



Georges Seurat
(1859-1891)

Street Scene
(Dans la rue)

c. 1883

no signature or date

oil on poplar

h 15.6 cm x b 24.7 cm

WRM Dep. 822





Brief Report

Thin beads of paint along the edges, lateral traces of fastening on the picture support and signs of early pressure in the few white impasto areas suggest that this small-format study was painted in a paint-box (figs. 4, 9). The reduced palette is characterized by quick, dynamic applications of paint with quite broad brushes, the dominant colours are strongly contrasting blue and cream tones, supplemented by brown and green. A striking feature is the frequently diagonal orientation of the brushstrokes with which the predominantly creamy paint was applied, in many parts with very little paint on the brush. (fig. 7). Because of the extremely small amount of paint that Seurat used for the first lay-in of the building and the figures, not all the colour applications mixed wet-in-wet in a painting that was in all probability executed in a single session. The sketch in thin dark-blue paint remains partly untouched beneath the subsequent brushstrokes, an indication of a rapid drying period (fig. 8).

The panel of poplar wood, known as a *panneau d'étude*, close to the standard format P2, was re-used by Seurat for this street-scene. Before the study was executed, the artist completely covered an underlying painting with a layer of light-coloured paint applied with vigorous, irregular brush-strokes. This off-white intermediate layer serves as a ground for the visible composition. The only signs of the rejected sketch are dark blue and green tones as well as a reddish-brown on the originally unprimed wood at the edges of the picture in places (fig. 6). Here and there fine early shrinkage cracks and wrinkles in the visible layer of paint also point to a previous use. The X-ray of the rejected composition shows individual pointillist applications of paint, but no concrete depiction is visible on account of the low degree of absorption (fig. 3). Verso, there is an historical inscription in the form of the figures "26", which indicates the posthumous registration of the study (fig. 5).



Picture support panel

Standard format	close to P2, horizontal (16.0 x 24.0 cm)
Thickness	0.3 cm
Type of wood	poplar (<i>Populus sp.</i>)
Panel structure	consists of one board
Grain direction	horizontal
Cut of panel	tangential
Traces left by production/treatment	semi-industrial(?), slightly staggered saw-marks on the left-hand edge of the picture point to treatment subsequent to production but before the painting
Producer's/dealer's marks	none

Ground

Preliminary remark	the panel was originally unprimed, in what follows the intermediate coat between the rejected and the visible painting will be treated as the ground
Sizing	uncertain
Colour	off-white (fig. 6)
Application	manually by Seurat himself
Binding medium	oil
Character and appearance	what we have here is probably not priming material but a white, non-absorbent paint applied with vigorous brush-strokes in a predominantly diagonal direction (figs. 6, 8)



Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	no painted or drawn compositional lay-in discernible
Extent/character	–
Pentimenti	–

Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision	the structure and subject of the first painting can only be vaguely surmised on the basis of the X-ray and of clues along the edges of the picture (figs. 3, 6); a first lay-in of the figures and architecture was applied in rapid, almost dry brush strokes in blue or brown on the largely dry intermediate coat; the underlayer is still visible beneath; there followed an addition of the cream-coloured areas, interspersed with repeated applications of further blue accents, for example in the figures; the applications of paint are superimposed wet over almost dry to wet-in-wet; subsequent applications of blue have mixed with the cream-coloured underlayer, in part heavily streaked (figs. 7, 8)
Painting tools	broad flat brushes of various sizes
Surface structure	very irregular; the frequent diagonal brush-strokes of the light-coloured intermediate coat beneath dominate the structure of the painting (figs. 4, 6); white impasto areas bear clear signs of pressure (paint-box? storage?) (fig. 4); partial marking of early shrinkage cracks in the intermediate coat (fig. 10)
Palette	hues revealed by microscopic inspection: yellow ochre, a blended brownish-red, two blue tones, a dark green, small quantities of a transparent dark red, pale yellow, partly blended with white VIS spectrometry: yellow ochre/iron-oxide yellow, iron-oxide red/brown, natural and synthetic (French) ultramarine(?), vermilion, chrome or cadmium yellow(?)
Binding mediums	presumably exclusively oil



Surface finish

Authenticity/condition	there is no evidence that an original varnish ever existed; currently there is a semi-gloss non-yellowed varnish; slight remains of an older, badly yellowed coat can be discerned
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Signature/Mark

When?	–
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Autograph signature	–
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Serial	–
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Frame

Authenticity	uncertain
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State of preservation

The painting is in a good condition; defects and retouchings are present only to a small degree (fig. 10).



Additional remarks

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Literatur

- Kirby et al. 2003: Jo Kirby, Kate Stonor, Roy Ashok, Aviva Burnstock, Rachel Grout, Raymond White: Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology, at: National Gallery Technical Bulletin, Vol. 24, S. 5-37, London 2003
- Brame/Hauke 1961: Paul Brame, César M. de Hauke: Seurat et son Œuvre, Vol. I, 69, p. 40, with ill., Paris 1961

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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Fig. 1
Recto

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Fig. 2
Verso





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Fig. 3
X-ray reveals re-use



Fig. 4
Detail in raking light,
the brush-strokes of the
paint layer and signs of
pressure in the impasto
sections are obvious



Fig. 5
Detail of the bottom right-hand corner: the inscription “26” is the inventory number assigned by the executor of the artist’s estate (applied upside-down with respect to the picture)



Fig. 6
Green colour blend of the first painting along the edge of the picture (1), off-white intermediate coat (2), visible paintlayer (3), microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

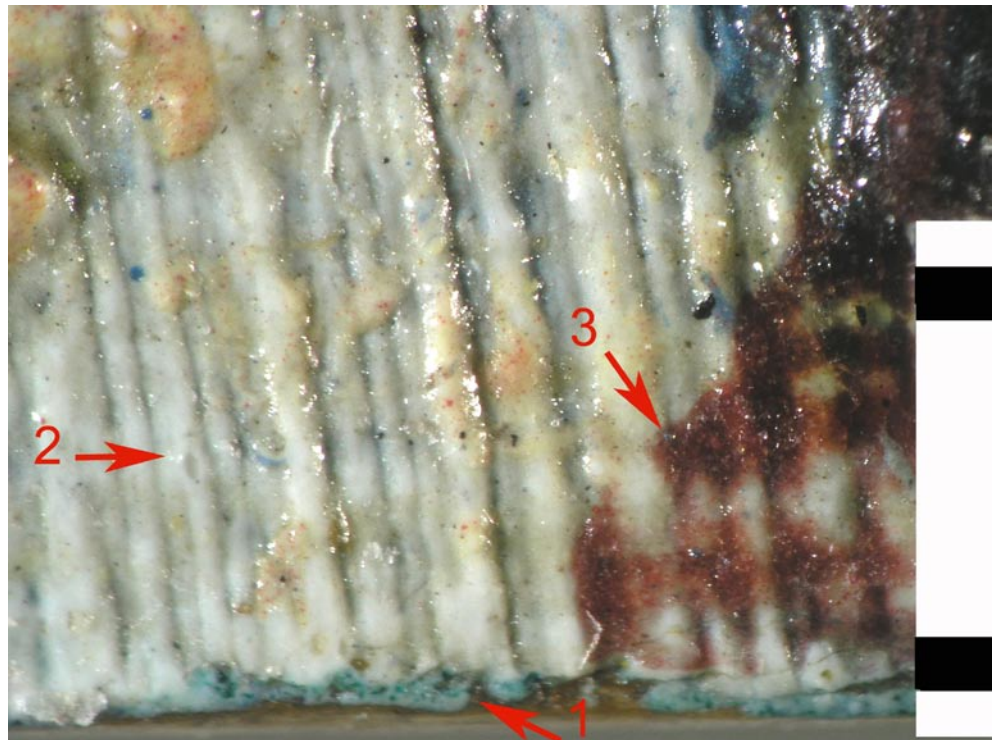




Fig. 7
Applications of paint
mixed wet-in-wet,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 8
Thin applications of
paint were applied to
already partly dry layers,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

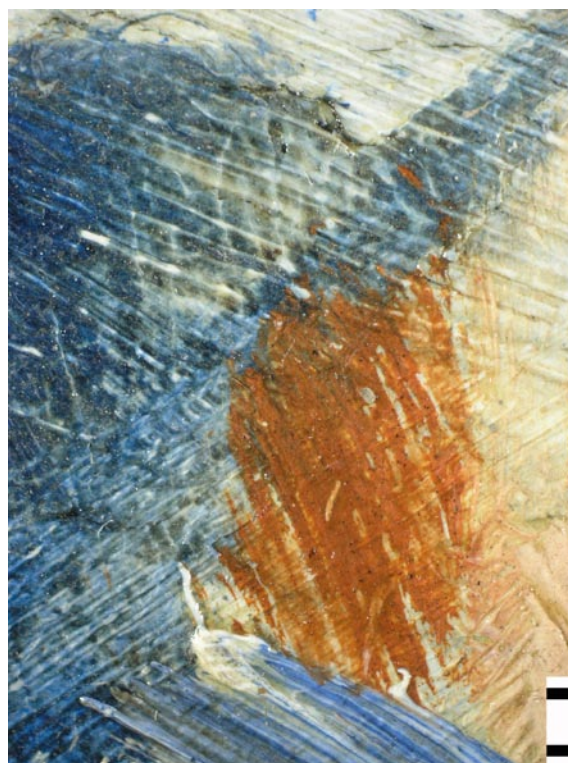




Fig. 9
Early shrinkage cracks
in the intermediate
coat have been partially
retouched during a
restoration which cannot
be dated,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 10
A defect near the edge
indicates that the
painting was executed
in a paint-box (area
indicated by red marking
on the inset),
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)





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Fig. 11
An originally oval,
fragmentary historical
paper sticker which
cannot be more closely
identified,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

