



Edouard Manet

(1832-1883)

Still-Life with Asparagus

(Une botte d'asperges)

c. 1880(?)

signed bottom left: „Manet“

no date

oil on textile

h 46.5 cm x b 55.0 cm

WRM Dep. 318





Brief Report

The *Still Life with Asparagus* was painted on a fine, pre-primed canvas, which can be shown to be part of a pre-painted larger-format canvas. This is proved by colour discrepancies between the still-life and paint-layers which extend on the bottom turnover edge right to the edge of the canvas (fig. 6). As it is only at the lower edge of the picture and in the area of the bottom right-hand corner that paint applications dating from the first painting can be found beneath the painting visible today, where otherwise intact surfaces of the pale-grey ground are either visible through the paint or else are simply exposed (fig. 7), most of the canvas appears to have been unpainted when Manet set about painting the bunch of asparagus. Small holes at relatively large intervals between the nails of the still extant authentic stretching of the canvas point to a temporary fastening of the piece of canvas, which was evidently cut out on all four sides (fig. 5). This interim fastening, which may have been on to a rigid base, can however at most have served for the preliminary planning of the composition, as none of the paint applications extend beyond the front edges of the frame, in other words were only applied after the canvas was stretched on the extant original stretcher. Using brush and paint, Manet sketched the shape of the bunch of asparagus on the primed canvas (fig. 8). The sequence of the application of the different colours cannot be determined, as the first applications, in the region of the bunch of asparagus, the brown background and the greenery are juxtaposed carefully without any overlapping.

The brown paint applications in the background are thin and in some cases semi-transparent (fig. 8). In transmitted light, we can discern the strokes of a flat-ferrule brush or possibly a hake brush too (fig. 3). As the painting proceeded, wet-in-wet, the pale-grey ground was incorporated into the colour scheme with great efficiency and to great effect by being left unpainted, in particular in the area of the bunch of asparagus. In the harmony of impasto brush-strokes and dabs, the surface of the asparagus stalks and heads is imitated to make them almost tangible (fig. 8). Only shortly before the painting was complete were the boundaries between the different colour fields relaxed by individual brush-strokes. Likewise at a late stage, if not last of all, the edges of the painting were gone over with a brush-handle or something similar to reveal the pale ground once more (fig. 11). It is unclear whether the object was to test the effect of the composition or to suggest a pale frame. Individual paint applications overlapping these scraped-away edges indicate the placing of final colour accents, however, completing the painting, which was presumably executed very rapidly in a single sitting, including the signature which was added while the paint surface was still wet (fig. 4).



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Picture support canvas

Standard format	F10 (46.0 x 55.0 cm) horizontal
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 29/30, horizontal 30/31 threads per cm; very fine canvas light-brown in colour, irregularities such as knots and thickening; above all in the horizontal threads; thread thickness vertical 0.1-0.3 mm, horizontal 0.2-0.4 mm, weak Z-twist
Stretching	original fastening with nails has been preserved, the tacking margin was unevenly cut only after this stretching, additional very small holes in the tacking margin point to a previous temporary fastening of the piece of canvas
Stretcher/strainer	original stretcher with vertical central bar
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	edges verso fraying to a depth of 1.5 cm from the outside; towards the canvas the stretcher chamfered to prevent contact with fabric; at the bottom edge on the left recto there are two pointed elevations indicating heads of nails beneath, possibly a further indication of the stretcher being used for a second time
Manufacturer's /dealer's marks	not present



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Ground

Sizing	present
Colour	light grey (relatively dark)
Application	single-layer, pre-primed
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	presumably applied thin, the tops of the threads are only just covered by the ground, so that the canvas structure is discernible (<i>"à grain"</i>); in places the tops of the threads are exposed, although it is not clear whether this is due to the way the ground was applied (smoothing tool?) or to later unintentional partial friction

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	round brush and paint of differing consistency and pigmentation, evidently mixed on the palette alternately in grey, ochre and black shades
Extent/character	only in the area of the asparagus bunch a few very sketchy lines to indicate the shape, many of them still visible where no later applications of paint have been made
Pentimenti	on each side of the two osier withies, ochre lines can be seen, whose slightly deviating course indicates not only a more oblique position of the bunch of asparagus but also possibly a wrapping originally planned to be broader



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Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

no sequence can be determined, as the first applications of paint in the background, the bunch of asparagus and the greenery do not overlap and subsequent applications merge into each other where they meet; the paint was applied wet-in-wet throughout in a single session, the colours being mixed on the palette and varying in consistency, opacity and manner of application: in the background there are very thin semi-transparent applications with scumbling effect, semi-dry alongside saturated and impasto brushstrokes and dabs in the area of the bunch of asparagus and greenery; in the lower right-hand area of the greenery subsequent applications of light grey paint, which in one small area overlay the greenery in order to suggest the white surface of the table shining through

Painting tools

flat- and round-ferrule brushes, possibly occasional use of a hake brush in the brown background

Surface structure

varying between very smooth to relief-like impasto with brushstrokes recognizable throughout

Palette

hues revealed by microscopic inspection: white, yellow ochre, two different yellows, red earth pigment, transparent red, powerful red, medium green, bluish-green, strong blue, black
VIS spectrometry: chrome yellow(?), cadmium yellow, Naples yellow(?), antimony yellow(?), chrome yellow orange, chrome oxid hydrat green, viridian, cobalt blue

Binding mediums

presumably exclusively oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/condition

the existence of an original varnish cannot be proved; currently there is a thin, slightly yellowed varnish; remains of an older, badly yellowed coating can be discerned



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Signature/Mark

When?	in the artist's own hand immediately after completion of the painting
Autograph signature	with brush and thin black paint in two strokes with intermediate re-wetting of brush; first stroke: "ma", second stroke: "net" with following point through which a hook-like brushstroke runs, underlining the end of the signature
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

The painting is unlined and is generally in good condition with only trivial craquelure; loss of paint is confined to small dot-sized areas.

Additional remarks

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Literature

- Osten 1969: Gert von der Osten, "Manets Spargelbündel 'bei Liebermann' jetzt in Köln", Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch Vol. XXXI, Cologne 1969, pp. 135-148
- Osten 1971: Gert von der Osten, Nachtrag, Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch Vol. XXXI, Cologne 1971, pp. 253-258
- Rouart/Wildenstein 1975: Denis Rouart, Daniel Wildenstein, Edouard Manet, Catalogues raisonnés, Lausanne/Paris 1975, p. 268, no. 357

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 | |

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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso





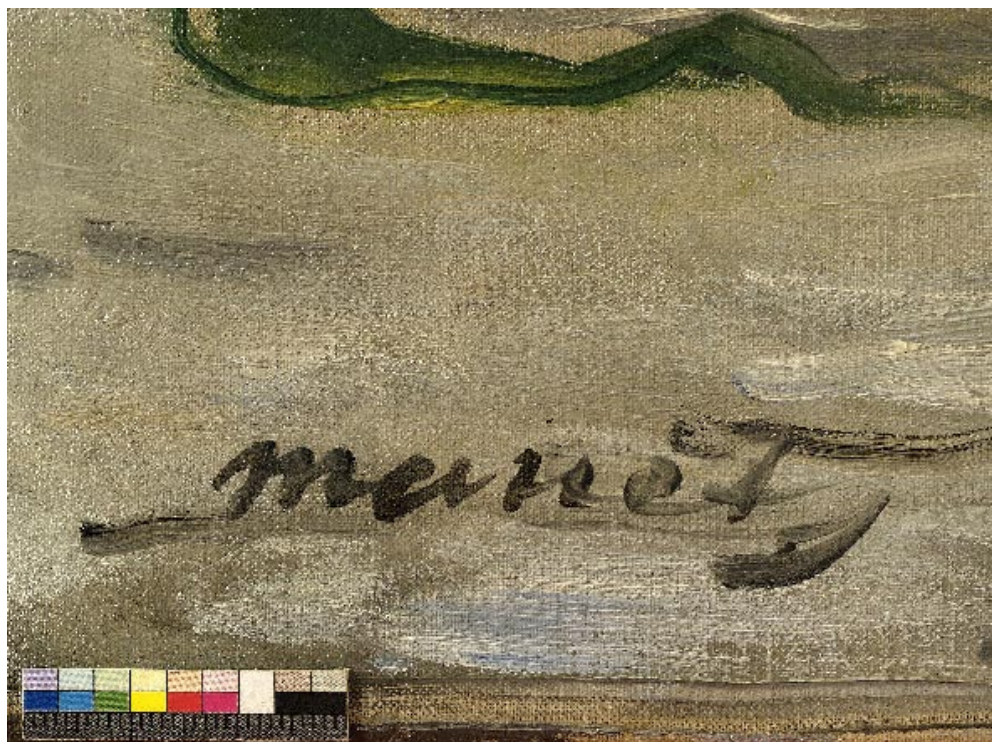
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Fig. 3
Transmitted light photograph; the numerous unpainted areas (here yellow) and areas of thin paint application are clearly visible, as are the places in the picture background where a flat-ferrule brush was applied to the canvas and lifted



Fig. 4
Detail, signature





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Fig. 5
Nail and hole
presumably due to a
temporary fastening,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

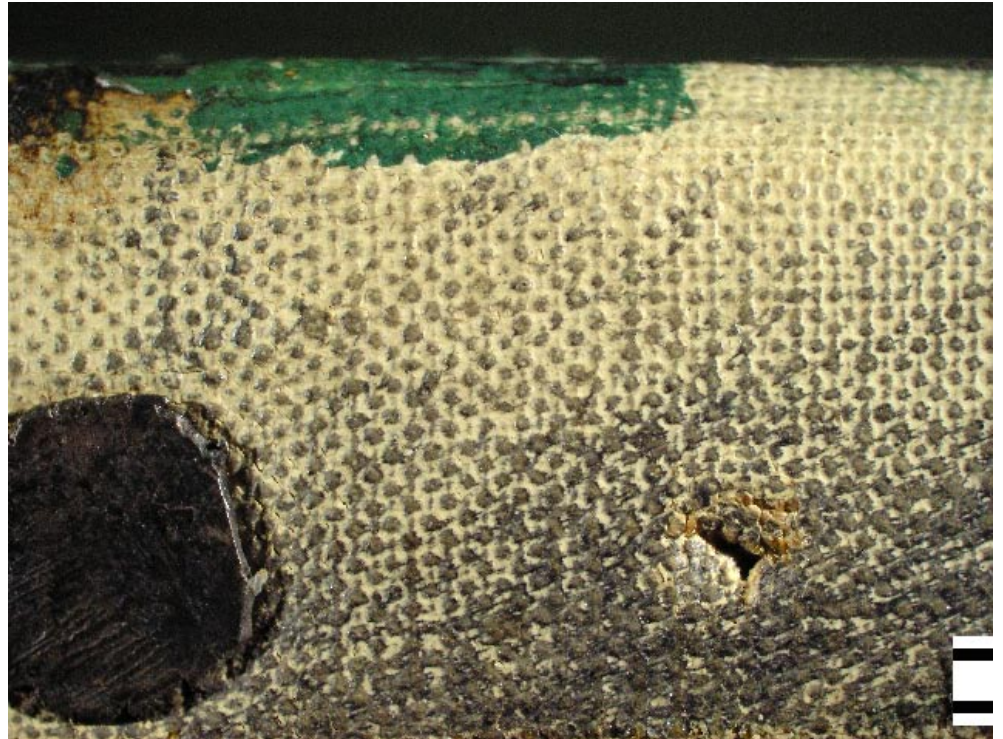
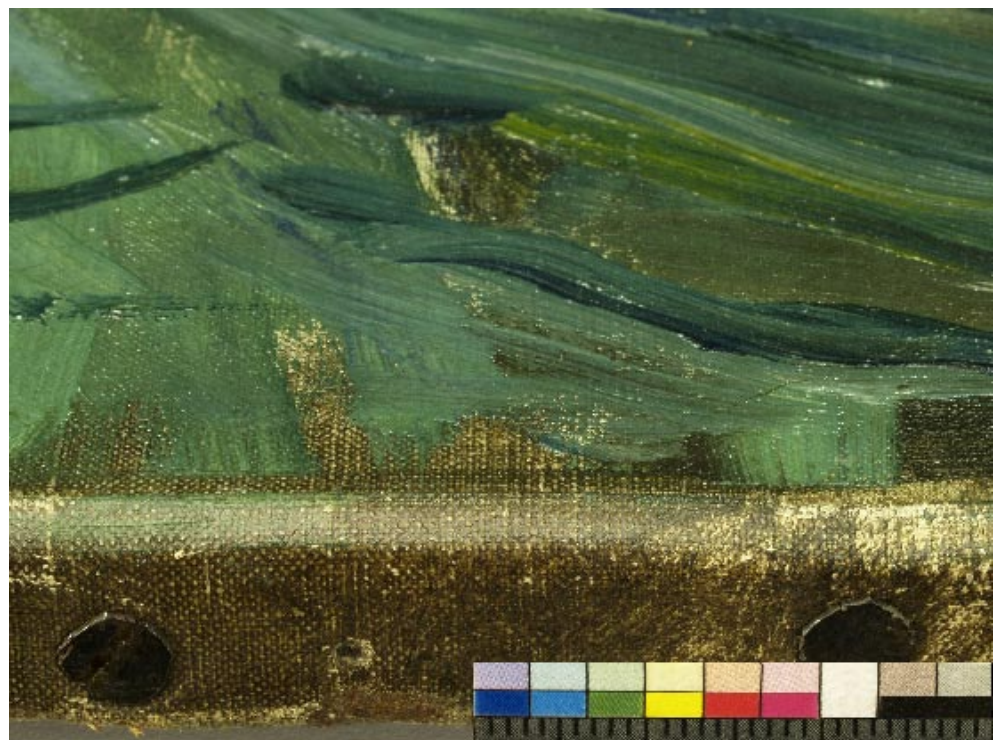


Fig. 6
Detail, dark paint left
over from a previous
painting of the lower
foldover edge



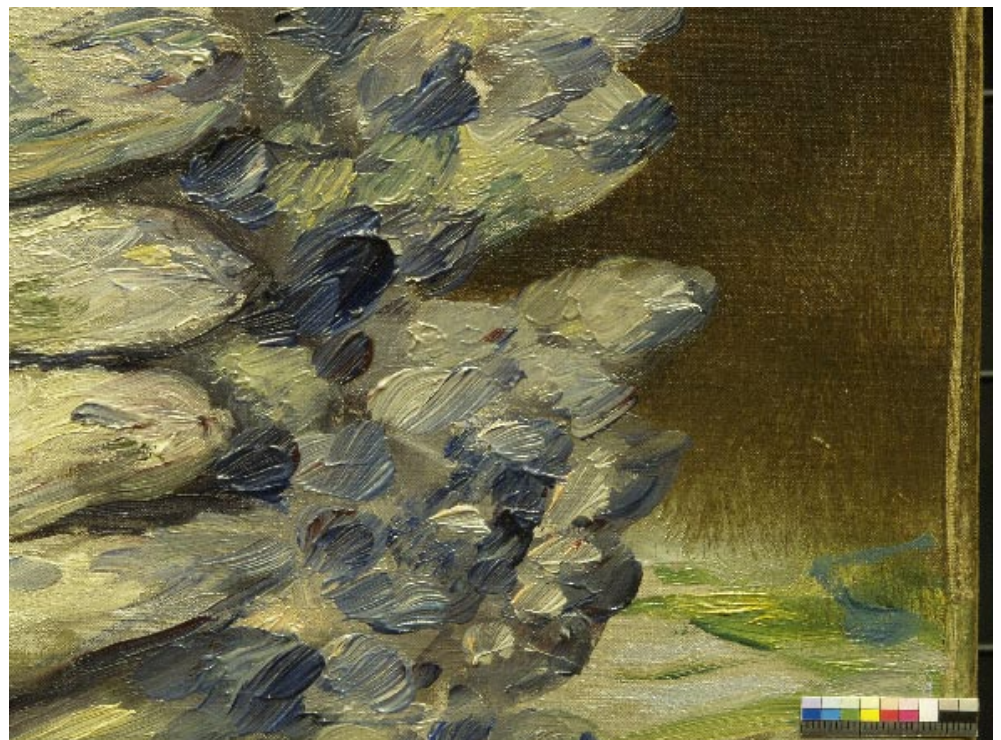


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Fig. 7
Detail, the light-grey
ground, integrated into
the colour composition
through being left
unpainted



Fig. 8
Detail, impasto
applications of paint



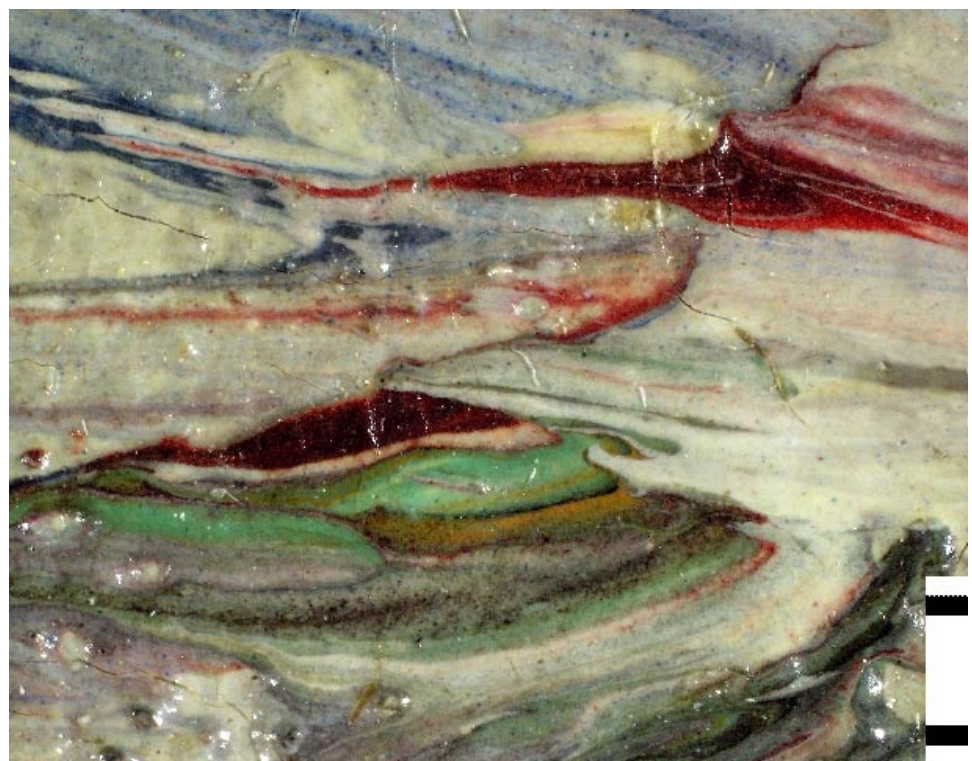


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Fig. 9
Detail, wet-in-wet
highlights on larger area
of paint in the area of
the greenery



Fig. 10
Mixing of various
colours wet-in-wet in
the asparagus tips,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)





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Fig. 11
Detail, all-round scraping
of the still-wet paint in
the region of the top left
corner



Fig. 12
Detail, final paint
applications overlap the
scraped edges

