



Claude Monet

(1840-1926)

The Seine at Asnières

(La Seine à Asnières)

1873

signed bottom right: "Claude Monet"

undated

Oil on canvas

h 54.2 cm x b 72.5 cm

WRM Dep. FC 784





Brief Report

This painting, dating from 1873 and showing the Seine at Asnières with three barges in the centre, has an almost uninterrupted provenance and is believed to have been sold at a very early date. Probably it was one of the paintings by Monet, Morisot, Renoir and Sisley that were put up for auction at the Hôtel Drouot on 24 March 1875, in other words two years after it was painted [Wildenstein 1974, no. 268, p. 228]. In this work too, in the standard P20 size on a thin cream-white ground, Monet evidently used charcoal to sketch parts of the composition (fig. 8). Here we see similarities with the working procedure he used in the painting of fishing-boats on the beach at Etretat, which is also in the Cologne collection, albeit dating from about ten years later (1883/84), and also the 1885 painting of houses in the fog at Falaise. The paint only rakes the elevated parts of the canvas, and while there are wet-in-wet applications, most are wet on dry, indicating that this work was the result of a number of sessions (figs. 9, 10). Whether all these sessions were in situ or whether the work, once started, was finished in the studio, is still uncertain.

Monet is known to have employed both approaches. [House 1986]. Technological examination of the painting has revealed that two additions have been made, in the left foreground and on the right-hand edge (figs 4, 12, 13). These additions without a doubt constitute an attempt by someone else to improve the picture; they closely imitate Monet's brushwork, which uses up nearly all the paint on the brush at each stroke, but stand out when the picture is viewed under UV (figs 4, 13). These overpaintings are separated by a layer of varnish from the original paint-layer, and do not share the network of age-related cracks evinced by the latter. It may be that these areas were perceived as incomplete or monotonous. The illustration of the work used in the catalogue raisonné goes back to a black-and-white photograph from the Durand-Ruel gallery; while undated, it is later than 1928, and shows the condition of the painting before this (likewise undated) intervention, which itself mirrors the reception history of the work (fig. 13).



Picture support canvas

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Standard format | P20 (73.0 x 54.0 cm) horizontal |
| Weave | tabby weave |
| Canvas characteristics | lining makes it difficult to be precise: very fine, dense weave; vertical and horizontal app. 27 threads per cm; yarn thickness 0.2-0.4 mm; Z-twist |
| Stretching | not authentic; turnover edges removed in the process of lining |
| Stretcher/strainer | stretcher with centre bar, probably authentic; X-ray shows a few remaining tacks, suggesting re-use; corner joints each secured by a nail |
| Stretcher/strainer depth | 2.0 cm |
| Traces left by manufacture/processing | edges chamfered outwards on the reverse by 1-2 mm over a breadth of 1.0-1.5 cm; in the corners there are hand-made marks as guides for the joins |
| Manufacturer's/dealer's marks | not determined (hidden) |



Ground

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Sizing | present, glutin size(?) |
| Colour | white (yellowish) |
| Application | presumably single-layer application before cutting-to-size and stretching; the ground clearly follows the surface structure of the canvas, possibly applied with a brush (fig. 7) |
| Binding medium | presumably oil |
| Texture | colourwise very homogeneous ground with an evenly lively surface structure; slightly transparent effect, a few yellowish-orange particles discernible (ochre?) |

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Medium/technique | charcoal(?) (fig. 8) |
| Extent/character | charcoal specks visible only on microscopic inspection, suggesting a very sketchy underdrawing |
| Pentimenti | it may be that Monet made a correction to the drawing after he had started painting; this observation is curious and not unambiguous in its interpretation, but charcoal particles embedded in the paint-layer, and others on the surface in the region of the barge in front, suggest this conclusion (reflection of the rudder in the water) |



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

the painting was evidently executed in a number of sessions with interruptions, both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry brushstrokes are discernible (figs 9, 10); in the sky region the paint was applied very thinly with a fairly dry brush; in the rest of the painting, the paint was applied with more body, especially in colours blended with white (fig. 3); dry-looking brushstrokes which only rake the elevated parts of the canvas are characteristic (fig. 10)

Painting tools

flat-ferrule brushes of varying width, on the narrow side with a maximum width of 0.7 cm, but most 0.5 cm; here and there a pointed brush was also used; numerous brush-hairs are embedded in the paint-layers (fig. 11)

Surface structure

highly variable, from thin to very impasto in places; structures somewhat squashed by the lining procedure

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale yellow, medium yellow, orange-yellow, bright orange, dark red lake, pale red, medium red, medium blue, greenish-blue, dark green, medium green, brown, black (only in blends)

VIS spectrometry: chrome yellow(?), cadmium yellow(?), red lake, iron-oxide red(?), vermilion(?), ultramarine blue(?), Prussian blue(?), cerulean blue, viridian, copper-based green

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

varnished, not authentic



Signature/Mark

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| When? | following completion of painting on the dried blue paint-layer in a homogeneous dark-grey to black paint applied with a brush (fig. 6) |
| Autograph signature | fairly dry brushstrokes; orientation and handwriting accord with other Monet signatures of the time [David 2006] |
| Serial | – |

Frame

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Authenticity | not original |
|--------------|--------------|

State of preservation

Extensive restoration measures (lining, varnish removal), and later additions at a time undetermined, but later than 1928, extent of the overpainting easily visible under UV, and documented (figs 4, 12, 13); the original state can be seen in an historical illustration dating from no earlier than 1928 (fig. 13); X-ray reveals two smaller holes (fig. 5); subsequent removal of varnish also removed part of the non-original painting; paint-layer abraded in places.

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. 115, pp. 262f., with ill.
- David 2006: Jeanne-Marie David, *De la naissance d'un nom à l'évidence d'un style. Une étude de la signature de Claude Monet (1840–1926)*, Mémoire de recherche appliquée, Paris 2006, unpubl. thesis, École du Louvre, Paris
- House 1986: John House, *Monet. Nature into art*, New Haven/London 1986, p. 66
- Wildenstein 1974: Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet. Biographie et catalogue raisonné*, Lausanne/Paris 1974, vol. I 1840-1881 (peintures), cat. no. 269, pp. 228f. with ill.
- Wildenstein 1996: Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet oder der Triumph des Impressionismus. Catalogue Raisonné*, Cologne 1996, vol. II, cat. no. 269, p. 116, with ill.

Source of illustrations

Fig. 14 makes use of a historical photograph from the Durand-Ruel gallery; all other illustrations: 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
UV fluorescence





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Fig. 5
X-ray



Fig. 6
Detail, signature



Fig. 7
Thin ground, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)

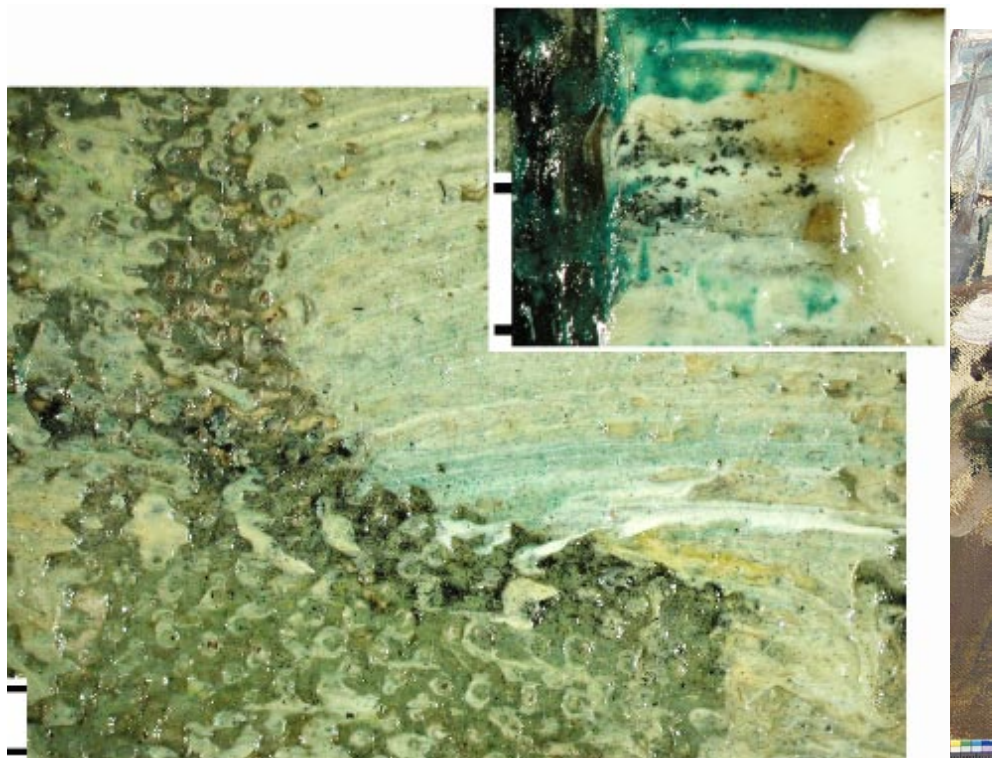


Fig. 8
Underdrawing in
charcoal(?), microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)



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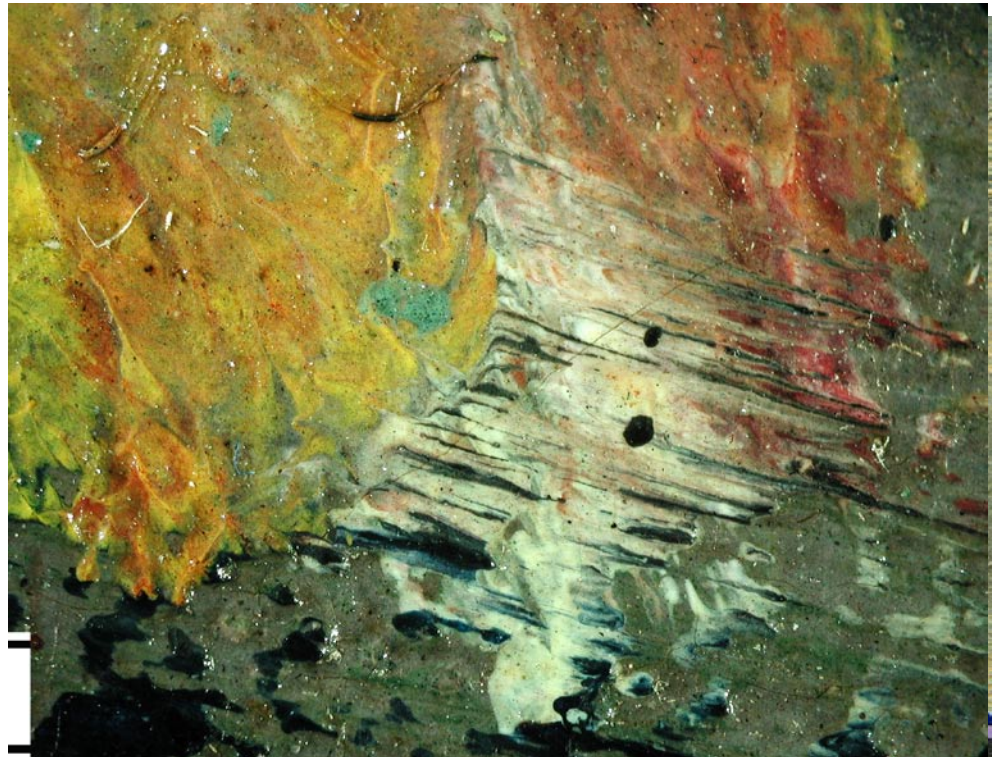


Fig. 9
Wet-in-wet paint
applications, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 10
Detail, numerous
brushstrokes which
not only mix with
the underlying paint
applications but were
also applied wet on dry

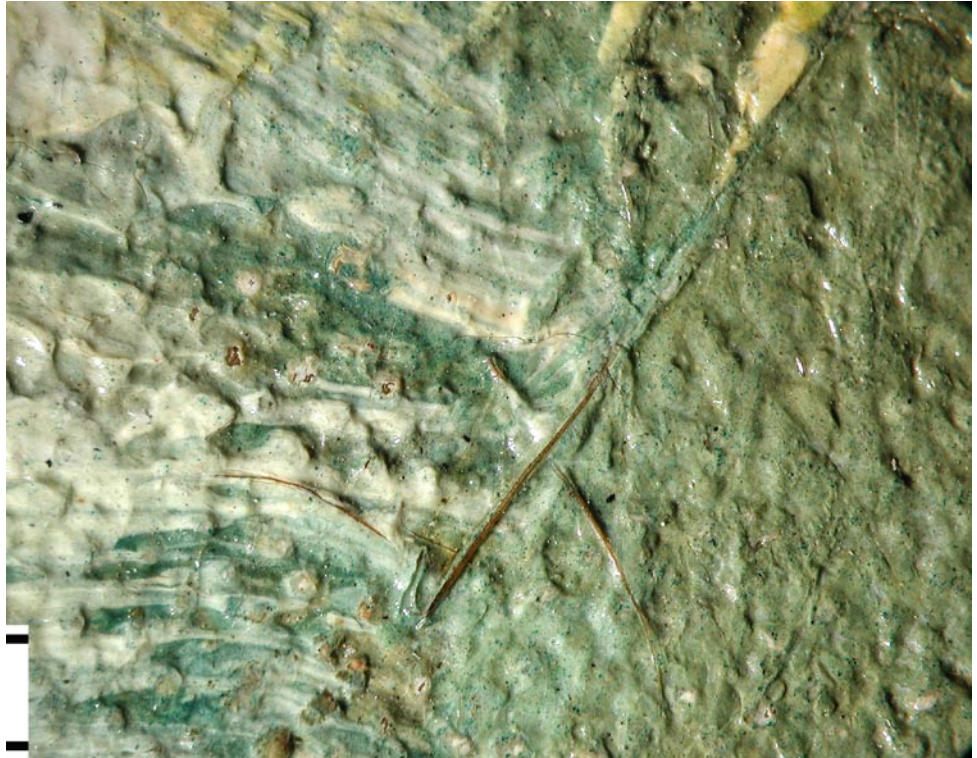


Fig. 11
Brush-hairs embedded
in the paint-layer,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

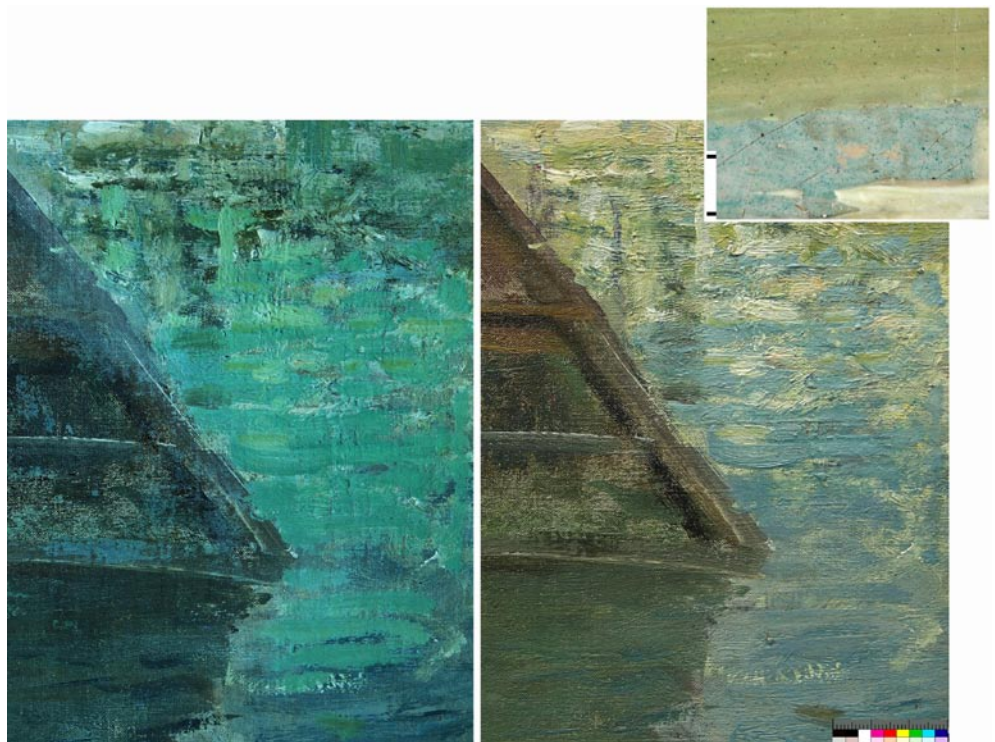


Fig. 12
Detail of the same area
at the bottom edge
under UV (left) and in
incident light, paint ap-
plication added by some-
one other than the artist,
microscopic photograph
top left, craquelure in the
original blue paint-layer
does not continue into
the green, which was
added later (M = 1 mm)



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Fig. 13
Extent of the later non-authentic additions:
current condition in
incident light (top); map-
ping of the overpaint-
ing under UV (middle);
historical photograph
from the Durand-Rouel
gallery, undated, records
condition of painting
at some time post-1928
(bottom)