



**Camille Pissarro**

(1830-1903)

**L'Hermitage near Pontoise**

(L'Hermitage à Pontoise)

1867

*signed and dated bottom right:  
"C. Pissarro. 1867"*

*Oil on canvas*

*h 91.0 cm x b 150.5 cm*

*WRM 3119*





## Brief Report

Pissarro's large-scale painting *L'Hermitage near Pontoise* is among his early masterpieces and belongs to a group of pictures intended for the Paris Salon exhibition of 1868. It cannot be ascertained with certainty, however, whether this painting was in fact exhibited there [Tinterow/Loyrette 1994, p. 446; Pissarro/Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005, Vol. II, no. 119, p. 111]. In about 1930 the picture was purchased by Ambroise Vollard from Pissarro's son, Georges Manzana-Pissarro, and it is perhaps in connexion with this purchase that the lining of the stable, twill-weave canvas is to be understood. Even with the unaided eye, and strikingly so under raking light, it is evident that the robust canvas had already been painted on when Pissarro started the depiction of the manor house we see here. This is evidenced by surface structures deviating from the visible composition, which have to be assigned to the underlying painting (figs. 3, 7). The X-ray picture reveals a totally different scene with broad fields, a higher horizon and a bridge in the foreground (Abb. 4). A picture by Pissarro with a very similar motif to this latter is in the possession of the Musée d'Orsay, and titled *The Route d'Ennery near Pontoise*, which is dated seven years later. It is true that this latter painting is much smaller, and the beholder's standpoint is not the same, but the depiction of the same hilly landscape in a neighbouring valley is unmistakable (fig. 14).

The reason why Pissarro rejected this first motif is unclear, and may be linked to his financial situation at the time. Without adding a separating layer, he very carefully overpainted the first motif with the scene we see today. It is impossible to say how much time elapsed between the first painting and the present one. It is striking, though, that very few early shrinkage cracks developed, and these, together with occasional unpainted areas in the new picture, provide valuable evidence regarding the coloration of the rejected composition: the dominant tones were a bright pale blue in the sky, green, dull yellowish-green and ochre in the foreground and blackish-grey along the horizon (figs. 11, 12). When depicting the visible *L'Hermitage near Pontoise*, the artist used brushes and spatula or palette knife alternately. Pissarro thus modelled the surface of the impasto paint in a very discriminating fashion and almost sculpturally (figs. 7, 8). Even though individual paint applications blend into each other wet-in-wet, dry phases can be established beyond doubt, so that we may presume that Pissarro painted the picture in a number of sessions (figs. 9, 10). Two fingerprints in the peripheral region of the grey sky are presumably the artist's own, additionally manifesting his presence in the painting (fig. 13). The autograph signature and date were executed wet on dry after the painting was complete (fig. 6).



## Picture support canvas

Standard format	not a standard size
Weave	twill weave (herringbone or pointed twill?) (figs. 4, 5)
Canvas characteristics	vertical 16, horizontal 19 threads per cm; the zigzag pattern or alternation in rib direction can be seen in the X-ray picture (fig. 4); the repeat consists of at least three warp or weft threads, each vertical thread lying over two horizontal yarns and then beneath a further horizontal thread; a medium-thick canvas with a yarn thickness of 0.3-0.6 mm; Z-twist (fig. 5)
Stretching	not original; foldover edge can only be seen at the top, here it is cut back to a breadth of 1.5 cm; in the X-ray very irregular stretchmarks can be seen along the bottom edge (fig. 4); the present stretching accompanied a lining measure undertaken before 1930 (datable label and inscriptions on the first adhesive tape securing the foldover)
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with cross-bars: three vertical and one (central) horizontal; authenticity undetermined, old nails visible in the X-ray picture point however to re-use (fig. 4)
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	the joints of the central cross with the sides take the form not, as is more frequent, of a mortise-and-tenon, but of a cross-lap; the vertical bars left and right make mortise-and-tenon joints with the sides, possibly these are of later date (fig. 2)
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	not determined (canvas is lined, large areas of stretcher covered by adhesive tape)



## Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	undetermined
Application	presence of a ground is dubious; there are several peripheral areas where the canvas is visible, but the foldover edge is stuck down with adhesive tape and the peripheral areas have been muddied by subsequent extent retouching measures; it must remain open whether the canvas was manually primed on the area where the picture was actually to be painted (with peripheral losses or unprimed areas), or was left totally unprimed; the X-ray is dominated by absorption of the paint applications, so that it too permits no conclusion as to priming
Binding medium	undetermined
Texture	undetermined

## Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	not ascertainable; thick closed paint layers do not allow the use of stereomicroscopic observation or IR reflectography to draw any conclusions about the existence of a drawn or painted composition lay-in; this is true both of the visible picture and of the rejected painting
Extent/character	–
Pentimenti	the head of the man in the left foreground was possibly originally further to the left (fig. 9)



## Paint layer

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

1. first painting (depiction of the valley along the Route d'Ennery, figs. 4, 11, 12; cf. fig. 14): statements are only possible by interpretation of the X-ray photo, raking-light examination, and stereomicroscopic observation through early shrinkage cracks or along the edges of unpainted areas (no samples of the paint layer were taken); the motif can be identified beyond doubt by comparison with the painting in the collection of the Musée d'Orsay; conspicuous sharp edges visible in the surface structure lead to the conclusion that Pissarro was using a spatula even for this rejected first lay-in; it is not certain how far he progressed with it, but the X-ray suggests the picture was well advanced; there is no evidence of any final coating

2. second painting (depiction of *L'Hermitage near Pontoise*, the painting now visible, fig. 1): Pissarro used first a spatula to spread the viscous paint, and then used flat-ferrule brushes, as well as the spatula again, to structure it (figs. 7, 8); alternating paint application from top to bottom: first he laid in the sky, and then proceeded to the details of the landscape before returning to the sky and then revising various parts of the picture (e.g. group of trees on the right); paint application both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry (figs. 9, 10)

### Painting tools

Palette-knife or spatula and flat-ferrule brushes ranging in breadth from 0.5 cm to 1.5 cm (fig. 8)

### Surface structure

characteristic texture of the twill-weave canvas is only partly visible in the peripheral regions; dominant are the ubiquitous traces of the painting tools (brushes, palette knife/spatula) of the visible painting; covered-over structures of the rejected painting are likewise easily discernible, above all because of the diagonal sharp edges in the region of the group of buildings (fig. 7); microscopic observation reveals the structure of the paint to be very heterogeneous with particles of different sizes

### Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals (in the visible painting): white, yellow, two reds, medium green, dark blue, dark brown, black; (in the rejected painting): ochre, bright pale blue, green, dull yellowish-green, blackish-grey  
VIS spectrometry (in the visible painting): iron-oxide red, vermilion(?), copper-based blue(?), Prussian blue(?), chrome green (= chrome yellow + Prussian blue); (in the rejected painting): Prussian blue(?)

### Binding mediums

presumably oil



### Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition	varnished, not authentic
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### Signature/Mark

When?	following completion of the painting (but not long after, as early shrinkage cracks affect both the signature and the underlying paint layer) wet-on-dry in dark-brown paint (reddish-brown, black and white pigment particles discernible) applied with a pointed brush (fig. 6)
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Autograph signature	corresponds with Pissarro's known signatures of the 1860s and 70s
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Serial	–
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### Frame

Authenticity	undetermined; it is a historical carved frame with Renaissance ornamentation, whose method of production and state of preservation suggest that the framing is either authentic or was done at a very early date
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### State of preservation

Lined at an early date; craquelure due to aging only serious in the sky, often only isolated cracks; extensive peripheral retouching, which in the bottom right-hand corner impinges on the date; frame extremely fragile.



### Additional remarks

Two fingerprints in the peripheral region of the sky at top left and top centre, left before the paint was fully dry, are presumably Pissarro's own (fig. 13).

This is the second use of the same canvas, see detailed description in summary above.

### Literature

- Bomford et al. 1990: David Bomford, Jo Kirby, John Leighton et al., *Art in the making. Impressionism*, London 1990, p. 158 with ill.
- Callen 1982: Anthea Callen, *Techniques of the Impressionists*, London 1982, p. 46, with numerous ill.
- Pissarro/Venturi 1939: Ludovic Rodo Pissarro, Lionello Venturi, *Camille Pissarro, son art, son œuvre*, Paris 1939, cat. no. 56, p. 85, with ill.
- Pissarro/Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005: Joachim Pissarro, Claire Durand-Ruel Snollaerts, *Pissarro, Critical Catalogue of Paintings*, Vol. II, no. 119, p. 111, with ill.
- Tinterow/Loyrette 1994: Gary Tinterow, Henri Loyrette, *Origins of Impressionism*, exhib. cat. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/ Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1994, p. 446, with ill.
- Wallraf-Richartz-Museum Cologne, *Von Stefan Lochner bis Paul Cézanne, 120 Meisterwerke der Gemäldesammlung*, Cologne 1986, p. 244, with ill.

### Source of illustrations

Fig. 14: Musée d'Orsay, ©Jean-Gilles Berizzi

All further 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, lined





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Fig. 3  
Raking light



Fig. 4  
X-ray







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Fig. 5  
Twill-weave canvas,  
microscopic photograph  
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 6  
Detail, signature  
with detail enlarged,  
microscopic photograph  
(M = 1 mm), arrows  
indicate early shrinkage  
cracking, which affects  
the paint layer including  
the signature



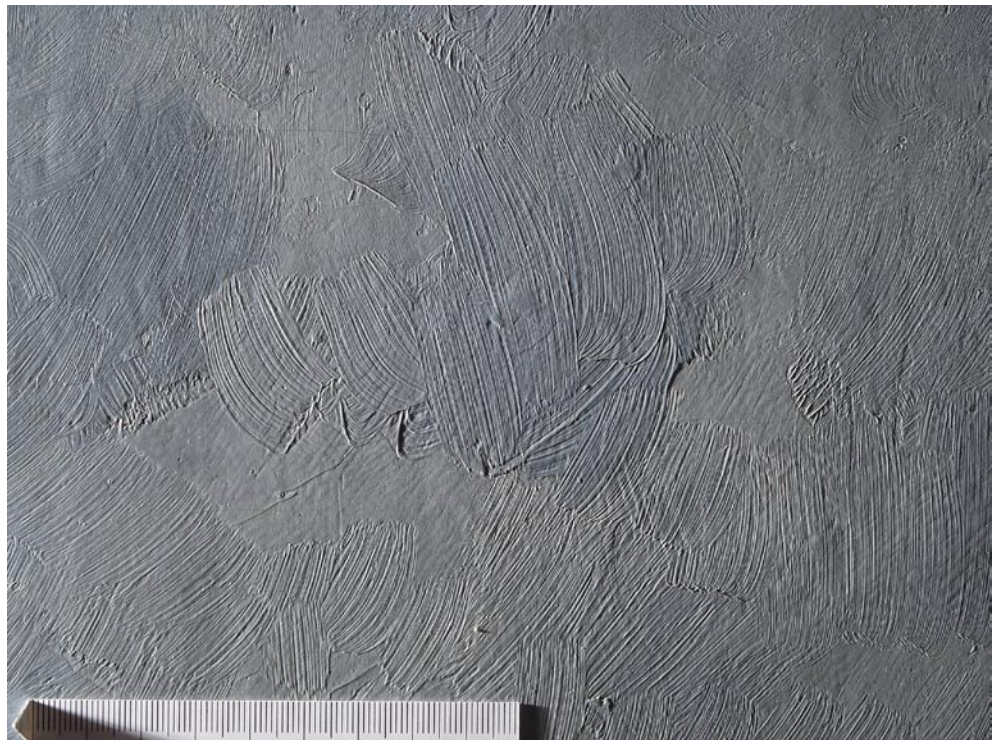


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Fig. 7  
Detail, virtuoso use  
of brush and spatula;  
underlying diagonal  
structures of the first,  
rejected, painting are  
discernible



Fig. 8  
Detail in raking light,  
traces of spatula and  
brush







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Fig. 9  
Detail of figure in left foreground, which was painted on an already dry paint layer



Fig. 10  
Example of wet-in-wet painting, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

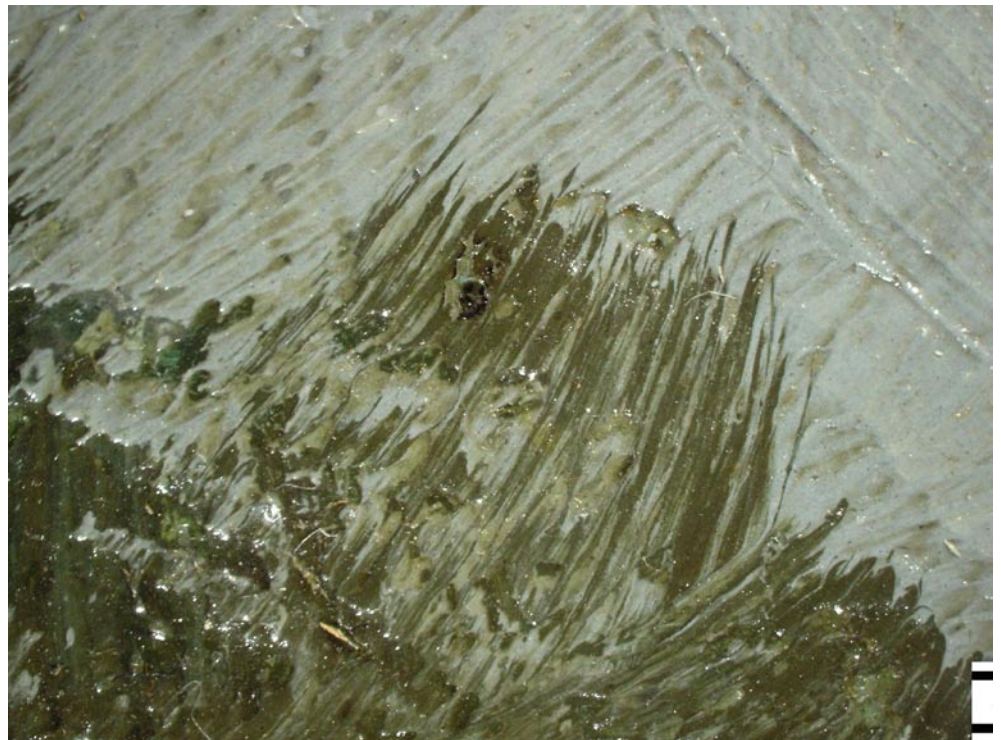






Fig. 11

Unpainted areas within the spatula-applied grey paint in the region of the sky; revealing the bright pale blue beneath, which belongs to the first painting, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

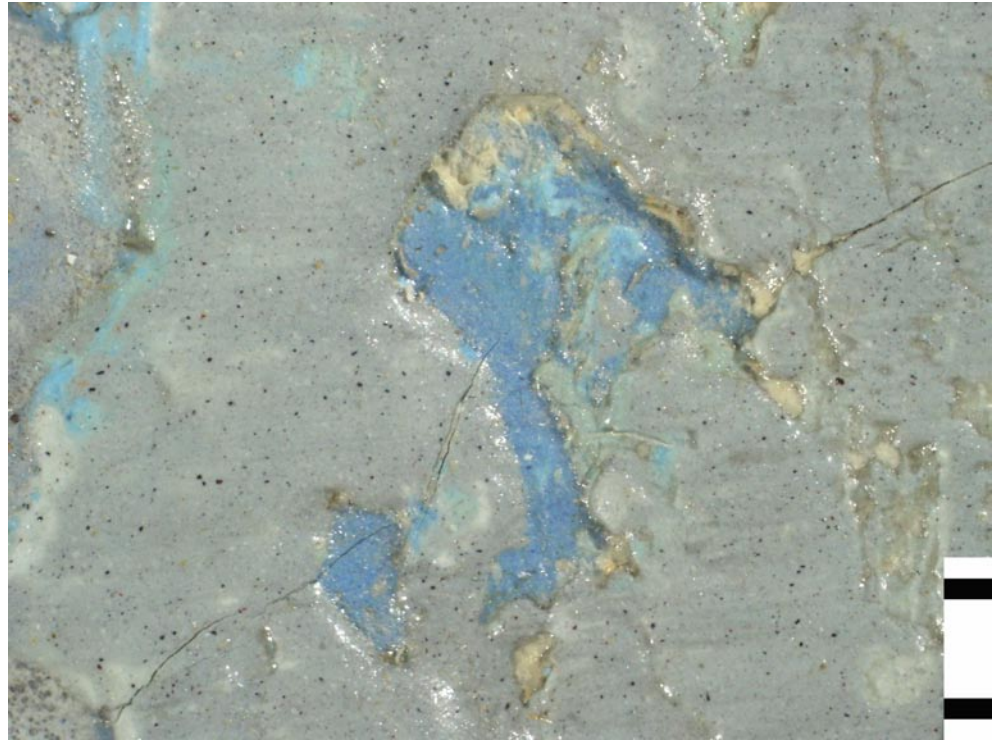
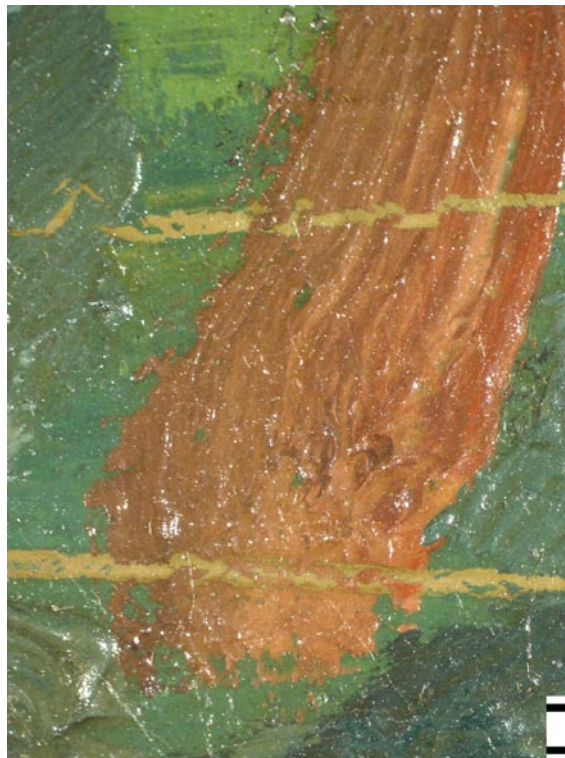


Fig. 12

Early shrinkage cracks in the visible painting, which reveal the ochre paint layer of the rejected painting (in the region of the hand of the man in the left foreground), microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)





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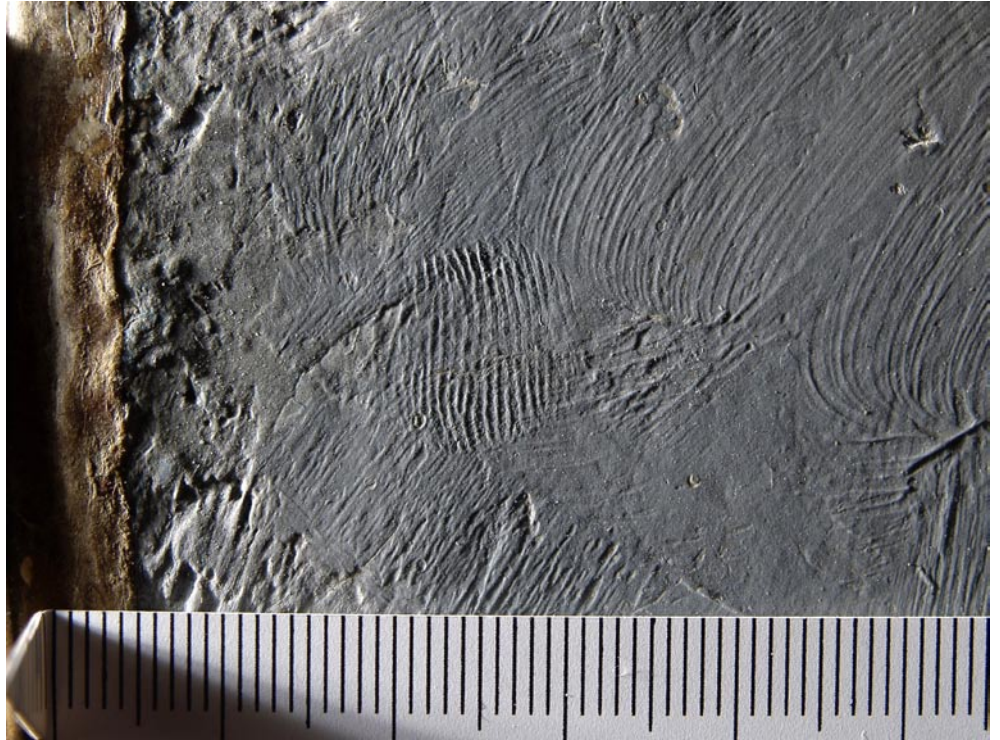


Fig. 13  
Detail in raking light,  
fingerprint of Pissarro  
(?) in the top left-hand  
corner



Fig. 14  
Camille Pissarro, *The  
Route d'Ennery near  
Pontoise*, 1874, h 55.0 x b  
92.0 cm, Musée d'Orsay,  
Paris; the composition is  
strikingly similar to that  
in the X-ray of the first  
compositional lay-in of  
the painting in Cologne