



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
(1841-1919)

Jean Renoir Sewing
(Jean Renoir, cousin)

c. 1900

*Signature stamp bottom left and verso:
"Renoir."*

undated

Oil on canvas

h 55.5 cm x b 46.4 cm

WRM Dep. FC 680





Brief Report

Renoir painted the portrait of his son Jean in about 1900 [Reuber 2007]. According to the sitter himself, who vividly recalled the tedious sittings for this portrait [Renoir 1962, pp. 351f], the painting, in the standard F10 format, shows him sewing a costume for his beloved cuddly camel. The canvas evinces a lively structure and has a commercially applied two-layer yellowish-white ground (figs 3, 8). The painting is characterized by a number of mostly translucent and very thin applications, typical of Renoir's technique at this time (fig. 10, 11). The paint was mostly applied wet-in-wet, but also wet on dry. A remarkable feature is the number of times the artist revised his work in the search for perfection: some of these revisions can even be seen with the naked eye in the form of numerous pentimenti, for example changes in the shape of the sleeve, bow and hair (fig. 13). Microscopic examination also reveals however that large areas of the first paint applications were removed by scraping away paint that was already dry before new paint was applied (fig. 12). This procedure was already noted by Burnstock as an occasional element of Renoir's working method [Burnstock et al. 2005, p. 61]. There is no autograph signature, reflecting Renoir's signing habits at the time, for by his own account he often did not sign works that remained in his house or studio [Ehrlich-White 1984, p. 222]. The signature stamps recto and verso can be assigned a terminus post quem of 1927 [see "Signature" below] and were probably applied only when the painting left the possession of the family at some time after 1931, in other words some years after Renoir's death (fig. 7).

However neither Jean Renoir himself, nor any other publication, mentions that he was painted twice by his father in this pose. The collection of the Art Institute Chicago has a painting which is virtually identical in size and motif (fig. 14) [Druick 1997, p. 69]. The two works have often been confused in the literature hitherto. The similarity of the two pictures is striking, not only in respect of the depiction, but also of the choice of materials and the painterly process: the Chicago version was apparently painted on pre-primed canvas cut from the same length of material, as the structural identity of the fabric, revealed by X-ray, shows (figs 6, 15). Here too, not only pentimenti but also an obviously mechanical reduction of the paint layers reveal an intensive confrontation with the depiction of his son [Chicago Art Institute 2008]. For this reason it may be presumed that the two pictures were painted within a short time of each other; however it is not clear in which order they were painted, or indeed why there are two versions. Possibly Renoir worked on both in parallel. Unlike the Cologne picture, the one in Chicago bears Renoir's autograph signature, doubtless because it was sold during his lifetime. By 1914 it was already in the possession of the art dealer Durand-Ruel.



Picture support canvas

Standard format	F10, vertical (55.0 x 46.0 cm)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 20-22, horizontal 16-17 threads per cm; medium-thick, strongly structured, closely woven canvas with numerous irregularities in the lines of the threads, and an emphasis on the vertical threads (fig. 3); there are particularly conspicuous repeating concentrations of horizontal threads extending over several rows (fig. 6); the canvas threads are of uneven thickness ranging from 0.2 to 0.6 mm, Z-twist; these characteristics of the fabric structure are also present in the canvas of the Chicago painting (fig. 15)
Stretching	authentic; regular original fastening with nails still extant; foldover cut back to a width of app. 1.3-2.2 cm only after stretching; stretch-marks more strongly arc-shaped along the top and bottom edges
Stretcher/strainer	authentic; stretcher with centre bar (fig. 2)
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	scratches along the outer edge of the stretcher, presumably caused by the final cutting to size of the stretched canvas
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none present



Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	white (yellowish)
Application	primed prior to stretching and cutting to size; two layers (fig. 8), no utensil traces visible, irregular edge of the priming on the right suggests application with a brush (fig. 8)
Binding medium	1st layer possibly aqueous (with starch?); 2nd layer presumably oil
Texture	very thin homogeneous layers: 1st layer very porous and oil-free, with not much filler; pronounced craquelure and numerous bubbles; 2nd layer yellowish-cream, smooth with a matt oily surface sheen, individual particles of yellow ochre and finely distributed black discernible at microscopic level (fig. 8)

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	neither IR reflectography nor stereo-microscopy provide any clues to the existence of an underdrawing or underpainting
Extent/character	–
Pentimenti	only in the course of the painting process, cf. “Paint layer” and fig. 13 below



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

predominantly translucent paint application in a number of thin layers, both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry; in individual places particularly highly dilute paint applications have formed droplets (fig. 10); during the painting process, the artist mechanically reduced the first layer: this is evidenced by numerous minor and minuscule losses on the high points of the canvas, this being particularly noticeable in the area of the dress (fig. 12); the subsequent paint-layers re-sealed the surface, a situation made clear by microscopic depictions under raking light which reveals fine craters on the high points of the canvas texture (fig. 12); the visible painting represents a comprehensive revision of the portrait with numerous changes to details of the composition (pentimenti in this sense only) (figs. 11, 13)

Painting tools

brushes of varying width; numerous hairs are embedded in the paint layers

Surface structure

in spite of the numerous, but almost totally translucent paint layers, it is the canvas structure that dominates, the brushwork only being discernible in those places with an admixture of white or yellow (fig. 3)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale yellow, yellowish-orange, pale red lake, pale red, dark blue, medium green, black (only as admixture)
VIS spectrometry: Naples yellow, iron-oxide yellow, iron-oxide red, diazo colorant(?), chrome red(?), cobalt blue, copper-based green pigment(?)

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

present varnish not authentic; remains of a former coat can be found predominantly around the stamped signature (fig. 7)



Signature/Mark

When?	signature stamp “Renoir.” recto and also verso on the centre-bar of the stretcher (fig. 7); the placing of the stamp verso over the adhesive for the label of the Bernheim-Jeune gallery dated 1927 establishes a terminus post quem for the stamp and may be related to the sale of the painting by the family only after 1931, in other words some years after Renoir’s death
Autograph signature	–
Serial	the two stamps are identical; they are in black, matt-looking paint with little oil; the impression of the stamp is clearly visible verso (fig. 7)

Frame

Authenticity	undetermined; British Rococo frame [Mitchell/Roberts 1996, p. 64, fig. 46], whose method of manufacture and state of preservation suggest that it is a historic frame; the label of the purported maker seems however to be of more recent origin (coated offset paper), so that we must assume it to be a later addition
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State of preservation

Slight deformations of the canvas along the stretchmarks on the left-hand edge of the picture (fig. 3); varnish has penetrated to verso through the craquelure (fig. 2); signature recto reduced by removal of varnish in the past, the aureole of old varnish here documents an area untouched by the more recent treatment (fig. 7, UV fluorescence photograph); only isolated retouchings in the peripheral areas.

Additional remarks

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Source of illustrations

Figs 14, 15: ©Art Institute of Chicago

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

Literature

- Bernheim-Jeune 1931: Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, *L'Atelier de Renoir*, vol. 1, Paris 1931, no. 190, plate 62
- 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. 142, p. 318, with ill.
- Burnstock et al. 2005: Aviva Burnstock, Klaas van den Berg, John House, "Painting techniques of Pierre-Auguste Renoir 1868–1919", *ArtMatters, Netherlands Technical Studies in Art*, vol. 3, 2005, 47–65
- Chicago Art Institute 2008: kind support of the Conservation Department of the Chicago Art Institute; statements based on unpublished investigations and pictorial material
- Druick 1997: Douglas W. Druick, *Renoir*, The Art Institute of Chicago, New York 1997, p. 69
- Ehrlich-White 1984: Barbara Ehrlich-White, *Renoir – his life, art and letters*, New York 1984
- Mitchell/Roberts 1996: Paul Mitchell, Lynn Roberts, *A History of European Picture Frames*, London 1996
- Renoir 1962: Jean Renoir, *Renoir, my Father*, Boston 1962
- Reuber 2007: Lena Reuber, "Vergleichende Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und kunstgeschichtlichen Einordnung der zwei Versionen des Gemäldes von Pierre-Auguste Renoir von 1898 und 1899", unpublished term paper, Cologne University of Applied Science, 2007
- Vollard 1918: Ambroise Vollard, *Tableaux, Pastels & Dessins de Pierre-Auguste Renoir*, Paris 1918, vol. 1, no. 359, p. 90, with ill.



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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Pierre-Auguste Renoir – Jean Renoir Sewing
Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso





Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light



Fig. 5
UV fluorescence



Fig. 6
X-ray



Fig. 7
Signature stamps;
details of the stamp
recto in incident light
(top) and under UV
fluorescence (middle),
and of the stamp *verso*
(bottom),
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

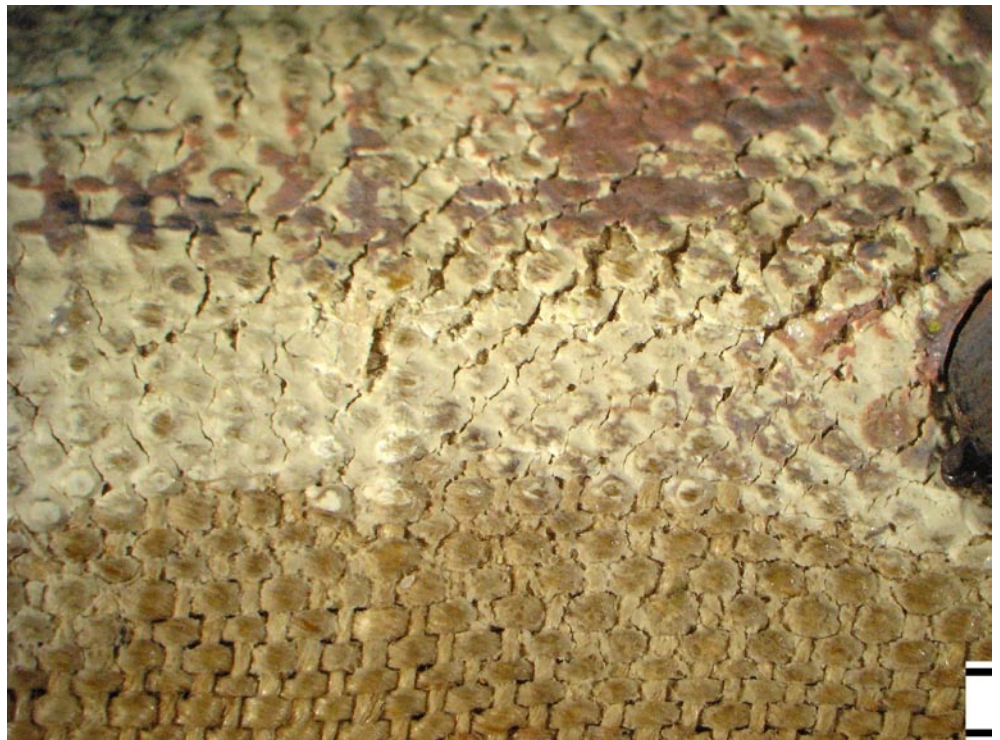


Fig. 8
Edge of the ground on
the pre-primed canvas,
two-layer application,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 9
Detail, flesh tints

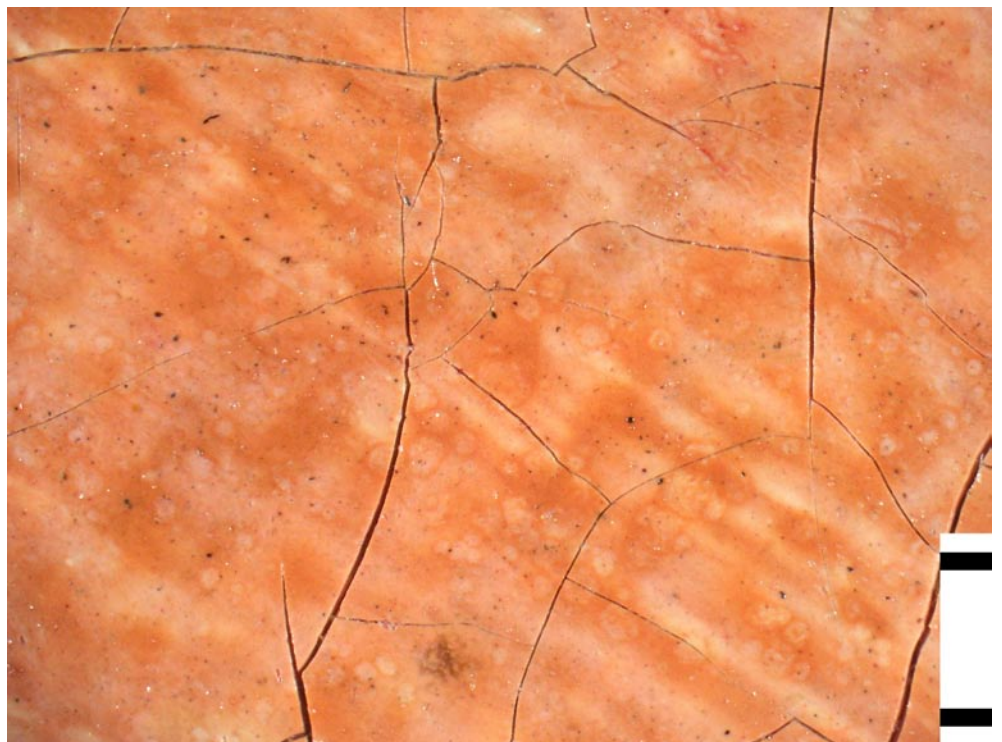


Fig. 10
Translucent paint
application in the area of
the dress, with formation
of aureoles as a result
of extreme dilution,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 11
Detail, artist's revision
of the sleeve

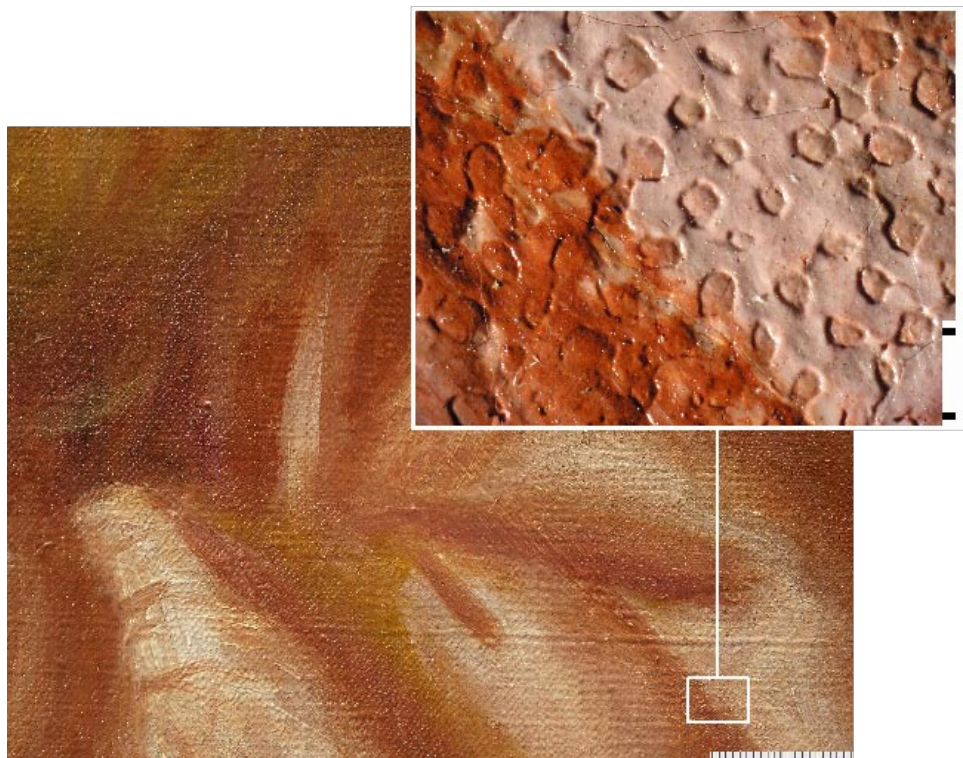


Fig. 12
Detail of right sleeve,
artist's own overpainting
of an area from which
layers of paint had
previously been
removed, particularly
evident under the micro-
scope in raking light
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 13
Artist's revisions: mapping of changes in compositional details



Fig. 14
Pierre-Auguste Renoir,
Jean Renoir Sewing,
1900, oil on canvas, 55.4
cm x 46.5 cm, Mr. and
Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson
Collection, 1937.1027, The
Art Institute of Chicago,
illustration © The Art
Institute of Chicago



Fig. 15
X-ray (composite) of the
picture illustrated in fig.
14, illustration © The Art
Institute of Chicago.

