

# “The New Mechanism for Picture Making” Early Works by Raoul Dufy in the Carmen Thyssen- Bornemisza Collection

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The growing interest shown in Raoul Dufy in recent years has considerably increased our knowledge of his work.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, a few aspects of his prolific, varied output have yet to be studied systematically. Such is the case of the period from 1903 to 1907, to which two of the Normandy-born painter's most important works in the Carmen Thyssen Collection belong: *The Fish Market, Marseille* (*Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille*) and *The Little Palm Tree* (*Le Petit palmier*). The information gleaned from the latest research and in-depth analyses of both works now allow them to be reliably dated. This is the purpose of the present article.

## 1903–7. A period under constant revision

The years immediately before and after the emergence of fauvism in 1905 are unanimously considered the most significant in Dufy's career. During this time, Dufy achieved early maturity in his artistic language in dialogue with the most ground-breaking painting of his day.

Nevertheless, few solid facts are known about this period. Barely any written correspondence survives, and the references provided by exhibition catalogues and known critiques of the period are scant. Moreover, only a few drawings from the autumn of 1903 have survived to this day and the most of his canvases do not bear a date. What is known for sure about those years?

In 1903 Dufy shunned academic teachings for good. By then the painter had lost interest in Léon Bonnat's classes at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Similarly, whereas most of his fellow students regularly visited the Louvre to copy the old masters, he preferred to wander around galleries such as those of Durand-Ruel and Vollard to view the impressionist painters, whose language he was starting to embrace.

Dufy's espousal of modern art in 1903 is indicated by his participation for the first time in the Salon des Indépendants (and again during the years that ensued) and by his ever closer relationship with the gallery owner Berthe Weill, whom he had met the previous year and in whose gallery he showed his work regularly until 1909. This may also explain his decision to spend August and September 1903 in the south of France. In Marseille and Martigues, stimulated by the bright Mediterranean light, Dufy enlivened his palette and experimented with more vibrant brushstrokes.

The following year, Dufy again took part in the Salon des Indépendants and the group exhibitions at Berthe Weill's gallery. But more significant still was his summer sojourn in Fécamp with the painter Albert Marquet, close to Henri Matisse, who must have assured him that the path he had embarked on

in the French Midi region the previous year was the right one. He became even closer to Matisse the following year when, as well as showing his work at the Salon des Indépendants, he viewed the future fauvist leader's *Luxury, Calm and Pleasure* (1904). Dufy described that experience years later:

At the sight of that painting [...] I understood the new rationale for painting, and in contemplating the miracle of imagination at play in line and colour, impressionist realism lost its charm for me. I immediately understood the new mechanism for picture making.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years this assertion, repeated time and time again by modern historiography, has gained the significance of a key document in understanding the painter's early career. However, its late date – a quarter of a century after the events to which it refers – requires us to proceed with caution. In fact, what Dufy must have experienced on gazing at Matisse's painting was most likely the realisation that a new system of representation other than the impressionists' concern with retinal experience was possible. Nevertheless, as a language it was still in its infancy and owed much to neo-impressionism. It would be some time before Dufy shunned the impressionist concern with capturing the fleeting – at least until the definite establishment of fauvism at that year's Salon d'Automne.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, several testimonies show that until the autumn of 1905 at least – following another summer spent with Marquet at Le Havre – Dufy remained strongly attached to impressionism. This may be deduced from the painter's known statements made to Charles Morice and published by the magazine *Mercure de France* in August. When asked about the end of the French movement, Dufy replied: “If by IMPRESSIONISM we mean all of the different tendencies of the painters of 1870, no, impressionism is not finished.”<sup>4</sup> To these statements should be added a hitherto unpublished postcard that Dufy wrote to his painter colleague (Achille-Émile) Othon Friesz on 12 October 1905, in which he states, with clear admiration for Pissarro:

My dear Emile  
Father Pissarro (sic) has definitely painted Rouen admirably.  
I hope to see you in Paris and shake your hand  
Raoul Dufy  
Regards to your family.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, when Dufy again showed his work at Berthe Weill's gallery in October–November 1905 – this time alongside Camoin, Derain, Manguin, Marquet, Matisse and Vlaminck – he came up against the violent opposition of the fauves' leader.

In fact, everything indicates that it was in the spring–summer of 1906 when Dufy, like Friesz and Braque, shunned the impressionism of his early work to embrace the new fauvist language. The eight canvases Dufy showed at the Salon des Indépendants in March – among them three snow scenes and two of “large trees” – were described by the critic Jean-Aubry, in *Le Courrier du Havre*, as “somewhat violent impressionism” with rather unsettling [...] effects of colouring”.<sup>6</sup> Unlike in earlier competitions, this time Dufy was not referred to in the catalogue as living in Paris but rather in Sous-les-Rochers, Falaise (Calvados), in Lower Normandy, where, according to Berthe Weill, Dufy and his partner Claudine had rented a farm for a small sum.<sup>7</sup> A few scenes, painted in Falaise during the winter and spring,<sup>8</sup> attest to this shift away from impressionism, shunning a restricted palette true to the local colour of objects and its variations under ambient light for more vivid tones, although the colours continue to display impressionistic vibration.

At the end of May Dufy showed his work together with the fauvists Braque, Derain, Friesz, Manguin, Marquet, Matisse, Puy and Vlaminck, among others, at the exhibition at the Cercle de l'Art Moderne in Le Havre. But it was above all during the summer he spent on the coast of Normandy, once again painting alongside Marquet, that he truly adopted the new fauvist artistic language, using a few highly contrasting saturated colours in large patches of static colour. The places where Dufy painted during that summer include the bay of Sainte-Adresse, as evidenced by the title of a painting he exhibited at the Salon d'Automne. Based on this information, the artist's following testimony, also from a later date, might be attributed to those months:

In 1905 or 1906 [...] I was painting on Sainte-Adresse beach. Up until then I had done beaches in the impressionist manner and I had reached saturation point with them, realising that this method of imitating nature was leading me in the direction of infinity, right down to its slightest and most fleeting meanders and details. And I remained outside the picture.

One day, when I could stand it no longer, I went out with my paint box and a single sheet of paper. Arriving before some beach motif or other, I sat down and started looking at my tubes of color and my brushes. How, using these materials, was I going to render not what I saw, but what is, what exists for me, *my reality*? There, right there, and nowhere else, was the problem. [...]. Then, to each object I gave, with black mixed with white, the shape of its contours, each time leaving in the center the white of the paper, which I then colored with a specific single and extremely intense tone. What did I have? Some blue, some green, some ochre – few colors. [...] From that day forth it was impossible for me to return to my sterile



Fig. 1  
 Raoul Dufy  
*Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille*, c. 1903  
 Oil on canvas. 54 x 65 cm  
 Madrid, Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza  
 on loan at Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza  
 [Laffaille, no. 98]

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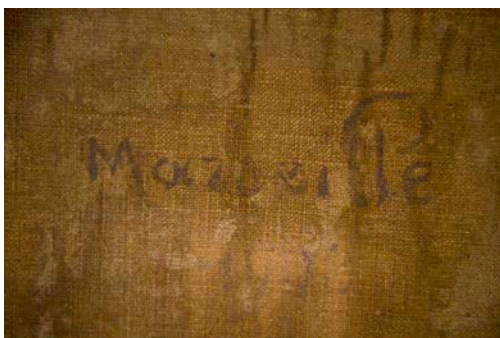


Fig. 2  
 Raoul Dufy  
*Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille*, c. 1903 (detail of reverse)  
 Oil on canvas. 54 x 65 cm  
 Madrid, Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection  
 on loan at Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza  
 [Laffaille, no. 98]

struggles with the elements that presented themselves to my sight. No longer was it a question of representing those elements under their external form.<sup>9</sup>

That October 1906 Dufy viewed the major Paul Gauguin retrospective at the Salon d'Automne. He spent the end of the year and the first months of 1907 in Normandy, at his parents' house in Le Havre, as the 1907 catalogue of the Salon des Indépendants states. In the spring, as well as entering works for the Salon des Indépendants, he again took part in an exhibition of the fauvist group at the Galerie Berthe Weill and in the show at the Cercle de l'Art Moderne in Le Havre. The works he painted that year display the maturity of his fauvist style. They are dominated by highly saturated, often arbitrary colours, distributed in large areas – as in Gauguin – delimited by thick contours that accentuate the two-dimensional and decorative structure of the canvas.

Dufy's espousal of full-fledged fauvism, however, would soon come to an end. In October, after taking part in the Salon d'Automne and viewing the major Cézanne retrospective, Dufy travelled to Marseille, following in the footsteps of the painter from Aix-en-Provence. The previous year Braque and Friesz had travelled to L'Estaque with a similar aim. In the autumn of 1907 Dufy developed the same fascination with Cézanne's oeuvre that was common to many of the avant-garde artists of the time, ushering in a new constructive period in his work.

In the light of this information, to what moment in Dufy's early career should we attribute the two canvases in the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza, *Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille* and *Le Petit palmier*?

### ***Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille***

The date of *Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille* [Fig. 1] has been widely disputed. In 1970 the painting was featured in an exhibition devoted to Raoul Dufy in Bordeaux as being executed in “1904–5” and two years later Maurice Laffaille dated it – together with the other three Marseille market scenes – to 1905.

Ronald Pickvance, who studied the reverse of the painting in the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in 1997, noted that it retains a painted inscription: “Marseille 190(?)” [Fig. 2]. Pickvance thought it was “1903”, but lent more credence to the date “1905”. According to the English historian, although *Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille* displayed evident impressionistic traits – particularly in the style of execution – it also foreshadowed the freedom of fauvism, specifically in the pink awning on the right.



Fig. 3  
 Raoul Dufy  
*Theatre, Martigues*  
*(Théâtre aux*  
*Martigues)*, 1903  
 Oil on canvas.  
 59 x 80 cm  
 (La Ville de Martigues-  
 Musée Ziem)  
 [Laffaille, no. 48]



Fig. 4  
 Léon-Augustin Lhermitte  
*Les Halles*, 1895  
 Oil on canvas. 404 x 635 cm  
 Paris, Petit Palais



Fig. 5  
 Raoul Dufy  
*Le Marché à*  
*Marseille*, 1903  
 Watercolour  
 on paper  
 Location unknown  
 [Guillon-Laffaille,  
 no. 30]



Fig. 6  
 Raoul Dufy:  
*Le Marché à*  
*Marseille*, 1903  
 Oil on canvas.  
 60 x 73 cm  
 Geneva, Musée  
 du Petit Palais  
 [Laffaille, no. 100]

Fanny Guillon-Laffaille, who also maintains 1905 as its date of execution, has spoken of the struggle in the painting between the contrasting light characteristic of nineteenth-century painting and the more modern contrasts of complementary colours.

The latter contrasts are no doubt the basis for dating it to the later year. But more than fauvism, it seems to recall the work of Van Gogh, whose retrospective Dufy may have seen at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in March 1901 and whose famous *Potato Eaters* of 1885 most likely inspired his *Theatre, Martigues* (1903) [Fig. 3]. The historian Maïthé Vallès-Bled, who has recently ascribed Dufy's series of Marseille markets to 1903, likewise underlines the strong influence of Van Gogh's work found in it.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the reminiscences of the Dutch painter in *Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille* are perceptible not only in the sharp contrast of reds and greens but also in the long, loaded brushstrokes of the crate in the foreground and, above all, the awning on the right.

Moreover, the chosen theme – still indebted to nineteenth-century naturalism – is more in line with Dufy's initial work than that of 1905 (suffice it to remember that at the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français in 1901 Dufy had shown *End of the Day, Le Havre*, based on the local port workers' strike). For the series of works devoted to Marseille market, Dufy may well have drawn inspiration from Léon-Augustin Lhermitte's large composition *Les Halles* (1895). [Fig. 4]

In fact, an early date is confirmed by a watercolour, its location now unknown, executed by Dufy and showing the same motif of the interior of the Marseille market of the Halle Delacroix, which bears the inscription “R. Dufy 1903 / Marseille” [Fig. 5]. A comparison between the two works is significant. The oil painting repeats the same photographic angle of vision, possibly influenced by Degas, but the figures have changed substantially. The stallholders in the middle ground are also identical, though the figure of a female vendor that Dufy does not seem to have satisfactorily captured has disappeared from the foreground. She is replaced by a frontally depicted housewife whose face is taken from another painting in the series – *Le Marché à Marseille* (1903) in the Petit Palais in Geneva [Fig. 6] – and a vendor with her back to the viewer whose pose recalls the woman in the foreground of Lhermitte's abovementioned composition. But the most significant change is in the background of the composition, where the entrance to the market, previously open, is now closed by several awnings, allowing Dufy to accentuate the contrast between the vermilion and the chrome green.<sup>11</sup>

If any doubts still remain as to the date of the work in the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, recent studies have confirmed that there is no documentary evidence that Dufy travelled to the south of France in 1905,<sup>12</sup> as previously believed.





Fig. 7  
 Raoul Dufy  
*Le Petit palmier*,  
 c. 1906  
 Oil on canvas.  
 91.5 x 79 cm  
 Carmen Thyssen-  
 Bornemisza on loan  
 at Museo Thyssen-  
 Bornemisza  
 [Laffaille, no. 205]  
[\[+ info\]](#)



Fig. 8  
 Raoul Dufy  
*Le Jardin d'hiver*,  
 1907  
 Oil on canvas.  
 81 x 65 cm  
 Private collection,  
 United States  
 [Laffaille, no. 206]



Fig. 9  
 Raoul Dufy  
*Dans le jardin  
 au Havre*, c. 1906  
 Oil on canvas.  
 55 x 46 cm  
 Sold at Sotheby's,  
 New York, 12  
 November 1997,  
 lot 23  
 [Laffaille, no. 195]

### *Le Petit palmier*

The date of *Le Petit palmier* [Fig. 7] has also been subject of debate. In 1972 Maurice Laffaille dated it to “1905”<sup>12</sup>, though in the catalogue raisonné of the painter’s works he included it in a group of paintings of interiors dated to “1907”, prominent among which is *Jardin d’hiver* [Fig. 8], now in a private collection in the United States. In 1997 this similarity in theme led Pickvance to date it later, to Dufy’s trip to Marseille and Martigues in autumn 1907. However, its nuanced colour led him to state that Dufy took some time to assimilate Matisse’s lessons.<sup>13</sup>

Two years later, *Le Petit palmier* was shown with the date “1907” in the Raoul Dufy retrospective at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon and at the Museu Picasso in Barcelona. Christian Briend suggested that *Jardin d’hiver* had been painted at Dufy’s parents’ house in Le Havre and shown at the Salon d’Automne of 1907 as *La Serre* [Greenhouse], belonging to M. Druet’s collection.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, although similar motifs are repeated in *Jardin d’hiver* and *Le Petit palmier*, such as the motley vegetation and winding path, the style of painting is very different. Whereas the former is notable for the predominant contrast of blues, greens and lilacs in an essentially two-dimensional arrangement, the latter has a marked funnel-like perspective with powerful chiaroscuro contrasts and small touches of colour inherited from neo-impressionism. These differences led Fanny Guillon-Laffaille to rightly move its date back again to “1905”.

Despite the difficulty of establishing a certain date for *Le Petit palmier*, it seems most likely to be “c. 1906”. Indeed, *Le Petit palmier* is not related so much to the group of paintings of interiors executed in 1907 as to three slightly earlier canvases on a similar theme: *Dans le jardin au Havre*, c. 1906;<sup>15</sup> *Dans le jardin*, c. 1906 [Fig. 9]; and *Le jeu d’échecs*, 1906.<sup>16</sup> The indoor garden setting is the same, as are the folding chairs (which differ from those featured in the 1907 paintings). But there are further elements in common, for example the contrasting chiaroscuro between the foreground motifs and the surrounding vegetation, and the solid masses of certain objects such as the table and the flowerpot. Unlike from the summer of 1906 onwards, here Dufy does not yet outline forms with thick dark contours but juxtaposes tones instead.

But these are not the only elements that link *Le Petit palmier* to around 1906 in the painter’s career. The mosaic brushstrokes found in the canvas in the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection can also be seen in other paintings produced that year, such as the aforementioned *Le Bal champêtre à Falaise* (private collection) and *L’Estacade du casino Marie-Christine à Sainte-Adresse*



Fig. 10  
 Raoul Dufy  
*L'Estacade du Casino Marie-Christine  
 à Sainte-Adresse*, 1906  
 Oil on canvas. 64.8 x 80 cm  
 Milwaukee Art Museum, gift of Mr. Harry Lynde Bradley  
 [Laffaille, n. 214]

(Milwaukee Art Museum) [Fig. 10], whereas they disappear following the adoption of large colour planes in the summer–autumn of 1906.

### An unfinished puzzle

Despite the progress made in learning about Raoul Dufy's oeuvre, doubts still remain about the dates of some of his most important works, including a good many of those painted between 1903 and 1907. *Le Marché aux poissons à Marseille*, c. 1903 and *Le Petit palmier*, c. 1906, both belonging to the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, are two significant examples. This article sets out to provide a sound date for both canvases and to help understand the painter's early output. Nevertheless, any real breakthrough will necessarily involve systematic analyses of existing documentary sources and technical studies (X-ray, infrared, paint composition, etc.) of his paintings. We hope that this work, already underway at some museums, will shed new, conclusive light on them.

### Notes

- 1 Although Raoul Dufy's work fell somewhat into oblivion shortly after his death in 1953, increasing attention has been paid to his art since the 1970s and more so in recent decades. In addition to the huge task undertaken in 1972 by Maurice Laffaille and Fanny Guillon-Laffaille, who brought out the catalogue raisonné of his oils, watercolours, gouaches, pastels and drawings, in 1983 the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Hayward Gallery of London staged a major retrospective and Dora Perez-Tibi's splendid monograph was published by Flammarion in 1989. Historians, among them Christian Briend, Jacqueline Munck, Sophie Krebs, Maïthé Vallès-Bled and Brigitte Léal, have subsequently studied his oeuvre in greater detail – including his engravings and designs for textiles and ceramics – through exhibitions such as those held in Lyon-Barcelona in 1999; in Paris-Nice and in Le Havre-Céret-Roubaix in 2003; in Paris in 2008; in Sète in 2010; in Martigues in 2013; in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya in 2014; and in Madrid in 2015.
- 2 “Devant ce tableau, raconte Dufy, j'ai compris toutes les nouvelles raisons de peindre et le réalisme impressionniste perdit pour moi son charme à la contemplation du miracle de l'imagination introduite dans le dessin et la couleur. / J'ai compris tout de suite la nouvelle mécanique picturale.” Marcelle Berr de Turique : *Raoul Dufy*. Paris, Floury, 1930, p. 81. Dufy could only have seen *Luxury, Calm and Pleasure* at the Salon des Indépendants between 25 February and 25 March 1905, because it was immediately acquired by the neo-impressionist painter Paul Signac.
- 3 In Philippe Dagen's opinion, in 1905 Dufy was still practicing a modern realism related to impressionism. See Philippe Dagen: “¿'Preocupaciones técnicas únicamente'? Dufy, Cézanne, el impresionismo y el fauvismo” in *Raoul Dufy*. [Exh. cat. Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts; Musée de l'Imprimerie; Barcelona, Museu Picasso-Museu Tèxtil i d'Indumentària]. Paris, RMN, 1999, p. 31.
- 4 “Si nous entendons par IMPRESSIONNISME l'ensemble des tendances si différentes des peintres de 1870, non, l'impressionnisme n'est pas fini.” Raoul Dufy in Charles Morice: “Enquête sur les tendances actuelles des arts plastiques”, *Mercure de France*, LVI, no. 196, 15-VIII-1905, p. 548.
- 5 “Mon cher Emile / Décidément le père Pissaro (sic) a admirablement peint Rouen. J'espère te voir à Paris et te la serrer. / Raoul Dufy / Amitiés chez toi.” Postcard from Raoul Dufy to Othon Friesz, 12 October 1905. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Collections Jacques Doucet, Autographes 099, 80, 06.

## Notes

- 6 Georges Jean-Aubry, “Les artistes normands”, *Le Courrier du Havre*, 31-III-1906; repr. in *Raoul Dufy* [Exh. cat., Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Musée de l’Imprimerie; Barcelona, Museu Picasso, Museu Tèxtil i d’Indumentària]. Paris, RMN, 1999, p. 237.
- 7 Berthe Weill: *Pan !.. dans l’œil. Ou trente ans dans les coulisses de la peinture contemporaine (1900-1930)*, Paris, L’échelle de Jacob, 2009, p. 69.
- 8 See specifically *Rideau d’arbres à Falaise* (sold at Christie’s, New York, on 11 May 1995, lot 257); *Calèche à Falaise* (sold at Sotheby’s, New York, on 7 November 2013, lot 224); *Paysage aux masions à Falaise* [Laffaille 175] (sold Brist Scp., on 8 June 2000, lot 20); and *Le Bal champêtre à Falaise* [Laffaille, no. 182] (location unknown). The first three have been dated to 1905, but the fact that their subject-matter tallies with the information provided in the 1906 catalogue of the Salon des Independants suggests that they were in fact painted in the winter and spring of 1906.
- 9 “Vers 1905-1906 [...] je peignais sur la plage de Sainte-Adresse. Jusq’alors, j’avais fait des plages à la manière des impressionnistes et j’en étais arrivé à un point de saturation, comprenant que, dans cette façon de me calquer sur la nature, celle-ci me menait à l’infini, jusque dans ses méandres et ses détails les plus menus, les plus fugaces. Moi je restais en dehors du tableau. / Un jour, n’y tenant plus, je sortis avec ma boîte à couleurs et une simple feuille de papier. Arrivé devant un motif quelconque de plage, je m’installai, et me mis à regarder mes tubes de couleurs, mes pinceaux. Comment, avec cela, parvenir à rendre non pas ce que je vois, mais ce qui est, ce qui existe pour moi, *ma réalité* ? Voilà tout le problème. [...] Je me mis alors à dessiner, à choisir dans la nature ce qui me convenait. Puis, chaque objet, je lui donnai, avec du noir mélangé à du blanc, le modelé de ses contours, laissant chaque fois, au centre, le blanc du papier, que je colorai ensuite d’un seul ton spécifique et assez intense. Qu’est-ce que j’avais ? Du bleu, du vert, de l’ocre, peu de couleurs. [...] A partir ce jour-là, il me fut impossible de revenir à mes luttes stériles avec les éléments qui s’offraient à ma vue. Ces éléments, il n’était plus question de les représenter sous leur forme extérieure.” Raoul Dufy in Pierre Courthion: *Raoul Dufy*. Geneva, Pierre Cailler Éditeur, 1951, p. 66. English translation cited from Raoul Dufy [exh. cat., Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 17 February–17 May 2015], Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2015, p. 149.
- 10 Maïthé Vallès-Bled: *Dufy en Méditerranée*. [Exh. cat. Sète, Musée Paul Valéry]. Salles la Source, Au Fil de Temps, 2010, p. 34.
- 11 Data gleaned from the chemical analyses recently carried out on the painting by Andrés Sánchez Ledesma of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza laboratory, Madrid. *Fish Market, Marseille* also has the particular feature that there is a small portion of vermilion in all the pigments analysed.
- 12 Lucienne Del’Furia and Gérard Fabre: “Dufy, de la Manche à la Méditerranée”, in *Dufy. De Martigues à l’Estaque. 1903-1925*. [Exh. cat. Martigues, Musée Ziem]. Cologne, Snoeck, 2013, p. 22.
- 13 Ronald Pickvance in *Del vedutismo a las primeras vanguardias: obras maestras de la colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza*. Llorens Serra, Tomàs (ed.). [Exh. cat. Bilbao, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao]. Madrid, Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, 1997, n. 60, p. 192.
- 14 Christian Briend in *Raoul Dufy* [Exh. cat., Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Musée de l’Imprimerie; Barcelona, Museu Picasso - Museu Tèxtil i d’Indumentària], Paris, RMN, 1999, p. 86.
- 15 Laffaille, no. 195.
- 16 Laffaille, no. 197.