



**Théo van Rysselberghe**  
(1862-1926)

**Cap Gris Nez**  
(Le Cap Gris – Nez)

1900

*monogrammed and dated  
bottom left: "19 VR 00"*

*Oil on canvas*

*h 65.5 cm x b 81.0 cm*

*WRM Dep. FC 714*





## Brief Report

This landscape-format painting in the standard F 25 size depicts in pale green and blue tones the view across a heavily vegetated steep cliff to the open sea. The two layers of white ground seem to have been applied by the artist himself (fig. 6). Starting from a spare bluish-violet sketch of the contours, van Rysselberghe filled in the areas with dynamically placed short brushstrokes that in many cases modelled the topography in their course and direction (fig. 9). While the foreground has numerous places where the ground is visible, the paint applications become increasingly compact as we move towards the sky. During the painting process, van Rysselberghe corrected the outline of the cliffs, changed the clouds and partly overpainted a previously planned boat (fig. 8). The landscape was painted on the verso of a painting which the artist had rejected and painted over in white; he then turned it round, cropped the edges and stretched it on the present stretcher. On what is now the verso we can with the naked eye only recognize the bare outlines

of a grisaille portrait in vertical format, but infrared reflectography brings it out much more clearly: it is probably a portrait of the Belgian artist, van Rysselberghe's friend Constantin Meunier (figs 2,11). The execution evinces a strong similarity with two other works by van Rysselberghe, which show Meunier in the same pose [Feltkamp 2003, nos. 1900-007, 1900-015], a charcoal drawing and a grisaille in oil on canvas respectively, which are now in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo (fig. 12). Like the Cap Gris Nez landscape, these works were executed in 1900 and were mentioned as early as 1901 in a letter from the artist to his friend Octave Maus [Chartrain-Hebelinck 1966, pp. 82/83]. It was in 1901 too that all three works were shown at the "La Libre Esthétique" exhibition in Brussels. We may presume that the failed first attempt at the portrait on the verso of *Cap Gris Nez* was painted very shortly before the two other portraits of Meunier and was concealed under a white ground precisely because the three pictures were due to be exhibited together.



### Picture support canvas

Standard format	F25 (81.0 x 65.0 cm), horizontal
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	very fine, compact weave with 32-34 weft and warp threads per cm; Z-twist; the right-hand edge of the painted canvas coincides with the edge of the cloth
Stretching	authentic stretching with nail intervals of 4.3-6.5 cm; there are further holes along the turnover edge which match nothing on the present stretcher and may derive from a provisional stretching on a different frame; when the canvas was first painted, namely with the portrait, it was larger, and in the course of preparation for the second painting was cropped, along with the ground and paint layer, on three sides (left, bottom, and top), only on the right hand edge do we still find nail holes with corresponding stretchmarks, which presumably date from the first stretching of the portrait
Stretcher/strainer	authentic; stretcher with vertical centre bar and simple mortise-and-tenon joints, contemporaneous with the stretching of the canvas for the painting of <i>Cap Gris Nez</i>
Stretcher/strainer depth	1.9 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	none
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none present



## Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	1) off-white; 2) white
Application	thin, even ground in two layers applied after the canvas was on the present stretcher and extending to the edge of the painting, presumably applied by the artist himself (fig. 6)
Binding medium	undetermined
Texture	thin layer, so that the structure of the canvas remains visible; the first layer clearly shows on microscopic inspection white pigment particles, both layers show fine burst bubbles, which continue into the paint layer (fig. 6)

## Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	brush and paint, presumably oil
Extent/character	van Rysselberghe used brisk blue and violet brushstrokes to sketch the outlines of the slope and details of the terrain; this brush-underdrawing was only partially covered as painting proceeded and was integrated into the picture in places (fig. 7)
Pentimenti	the first outline of the slope was corrected as work progressed and covered with closely-spaced dabs of the brush (fig. 8)



## Paint layer

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

the sparse outline sketch was followed by a heavily impasto application of paint using short brushstrokes; in general a rapid, impulsive painting technique both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry; the paints were mostly blended before application; brushwork and direction of application vary from region to region, with numerous areas of visible ground in the region of the terrain and the sea, by contrast the paint application in the sky is very dense; minor compositional amendments during the course of the work can be detected under raking light as a result of a conspicuously multi-layered paint application (figs. 3, 8): changes in the shapes of the clouds and the coastline, as well as the overpainting of another boat in the sea; in the sky, the pentimenti are characterized by early shrinkage cracks

### Painting tools

presumably pointed or round brushes varying in breadth from 0.3-0.6 cm

### Surface structure

very lively impasto; the artist used the direction of the brushstrokes to model individual elements of the depiction; the clouds in particular stand out through their marked paint relief (fig. 3)

### Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, yellow, orange, medium red, red lake, pale violet, deep violet, pale blue, medium blue, pale green, dark green; particular striking is the strongly coloured UV fluorescence of some of the pigments (fig. 4)

VIS spectrometry: chrome yellow(?)/cadmium yellow(?), chrome red(?), vermillion, rose madder(?), cobalt violet, cobalt blue, viridian, FTIR: white lead, cobalt blue, additions of zinc stearate

### Binding mediums

oil (FTIR)

## Surface finish

### Authenticity/Condition

varnished, not authentic



## Signature/Mark

When?	applied to the dry paint-layer, but probably not long after the picture was painted, as the violet colour also occurs in the picture itself
Autograph signature	very fine brush, dilute application, monogram VR framed in a square and flanked symmetrically left and right by the figures of the date, "19" and "00" respectively (fig. 5)
Serial	–

## Picture verso

The present picture was painted on the canvas support of a rejected portrait (figs 2-11). The canvas, at that time some centimetres larger in each direction, was stretched in portrait format and primed in white. The original format and the exact stretching cannot now be reconstructed. Using greyish-green dilute paint, van Rysselberghe used brisk and dynamic brush-strokes to first sketch the outlines of the head and body, before going on to the fine details of the face. The next step was to work on the body, however the details were only executed in part. On the transition from the shoulder to the shaded background is a massive undifferentiated patch of paint which may have been the cause of the artist's dissatisfaction with his work. As far as we can tell given the all-over cover-up, the paint layer is very thin, with the ground visible through it in places. Rysselberghe very carefully covered the unfinished portrait with a layer of white paint, using a spatula for the purpose, which left characteristic traces. The thin and doubtless fairly fluid application allows the covered painting to show through in places where the threads of the canvas cross. For the painting of *Cap Gris Nez*, the artist cropped the canvas along three sides and stretched it on a stretcher in portrait format, but turned it horizontally to paint

## Frame

Authenticity	later
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### State of preservation

Slight deformations in the canvas; there are two restored tears of 4.4 and 2.5 cm length in the top right-hand corner; some longish scratches in the paint layer; from all the green and green blends in the picture which were covered with other colours, substance migrated through the overlying layers (fig.10); this substance, sometimes milky-transparent, was identified by FTIR as zinc stearate with a very little linseed oil [Jägers 2008, FC 714].

### Additional remarks

The top bar of the stretcher bears the inscription, applied with a brush in black paint: 'Le Cap Gris-Nez (temps brumeux)' (fig. 2). According to information kindly provided by the van Rysselberghe connoisseur Olivier Bertrand, this is in the artist's own handwriting.

### Literature

- Chartrain-Hebbelinck 1966: M.-J. Chartrain-Hebbelinck, Les Lettres de van Rysselberghe à Octave Maus, in Bulletin Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1966/1-2, pp. 82-83
- Feltkamp 2003: Ronald Feltkamp, Théo van Rysselberghe 1862–1926, Brussels 2003, No. 1900-045, p. 331, with ill.
- 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. 146, p. 328, with ill.
- Jägers 2008 FC 714: [Analysenbericht in der Objektakte]



### Source of illustrations

Fig. 14: Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

All further illustrations: 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                     |                                          |

Author of examination: Daniela Kocheise

Date: 04/2007

Author of brief report: Hans Portsteffen

Date: 05/2008





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Fig. 1  
Recto



Fig. 2  
Verso





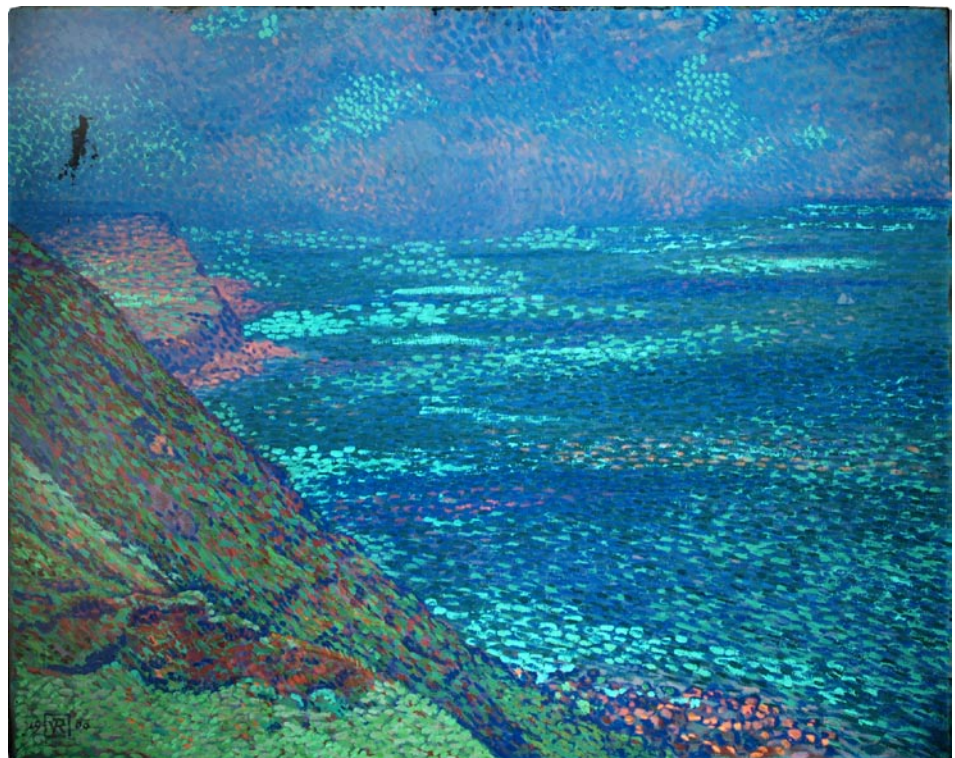


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Fig. 3  
Raking light



Fig. 4  
UV fluorescence







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Fig. 5  
Detail, signature



Fig. 6  
Right-hand turnover  
edge with edge of  
painted surface and  
clear stretchmarks; the  
two details show the  
ground in its two-layer  
application (top) and  
with fine air-bubbles  
which are apparent right  
into the blue paint layer  
(bottom), microscopic  
photo (M = 1 mm)

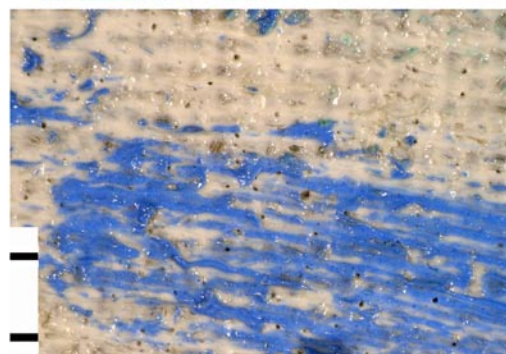






Fig. 7  
Detail of the foreground,  
the bluish-violet  
underdrawing is still  
visible as the outline of  
the cliffs



Fig. 8  
Mapping of the  
compositional changes  
during the painting  
process, with details of  
the revised clouds (top),  
the correction on the  
slope of the cliff (middle)  
and the overpainted  
boat (bottom)

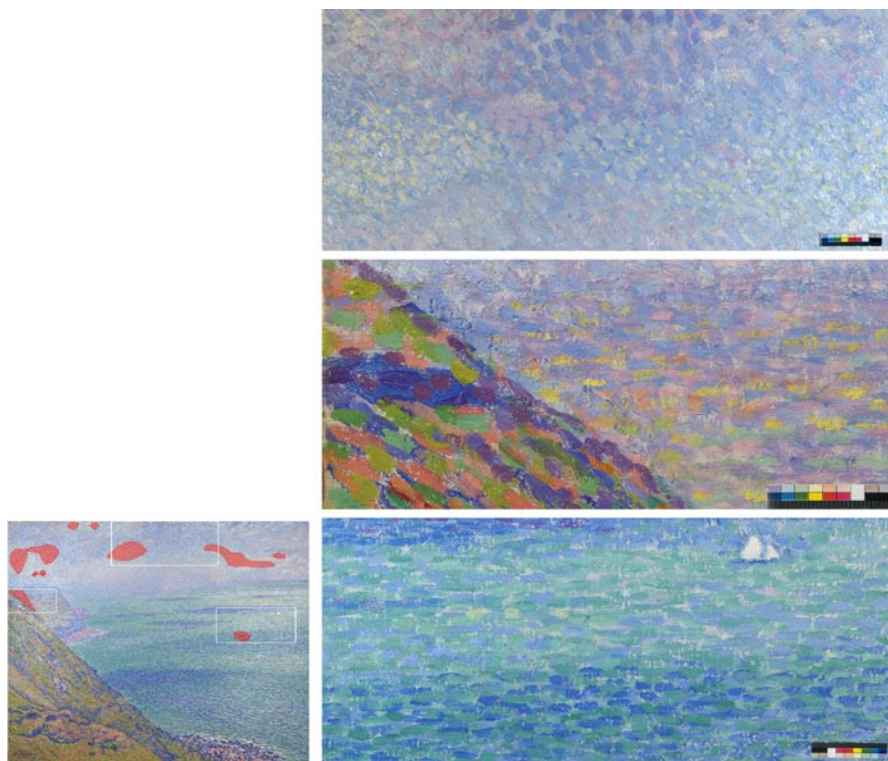






Fig. 9  
Dynamically placed  
short brushstrokes,  
often modelling the  
topography through  
their course and  
direction

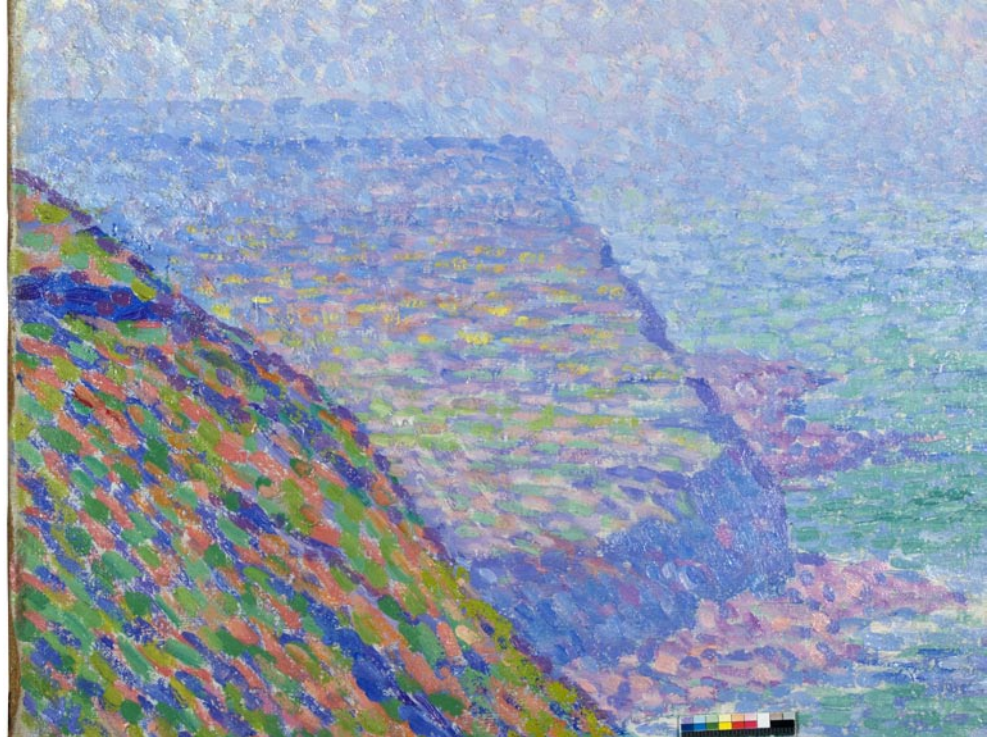
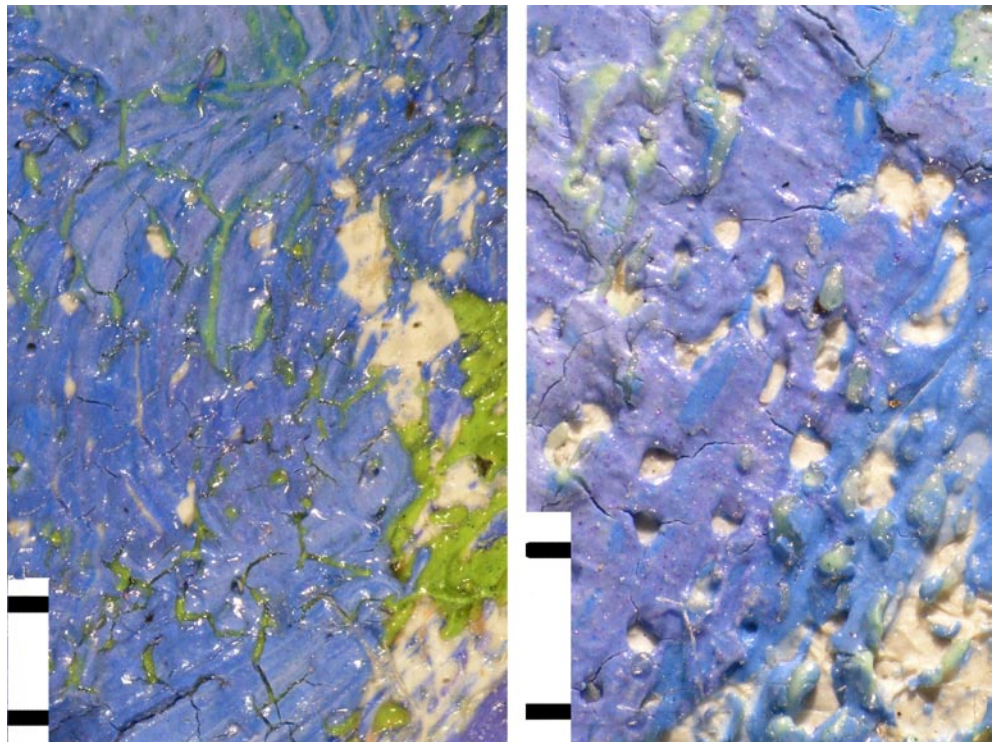


Fig. 10  
Substance emanating  
from underlying paint  
layers consisting of  
green or green blends,  
microscopic photographs  
(M = 1 mm)





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Fig. 11  
Verso, grisaille painting,  
portrait of Constantin  
Meunier under UV  
radiation (left) and in IR  
reflectography (right)

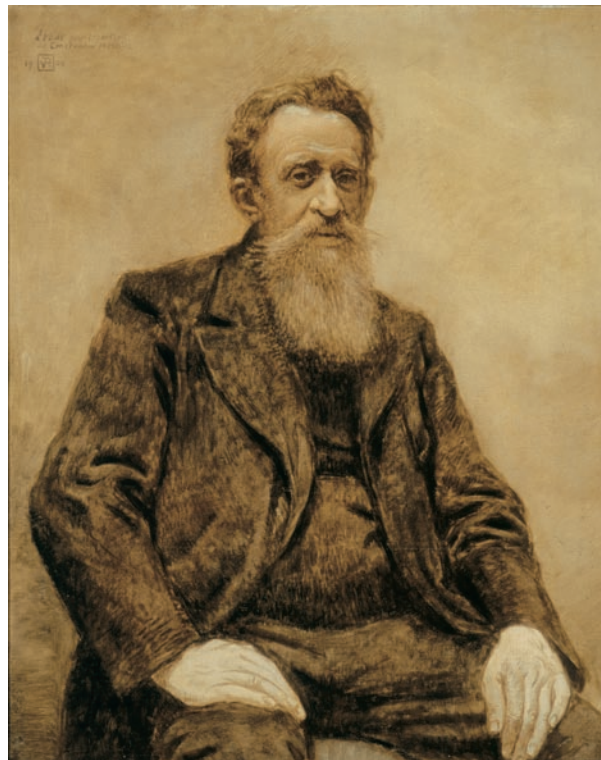


Fig. 12  
Théo van Rysselberghe,  
*Study for the portrait of  
Constantin Meunier*,  
1900, oil on canvas,  
grisaille, 100 x 81 cm,  
Kröller-Müller Museum,  
Otterlo