

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



The Village of Becquigny

Théodore Rousseau (French, 1812–1867)

Date ca. 1857

Medium Oil on mahogany panel

Dimensions 25 x 39 3/8 in. (63.5 x 100 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1902.1.108

Currently On View

Second Floor, Room 22, Breakfast Room

Commentary During a trip through Picardy in 1857, Rousseau was much taken by the unchanged, rustic appearance of Becquigny, a village not far from Saint-Quentin. With its low thatch-roof huts it seemed to him a strange survival from an ancient past. The artist's first rendering of the village road, so reminiscent of Hobbema's famous Avenue at Middelharnis (National Gallery, London), delighted his friends with its freshness and brilliance, but Rousseau was less satisfied. In a letter to his friend and biographer Alfred Sensier, he stated that while the "outline" of the picture had been settled, its "composition" was unfinished, adding: "but I understand by composition that which is within us and which penetrates as far as possible into the external reality of things. . . ." The recipient of this letter noted that the day before Rousseau sent the painting to the Salon of 1864 (entitled simply A Village), he repainted the whole sky. Influenced by the first Japanese prints he had seen, he changed it to a clear sapphire blue — a meteorological effect rarely witnessed in the skies of northern France. Although the picture attracted attention, the sky was widely criticized. Even Sensier noted that in it the artist had shown "an excess of invention." As a result of all this, Rousseau began to rework the sky once again, ultimately restoring its original softer tones. The first owner of this important landscape, Frédéric Hartmann, succeeded in taking possession of his promised acquisition only by going with Sensier to Rousseau's Paris studio the day before the artist died and claiming it. Source: Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Frédéric Hartmann, Münster. His sale, May 7, 1881, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, Lot 15, sold for 38,000 francs. Archibald Coats, Glasgow. Knoedler. Frick, 1902. Source: Paintings in The Frick Collection: French, Italian and Spanish. Volume II. New York: The Frick Collection, 1968.