

EXPERT REVIEW AND ATTRIBUTION

Aivazovsky I.K. (1817-1900). Russia
Escaping the Storm 1886
Canvas, oil, 69x107 Private collection

The picture shows a stormy sea near the rocks whose contour is fading in the darkness. A boat with shipwreck survivors is heading towards the rocks. Lightning flashes in the stormy sky under the dark clouds.

The colour pattern is a composition of cold and warm grey, dark blue and yellowish ochre tones.

The picture was painted on thin, loose, middle-grain canvas with a light factory primer and was stretched on a folding frame (the edges being glued with paper strips).

The picture was painted in several stages. The basic outline was made with rather large (long and wide) strokes of average density, clearly showing the texture of the bristle brush, sometimes rounded-up and becoming zig-zag. Later, smaller details were painted on the slightly dried layer. The illuminated edges of the clouds were painted with short strokes of the bristle brushes, as if going around the rounded curve. The foam of the waves was painted with thin flowing zigzags, which in certain spots (on illuminated surfaces) become denser and form clots. The finest finishing details (parts of the foam net, dissolving in the water, and flows of water streaming down the rocks) were painted with semi-transparent white glazing. The boat with people is painted with thin strokes over the textured image of the water's surface. The silhouettes of the people were painted in a generalised form with colourful (light blue, emerald, red and ochre) coiling strokes.

The picture perfectly captures the people's determination to survive while facing the merciless force of nature.

There are two authentic author's signatures on the picture. One is on the face of the picture in the bottom right-hand corner and made with black paint: *Aivazovsky / 1886*. The signature paint has the same craquelures as the underlying layer of paint. The other author's signature, made with brown paint, is on the reverse of the picture, in the top right-hand section: *Aivazovsky*

The picture was examined in the visual, infrared and ultraviolet (visible luminescence) spectra, in side light and under a microscope.

In the visible ultraviolet luminescence we found an uneven layer of old varnish with an orange tone of fluorescence. The varnish has been retained mostly in the top part of the picture, while in the bottom it was removed as a result of the restoration cleaning. Moreover, the picture has another layer of varnish, with blue fluorescence, which was applied later.

By examining the picture in the closer infrared spectrum we found an author's preparatory drawing made on the primer with a graphite pencil.

The amount of restoration can be considered minor and generally the picture is well preserved.

In addition, L.N. Lugina, a candidate in chemistry, examined micro-samples of the paint using infrared spectral analysis and microchemical, emission chemical, luminescent and thermal chemical analyses. She identified the following pigments of the paint layer: lead whites, blue cobalt, yellow cadmium, lead chrome, composite green, sienna and black coal. As a result of the examination we found that the picture was made in the last quarter of the XIX century, which does not contradict the date on the picture (1866).

Below we disclose various aspects of comparison of the picture under examination with the published authentic works of I.K. Aivazovsky.

Motif

The artist drew storms, shipwrecks and the rescue of people more and more often from the 1870s onwards. His pictures "Storm in the Black Sea" and "Rainbow" (1873), "Storm at the Aya Cape" (1875), "Shipwreck" (1876), "Storm" (1886), "Shipwreck" (1880s), and "Sea Storm" (1893) are the closest analogues to this picture (figures 6-12). The composition of the picture is most similar to "Storm in the Black Sea" (1873), part of the collection of Omsk Regional Museum of Belle Arts named after M.A. Vrubel. The motif of the thunderstorm clouds during the storm is a close analogue of "Thunderstorm" (1889), part of the collection of the National Gallery named after I.K. Aivazovsky (Feodosia) (fig. 33).

Preparatory drawing

Generally, Aivazovsky's preparatory pencil drawings of any picture showing a rough sea have no parallel lines marking the horizon and various parts of the pictures, as are characteristic of most of his pictures.

At the same time, the pictures in this group almost always have free lines that only in part coincide with the final painting of waves and (sometimes) clouds. The picture under examination has long, curvy, almost parallel diagonal lines showing the water and individual waves (fig. 14). We see a similar wave outline in the images of the rough sea in other drawings of the artist, e.g. "Shipwreck" (1876, Feodosia), as well as in the image of a calm sea ("Ischia Island near Naples", 1892, Feodosia) (fig. 15,16).

Peculiarities of painting patterns in individual elements of picture

Waves. Generally, Aivazovsky paints a rough sea with rather dense basic lines, made using long strokes of bristle brushes. He paints the finishing details of the sea foam and ridge of wave using various patterns, from white glazing to various texture clots. In addition to the picture under examination, we see this technique, for example, in his pictures "Shipwreck" (1876) and "Napoleon on St. Helena" (1897), part of the collection of the National Gallery named after I.K. Aivazovsky in Feodosia (fig. 17-19).

Foam on ridge of waves in this picture is made with almost pure whites using diagonal rows of small concave strokes of bristle brushes (wavy and round-up, with frayed ends).< The artist used a similar method to paint the wave foam in his other pictures ("Gunboat" and "Beating of Waves at Crimea Shores" 1892) (fig. 21, 22). These methods have their peculiarities in each specific case, depending on the artistic goals.

Water streaming down from the rock is made with long strokes, having soft, almost dissolving edges, using white glazing. We see a similar method in Aivazovsky's picture "Wave Beating" (1888) at the Nikolaev Art Museum (figs. 23, 24). The drawing of the water streaming down from the paddles is different – these are groups of small strokes.

Human figures in the shipwreck settings are usually highly generalised and express the peoples' struggle to be rescued. The degree of generalisation tends to increase in later works of the artist, even to the point where the face features are not recognisable, as we see in the picture under examination (fig. 25-27). Depicting figures with winding strokes is also a trait of other pictures of the artist (fig. 28).

Clouds. Bulging thunder clouds, peculiar to this landscape, are also present in other works of the artist, e.g. "Thunderstorm", 1889 (fig. 33). Also, the clouds in the "daylight" works of the artist have a similar structure, e.g. "Group of Clouds", 1889 (fig. 31,32), where they are made with small, short strokes, well forming their rounded contours. A pencil drawing on the primer, which lightly sets the boundaries of the clouds, is peculiar to depicting this type of cloud (fig. 30, 32).

Artist's signatures. Usually Aivazovsky signed his works with more than one signature, in different corners of the picture or with one overlaying another. Often he would sign on the reverse of the canvas, as we see here. Generally, the artist's signatures are clearly variable both between and within different time periods. The signature on the picture under examination has some peculiarities, in particular a straight horizontal line protruding beyond the first element of the letter 'A'. This is similar to the signatures on pictures like "Sea. Simeiz" 1864 (canvas, oil, 120x170), "Beating of Waves at Crimea Shores" 1892 (canvas, oil, 130x217) (both from the collection of the National Gallery named after I.K. Aivazovsky in Feodosia (fig. 37, 38). Generally, this signature is characteristic of the last two decades of the artist's creative life.

Technology.

The type of canvas similar to that of the picture under examination (relatively thin and of loose weaving) was used for other works by Aivazovsky, although he preferred more dense canvas in general.

The choice of pigments is highly characteristic of Aivazovsky's paintings. Of the identified pigments, lead white, blue cobalt and yellow cadmium are most favoured and used by Aivazovsky. In the last two decades of his artistic life, Aivazovsky extensively used lead chrome and alizarin crimson. He constantly used composite green, sienna and black coal in all his works. This picture does not include paints that Aivazovsky seldom or never used (see Tsitovich V.I., Lugina L.N., Timchenko T.P. Technology and expert reviews of paintings by I.K. Aivazovsky. Kiev, 2002. - Table page 77).

Conclusions

As a result of comprehensive examination and including art studies, technical, technological, visual and instrumental types of examination, we conclude that the picture under examination is undoubtedly a characteristic work of I.K. Aivazovsky from the latter period of his artistic life and that it is of great artistic value.

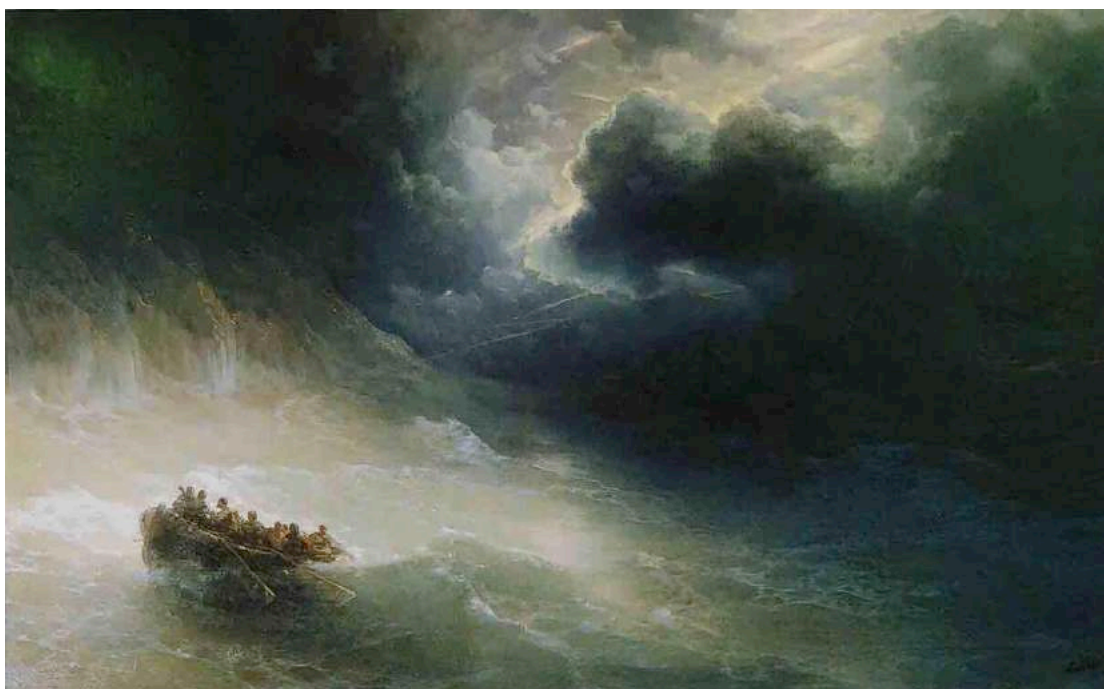
The picture will certainly be very attractive to museums and private collections.

Biography of artist:

Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky (Gaivazovsky) was a great Russian seascape artist. He was born in Feodosia on 17 (29) July 1817 and died there on 19 April (2 May) 1900. He studied at Feodosia Architects, then in the Emperor's Academy of Arts (from 1833) under M.N. Vorobiov and A. Tanner. He participated in the exhibitions of the Academy of Arts from 1835 and in 1837 received a gold medal and the title of artist. From 1840-1844, as a grant recipient, he visited Italy, Germany, France, Spain and the Netherlands. In 1844 he was awarded the title of academician, and in the same year he became the official artist of the Marine Headquarters, travelling a great deal. From 1847 he worked as a professor of drawing. He was a member of the Rome, Florence, Stuttgart and Amsterdam Academies of Art. More than 120 exhibitions of his works were held in his lifetime, in Russia and abroad. He captured romantic aspects of the sea, fortresses, sea battles and landscapes and produced portraits, Christianity-related compositions and drawings. His works are held in many collections, whereof the most complete ones are in the Aivazovsky National Art Gallery in Feodosia, the Art Gallery of Armenia, the State Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow), the Russian State Museum (St Petersburg) and Kyiv Russian Art Museum.

V.I. Tsitovich

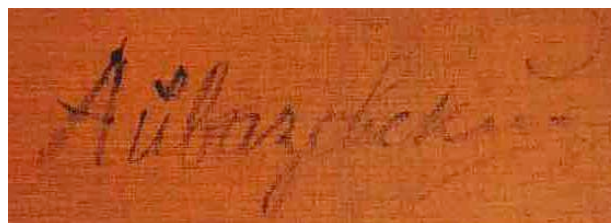
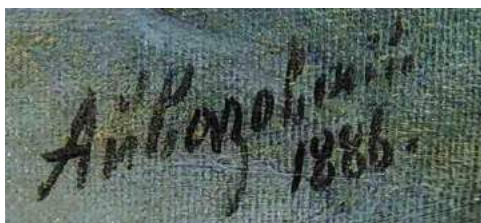
Art expert



1. Aivazovsky I.K. Escaping the Storm. 1886 c., o., 69x107 Private collection



2. Fragment of picture.



3,4. Author's signatures on face and reverse.

Motif



5. Escaping the Storm. 1886.



6. Storm in the Black Sea. 1873. C., o., 134x172 Omsk



7. Shipwreck. 1876. C., o., 132.7x170 Feodosia



8. Storm. 1886. W., o., 22.3x15.9 Private collection



9. Rainbow. 1873. C., o., 102x132 STG



10. Storm at the Aya Cape. 1875. C., o., 215x325 SRM



11. Shipwreck. 1880s C., o., 41x51 St. Lazarus convent



12. Storm in the Sea. 1893. C., o., 28x41 Boston.

Preparatory drawing



13.Escaping the Storm. 1886. IR reflectogram. 14.Same, high-contrast fragment.



15.Shipwreck.1876. Feodosia.

IR reflectogram fragment.

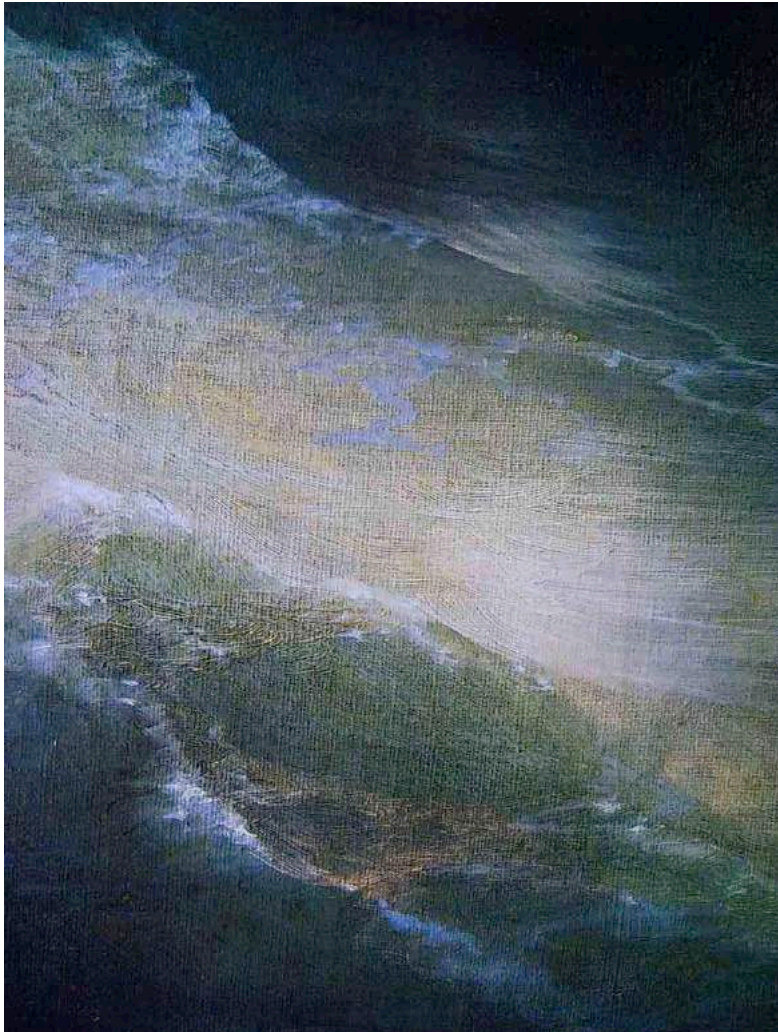


16.Ischia Island near Naples. 1892. C., o.,

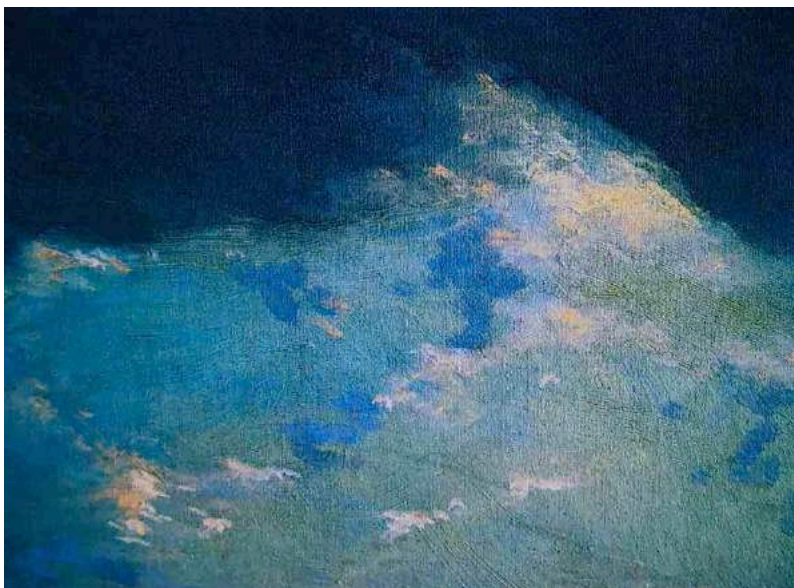
135x235 Feodosia. IR reflectogram fragment.

Peculiarities of artistic manner

a) Waves



17. Escaping the Storm. 1886. Fragment.



18. Shipwreck. 1876. Feodosia. Fragment.



19. Napoleon on St. Helena. 1897. Feodosia. Fragment.

b) Foam on waves



20. Escaping the Storm. 1886. Fragment.



21. Gunboat. Canvas, oil.

Private collection. Fragment



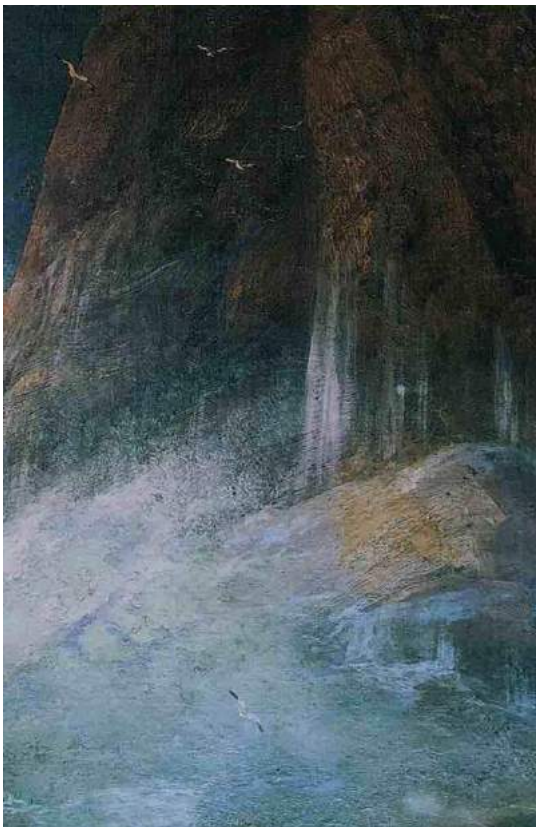
22. Beating of Waves at Crimea Shores.

1892. C., o., 130x217 Feodosia. Fragment.

c) Water streaming down rocks



23. Escaping the Storm. 1886. Fragment.



24. Wave Beating. 1888. C., o., 43.3x34.4 Nikolaev.

d) Human figures



25. Escaping the Storm. 1886. Fragment.



26. Shipwreck. 1876. Feodosia. Fragment.



27. Wreck. 1873. C., o., 83.5x75.5.
Vologda. Fragment.



28. Ship in the Sea. 1896. W., o.,
21.8x15.9 SRM Fragment.

e) Clouds



29, 30. Escaping the Storm. 1886. Fragment in the visible and IR spectra.

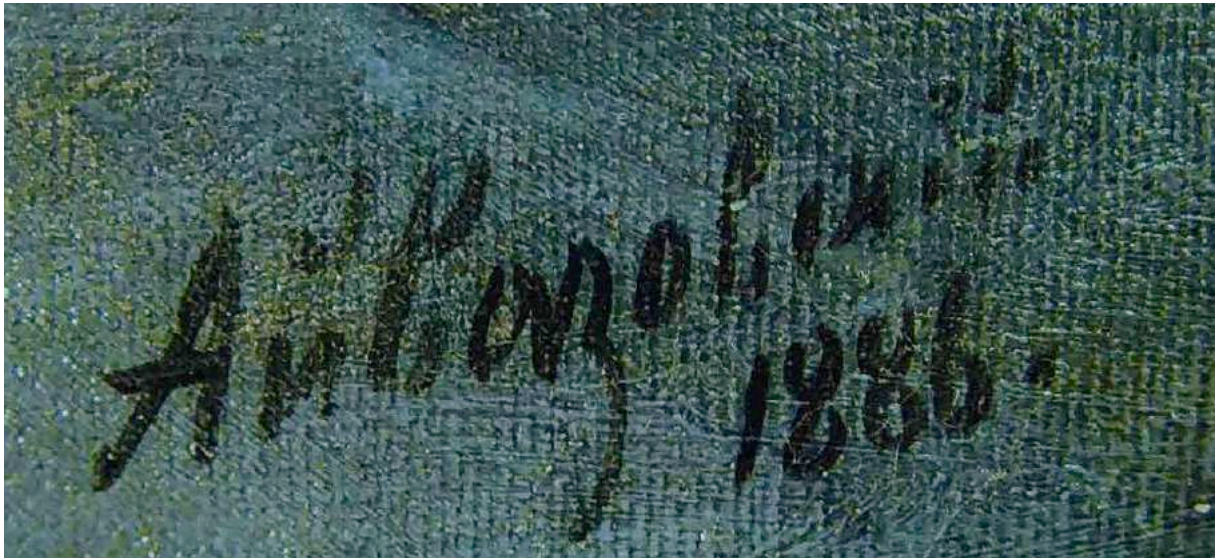


31,32. Group of Clouds. 1889. C., o., 111x148 Feodosia. Fragment in the visible and IR spectra.

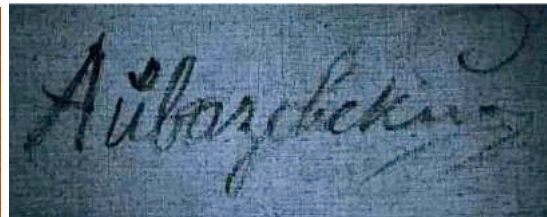
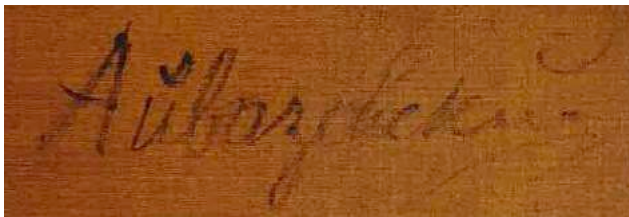


33. Thunderstorm. 1889. C., o., 148x112 Feodosia. Fragment in visible spectrum.

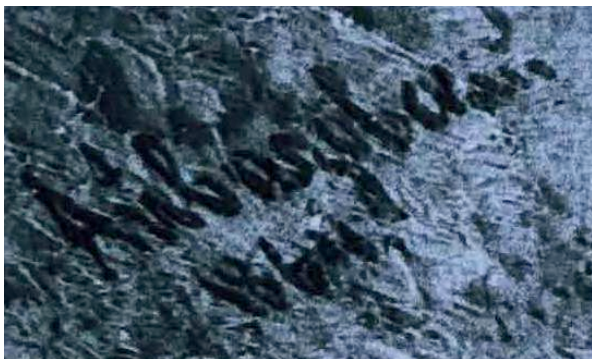
Signatures



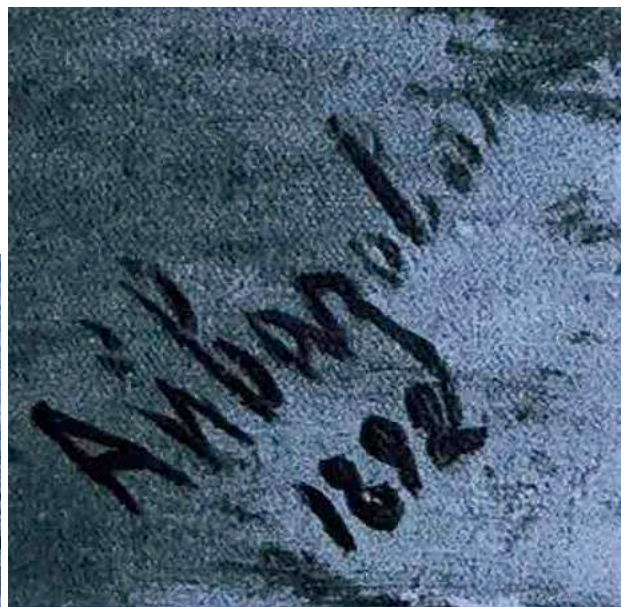
34. Escaping the Storm. 1886. Fragment (signature on face).



35, 36. Escaping the Storm. Signature on reverse in visible and IR spectra.



37. Sea. Simeiz. 1864. Feodosia.



38. Beating of Waves at Crimea Shores. 1892.

Feodosia.