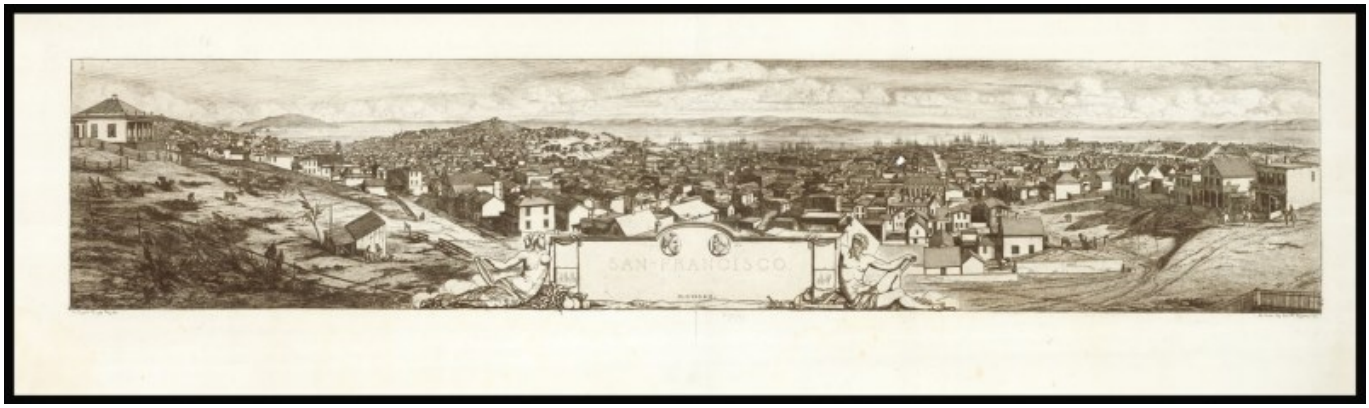


Engraving, sheet 335 by 1150 mm, image 182 by 950 mm.

A FRENCHMAN’S VIEW OF SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco

Author
MERYON, Charles

Publication date
1856.

Publisher
A. Delatre Imp. Rue Poissoniere 149,

Publication place
[Paris],

Physical description
Engraving, sheet 335 by 1150 mm, image 182 by 950 mm.

Dimensions
335 by 1150mm. (13.25 by 45.25 inches).

Notes
A fine and exceptionally detailed view of San Francisco. The city was a point of interest in Europe after the gold rush of 1848, as people from within America and abroad rushed to California to seek their fortune. The population grew rapidly, forcing the city to expand haphazardly with narrow streets that survive to this day. The large title cartouche is supported by river gods who appear to be holding sieves, a reference to the activity that was making the city rich.

Meryon, 1821-1868, was a French printmaker best known for etchings that romantically depict the life and mood of mid-19th-century Paris. He was commissioned by the prominent French banker François Louis Alfred Pioche to create this large-scale panoramic view of San Francisco. Pioche had made his fortune in San Francisco, but was back in Paris seeking investors for his rapidly growing American business interests. Since Meryon had never visited San Francisco, he based his etching on an anonymous 5-daguerreotype panorama of the city (a copy of which survives in the Art Institute of Chicago).

Meryon depicts San Francisco just as Pioche would have wanted him to – a bustling yet still growing

metropolis, rife with opportunity for the investor. There is almost empty farmland in the foreground, followed by a jam-packed cityscape, and ending with a busy port-scene densely populated with cargo ships. The symbols of California's wealth, gold mining equipment and a cornucopia of fruits and vegetables, surround the river gods, reaffirming the idea of economic promise. Inside the title cartouche are 2 portrait medallions – one of Alfred Pioche and the other of his business partner, Jules-Barthélémy Bayerque.

Méryon is clearly a master of etching, often striking in his originality and modernity. Sadly yet typically, he was appreciated by only a few of his contemporary artists and critics, such as the Goncourt brothers, Victor Hugo and Baudelaire. During his lifetime however, Meryon's prints sold for almost nothing. His life was one of great disappointments and terrible hardships; he became subject to depression and hallucinations, and, shortly after the completion of his famous Paris series, he was committed to the Charenton asylum at Saint-Maurice, where he died in 1868.

Bibliography
Schneiderman 54, state III (Delteil IV).

Provenance

Price: £6000

Inventory reference: 12543

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