Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Raoul Dufy (Le Havre 1877 - Forcalquier 1953)

The Bay of Sainte-Adresse

Pencil on white paper.
Extensively inscribed by the artist lumieres à gauche, contre jour ou ombre, lumières a droite, bleu, vert dégradé, carul(?), ocre rouge [?] blanc, orient et persian(?) blanc et noir in the margins of the sheet.
200 x 587 mm. (7 7/8 x 23 1/8 in.) [image]
500 x 654 mm. (9 5/8 x 25 3/4 in.) [sheet]

Raoul Dufy painted his native town of Le Havre and the expanse of the bay of Sainte-Adresse throughout his career. As has been noted, 'There is also, in Dufy's visual repertoire, the pier and the bathing beach of the Casino Marie-Christine with the little harbour, the shallow cliffs, the church, the bathers and the fishermen of Dufy's youthful playground in real life: Sainte-Adresse, already painted by Boudin and Monet, when Dufy was still a boy…Regattas and yacht races were in his blood from his childhood in Le Havre: blue sea and blue sky flood through his work.'

Of Dufy's yachting subjects in particular, one scholar has written, 'Even a slight study of the later racecourse and yachting paintings will show a strong abstract predilection which continually goes far beyond mere topography. These paintings are like visual tone-poems, with their veils and bands of colour, their merger of sea and sky into one enveloping great sweep of blue, structured by squares of light, their own scintillating areas of colour setting up a counterpoint at variance with the objects depicted…even more emphatically abstract are those yachting subjects in which the furling of sails, Le sèchage des voiles, and other convolutions of air, sea, light, space, wheeling gulls and – spiralling in swirling conical and triangular shapes – the sails, are transformed into a series of magical evocations of movement which, however practical in their origin, end in Dufy's hands as abstract structures of great beauty.'

In its rectangular, panoramic format, the present sheet would appear to be a preparatory study for a large, signed gouache by Dufy, of similar composition and identical dimensions. A slightly smaller variant of the same composition, also drawn in gouache, was in a private Japanese collection in 1983. Both gouaches are in turn related to one of the best-known works of Dufy's career; the very large painting on cotton of La Baie de Sainte-Adresse, one of a series of fourteen 'tentures' commissioned by Paul Poiret for the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs of 1925. These tentures were large wall hangings, painted in mordant colours on dyed cotton and measuring almost three metres high and four metres in length. They were intended to hang as decoration on a barge on the Seine, where Poiret had chosen to display his work during the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs. As one scholar has noted of this particular composition, 'A frequent event in Le Havre, the regatta played an important part in the life of the people of the city. The sailboat race shown in the hanging is based on the one organized for the visit of the English flotilla. It provides Dufy with an excuse to portray the Seine estuary and the Bay of Sainte-Adresse with its cliffs stretching off to the north, encouraging daydreams and escapism.'

Extensively annotated by the artist with colour notes, this large sheet – despite the apparent spontaneity of the draughtsmanship - underlines the care with which Dufy developed his painted compositions.

Artist description:

Trained in the studio of Léon Bonnat at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Raoul Dufy was deeply affected by his first exposure to the work of Henri Matisse and the Fauve artists at the Salon des Indépendants in 1905. He soon took up the Fauvist manner, and had his first one-man show at the Galerie Berthe Weil in 1906, though by 1908 he had abandoned Fauvism for a more deliberately naïve style. He was at this point struggling to earn an income and, like Kees van Dongen and André Lhote, would sell drawings for five francs apiece to the Paris Journal. He produced his first woodcuts between 1909 and 1910, and around 1911 began working with the couturier Paul Poiret on the design of textiles, fabrics and interior decorations. This was to be the start of a long and fruitful collaboration with Poiret, who was to become Dufy's most important patron.

The years following the First World War found Dufy continuing to work for Poiret, as well as producing book illustrations, tapestry cartoons and designing stage sets. Exhibitions of his work were held throughout the 1920's at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, and the artist divided his time between Paris and the South of France. Dufy travelled to Morocco and Italy and was a regular visitor to England, where he painted the annual regattas at Cowes and Henley and the races at Epsom and Goodwood. He also painted the regattas at Le Havre and Deauville. For the Exposition Universelle of 1937 he was commissioned to paint a massive mural of La Fée Électricité, covering nearly six hundred square metres, for the Palais de la Lumière. This was followed by a series of mural decorations for the Palais de Chaillot and panels for the Jardin des Plantes. Already suffering from the severe arthritis that in later years would confine him to a wheelchair, Dufy nevertheless continued to work steadily throughout the period of the Second World War, and in the years afterwards regularly exhibited at the Salon des Tuileries. A large retrospective exhibition of his work was held in Geneva in 1952, while in the same year an exhibition of more than forty paintings at the Venice Biennale earned the artist the Grand Prix.

Dufy's oeuvre consists of around two thousand paintings and the same amount of watercolours, as well as around a thousand drawings. He provided illustrations for some fifty books, and also produced woodcuts, tapestry cartoons, ceramic pieces and fabric designs, as well as stage sets and mural decorations. He created over two thousand designs for the silk manufacturers Bianchini-Ferrer in Lyons, and his fabric work was regularly exhibited at the Salons des Artistes Décorateurs.

As a draughtsman, however, Dufy has remained somewhat less appreciated, despite the originality of his vision and the popularity of his work in other media. Nevertheless, one recent scholar has justly praised Dufy's 'exceptional fluency, grace and spiritual refinement as a draughtsman', while Sir Kenneth Clark is said to have described the artist as 'comparable only to the greatest draughtsmen in European art, to Tiepolo or to Watteau, and misconceived, under-rated by the English.' As Dufy himself wrote in one of his notebooks, 'My drawings are indeed drawings in themselves, but not one of them exists for itself. They are always designs for paintings...My drawings are always done from nature and they express above all the density of forms and their position in light and space. They are always created to capture the effect of light. That is why they help me paint.'