



Paul Signac

(1863-1935)

The Seine at Courbevoie

La Seine à Courbevoie
(Paysage de rivière)

1883

*signed and dated bottom left:
"P. Signac / 83 / Neuilly"*

Oil on canvas

h 45.2 cm x b 81.7 cm

WRM Dep. FC 798





Brief Report

The picture of *The Seine at Courbevoie* was painted by Paul Signac at the age of just 20, while he was still entirely under the influence of the Impressionists (fig. 1). There are numerous testimonies to Signac's admiration for Monet, which is said to have inspired him to paint in the open air after visiting the Monet exhibition in the rooms of the art magazine "La Vie Moderne" in 1880. Three years later, when Signac sought to capture this Seine riverscape on canvas, he chose a loose weave in the study grade known as *pochade*. On the off-white ground he first drew vertical and horizontal lines, to mark the central axes of the picture, in reddish-brown pencil (figs 5, 6). Possibly these lines served to help him structure the landscape motif, which would indicate that the picture was painted on the spot. There are no other drawn compositional planning lines discernible. There may however be some, if he used a reddish-brown medium not accessible

to infra-red examination and then covered them with opaque paint. The existence of such a drawing is suggested by the fact that Signac painted large areas of individual regions while leaving out those places later occupied by some other motif, such as the boats. The detailed execution of individual motifs was often preceded by their being outlined in paint. The individual shapes are given expression with loosely applied brushstrokes of varying length. The paint was applied wet-in-wet throughout and the painting integrates the colour of the ground either through semi-transparent paint applications or by leaving the ground entirely free of paint (figs 8, 9). The final paint applications were designed to loosen up the boundaries between individual motifs or else to place pale impasto accents. We should imagine the original colours of the picture markedly cooler without the coats of varnish which have since yellowed considerably.



Picture support canvas

Standard format	possibly originally 25 Marine (81.0 x 54.0 cm)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical and horizontal 12-13 threads per cm; both Z-twist; thickness of yarn app. 0.6 mm, broad interstices of app. 2 mm, presumably a study-grade canvas of the then commercially standard <i>pochade</i> type (fig. 7)
Stretching	it is hardly possible to say anything about the original stretching, as much of the turnover edge has been lost all round, possibly also some of the picture surface, while the cut edges have been stuck down with paper (figs 4, 7, 11)
Stretcher/strainer	non-original softwood stretcher with cross-bars
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	stretcher chamfered verso towards the outer edges all round
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none present



Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	off-white (fig. 11)
Application	presumably single-layer ground of the <i>à grain</i> type; the lack of any turnover edge makes it impossible to determine beyond doubt whether the ground was applied before cutting-to-size and stretching; the even smoothness without discernible structure resulting from an application utensil suggests however that the canvas was industrially pre-primed
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	–

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	reddish-brown pencil (fig. 6)
Extent/character	division of the picture surface by means of vertical and horizontal central axis lines, varying in thickness from 1.0-4.0 mm (fig. 5); these lines seem to have served as an aid to capturing the motif in drawn/painted form; neither IR reflectography nor microscopy reveals any underdrawing of any motifs, however this cannot be ruled out
Pentimenti	–



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

loose, sketchy manner of painting; both semi-transparent and opaque paint applications allow the toned ground to show through in places, while in others the ground has been left unpainted (figs 8, 9); areas such as the water or the groups of trees to the left and right were to start with painted all over, before individual motifs and shapes were outlined in paint with a brush and then filled out with brushstrokes of varying length; the paint application was wet-in-wet, individual brushstrokes being juxtaposed or superimposed; colour blends were created both on the palette and through the wet-in-wet application; finally the boundaries between the forms and motifs were softened by individual brushstrokes and the last pale colour accents were added with increasing pastosity

Painting tools

brushes of various sizes

Surface structure

predominantly smooth, although individual paint applications with a high proportion of white stand out in relief (fig. 9)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: medium yellow, pale to medium red, red lake, medium green, medium blue, dark blue
Vis spectrometry: chrome yellow(?), cadmium yellow(?), vermillion, rose madder, copper-based green(?), cobalt blue, ultramarine blue

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

the present varnish is not original; no indication that the painting was originally varnished



Signature/Mark

When?	some time after the completion of the painting, as there is no mixing of the signature with the underlying paint (fig. 4)
Autograph signature	the name and date were applied in blue paint with a fine brush; the indication of the location “Neuilly” beneath the signature (partly hidden by the paper sticking down the edge of the picture) was applied in reddish-brown paint, but in all probability also by the artist (fig. 4)
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

The original canvas has been cropped all round and stuck to a second canvas (tabby weave, vertical and horizontal 18-19 threads per cm) using a waxy adhesive; numerous pressure marks on the paint-layer due to the lining measure (fig. 10); yellowed coat(s) of varnish with marked accumulations in the crevices of the paint-layer and ground (fig. 9), in the places where the ground is visible a grid-like pattern is visible as a result of regular accumulations in the interstices between the yarns (figs 8, 9); losses in the paint-layer and ground on the peripheries of the cropped original canvas; extensive retouching in the sky region (fig. 3).

Additional remarks

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Literature

- Budde/Schaefer 2001: Rainer Budde, Barbara Schaefer, *Miracle de la couleur* (exhib. cat. Cologne Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, 8 September - 9 December 2001), Cologne 2001, cat. no. 156, p. 356, with ill.
- Cachin/Ferretti-Bocquillon 2000: Françoise Cachin, Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon: Signac. *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, Paris 2000, no. 50, p. 156, 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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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso





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Fig. 3
UV fluorescence



Fig. 4
Detail, signature with date and indication of location "Neuilly", the latter in a different colour and partly covered by the paper sticking down the edge of the canvas





Fig. 5
Detail, reddish-brown
pencil line of the vertical
central axis, partly visible
in the sky in normal
incident line



Fig. 6
Reddish-brown pencil
line indicating the
vertical and horizontal
central axes of the
picture, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)



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Fig. 7
Detail, top right-hand
corner of picture,
beneath the paper the
loosely woven original
canvas is visible

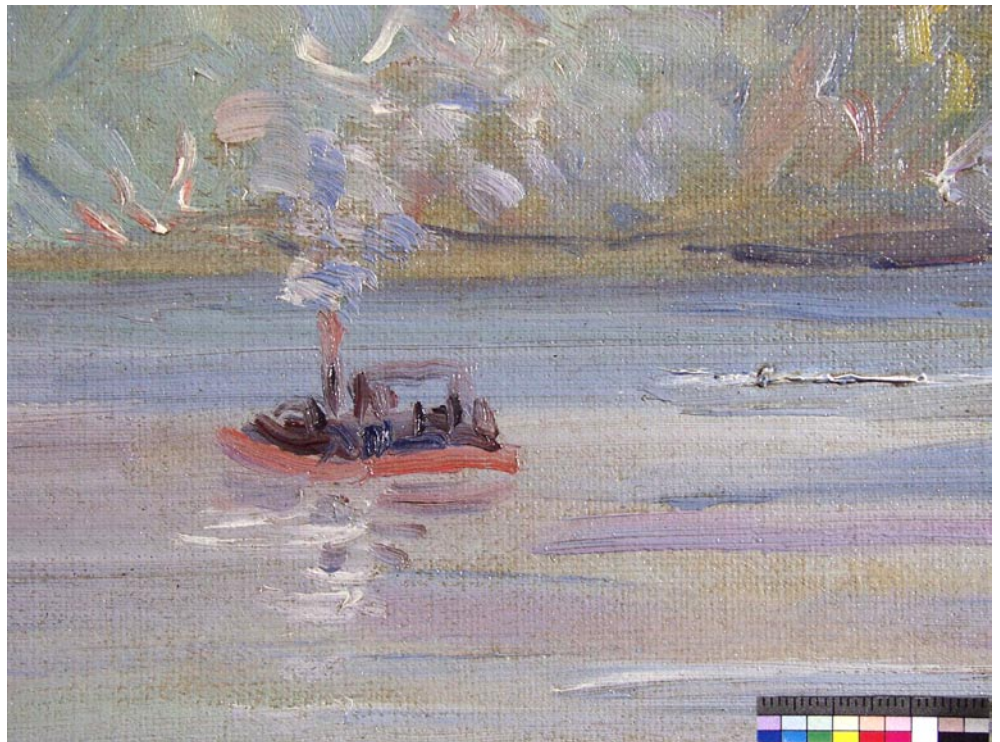


Fig. 8
Detail, course of river
with depiction of boat
and, above, the riverbank,
left unpainted to
incorporate the ground,
which is now a yellowish-
grey as a result of the
overlying coats of varnish



Fig. 9
Detail course of river
with depiction of boat;
raking light reveals
not only the depths
of the structure of the
original loosely woven
canvas, but also the
increased accumulations
of browned varnish
remains

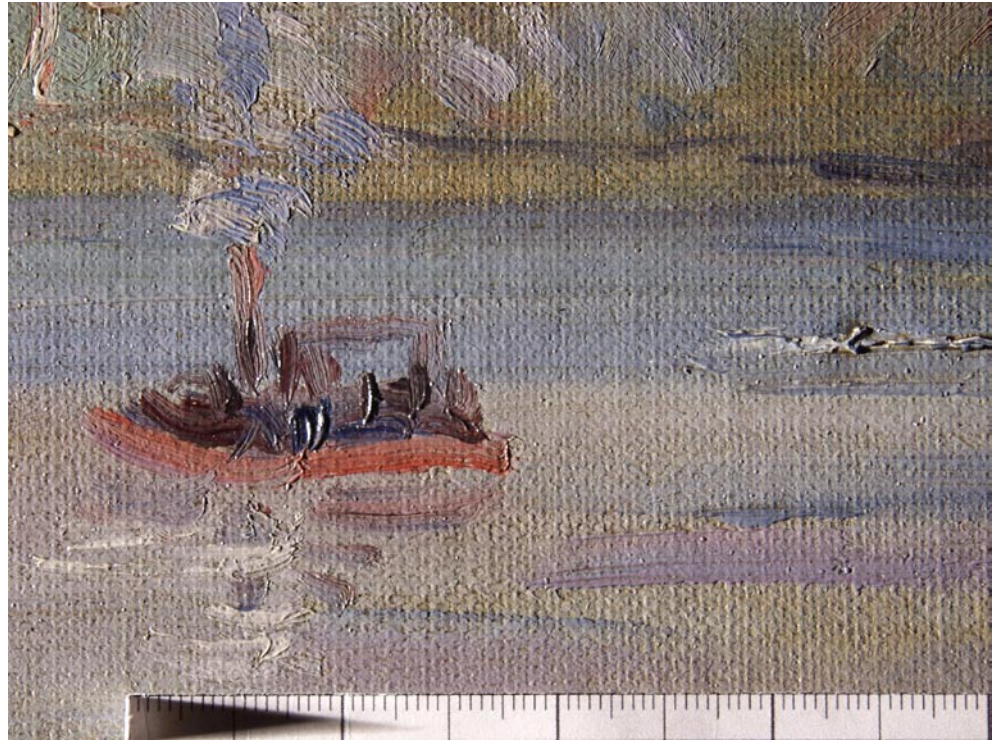
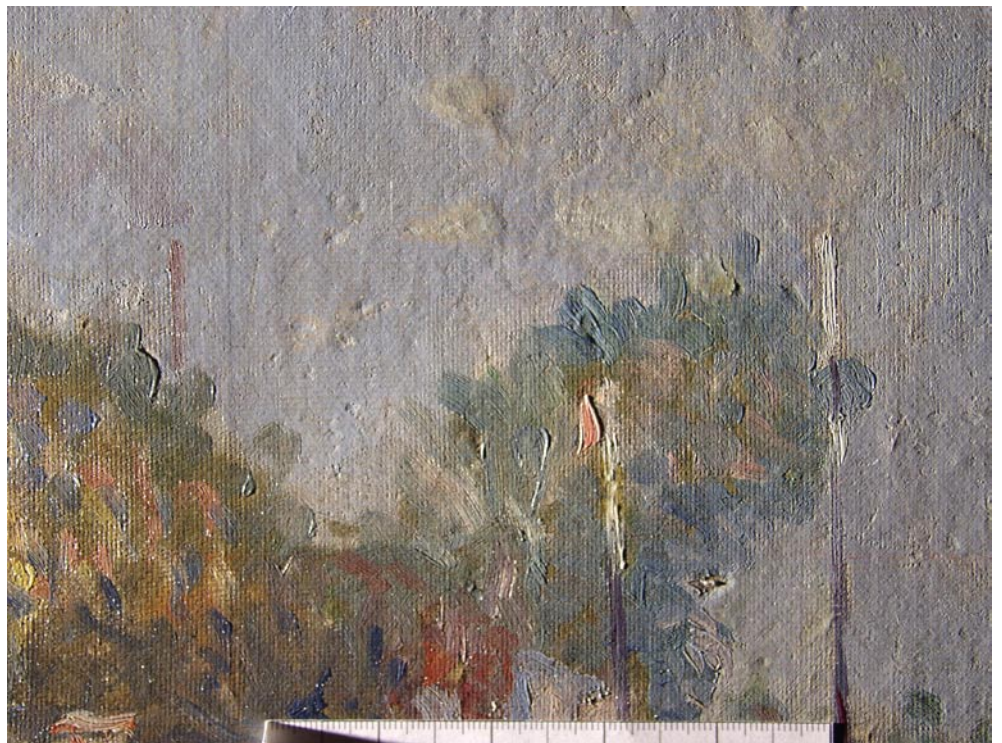


Fig. 10
Detail, trees in the left
background with heavy
pressure marks on the
paint-layer (raking light)





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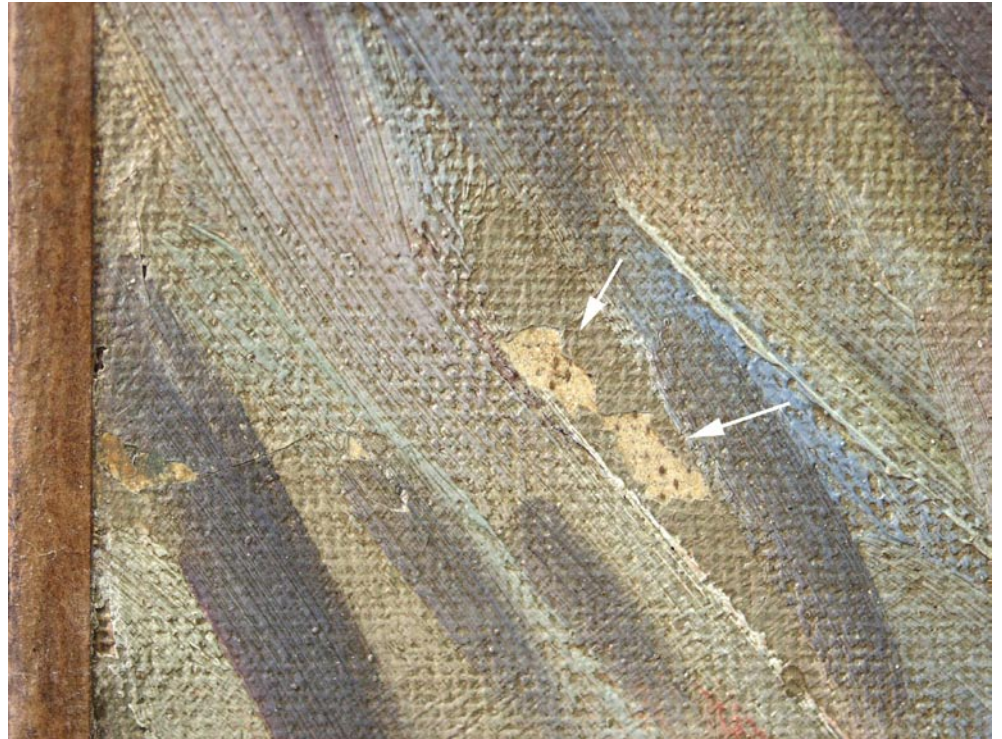


Fig. 11
Detail, left-hand edge
of picture, losses in the
paint-layer reveal the off-
white ground