Georges Seurat  
(1859-1891)  

Figure in a Landscape at Barbizon  
(Figure massive dans un paysage a Barbizon)  

c. 1882  
no signature or date  
Oil on poplar  
h 15.5 cm x b 24.8 cm  
WRM Dep. FC 705
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 stereomicroscopy 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.
### Picture support panel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard format</th>
<th>close to P2 (24.0 x 16.0 cm), horizontal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thickness</td>
<td>2 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of wood</td>
<td>poplar (Populus sp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel structure</td>
<td>consists of one board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain direction</td>
<td>horizontal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut of panel</td>
<td>tangential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sizing</th>
<th>undetermined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colour</td>
<td>no ground present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binding medium</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character and appearance</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium/technique</th>
<th>neither microscopic examination nor IR reflectography suggest any underdrawing or underpainting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extent/character</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentimenti</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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
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)

Signature/Mark

When?  –

Autograph signature  –

Serial  –

Frame

Authenticity  not original

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].
Georges Seurat – Figure in a Landscape at Barbizon
Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Literature


Source of illustrations

All illustrations and figures Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud

Examination methods used

- ✔ Incident light
- ✔ Raking light
- ✔ Reflected light
- ✔ Transmitted light
- ✔ Ultraviolet fluorescence
- ✔ Infrared reflectography
- ✔ False-colour infrared reflectography
- ✔ X-ray
- ✔ Stereomicroscopy
- ✔ VIS spectrometry
- ✔ Wood identification
- ✔ FTIR (Fourier transform spectroscopy)
- ✔ EDX (Energy Dispersive X-ray analysis)
- ✔ Microchemical analysis

Author of examination: Katja Lewerentz  Date: 5/2005
Author of brief report: Katja Lewerentz  Date: 11/2008
Georges Seurat – Figure in a Landscape at Barbizon

Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Fig. 1
Recto

Fig. 2
Verso
Fig. 3
Reflected light, wood structure of the panel is revealed through the thin paint application

Fig. 4
Raking light
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).
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
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)
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