



Berthe Morisot

(1841-1895)

Boats on the Seine

(Bateaux sur la Seine)

1879/80 (?)

signed bottom right:
"Berthe Morisot"

undated

oil on canvas

h 27.0 cm x b 51.9 cm

WRM Dep. FC 615





Brief Report

The picture was painted in the little town of Villeneuve-la-Garenne, about six kilometres from Paris, unmistakable thanks to the bridge, which Morisot captured in another comparable work painted in 1880, *Pont sur la Seine* [Morisot 2002, pp. 197f.; Claret, Montalant 1997, CMR 93]. Mary Cassatt, Morisot's fellow artist and friend, was the first owner of the picture, which remained for a whole century, until 1984, in the possession of the Cassatt and Stewart families. This is presumably also the reason why the painting was not mentioned in the first catalogue raisonné of Morisot's works [Bataille/Wildenstein 1961], but only in the 1997 revision [Claret, Montalant 1997, CMR 84]. The picture was painted on a very fine, commercially pre-primed canvas such as we often find in Morisot's work [cf. Morisot, WRM FC 710 and 602]. The exact stretching of the canvas is no longer evident, as a result of far-reaching restoration measures; however there are clues, which curiously point to a fastening within the area of the picture (figs. 5, 6). The underdrawing was presumably carried out in two stages. Microscopic examination reveals partial accumulations of black, charcoal-like particles in the paint, which, while we cannot reconstruct a specific line from them, could point to the use of charcoal for the first lay-in of the picture (fig. 8).

It would seem that the unbound charcoal particles were smeared by the subsequent applications of paint and diffusely embedded in the paint-layer. This first drawn lay-in was presumably followed by a rapid, in places semi-transparent brush-drawing in black paint (fig. 9). The following applications of paint are likewise overwhelmingly semi-transparent, applied wet-in-wet, with numerous places where paint was not applied, so that underlying layers are visible (fig. 10). In contrast, the areas where there was an admixture of white in the sky and the row of houses are denser and more impasto (fig. 4). Various more or less trivial alterations during the painting process can be detected, including not only colour corrections, but also the partial mechanical reduction of paint-layers already applied, as for example in the light-blue reflections in the water (fig. 12). The signature was only added afterwards in semi-transparent green paint on the already dry surface, which seems already by then to have suffered some abrasion due to handling and storage (fig. 7).



Picture support canvas

Standard format	not a standard size
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	32 threads per cm vertical and horizontal; very fine, thin and even fabric
Stretching	the current stretching was carried out in the course of lining, the turnover edge being removed and the edges of the picture cropped all round, presumably by up to max. 1 cm in relation to the stretcher dimensions; on the top and bottom edges there are fillings and retouches the size of a nail-head within the picture area at largely regular intervals of 3.5-5.5 cm, which point to a previous stretching, or else fastening to a decorative frame (figs. 5, 6)
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with vertical centre-bar, presumably original; in the course of the lining, enlarged by 1 cm respectively through additional laths at the top and on the left
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	–
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none to be seen



Ground

Sizing	not determined
Colour	off-white
Application	thin, even layer with no visible signs of utensils, presumably commercially pre-primed; only at the bottom edge are there clear stretch-marks extending up to 8 cm into the picture and presumably due to the original stretching of the length of canvas during pre-priming (Abb. 6)
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	homogeneous

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	underdrawing presumably in two stages: 1) charcoal; 2) brush and highly diluted black paint
Extent/character	1) charcoal: over the whole area of the picture stereo-microscopy detects partial accumulations of charcoal-like particles in the paint (fig. 8), although no specific lines can any longer be reconstructed 2) brush and black paint: underdrawing-lines can only be detected here and there with the use of stereo-microscopy and IR reflectography; altogether the composition lay-in comes across as rapid and highly sketchy, with in some cases very thin lines (e.g. in the small ochre boat) and in other places broad, semi-transparent brush-strokes, which already resemble an underpainting (e.g. along the bank of the Seine, fig. 9)
Pentimenti	–



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

loose, sketchy painting technique, in many places wet-in-wet, but also wet-on-dry, in presumably two or three sessions; the paint was generally fluid when applied; the applications were in semi-transparent stripes, with lively brushwork, and frequent places where underlying paint-layers or the underpainting are left exposed; thicker areas with no such exposures can be found in the sky, in the houses along the bank and where multiple applications were made in order to correct colours or shapes or make them more exact; in some places the paint was partly reduced while still wet or at least soft with some utensil (palette knife, broad brush, rag?), e.g. light-blue reflections in the water, foreground (fig. 12)

Painting tools

flat-ferrule bristle brushes ranging in width from app. 3 to 10 mm; individual highlights and contours were executed with a fine, pointed hair brush of about 1 mm width

Surface structure

highly dilute, smooth colour areas as well as a few impasto areas, especially where there is an admixture of white (Abb. 3)

Palette

hues revealed by visual microscopic examination: white, pale gold ochre, medium yellow, medium red, red lake, medium blue, pale semi-transparent green, dark green, black
VIS spectrometry: iron-oxide yellow, chrome yellow(?) or cadmium yellow(?), vermilion, cobalt blue, copper green, viridian

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

varnished, not authentic



Signature/Mark

When?	signature bottom right 'Berthe Morisot' was applied in green semi-transparent oil paint on the already dry paint-layer using a fine hair brush (fig. 7)
Autograph signature	probably in her own hand, as the handwriting shows clear resemblances to the signatures on other works by Morisot; the surrounding green paint-layer, also beneath the signature, shows signs of abrasion
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

The canvas has been lined; when this was done, the original foldover edge was removed, and the edges of the picture cropped by up to max. 1 cm; the stretcher bars at the top and on the left were made broader by additional wooden laths; impasto areas show signs of being flattened; considerable abrasion of the paint-layers, presumably in the course of the removal of earlier coats of varnish; a few in-fillings and retouches, mainly at the top and bottom edges.

Additional remarks

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Literature

- Bataille/Wildenstein 1961: M.-L. Bataille, Georges Wildenstein: Berthe Morisot. Catalogue des Peintures, Pastels et 'Aquarelles', Paris 1961
- Budde/Schaefer 2001: Rainer Budde, Barbara Schaefer, *Miracle de la couleur* (Ausst.kat. Köln Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, 8. September - 9. Dezember 2001), Köln 2001, Cat. Nr. 123, p. 280, with figs
- Clairet/Montalant/Rouart 1997: Alain Clairet, D. Montalant, Yves Rouart: Berthe Morisot (1841-1895): Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Peint, Paris 1997 (CMR 84)
- Morisot 2002: Berthe Morisot, exhib. cat. Fondation Pierra Gianadda Martigny, 19 June - 19 November 2002, Martigny, Switzerland 2002, pp. 197ff., with illustrations

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:	Caroline von Saint-George

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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso





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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light



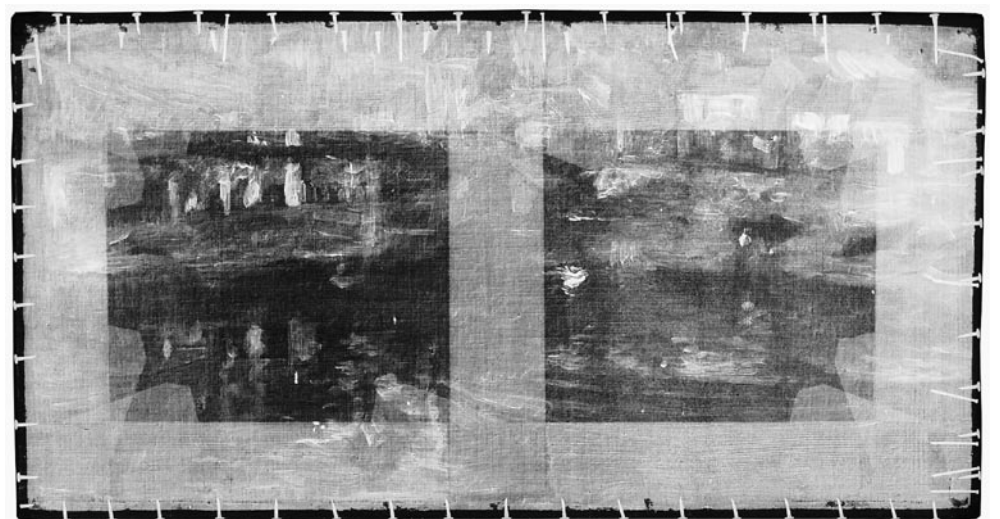


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Fig. 5
UV fluorescence



Fig. 6
X-ray





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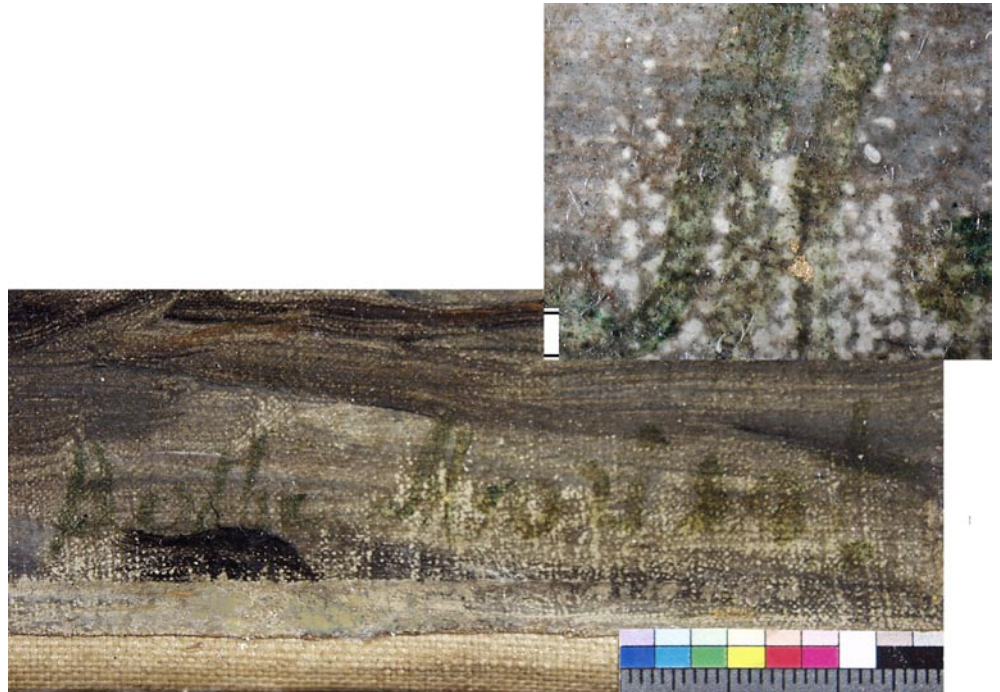


Fig. 7
Detail, signature

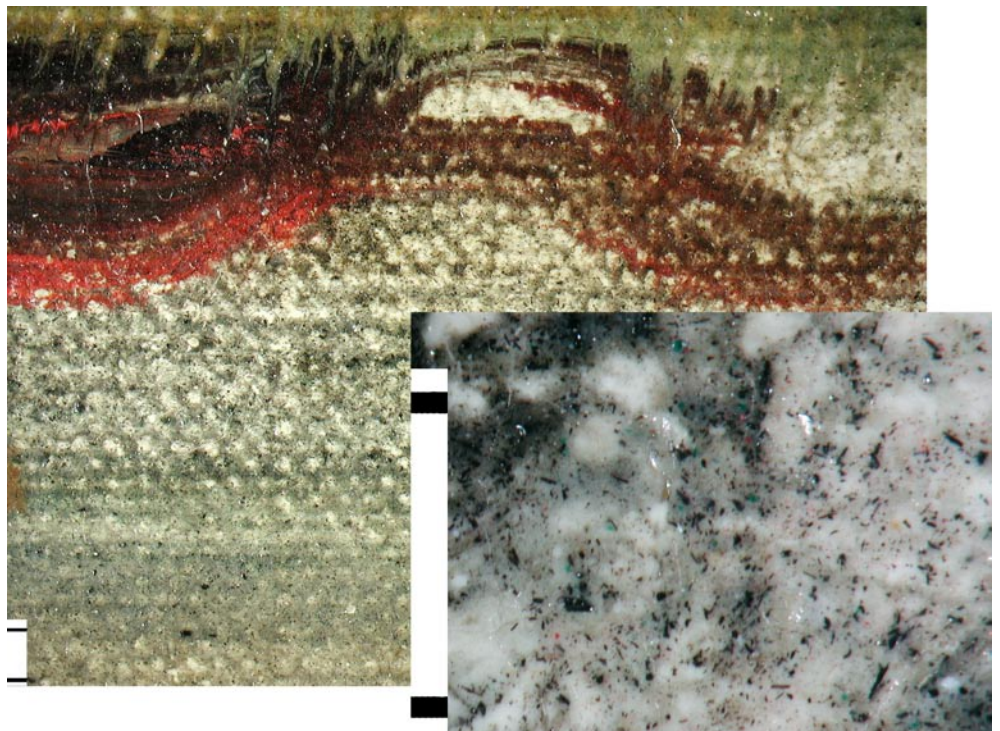


Fig. 8
Fine charcoal particles
point to a first under-
drawing in this medium,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



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Fig. 9
Black line of the brush-
and-paint underdrawing
in the bank on the right,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

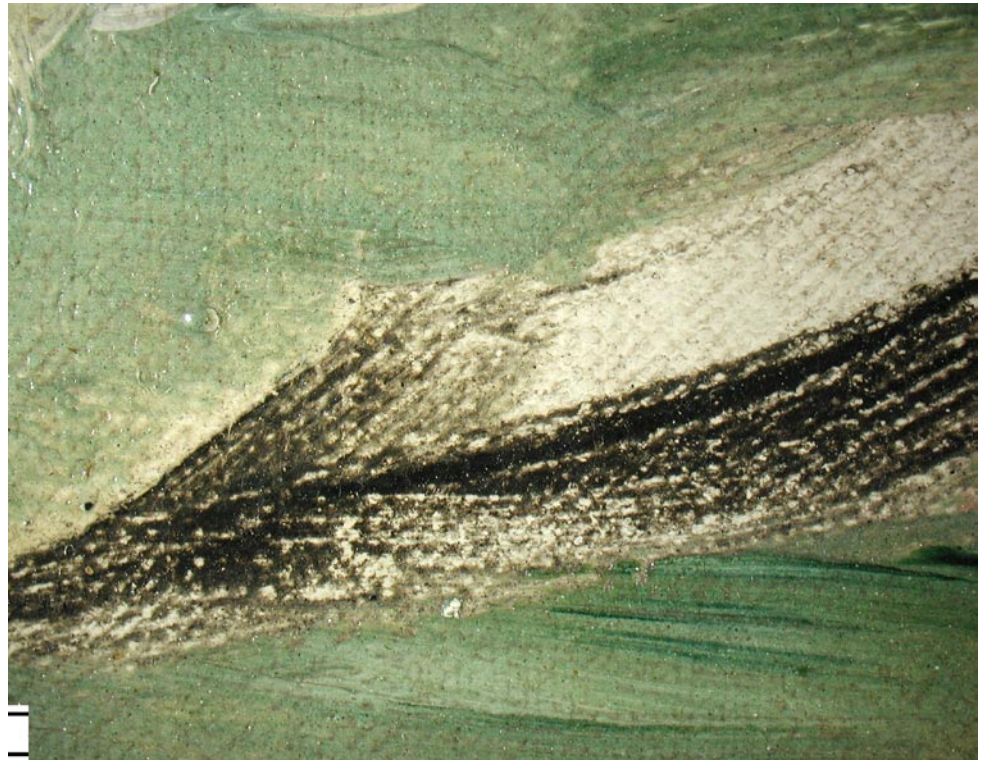


Fig. 10
Wet-in-wet paint
applications in the
vicinity of the bridge,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)





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Fig. 11
Detail, row of houses,
corrections in the roof
region



Fig. 12
Detail, surface of water,
partial reduction of the
pale-blue paint while
still wet or at least still
soft

