



Henri Edmond Cross
(1856-1910)

The Clearing
(La clairière)

1906/07

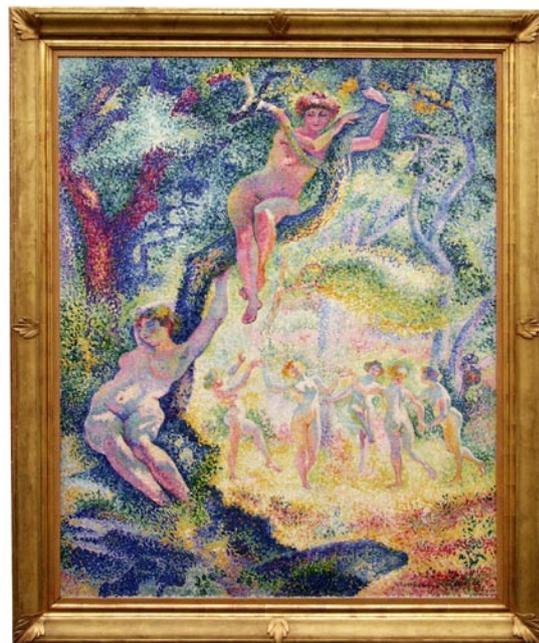
signed bottom right:
„henri Edmond Cross“

undated

Oil on canvas

h 162.0 cm x b 132.0 cm

WRM Dep. FC 660





Brief Report

This large painting, depicting a sunlit clearing in which naked women are dancing a reel, is one of Cross's major works (fig. 1). More than ten extant drawings and a total of five oil studies for this work are believed to exist [Compin 1964, p. 272-275]. Of these, four studies on paper (present whereabouts unknown) in blue pencil and bistre are said to represent the whole composition. One of these drawings, according to details in the catalogue raisonné, has a grid and could also, in view of the fact that its proportions match those of the painting, have served as a pattern for transferring the composition to the canvas [Compin 1964, p. 272]. Interestingly, drawn lines similar in colour to those used for the preliminary works (blue pencil and bistre) were also used for the markings and lines for the lay-in of the grid on the primed canvas. The grid, whose lines are not at uniform intervals, is based on blue markings at the edges, and was itself drawn by Cross with a reddish-brown pencil (fig. 8), after (presumably himself) giving the canvas, already pre-primed in yellowish-white, an additional ground in pure white. Cross outlined the individual motifs and shapes of the composition in black pencil or charcoal (fig. 3). The subsequent applications of paint were executed at first in thin layers with flourishes of the brush, and then in individual short brush-strokes or dabs.

As work proceeded, he changed colours often and also made numerous corrections, and the paint applications became increasingly impasto (figs. 9, 10). The arrangement of the individual dabs or strokes of paint often underlines the form of the motif. In addition to pure colours and homogeneous blends, individual brush-strokes bear witness to the fact that Cross also loaded his brush with two different colours in such a way that they only mixed when he applied them to the canvas (fig. 11). In places there are traces of drips of paint, which could indicate either that he tried to transport too much paint, or that his working manner was impulsive. Variations between matt and gloss on the unvarnished surface of the paint-layer point to the fact that the paints he used differed in their binder content. Individual applications of paint, particularly blue paint, are often characterized by both early shrinkage cracks and a marked network of cracks caused by aging (fig. 12). Here, as in many other places, we can see a lack of adequate adhesion between individual paint-layers as well as between the bottom paint-layer and the ground.



Picture support canvas

Standard format	F 100 vertical (162.0 cm x 130.0 cm), paper sticker stating the standard size in the middle of the lower bar of the stretcher (fig. 6)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 20, horizontal 19/20 threads per cm; faults in the weave in places (weft threads miss several warp threads) and small knots
Stretching	original, with nails (diameter of head: 6 mm); unusually broad foldover edges, reaching right back to the reverse of the stretcher
Stretcher/strainer	original softwood stretcher with simple cross bars (fig. 2)
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.5 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	toothlike impressions of 13 cm broad stretching forceps running all the way round; nail-holes at the top edge of the canvas, which presumably derive from the stretching of the whole length of canvas prior to the first priming
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	paper sticker in the middle of the bottom bar of the stretcher shows, between the number 100 and the letter F the lozenge-shaped Bourgeois company trademark with the inscription 'PARIS B DÉPOSÉE' (fig. 6)



Ground

Sizing	present
Colour	yellowish-white beneath, white above
Application	two layers; the first yellowish-white layer was applied prior to stretching, the edge of the ground can be seen at the top foldover edge of the canvas (fig. 7); the second pure-white ground extends only to the front edges of the stretched canvas and was presumably done by the artist
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	slight gloss, canvas structure still visible

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. blue crayon/pencil, which in short strokes established the points on the edges recto where, next, nails were knocked through the canvas into the lateral surfaces of the stretcher2. reddish-brown crayon/pencil for the lay-in of a grid with lines at varying intervals (e.g. particularly close together in the region of the dancing women); attempts at reconstruction suggest that Cross used as a guide lengths of thread or string which were tensed separately up and down and across between the rows of nails3. drawn lay-in of the composition in black (charcoal?)
Extent/character	detailed underdrawing of all the forms of the composition, in the outlines of the heads, the body of the woman in the tree, and elsewhere, visible to the naked eye
Pentimenti	–



Paint layer

Paint application/technique
and artist's own revision

mostly dots or short strokes of colour, which as the layers accumulate become more impasto; first lay-in of the forms in thin paint and vigorous brush-strokes, some of which smudged the black lines of the underdrawing; next a first layer of opaque but in generally still thin dots of paint, further painterly execution in increasingly impasto strokes or dabs of paint, especially impasto in the highlights and the colour applications made lighter with white; the direction in which the individual dots or strokes of paint were applied often underscored the forms of the composition (e.g. tree-trunk, body of the woman in the tree); the density of the dots and strokes of paint varies in the different motifs; the paints were applied either in pure form or, to all appearances, paints mixed to a highly homogeneous blend on the palette; more rarely, two different colours are only combined when applied to the canvas (e.g. green and white); dark green, dark blue, violet and yellow-to-orange paint applications come across as particularly matt

Painting tools

brushes

Surface structure

varying from smooth to strongly impasto

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale yellow, dark yellowish-orange, orange-red, light bright red, dark red, dark green, medium blue, dark blue, violet, black
Vis spectrometry: chrome yellow(?), cadmium yellow(?), vermilion(?), rose madder, viridian, cobalt blue, ultramarine, cobalt violet

Binding mediums

presumably oil (FTIR)

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

preserved in original unvarnished state



Signature/Mark

When?	at some time after the painting was finished, as there is no sign of any mixing of the paint in the signature with the underlying paint-layers
Autograph signature	in dark-green paint, applied with a brush
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

There are several indications that the surface of the painting was wet-cleaned at an early date; dish-like flaking, in some cases with rolled-up edges (especially in white-and-green paint mixtures) and separation of layers have at some time in the past led to losses of layers of paint; yellow, possibly cadmium-containing, paint applications are in some places powdery or have darker patches [Leone/Burnstock/Jones 2005]; depressions in the impasto paint applications near the edge of the picture presumably occurred at a very early date when the picture was being framed.

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. 30, p. 80, with ill.
- Compin 1964: Isabelle Compin, *H.E. Cross*, Paris 1964, pp. 272-275
- Leone/Burnstock/Jones 2005: Bronwyn Leone, Aviva Burnstock, Chris Jones, "The deterioration of cadmium sulphide yellow artists' pigments", in *ICOM-CC 14th Triennial Meeting*, The Hague, 12-16 September 2005, 2, 2005, pp. 803-813

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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Date: 08/2004, 11/2006

Author of brief report: Iris Schaefer

Date: 04/2008

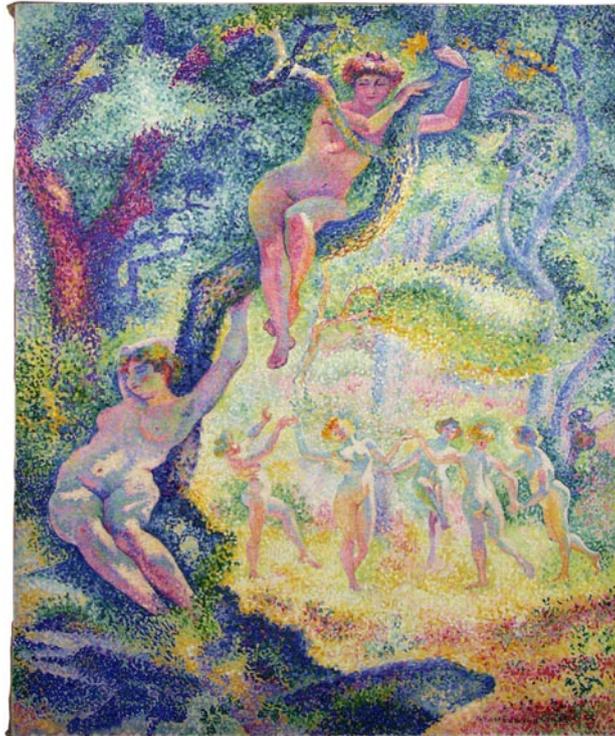


Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso



Fig. 3
IR reflectogram



Fig. 4
Recto with mapping of
the grid and the blue
pencil markings for
the nails to stretch the
threads



Fig. 5
Detail, signature,
bottom right



Fig. 6
Detail, paper sticker
with indication of
size and trademark of
the Parisian company
Bourgeois



Fig. 7
Detail, top foldover edge
of canvas with edge of
ground and toothlike
impressions of stretching
pliers

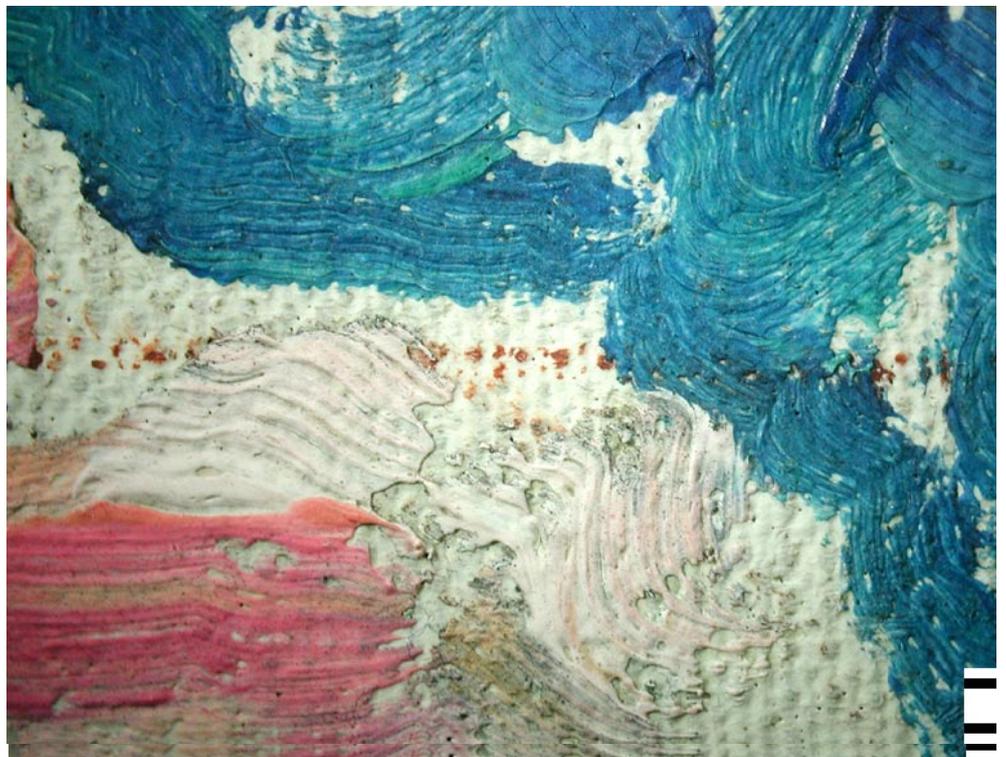


Fig. 8
Brown line of the drawn
grid, microscopic photo-
graph (M = 1 mm)

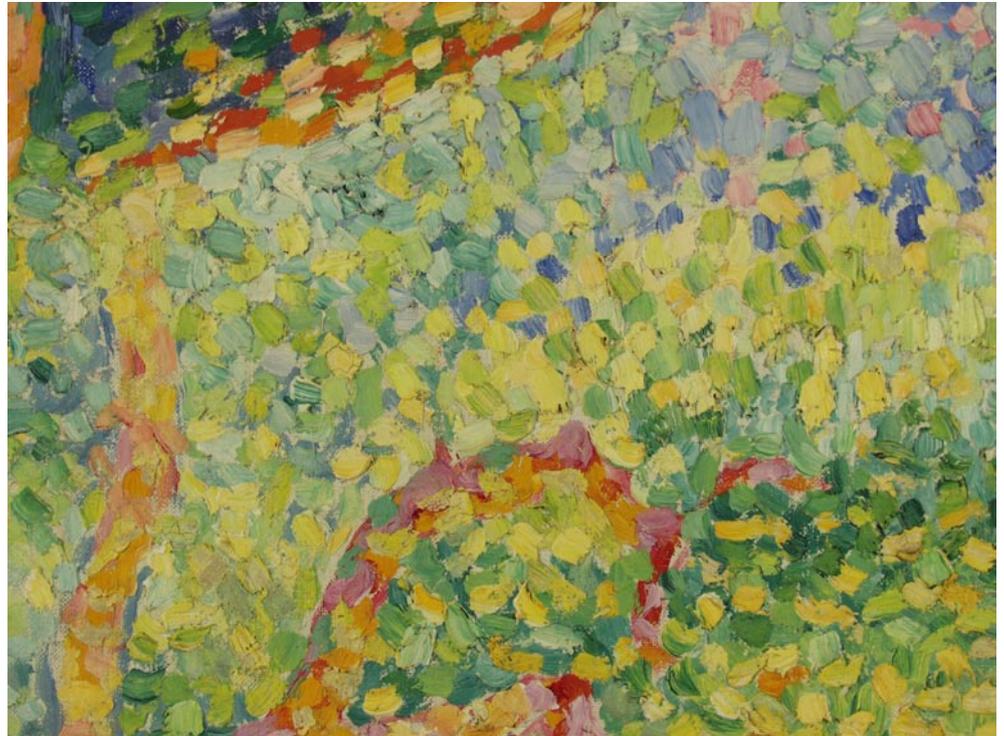


Fig. 9
Detail, centre of picture
with dense application
of short brush-strokes



Fig. 10
Detail (as in fig. 9),
centre of picture in
raking light with
increasingly impasto
brush-strokes in the
top layers



Fig. 11
Blend of white and green
paint only mixed when
applied to the canvas,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 12
Crack formation with vis-
ible losses in blue paint
applications, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)

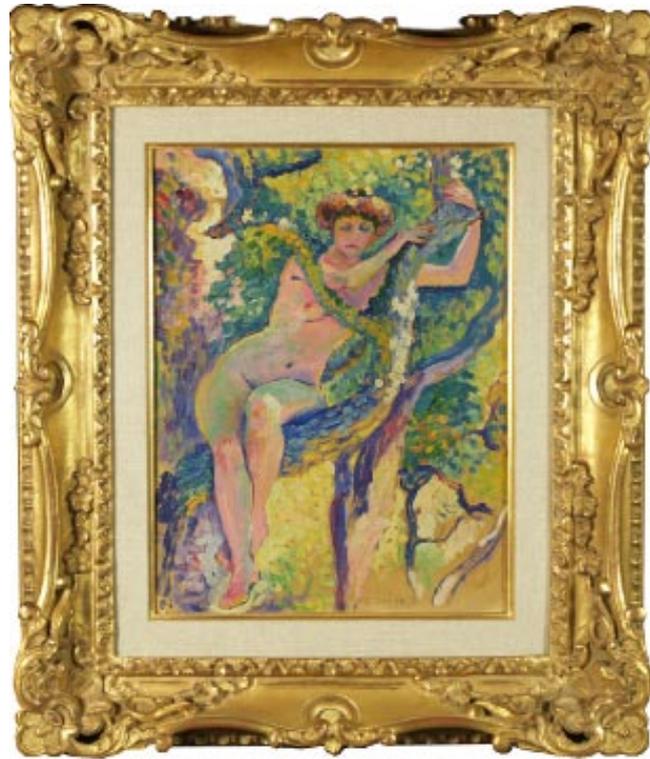


Abb. 13
Henri Edmond Cross
Woman in Tree
(Study to *The Clearing*), c. 1906,
oil on paper on canvas,
h 35.1 x b 27.0 cm
WRM Dep. 854