



Maximilien Luce

(1858-1941)

**Notre Dame, View from
Quai Saint-Michel**

(Notre Dame, Vue du
Quai Saint-Michel)

1901-04

*signed and dated bottom left:
"Luce 1901-04"*

Oil on canvas

h 101.0 cm x b 118.8 cm

WRM Dep. FC 692





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Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Brief Report

Luce painted more than a dozen views of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris in the 1890s and increasingly in the early years of the 20th century. This painting is one of the last in the series and is not only the largest, but is also the “widest-angle” view, taking in more of the surroundings than any other [Bouin-Luce/Bazetoux 1986, vol. 2, cat. no. 143-157, pp 41-46]. Luce chose an industrially pre-primed canvas of medium-dense weave, which, authentically stretching on the original stretcher is not in one of the standard French sizes (fig. 2). The white, pore-filling ground only just covers the elevations of the weave, influencing not only the appearance of individual paint applications, which in many places come across as perforated, but also the general surface characteristics of the painting. Before starting to paint, Luce fixed the most important elements of the architecture and streets in a two-stage under-drawing process (figs 9, 10). No sequence of paint applications can be identified, as throughout the picture they reciprocally overlap at the boundaries of individual zones of motifs. It is clear, however, that Luce first established the main colours and forms in predominantly thin paint applications. In the pale areas, for example the cloudy sky, he deliberately integrated the white ground by applying no paint (fig. 4).

Only exceptionally does the brushwork evince any long strokes, for example in the steps leading down to the Seine bottom left. In general, short strokes dominate, their direction changing all the time and often crossing, along with dabs of paint, which increase in fineness especially in details such as the figures and horses on the bridge (fig. 11). The great majority of superimposed paint applications involved no mixing of the colours, so that there must have been drying phases, which cannot be specified more precisely, during the painting process. Wet-in-wet mixing of individual brush-strokes can only be seen in the uppermost layers, apparently applied during the final session. The paints are largely pure, being mixed only with white. They thus generate all in all a pastel-like impression, within which hues from pink to violet dominate. In places individual brush-strokes also reveal the transport and application of incompletely mixed paints of different pigmentation (fig. 12), but these are mostly colours that are immediate neighbours in the spectrum, for example blue and violet. The 1901-04 dating, in all probability Luce’s own, within the signature of the painting (fig. 6) must be subject to question in view of an inscription on the canvas verso, detected in the context of the present examination, which states “Luce 1902-1904” (fig. 7) (see Additional remarks).



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Picture support canvas

Standard format	not a standard size
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	canvas of medium density with selvage at bottom edge (fig. 8), vertical and horizontal 18 threads per cm; Z twist (albeit not very pronounced in the weft yarns); yarn thickness highly variable, from 0.3–0.6 mm; some irregularities in thickness, fibrous components; the highly variable yarn thickness and individual weaving defects characterize in particular the vertical warp yarns; the canvas structure in a horizontal direction is by contrast emphasized by the relatively homogeneous weft yarns
Stretching	authentic; turnover edge of variable breadth, but extending as far as the reverse of the stretcher on all sides; pronounced stretchmarks at the bottom edge, extending up to 25 cm into the canvas and due to the stretching of the uncut canvas for industrial priming; the stretchmarks correspond with the tacking holes in the bottom turnover edge (fig. 8)
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with horizontal and vertical centre bars, softwood (fig. 2)
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.5 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	semi-industrial; groove marks in the area of the joints point to partial finishing by hand; bars chamfered inwards <i>recto</i>
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none present



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Ground

Sizing	present
Colour	white
Application	applied before cutting-to-size and stretching; thin application in one or two layers, pore-filling
Binding medium	presumably oil, an aqueous component cannot be excluded
Texture	homogeneous, matt surface, individual air holes in the depths of the weave

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	two-stage underdrawing: 1) charcoal(?) 2) blue crayon or brush and blue paint, all the media only cover the elevations of the canvas weave (fig. 9)
Extent/character	1) architecture and streets were fixed by drawing before painting began; this drawing can only in places be made visible by IR reflectography; the microscope reveals the two-stage process: the signs of a first lay-in are thin, black strokes (charcoal?), whose dotted lines seem to point to the artist searching for the right form 2) revisions of the above were executed in blue crayon (wax or oil-chalk) or fine brush in blue paint; as these blue strokes are sometimes mixed with the overlying paint applications, it is possible that the artist continued to add drawn compositional aids after he had begun painting
Pentimenti	the south (right-hand) transept of the cathedral was originally planned to be further to the right; the drawing is however broken off here and moved to the left – done in dark-blue crayon/fine brush(?) (fig. 9)



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Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

divisionist technique; brush-strokes highly variable in length and direction, in places dabbing application, meticulous in the fine details (fig. 10); mixing of the paint of individual brush-strokes only in the uppermost layers, apparently applied in the final working session

Painting tools

brushes varying in width between 0.2-1.0 cm

Surface structure

paint applications with brush sometimes saturated, sometimes almost dry; thin or half-dry applications of the first lay-in often just graze the elevations of the canvas; as work progressed the paint was applied more liberally and becomes increasingly impasto especially when there is an admixture of white

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, yellow, orange-yellow, strong red, red lake, violet, pale greenish-yellow, various blues, darker blue-green

VIS spectrometry: zinc yellow(?), chrome yellow(?)/cadmium yellow(?), iron-oxide red(?), red lake (synthetic?), two different rose madders(?), cobalt violet, viridian, ultramarine

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

thin coat, not authentic; the surface looks matt, however influenced and varied by the brushwork and density of the underlying painting



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Signature/Mark

When?	added after the paint-layer had dried, in predominantly dark-blue paint with a small proportion of violet, incompletely mixed (fig. 6)
Autograph signature	graphology, colour and method of application all point to an autograph signature reading “Luce 1901-1904”
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	not authentic; clues to the possible first or original frame are provided by typical pressure marks in the peripheral zone, which are clearly due to the paint-layer’s not having dried completely; on the bottom edge adhering remains of the setting reveal an orange-red paint-layer on a pale ground
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State of preservation

Yellowed varnish remains in the crevices of impasto paint applications and on the periphery, and dark patches on the canvas *verso* point to the removal of an earlier coat of varnish; cleaning measures using solvents are additionally suggested by abrasions of the ground, especially in the area of the sky; retouching in places; the present varnish seems to have been applied by spraying and there are embedded fibres in many places (cotton-wool?!). The colour illustration in the *catalogue raisonné* seems to depict the painting before the varnish was removed [Bouin-Luce/ Bazetoux 1986, vol. 1, p. 100].

Additional remarks

On the canvas *verso* in the bottom right quadrant there is a barely legible inscription upside-down in relation to the picture, in blue crayon, which, as far as it is possible to identify, states the artist and the time the picture was painted. It cannot be excluded that Luce added this inscription by hand himself. The dates are barely legible under visible light, but IR reflectography clearly shows it to state: “Luce 1902[sic!]-1904” (fig. 7).



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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, no cat. no., p. 356, with ill.
- Bouin-Luce/Bazetoux 1986: Jean Bouin-Luce, Denise Bazetoux, *Maximilien Luce, catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, 1986, vol. 1., colour ill. p. 100; Series of Notre Dame de Paris depictions, pp. 98-99, ill. nos. 38-143, 39-148; vol. 2, cat. no. 143-157, pp 41-46
- Cazeau 1982: Philippe Cazeau, *Maximilien Luce*, 1982, Series of Notre Dame de Paris depictions, ill. pp. 114, 123-125
- Verneilh 1983: Béatrice de Verneilh, "Maximilien Luce et Notre-Dame-de-Paris", in *L'Œil*, March 1983, p. 24, with colour 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 | |

Author of examination:	Katja Lewerentz
Author of brief report:	Iris Schaefer

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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso



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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light





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Fig. 5
UV fluorescence



Fig. 6
Detail, signature



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Fig. 7
Detail, canvas verso,
barely legible inscription
stating artist's name and
date of picture in normal
incident light (top) and
after digital processing
(bottom)



Fig. 8
Detail, bottom turnover
edge of the canvas with
extant selvage and edge
of ground





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Fig. 9
Underdrawing line
in black (charcoal?)
and subsequent blue
medium,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 10
Detail, IR reflectogram
with visible first lay-in
of the transept further
to the right than in the
painted picture





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Fig. 11
Detail, meticulous
dabbing paint
applications to depict
people and horse-drawn
carts on the bridge

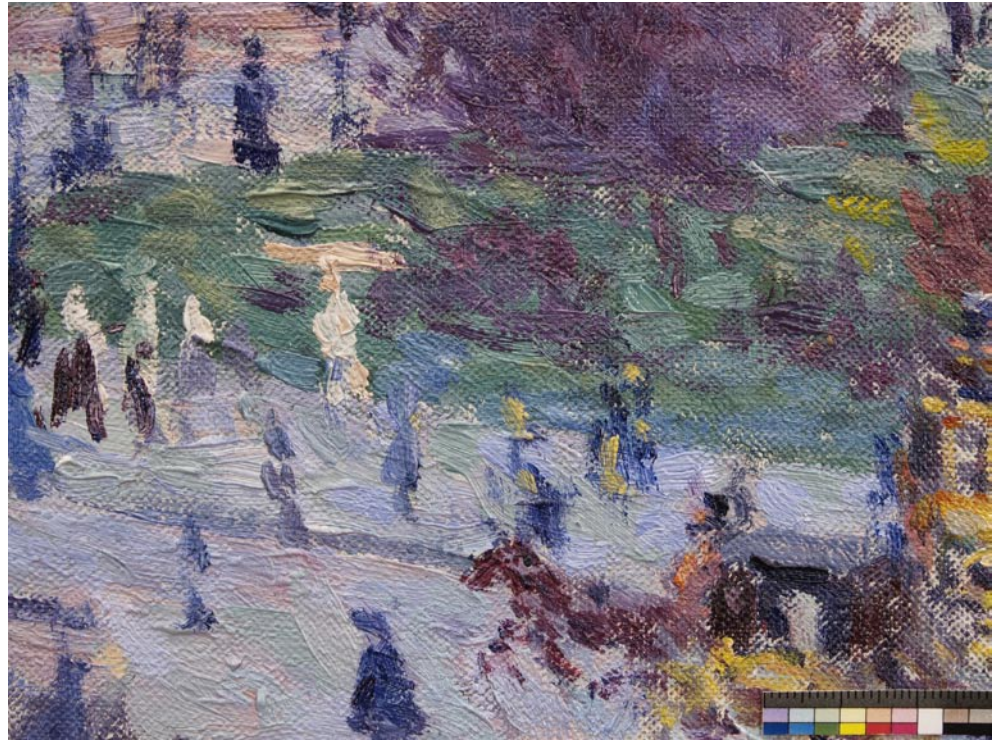


Fig. 12
Differently pigmented
paint only mixed on the
canvas, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)





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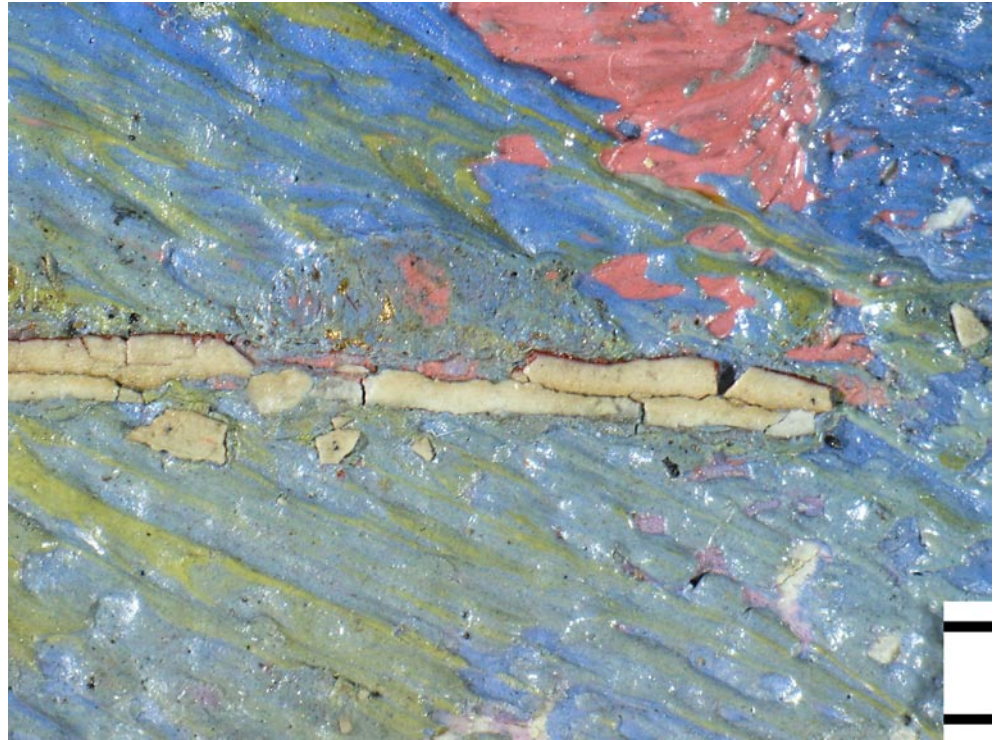


Fig. 13
Remains of the setting
of a frame pressed into
the still wet paint-layer,
revealing an orange-red
paint-layer on the side
facing the surface of
the picture, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)