



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
(1841-1919)

Villeneuve-les-Avignon

1901

signed bottom right: "Renoir."

undated

Oil on canvas

h 33.0 cm x b 53.5 cm

WRM Dep. FC 791





Brief Report

In this small painting, Renoir gives us a view in cheerful colours of the little town of *Villeneuve-les-Avignon* in the south of France (figs 1, 7). The predominantly translucent and mostly wet-in-wet paint applications on a pale, presumably commercially pre-primed canvas give the painting a very soft, almost feathery appearance. The artist probably used hair brushes to apply the paints. This working method is to be seen time and again in Renoir's œuvre from shortly after 1875 already, and is also evident in the portrait of his son Jean, painted around 1900, and likewise in the possession of the Wallraf [WRM Dep. FC 680]. Numerous clues speak in favour of an authentic revision of the painting by the artist himself following an early lining. Thus on the peripheries there are extensive revisions which can be proved to have been carried out only after the lining procedure, namely by the fact that there are paint applications on top of an all-round paper covering stuck on in the course of the lining measure (figs 9, 10). The manner of the additions and the composition of the paint suggest that Renoir was responsible. Although the provenance of the present painting is unclear, and it is questionable whether it was ever in the possession of Durand-Ruel, Renoir's dealer from the 1880s onwards, the correspondence between the two men is nonetheless a revealing written source regarding the practice and background of early linings of Renoir's paintings. Thus on 27 November 1912 Durand-Ruel wrote to Renoir from Paris that "[...] canvases which I have collected from you are on stretchers.

In line with your advice, they have been lined *à l'italienne* [this presumably means the lining canvas was stuck with paste] and cropped to the extent that there is nothing to cover around the edge. Even so, there are gaps in the corners of some paintings. Albert André has told me that I should rub them with a coloured rag, as this would make your retouching easier, since you don't like working on an unprimed canvas. I would like to send you these two small paintings. You can inspect and sign them in two hours, as there is almost nothing to do." [Renoir 1995, vol. 2, p. 89]. We may therefore presume that Renoir painted this picture, like many others in the late 1890s, on pre-primed canvases cut from the roll [Renoir 1995, Renoir 1931, Burnstock et al. 2005, Renoir 1962]. Often indeed we find several independent studies on one piece of canvas [cf. Renoir 1931, plates 31, 69, 72, 87]. Lining, in these situations, evidently functioned as an aid to stretching, and to getting the painting into a state in which it could be exhibited or sold. Possibly in this case it was Durand-Ruel who had the work cropped, lined and stretched with a view to returning it to the artist for reworking the periphery, and maybe also the signature (figs 5, 9). A particularly conspicuous early-shrinkage craquelure, areas where the paint has been squashed, along with traces of paint that have pushed up through the network of cracks may all be evidence of this early intervention before the painting was completely dry (figs 11, 12).



Picture support canvas

Standard format	close to M10 (55.0 x 33.0 cm), horizontal (fig. 2)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	very fine weave, density and thickness of yarns undetermined, diagonal structure due to the dominance of the vertical yarns; presumably contemporary lining canvas: 19 threads each horizontal and vertical, thickness varies from 0.4-0.7 mm, Z-twist
Stretching	lining canvas tacked at intervals of app. 2.8-3.5 cm
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with vertical centre-bar, presumably the first, i.e. authentic, stretcher
Stretcher/strainer depth	1.8 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	recto and verso chamfering along the inner and outer edges
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	undetermined as canvas verso is not accessible to inspection, but unlikely



Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	off-white
Application	primed before stretching and cutting to size, probably one or two layers
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	thin even layer

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	none discernible
Extent/character	–
Pentimenti	none discernible; one pentimento in paint is dealt with in the following section (fig. 6)



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

it may be presumed that Renoir painted the picture to start with on a pre-primed, unstretched canvas; there are no traces of fastening although there are traces of an edge of an original paint-layer at a distance of 1–2 cm from the present edge of the picture all round (fig. 9); these first, predominantly semi-transparent paint applications blend wet-in-wet and suggest brisk work; unlike other Impressionist artists Renoir did not spurn the use of black entirely [Burnstock/ Van den Berg/ House 2005, p. 54], so it is not surprising that brushstrokes in black can be found in this painting too (fig. 8); after a lining measure possibly commissioned by the dealer Durand-Ruel, the painting was evidently revised by Renoir himself, as analyses of paints and binding agents using various techniques confirm that these are largely identical; the revision affected the peripheral region, presumably to cover areas where the ground was visible, but also in the interior of the painting the dark-green paint applications in the region of the trees seem to have been added later; a coloured *pentimento* in orange-pink hues centre-right shows through the semi-transparent paint applications, but does not allow any conclusions to be drawn regarding possible deviations from the final composition (fig. 6)

Painting tools

brushes, presumably hair

Surface structure

very smooth with few impasto areas; as a result of the lining, deformations are apparent in the picture support and the paint-layer (figs 3, 12)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale and dark yellow, pale red, dark red lake, dark green, blue, black;
VIS spectrometry: Naples yellow(?), iron-oxide yellow, iron-oxide red(?), viridian, cobalt blue
FTIR/EDX/microchemical analysis: lead white, zinc white, Naples yellow, ochre, cobalt blue, viridian

Binding mediums

oil (FTIR analysis)

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

not authentic; varnished, remains of older coats can be discerned under UV stimulation, e.g. in the region of the signature (fig. 5)



Signature/Mark

When?	signature bottom right (fig. 5); applied with a pointed brush on the dry paint-layer; signature was re-traced, first in a pale semi-transparent brown (still easy to see in the “R”), the remaining inscription was re-traced in thin black paint with a brush
Autograph signature	the signature accords with autograph signatures of Renoir dating from this period; the reinforcement is possibly connected with the lining and Renoir’s own revisions to the painting
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	not authentic
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State of preservation

Picture-support lined (original?); in this connexion there are isolated fine corrugations in the structure of the picture (fig. 3); a piece of evidence for fairly frequent lining measures is a warning comment in the correspondence between Renoir and Durand-Ruel, Paris, 24 March 1904, Renoir to Durand-Ruel, “[...]don’t line, it’s still too fresh.” [Renoir 1995, vol. 1, p. 222]; some regions with marked network of early shrinkage cracks bear evidence of retouching by another hand (fig. 4), further retouching in both top corners and in the middle of the picture; a few fine scratches (top edge, centre / foliage of left-hand tree); weak abrasion marks in places on the periphery.

Additional remarks

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Source of illustrations

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

Literature

- Budde/Schaefer 2001: Rainer Budde, Barbara Schaefer, *Miracle de la couleur* (exhib. cat. Cologne, Köln Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, 8 September - 9 December 2001), Cologne 2001, cat. no. 143, p. 320, with ill.
- Burnstock/van den Berg/House 2005: Aviva Burnstock, Klaas van den Berg, John House, *Painting techniques of Pierre-Auguste Renoir 1868-1919*, ArtMatters, Netherlands Technical Studies in Art, vol. 3, 2005, 47-65
- Renoir 1931: *L'Atelier de Renoir*, (ed. by Bernheim-Jeune, foreword Albert André), vol. 1, Paris 1931, plates 31, 69, 72, 87
- Renoir 1962: Jean Renoir, *Renoir, my Father*, Boston 1962
- Renoir 1995: *Correspondance de Renoir et Durand-Ruel (1881-1906)*, vol. 1, Lausanne 1995, p. 222 and *Correspondance de Renoir et Durand-Ruel (1907-1919)*, vol. 2, Lausanne 1995, p. 89

Examination methods used

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|--|--|
| ✓ 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 | |

Author of examination: Katja Lewerentz

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Author of brief report: Katja Lewerentz

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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso, lined





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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
UV fluorescence





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Fig. 5
Detail, signature in
incident light and under
UV stimulation (bottom),
later revision in black
paint is discernible
under the microscope
(arrows), microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 6
Detail, orange-pink
pentimento is visible
(arrows)



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Fig. 7
Detail, view of town



Fig. 8
Use of black, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)

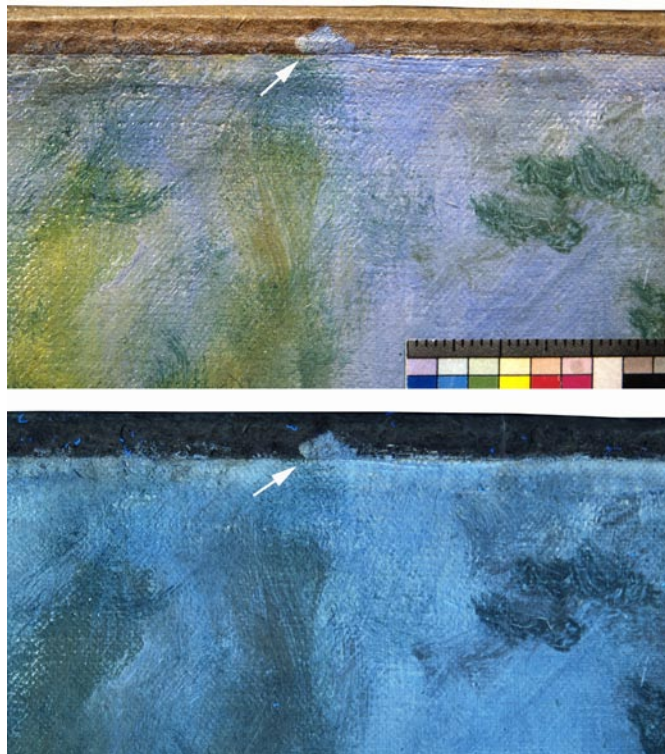


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Fig. 9
Detail, top edge,
shows original edge of
painting (arrows) with
subsequent revisions by
the artist



Fig. 10
Details, top edge in
incident light and under
UV stimulation (bottom);
the painted revision of
the peripheral regions
was carried out after the
canvas was lined and
the edges taped over
(arrows)



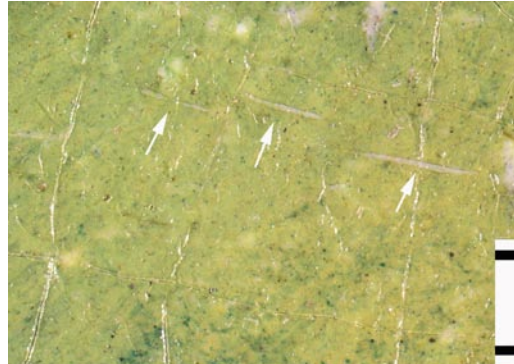


Fig. 11
Paint or ground which
has penetrated from
underlying layers
through the network of
early shrinkage cracks,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

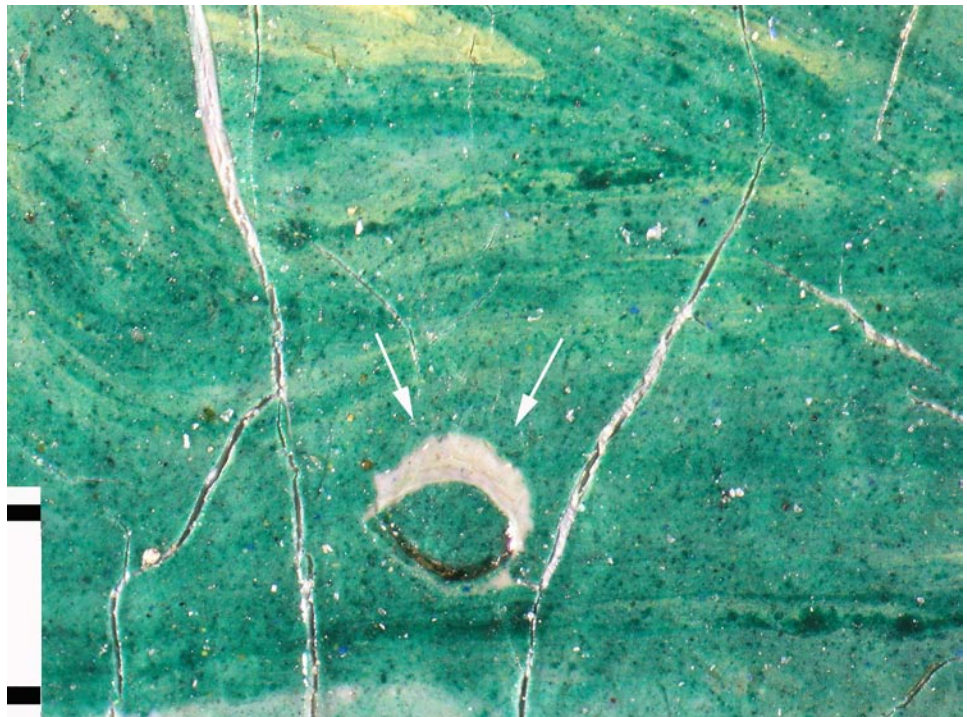


Fig. 12
In places, the lining
procedure squeezed, tore
open, or even shifted the
paint and ground layers
(arrows), microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)