



**Paul Gauguin**

(1848-1903)

**The Seine  
at the Pont de Grenelle**  
(La Seine au Pont de Grenelle)

1875

*signed and dated bottom right:  
"P Gauguin. 75"*

*Oil on mahogany panel*

*h 30.6 cm x b 45.7 cm*

*WRM Dep. FC 744*





## Brief Report

This painting with its view of the industrial buildings on the banks of the Seine is one of Gauguin's early works [Wildenstein 1964, cat. no. 15, Wildenstein 2001, cat. no. 18]. In 1875, when *The Seine at the Pont de Grenelle* was painted, Gauguin was still working as a stockbroker. He was to pursue painting as a sideline for another seven years, before finally deciding in 1882 to turn his back on the world of finance. This picture is one of the few that Gauguin painted on wood. He used a commercially prepared mahogany panel (Fr. *acajou*), which evidently came pre-primed with its off-white ground (fig. 8). A stencil verso indicates the panel to be a product of the Latouche company, although the format does not match any of the known standard sizes (figs 2, 4). However there is nothing to suggest that Gauguin cropped a panel that was originally of such a format. Before starting the actual painting, Gauguin established a perspective vanishing-point structure in the region of the buildings, apparently with a pencil and ruler. This can be seen clearly in the IR reflectogram, while microscopic inspection reveals no obvious clues to the precise nature of the medium (fig. 9). The drawing was followed by very thin, semi-transparent underpaintings (Fr. *ébauche*) in parts of the picture, with intensive, coarsely pigmented red ochre and greenish brown (fig. 10). The remaining painting was executed briskly wet-in-wet, including the signature.

In this process, individual paints blended only when applied to the panel itself, e.g. in the bow of the barge in the foreground. The brushwork is easy to follow, but hardly impasto, the pale ground serving time and again as a reflector thanks to the thinness of the paint. It takes microscopic enlargement to discern the use of red lake. Individual paint applications which come across as green, brown or black originally included clear red accents. In the fine cracks of these applications, which under the microscope look as if they have been broken open, can be seen what was once a raspberry-red lake, but is now a whitish, powdery, in some places foamy-looking substance (fig. 12). The particular kind of lake has not been identified beyond doubt, but the most recent investigations of van Gogh's and Guillaumin's paintings suggest that the addition of starch alongside the oily binding medium was responsible for pronounced bleaching and structural changes in the paint layers involved [Bommel/Geldorf/Hendriks 2005, Burnstock/Lanfear/Berg, 2005]. There are incidentally two further works depicting the same motif in a similar format and also on wood; one unsigned study with an identical scene but far more sketchy in character, titled *Le Port de Grenelle - I* [Wildenstein 2001, cat. no. 17] and a detail of the motif titled *Les Usines Cail et le Quai de Grenelle* [Wildenstein 2001, cat. no. 16].



## Picture support panel

Standard format	not a standard size; the dimensions lie exactly halfway between <i>paysage</i> and <i>marine</i> 8; there are no signs that the panel was reduced in size from a standard format either before or after the picture was painted
Thickness	1.2 cm
Type of wood	mahogany ( <i>Swietenia sp.</i> )
Panel structure	one board
Grain direction	horizontal
Cut of panel	tangential
Traces left by production/treatment	vertical tooling marks verso resulting from smoothing of the surface (fig. 6); a horizontal hole app. 2 mm broad on each of the short sides, perhaps in connexion with a fastening while the panel was being prepared (planing or priming?) (fig. 6); on the top edge a round hole of app. 1 mm diameter, perhaps marking the fastening to an easel; planed all the way round over a breadth of app. 1.5 cm down to app. 0.7 cm; recto a dent in the panel is discernible in raking light beneath the intact paint and ground layers (fig. 7); a transparent coating has been applied verso
Producer's/dealer's marks	Latouche stencil in black paint in the middle verso, inscribed in an oval, inverted with respect to the picture, clearly legible under UV (fig. 4): "TOILES & TABLEAUX et COULEURS/LATOUCHE / 34[,] Rue de Lafayette [,] 34. / ENCADREMENTS"



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## Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	off-white (fig. 8)
Application	primed before or after cutting-to-size(?), one or two layers
Binding medium	presumably oil
Character and appearance	thin, very even layer without discernible utensil marks resulting from application or smoothing suggest a professional job; microscopic inspection reveals fine, ochre-yellow/red pigment particles

## Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	pencil(?), fine, dark strokes of constant thickness; a ruler was evidently used (fig. 9)
Extent/character	IR reflectography reveals the perspective construction above the factories, leading to a vanishing point on the right-hand side of the picture; a graphic lay-in of the composition in the vicinity of the crane is also partly recognizable; even under microscopic inspection these lines are not clearly visible in spite of the open painting technique; there is no direct view of the underdrawing lines, only a view through the paint-layer (fig. 9)
Pentimenti	none discernible



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Brief Report on Technology and Condition

## Paint layer

### Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

coloured underpaintings (Fr. *ébauche*) in red ochre and greenish-brown discernible in the area of the tall factory building on the left and the roofs of the buildings (fig. 10); it can be assumed that these are more extensive; the subsequent paint applications were executed wet-in-wet throughout with short, offset, narrow brushstrokes; the sequence of applications cannot be unambiguously determined, but Gauguin appears to have worked on the row of houses against the sky before setting further accents (fig. 11); it is possible that the painting deviates from the underdrawing in the area of the crane, which was shifted to the right and downwards (fig. 9)

### Painting tools

various brushes of no more than 0.5 cm in breadth; numerous brush-hairs or parts of such are embedded in the paint-layer

### Surface structure

brushwork clearly visible everywhere, moderate impasto only where paints were blended with white

### Palette

microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale yellow, ochre, red-orange, pale red lake, medium green, dark blue, medium blue, black  
VIS spectrometry: cadmium(?) or chrome yellow(?), iron-oxide yellow, vermillion, cochineal(?), iron-oxide red, green earth(?), Prussian blue;  
microchemical and FTIR-spectroscopic analysis of the altered red lake: no identification of the colorant; calcium and potassium salts for the laking of the red colorant; admixture of starch and white lead

### Binding mediums

presumably largely oil; red lake: oil bound

## Surface finish

### Authenticity/condition

not authentic; varnished, remains of an older coat are present



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#### Signature/Mark

When?	signature and date bottom right “P Gauguin. 75”; applied in dark-blue paint with a pointed brush wet-in-wet on the underlying paint-layer (fig. 5)
Autograph signature	the execution matches other autograph signatures by Gauguin at this early period
Serial	–

#### Frame

Authenticity	not authentic
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#### State of preservation

Small dent in the panel pre-dates the painting (fig. 7); the edges of the picture have isolated losses in the paint down to the ground, in places strongly abraded; edges darkened as a result of yellowed varnish remains; just a few, mainly vertical fine shrinkage cracks and cracks due to aging in the bottom left-hand corner; on a micro scale those areas where red lake was one of the colours employed show changes, the paint layers appearing to have burst open with microscopic eruptions of material: these seem to be stable, however (fig. 12).

#### Additional remarks

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#### Source of illustrations

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



## Literature

- Bommel/Geldorf/Hendriks 2005: Maarten van Bommel, Muriel Geldorf, Ella Hendriks, "An investigation of organic red pigments used in paintings by Vincent van Gogh (November 1885 to February 1888)", in: *Art Matters, Netherlands technical studies in art*, 3, 2005, 111-137
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- Burnstock/Lanfear/Berg 2005: Aviva Burnstock, Ibby Lanfear, Klaas Jan van den Berg (et al.), "Comparison of the fading and surface deterioration of red lake pigments in six paintings by Vincent van Gogh with artificially aged paint reconstructions", in: *ICOM-CC 14th Triennial Meeting, The Hague*, 12-14 September 2005, 1, 2005, 459-466
- Christensen 1993: Carol Christensen, "The Painting Materials and Techniques of Paul Gauguin", in: *Conservation Research, Monograph Series II, Studies in the History of Art*, 41, 1993, 63-103
- Jirat-Wasiutynski/Newton 2000: Wojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski, H. Travers Newton, *Technique and Meaning in the paintings of Paul Gauguin*, Cambridge/New York 2000
- Wildenstein 1964: Georges Wildenstein, *Gauguin, Catalogue I*, Paris 1964, cat. no. 15, p. 8, with ill.
- Wildenstein 2001: Daniel Wildenstein, *Gauguin, Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage, Catalogue de l'oeuvre peint (1873-1888)*, Paris 2001, cat. no. 18, p. 20, with ill.

## 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 with barely legible  
dealer's stamp (cf. fig. 4)





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Brief Report on Technology and Condition



Fig. 3  
UV fluorescence



Fig. 4  
Details, dealer's stamp of  
the Latouche company in  
incident light and under  
UV (bottom)



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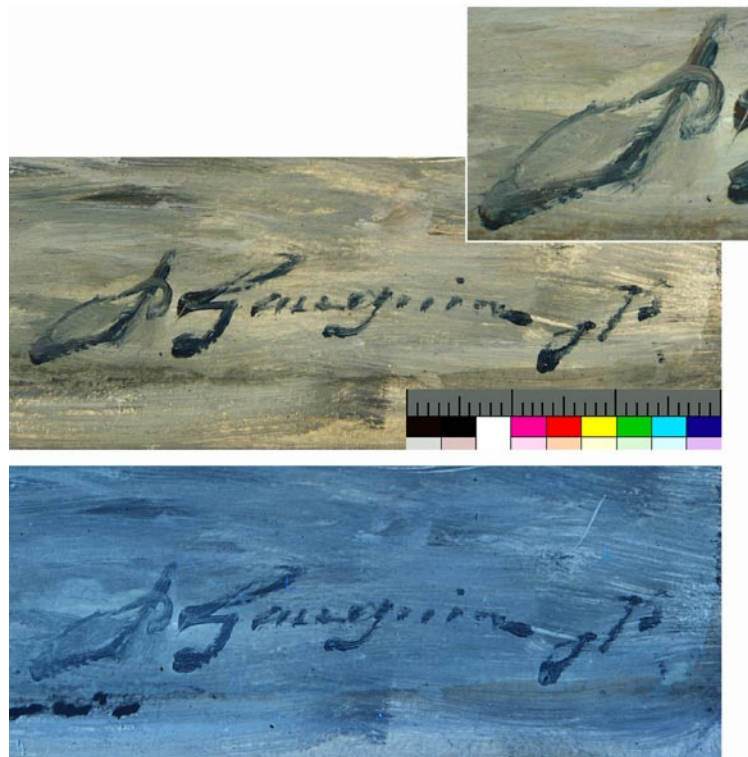


Fig. 5  
Details, signature  
applied wet-in-wet  
under incident light and  
UV, top left microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 6  
Details, traces of  
manufacture of panel  
verso, in raking light  
(top), below, traces of a  
fastening (arrow)





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Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Fig. 7  
Detail, raking light,  
beneath the intact  
paint and ground layers  
a dent in the panel is  
discernible

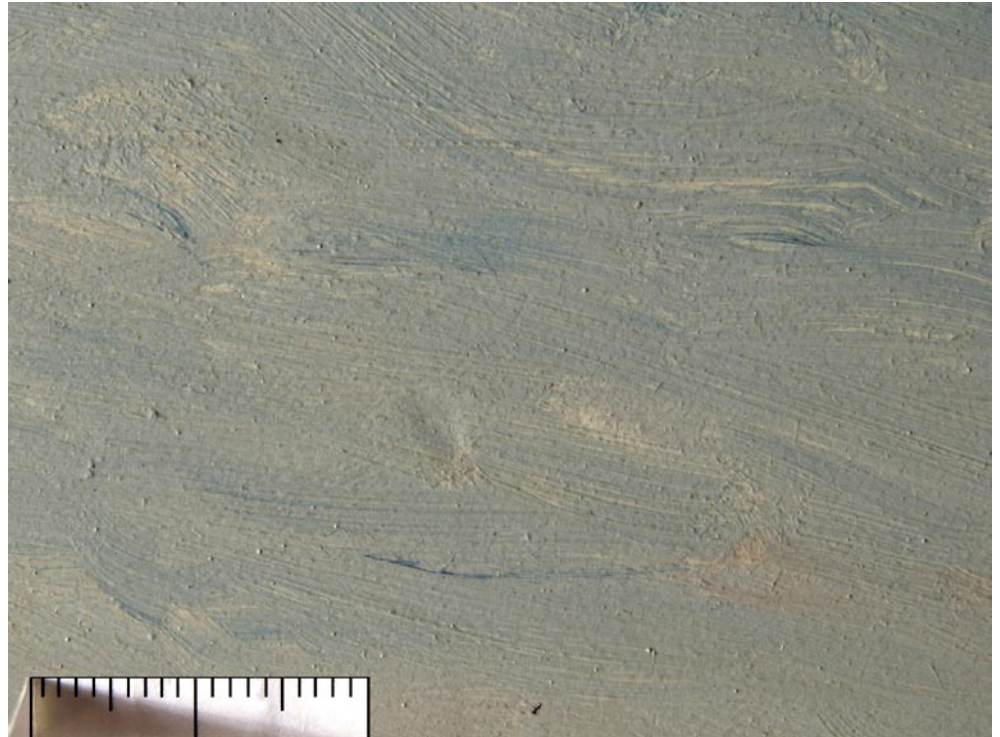


Fig. 8  
Off-white ground of the  
panel along the bottom  
edge where paint has  
been lost, microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)



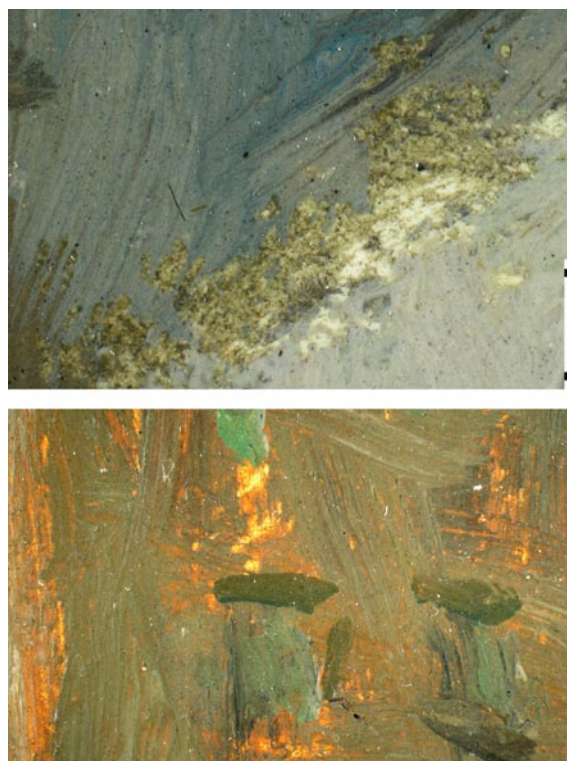


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Fig. 9  
Constructional underdrawing lines are discernible in the IR reflectogram, but they only rarely appear through the paint-layer, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 10  
A thin coloured underpainting (Fr. *ébauche*) is visible in those places where the top paint layer has not been applied, microscopic photograph, (M = 1 mm)







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Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Fig. 11  
Wet-in-wet paint  
applications at the  
transition from the row  
of houses to the sky,  
applied successively,  
and rounded off by  
even smaller accents,  
microscopic photograph  
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 12  
Mapping and  
microscopic photograph  
(M = 1 mm) testify to  
changes in the paint-  
layers which contained  
red lakes

