



Claude Monet

(1840-1926)

**Fishing Boats
on the Beach at Etretat**

(Bateaux de pêche et Porte d'Aval)

1883/1884

*signed and dated bottom right:
"Claude Monet 1884"*

Oil on canvas

h 73.5 cm x b 100.5 cm

WRM 3120





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Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Brief Report

This coastal landscape in Normandy with a view of the natural rock arch of Aval is said to have been one of four pictures painted by Monet from his window in an annex of the Hotel Blanquet, where he was staying while in Étretat [Wildenstein 1979, cat. nos. 821-824]. However to judge by all the observations of the painting technique, it could just as well have been painted immediately in situ. This latter view is supported by the terseness of the drawn composition planning and the wet-in-wet paint applications with many places where the ground has been left visible, which all point to rapid execution (figs. 7-9). Another pointer to a plein air execution is the obviously unintentional damage to the still wet paint layer on the left of the picture (fig. 12). Monet chose a pre-primed canvas which has a second, yellow-tinted ground layer confined to the area covered by the picture (fig. 6). Monet integrated both the colour of this second ground and the still visible texture of the canvas into the composition. Thus the cream-coloured ground can be seen not only in the many areas which were left unpainted, but also in the many other places where the brush-strokes only grazed the high points of the weave (fig. 8). Monet used these to lay in most of the forms and motifs before moving on to more copious applications of paint, which he continued to execute briskly.

The generally restricted palette which Monet used for this painting, includes, interestingly enough, a black pigment (fig. 11). The brushwork varies according to the shape and the motif. Conspicuous are the often sickle-shaped, and sometimes spiral, almost somersaulting brushstrokes, with which he effectively depicts the waves of the sea (fig. 9). The open technique with paint applications ranging from the thin and semi-transparent via opaque to impasto lend this painting overall a sketch-like character. The signature in the bottom right-hand corner was evidently added by Monet later in violet paint, which was not used anywhere else in the picture (fig. 5). Wildenstein judges Monet's dating to 1884 as erroneous, and believes it to be part of a group painted in January 1883. It is interesting to note that there is a pencil sketch for this painting in one of Monet's sketchbooks (Musée Marmottan, 5131, fol. 25 r.); it is followed by a sketch (5131, fol. 26 v.) which served as the basis for a painting dating from 1884 [Wildenstein 1979, cat. no. 908, La falaise d'Aval, avec la Porte et l'Aiguille].



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Picture support canvas

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Standard format | P 40 horizontal (73.0 x 100.0 cm) |
| Weave | tabby weave |
| Canvas characteristics | vertical 13, horizontal 17 threads per cm; thread thickness 0.3-0.5 mm vertically/0.5-0.8 mm horizontally; irregularities in the threads which are also apparent in the ground recto; quality of the weave impaired by numerous bundles of fibre standing proud of the surface and not integrated into the structure |
| Stretching | authentic; nail fastenings at regular intervals of 6.5-7.0 cm, stretching parallel to threads and the even cut of the foldover edge suggest the work was carried out professionally |
| Stretcher/strainer | original stretcher with cross-bars |
| Stretcher/strainer depth | 2.3 cm |
| Traces left by manufacture/processing | the joints of the cross-bars with the sides take the form not, as is more frequent, of a mortise-and-tenon, but of a cross-lap |
| Manufacturer's/dealer's marks | none present |



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Ground

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Sizing | present |
| Colour | 1. off-white 2. cream (tinted yellow), (fig. 6) |
| Application | the first greyish-white layer extends to the outer edges of the fold-over and seems to have been applied when a larger length of canvas was pre-primed at the factory; the second, cream, ground covers only the area occupied by the painting; it is not clear whether this second ground was applied by Monet himself or his colour merchant |
| Binding medium | presumably oil; this can be assumed to be the main medium in particular for the cream ground |
| Texture | no trace of any application tool in the first layer, which seems brittle and to have a low proportion of oil; the second layer, markedly thicker and with a higher proportion of binding agent, shows traces of having been applied with a brush app. 5.0 cm broad |

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Medium/technique | microscopic black particles of various sizes below and within the paint applications suggest the use of charcoal (fig. 7); the paucity of material traces means that there are no findings from IR reflectography |
| Extent/character | short strokes over the whole surface of the picture in agreement with the forms of the painted depiction (fig. 7); the accumulation of black particles on the high points of the primed canvas suggests little pressure was applied when the drawing was made; in general very terse underdrawing with few lines or marker points; contemporary eye-witnesses describe Monet's technique as a brisk charcoal lay-in on the primed canvas, but hitherto this had not been demonstrated for any painting by him dating from after 1875 [House 1986, p. 66] |
| Pentimenti | the perspective of the rock arch is slightly different from the underdrawing (fig. 10) |



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Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

paint applied wet-in-wet throughout; in many places the cream ground is visible through the paint, or has been left unpainted; a particular effect is achieved by the almost dry brush-strokes which have left paint only on the high points of the primed canvas and should be assigned, in a varying blend of grey, blue and violet shades, to the first lay-in of the composition (fig. 8); paints, some thin and some spread out to the point of semi-transparency (e.g. in the sky) contrast with thick and in some places impasto applications (waves) (fig. 9); the brushwork is visible throughout, often underlining the shape of the motif (e.g. the curves of the strokes used for the depiction of the waves); the open painting technique, and the way the strokes were applied in the shaping of individual motifs and shapes, give the impression that the picture was painted rapidly

Painting tools

brushes of breadths from 0.3 cm (e.g. dark strokes on the straw roof of the hut in front) and 1.0 cm (foreground, beach), the dominant brushstroke width being app. 0.5 cm (waves, boats); numerous brush hairs embedded in the paint-layer

Surface structure

characterized by the reliefs of impasto brush structures in the environment of largely smooth paint applications; to all appearances intentional emphasis of the canvas structure through semi-dry brush-strokes (fig. 3)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, yellow, reddish-brown, pale red, intense red (lake?), intense pale green, dark bluish-green, medium blue, violet (signature only), black (fig. 11)
Vis spectrometry: iron-oxide red(?), vermillion, rose madder, viridian, copper-based green, cobalt blue, cobalt violet

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

varnished, not authentic



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Signature/Mark

When? after the paint layer had dried (fig. 5)

Autograph signature in violet paint applied with a brush

Serial –

Frame

Authenticity not determined, in all probability not original

State of preservation

Unlined, inner edges of the stretcher are marked by cracks in the paint layer and ground, craquelure especially in applications of paint with a high proportion of white; remains of yellowed varnish in the cracks of impasto applications.

Additional remarks

On the left-hand side of the picture there is a scratch-like abrasion in the paint-layer due to unintentional contact with an object during the painting process or to handling of the painting (fig. 12).



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Literature

- Wildenstein 1979: Daniel Wildenstein, Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné, vol. II (1882-1887), Paris/Lausanne, p. 102, 103 (ill.)
- Wildenstein 1991: Daniel Wildenstein, Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné, vol. V, Paris/Lausanne, p. 100, D 260
- Wallraf-Richartz-Museum Köln, Vollständiges Verzeichnis der Gemäldesammlung, edited by Christian Hesse and Martina Schlagenhauser, Cologne/Milan 1986, p. 63 (fig. 740)
- House 1986: John House, Monet. Nature into art, New Haven/London 1986, p. 66

Source of illustrations

All illustrations and figures Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud

Examination methods used

- | | |
|--|--|
| ✓ Incident light | ✓ VIS spectrometry |
| ✓ Raking light | – Wood identification |
| – Reflected light | – FTIR (Fourier transform spectroscopy) |
| ✓ Transmitted light | – EDX (Energy Dispersive X-ray analysis) |
| ✓ Ultraviolet fluorescence | – Microchemical analysis |
| ✓ Infrared reflectography | |
| – False-colour infrared reflectography | |
| – X-ray | |
| ✓ Stereomicroscopy | |

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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso





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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light





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Fig. 5
Detail, signature

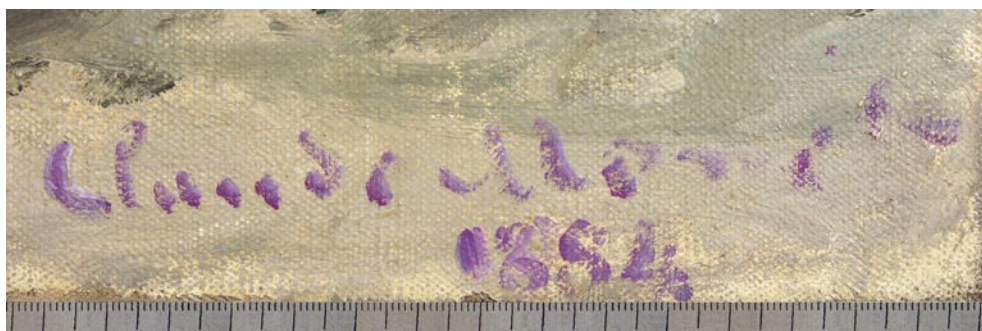


Fig. 6
Two-layer ground, visible
brushwork in the upper,
cream-coloured layer,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



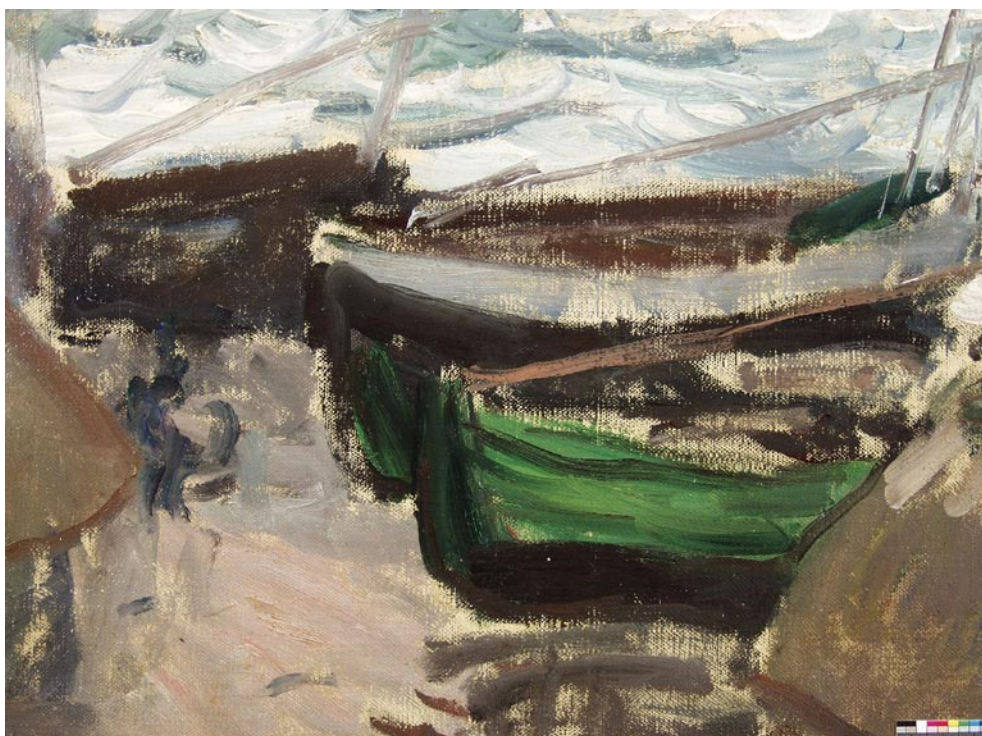


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Fig. 7
Sparse underdrawing
in charcoal, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm),
with mapping of the
stereo-microscopic
findings



Fig. 8
Detail, open painting
technique, visibly
integrating the cream-
coloured ground





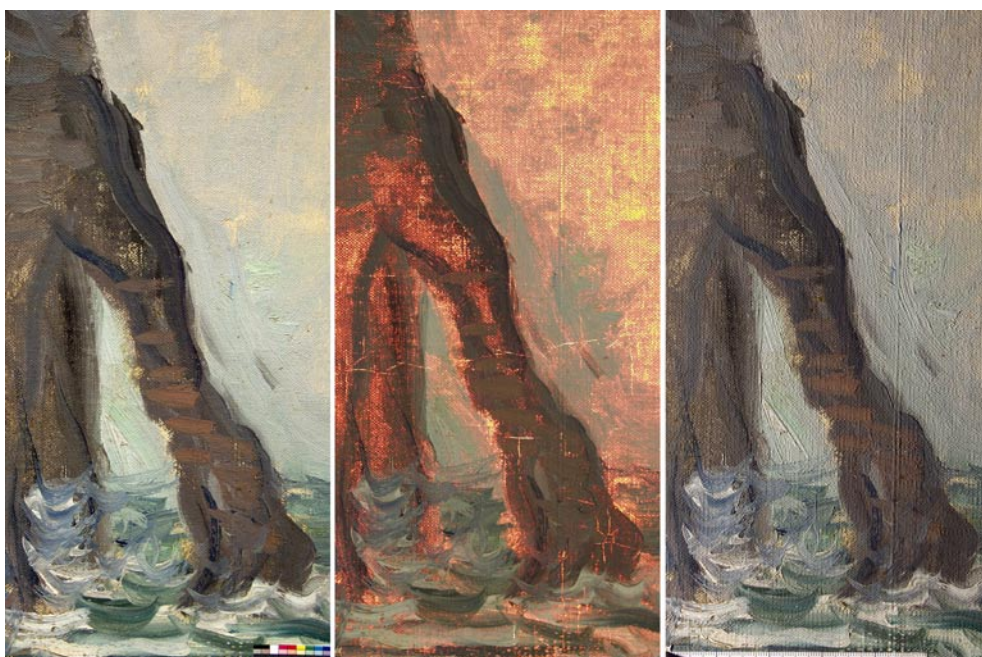
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Fig. 9
Detail, spiral
somersaulting brush-
strokes in the region
of the sea



Fig. 10
Details, pentimento in
the rock arch in incident
light, transmitted light
and raking light





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Fig. 11
Wet-in-wet paint
application with black
pigment, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 12
Detail, unintentional
damage to what was still
the wet paint on the left-
hand edge of the picture