

An oil painting of a coastal landscape. In the foreground, a dark, rocky cliff with some sparse vegetation and a small blue object (possibly a hat or bag) is visible. The middle ground shows a body of water with some small boats or structures. In the background, a distant cityscape, likely Istanbul, is visible under a vast, pale sky. The painting has a textured, expressive style with visible brushstrokes.

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Félix Ziem
Vue de Istanbul

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FÉLIX ZIEM

(Beaune 1821–1891 Paris)

VUE DE ISTANBUL

Signed lower right: "Ziem."

Oil on canvas

48 × 35 cm (18 3/4 × 13 3/4 in.)

Provenance

Acquired from Jane Roberts Fine Art, Paris;
Private Collection, Paris.

Literature

Ziem, Félix François Georges Philibert. *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*. (2011, October 31). Retrieved 30 Sep. 2025, from

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Saint-Raymond, Léa, *How to Get Rich as an Artist: The Case of Félix Ziem—Evidence from His Account Book from 1850 through 1883*, *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*, Volume 15, Issue 1, Spring 2016. <https://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring16/saint-raymond-on-how-to-get-rich-as-an-artist-felix-ziem>, accessed 30 September 2025.

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Félix Ziem's (1821-1891), *View of Constantinople*, masterfully captures the luminous essence and architectural grandeur of the Ottoman capital through a distinctive artistic vision that blends Orientalism, the Barbizon School, and early Impressionism.

This evocative work depicts a tranquil vista of Constantinople's waterfront, where the city emerges like a mirage across the shimmering waters. In the distant left, the iconic outline of a great mosque, probably the Hagia Sophia, with its distinctive dome and minarets, rises ethereally above the urban sprawl, rendered in soft, hazy tones that suggest both distance and mystery. A wooden caique (a traditional fishing boat) with figures aboard occupies the foreground waters, while others gather beneath the shelter of windswept trees and rustic structures along the shore, creating an intimate contrast to the majestic cityscape beyond.

Ziem's palette is remarkably subtle, favouring delicate transitions between the cool blues and greys of the expansive sky and water, and the warm earth tones of the foreground vegetation and boats. His characteristic loose brushwork creates a luminous atmospheric haze that envelops the entire scene, demonstrating his celebrated mastery of capturing the transformative effects of light. The painting balances documentary observation with romantic idealisation: the city appears both tangible and dreamlike, suspended in a moment of timeless serenity that enhances its exotic appeal while celebrating its unique blend of cultural heritage and natural beauty.

Félix François Georges Philibert Ziem was born in 1821 in the Burgundian town of Beaune, the son of Georges Barthélemy Ziem, an émigré from Poland who was a tailor by trade, and Anne-Marie Goudt, a native of Burgundy. Ziem was initially placed in an apprenticeship with an architect, a family friend, and studied at the School of Architecture in Dijon. Painting started as a hobby for Ziem, but it later developed into a career from which he achieved considerable commercial success, attracting high-status clients, including Ferdinand Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, Princesse Mathilde Bonaparte, the Baron de Rothschild, and the Duke of Devonshire. Ziem was also the first artist to have his paintings acquired by the Louvre during his lifetime.

In 1850, Ziem became connected with the Barbizon school of artists through his friendship with Théodore Rousseau, whom he joined at Barbizon, a village near Fontainebleau Forest. The Barbizon style, characterised by its focus on natural light and tonal qualities, greatly influenced Ziem's approach to landscape painting. However, Ziem also admired the works of Claude Lorrain and J.M.W. Turner, both renowned for their portrayal of light. Indeed, in 1868, art critic Théophile Gautier favourably compared Ziem's work to that of Turner and Bonington. It is likely no coincidence that this trend towards painting from nature coincided with the invention

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of oil paints in metal tubes, pioneered by American artist John Goffe Rand (1801–1873), which revolutionised the practice of painting outdoors.

Beyond his association with the Barbizon artists, Ziem was an enthusiastic traveller, initially exploring the South of France and the Provençal port town of Martigues. Starting in 1842, Ziem journeyed to Italy, visiting Rome and Venice, and returning to France via Germany and Austria. During this trip, he met Prince Gregori Gagarin, whom he accompanied on a journey to Russia from 1843 to 1844. Gagarin was also an artist, and together they travelled through Odessa, Kiev, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. However, Ziem's trip to Venice sparked a lifelong passion for the city, which he visited more than twenty-one times, making it the primary source of his artistic inspiration. Ziem's visit to Constantinople in 1847 was a natural extension of his Venetian explorations, although his plans to return were delayed by the Crimean War (October 1853 – March 1856). After the 1856 Treaty of Paris, the artist travelled from Marseilles to Constantinople, where he stayed for two months. He was captivated by the city, especially the effects of light, water, and colour, as well as the reflections of the sky in the sea—similar to what he loved in Venice. Following his stay in Constantinople, Ziem visited Egypt, Beirut, and Damascus.

This painting exemplifies Ziem's extraordinary ability to distil the sensory and emotional experience of place into atmospheric poetry. Working from preliminary drawings made on the spot during his visits to Constantinople in 1847 and 1856, Ziem transforms direct observation into evocative studio compositions that capture not only topographical accuracy but also the essence of his encounter with the city. The painting shows the full maturity of his technical vocabulary, the vaporous brushwork learned from his Barbizon peers, the luminous palette inspired by Turner and Claude, and the intimate yet expansive compositional sensibility honed through decades of travel. His studio practice allowed him to distil these on-site impressions, perfecting the interplay of light and atmosphere that makes the city appear suspended between memory and reality. Here, Constantinople is neither an ethnographic document nor pure fantasy, but rather a synthesis of observation and imagination, where the specific topography of the Golden Horn becomes a vehicle for exploring universal themes of beauty, tranquillity, and cultural encounter. The painting stands as a testament to Ziem's unique achievement: the creation of a visual language that could capture not merely what he saw in the moment, but what lingered in his memory, the shimmering, transient magic of places where light, water and history converge.

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