



Berthe Morisot

(1841-1895)

The Harbour at Nice

(Le port de Nice)

1881/82

signed bottom right: "Berthe Morisot"

undated

Oil on canvas

h 41.4 cm x b 55.3 cm

WRM Dep. FC 710





Brief Report

According to her daughter Julie, Morisot painted this picture from a boat moored in the middle of the harbour [Manet 1985, p. 82]. Shortly after its completion it was shown at the 7th Impressionist exhibition in 1882. The commercial cream pre-primed canvas is not in any of the standard sizes then available. It is a very fine tabby weave, such as was popular in particular among the Paris Academy painters under the name of *toile fine* or *toile extra fine*. This comparatively expensive and exclusive fabric is often found in Morisot's œuvre, so that one can speak of a certain predilection. After a sketchy lay-in of the composition in black pencil or charcoal, the artist firmed up the chief forms with thinly applied earth colours. The subsequent execution proceeded rapidly, and the painting was completed, largely wet-in-wet, in a single session.

The paints, taken mostly unmixed from the palette, were applied with brushes of various widths in such a way that virtually every brisk stroke remained clearly identifiable (fig. 11). Although she made individual areas of paint successively denser with dabs of colour or her typical zigzag brushstrokes, in many cases the cream ground or the ochre underpainting remains visible. The fact that these empty spaces were intentional and are not to be seen as evidence of unfinished work is evidenced by the final brushstrokes, which were executed when the rest of the work was already dry. The signature in the bottom right-hand corner was presumably also done with the same paint in a single flourish.



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Picture support canvas

Standard format	not a standard size
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	36 threads per cm vertical and horizontal; very fine, thin and even weave
Stretching	the present stretching was performed when the painting was lined and provided with a canvas backing; the fact that the edges of the painting do not match the present stretcher suggests that the latter is not original; at the lower edge the painting continues into the foldover and is thus cropped by the edge of the stretcher; in other words the picture was originally somewhat larger
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with vertical centre-bar; authenticity not determined: manufacture, signs of use, dealer's stamp, exhibition and transport stickers suggest considerable age; however uncertainty results from the change in the picture's size; re-stretching on the present stretcher and consequent reduction in size could however have been done by Morisot herself, who perhaps executed the painting on a somewhat larger provisional stretcher or strainer
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	–
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	oval stamp in black paint on the centre-bar of the stretcher verso, inscription largely illegible: „COULEURS FINE & TOILES à TABLEAUX/ P:APRIN/ PARIS/ ... RUE DE ...“, h 4.5 x b 7.8 cm (fig. 12)



Ground

Sizing	not determined
Colour	yellowish cream
Application	applied before canvas was cut to size and stretched, presumably one to two layers; smooth and even application without visible traces of utensils
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	visible under the microscope are larger, white, round particles (lead-white?) and individual intensive gold-ochre to orange particles of different shapes and sizes (fig. 18)

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	charcoal, or graphite/lead pencil
Extent/character	the lines of the underdrawing can only be seen here and there by means of a stereo-microscope in places not covered by paint, and by infrared-reflectography beneath thin pale colour areas; blackness varies considerably depending on the pressure applied by the artist; thin lines with a thickness of 3 to 4 mm; altogether evidently a reduced, very sketchy lay-in of just a few contours of the picture (fig. 9)
Pentimenti	the painting deviates from the underdrawing in the region of the central boat: to its right there are outlines of a hull, pointing to a shift of this motif; beneath there are outlines of another boat, which was not realized at all in the subsequent painting (fig. 9)



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

the sketchy drawing was followed by a partial wash in earth colours (pale ochre, sienna, green earth, fig. 10); the work then proceeded quickly and for the most part wet-in-wet, in one session; it became increasingly impasto in dabs and strokes; the final paint applications were executed when the previous one was already dry; the zigzag of a number of brushstrokes is a characteristic feature; the colours were mixed almost exclusively on the palette, however the mixture was not always complete and the result not the desired homogeneous hue: the streaks of the individual colours are often visible; apart from minor colour corrections during the painting process and a partial reduction of existing paint applications, no major changes seem to have been undertaken

Painting tools

flat-ferrule bristle brushes varying in width from c. 2 mm to 12 mm; the highly thinned first brushstrokes in ochre hues were executed with somewhat broader hair brushes or pointed brushes (fig. 10)

Surface structure

highly thinned, smooth colour areas on the one hand, sometimes strongly impasto areas on the other, especially where there are admixtures of white

Palette

hues revealed by visual microscopic inspection: white, several ochres (pale gold ochre to brown and red ochres), pale yellow, medium yellow, medium red, red lake, violet, pale blue, medium blue, pale semi-transparent green, dark green, dark blue, black
VIS spectrometry: iron-oxide yellow, Naples yellow(?), chrome-yellow(?)/cadmium yellow(?), iron-oxide red, vermillion, cobalt violet(?), cerulean blue, cobalt blue, ultramarine (?), copper green

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

varnished, but this is not authentic: the varnish was applied only after the edges were stuck with adhesive tape (now removed), beneath which the unvarnished edges were preserved (fig. 12)



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Signature/Mark

When?	signature bottom right, “Berthe Morisot” was applied with a fine-hair brush and ochre oil-paint when the paint-layer was already dry; the colour was also used in the painting, hence the signature was probably added soon after the painting was finished
Autograph signature	presumably autograph, as the handwriting has many points in common with that on other works by her; the application varies in its thickness and degree of saturation, as is particularly clear in “Berthe”
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	gilt carved frame with acanthus and floral ornamentation in the corners, authenticity doubtful
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State of preservation

Lining with canvas backing; individual small losses as for example at microscopic level in the signature.

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. 113, p. 31, fig. 146 (in illustration section)
- Breeskin 1970: Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, Mary Casatt, A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oils, Pastels, Watercolors and Drawings, Washington 1970, entry 371, p. 155
- Budde/Schaefer 2001: Rainer Budde, Barbara Schaefer, Miracle de la couleur (Ausst.kat. Köln Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, 8. September - 9. Dezember 2001), Köln 2001, Cat. No. 125, p. 248, with figs
- Clairet/Montalant/Rouart 1997: Alain Clairet, D. Montalant, Yves Rouart: Berthe Morisot (1841-1895): Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Peint, Paris 1997, No. 114, fig. p. 169. (CMR 114)
- Manet 1985: Julie Manet, Journal (1893-1899), Paris 1985
- Stuckey/Scott 1987/88: C.F. Stuckey, William P. Scott: "Berthe Morisot – Impressionist", exhib. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington/ Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth (Texas) / Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1987/88, fig. 60, p. 90

Source of illustrations

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

Examination methods used

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|--|--|
| ✓ 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 detail of
dealer's stamp "P: Aprin"





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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light



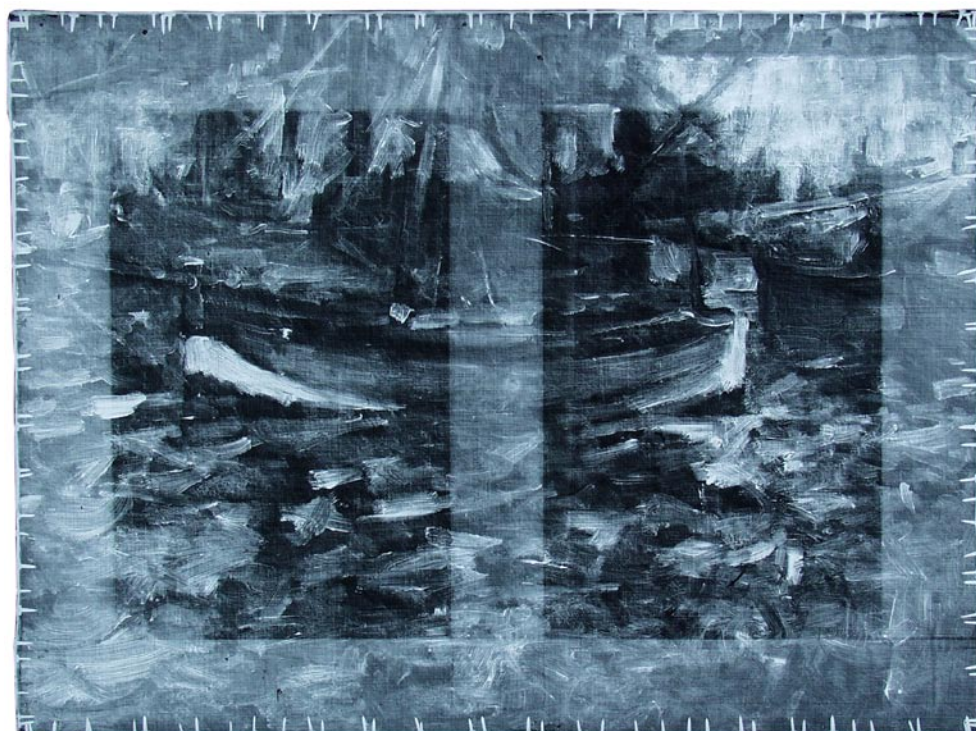


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Fig. 5
UV-fluorescence



Fig. 6
X-ray





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Fig. 7
Detail, signature



Fig. 8
Cream ground,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



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Fig. 9
Black line of the brush
underdrawing, whose
extent in the total
picture is marked in
white,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

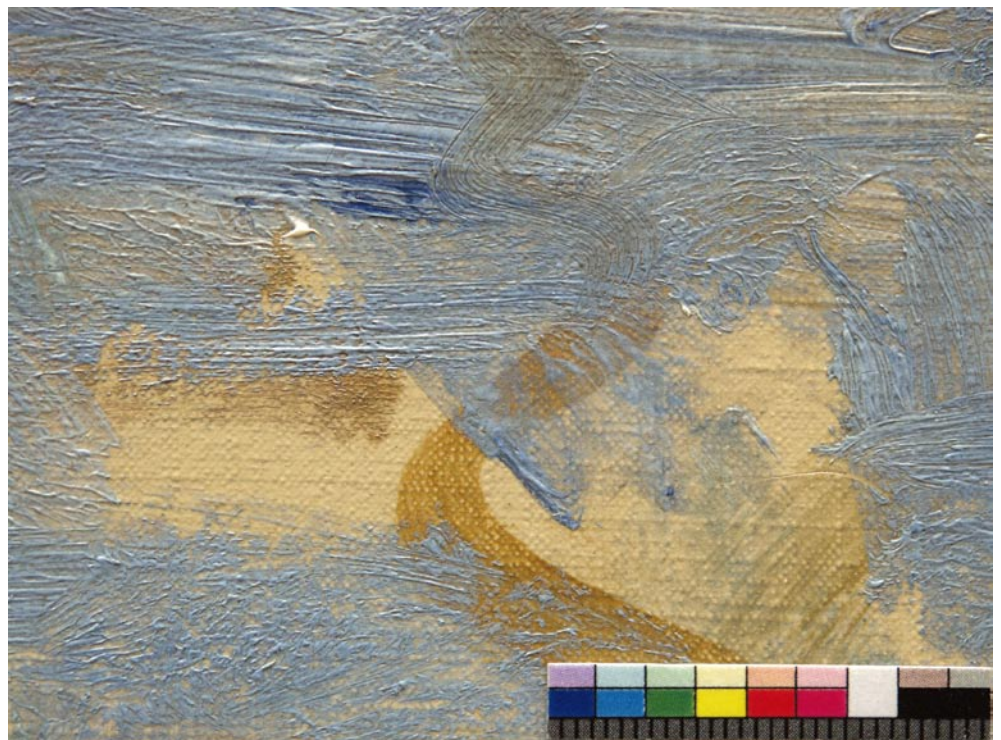


Fig. 10
Detail, surface of water,
strokes of flat-ferrule
brush (pale blue) and
hair or pointed brush
(ochre glaze)



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Fig. 11
Detail, masts of boats,
characteristic application
technique

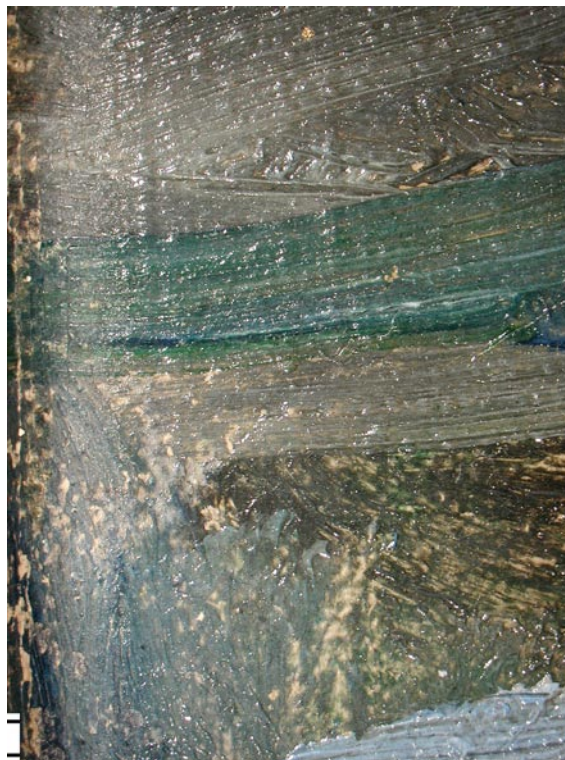


Fig. 12
Left-hand edge remained
unvarnished,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)