



Alfred Sisley

(1839-1899)

The Environs of Louveciennes

(Environs de Louveciennes)

1876

*signed and dated bottom right:
"Sisley. 76"*

Oil on canvas

h 61.5 cm x b 45.7 cm

WRM Dep. FC 707





Brief Report

Alfred Sisley's picture titled *The Environs of Louveciennes* was painted in 1876, a year after the artist had moved away from this small town 30 km from Paris to which he had fled to escape the siege of the capital in 1871. But he continued to seek motifs in the area, which links the picture closely to two other works by Sisley dating from 1876 and 1878, *Rue à Louveciennes* and *La neige à Louveciennes* [Budde/Schaefer 2001, p. 377, Daulte 1959, cat. nos. 221, 282]. For the present central-perspective depiction of a road, Sisley chose a standard P12 study-grade canvas primed in cream and stretched (fig. 7). The present stretcher may re-use pieces of a previously used one, taking the vertical elements of a standard P10 (46.0 cm) stretcher: this is suggested by a stencil verso, partly erased, but discernible under IR reflectography, including the number "10" in the centre of the top bar (fig. 2).

Neither stereo-microscopy nor IR reflectography gives any hint of any drawn or painted compositional lay-in, so we may presume that Sisley dispensed with this stage. The paint was applied both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry (figs 9, 10, 11). There are several highly impasto applications, closely interwoven, and they give only the occasional glimpse of the pale ground between individual brushstrokes (fig. 8). Sisley only signed and dated the picture in dark green when the paint was dry (fig. 6). The painting is one of the relatively few works which Sisley managed to sell in his lifetime, but the frequent changes in the subsequent ownership of a painting with a sensitive canvas evidently led to a number of restorations including a very rigid lining (figs 2, 7).



Picture support canvas

Standard format	P12 (60.0 x 46.0 cm), vertical
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	very open study-grade almost net-like weave (Fr. <i>pochade</i> or <i>toile étude</i>); density of yarns cannot be determined because of the lining, app. 12-15 per cm; yarn thickness app. 0.2-0.3 mm; Z twist
Stretching	what we have here is a second stretching resulting from the lining process, turnover edge not visible (covered with adhesive tape, possibly cropped)
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with horizontal centre bar; extensive traces of use; inscriptions and stickers suggest authenticity
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	stretcher possibly uses the vertical elements from another stretcher of the standard P10 size (46.0 cm) for the shorter horizontal bars top and bottom here, as suggested by a black stencil of the number "10" on the top bar, partly erased, but revealed by IR reflectography (fig. 2)
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none visible because of the lining



Ground

Sizing	undetermined; probable however because of the netlike quality of the canvas
Colour	yellowish white (Fr. <i>jaune</i> , fig. 8)
Application	impossible to determine whether the ground was applied before the canvas was cut to size and stretched; thin, one or two layers
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	even and homogeneous; microscopic inspection reveals the addition of fine, ochre pigment particles (fig. 8)

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	–
Extent/character	neither microscopy nor IR reflectography suggest any compositional planning either painted or drawn
Pentimenti	–



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

the painting was probably executed in at least two working sessions; the paint was applied wet-in-wet and also evidently wet-on-dry in countless short straight strokes with a predominantly diagonal orientation (figs 9, 10, 11); several superimposed paint applications, in some cases with slightly different brushwork, are discernible under raking light primarily in the lower half of the picture (fig. 3); the paintwork is very dense, so that the cream ground is only rarely visible between the individual brush-strokes (fig. 8)

Painting tools

bristle brushes (?) of stroke breadth varying between 0.2-1.0 cm

Surface structure

brushwork easily visible throughout, in places the paint is spread out, but predominantly impasto (fig. 3)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale yellow, orange-red, red lake, dark blue, medium blue, dark green (semi-transparent)
Vis spectrometry: chrome(?)/cadmium(?) yellow, iron-oxide red(?), red lake not identifiable, cobalt blue, viridian

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

present varnish is not authentic, possibly including fluorescing components, as retouching beneath it is not revealed under UV stimulation (fig. 5)



Signature/Mark

When?	with a fine brush in dark-green, fairly viscous paint “Sisley. 76” applied after the painting had dried (fig. 6)
Autograph signature	accords in appearance and execution with Sisley’s signatures of the period
Serial	–

Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

Very rigid lining, possibly with an intermediate layer (lining canvas in tabby weave, vertical 21, horizontal 17 threads per cm; adhesive not determined); edges stuck down all round with adhesive tape; stretcher not perfectly rectangular (fig. 2); pronounced craquelure, in places dark and discoloured as a result of the lining adhesive; individual losses along the edges; some fillings and retouching (fig. 5), signature partly re-traced with a semi-transparent brushstroke.

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. 162, p. 376 with ill.
- Daulte 1959: Françoise Dault, Alfred Sisley. *Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint*, Lausanne 1959, cat. no. 222, with ill.

Source of illustrations

All 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 | |

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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso, lined



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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light



Fig. 5
UV fluorescence



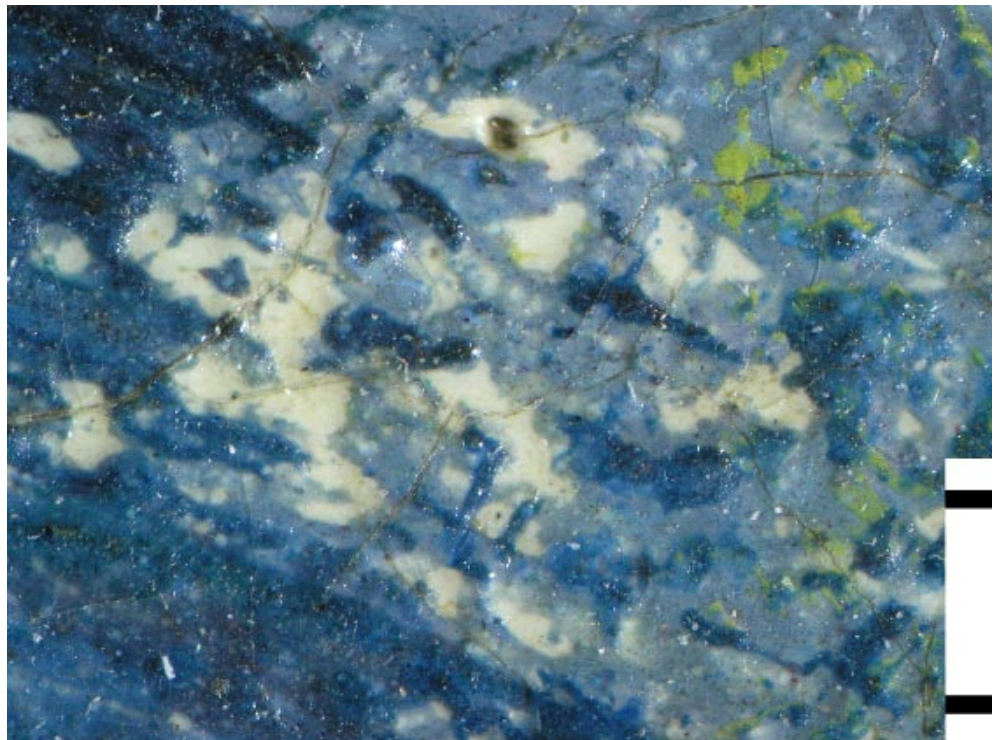
Fig. 6
Details, signature and date with detail of the letter "y" in incident light (top) and under UV stimulation (bottom), microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)



Fig. 7
A loss in the paint-layer
(adjacent to a retouching
and filling), which
reveals the original
loosely woven study-
grade canvas (arrows),
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



Fig. 8
Area left unpainted,
revealing the cream-
coloured ground,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)





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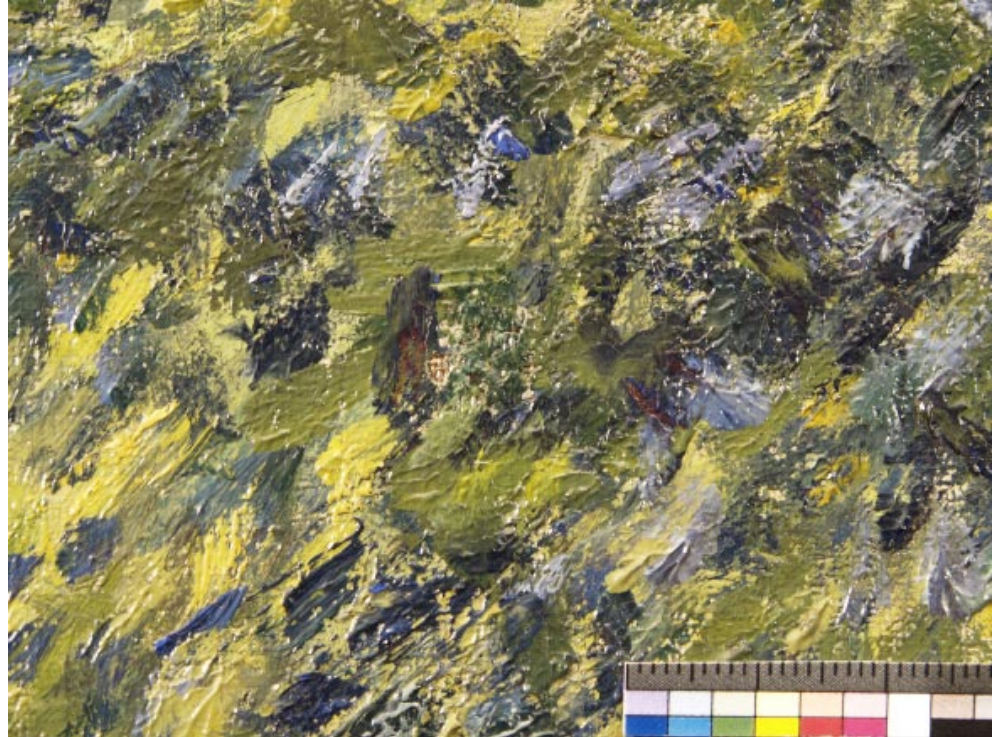


Fig. 9
Detail of the paint applications, both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry in the region of the foliage



Fig. 10
Wet-in-wet paint applications, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

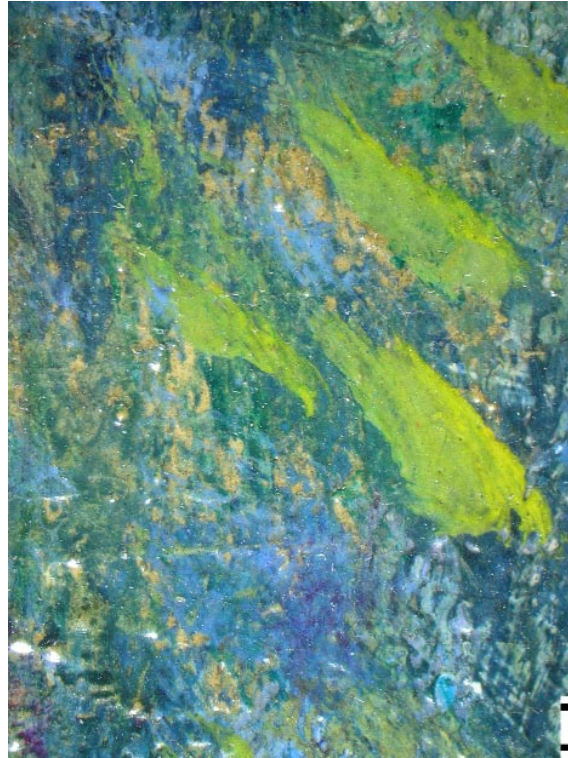


Fig. 11
Wet-on-dry light-
green brush-strokes,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

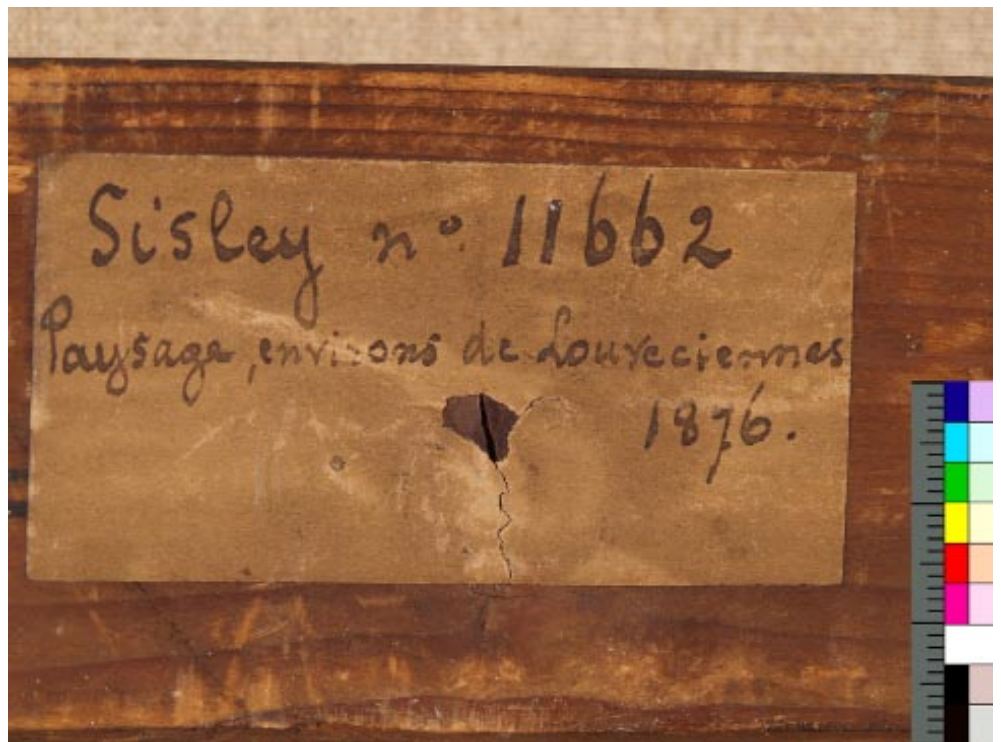


Fig. 12
Early sticker verso, from
an exhibition, gallery or
auction