

DUKE STREET GALLERY

INFORMATION SHEET



ALFRED MONTAGUE (1823-1883)
ENTRANCE TO A DUTCH RIVER

Materials

Oil on canvas 38 "x 60"

DUKE STREET GALLERY

INFORMATION SHEET

Alfred Montague
exh. 1832 - 1883

It is truly remarkable that so little is known about this most talented artist, who exhibited so widely for fifty-one years. Not only did Alfred Montague show his works as far afield as Philadelphia and Boston as well as frequently in London, but towards the end of his career his paintings were regularly selling in excess of one hundred guineas. That was a princely sum indeed in the 1880's! Why then do we know virtually nothing about the man himself? Research thus far has not revealed where or when he was born, although it seems that he spent his childhood in East London, probably near the Docklands area. No one has yet discovered where he learned to draw, nor who it was who taught him. What was it that took him so often across the Channel to Northern France, Belgium and Holland?

It would seem therefore that whilst Montague was obviously known and appreciated by his Victorian contemporaries, nothing that may have been written about him has survived. There do not appear to be any existing chronicles concerning his activities nor even period critiques of his works so frequently exhibited at the Royal Academy, the Royal Society of British Artists, the British Institute and Suffolk Street. Usually information concerning 19th century artists was gleaned from their patrons; and more often than not such patrons were members of the aristocracy. In the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, that was where the country's wealth still resided. More often than not an artist's success depended upon introductions provided by such patrons and the financially rewarding commissions that followed.

Now apparently Alfred Montague was able to achieve a reasonable degree of success without such patronage. This being the case, one must suppose that he or more likely his family enjoyed their own wealth from another source. The young Alfred became an artist in his own right because he chose that career. It follows that he could draw and paint because of his natural talents rather than as the result of a long apprenticeship. Certainly there is a splendid freedom to his brushwork which gives the theory credibility. At the same time it may be assumed that his parents' wealth came from their success as merchants, trading between London and Europe. Simple then for Alfred to travel on the company vessels to the harbours and coastal towns of the Low Countries which provided the inspiration for so many of his compositions.

During his very productive life, and as well as his European travels, Montague toured extensively throughout England and along its coastline. His paintings of the English countryside are delicate and thoughtful, compositions of towering elms framing charming rustic scenes in total and refreshing contrast to the smoke, grime and poverty of city life. His coastal scenes depict the inland waters and how they were used to convey the results of commerce around the island in place of good roads which were somewhat lacking in those days. Whilst we still know little of the man, we do have his wonderful paintings to admire and enjoy; even if they do appear undervalued in a world where auction houses dedicate their every hour inflating prices (but not value) beyond all sense.