



**Paul Gauguin**

(1848-1903)

**Manuring the Fields**

(La fumure des terres)

1884

*signed and dated bottom right:  
"P. Gauguin. / 84"*

*Oil on canvas*

*h 59.2 cm x b 73.3 cm*

*WRM Dep. FC 663*





## Brief Report

This landscape, *Manuring the Fields*, formerly wrongly interpreted as *Gathering in the Hay*, dates from Paul Gauguin's months in Rouen in 1884 [Wildenstein 1964, cat. no. 124; Wildenstein 2001, cat. no. 117]. Seven pictures dating from this period can be proved to have been delivered to the Durand-Ruel gallery in April 1884, being assigned the lot numbers 4274–4280 [Wildenstein 2001, p. 136]. That the present picture was one of them was hitherto merely presumed by Wildenstein, but it has now been confirmed by a sticker verso with the handwritten number 4274 (fig. 2). Gauguin chose an extremely finely woven canvas in the standard F20 (73.0 x 60.0 cm) size with a commercial cream ground for the motif (figs 2, 7). A format stencil verso is evidence of the use of a ready-made pre-stretched canvas, although we have no dealer's mark. The use of commercial grounds by Gauguin has been demonstrated for his early period in the 1870s; only in the following decade did he come to prefer coarse canvases which he primed himself [Christensen 1993, p. 65]. Traces of composition planning can also be discerned on this picture: microscopic inspection reveals along the borders of the areas of colour fine black particles which are due to a sketchy underdrawing in charcoal(?) and got mixed into the wet paint-layer as the paint was applied (fig. 8).

The painting took up at least two working sessions. The underdrawing was followed by an underpainting, at first in semi-transparent paint at first, over which the succeeding layers were applied wet-on-dry, as can be seen in particular with the house in the right foreground (fig. 10). As he painted, Gauguin oriented himself by what he had set out in the drawing, as unpainted areas demonstrate; this is particularly easy to see in transmitted light (fig. 9). The allegedly subdued coloration shows on closer inspection the use of intensive hues which were subsequently largely covered over. The blue of the roofs is one example here. However, the fact that the paint does not cover everything each time allows these bright hues to play their part in the total colour effect (fig. 12). The use of viscous paint means the brushwork is visible throughout. One pentimento is represented by the figure by the wheelbarrow in the centre-right foreground, which was added over paint which had already dried (fig. 11). When the painting was restored at some time in the past, a coat of varnish was removed, leaving a uniformly matt surface (figs 3, 13).



## Picture support canvas

Standard format	F20 (73.0 x 60.0 cm), horizontal; stencilled '20' on the right-hand half of the canvas verso, turned 90° clockwise vis-à-vis the picture (fig. 2)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical and horizontal 30 threads per cm; very fine, compact weave with largely even yarn thickness of 0.2-0.4 mm (vertical/horizontal) and only a few knots or irregularities; Z-twist
Stretching	authentic; nailed at intervals of app. 5.5-7.0 cm; conspicuous stretch-marks along all edges
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with vertical centre-bar
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	recto and verso chamfering along the inner and outer edges by app. 5 mm, scoring for the grooves for the wedges
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	–



## Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	white with a pale cream-to-yellowish tone (fig. 7)
Application	applied presumably in one or two layers prior to cutting-to-size and stretching
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	very thin, even layer

## Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	charcoal(?) (fig. 8)
Extent/character	it takes microscopic inspection to reveal traces of charcoal particles in places, suggesting a sketchy underdrawing; to judge by such traces in places left unpainted to reveal the ground, the house on the right, the field, the figure on the left, the hedge and the heaps of manure were sketched before any paint was applied (fig. 4)
Pentimenti	none can be determined (see below)



## Paint layer

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

at least two stages in the painterly execution can be inferred, as Gauguin worked both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry; following the under-drawing, the first coloured lay-in in thin semi-transparent paint; paint applied subsequently was of a viscous consistency; the sequence is difficult to establish, as the individual parts of the picture were evidently worked on alternately several times in order to achieve the final colour effects; the addition of the figure with the wheelbarrow and possibly also the subduing of the colour impression of the roof of the house from bright blue to blue-black on the right-hand edge of the picture can be regarded as pentimenti (figs 9-12)

### Painting tools

various brushes of breadths mostly between 0.3 and 1.0 cm

### Surface structure

brushwork clearly visible throughout, as Gauguin used dry, thick paint in a number of applications (figs 3, 12)

### Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale yellow, ochre, red-dish-orange, medium red, pale red lake, dark green, medium green, pale yellowish-green, dull green, dark blue, medium blue, black  
VIS spectrometry: cadmium(?) or chrome yellow(?), iron-oxide yellow, vermilion, rose madder(?), zinc green(?), copper-based green pigment(?), ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, iron-oxide red/brown

### Binding mediums

presumably purely oil

## Surface finish

### Authenticity/Condition

not authentic; now unvarnished following removal of coat of varnish in the past (fig. 13)



## Signature/Mark

When?	signature and date bottom right; applied with a pointed brush in semi-transparent dark-blue paint, which corresponds with the blue blend in the hedge on the left of the picture; applied to the fully dried underlying paint-layer (fig. 6)
Autograph signature	agrees with Gauguin's autograph signatures of the period
Serial	–

## Frame

Authenticity	not authentic
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## State of preservation

Under raking light a dominant network of aging cracks is clearly discernible recto, above all also a diagonal tension craquelure in the corners (fig. 3), likewise the impression of the stretcher is also clearly visible; verso varnish which has penetrated through the craquelure testifies to a former coat of varnish or to its removal (fig. 2); inconsequential losses in the paint-layer in the bottom quarter of the picture; a few short scratches in the paint-layer on the top and bottom edges which presumably arose during the painting process or shortly afterwards; negligible remains of a shiny, heavily yellowed coating in the bottom third of the painting and along the turnover edge bear witness to a removal of varnish in the recent past, which gave the surface of the painting an astonishingly even matt gloss (figs 7, 13).

## Additional remarks

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## 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. 45, p. 122, with ill.
- 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
- Stevenson 2005: Lesley Stevenson, *Gauguin's Vision: A Discussion of Materials and Technique*, in: Belinda Thomson (ed.), *Gauguin's Vision*, exhib. cat., National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh 2005, 6. July - 2 October 2005, 111-119
- Wildenstein 1964: Georges Wildenstein, *Gauguin, Catalogue I*, Paris 1964, cat. no. 339, p. 130, with ill.
- Wildenstein 2001: Daniel Wildenstein, *Gauguin, Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage, Catalogue de l'œuvre peint (1873-1888)*, Paris 2001, cat. no. 117, p. 136, with ill.

## Source of illustrations

All 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 with indication of  
size and historic inscrip-  
tion by the Durand-Ruel  
gallery





Fig. 3  
Raking light



Fig. 4  
Transmitted light





Fig. 5  
UV fluorescence



Fig. 6  
Details, signature in  
incident light (top) and  
under UV

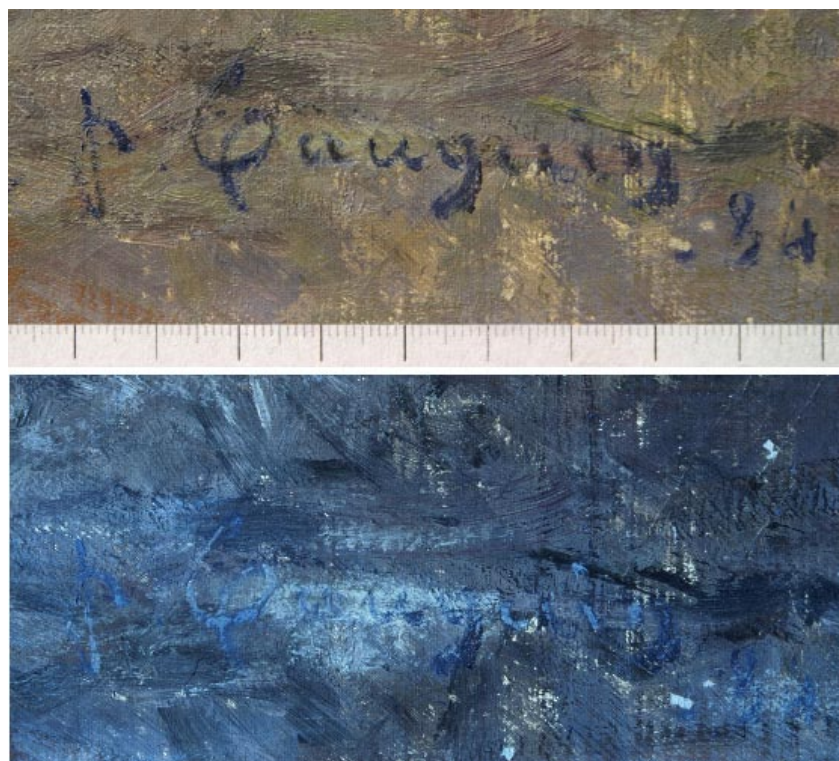




Fig. 7  
Cream ground on the turnover edge; top edge shows remains of varnish, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

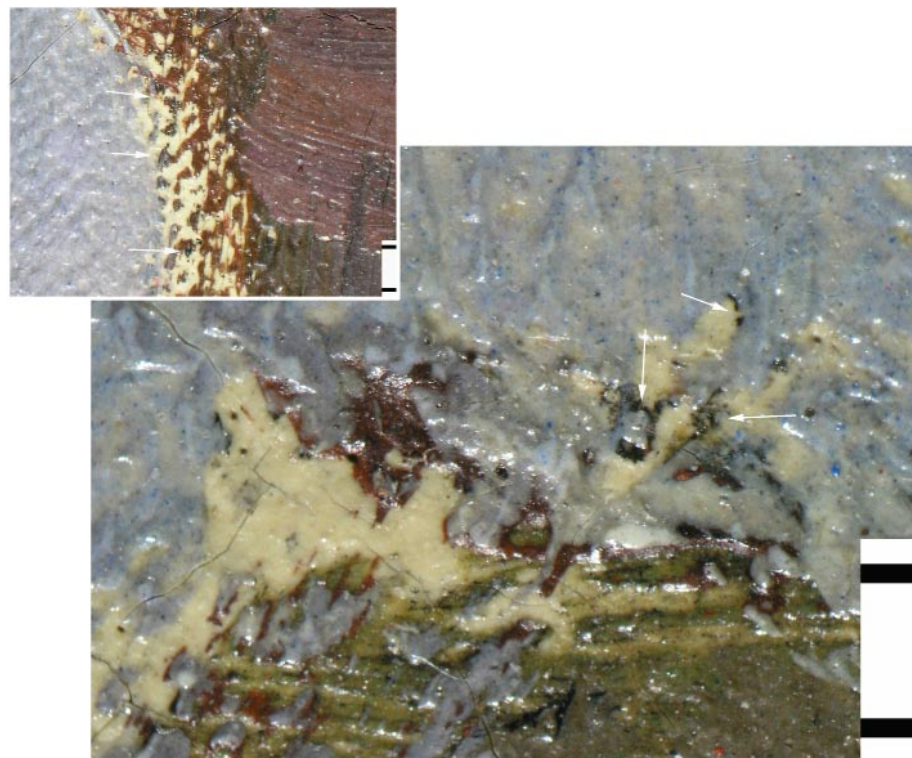


Fig. 8  
Charcoal particles from the underdrawing (arrows), microscopic photographs (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 9  
Details in incident and transmitted light, areas left unpainted during the lay-in in colour of the depiction of the figure are rendered visible



Fig. 10  
In one place where overlying paint was not applied, a thin underlying layer can be discerned, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 11  
Details in incident  
and transmitted light;  
here the paint cover is  
complete, indicating that  
this figure was added  
later by Gauguin



Fig. 12  
Underlying impasto blue  
paint-layers in the region  
of the house, microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)



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Fig. 13  
Remains of varnish, left  
behind after a coat of  
varnish was removed  
in the past, microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)

