



Paul Signac

(1863-1935)

The Harbour of Concarneau

(Concarneau le port)

1933

signed bottom right: "P. Signac"

no date

Oil on canvas

h 53.0 cm x b 73.5 cm

WRM Dep. FC 656





Brief Report

This painting of the harbour at Concarneau, painted in 1933 two years before the artist's death, bears witness to Signac's lifelong passion for sailing boats (fig. 1). Dashes on the left-hand turnover edge and numerous pricks within the blue margin of the picture suggest that Signac used a grid, which we can no longer reconstruct, in order to transfer the composition from a picture previously executed in a different medium (fig. 7). One possibility would be an India-ink drawing in unknown private possession mentioned in the catalogue raisonné [Cachin/Ferretti-Bocquillon 2000, p. 340], in the same format as, and closely related to, the present work. The individual forms of the depiction were first outlined in black pencil, and then enhanced as dotted lines in blue paint applied with a brush (fig. 8). Only then was a coat of pure white paint applied, which comes across as streaky in many places; an attempt

was made not to obscure the blue lines. To all appearances, Signac applied this white paint layer out of dissatisfaction with the off-white ground of the pre-primed canvas (figs 5, 9, 10). The painting itself is dominated by short brushstrokes applied in various directions. While the horizontal brushstrokes used for the sky consist largely of blue tones lightened with white, the horizontal brushstrokes used for the reflections of the boats and sails in the water are generally more intensive and colourful (fig. 11). Signac used luminous, sometimes pure pigments for the hulls and sails of the boats. The consistency of the paints varies here from thin and semi-transparent via opaque to impasto (fig. 12). In a final stage, Signac edged some of the vertical and diagonal brushstrokes in blue paint (fig. 11). In the same way, he enhanced the individual blue outlines of the first, drawn, lay-in.



Picture support canvas

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Standard format | P 20 (73.0 cm x 54.0 cm), horizontal |
| Weave | tabby weave |
| Canvas characteristics | vertical 19-21, horizontal 15-17 threads per cm; both Z-twist; the vertical threads are considerably thicker and wavier than the horizontal; here and there threads have come loose from the canvas weave, got twisted, and stand out as thickened yarn |
| Stretching | evidently stretched several times as evidenced by (now unused) fastening holes in the turnover edge; the majority of these holes match holes in the stretcher; the turnover edge of the pre-primed canvas extends to the back of the stretcher (fig. 7) |
| Stretcher/strainer | presumably original stretcher with centre-bar |
| Stretcher/strainer depth | 2.0 cm |
| Traces left by manufacture/processing | – |
| Manufacturer's/dealer's marks | on the left hand half of the canvas verso rotated through 90 degrees anti-clockwise with respect to the picture (in accordance with the portrait format) an oval stamp with the inscription in black [of the Parisian firm of Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet:] "Toiles & Couleurs / Extra Fines / Lucien Lefebvre-Foinet / Paris / 19, Rue Vavin & 2, Rue Brea" (Abb. 2, 6) |



Ground

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Sizing | weak, the interstices of the threads are not completely closed by the size |
| Colour | off-white |
| Application | single-layer ground applied before cutting to size and stretching; contains blister-like hollows (air bubbles) |
| Binding medium | presumably oil |
| Texture | thin, smooth with slightly glossy surface |

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Medium/technique | brush and semi-transparent blue paint |
| Extent/character | black pencil markings on the left-hand turnover edge of the canvas verso (right-hand when seen from the back, fig. 7) and demonstrably pricked holes in the periphery or beneath the blue margin of the picture on all four sides, suggest a process of transfer of a picture existing separately from the present work (fig. 10); as no regular grid is produced by joining opposite points, neither can any lines be detected on the canvas (which might be hidden by the second, pure white paint application described below), the exact procedure remains however unclear; the enclosure of the picture area with a soft black pencil does not (with dimensions of 51.0 x 71.5 cm) completely fill the canvas to the turnover edge of the fabric; there is a gap of 0.7-1 cm between it and the outer edge; the same black pencil was used for the compositional lay-in of the picture; both this and the lines of the drawn margin were subsequently redrawn with a brush in a thin, blue paint (fig. 8), often in short strokes of varying chromatic intensity; some of the black drawing lines were etched; these blue outlines play a major role in the total coloration |
| Pentimenti | – |



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

following the brush-drawing described above, a pure white paint-layer was applied (figs 5, 9, 10) within the blue margin (51.0 x 71.5 cm); this mildly impasto paint-layer was applied mostly in a vertical direction and at first did not cover the motifs outlined in blue, in the interior areas (e.g. of the sail of the foremost boat) the direction of application changes, and in places the blue brushstrokes are also covered in semi-transparent paint; the picture is composed of mosaic-like applications of paint whose predominantly rectangular shape is determined by the short length of stroke of a flat-ferrule bristle brush; sky and sea are laid-in in horizontal brush-strokes; there are vertical and diagonal paint applications in the region of the sails and mast; in parallel with and following the execution in paint, the accentuation and outlining of the sailing boats was done with blue brushstrokes, resulting at the same time in the accentuation and softening of individual colour cells; all the paints are blended either with white or with the adjacent colour in the spectrum, only rarely in pure form

Painting tools

flat-ferrule bristle brushes

Surface structure

the alternation of smooth with relief-like impasto brushstrokes in different directions of application, together with matt and glossy paint surfaces produces a lively surface structure (fig. 12)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: pale yellow, medium yellow, medium orange, pale red, transparent red, medium blue, medium blue with a red cast, dark green
Vis spectrometry: zinc yellow(?), chrome yellow(?), cadmium yellow, red lead, rose madder, cobalt blue, ultramarine blue, viridian
FTIR: cadmium yellow, cadmium orange(?)

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

the painting is in its authentic unvarnished state, producing an interesting alternation between the predominantly matt paint applications with an admixture of pale colours and the chromatically intensive brushstrokes with sometimes glossy surfaces



Signature/Mark

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| When? | some time after the completion of the painting, as there is no mixing of the signature with the underlying paint (fig. 5) |
| Autograph signature | in glowing blue paint applied with a fine brush |
| Serial | – |

Frame

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Authenticity | not original |
|--------------|--------------|

State of preservation

Corrugations along the top edge (fig. 3); abrasions and losses of the ground along the edges of the picture and in the region of old nail-holes in the turnover edge; isolated losses within impasto paint applications.

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. 15, p. 368, with ill.
- Cachin/Ferretti-Bocquillon 2000: Françoise Cachin, Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon: *Signac. Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, Paris 2000, p. 340, ill. 607
- Signac 1899: Paul Signac: *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, Paris 1899



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 | – Material-invasive analysis |
| – False-colour infrared reflectography | |
| – X-ray | |
| ✓ Stereomicroscopy | |

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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso



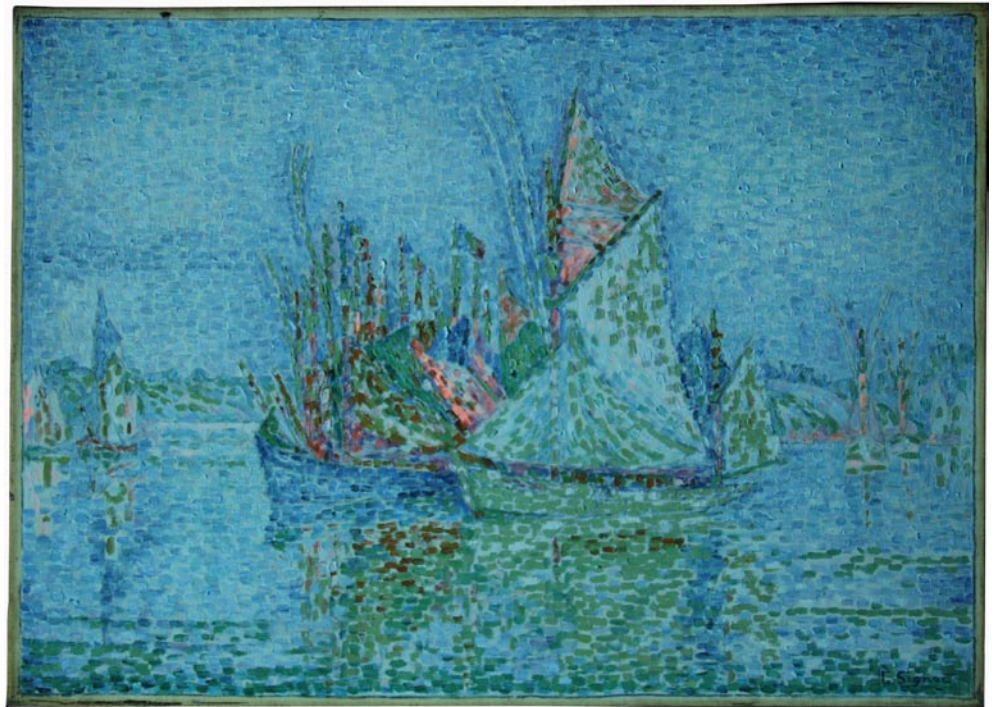


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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
UV fluorescence





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Fig. 5
Detail, signature and
right-hand edge of
picture with blue outline
of the painted area



Fig. 6
Detail, dealer's stamp
on canvas verso



Fig. 7
Detail, left-hand
turnover edge, which
extends to the rear of
the stretcher and shows
black markings in the
form of dashes



Fig. 8
Blue brush lines to lay
in the composition,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



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Fig. 9

Brush outline in blue over black pencil line at the left-hand edge of the picture, to the left the commercially pre-primed canvas is visible, to the right the streaky pure-white paint layer which functioned as a second ground, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 10

Detail, blue outline at the right-hand edge of the picture with visible prick hole below the line





Fig. 11

Detail, variety of colour in the region of the ships' hulls and sails, blue outlines reinforcing the cell-structure of the individual brushstrokes



Fig. 12

Detail, the surface of the painting is characterized by an alternation of smooth and impasto paint applications (raking light)

