

GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS

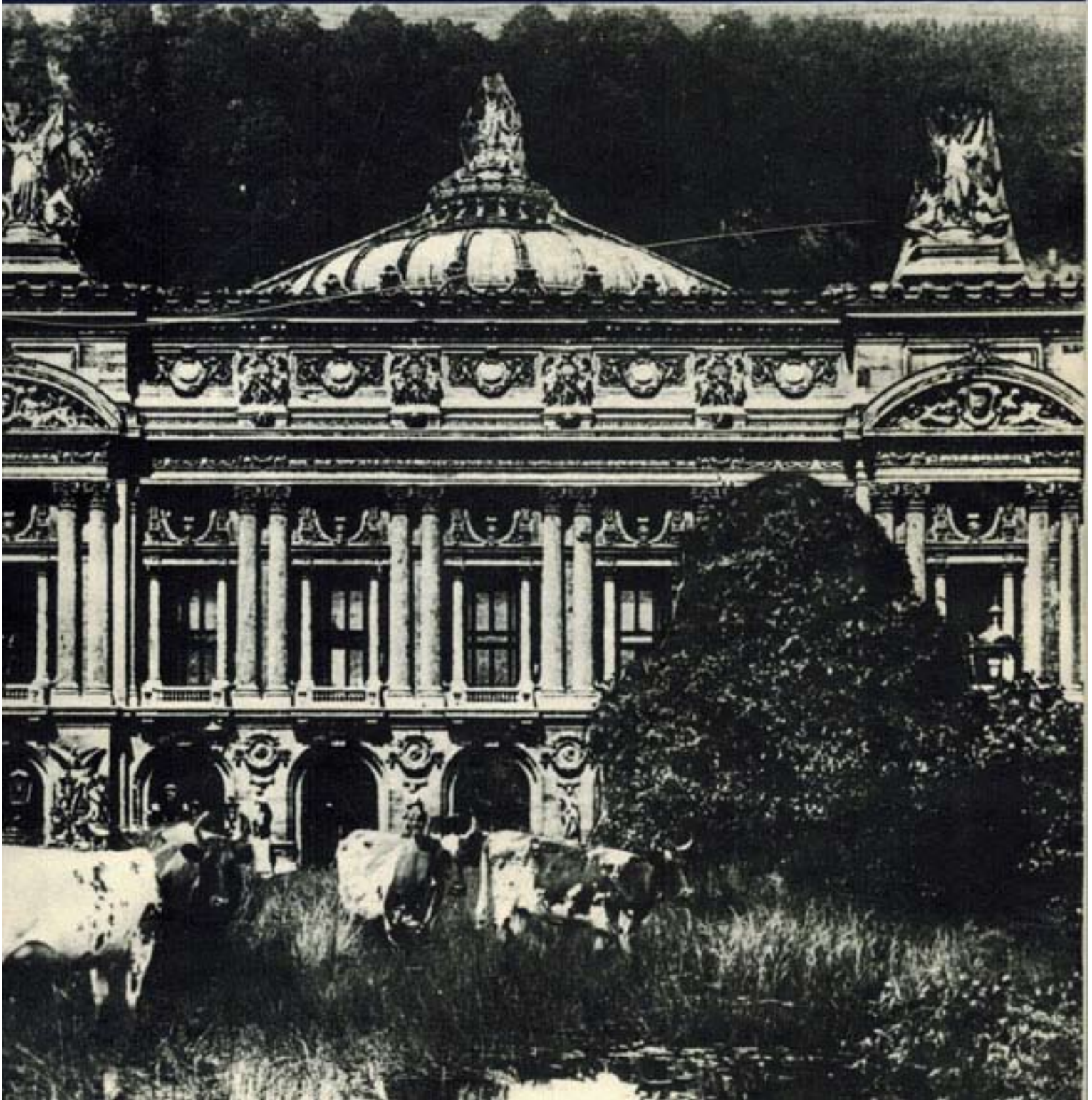
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FRANÇOIS-AUGUSTE BIARD : ARTIST-NATURALIST-EXPLORER

BY

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FRANÇOIS-AUGUSTE Biard, celebrated during the reign of King Louis Philippe as one of France's leading genre painters, embarked upon a remarkable series of explorations about which little has been written since the artist's death in 1882¹. On journeys to the Arctic island of Spitsbergen in 1839 and the Brazilian rain forest from 1858-1860, Biard completed a large number of *plein air* studies that were later incorporated into full scale Salon paintings. His Arctic landscapes will provide the focus for this study.

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Two opposite orientations, the commitment to naturalism and a vivid romantic imagination, shaped an œuvre that is unique in style and subject. The artist's concern for documenting Arctic topography, meteorologic conditions and native populations is often balanced by the introduction of dramatic narratives and fantastic interpretations of unusual geological features.

The scientific value of Biard's work was confirmed when he was awarded a commission to decorate the vestibule of the Galerie de Minéralogie at the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. By expanding the scope of landscape painting, Biard also made an important contribution to the history of art. A study of his paintings offers a

greater understanding of the role of naturalism in nineteenth century French painting. More importantly, his work is evidence that artists in France were inspired by the international sensibility embracing the sublime in nature².

Biard's accomplishments and reputation were directly related to his singular personality and multifaceted interests which were illuminated in several articles published by the magazine, *Musée des Familles* and in Louis Boivin's short book, *Notice sur M. Biard*. Together they present Biard as a flamboyant, self-confident and worldly figure who cultivated the friendship of royalty, scientists, mariners and men of letters. His salon at the chic 8 Place Vendôme, where he resided for almost twenty-five years, was noted for its stimulating and wide-ranging topics of discussion. As noted in the *Musée des Familles* (juin 1939) : « la conversation va d'un problème de mathématiques à une aventure de navigation, d'un cas curieux de pathologie à une anecdote de coulisse, d'un tableau à un progrès de la chimie, d'un calembour bouffonnement bête à quelque discussion de vaste portée ».

The artist conceived his atelier as a small museum of anthropology. Exotic objects from all corners of the world were displayed along with Biard's own sketches. The full range of his collection, which at one time was reputed to contain over a thousand articles, included : weapons, vases, cooking implements, musical



FIG. 1. — François-Auguste BIARD. *Embarcation attaquée par des ours blancs*, Salon of 1839. Leipzig, Museum der Bildenden Kunst. Phot. Museum.

instruments, costumes, dolls, tents and an array of household items³. Even the tools used to torture Negro slaves interested Biard, who painted several abolitionist paintings during his career. Biard viewed his museum as a means of extending the boundaries of knowledge and consequently rendering a service to humanity. His travels were, in part, motivated by an obsession to collect with the aim of expanding his museum.

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Biard's first voyage dates from the years 1827-1828 when he accepted a post as professor of drawing to young naval recruits stationed on the training ship, *La Bayadère*⁴. While sailing and visiting ports of call in Greece and the Middle East, the artist introduced students to the methods of recording sites and events. On the eve of the invention of photography, drawing was still viewed as an essential and mandatory skill. Biard's responsibilities encouraged documentary naturalism, a direction reaffirmed in many of his own paintings⁵.

During the 1830's, Biard toured England, Scotland, Spain and Switzerland with the intent of depicting the peoples and customs of these

regions. Like Théophile Gautier, he realized that cultural homogenization, a process rooted in the Industrial Revolution, threatened these lifestyles. Biard's sketches were not only useful as ideas and details for genre paintings, but as documents of separate cultural identities and valuable additions to his museum.

The artist's interest in sublime landscape fully emerged during these years. A strenuous walking tour of the Scottish Highlands gave him the opportunity to study lakes and fog-shrouded mountains. In Switzerland, Biard painted numerous alpine landscapes under varying weather conditions and times of day⁶. Surprisingly, landscapes were not exhibited at the Salons of these years when other studies of his European tour could be seen. At this stage in his career, Biard may have considered this genre a private and tentative pursuit. Only after the voyage to Spitsbergen was the importance of landscape confirmed.

Biard's first Arctic painting, *Embarcation attaquée par des ours blancs*, was exhibited a few months prior to his trip north at the Salon of 1839 (fig. 1). Landscape, however, merely sets the stage for the portrayal of a terrifying incident. Biard concentrates instead upon the polar bears and the

FIG. 2. — F.-A. BIARD. *Chasseurs norvégiens au Spitzberg*, Salon of 1842. Bayeux, Musée de Peinture. Phot. Museum. « Avec autorisation spéciale de la Ville de Bayeux-Collection du Musée Baron Gérard ».



large-scaled figural composition that occupies the full height of the canvas. When comparing *Embarcation attaquée par des ours blancs* with a later painting of a similar subject, *Chasseurs norvégiens au Spitzberg* from the Salon of 1842, the transformation that occurs in Biard's work after exposure to the sublimity of Arctic terrain is apparent (fig. 2).⁷ In response, the artist banishes humanity to a small niche within a vast, starkly beautiful setting lit by the glow of the northern lights.

Embarcation attaquée par des ours blancs is in fact a synthesis of sources. The fantastic ice formations in the background are borrowed from an 1837 Salon painting, *La Corvette la Recherche au milieu des glaces* (known only through a lithograph, fig. 3) by Auguste Mayer.⁸ Biard may have been familiar with the adventures of Willem Barents, the sixteenth century Dutch explorer and discoverer of Spitsbergen, whose confrontation with a bear was illustrated by Jean Theodor de Bry (fig. 4).



FIG. 3. — Auguste MAYER. *La Corvette la Recherche au milieu des glaces*, from *Atlas Pittoresque of Voyage en Islande et au Groënland...* (1842). Phot. author.



FIG. 4. — Jean Theodor de BRY. *How a Bear Came into our Boat*. One of a series of sixteenth century engravings depicting incidents on voyages of the Dutch explorer Willen Barents. (From Wally Herbert, *Polar Deserts*, London, 1971, p. 70).

Biard's fascination with the Arctic coincided with the interests of the French Government, which was in the midst of launching a series of polar expeditions⁹. The sequence of events that led to Biard's participation began with his 1839 Salon painting. Admiring it at the exhibition, King Louis-Philippe suggested to the artist that he might benefit by joining the Commission scientifique du Nord¹⁰. Contrary to many accounts, the artist did not serve the expedition in any official capacity. His only contribution, a portrait of the President of the commission, Paul Gaimard, was reproduced in the voyage's two-volume *Atlas Pittoresque et Historique* (fig. 5). In correspondence, Biard made it known that he independently financed his ocean passage to Spitsbergen.

The artist was joined in his travels by Léonie d'Aunet, an eighteen-year-old fellow explorer who later became his wife as well as the mistress of Victor Hugo¹¹. In addition to writing drama for the theatre, M^{lle} d'Aunet published a popular travelogue titled *Voyage d'une femme au Spitzberg* (1855) that first appeared in the *Revue de Paris* in 1852. Her descriptions and impressions of the island along with those of Xavier Marmier, the expedition's official chronicler, are valuable records that complement Biard's paintings and the lithographs bound in the *Atlas Pittoresque et Historique*¹². Fortunately, this documentation of both Biard's and the crew's itinerary facilitates the recreation of activities and events.

Biard and M^{lle} d'Aunet travelled by themselves through Germany, Denmark and Norway before meeting the members of the commission at Hammerfest, the northernmost town of Europe. On July 17, 1839, the *Recherche* set sail for Spitsbergen, where a team of French and Scandinavian scientists planned to study. After fourteen days at sea, often imperiled by snow, ice and fog, the *Recherche* anchored at Magdalena Bay. Here the crew pitched tents for themselves and their scientific equipment (fig. 6). Due to the exigencies of weather, the sojourn lasted thirteen days. When the corvette returned to the continent on August 22, Biard and M^{lle} d'Aunet parted company with the commission, setting out to explore the wilds of Lapland. Some members of the expedition, in turn, started the second leg of their

mission by continuing on land across Northern Europe to Russia.

While scientists collected data, Biard joined Barthélemy Lauvergne and Charles Giraud, the commission's appointed artists, in sketching the awesome glaciers, towering mountain peaks and rocky coastline that engulfed them. According to Marmier (p. 266), the artists were the busiest members of the crew: « *La météorologue installait de tous côtés ses baromètres et ses thermomètres, le géologue s'armait de son marteau de chasseur, de son fusil, et les peintres, plus occupés encore que nous tous, ne savaient par où commencer, tant il y avait autour d'eux de points de vue nouveaux, de sites pittoresques, de scènes admirables* ». Throughout a long career, these views inspired Biard to complete over a dozen Salon paintings exhibited from 1841 until 1880.

The early paintings are especially masterful and convincingly authentic since Biard's excitement was still high pitched and the memories of voyage were fresh in his mind. At the Salon of 1841, Biard exhibited this first group of northern landscapes: *Magdalena Bay... effet d'aurore boréale*, *Vue de l'Océan glacial, pêche aux morses par des Groënlandais* and *Le duc d'Orléans descendant la grande cascade de l'Eyanpaikka sur le Fleuve Muonio...*

In *Magdalena Bay... effet d'aurore boréale*, an auroral display, one of nature's most compelling spectacles, mesmerizes and enchants the viewer (fig. 7). Slowly the brutal aftermath of a shipwreck is discerned. Four fishermen already dead from cold and exhaustion, and a lone survivor who is certain to meet a similar fate fall victim to the polar desert. By portraying the Arctic wilderness as captivating yet simultaneously forbidding, Biard dramatically translates this paradox inherent in the sublime.

The imaginary tragedy takes place in a realistically observed setting. Mountains and glaciers depicted are fragments of Magdalena Bay's panorama that the artist recorded in eighteen detailed oil studies and, as we shall see, recreated for the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle. Observed by the artist during his trek through Lapland, the northern lights are among the first representations of this phenomenon ever made¹³. Biard's fascina-

FIG. 5. — F.-A. BIARD. *Vue de l'île de l'Ours ou Beerin Eiland* from *Atlas Pittoresque et Historique of Voyages de la Commission scientifique du Nord...* (1848). *Phot. author.*



tion with this subject parallels the work of four meteorologists who studied the aurora for the Commission scientifique du Nord. The painting is thus a visual counterpart to the data compiled by these men and published as one of the twenty volumes documenting the findings of the expedition¹⁴.

Magdalena Bay... represents an expansion of alpine landscape iconography which proved popular with French artists from the late eighteenth



FIG. 6. — Barthélemy LAUVERGNE. Detail from *Panorama de la Baie de la Madeleine* from *Atlas Pittoresque et Historique of Voyages de la Commission scientifique du Nord...* (1848). *Phot. author.*

century into the first half of the nineteenth century. While widening the geographical boundaries of landscape and introducing new motifs, Biard is part of a firmly established tradition that includes such artists as Alexis Noel. A comparison between *Magdalena Bay...* and Noel's *Hospice du grand Saint-Bernard par un temps de dégel* (Musée de Chambéry) exhibited at the Salon of 1836 reveals significant similarities. Common to both and typical of a large number of French sublime landscapes is the artist's commitment to recording the facts of geography and atmosphere. The use of narrative intended to heighten the drama of setting is also an essential part of each painting. Biard's unusual landscapes thus build upon an existing foundation.

In its setting and context, *Magdalena Bay...* may be compared to an American painting, Frederic Edwin Church's *Aurora Borealis* of 1865 (fig. 8). Both convey the theme of human fragility in a confrontation with hostile natural forces. Within this realm, life hinges precariously on time; the viewer expects Biard's fisherman to perish just as one contemplates the dangerous position of Church's ship trapped in its winter resting grounds¹⁵. A haunting calm also pervades the frozen atmosphere. Xavier Marmier's description of the solitude experienced at Magda-



FIG. 7. — F.-A. BIARD. *Magdalena Bay; vue prise de la presqu'île des Tombeaux, au nord du Spitzberg, effet d'aurore boréale*, Salon of 1841 and Exposition Universelle, Paris 1855. Paris, Musée du Louvre. Phot. Musées Nationaux.

lena Bay (p. 350) corresponds to the feelings generated by both paintings : «*J'étais seul alors au milieu de la solitude immense; nul bruit ne frappait mon oreille, nulle voix ne venait m'interrompre dans mon rêve. Les rumeurs de la cité, les passions du monde, étaient bien loin. Mon pied foulait une des extrémités de la terre, et devant moi il n'y avait plus que les flots de l'Océan et les glaces du pôle. Non, je ne saurais exprimer toute la tristesse, toute la solennité de l'isolement dans un tel lieu... J'ai courbé le front sous le sentiment de mon impuissance, et ma bouche n'a murmuré que l'humble invocation du chrétien* ».

In contrast to intimations of defeat at nature's hand, *Vue de l'Océan glacial, pêche aux morses par des Groënlandais* is a painting of human challenge and adaptation to the Arctic environment (fig. 9). Like *Magdalena Bay*..., it is based upon the union of fact and fantasy. Biard did not witness an actual hunt; first hand observation of the walrus occurred upon his return to Hammerfest where fishermen were returning with their catch. The opportunity to study native people, their hunting weapons and kayaks (which were later purchased for his museum) provided Biard with authentic details. His sensitivity to meteorological condi-

tions as recorded in the oppressive grey sky and magical blue tint of ice is one more manifestation of the artist's documentary skill. At this time the optical effects of Arctic light were the subject of discussion among French scientists¹⁶.

The strange and unique northern scenery that stimulated Biard's inquisitive nature also kindled his imagination. It freed him from traditional



FIG. 8. — F.-E. CHURCH. *Aurora Borealis*, 1865. Washington D.C., National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Eleanor Blodgett. Phot. Museum.



FIG. 9. — F.-A. BIARD. *Vue de l'Océan glacial, pêche aux morses par des Groënlandais*, Salon of 1841 and Exposition Universelle, Paris 155. Dieppe, Château-Musée. Phot. Bulloz.

conceptions of landscape by providing the catalyst for invention. In *Vue de l'Océan glacial...* Biard transforms geologic reality into a protosurrealistic vision of the Arctic. He purposefully achieves an hallucinatory effect by free association and by exaggerating the forms of icebergs to suggest the presence of bizarre and frightening beasts¹⁷. Biard was not the only polar traveller to respond to the dreamlike properties of icebergs.

Mariners to both the North and South poles described their weird shapes and resemblances to other natural and man-made objects. Biard's painting is noteworthy as an artist's response to the impressions often recorded in official journals.

A comparison of Biard's painting with Church's *The Icebergs* and Caspar David Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice* illustrates some affinities and



FIG. 10. — F.-E. CHURCH. *The Icebergs*, 1861. Dallas, Museum of Art, Anonymous gift. Phot. Museum.



FIG. 11. — C.-D. FRIEDRICH. *The Sea of Ice*, 1823-24. Hamburg, Kunsthalle.

variations in polar iconography (figs. 10 et 11). Of the three, *Vue de l'Océan glacial...* is the most imaginative and whimsical since the forms do not correspond to recognizable geological features. By contrast, Friedrich's ice possesses the same properties as slate : layered, fractured and grey in tonality. In a similar reference to land forms, Church conceives his icebergs as mountains which form the protective barrier of a sheltered cove.

In both Church and Friedrich's paintings, a religious theme of salvation or lack thereof is implied by the position of ice and the fragments of ship protruding above the surface. Ice in these paintings stimulates contemplation rather than fantasy. The symbolic message is heightened by the apparent stasis of the formations, evoking a sense of timelessness. The fluid and dynamic curvilinear and jagged calves of ice in Biard's painting do not relate to spirituality but rather reinforce the narrative.

Therein lies one of the differences between the French and other interpretations of sublimity by American and German artists. In French landscape painting, nature and religious symbolism are rarely interchanged¹⁸. *Vue de l'Océan glacial...*

is an ethnological record of the survival of people indigenous to the region. In this graphic representation of human drama and events, Biard sets himself apart from Church and Friedrich.

Biard was supported by France's most important collector, King Louis Philippe who purchased *Vue de l'Océan glacial...*, *Magdalena Bay...* and commissioned *Le duc d'Orléans descendant la grande cascade de l'Eyanpaikka sur le fleuve Muonio, Laponie, septembre 1795* (fig. 12). Through both his active patronage and sponsoring of scientific expeditions, Louis-Philippe directly encouraged the painting of awesome landscapes. His predilection for sublime nature probably emerged during his exile from France. At this time he became an avid explorer and adventure seeker, visiting remote areas of North America and northern Scandinavia. The subject of the commissioned painting refers to an actual experience during this restless period of his life. Over fifty years later, Biard travelled down the same dangerous stretch of river. He was thus able to capture the details of site of an inaccessible region to create an authentic document and memento of the king's wilderness adventure.

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FIG. 12. — F.-A. BIARD. *Le duc d'Orléans descendant la grande cascade de l'Eyanpaikka sur le fleuve Muonio, Laponie, septembre 1795*, Salon of 1841. Versailles, Musée National du Château.



FIGS. 13.-18. — F.-A. BIARD. *Panorama of Magdalena Bay*, 1852 and 1862-63. Paris, Jardin des Plantes, vestibule of the Galerie de Minéralogie, Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle. *Phot. author.*

Biard's passion for the Arctic culminates in the panorama of Magdalena Bay presently on display in the vestibule of the Galerie de Minéralogie at the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. Biard was granted the commission for this project in 1851 after writing a persuasive letter of Introduction to the Minister of the Interior¹⁹. The artist proposed creating a series of paintings for the vestibule which would illustrate in his words, « *un des plus intéressants voyages de notre marine* ». Highlighting his own experiences during the 1839 scientific mission to Scandinavia, Lapland and Spitsbergen, Biard listed the subjects studied and painted on this voyage: The panorama of Magdalena Bay, the aurora borealis and the portraits and costumes of Lapps. In addition to its value as documentation, the artist wrote that the project would complement the areas of study pursued by the museum.

Biard's paintings continued an earlier scheme to decorate the Galerie de Minéralogie with landscapes representing natural wonders²⁰. In

1842 and 1843, Charles Rémond contributed six paintings that still hang today, providing early evidence that France led the Western world in integrating the study of science with art. Lack of funding for the project was an issue that, needless to say, delayed its completion. It is not known whether Biard learned, through his association with naturalists at the museum, of the Interior department's willingness to continue the project at this time, or if his own ideas regarding the use of the space generated renewed interest in the decoration. In either case, the minister must have considered Biard's credentials and ideas impressive.

Biard aimed to recreate on a grand scale the dramatic beauty, excitement and isolation of the north. The 360 degree *Panorama of Magdalena Bay* was a skillful solution to the limitations of a square space that was segmented in the middle of each wall by a set of doors (fig. 13). Ignoring these divisions, Biard continued the scenes around the corners and united the ensemble by

representing the range of mountains and glaciers that mark the shore. The panorama is cleverly designed with the entrance door corresponding to the *Recherche's* point of entry into the bay. The viewer is initially confronted with the same landscape that the expedition members glimpsed upon arrival. As the visitor leaves the vestibule, it is through an inlet into the vastness of the Arctic Ocean.

While the format of a panorama conformed well to the dimensions of the space, the artist was probably also aware of its relationship to Alexander von Humboldt's notions about art and nature. The nineteenth century's most renowned naturalist, who spent many years engaged in research in Paris, believed that the panorama fostered the public's respect for and admiration of nature. Towards these ends he proposed erecting buildings to house panoramas depicting the planet's varied ecological zones²¹. Although Biard's

paintings are installed within a museum rather than an independent structure, they were among the first to realize Humboldt's ideas.

Biard executed the panorama in three phases. Initially in 1851, he painted two hunting scenes of walrus and reindeer to cover one entire wall (figs. 14 et 15). After only six months, the paintings were ready to be glued in place. An informal agreement to continue the project may have transpired between Biard and the ministry, however a dispute prevented its completion until more than a decade later. A new contract to begin paintings for two more walls was eventually signed in 1862 after Biard presented his original set of paintings to the new Minister of the Interior during a tour of the building. These two lateral sides showing Magdalena Bay's grim cemetery and two geologists engaged in research were finished that same year (figs. 13, 15, 16). In 1863, Biard was commissioned to complete the fourth



FIG. 14.

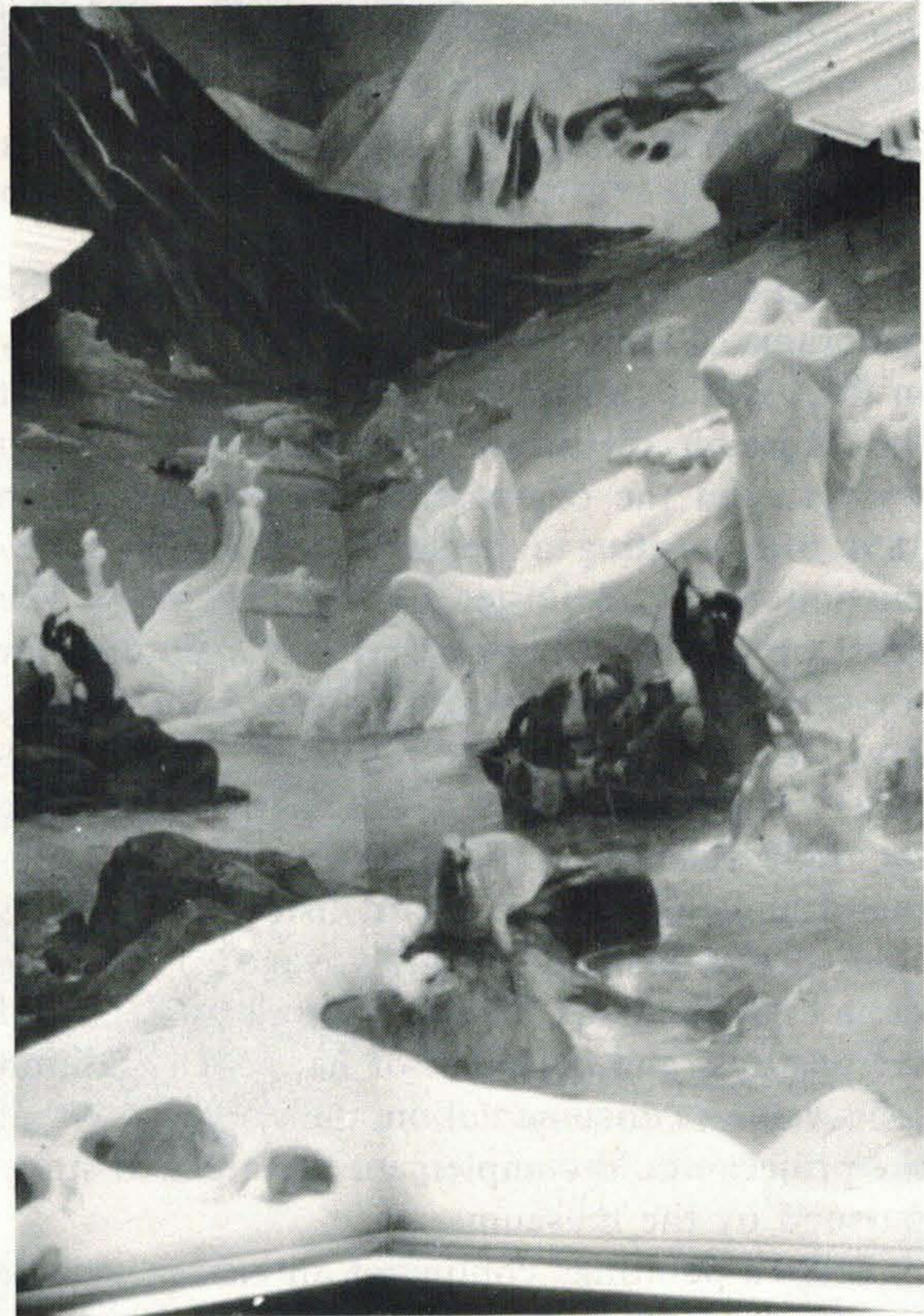


FIG. 15.

and final set of paintings of a polar bear hunt and a den of foxes (figs. 16 et 17). By 1864 the panorama could be seen in its entirety.

The *Panorama of Magdalena Bay* is a vision of what Biard observed and imagined the Arctic to be. The elevations of mountains, locations of glaciers and outcrops of rock along the coastline are faithfully translated from the oil sketches painted during eight and ten hour stretches of time each day at temperatures of one degree Fahrenheit. Its accuracy corresponds admirably to the eight pages of lithographs by Barthélemy Lauvergne published in the *Atlas Pittoresque et Historique*. On the other hand, the hunting scenes supposedly initiated by members of the expedition never occurred²². (While it is doubtful that the artist ever laid eyes on a polar bear in its native habitat, both reindeer and walrus, as

mentioned earlier, were sketched by Biard during the later part of his trip).

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That Biard was dedicated to documentation is evident from the six hundred drawings and thirty-eight oil sketches that he amassed over the course of these travels. What accounts then for his fabrication of the commission's activities? Biard's liberties reflect his own passion for drama and adventure as well as the tradition of large scale decorative projects for public institutions. The artist must have realized the need to include more than a realistic tableau of a scientific mission. Images of combat with rarely depicted Arctic fauna conceived in the romantic manner of Eugène Delacroix would satisfy both public



FIG. 16.



FIG. 17.

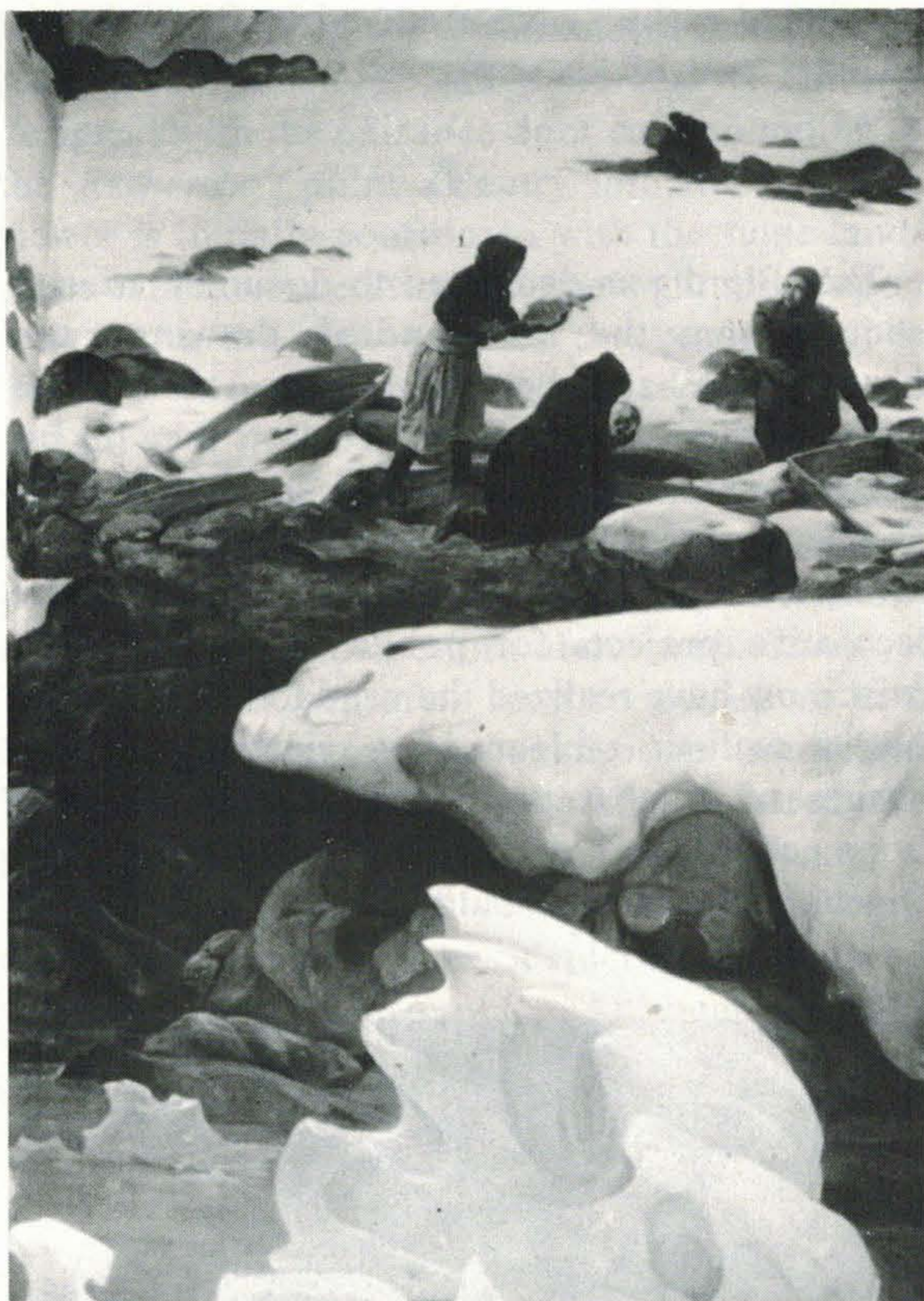


FIG. 18.

curiosity and the requirements of monumental wall painting.

Not all of the narratives are fictional. On the wall representing the island's legendary cemetery, located a short distance from the expedition's campsite, bones of men lay scattered after wind and storms had dislodged their graves of stone (fig. 18). Three of the crew examine the remains of a corpse and the commemorative inscription on a simple wooden cross. A self-portrait sketching *en plein air* is visible above. On the other side of the door, two polar bears peer into an empty coffin (fig. 17).

This section of the panorama is a reminder of man's vulnerability and his ultimate powerlessness against nature; the polar bear becomes a symbol of her destructive forces. A similar theme is communicated by the English artist, Sir Edward Landseer, in *Man Proposes, God Disposes* (Egham, Royal Holloway College) painted only one year

later. Arctic explorations were the stimulus for both representations. However, the unsuccessful and fatal attempt by Sir John Franklin to find a Northwest passage in 1845 explains the more graphic savagery and hopelessness in Landseer's painting.

On the wall opposite the cemetery scene, the scientific activities of the Commission scientifique du Nord are conducted by two solitary figures (figs. 15 et 16). Appropriately, this wall frames the entrance door into the Galerie de Minéralogie. On the left, a naturalist is shown examining specimens through a magnifying glass while another scientist extracts minerals from a rock. Both men are poised on shoals, dwarfed by fantastically shaped icebergs and the distant mountains.

Biard's popularity had already peaked by the time the decoration for the vestibule of the Galerie de Minéralogie was completed. Although he continued to exhibit many paintings each year at the Paris and Lyon Salons, he became increasingly more involved in scientific pursuits. Biard's travels in Brazil during the years 1858-60 may be understood in relation to the artist's consuming interest in natural history and the influence of Alexander von Humboldt who celebrated the wonders of South American flora in his popular five volume book, *Kosmos* (1845-1862). The primeval forest once romanticized by philosophers as the setting for a nobler existence was now viewed as an encyclopedia of new and fascinating pieces of information. This spirit guided Biard on his second and last major voyage when the artist substituted the equatorial heat of the tropics for the frigid temperature of the north.

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In *Deux années au Brésil* (1862), a lengthy book written and illustrated by Biard, the artist's activities as an amateur naturalist are recorded: collecting and classifying insects, birds, shells and orchids vie with time spent sketching plants and Indians, painting panoramas of the rain forest and experimenting with photography. These activities in turn increased his skill as a naturalist

painter. When Biard exhibited one of his Brazilian landscapes at the Salon of 1861, Théophile Gautier remarked that « *un botaniste ne trouverait rien à redire aux végétations exotiques de la Forêt vierge...²³* »

Biard's travels in Brazil are outside the scope of this study. However, it is noteworthy that comparisons between Biard and Frederic Edwin Church are once again revealing. Both artists approached the South American continent with an inquiring mind and a scientist's inclination for observation. Detailed studies of flora are the building blocks of their tropical scenes. In many ways, Biard and Church's experiences and personalities were remarkably alike. An overwhelming desire to travel to new lands in order to sketch scenery still unknown to their contemporaries led both artists to the ice-bound waters of the north. Both were avid naturalists whose familiarity with Alexander von Humboldt's ideas inspired tropical voyages. Wealth enabled Biard and Church to finance their own expeditions and maintain elaborate atelier-museums in which to exhibit their sketches and collected objects. Their eclectic tastes and flamboyant lifestyles may be explained

as an attempt to assimilate their multifaceted personalities and experiences with their native culture which by itself failed to provide sufficient stimulation for their imaginations.

In summary, Biard's career embraced two modes of thought and expression. On the one hand, he was the quintessential artist-naturalist-explorer. In this capacity, the artist documented the reality of site. Conversely, Biard was a beguiling fantasist who maintained the freedom to interpret new places and dramatic themes in original ways. This dichotomy between the real and fantastic was one of the features of the Arctic described by Léonie d'Aunet : « *On a jamais rien vu de comparable à ce qu'on voit et à ce qu'on entend là; on n'a jamais imaginé quelque chose du fantastique, et du réel; cela déconcerte la mémoire, hallucine l'esprit et le remplit d'un indicible sentiment, mélange d'épouvante et d'admiration²⁴* ». It is Biard's ability to communicate this aspect that makes his landscapes so beautiful and provocative. Although forgotten since his death, Biard is a strikingly original figure in nineteenth century art and France's most ardent interpreter of the sublimity in nature.

B.C.M.

NOTES

1. The most complete account of Biard's early travels may be found in Louis BOIVIN, *Notice sur M. Biard; ses aventures*, Paris, 1842.

2. This subject is explored in my doctoral dissertation, *Sublime Landscape Painting in Nineteenth Century France: Alpine and Arctic Iconography and their Relationship to Natural History*, submitted to the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University in April 1983. I am indebted to Professor Robert Rosenblum who first introduced me to the landscapes of François-Auguste Biard and provocatively suggested that a tradition of sublime landscape might exist in France.

3. For a list of objects classified under « curiosités étrangères » see : *Catalogue de Tableaux et Études Peintes d'après Nature par M. Biard*, sale Hôtel Drouot, 6, 7, 8 mars 1865.

4. According to a letter from the captain of the *Bayadère* to the Minister of the Navy, dated 13 January 1829, students were obligated to attend drawing lessons one hour each day in addition to their regular studies. See : Archives Nationales, Marine BB4 489.

5. During this time, Biard also compiled a repertory of Oriental images to be included in future Salon paintings. The

artist's most important painting in this genre, *Le Désert* (Salon of 1838) was purchased by Louis-Philippe.

6. A list of Biard's Alpine landscapes may be found in *Catalogue de Tableaux...* Nr. 213 through 283 describe views in the Dauphiné and Savoie regions including the area of the Grande Chartreuse.

7. This painting at the Musée de Bayeux has been mistitled. Although official records indicate the painting as *Esquimaux luttant contre des ours*, it fits the description of the 1842 Salon painting. See : Wilhelm TENINT, *Album de Salon de 1842*, Paris, 1842, pp. 19-20.

8. Auguste Mayer was the official artist on two major expeditions, the voyage to Iceland and Greenland in 1835-36 and the first phase of the Commission scientifique du Nord's expedition to Spitsbergen in 1838 when the *Recherche* reached as far north as Bell-Sound.

9. In addition to the above referenced expeditions, the French government also sent Dumont d'Urville to discover the location of the magnetic South Pole. The *Astrolabe* and the *Zelée* sailed to Antarctica during the years 1838-40.

10. See Ernest FILLONNEAU's introduction to the *Catalogue de Tableaux par Biard*, sale Hôtel Drouot, 18 mars 1875.

11. On the relationship between Mlle d'Aunet and Victor Hugo, see : Louis GUIMBAUD, *Victor Hugo and Mme Biard*, Paris, 1927.

12. Xavier MARMIER wrote two books on his travels to Spitsbergen : *Lettres sur le Nord, Danemark, Suède, Laponie, Spitzberg*, Paris, 1840, and *Voyages de la Commission scientifique du Nord... Relation du voyage*, 2 vols., Paris, 1842.

13. Théodore Gudin also painted a seascape with the Aurora Borealis titled *Aurore boréale, côte d'Écosse* which he exhibited at the Salon of 1847 and later at the Exposition Universelle in 1855.

14. According to MARMIER in *Voyages de la Commission scientifique du Nord...*, p. 21 these scientists observed 153 auroral displays during the winter of 1838-39 while stationed in Lapland.

15. An interpretation of Church's painting is given by William H. TRUETTNER, *The Genesis of Frederic Edwin Church's "Aurora Borealis"*, in *The Art Quarterly*, no. 31, Autumn 1968, pp. 267ff.

16. See letter written by the chief geologist at the École des Mines, Jean-Baptiste ÉLIE DE BEAUMONT, included in *Voyage en Islande et au Groënland... Relation du voyage*, Paris, 1842, p. 421.

17. Biard cultivated this ability to respond to and capture the bizarre patterns suggested by natural forms. He writes about his reactions and imaginings in *Notes de voyages. Entre Christiania et Drontheim*, in *Musée des Familles*, vol. 8, septembre

1841, p. 371 and in *Deux années au Brésil*, Paris, 1862, pp. 146-149.

18. When French landscape artists want to draw parallels between religion and the sublimity in nature they do so literally by including representations of a monastery or religious figures in their paintings. The best example is Josephine Sarazin de Belmont's painting. *Vue de la vallée d'Argellès prise de la Chapelle de Pietà* (Salon of 1831) at the Musée de Bagnières de Bigorre.

19. A history and chronology of the paintings in the vestibule can be found at the Archives Nationales, F²¹64, 6 series and F²¹19. A description of these paintings appears in the *Inventaire des richesses d'art, Paris Monuments civiles*, vol. II, pp. 104-105. The dates, however, are not accurate.

20. A discussion of Rémond's contribution to the Galerie de Minéralogie is presented in Chapter III : The Collaboration between Artists and Geologists, MATILSKY, *Sublime Landscape Painting...*, pp. 104-134.

21. Alexander von Humboldt's ideas regarding the panorama is discussed by Barbara NOVAK, *Nature and Culture*, New York, 1980, pp. 70-71.

22. An initial drawing for this wall, preserved at the Archives Nationales, shows the protagonists as Lapps rather than Frenchmen in naval uniform. At some point during the execution of these paintings, Biard changed his cast of characters.

23. Th. GAUTIER, *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861*, Paris, 1861, p. 61.

24. *Voyage d'une femme au Spitzberg*, 3ed., Paris, 1863, pp. 176-177.

RÉSUMÉ : *François-Auguste Biard, artiste, naturaliste, explorateur.*

En 1839, F.-A. Biard participa à une expédition scientifique française au Spitzberg où il exécuta des études en plein air de l'Arctique, qu'il utilisa ensuite dans des peintures exposées au Salon et dans la décoration de la Galerie de Minéralogie du Museum d'Histoire Naturelle dont il avait reçu la commande en 1851.

Ses peintures de paysage, qui sont uniques, sont une synthèse d'éléments naturalistes de topographie et de météorologie avec des descriptions imaginaires et des interprétations fantastiques de géologie. Une étude de l'artiste permet de mieux comprendre la relation entre la science et l'art au XIX^e siècle. Plus encore, l'interprétation par Biard du « Sublime » dans la nature, montre que les artistes français étaient émus par cet aspect romantique du paysage, tout autant que des peintres beaucoup plus connus, comme F.-E. Church et C.-D. Friedrich.