



Paul Signac

(1863-1935)

Capo di Noli

May 1888

signed bottom left: "P. Signac"

undated

Oil on canvas

h 93.5 cm x b 75.0 cm

WRM Dep. FC 682





Brief Report

This picture in portrait format was painted a year before the publication of Signac's famous treatise *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme* [Signac 1899] and shows a classical composition of a harbour on the Italian Riviera (fig. 1). Signac planned all the forms of the composition in blue paint with a brush on a thinly primed canvas with its weave still clearly discernible (fig. 8). The painting consists of a multitude of mostly impasto brush-strokes and dabs. The individual applications of paint become more and more concentrated through the step-by-step application in particular in the dark compositional elements, resulting in a maximum of four superimposed or overlapping paint layers (figs. 9, 10). Colour cells richly differentiated in their density of application, their size and their direction are a distinguishing feature of this picture. Within any given motif, one direction of paint application is dominant. The fact that adjacent applications of different-coloured paint rarely mix suggests that not only was the work spread over a number of sessions, but also that this picture was painted in the studio. In his journal, Signac noted that for the painting *Capo di Noli* he aimed for "extreme polychromy" and that to prepare as brilliant a colour effect as possible, he had used samples of dyed silk [Cachin/Ferretti-Bocquillon 2001, p. 228].

Faithful to his colour-theoretical approach, for this picture Signac used red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet, which were applied either pure, or, if blended, then only either with white or with a spectrally adjacent colour. A systematic approach can be seen in the composition of the local, light and shadow tones of the individual motifs. We often find combinations of two spectral neighbours, which are then contrasted with the respective complementary colours in the shadows. One peculiarity concerns a revision of the painting in the peripheral regions, presumably in the artist's own hand. Here a fine pencil line on the paint layer runs parallel to the outside edge at a distance of 0.6-1.2 cm, covered in many places by overlying strokes of paint. The individual strokes of paint take up the coloration of the underlying painting mostly in paler tones and thus form a kind of internal frame inseparable from the picture (fig. 7). This was created only after the picture was completed, indeed after the signature was added, as proved by individual strokes which marginally overlap Signac's name in the bottom left-hand corner. But also the fact of a deviating fluorescence of this subsequently painted frame does not allow any clear conclusion on the exact time of this revision.



Picture support canvas

Standard format	F30 vertical (92.0 cm x 73.0 cm)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 20-22, horizontal 17-19 threads per cm; some threads, both vertical and horizontal, lie proud of the surface
Stretching	not original
Stretcher/strainer	not the original stretcher
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.4 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	none
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	possibly hidden by lining canvas

Ground

Sizing	not determined
Colour	white (lead white)
Application	single-layer application before cutting-to-size and stretching, the ground barely fills the interstices between the threads (figs. 7, 9)
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	because of the lining adhesive, not possible to assess; FTIR evidence of lead white in the ground



Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	brush and blue semi-transparent paint (fig. 8)
Extent/character	detailed underdrawing of all forms in the composition; the blue lines are in places (e.g. in the group of figures) not covered by applications of paint and come across as autonomous colour components in the total composition (fig. 8)
Pentimenti	slight deviations from the lines of the underdrawing in breadths of a few millimetres

Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision	systematic and step-by-step application of paint in separate sessions (wet on dry); mostly short, straight and saturated dashes of paint in a direction oriented to the motif (e.g. horizontal for the sea); increasingly impasto in proportion to the amount of white; in pale regions of the composition (e.g. sky) the ground is integrated, albeit sparingly, in areas of strong or dark colour the paint applications are denser; the blue lines of the underdrawing seem in places to have been deliberately allowed to remain visible
Painting tools	flat-ferrule bristle brushes
Surface structure	the relief-like impasto brush-strokes generate a surface structure that comes across as lively, in particular as a result of their changing orientation (figs. 9, 10)
Palette	visual microscopic inspection reveals: medium yellow, medium orange, pale red, red lake, pale green, dark green, medium blue, dark blue, violet; VIS spectrometry: vermillion, alizarin lake, chromium-based green pigments, cobalt blue, ultramarine, cobalt violet; FTIR: cadmium yellow, cadmium orange(?)
Binding mediums	presumably oil



Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition	high-gloss varnish applied at a later date
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Signature/Mark

When?	not at the same time as the painting was completed, as there is no discernible blending of the signature paint with underlying paint applications
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Autograph signature	with a fine brush in violet paint, which still has clearly recognizable proportions of blue where the letter “P” starts; the individual letters were inscribed separately, producing a dot-like structure in the inscription, an effect that has been enhanced by abrasion on the high points of the weave
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Serial	–
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Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

During the course of an earlier re-stretching, presumably after the lining, parts of what had been the fold-over edge were pulled on to the recto side of the stretcher, increasing the size of the picture from an original 92.0 x 73.0 cm to 93.5 x 75.0 cm; the lining led to numerous changes to the original (excessive pressure led to increased visibility of the texture of the original canvas, the squashing of impasto applications, and the darkening of the ground as a result of penetration by the lining adhesive, which contained wax); extensive abrasion of the ground on the high points of the weave; changes in yellow and orange paint applications (FTIR analysis proves these to be cadmium pigments) come across as matt and under the microscope reveal transparent products of change, some whitish, some grey or brownish [Leone/ Burnstock/ Jones 2005].

Additional remarks

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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, cat. no. 158, pp. 360-363, with ill.
- Cachin/Ferretti-Bocquillon 2001: Françoise Cachin, Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon: Signac. *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, Paris 2000, p. 235, fig. 319
- Cahn 2005: Isabelle Cahn, *Bordures néo-impressionnistes, une expérimentation aux limites de la peinture*, *Le Néo-impressionisme de Seurat à Paul Klee*, catalogue of the correspondent exhibition in the Musée d'Orsay, 14 March - 10 July 2005, Paris 2005, p. 62-72
- Signac 1899: Paul Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, Paris 1899 (an English translation is contained in Floyd Ratliff, *Paul Signac and Color in Neo Impressionism*, New York, 1992)
- Leone/Burnstock/Jones 2005: Bronwyn Leone, Aviva Burnstock, Chris Jones, "The deterioration of cadmium sulphide yellow artists' pigments" in ICOM-CC 14th Triennial Meeting, The Hague 12-16 September 2005, 2, 2005, pp. 803-813.

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 | |

Author of examination:	Katrin Menz
Author of brief report:	Iris Schaefer

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Fig. 1
Recto

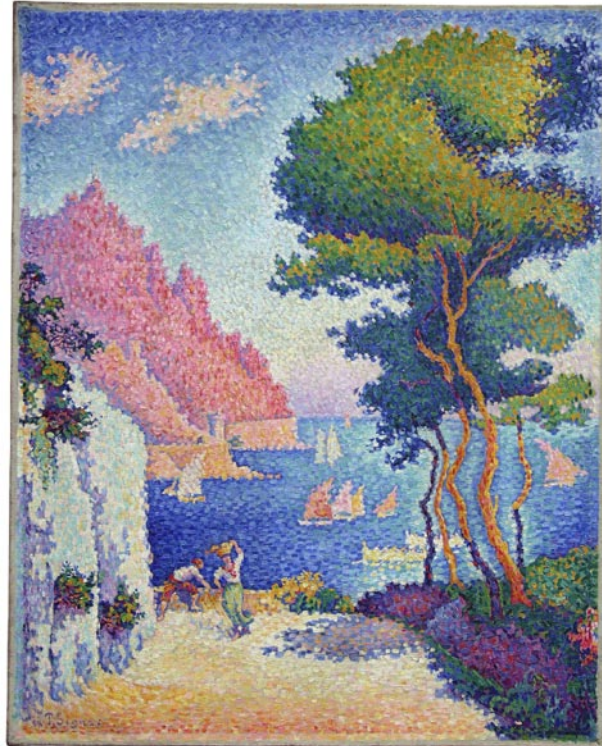


Fig. 2
Verso

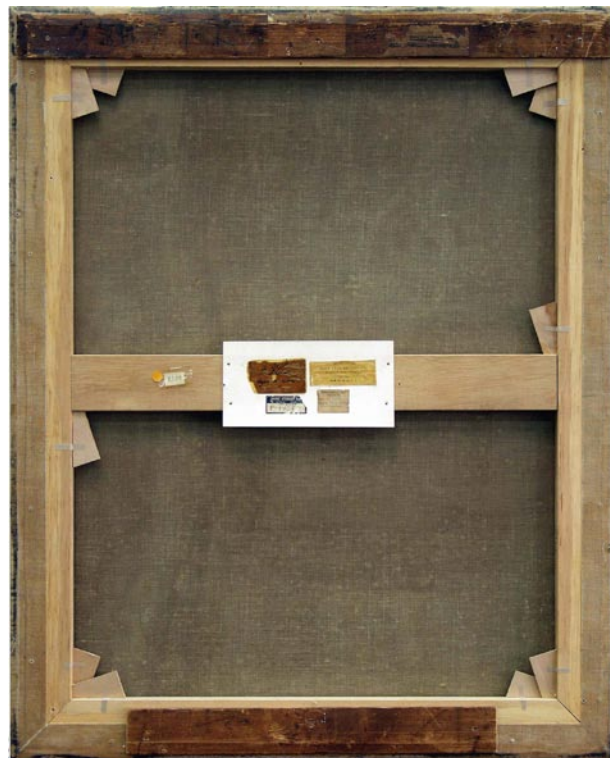




Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light





Fig. 5
UV

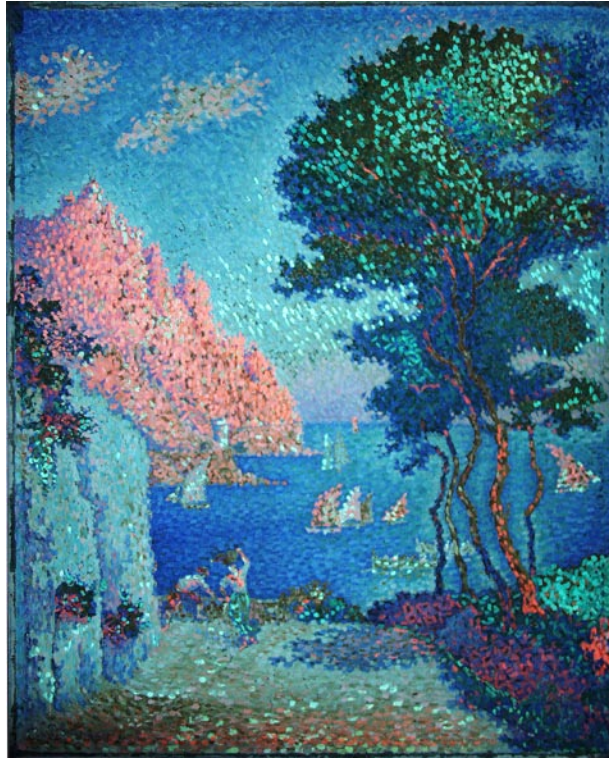


Fig. 6
IR reflectogram





Fig. 7
Detail, signature

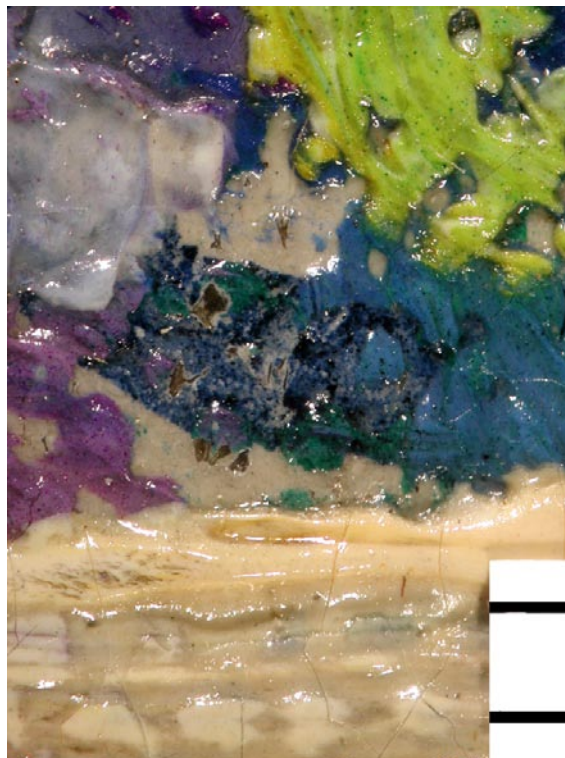


Fig. 8
Detail, blue
underdrawing line,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 9
Detail, raking light,
sailing boat and water

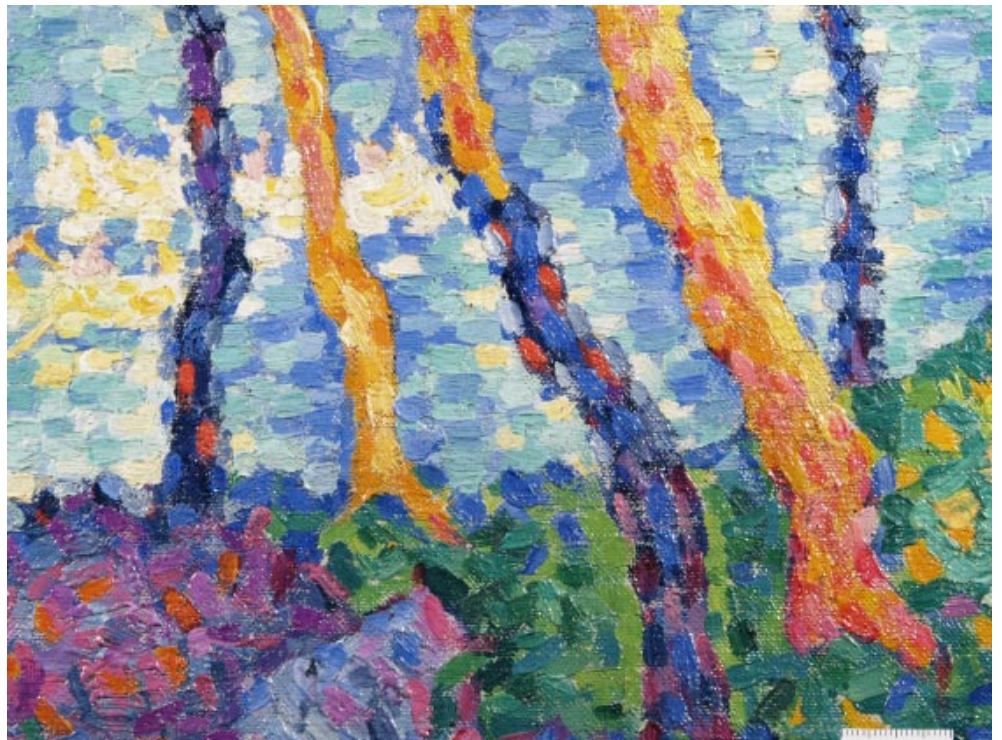


Fig. 10
Detail, tree-trunks
and bushes

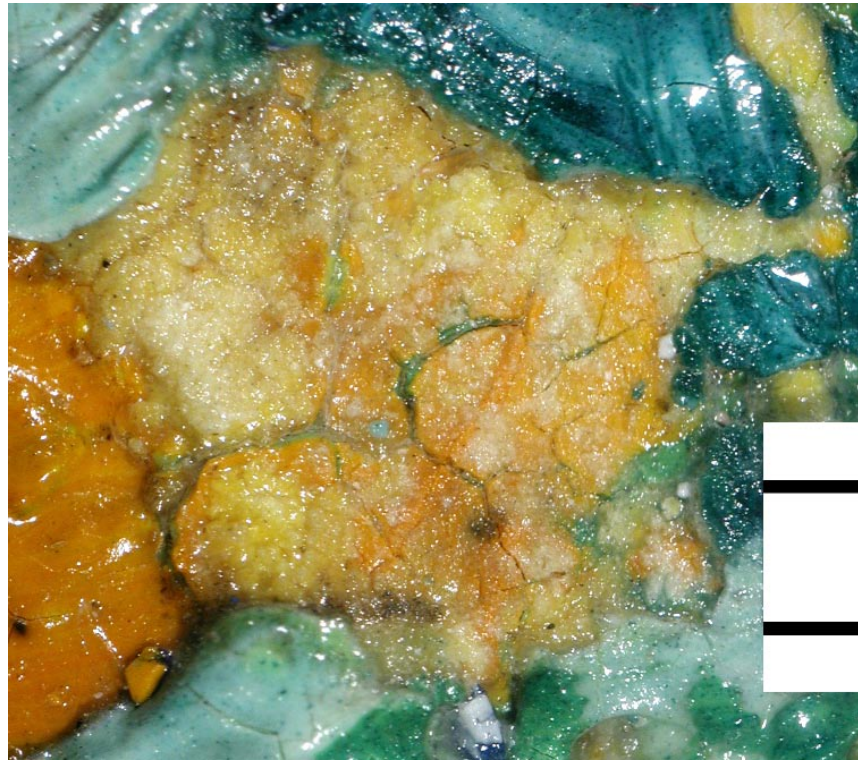


Fig. 11
Detail, changes in
yellow paint, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)

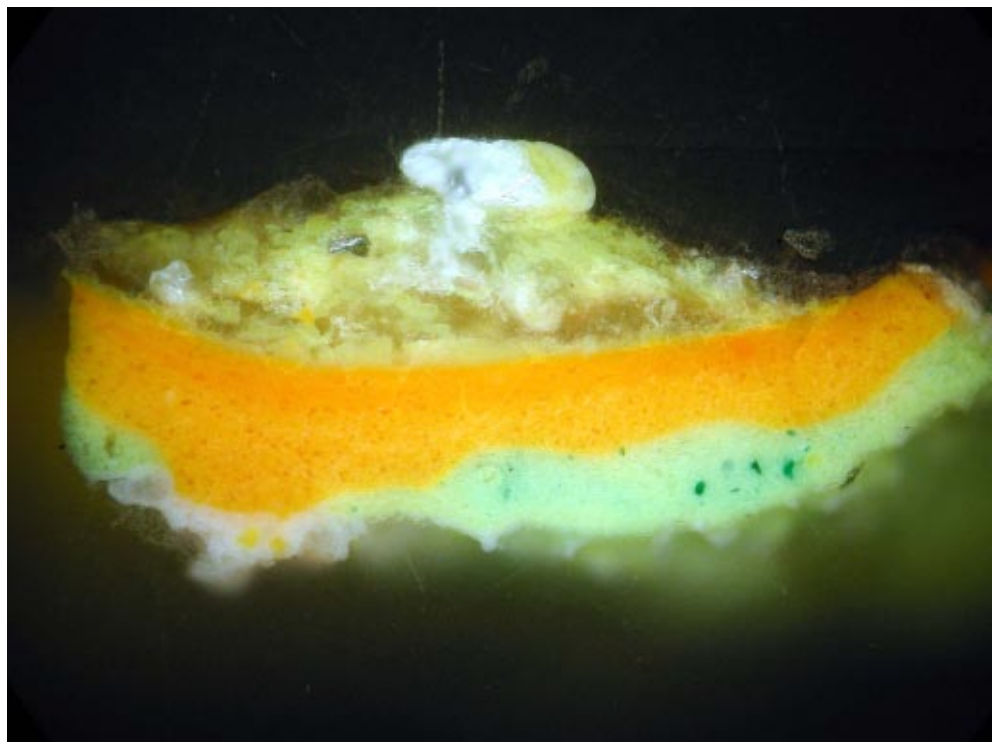


Fig. 12
Cross-section of a
paint-layer sample from
the area shown in fig. 11,
from top to bottom:
degraded yellow paint
layer with fungus-like
material growing from
it (cadmium sulphide
with a zinc component),
orange paint layer (pure
cadmium sulphide),
green paint layer
(chromium-based pig-
ment); magnified 200x