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6 ST. JAMES'S PLACE, LONDON, SW1A 1NP
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Alfred Stevens (Brussels 1823-1906 Paris)

Bord de mer au Havre au clair de lune (Seaside in Le Havre by moonlight)

Signed (lower right) 'A Stevens'; and signed, inscribed and dated (on reverse) 'Alfred Stevens. /Havre Septembre 83'

Oil on panel

32 ¼ x 50 ⅝ in. (82 x 52.5 cm.)



This painting depicts the sea at Le Havre, a major port in northern France's Normandy region where the Seine River meets the English Channel, by moonlight.

Alfred Stevens began his studies at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, where he knew François Navez, the Neo-Classical painter and former student of Jacques-Louis David. In 1843, Stevens went to Paris, joining his brother Joseph and was admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts, the most important art school in Paris.

He mastered what became his characteristic naturalistic style which owes much to 17th-century Dutch genre painting. He spent most of his career in Paris and exhibited regularly in Paris and Brussels, painting elegant Parisian women and the surrounding regions of France with a beautifully atmospheric and luminous style which he became known for.

Although he lived between Brussels and Paris, he spent a good deal of time at the Normandy coast, on doctor's orders as he suffered from a bronchial condition. During the summer he would often leave Paris for the sea and on occasions made deals with the Parisian dealer, George Petit, that he would paint during his break if Petit would fund his holiday in return for the paintings. As a result the scenes of the French coastline became a subject very dear to the artist's heart. As in his genre scenes, in his seascapes he applied his paint thickly which gave his work an almost sparkling quality, as seen here in the present painting. The moonlight appears to glisten on the ripples of the sea, enhanced by the delicate yet pronounced ridges of paint.