



Berthe Morisot

(1841-1895)

Child among Hollyhocks (Enfant dans les roses trémières)

1881

*signature stamp bottom right:
'Berthe Morisot'*

undated

oil on canvas

h 50.5 cm x b 42.5 cm

WRM Dep. 614





Brief Report

The motif of Morisot's daughter Julie playing in the garden near Bougival was based on three small pastel sketches with further depictions of the girl as preparatory studies [Bataille/Wildenstein 1961, nos. 457, 461, 467; Morisot 2002, p. 218]. The picture was displayed as early as 1882, a year after it was painted, at the seventh Impressionist exhibition, where it was assigned the catalogue number 94 and bore the title "*Baby*". In spite of this prominent exposure in the exhibition, Morisot evidently did not think it necessary to sign the work. In the bottom right-hand corner there is today a signature stamp, such as would normally only have been applied after the artist's death (fig. 7). Morisot's picture was painted on a unprimed fine canvas, such as we find fairly often in this artist's oeuvre [cf. Morisot 2002, nos. 53, 54, 56, 76, 84, 99]. Callen presumed that the non-use of a ground was not so much a deliberate technique as an emergency solution when the artist was using the verso of a canvas that had already been primed and painted on once before [Callen 2000, S. 67].

Thus in the present case we find verso a standard commercial white ground with the partly painted sketch of two horses' heads, which Morisot rejected at an early stage (fig. 2). She used the canvas and painted the unprimed side with the picture we have today of the *Child among Hollyhocks*. The open and sketchy painting technique, evidently with no assistance in the form of underdrawing lines, leaves the canvas visible in many places, although the latter's present brown colour is nothing like its original condition (figs. 10, 11). The reason for the change is the natural oxidation of the originally pale fabric, whose browning was further reinforced by a later coat of varnish, and quite certainly not intended by Morisot.



Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks

Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Picture support canvas

Standard format	not a standard size
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 29, horizontal 34 threads per cm; very fine, close and even weave (<i>toile fine</i> or <i>toile extra fine</i>); Z-twist
Stretching	the present stretching is authentic, but was not done until after the picture was painted, as the top and left-hand foldover edges are painted and cropped; on the top and right-hand foldover edges there are holes possibly resulting from a fastening of the canvas while it was being painted: these holes are in places surrounded by intact painting, suggesting that the canvas was first attached to a somewhat larger provisional frame or strainer by metal tacks within the field of the picture (fig. 8)
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with horizontal centre-bar; production technique, signs of use, exhibition and transport labels all point to it being old (fig. 2); the picture however was not painted on this frame (see above); a re-stretching on the present stretcher, for example for exhibition purposes, may have been done by Morisot herself
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	canvas is not square with the stretcher, but slightly skewed to top left
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none



Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks
Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Ground

Sizing	–
Colour	the present <i>recto</i> is unprimed; no sizing is detectable; the present <i>verso</i> has a commercial white ground with sizing (see verso)
Application	–
Binding medium	–
Texture	–

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	none detectable
Extent/character	–
Pentimenti	–



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

loose and open technique, in many places wet-in-wet with numerous places where underlying paint layers or the canvas were not painted over (figs 4, 9, 10, 11); the painting continues top and left a few centimetres beyond the current edge of the picture (see above, fig. 8); the first, predominantly thin paint applications, were followed by the detailed working with short brush-strokes and round dabs of paint, which emphasize mostly the vertical (girl, hollyhock, fence), but also the diagonal (green brush-strokes bottom right); paint consistency varies from semi-transparent to impasto; the final colour accents were done in red (flowers), in violet (roof, sky) and in semi-transparent dark green (lower half of picture, fig. 10)

Painting tools

flat-ferrule bristle brushes of various breadths between about 2 and 12 mm; the heavily diluted paint applications were presumably done with a hair or pointed brush

Surface structure

heavily diluted, smooth paint areas contrast with in places thick impasto, especially in areas with an admixture of white; the many unpainted areas result in the surface texture being characterized by the fine weave of the canvas (fig. 3)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, yellow ochre, medium yellow, orange, medium red, red lake (UV fluorescence: orange-red, fig. 5), violet (fig. 12), pale blue, medium blue, dark blue, medium semi-transparent green, dark green, brown, black;
VIS spectrometry: iron-oxide yellow, chrome yellow(?)/ cadmium yellow(?), zinc yellow(?), iron-oxide red(?), vermillion, alizarin madder, cobalt violet(?), cerulean, cobalt blue(?), Prussian blue, copper-based green, viridian, iron-oxide brown

Binding mediums

presumably oil



Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

today varnished, though this is not original, as the varnish has run into the craquelure; the application of the varnish resulted in raising and embedding of the fibres of the canvas, which is also evidence that the painting was originally unvarnished

Signature/Mark

When?

signature stamp 'Berthe Morisot' in dark-green paint on a part of the painting where the canvas is visible, presumably only after the artist's death (fig. 7)

Autograph signature

–

Serial

signature stamp, h 1.5 cm x b 4.0 cm; a rectangle can be discerned around the signature (breadth c. 5.2 cm); some of the letters flow into each other, so that it is difficult to tell them apart; in principle this kind of serial signature (with the conspicuously short 't') can be found quite often in Morisot's œuvre

Picture verso

The picture *verso* with the initial sketch of two horses' heads in landscape format was done on a pre-primed canvas; very thin, smooth and even ground applied before cutting-to-size and stretching (binding medium: presumably oil); microscopic inspection reveals larger white and a few small black particles, occasionally also transparent yellow inclusions; the artist first applied a very thin large-area umber painted ground in irregular brush-strokes, some of which were reduced by scraping or wiping; the few paint applications are for the most part wet-in-wet, of heavily dilute consistency and spread out using the brush; the few impasto areas seem if anything unintentional; the painting ends at the present bottom edge, but is cropped at the top and left by the edge of the canvas; colours: white, earth tones, medium red, red lake (UV fluorescence: orange, fig. 6), violet, dark blue (VIS spectrometry was not possible as the stretcher prevented application of the device to the canvas); the painting is unvarnished and hence very matt.



Frame

Authenticity

gilt carved frame with floral decoration in the corners and engravings in the smooth centre section of each bar; authenticity doubtful; a clue to the picture's first frame in white and gold can be found in a letter from Morisot to her husband [Morisot 2002, p. 218]

State of preservation

Slight change in format, probably due to re-stretching from an apparently larger provisional stretcher to the present stretcher (see above); a tear of about 4 cm in length in the bottom right-hand corner, stuck together and retouched; in the cerulean layer browned binding medium is emanating from the craquelure (fig. 13); the unpainted canvas recto is heavily browned, as a result of natural oxidation of the canvas and the later varnishing (figs 1, 10, 11).

Additional remarks

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Literature

- Bataille/Wildenstein 1961: M.-L. Bataille, Georges Wildenstein: Berthe Morisot. Catalogue des Peintures, Pastels et Aquarelles, Paris 1961, no. 107, p. 30, ill. 139 (in the illustration section)
- 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. 124, p. 282, with ill.
- Callen 2000: Anthea Callen, The Art of Impressionism, Painting techniques and the making of modernity, New Haven/London 2000
- Clairet/Montalant/Rouart 1997: Alain Clairet, D. Montalant, Yves Rouart: Berthe Morisot (1841-1895): Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Peint, Paris 1997 (CMR 108)
- Rouart 1941: Louis Rouart, Berthe Morisot, Paris 1941, ill. 22
- Morisot 2002: Berthe Morisot, exhib. cat. Fondation Pierra Gianadda Martigny, 19 June - 19 November 2002, Martigny, 2002, Nr. 55, S. 218-220, with ill.



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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Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks
Brief Report on Technology and Condition



Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso



Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks
Brief Report on Technology and Condition



Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light



Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks
Brief Report on Technology and Condition



Fig. 5
UV fluorescence

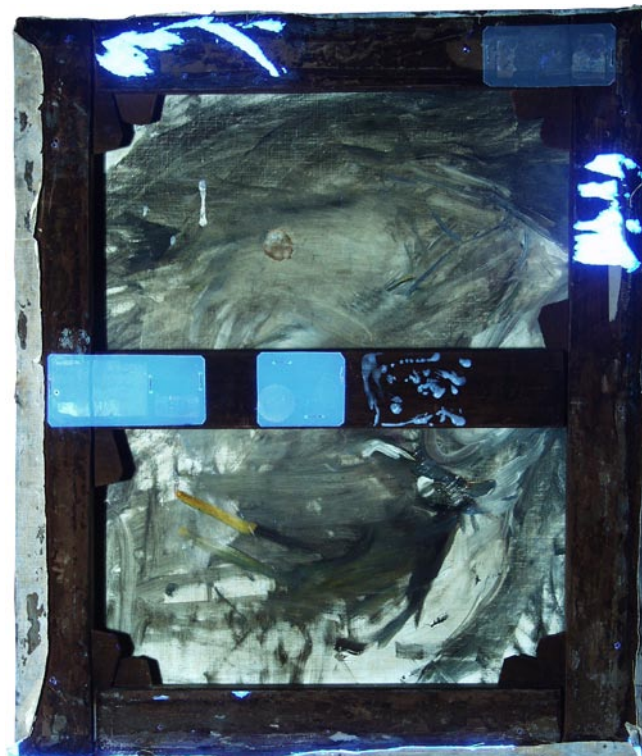


Fig. 6
UV fluorescence, verso



Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks
Brief Report on Technology and Condition



Fig. 7
Detail, signature in
incident light (top) and
UV fluorescence (bottom)



Fig. 8
Detail, top foldover
edge, painted and with
holes from an earlier
stretching



Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks
Brief Report on Technology and Condition



Fig. 9
Detail, child

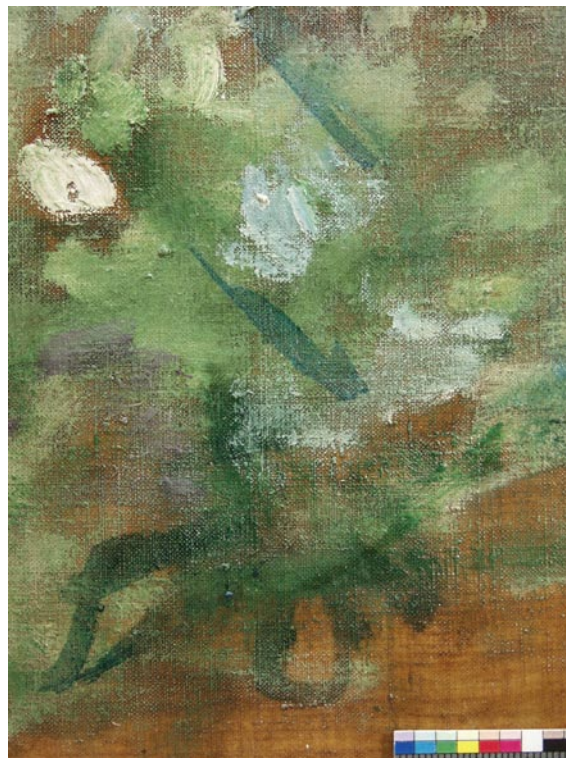


Fig. 10
Detail, semi-transparent
and opaque paint
applications on the bare
canvas

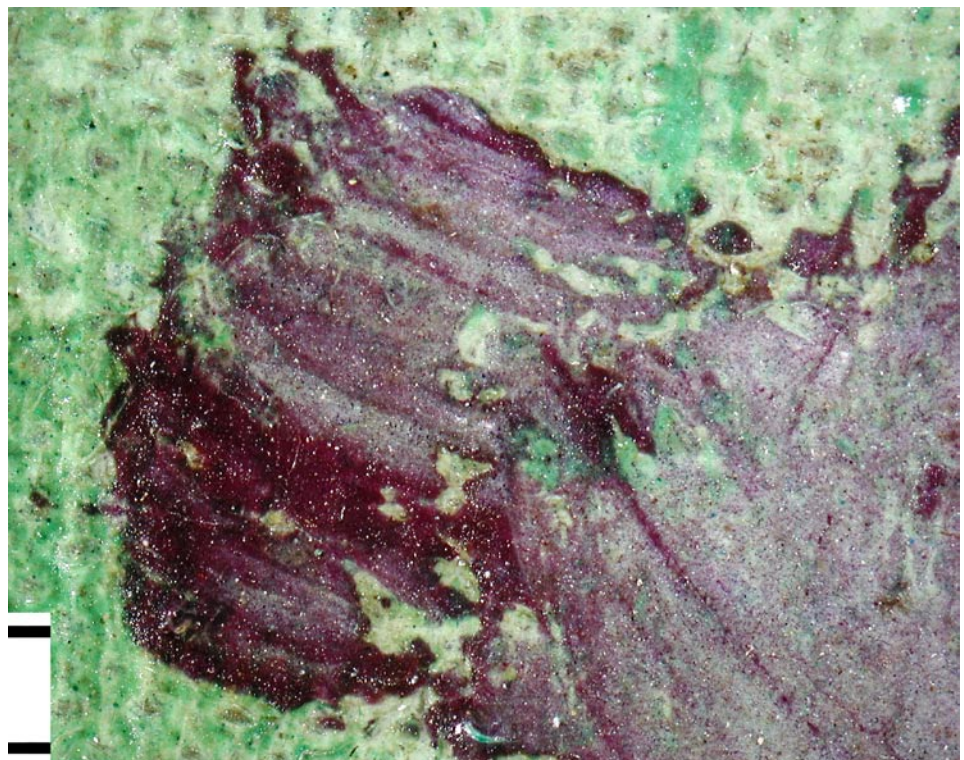


Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks
Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Fig. 11
Detail, wet-in-wet
and wet-on-dry paint
applications



Fig. 12
Violet paint application,
presumably cobalt violet,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)





Berthe Morisot – Child among Hollyhocks
Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Fig. 13
Drop-like emanation
of browned binding
medium in the cerulean
layer, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)

