



**Camille Pissarro**

(1830-1903)

**Orchard in Pontoise at Sunset**  
(Verger à Pontoise, soleil couchant)

1878

*dated and signed bottom right:*  
"Pissarro. 1878"

*Oil on canvas*

*h 46.7 cm x b 55.2 cm*

*WRM Dep. FC 712*





## Brief Report

This picture was previously owned by Dr. George Viau (1855-1939), a Parisian dentist who was one of the earliest collectors of Impressionist paintings [Pissarro/Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005, p. 373, cat. no. 541]. This is also confirmed by a sticker *verso* (figs 2, 8). For the depiction of the orchard, Pissarro chose a twill-weave canvas pre-primed in a warm light-grey (fig. 7) [cf. Pissarro, WRM 3119]. As in another, much later depiction of an orchard by Pissarro in the Wallraf collection, what we have here is a canvas in the standard F10 size, but turned through 90 degrees [cf. Pissarro, WRM Dep. 850]. The ground can be seen under raking light and in the X-ray photograph to have conspicuous scratches, which must have been present before the picture was painted, but whose cause is unknown. The painting was executed, without any discernible compositional planning in the form of underdrawing or underpainting, in short, often shallowly diagonal brush-strokes, the colours often only blending when placed on the canvas (figs 10, 11).

Mostly Pissarro applied the paints wet-in-wet and fairly impasto, but in the region of the sky or on the left-hand edge of the picture in the trees the paint is more spread out and thus has less body. There are hardly any places in the picture which have been left unpainted to reveal the ground. The signature in the bottom right-hand corner was added immediately, or at least shortly, after the painting was complete (fig. 6). The surface relief of the painting was largely destroyed by an early lining measure, which in this case can, thanks to an exhibition sticker, be dated to before 1930. On the lining canvas *verso* is a stencil with the name and address of R. Gerard, Paris, who may have been the restorer responsible (fig. 9).



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### Picture support canvas

Standard format	F 10 (55.0 x 46.0 cm) horizontal
Weave	twill weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical and horizontal app. 20 threads per cm; the repeat consists of at least 3 weft or warp yarns, each vertical yarn passing over 2 horizontal yarns and then under a further horizontal yarn; fine, albeit loosely, woven fabric with yarn thickness of 0.2-0.5 mm; Z-twist (fig. 7)
Stretching	not authentic; re-stretched after lining; intervals of the original tacking app. 3.0 to 5.0 cm
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with crossed centre bars; presumably not original, but post-dating the lining of the canvas; stretcher 0.5 cm larger all round than indicated by the edge of the painting
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	there are fine markings at the corner-joints to indicate the position of the grooves for the wedges
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none visible on account of the lining



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## Ground

Sizing	present
Colour	warm pale grey (similar to <i>gris clair</i> )
Application	primed before cutting-to-size and stretching, thin, one or two layers
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	very even and homogeneous; pigmentation visible under the microscope: mix of different-sized particles of red ochre, black and occasional coarse lead-white (fig. 13); under raking light and in the X-ray, scratches in the ground can be seen, whose origin is unknown, but they may have been caused by the ground's having been applied by a palette knife during manufacture, or else possibly represent manual damage that occurred after Pissarro acquired the canvas and could not be repaired before painting commenced (figs 3, 5)

## Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	–
Extent/character	neither microscopy, UV fluorescence nor IR reflectography give any hint of any compositional planning in the form of an underdrawing or underpainting
Pentimenti	–



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## Paint layer

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

largely wet-in-wet, but also wet-on-dry (e.g. tree at left-hand edge); at the top edge there is some partial orange-pink underpainting beneath the visible colours of the sky; the paint is in places extremely coarse-grained (for example the transparent milky green) and was often only blended on the canvas itself (fig. 11); the brushwork often takes the form of short, shallowly diagonal strokes; no sequence of application can be discerned, as the paint-layers are superimposed alternately, while in addition the lining procedure also heavily flattened the paint

### Painting tools

brushes of various breadths; the presence of both bristles and hairs embedded in the paint suggests the use of both hair and bristle brushes

### Surface structure

highly variable, from impasto (foreground, vegetables, fig. 10) to widely spread out (sky); on the peripheries the diagonal structure of the canvas is just discernible; however the lining resulted in the almost total flattening of the surface relief (figs 3, 12)

### Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale yellow, red-orange, pale red lake, dark red lake, dark blue, medium green (milky-transparent);  
Vis spectrometry: pale red lake could not be determined, carmine(?), iron-oxide red(?), cobalt blue, copper-based green

### Binding mediums

presumably oil

## Surface finish

### Authenticity/Condition

varnished, not authentic; remains of two different older yellowed or greyed coats can be discerned in the crevices



### Signature/Mark

When?	immediately after the painting was complete (fig. 6)
Autograph signature	certain, as the inscription "Pissarro. 1878" in blue paint with a brush, mixed with red lake and white, was applied wet-in-wet to the paint layer in the bottom right-hand corner (fig. 6)
Serial	–

### Frame

Authenticity	not original
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### State of preservation

Canvas lined before 1930 (exhibition label *verso* establishes *terminus ante quem*), presumably by "R. GERARD / 4, A<sup>ue</sup> de Messine / PARIS" (stencil on lining canvas *verso*) (fig. 9), with marked flattening of the surface structure and some heat damage (figs. 3, 12); material: grey lining adhesive, lining canvas in tabby weave, 20 x 25 threads /cm, lining canvas coated *verso* (easily visible under UV); marked horizontal damage to the paint-layer in the foreground, where there are extensive wax(?) fillings and retouching e.g. in the line of vegetables (fig. 4); in places serious abrasion of the paint-layer, presumably due to inexperienced surface cleaning or varnish removal (fig. 13).

### Additional remarks

Pissarro was one of the Impressionist painters who at an early date preferred white frames [Cahn 1989, p. 65]. Although there is no evidence of this for this painting, it is nonetheless conceivable. For this reason, at the exhibition "Painting Light – The hidden techniques of the Impressionists" it was displayed in a reconstructed white frame for didactic reasons [Schaefer/von Saint-George/ Lewerentz 2008, p. 182, ill. 191, Mendgen 2008, p. 329-334, ill. 3-5].



## 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, no cat. no., p. 436, with ill.
- Cahn 1989: Isabelle Cahn (ed.), *Cadres de peintres*, exhib. cat. Musée d'Orsay, Paris 1989, p. 65
- Duret 1906: Théodore Duret, *Histoire des peintres impressionistes. Pissarro, Claude Monet, Sisley, Renoir, Berthe Morisot, Cézanne, Guillaumin*, Paris 1906, ill. p. 73, 4th ed., 1939, ill. p. 41
- Mendgen 2008: Eva Mendgen, "Impressionisten: Konzepte der Bildpräsentation und Restaurierungsansätze", in: *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung*, vol. 2/2008, 329-334
- Pissarro/Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005: Joachim Pissarro, Claire Durand-Ruel Snollaerts, *Pissarro, Critical Catalogue of Paintings*, vol. II, Paris/Milan 2005, no. 541, p. 373, with ill.
- Pissarro/Venturi 1939: Ludovic Rodo Pissarro, Lionello Venturi, *Camille Pissarro, son art, son œuvre*, Paris 1939, cat. no. 440, pl. 88
- Schaefer/von Saint-George/Lewerentz 2008: Iris Schaefer, Caroline von Saint-George, Katja Lewerentz, *Painting Light – The hidden techniques of the Impressionists*, exhib. cat. Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud Cologne, 29 February-22 June 2008, Cologne 2008, p. 182 with ill.

## Source of illustrations

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





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### 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                     |                                          |

Author of examination:	Katja Lewerentz
Author of brief report:	Katja Lewerentz

Date: 1/2005
Date: 12/2008





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Fig. 1  
Recto

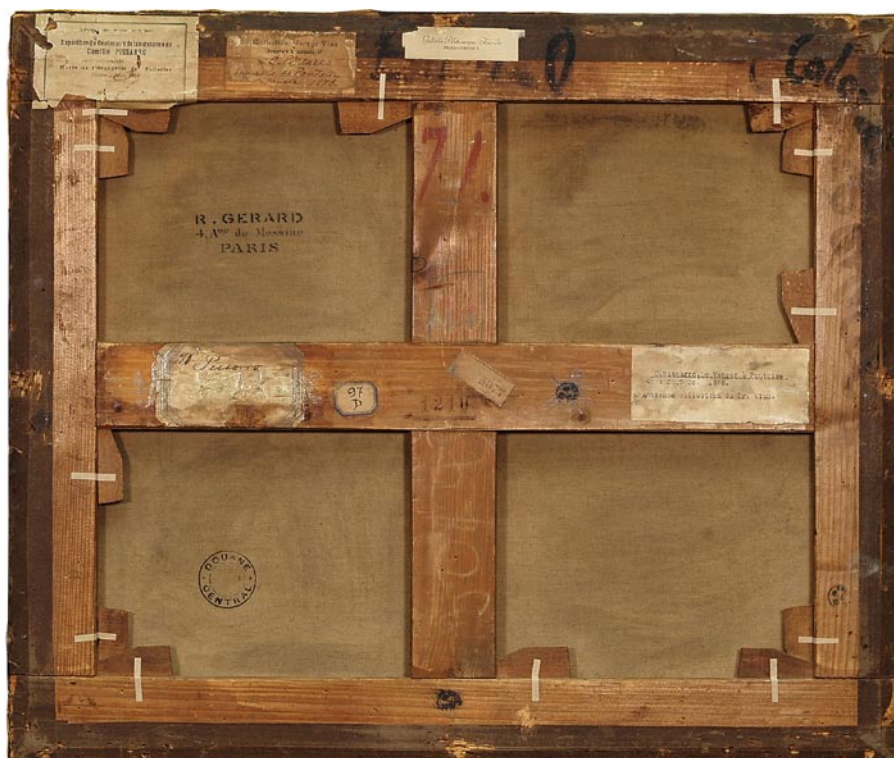


Fig. 2  
Verso, lined (cf. fig.9)





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Fig. 3  
Raking light



Fig. 4  
UV fluorescence







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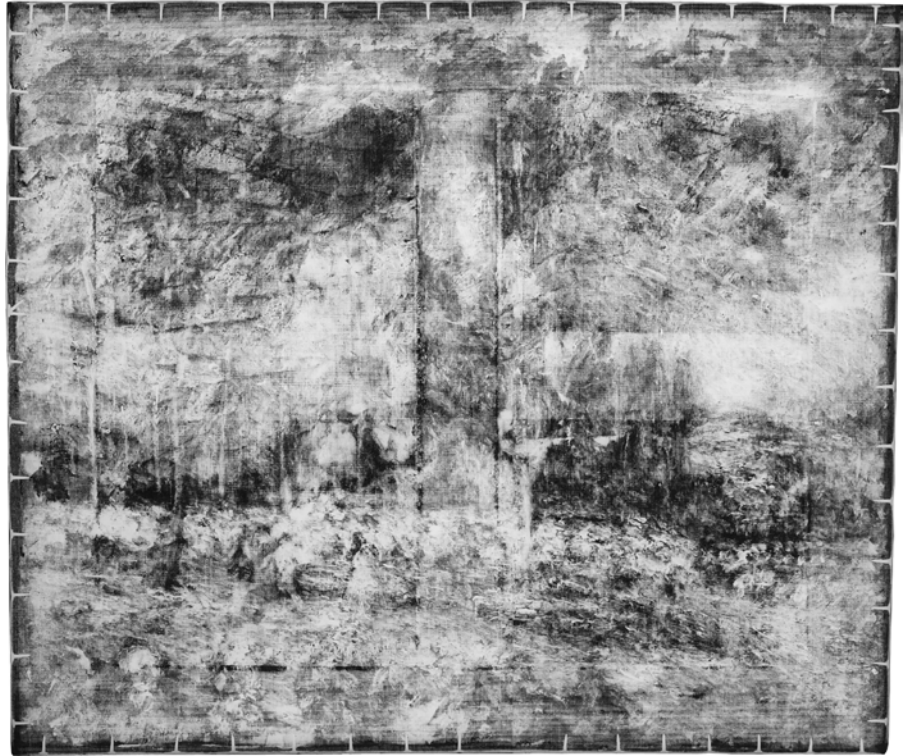


Fig. 5  
X-ray



Fig. 6  
Signature and detail  
of the letters “Pi” in  
incident light (top) and  
under UV stimulation  
(bottom); the blue paint  
partly blends with the  
underlying paint-layer  
wet-in-wet, microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)





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Fig. 7  
Visible area of the  
original twill-weave  
canvas microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 8  
Label verso of the  
Dr. George Viau  
collection





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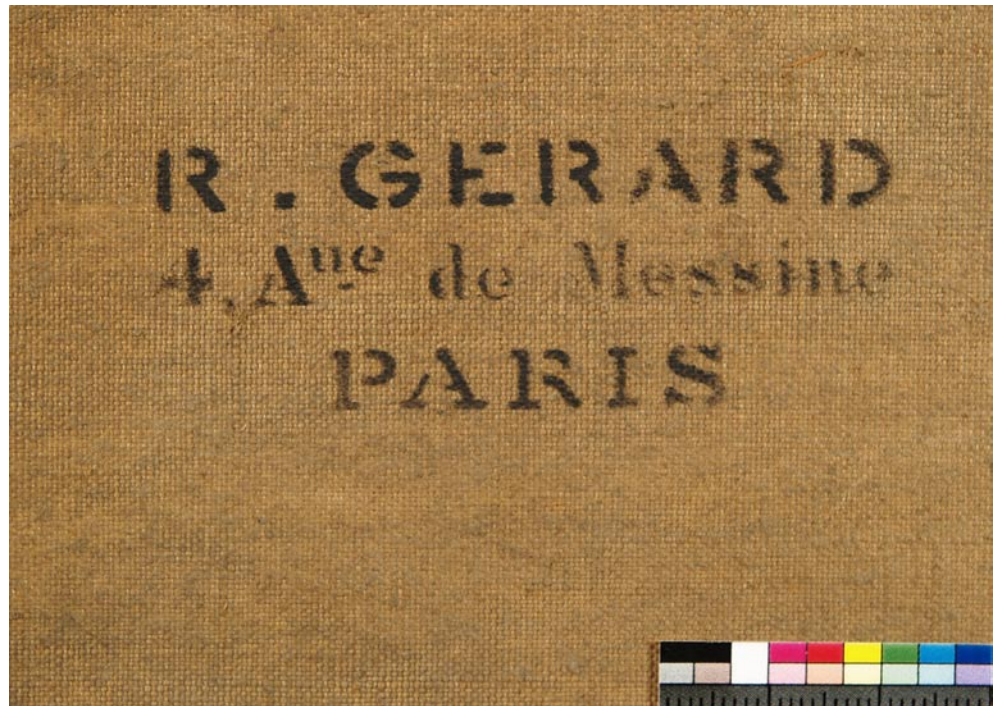


Fig. 9  
Stencil *verso* on  
the lining canvas,  
presumably of the  
restorer who carried out  
the lining



Fig. 10  
Detail, wet-in-wet  
impasto paint  
applications





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Fig. 11  
Paints of various colours  
applied wet-in-wet  
blending in the brush-  
stroke, microscopic  
photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 12  
Heavy flattening of the  
surface structure, detail  
under raking light



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Fig. 13  
Abrasions of the paint-layer and ground right down to the canvas, due to inexpert varnish removal or surface cleaning, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

