

EMILE SAMOIOLOVICH VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM

(Russian 1843 - 1889)

View of the Ayu Dag

signed in Cyrillic and dated '75' (lower right)
watercolour on paper
27.5 x 39.5 cm (10¾ x 15½ in)

IN THIS WORK, THE COLOSSAL AYU DAG, OR 'BEAR Mountain', juts out from the Crimean coast into the Black Sea, dominating the picture. On the beach in the foreground two figures chat together in the bright sunshine, having returned from their morning fishing trip. The viewer's eye is led from them, around the curve of the bay to the cape of Suuksu, beyond which is the mass of Ayu Dag. On the right-hand side the expanse of deep blue sea merges with the almost cloudless sky. Even though the scene is already flooded with bright sunshine, the orange tinge on the horizon is suggestive of dawn and indicates that the day will soon be stiflingly hot.

View of the Ayu Dag is a work typical of Emile Samoilovich Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, revealing his ability to convey intense atmosphere in his watercolours. In a comparable work such as *Adriatic Coast*, see figure 1, the artist also devotes a large proportion of the composition to the sea and the sky, rendered in bright shades of blue and white. His depictions of the land similarly contain an abundance of white brush-strokes, suggesting the reflective glare of the sun.



Emile Samoilovich
Villiers de l'Isle Adam,
Adriatic Coast, 1880,
Private Collection
(Figure 1)



Luigi Osipovich Premazzi, *View of Lake Maggiore*, 1879,
The Hermitage, St. Petersburg (Figure 2)

Due to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's skilful manipulation of watercolours there is an almost tangible sense of the coastal atmosphere.

The influence of Luigi Osipovich Premazzi (see inventory), an artist whom Villiers de l'Isle-Adam knew and admired, is very much evident in *View of Ayu Dag*. Premazzi was renowned for his ability to imbue his scenes with the intense light of summer, an example being *View of Lake Maggiore* (fig. 2). As in the present work, Premazzi uses a simple composition, allowing the viewer's eye to move from the foreground figures, over the still water, to the mountainous background, but it is the palpable sense of heat which dominates the work.

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam started his career in the military and taught himself to paint, before receiving a more formal artistic education in Odessa and St. Petersburg, winning awards for his landscapes in watercolour. He started to exhibit his work and his talent for boldly and faithfully reproducing nature was soon recognised. In the early 1880s he developed tuberculosis and travelled to Italy for his health. His scenes of Naples and Palermo from this time, show a slightly looser technique. Although he died at a premature age, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's contribution to, and influence on, Russian watercolour painting was such that the Society of Russian Watercolourists organised a posthumous exhibition of his work in tribute.

