The importance of Auguste Renoir as a landscape painter was recently assessed in the exhibition “Renoir Landscapes: 1865–1883” at the National Gallery, London, to which The Metropolitan Museum of Art lent The Bay of Naples (Morning) (Figure 1). Until now it was believed that the first owner of the painting was the New York–based Scottish dealer James Smith Inglis (1852–1907), but recent research, based on the ledgers of the dealer Paul Durand-Ruel (1831–1922), establishes that the first owner was the largely forgotten Scottish collector James Duncan of Benmore (1834–1905).

Duncan (Figure 2) was born on April 4, 1834, in Mosfield, Springburn, near Glasgow, the son of James Duncan (1788–1840), a successful Glasgow bookseller. About 1850 he entered the office of Warden, Macpherson and Co., a prominent Greenock sugar-broking firm, and subsequently formed a partnership with the Greenock refineries Alexander Scott and James Bell, who also operated in London. In 1869 Duncan formed his own company, Duncan and Co., with a refinery at Clyde Wharf, Silvertown, Essex; this heralded the start of an extremely prosperous career in the course of which he became the leading sugar refiner in London. He held the prominent positions of chairman of the Sugar Refiners’ Committee, chairman of the Railway and Canal Traders’ Association and vice-president of the Society of Chemical Industry.

Between 1870 and 1883 Duncan put together a remarkable collection of paintings and sculpture—both old masters and nineteenth-century British, German, Italian, Austrian, and French works—that was one of the most important to be formed in late nineteenth-century Britain. To house his art, in 1879 he built a vast picture gallery next to his mansion in Benmore, Argyllshire (Figure 3), where he spent time when not at his London residence at 71 Cromwell Road, Kensington. Duncan showed a predilection for French nineteenth-century paintings, especially large academic pieces such as Jules Letévrère’s Diana Surprised of 1879 (Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires) and Jean Jacques Henner’s Eglogue of 1879 (Petit Palais, Paris). He also assembled a significant body of Barbizon works, including Théodore Rousseau’s Mont Chauvet, Forêt de Fontainebleau of about 1845–50 (location unknown) and Charles-François Daubigny’s Banks of the Oise of 1863 (Figure 4).

Duncan bought his most important French pictures from Durand-Ruel, whom he most likely met in the early 1870s when the dealer was organizing a number of exhibitions of French art at his Bond Street gallery under the title “The Society of French Artists.” Durand-Ruel noted that sometime in 1872 or 1873 he sold Duncan one of his most significant early purchases of French art: Camille Corot’s celebrated La toilette of 1859 (private collection, Paris). The dealer’s ledger for February 1874 records that Duncan also bought two works by Gustave Courbet, Bergère avec moutons et chiens for 6,000 francs and an untitled landscape for 3,400 francs. Such was Duncan’s wealth that he could afford to pay Durand-Ruel 46,000 francs for Eugène Delacroix’s Death of Sardanapalus of 1827 (Figure 5), arguably his greatest acquisition. Precisely when he bought the work has yet to be established, but it was most probably between 1878 and 1880. Duncan’s name appears again in Durand-Ruel’s ledger in May 1883, when he purchased William Bouguereau’s La nuit of 1883 (Figure 6), Eugène Boudin’s Soleil couchant (location unknown), and Renoir’s Bay of Naples.

John Rewald claimed in 1973 that James Inglis bought the Metropolitan’s Bay of Naples from Durand-Ruel on May 1, 1883. Inglis owned the painting sometime before July 18, 1888, when he sold it to Boussod, Valadon & Cie. He did indeed acquire works from Durand-Ruel between 1881 and 1892, but none of these was by Renoir, and his name does not appear at all in Durand-Ruel’s ledger for 1883. The ledger for May 1, 1883, clearly records Duncan as the purchaser of Naples, stock number 2391, at a price of 3,000 francs. That original stock number, 2391, can still be seen on the back of the Metropolitan’s painting. How long Duncan owned his Renoir is not known, but it is likely to have been in his collection until at least 1886, the year he was forced to sell many of his paintings when his business...
suffered serious financial difficulties as a result of foreign bounties on sugar. Inglis most likely bought the picture between 1886 and 1888, either directly from Duncan or through a dealer.

Duncan’s acquisition of The Death of Sardanapalus alone would have ensured his reputation as a collector, but his purchase of the Renoir secures his place in the history of nineteenth-century British collecting of French art. Until now it was thought that the first Impressionist work to enter a Scottish collection was Edgar Degas’s At the Milliner’s of 1882 (Metropolitan Museum), which the Glasgow collector Thomas Glen Arthur (1857–1907) bought from the dealer Alexander Reid (1854–1928) in 1892. But Duncan’s purchase of the Renoir nine years earlier confirms that he was the first Scottish collection known to feature an Impressionist work. Duncan is thereby revealed as one of a small, pioneering group of British collectors who bought Impressionist paintings in the 1870s and early 1880s, among them Henry Hill (1812–1882), Louis Huth (1821–1905), Samuel Barlow (1825–1893), and Constantine Ioniades (1833–1900). Huth became the first English collector to own an Impressionist painting when he bought Le foyer de la danse à l’Opéra, which Degas painted in 1872 (Musée d’Orsay, Paris), from Durand-Ruel in 1873. Hill bought seven works by Degas, including The Dancing Class of about 1870 and The Rehearsal of the Ballet Onstage, probably of 1874, both of which are now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and he also owned Claude Monet’s Garden Orchard Scene with Blossom and Poplars, which dates to before 1882 (present location unknown). Ioniades acquired Degas’s Robert le Diable of 1876 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) from Durand-Ruel in 1881. Barlow was the first English collector to evince a taste for Impressionist landscapes, showing a preference for Camille Pissarro, by whom he owned four pictures, including Une rue à Louveciennes of 1871 (Manchester City Art Gallery).

The apparent lack of interest in Renoir’s work in Britain may partly be explained by the fact that in the 1870s collectors there had few chances to see it. Between 1872 and 1874 Durand-Ruel exhibited only three of Renoir’s pictures in London, and not until July 1882 did he show his paintings again, this time at White’s Gallery in King Street. In April 1883 the dealer organized an exhibition entitled “Paintings, Drawings and Pastels by Members of ‘La Société

3. Benmore House, Argyllshire, with the Picture Gallery at the right. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Commission of the Ancient and Historical Monuments, Edinburgh


6. William Bouguereau (French, 1825–1905). La nuit, 1883. Oil on canvas, 82 x 42¾ in. (208.3 x 107.3 cm). Hillwood Museum, Washington, D.C. (S1.12)
des Impressionistes” at Dowdeswell and Dowdeswell’s gallery in London at which he showed eight paintings by Renoir, some of them landscapes. The exhibition received mixed reviews. The most complimentary critic praised Renoir as a figure painter.27 The most powerful invective was reserved for his landscapes, along with those of Monet and Alfred Sisley, in which one reviewer discerned “as much vulgarity—of sentiment, ambition and technique—as can well be put on canvas.”28

By the time the Dowdeswell show opened in London on April 20, Duncan had very likely already seen Renoir’s work at the exhibition Durand-Ruel had installed three weeks earlier at his gallery in the Boulevard Madeleine in Paris. The Paris exhibition was devoted entirely to Renoir and showed seventy paintings, fourteen of which were landscapes, including The Bay of Naples.29 The landscapes provoked extremely negative responses from French critics, even from such champions of Impressionism as Philippe Burty and Gustave Geffroy, both of whom cited Renoir’s paintings of Naples as the most convincing evidence of the artist’s failure as a landscape painter.30

There is no evidence to explain Duncan’s motive for buying The Bay of Naples, the only Impressionist work he appears to have owned. It may simply have been the subject matter that interested him, as he also acquired a Bay of Naples by the seventeenth-century painter Johannes Lingelbach (1622–1674).31 His purchase of a Renoir at the beginning of May 1883, immediately after so many negative critical reviews of the artist’s landscapes had appeared in Britain and France, attests to his independent taste. Not only was The Bay of Naples the first painting by Renoir that Durand-Ruel sold in Britain, it proved (so far as we know) to be the only Renoir acquired by a British collector in the nineteenth century.32

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NOTES


2. John Rewald first published the painting’s provenance in “Theo van Gogh, Goupil, and the Impressionists,” Gazette des beaux-arts 81 (January 1973), pp. 1–108, where (p. 62, n. 60) he cited François Daulte as having supplied the information. This provenance is cited by Christopher Riopelle in Bailey et al., Renoir Landscapes, p. 249, n. 1. Inglis initially worked as manager for Cottier and Co. at 144 Fifth Avenue in New York. The firm had been founded in London by the Glasgow entrepreneur Daniel Cottier (1838–1891), who specialized in stained glass and furniture design and also dealt in paintings, showing a marked preference for the Hague and Barbizon Schools. The New York branch was opened in 1873. Following Cottier’s death, Inglis succeeded him as head of the firm and formed a fine collection of paintings by Courbet, Degas, Corot, Dauzigny, and Monticelli (see “Rare Works Shown at Inglis Sale,” New York Times, March 9, 1909). For information on Cottier, see Brian Gould, Two Van Gogh Contacts—E. J. van Wisselingh, Art Dealer; Daniel Cottier, Glass Painter and Decorator (Bedford Park, Ill., 1969); and Max Donnelly, “Daniel Cottier: Pioneer of Aestheticism,” Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 23 (1999), pp. 33–51. I am grateful to Simon Houfe for drawing my attention to Donnelly’s article.

3. Durand-Ruel listed the painting as “Naples,” stock no. 2391, which he sold to “Monsieur Duncan” on May 1, 1883, for 3,000 francs. I am grateful to Madame Flavie Durand-Ruel for providing me with this information.


5. In his capacity as chairman of the Sugar Refiners’ Committee Duncan contributed many articles on sugar refining to the London Times in the late 1870s and 1880s (see, for example, “The Sugar Question,” November 1, 1879, p. 4).

6. I am presently working on a more detailed article about Duncan’s collection.

7. Duncan bought Benmore estate in 1870. I am grateful to Peter Baxter for this information. In 1873 Duncan moved from 5 Highbury Hill to 71 Cromwell Road, which was his London residence until the mid-1890s. I am grateful to Anne Beales for clarifying this.


9. I am grateful to Ronald Pickvance for drawing my attention to the fact that Duncan owned this painting. The picture was exhibited in 1878 as “River Scene” in the Glasgow Corporation Galleries; see Official Catalogue of the Glasgow Fine Art Loan Exhibition in Aid of the Funds of the Royal Infirmary, Held in the Corporation Galleries, Sauchiehall Street: With Descriptive and Biographical Notes by a Member of the Acting Committee, May–June–July, 1878 (Glasgow, 1878), p. 2, no. 3. The catalogue entry for the painting tallies exactly with the Metropolitan’s painting. I am grateful to Frances Fowlie for drawing my attention to this catalogue. It was probably The Banks of the Oise that Duncan lent to the Munich International Exhibition in 1883, where it was exhibited as “Landschaft”; see Illustrierter Katalog der internationalen Kunstausstellung im Königl. Claspalaste in München 1883 (Munich, 1883), p. 239, no. 424. I am grateful to Christian Fuhrmeister for sending me an electronic copy of this catalogue. Duncan’s name first appears in connection with the picture in Collection H. V. (Henri Veye): Catalogue De Tableaux Modernes De Premier
Ordre, Pastels, Aquarelles, Dessins, Sculptures Dont La Vente Aura Lieu Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, February 1–2, 1897, lot 34 (Collection Duncan). Robert Hellebrant (Charles-François Daubigny, 1817–1878 [Morges, 1976], p. 94) lists the Metropolitan’s painting as no. 264. However, he also illustrates Bord de l’Oise, 1865 (ibid., p. 99, no. 285), the composition of which is identical to no. 264. As all the information for no. 285 is taken from the description found in the catalogue of the Henri Vever sale cited above, which is undoubtedly the Metropolitan’s painting, it seems that Hellebrant mistakenly included two entries for the work: nos. 264 and 285. I am grateful to Asher Miller for so kindly answering my questions about The Banks of the Oise. This is the only Daubigny that has thus far been linked to Duncan’s collection.

10. Douglas Cooper first published details of the impressionist paintings that were shown at the eleven exhibitions between 1870 and 1875 in The Courtauld Collection: A Catalogue and Introduction (London, 1954), p. 22. See also Kate Flint’s appendix “Impressionist Works Exhibited in London 1870–1905,” in Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception, ed. Kate Flint (London, 1984), pp. 356–75. For a recent detailed account of all the impressionist works shown at these exhibitions, see “Appendix 1: List of Exhibitions of Impressionist Art in Britain, 1870–1913,” in Madeleine Korn, “Exhibitions of Modern French Art and Their Influence on Collectors in Britain, 1870–1918: The Davies Sisters in Context,” Journal of the History of Collections 16, no. 2 (2004), pp. 207–8. Less attention has been given to the other French works that Durand-Ruel exhibited, some of which were important canvases, such as Delacroix’s Death of Sardanapalus. See Catalogue of the Society of French Artists Exhibition, July 5, 1873, no. 13.


12. I am grateful to Flavie Durand-Ruel for this information. Bergère avec moutons et chiens was most likely La bergère, 1866, whose present location is unknown. See Robert Fernier, La vie et l’oeuvre de Gustave Courbet: Catalogue raisonné, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1977–78), vol. 2, p. 18, no. 547.


14. The earliest Duncan could have bought the painting would have been sometime after Durand-Ruel showed it in his Paris gallery in 1878. The catalogue of this exhibition (Exposition rétrospective de tableaux et dessins des maîtres modernes [Paris, 1878], no. 141, p. 241) lists the painting as belonging to a M. Fremyn. Although Johnson (Paintings of Delacroix, vol. 1, p. 114) acknowledges that The Death of Sardanapalus was exhibited at Durand-Ruel’s gallery in 1878, in his provenance entry he does not list Fremyn as having owned it. Fremyn was a notary who owned several works by Delacroix (see ibid., vol. 1, p. 131, vol. 3, 1832–1863, pp. 221, 235–38, 244). According to the Durand-Ruel archives, the lists of paintings in Durand-Ruel’s ledgers are complete from 1880 to 1890 and do not include the Death of Sardanapalus, which makes it probable that Duncan acquired it between 1878 and 1880. I am grateful to Flavie Durand-Ruel for confirming that there is no record of the sale of The Death of Sardanapalus in Durand-Ruel’s ledgers.

15. According to the Durand-Ruel archives, La nuit et Soleil couchant were both purchased by Duncan on May 5, 1883, for $36,750 and 4,000 francs respectively.

16. See note 2 above.

17. I am grateful to Paul Louis Durand-Ruel for clarifying this.

18. I am grateful to Asher Miller at the Metropolitan Museum for checking the details on the back of the painting and for so kindly answering my queries about The Bay of Naples.

19. The Bay of Naples, La nuit, La toilette, and many other paintings were sold privately.


25. Le Pont des Arts, Paris of about 1867–68 (Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena) was shown at the “Fifth Exhibition of the Society of French Artists” in 1872, and La loge de 1874 (Courtauld Institute, London) and The Dancer of 1874 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) at the “Ninth Exhibition” in 1874. The titles of these pictures were first published in Cooper, Courtauld Collection, p. 22.


27. Contemporary reviews of the exhibition are reproduced in Flint, Impressionists in England, pp. 55–64.


29. This was shown with its sister painting, The Bay of Naples (Evening) of 1881 (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts). Durand-Ruel bought the two paintings from Renoir on May 22, 1882, for 700 francs each. Bailey (in Bailey et
al., *Renoir Landscapes*, pp. 68, 80, n. 127) cites the stock numbers originally listed by Durand-Ruel as “no. 2390, Naples, 700ff.” and “no. 2391, Naples, 700ff.” As we now know that stock no. 2391 relates to the Metropolitan’s version, and as Renoir produced only two views of Naples before 1882, the other painting of Naples that Durand-Ruel bought in 1882, no. 2390, had to have been the Clark version. Paul Louis Durand-Ruel has kindly informed me that the firm purchased no other painting of Naples by Renoir before 1936, and he concludes therefore that no. 2390 is the Clark version, which in 1884 Durand-Ruel sold to the New York collector Erwin Davis. The two versions of The Bay of Naples are recorded in *Catalogue de l’Exposition des œuvres de P.-A. Renoir (Paris, 1883)*, as no. 31, *Naples (soir)*, and no. 32, *Naples (matin)*. It was presumably *Naples (matin)* that Duncan acquired. I am grateful to Paul Louis Durand-Ruel for this information. The 1883 exhibition is discussed by Bailey in Bailey et al., *Renoir Landscapes*, pp. 71–73. For details of Durand-Ruel’s creation of the gallery, see M. Ward, “Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions,” *Art Bulletin* 73 (December 1991), p. 617. For a contemporary British review of the exhibition, see *Art Journal* (London), 1883, p. 167.

