

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **MONET ON THE NORMANDY COAST. THE DISCOVERY OF ÉTRETAT**

**19 MARCH–5 JULY 2026**

**Exhibition Annex**

**Frankfurt am Main, 17 March 2026.** The coastal town of Étretat has become a myth—and continues to fascinate to this day. The cliffs of Étretat, located in Normandy on the Atlantic coast, captivated numerous artists in the 19th century. From 19 March to 5 July 2026, the Städel Museum will present a major exhibition dedicated to the artistic discovery of the former fishing village of Étretat and its influence on modern painting. Around 170 exceptional paintings, drawings, photographs and historical documents on loan from leading French, German and other international museums as well as several private collections will be on display in Frankfurt. Among them are no fewer than twenty-four works by Claude Monet. Étretat played an important role in the emergence of a new style of painting that went down in art history as Impressionism. The artists were particularly interested in the distinctive cliff landscape, which they found both excitingly beautiful and threatening. Painters and writers travelled to Étretat, and it was through their works that this remote place became famous beyond France's borders. Following an increase in tourism around 1850, Étretat developed into a popular seaside resort and meeting place for artists, intellectuals and the Parisian bourgeoisie. Gustave Courbet painted his famous wave pictures here; Guy de Maupassant elevated Étretat to a place of longing in his writing; and Maurice Leblanc's fictional gentleman thief, Arsène Lupin, hoarded his treasures here. The aspiring painter Claude Monet was so fascinated by the unique cliffs and their three rock arches—the Porte d'Amont, the Porte d'Aval and the Manneporte—that he dedicated several paintings to them. Impressed by the ever-changing light and weather conditions, Monet began painting series of motifs in Étretat for the first time, a working method that would later become his trademark.

“Monet on the Normandy Coast. The Discovery of Étretat” is sponsored by Fraport AG, the Fontana Foundation, the Städtischer Museums-Verein e.V., and the City of Frankfurt am Main – Department of Culture and Science.

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In addition to works by Eugène Delacroix, Gustave Courbet, Claude Monet and Henri Matisse, the exhibition brings together a host of other important figures in modern and contemporary art, including Johann Wilhelm Schirmer and Eugène Le Poittevin, as well as Camille Corot, Eugène Boudin and Elger Esser. Together, the works illustrate the enduring fascination that this place continues to exert to this day. Loans come from the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, among others.

**Philipp Demandt**, Director of the Städel Museum, emphasizes: “With our major special exhibition in spring 2026, we are for the first time dedicating ourselves to exploring the emergence of the myth of Étretat. This coastal town, with its striking rock formations and unique light, has been a source of fascination for artists since the 19th century, and continues to captivate to this day. It was in Étretat that Claude Monet developed his famous serial depiction of motifs, which had a decisive influence on Impressionism. We are particularly proud that two outstanding works from the Städel Collection, which were created in Étretat, form the starting point of the exhibition: Monet’s *Luncheon* and Gustave Courbet’s *The Wave*. These are complemented by high-calibre international loans, including twenty-four works by Monet alone. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all lenders and our sponsors for their generous support. We look forward to exploring the enduring fascination of Étretat together with our visitors.”

“Claude Monet and the artists featured in this exhibition were travellers who captured the uniqueness of the coastal region around Étretat in their art. Travel and art bring people together, inspiring and strengthening the international exchange of knowledge and innovation. Connecting people worldwide is an important matter for us at Fraport AG. Our long-standing partnership with the Städel Museum is a testament to our commitment to strengthening cultural dialogue. We see these goals being fulfilled to a particular degree in this exhibition and are therefore very happy to support the Städel Museum,” explains **Stefan Schulte**, CEO of Fraport AG.

“It is a great win for our city that we are able to present the exhibition ‘Monet on the Normandy Coast. The Discovery of Étretat’ in Frankfurt. The Städel Museum represents outstanding scholarly work, which it shares with a wide audience through a diverse range of educational offerings. This exhibition is the result of successful German-French cooperation. In collaboration with our colleagues at the museum in our twin city of Lyon, the Städel curators have developed an art and cultural history exhibition that illustrates the multifaceted and, in some cases, far-reaching effects of

the popularisation of a place. This spring, Frankfurt is once again a cultural attraction for visitors from the region and far beyond,” says **Ina Hartwig**, Head of the Department of Culture and Science of the City of Frankfurt am Main.

**Stephan Scherer**, Chairman of the Fontana Foundation, on supporting the exhibition: “Étretat is much more than just a fascinating town in Normandy. With its chalk cliffs and its role for modern painting, it is both an essential natural space and a historically significant cultural site. We are delighted to support this outstanding exhibition project by the Städel Museum and thus help to convey the cultural significance of Étretat. We wish the public an enriching visit to the exhibition.”

**Sylvia von Metzler**, Chair of the Städtelscher Museums-Verein, says about the exhibition: “Gustave Courbet’s painting *The Wave*, an early and groundbreaking acquisition by the Städtelscher Museums-Verein, takes centre stage in this comprehensive special exhibition. To this day, we are grateful and happy to have one of Courbet’s important wave paintings in the Städel Museum’s collection. It exemplifies the extraordinary commitment of our more than 10,000 members to the Städel. We are therefore all the more delighted to support the exhibition and take a fresh look at Étretat as a place of artistic discovery.”

“In the hundred years or so from Romanticism to Classical Modernism, the artistic view of the impressive coastal landscape around the small town of Étretat underwent multifaceted change. The spectrum ranges from atmospheric watercolour and oil studies to early photographs and Claude Monet’s famous paintings of the impressive cliffs. With its distinctive coastal landscape, Étretat was a magnet for artists of several generations. In collaboration with the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, it was a central concern of ours to place Courbet’s epoch-making wave paintings and Monet’s serial landscape paintings in a broader context and to highlight Étretat’s significance for modern art,” explain **Alexander Eiling and Eva Mongi-Vollmer**, curators of the exhibition at the Städel Museum.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition begins with an **immersive projection** of the cliffs of Étretat, allowing visitors to experience the monumental effect of nature along the coast. It was created on the basis of a three-dimensional scan of the site by ICONEM, a Paris-based company specializing in the digitization of endangered cultural and natural assets

### **Étretat's Development in the 19th Century—Fishing Village, Seaside Resort, Artists' Colony**

The Alabaster Coast near Étretat was already a popular destination during the Romantic period. The first depictions of its rock formations attracted numerous artists, and over the course of the 19th century, the secluded fishing village developed into a centre for writers and artists. One of the first artists to spend an extended period in Étretat was **Eugène Isabey** (1803–1886), who created numerous landscape watercolours that convey an impression of the unadulterated natural beauty of the place. In the 1830s, **Johann Wilhelm Schirmer** (1807–1863) produced oil studies of Étretat that stand out for their keen observation of nature, while **Eugène Delacroix** (1798–1863) captured the coast in atmospheric gouaches and watercolours. At the same time, richly illustrated travel guides brought Étretat to the attention of a wider audience, and the coast became a popular tourist destination. **Eugène Le Poittevin** (1806–1870) depicted early seaside tourism in his 1886 panorama *Sea Bathing in Étretat* and enjoyed great success with his paintings at the Paris Salon, making Étretat particularly popular with urban audiences. Le Poittevin also focused on the everyday life of fishermen, which he depicted in romanticized representations. The multitude of depictions of Étretat, alongside contemporary publications, contributed significantly to the **creation of the myth** surrounding the place, as well as to its growing popularity. The local way of life and the appearance of Étretat changed fundamentally, and the place became a social and cultural space where the fishing village, seaside resort and artists' colony overlapped and influenced each other.

### **Gustave Courbet's Wave Paintings**

A separate room in the exhibition is dedicated to the famous wave paintings by Gustave Courbet (1819–1877). A storm that the artist observed from his studio in Étretat in 1869 was the starting point for a series of around twenty paintings. In his depictions of the cliffs and rough waves, Courbet dispenses with narrative elements, characteristic features of the location and the representation of the local population. Instead, he deliberately constructs an **artistic reality** by distorting or shortening the pictorial space through changes in perspective. He applies the paint not with a brush but with a palette knife, creating a rough, crusty surface that breaks with the rules of academic painting at the time. The two paintings entitled *The Wave*, one from the Städel Collection (1869) and the other from the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon (1869–70), are outstanding examples of this group of works and are complemented by other high-calibre loans, such as *The Cliffs of Étretat* (c. 1869–70) and *The Calm Sea* (1869). Courbet enjoyed unprecedented success with these motifs at the 1870 Paris Salon. Subsequent artists, including Monet, would measure themselves against Courbet and his works.

### Étretat as a Motif for Pioneers of Photography

Just a few years after the invention of photography, Étretat became a popular motif for photographers. One of the first photographic series of Étretat was taken in 1852 and was probably produced by the chemist Alphonse Davanne (1824–1912). Ten years later, he took another series, whose large-format prints are notable for their technical perfection. In these rare photographs, Davanne captures both the impressive landscape and the growing town, its beach densely covered with boats.

**Paul Gaillard** (1832–1890) experimented in parallel with shortened exposure times to capture the movements of waves and bathers. At the same time, photography had an impact on the work of several painters, such as **Anselm Feuerbach** (1829–1880), who never visited Étretat himself and who probably used a photograph as a direct model for his painting *The Manneporte at Étretat* (c. 1860). Conversely, photographers still refer to paintings of Étretat today. For example, **Balthasar Burkhard** (1944–2010) follows in Courbet's footsteps with his snapshots of waves, while **Elger Esser** (b. 1967) refers to the painter Johann Wilhelm Schirmer, among others, in his nostalgic, deserted photographs such as *Étretat (after Schirmer)* (2006).

### Monet and Étretat

Between 1864 and 1886, Monet stayed in Étretat at least six times. During this period, he produced around eighty paintings, several pastels and a series of drawings that still characterize the view of the place today. Étretat thus forms a focal point in Monet's artistic exploration of the Normandy coast. Numerous letters testify to his desire to break away from the established representations of Étretat and create something new.

After his first visits in 1864 and 1868–69, during which he painted one of the major works in the Städel Collection, *The Luncheon (1868–69)*, Monet returned to Étretat several times in the early 1880s, primarily outside the bathing season, with the prospect of commercially successful motifs. The artist deliberately refrained from depicting the place in a sophisticated manner, instead concentrating on painting outdoors and directly reproducing his impressions of nature. His painting style, characterized by seemingly spontaneous, rhythmic brushstrokes and finely coordinated colour values on the canvas, is emblematic of Impressionism. To capture different weather and light effects, Monet worked on several paintings simultaneously. Étretat is therefore closely associated with the serial approach to work that became a hallmark of his painting and provided a decisive impetus for the further development of modern art. Works from this creative phase, such as *Rough Sea at Étretat* (1883), *Étretat: The Needle and the Porte d'Aval* (1885), *Étretat: The Cliff and the Porte d'Aval* (1885) and *Étretat: The Manneporte* (1885–86), are brought together in the exhibition. Monet's Étretat motifs appealed to a large circle of

buyers, thus not only contributing decisively to his artistic success, but also reinforcing the myth surrounding Étretat.

### **Monet and the Consequences**

Étretat's growing popularity with wealthy tourists opened up a large market for Étretat motifs. By the end of the 19th century, works featuring these motifs had become a regular feature in exhibitions and galleries across France, attracting more and more artists to the coast. **Eugène Boudin** (1824–1898) integrated scenes from the everyday life of the local population into his landscape paintings, thus showing a facet of the place that Monet excluded in his mostly deserted depictions. The focus on the sublime cliff landscape also characterizes the work of numerous artists who came to Étretat in Monet's footsteps. Their paintings can be classified into different styles, ranging from **Émile Schuffenecker's** (1851–1934) Impressionistic, form-dissolving works to Paul Leroy's precise nature depictions and **Jean Francis Auburtins** (1866–1930) large-format watercolours and gouaches inspired by Japanese colour woodcuts. **Gustave Caillebotte** (1848–1894) also visited Étretat. However, in his work *Man in a Smock* (1884), he avoids depicting any typical local features. During two stays in Étretat in the summer of 1920, **Henri Matisse** (1869–1954) produced more than forty paintings and numerous drawings. Most of these works were exhibited in Paris that same year, underscoring the enduring popularity of motifs from Étretat. In a conscious engagement with the paintings of Courbet and Monet, Matisse devoted himself to the coast from different perspectives—as with his role models, people are only to be found sporadically. With just a few strokes and a reduced colour palette, he captured the characteristic elements of the beach in *Étretat. The Barrels* (1920), for example.

Étretat has been a holiday resort and destination for international tourism for more than 150 years. However, the influx of visitors poses as much of a threat to the cliffs as erosion and climate change. The examination of the myth of Étretat thus also makes it possible to understand, as if under a magnifying glass, the ambivalent effects of the popularization of a place and the role that art played in this process. With "Monet on the Normandy Coast. The Discovery of Étretat," the Städel Museum invites visitors to rediscover the fascination of Étretat.

### **MONET ON THE NORMANDY COAST. THE DISCOVERY OF ÉTRETAT**

**An exhibition in collaboration with the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon**

**Curators:** Alexander Eiling (Head of Modern Art, Städel Museum), Eva Mongi-Vollmer (Curator, Städel Museum), Stéphane Paccoud (Conservateur en chef, Peintures et sculptures du XIXe siècle, Musée des

Beaux-Arts de Lyon) and Isolde Pludermacher (Conservatrice générale peinture, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) in cooperation with Eva-Maria Höllerer (Curator, Städel Museum) and Nelly Janotka (Assistant Curator, Städel Museum)

**Exhibition Dates:** 19 March to 5 July 2026

**Information:** [www.staedelmuseum.de/en/](http://www.staedelmuseum.de/en/)

**Visitor Services and Guided Tours:** +49 (0)69-605098-200, [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de)

**Location:** Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

**Tickets:** 19 euros, reduced 17 euros, Tuesday Special: every Tuesday from 3.00 to 6.00 pm, €10; admission free for children under 12. Groups of at least 10 persons who would normally be charged the full admission fee: 17 euros per person. Registration is generally required for all groups, by telephone +49 (0)69-605098-200 or [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de). For up-to-date information on special opening hours, please visit [staedelmuseum.de/en](http://www.staedelmuseum.de/en)

**Exhibition Highlight Tours:** Regular one-hour guided tours introduce visitors to the most important works in the exhibition. All dates and program tickets can be found at [staedelmuseum.de/en/exhibitions-programme](http://www.staedelmuseum.de/en/exhibitions-programme).

**Digitorial®:** The free Digitorial® provides a multimedia introduction to the exhibition, offering descriptive short texts, interactive modules and fascinating background information. It illustrates the artistic discovery of the coastal town of Étretat and presents the fascinating paintings and drawings inspired by the rock formations, created by Claude Monet and many other artists. The digital application is available before the exhibition opens at [monetskueste.staedelmuseum.de/en](http://monetskueste.staedelmuseum.de/en) and can be used on smartphones, tablets and desktop computers. Digitorial® is a registered trademark of the SCHIRN, Städel and Liebieghaus. Conceived by the three Frankfurt museums as a digital educational resource, it has already been realized many times. The Digitorial® is sponsored by the Deutsche Börse Group.

**Audio Guide App:** The audio tour, which lasts about an hour and has around twenty-three stations, is available in German and English. The German version is narrated by Marie-Lou Sellem. The free exhibition app is available for iOS and Android in the App Store and Google Play Store from the start of the exhibition and can be downloaded to your smartphone at home or via the Städel WLAN.

**Catalogue:** To accompany the exhibition, Hirmer Verlag is publishing a catalogue edited by Alexander Eiling, Eva-Maria Höllerer, Stéphane Paccoud and Isolde Pludermacher, with contributions from the editors, as well as Sylvie Aubenas, Marie-Hélène Desjardins, Nelly Janotka, Yvan Leclerc, Naïs Lefrançois, Lucie Passilly, Anne Théry, Sylvain Venayre, Michaël Vottero, Pierre Wat, and a foreword by Sylvie Ramond and Philipp Demandt. Separate German and French editions, 280 pages, 274 illustrations, 50 euros (bookshop edition), 44.90 euros (museum edition).

**Accompanying booklet:** An accompanying booklet in German is available for the exhibition, 9.50 euros.

**Sponsored by:** Fraport AG, Fontana Foundation, Städtelscher Museums-Verein e.V., City of Frankfurt am Main – Department of Culture and Science

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