



## Georges Seurat

(1859-1891)

### Figure in a Landscape at Barbizon

(Figure massive dans un paysage  
à Barbizon)

c. 1882

*no signature or date*

*Oil on poplar*

*h 15.5 cm x b 24.8 cm*

*WRM Dep. FC 705*





## Brief Report

As in another work by Georges Seurat in the Wallraf collection from his series of small-scale study panels [cf. Georges Seurat, WRM Dep. 822], we see here the use of an unprimed poplar panel in the standard P2 format (figs 2, 3, 4). As the panel has been left unpainted in many places, its own coloration contributes to the total impression (figs. 2, 3). The panel is one of the sort that were offered for sale by the dozen, for example in the catalogue of the art-supply dealer Bourgeois Ainé in 1888 for various models of painting cases [Bourgeois Ainé 1888, pp. 92f]. This picture too presents further clues to its having been created in such a painting box, which was a utensil of open-air painting: verso numerous remains of paint can be seen predominantly in the top left-hand corner, which are possibly due to contact with surplus material inside such a painting case (fig. 2). Recto traces of paint in the top left-hand corner and a graze on the right-hand edge of the picture suggest a fastening within such a box (fig. 6). It is probable that the work was completed in a single session, as evidenced by the wet-in-wet paint applications, though some brushstrokes were applied half dry, thinly but using highly viscous paint.

The paint is loosely applied throughout, often with one stroke crossing over another (fig. 7). The visibility of so much of the surface of the panel was evidently felt to be a problem at an early date, as stereo-microscopy and UV fluorescence reveal additions by someone other than the artist in several places: thus the largely unpainted areas along the path as well as the outlines of the figure have been painted over (figs 11, 12). The coloration of these additions differs from that of the original painting, and furthermore they were applied on top of a non-authentic varnish, causing them to appear matt. Comparison with a historic illustration shows that these alterations must date back to before 1936 [Hauke 1961]. A reddish-brown used for the overpainting has been identified beyond doubt as cadmium red, which gives us a *terminus post quem* of 1910, when this new red pigment first appeared on the market.



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### Picture support panel

Standard format	close to P2 (24,0 x 16,0 cm), horizontal
Thickness	2 mm
Type of wood	poplar ( <i>Populus sp.</i> )
Panel structure	consists of one board
Grain direction	horizontal
Cut of panel	tangential
Traces left by production/treatment	semi-industrial(?); sawmarks along the edges of the picture; a noticeable knot in the wood on the bottom edge was not pre-treated (fig. 5)
Producer's/dealer's marks	–

### Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	no ground present
Application	–
Binding medium	–
Character and appearance	–



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## Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	neither microscopic examination nor IR reflectography suggest any underdrawing or underpainting
Extent/character	–
Pentimenti	–

## Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision	highly viscous, barely diluted paint was applied wet-in-wet, often crosswise, numerous areas of the panel being left unpainted in the process; not all the paint applications overlap, but we may assume that either the blue-black figure or the tree at the left-hand edge was painted first, followed by the cream-blue sky, and then by the lay-in of the path, the building and the filling-out of the grassy foreground; evidently the final stage consisted in the concentration and modelling of the various areas of colour, as evidenced by the wet-in-wet, though already drying, brushstrokes (figs 7, 8); striking, and extremely heterogeneous, is the pigmentation above all in the blue and green applications (figs 9, 10); the results of the Vis-spectrometry suggest natural or synthetic ultramarine blue, cobalt blue and viridian, though it is impossible to tell whether the paints were hand-ground
Painting tools	flat-ferrule brushes of various sizes, breadth of stroke from 0.4 to 1.0 cm, occasionally also pointed brushes or the edge of a brush
Surface structure	influenced by clearly visible wood structure; brushwork is also clearly visible by virtue of the highly viscous, almost stringy paint (figs 3, 4, 7, 8)
Palette	microscopic inspection reveals: pale yellow, medium yellow, reddish brown, two blues, dark green, red lake, sometimes mixed with white Vis spectrometry: iron-oxide yellow, chrome or cadmium yellow(?), iron-oxide red(?), cobalt blue, ultramarine blue, viridian overpainting: cadmium red, cobalt blue
Binding mediums	presumably exclusively oil



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## Surface finish

Authenticity/condition	not authentic; an unyellowed satin matt coating covers the whole surface, possibly containing wax; remains of an older heavily yellowed coat can be discerned at the top and bottom edges (figs 1, 12)
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## Signature/Mark

When?	–
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Autograph signature	–
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Serial	–
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## Frame

Authenticity	not original
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## State of preservation

The painting contains additions by someone other than the artist in several places; they are on top of an existing, possibly wax-containing, surface coating and appear matt (see Summary, also figs 11, 12); a black-and-white photograph of the work in the catalogue raisonné by Hauke, dating from 1936, shows the additions to have been already present by then; along the top and bottom edges are the yellowed remains of an earlier coat of varnish; there is a slight whitish efflorescence of the surface coating in the figure's blue garment.

## Additional remarks

There are several pointers to the use of a painting-case during the execution of the work (see Summary, also Figs 2, 6). Two nail holes at different distances apart on the top and bottom edges respectively are unexplained (fig. 5). On the panel verso are a number of old handwritten notes, thus for example in the top right-hand corner the number “36” of the posthumous inventory of the artist's estate (IR finding; it is covered by a sticker) and also the name of a previous owner (“Bossuat”) [Hauke 1961].



## 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. 155, p. 350, with ill.
- *Bourgeois Aîné 1888: Catalogue générale illustré. Fabrique de couleurs fines et matériel pour l'aquarelle, la gouache, le dessin, le modelage, la peinture à l'huile et la peinture sur porcelaine*, Paris 1888, pp. 92f.
- Hauke 1961: César M. de Hauke: *Seurat et son œuvre*, vol. I, cat. no. 25, pp. 14 and 264, with ill., Paris 1961
- Kirby et al. 2003: Jo Kirby, Kate Stonor, Ashok Roy, Aviva Burnstock, Rachel Grout, Raymond White: *Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology*, in: *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, Vol. 24, pp. 5-37, London 2003

## 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: Katja Lewerentz

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Fig. 1  
Recto

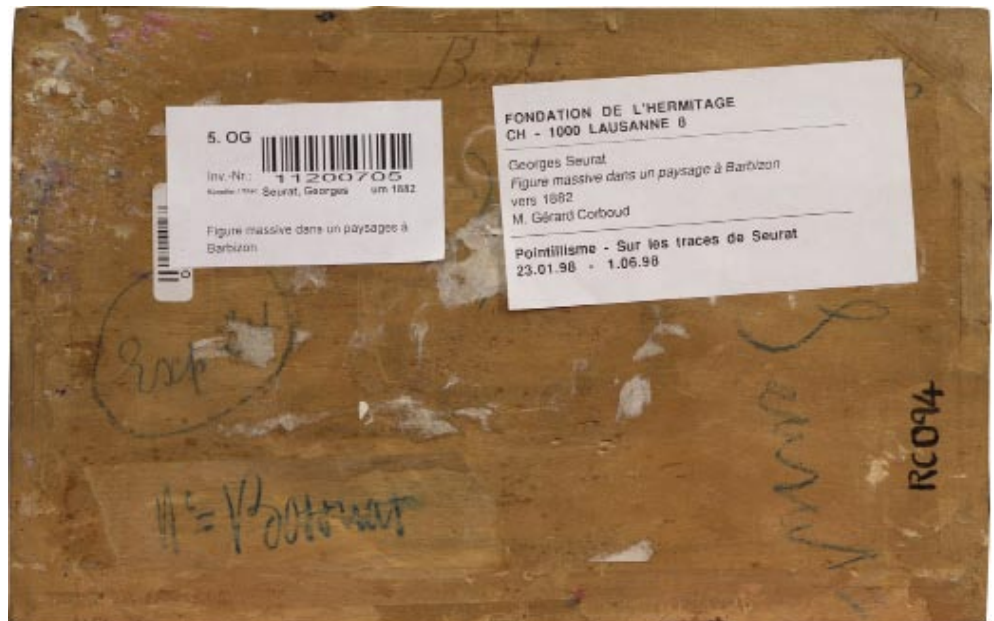


Fig. 2  
Verso



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Fig. 3  
Reflected light, wood structure of the panel is revealed through the thin paint application



Fig. 4  
Raking light





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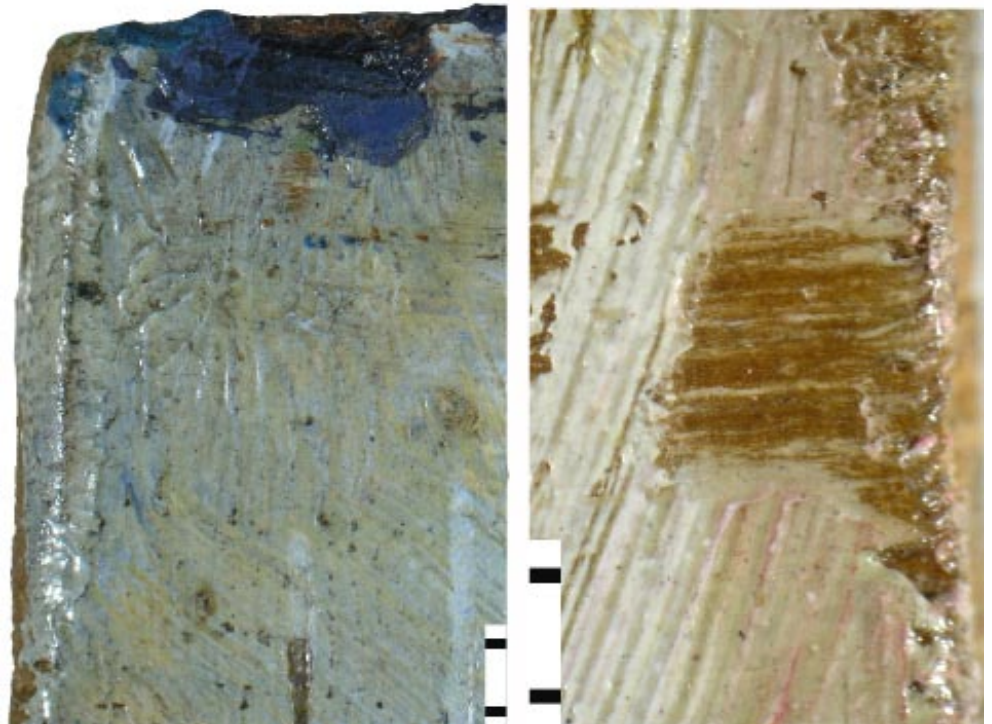
Fig. 5

Detail, a knot in the wood cropped by the lower edge of the panel (right), traces of the green paint of the original limit of the paint, and a hole probably due to a fastening during the painting process



Fig. 6

Signs of handling that may point to the painting's having been executed in a painting-case: traces of paint in the top left-hand corner (left) and a graze on the right-hand edge of the picture, which points to a possible fastening in such a case, microscopic photographs (M = 1 mm)





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Fig. 7  
Crosswise applications  
of paint, wet-in-wet,  
microscopic photograph  
(M = 1 mm)

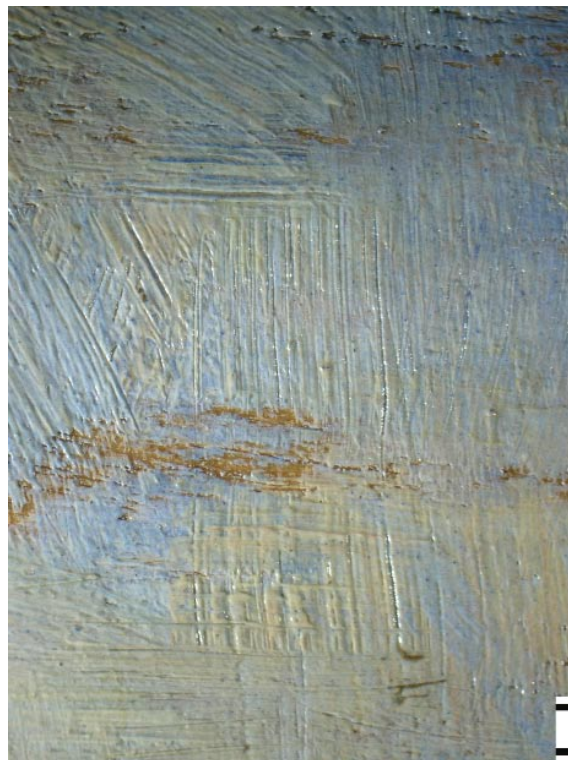


Fig. 8  
Brushwork in the region  
of the sky, applications  
of drying paint clearly  
reveal the brushstrokes,  
microscopic photograph  
(M = 1 mm) in slightly  
raking light





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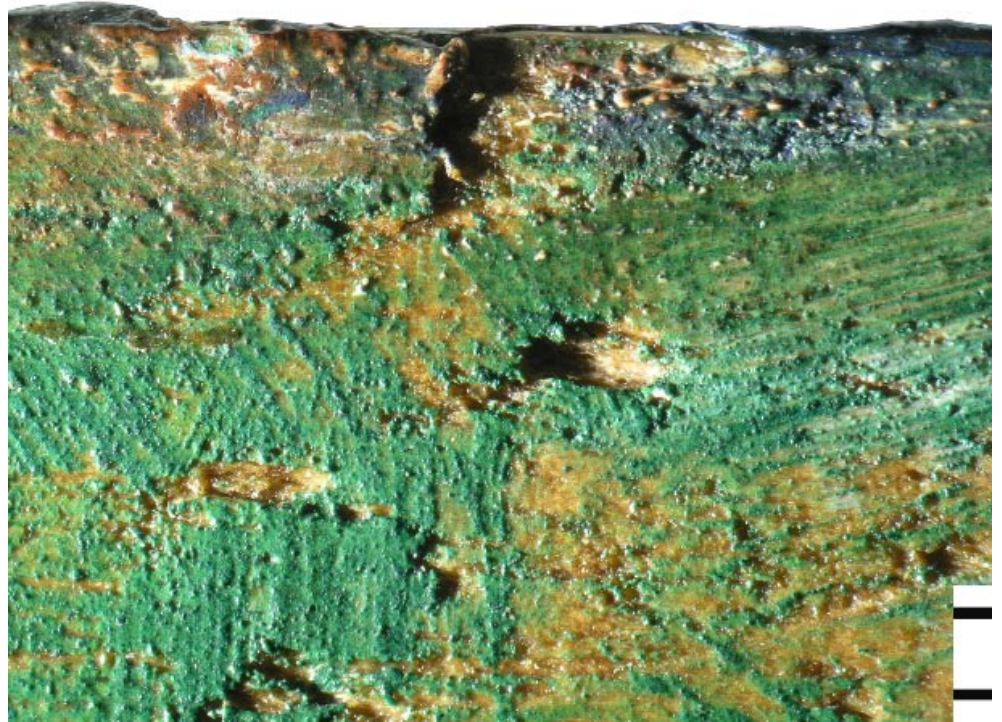


Fig. 9  
Coarse pigmentation  
in the green paint  
applications, microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)  
in raking light

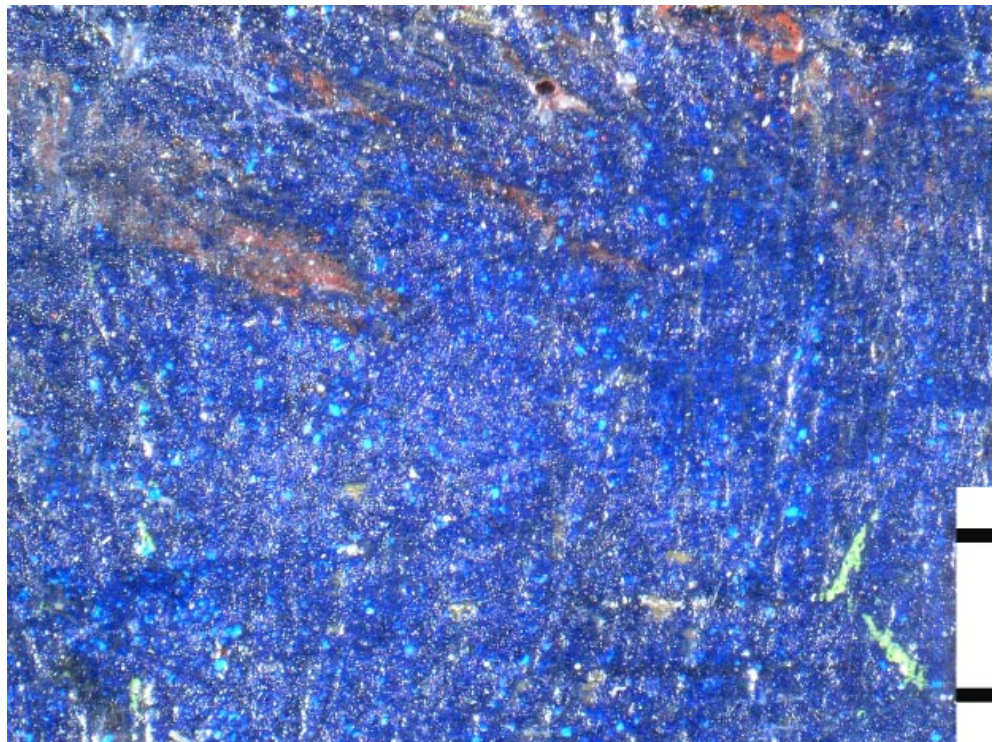


Fig. 10  
Pigmentation of the blue  
garment of the figure,  
microscopic photograph  
(M = 1 mm)





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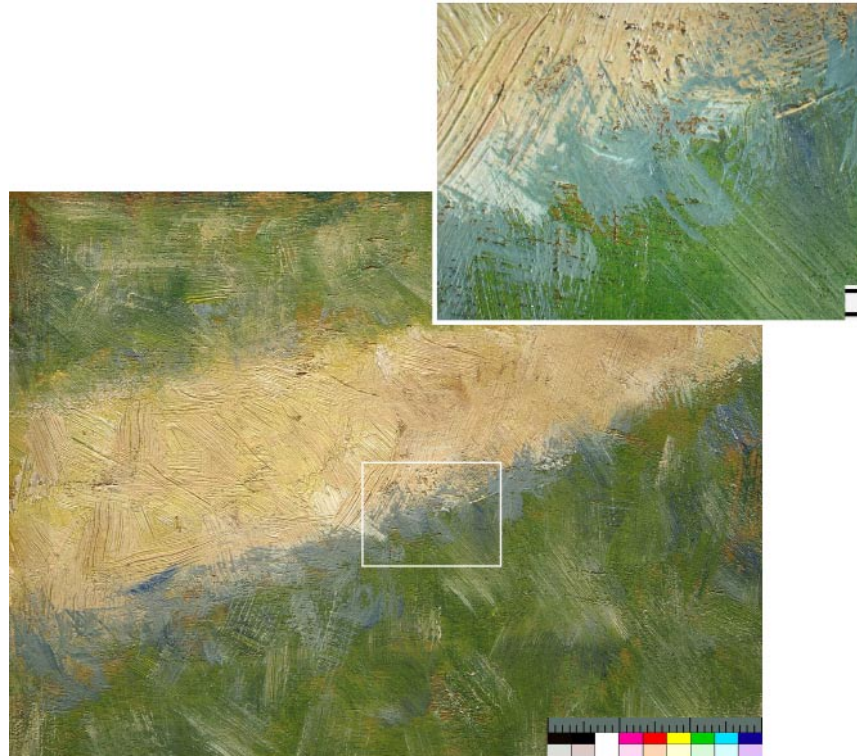


Fig. 11  
Detail, additions in blue-green paint along the path by someone other than the artist, microscopic photograph (top right, M = 1 mm)



Fig. 12  
Detail under UV fluorescence: palely fluorescing paint applications above the figure's head are likewise later additions