is of endless fascination to our gallery and with important pictures by him continuing to attain major prices at auction, both collectors and institutions alike are fully aware of his exceptional talent. Stevens's skill as a painter of elegant women, adorned with fine dresses, radiating the glamour of Second Empire Paris needs little introduction (see p.4). Suffice to say that by the 1880s he had achieved great success and celebrity, attracting distinguished clients such as King Leopold



fig 1.
CLAUDE MONET (1840-1926)
Garden at Sainte-Adresse
Oil on canvas
98 x 130 cm.
1867
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

II of Belgium and the American railway magnate and philanthropist William Henry Vanderbilt. Stevens had also been honoured with the newly constructed *rue Alfred Stevens* in Paris's 9eme arrondissement, and counted the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt as a pupil and friend.

With an artistic legacy such as this we are frequently asked if these marine paintings are in fact by the same 'famous figure painter'. It seems a most logical query, but the 'marines' by Stevens are now enjoying a revived status. People with no prior knowledge of the painter's work are instantly attracted to the impressionist feel and tonality of these charming pictures.

In 1880 Stevens developed bronchial problems and consulted his physician and friend, Dr. René Peter, who recommended he go to the seaside for some fresh air, a reprieve from breathing in turpentine fumes in his studio. Stevens duly went off to Sainte-Adresse on the Normandy coast for two months and started to paint seascapes. He had previously been a guest at Sarah Bernhardt's home in the town and this no doubt informed his decision to return there while convalescing. Sainte-Adresse was an established colony for artists in the summer months and the setting for Claude Monet's 1867 masterpiece *Garden at Sainte-Adresse* (fig 1.). Today, over one hundred and forty years later, we can still reap the benefits of this commendable remedy in the form of these serene and atmospheric seascapes.

His consummate grasp of colours and their values lent itself perfectly to capturing the changing weather all

along the Normandy coast and when looking at the quality of pictures he produced, it is easy to see why the famous Paris art dealer, Georges Petit, guaranteed Stevens 50,000 francs for the season's work. Petit's generous contract with the artist proved a sound decision because it would allow people without the resources of Vanderbilt or King Léopold to own a good painting with a famous signature. Over the next six years Stevens was to return regularly to paint the Normandy coast.

Stevens embraced '*La Mer*' as readily as he had '*La Femme*'. It was another inexhaustible theme – the sea and shore from calm to storm, in sunlight or moonlight, with or without beaches, bathers, headlands, fishermen and steamboats. To a painter of cashmere shawls and undulating silk fabrics, Stevens was acutely aware of every nuance of colour the sea, sky and shore presented him with. Of course, he soon realised the potential of combining his two subjects. We find ladies at the beach and, often, single figures stand at the water's edge looking longingly for the return of a vessel bearing their loved one. This entire theme culminated in a masterpiece, *La Villa des Falaises à Sainte Adresse* (fig 2.), which was with our gallery some years ago, and more recently sold at Sotheby's New York.

As a professionally trained and scrupulously disciplined artist, Stevens only used the highest quality artist's materials. Most of the seascapes included in this exhibition are painted on panels of well-seasoned mahogany and with oil colours of quality and permanence. Stevens employed a variety of brushwork from very fluid pigment in some passages to generous



fig 2.
ALFRED STEVENS (1823-1906)
La Villa des Falaises à Sainte-Adresse
oil on panel
67 x 91 cm.
1884
Private Collection

impasto in others. We see in some areas the streaks left by the hogshair brush showing how Stevens 'attacked' the paint on the panel. These paintings are the product of an experienced artist, freed from the pressures of his busy studio practice to paint variations of a landscape that clearly delighted him. We invite you to the gallery this early summer to enjoy a selection of these timeless seascapes, as fresh today as they were in the 1880s.

James Astley Birtwistle
May 2025



La Dame en blanc

oil on panel
36 x 19 cm.
signed



Voiliers et vapeur

oil on panel
41 x 32.5 cm.
signed



Le Tréport

oil on panel
35 x 27cm.
signed



Seascape with sailing boats

oil on panel
36 x 27 cm.
signed



Seascape with dark clouds

oil on canvas
29 x 27.3 cm.
signed



Vapeur et voiliers

oil on panel
41 x 32.5 cm.
signed



Vue prise à Dieppe
oil on canvas
74 x 60 cm.
signed



La plage près de Dieppe
oil on panel
36 x 27 cm.
signed



Le Havre
oil on panel
30 x 40 cm.
signed and dated October 1883

Bord de mer au Havre au clair de lune
oil on panel
82 x 52.5 cm.
signed, inscribed and dated (on reverse)
'Alfred Stevens. / Havre Septembre 83'



Le Havre, coucher de soleil
 charcoal on paper
 25.5 x 45 cm.
 signed and dated 1888

Voilier, effet de lumière
 oil on panel
 32 x 24 cm.
 signed



Cap Martin
oil on panel
45.5 x 55 cm.
signed, inscribed and dated 1894



Le Havre
oil on panel
41 x 66 cm.
signed, inscribed and dated 1881

