



### Claude Monet

(1840-1926)

### Houses in Falaise, Fog (Maisons à Falaise, brouillard)

1885

*signature stamp bottom right:  
"Claude Monet"*

*undated*

*Oil on canvas*

*h 73.5 cm x b 92.5 cm*

*WRM Dep. FC 673*





## Brief Report

The painting is one of a group of works which Monet painted in the winter of 1885 showing the Val de Falaise, to be precise the Vallon des Vaux Vailly near Giverny. Shrouded in fog to the right of the centre of the picture, a farmhouse near the hamlet of Falaise can just be made out. Monet seems to have chosen his standpoint in the middle of the valley between the hills overlooking the River Epte [Wildenstein 1979, p. 156]. According to the stamp verso, Monet acquired the standard F30-size canvas, which was pre-primed in off-white, from the artists' supplies dealer Vieille & Troigros (fig. 2). An interesting feature of this commercial priming is the presence of countless microscopically small holes, which continue into the paint layers (fig. 6). This may point to inadequate moistening as a result of the sizing not having been worked in properly, for example its having been applied too quickly. In spite of the fact that the canvas is almost entirely covered with paint containing a high proportion of white, it is still possible, using stereomicroscopy and infra-red reflectography, to follow Monet's steps when planning the picture, right down to the compositional sketch.

A few strokes, probably in charcoal, were enough for the artist to capture the fleeting motif in the fog as the first step in his planning [Abb. 8]. Monet's contemporaries described precisely this working technique, but hitherto it has not been demonstrated on any post-1875 pictures [House 1986, p. 66]. The paint was subsequently applied with rapid, mostly broad, diagonal brushstrokes over wide areas [figs 4, 10, 11]. The paints were applied wet in wet, and the motif seems to have been captured in a single session. The painting was evidently not completed, which may have been because the weather conditions did not return. The picture was not signed in the artist's lifetime. Only as part of the estate was the work, which was in the possession of Michel Monet, given its obtrusively dominant signature stamp (fig. 7).



## Picture support canvas

Standard format	F30 (92.0 x 73.0 cm) horizontal
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 24, horizontal 19 threads per cm; fine weave with, in places, major irregularities in the quality and thickness of the yarn; the horizontal threads are much thinner than the vertical: thickness of yarn varies from 0.2-0.3 mm (vertical), 0.5-0.7 mm (horizontal); Z-twist
Stretching	not authentic; original stretching was changed, using the same tacks and very largely the same holes (fig. 6); the distance between the tacks is very regular at about 5.5-6.5 cm; in addition individual holes or pairs of holes on all four sides point to a temporary stretching which was presumably in the context of the first stretching
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with centre bar, authentic
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	on the front, chamfered towards the picture surface, by about 3 mm; on the reverse all the outside edges are likewise chamfered by about 5 mm over a breadth of about 2 cm; scratches to mark the position of the grooves for the wedges
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	black stencil verso on the right-hand half of the canvas, inscribed in an outline the shape of a palette: "H. VIEILLE E. TROISGROS Succ./35 RUE DE LAVAL 35/PARIS/COULEURS FINES/TOILES PANNEAUX", perpendicular to the orientation of the picture, measuring max. h 5.5 x b 8.5 cm (fig. 2)



## Ground

Sizing	present, presumably glutin size; a conspicuous feature is the presence of microscopically small holes in the sizing, due to burst bubbles; because of inadequate sizing, these holes continue into the ground and the paint layer (fig. 6)
Colour	off-white
Application	primed prior to cutting-to-size and stretching, presumably a single layer, no discernible utensil marks
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	very even, homogeneous and thin layer; microscopic inspection reveals a transparent-looking filler, fine black and larger white (lead white?) particles are discernible (fig. 6)

## Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	black charcoal(?), microscopic inspection reveals the size and shape of the particles to be very irregular (fig. 9)
Extent/character	very sparing, sketchy indication of a few lines showing the shape of the most important elements in the middle of the picture; the high proportion of white in the paints muddies the results of the IR reflectogram, which can in consequence only be represented diffusely (fig. 8); in addition, the evidently unbound charcoal was mixed into the wet paint layer when the latter was applied over virtually the whole area of the canvas, and thus looks smeary under the microscope (fig. 9)
Pentimenti	possibly the shape of the hill on the left-hand side of the picture was corrected, on the IR reflectogram a line about 5.0 cm above the area subsequently executed in paint is dimly discernible



## Paint layer

### Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

after the drawn sketch of the composition Monet evidently worked from top to bottom into the foreground; the paint application was wet-in-wet throughout and was presumably completed in a single working session; all the areas of the picture, from the sky via the hills and buildings down into the foreground are very thin and spread out; in a very few places only, the pale ground is visible where no paint was applied (fig. 10); the brushwork is predominantly diagonal, often zigzag or with crossed strokes, in order to fill up the spaces quickly, as is particularly clear in transmitted light (figs. 4, 8, 11)

### Painting tools

flat-ferrule brushes of various breadths; the breadth of the strokes is mostly between 1.5 and 2.0 cm, with individual narrower strokes of 0.5 cm (figs. 10, 11)

### Surface structure

even while the paint was applied thinly, the brushwork is easy to follow; presumably the paint was very stiff as a result of the high proportion of white, and because Monet possibly did without any thinner; there are a small number of impasto areas in the foreground in the pink regions and also in the gables of the house (figs. 10, 11)

### Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, yellow, yellow-ochre, pale red (fig. 12), dark red lake, two different blues, dark green  
VIS spectrometry: because of the high proportion of white and the imprecision to be expected as a result, no VIS spectrometry measurements were carried out

### Binding mediums

presumably oil

## Surface finish

### Authenticity/Condition

varnished, not authentic



## Signature/Mark

When?	signature stamp recto 'Claude Monet' bottom right in black, very dominant paint (fig. 7)
Autograph signature	–
Serial	the writing corresponds to one of three known signature stamps used for Monet's works [David 2006]

## Frame

Authenticity	not authentic
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## State of preservation

In the top left-hand corner there is a tear about 5.5 cm long in the turnover edge behind the tacking; slight wavy or convex deformations of the fabric in the top right-hand third of the picture along the edge, in the bottom left-hand corner and to the right of the centre of the picture (fig. 3); adhesion between the ground and the canvas is partially weakened by the numerous small holes discernible in the sizing; some abrasions of the paint-layer resulting from earlier cleaning measures; craquelure only marked in a few areas of the paint-layer; individual places where elevated strongly impasto parts of the paint-layer are slightly squashed; curious remains visible in incident light of neon-coloured retouching around the signature stamp, visible under the microscope.

## Additional remarks

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## Literature

- Budde/Schaefer 2001: Rainer Budde, Barbara Schaefer, *Miracle de la couleur*, exhib. cat. Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne, 8 September - 9 December 2001, Cologne 2001, cat. no. 116, p. 264, with ill.
- David 2006: Jeanne-Marie David, *De la naissance d'un nom à l'évidence d'un style. Une étude de la signature de Claude Monet (1840-1926)*, Mémoire de recherche appliquée, Paris 2006, unpubl. thesis, École du Louvre, Paris
- House 1986: John House, *Monet. Nature into art*, New Haven/London 1986, p. 66
- Wildenstein 1974: Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet. Biographie et catalogue raisonné*, vol. II, 1979, cat. no. 977, pp. 156f. with ill.
- Wildenstein 1996: Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet oder der Triumph des Impressionismus. Catalogue Raisonné*, Cologne 1996, vol. II, cat. no. 977, p. 367, with ill.

## 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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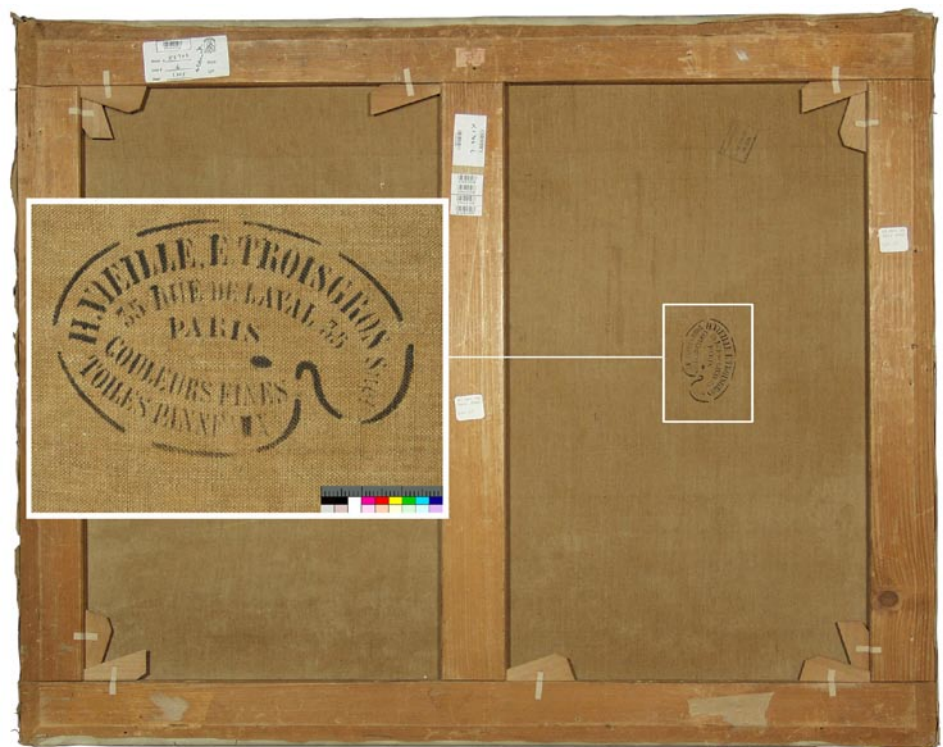


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Fig. 1  
Recto



Fig. 2  
Verso, with dealer's mark







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Fig. 3  
Raking light



Fig. 4  
Transmitted light







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Fig. 5  
UV fluorescence

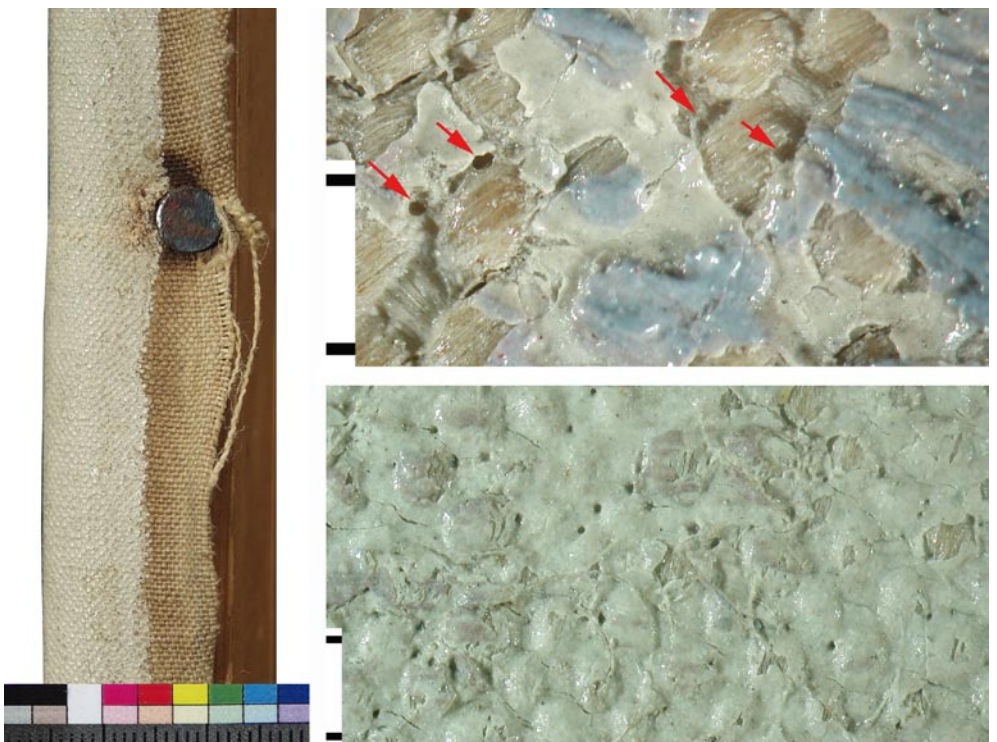


Fig. 6  
Details, right-hand turnover edge showing edge of ground, holes due to burst bubbles from the sizing of the canvas, continue into the ground and paint-layer, microscopic photographs (M = 1 mm)





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Fig. 7  
Details, signature stamp  
in incident light (top)  
and under UV (bottom),  
microscopic photograph  
(top right, M = 1 mm)

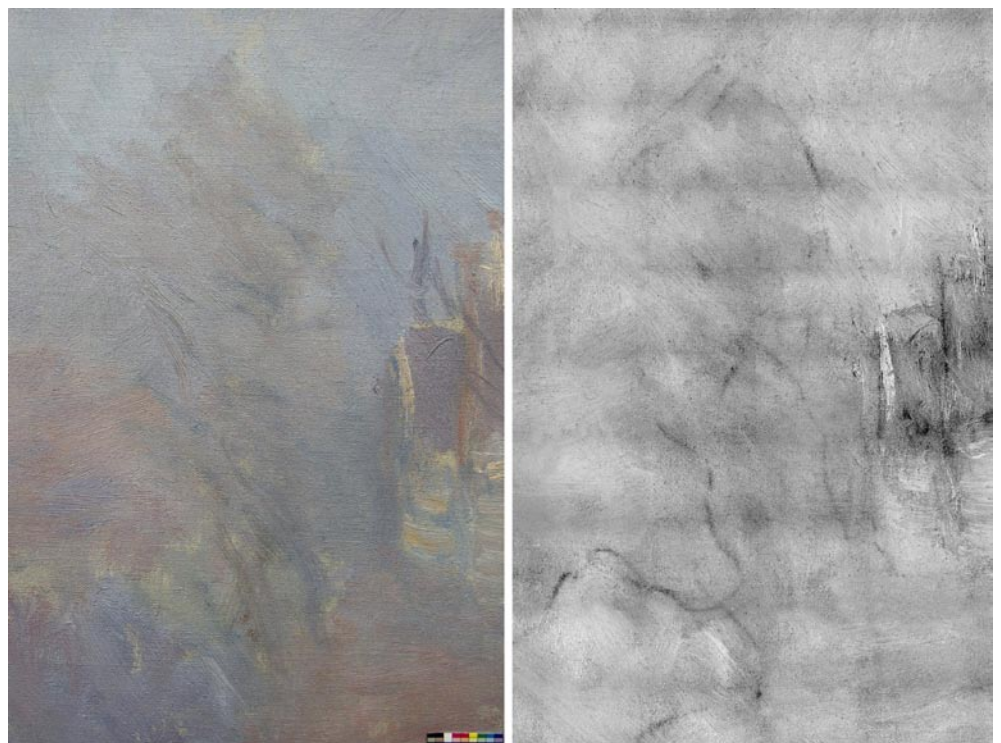


Fig. 8  
Details, sketch-like  
underdrawing in  
charcoal(?); detail in  
incident light (left);  
in the IR reflectogram  
(right) loose strokes of  
the drawn lay-in are  
visible





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Fig. 9  
Charcoal(?) particles of  
the underdrawing mixed  
into the paint-layer as  
smears, microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)

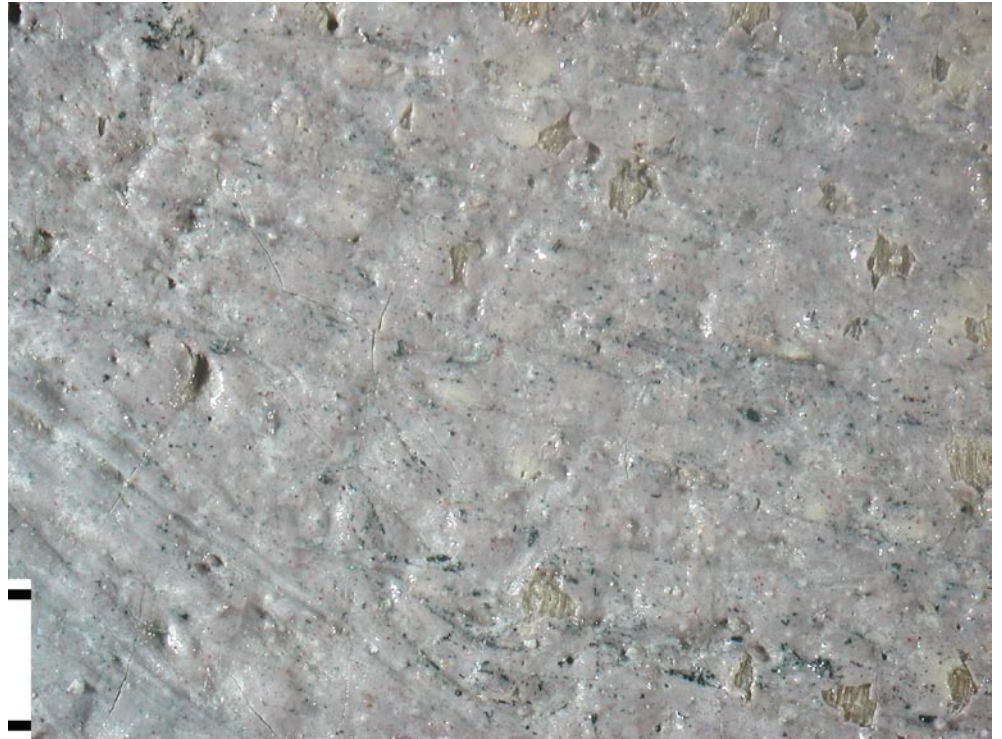


Fig. 10  
Detail, unpainted area,  
leaving the pale ground  
visible







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Fig. 11  
Detail, large-area zigzag  
brushstrokes with  
embedded hairs from  
the brush



Fig. 12  
Colour blend with pale  
red smear, presumably  
vermilion(?), microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)

