



**Vincent van Gogh**  
(1853-1890)

**Bridge at Clichy**  
(Pont de Clichy)

*Summer 1887*

*no signature or date*

*oil on canvas*

*h 55.0 cm x b 46.3 cm*

*WRM Dep. 813*





## Brief Report

This painting, described by the artist himself as a study (*étude*), was painted in Clichy to the north of Paris, and was the first of van Gogh's works to have been painted in France and chosen by the artist to appear in an exhibition in his Dutch homeland. In spring 1988 it was put on sale by the dealer Tersteeg in The Hague for 150 francs, before being returned to Paris as unsaleable [LT 471 (fig. 12), LT W 4; Tempel 1999, p.118]. Van Gogh used a presumably pre-primed canvas in the standard F 10 size, whose open weave was similar to what was then generally available as a *toile étude* or *pochade*, i.e. a study canvas. The ground is cream in colour, with a slight yellow cast, and recalls the toned *écru* or *jaune* grounds from the range of products then on offer (fig. 7). As an aid to composition, van Gogh used what he called his *perspective frame*, whose use has already been proved in twelve more paintings by him in 1887 and now in the Amsterdam Van Gogh Museum [Hendriks 2005, p. 473]. The striking lines in the frame, in the *Union Jack* pattern, along with a subsequent underdrawing in pencil, can be seen even with the naked eye (fig. 7), but are brought out much better with infrared reflectography (fig. 6).

The precise appearance and method of use of the perspective frame are described in the Brief Report on van Gogh's *Langlois Drawbridge* (WRM 1197) and in Hendriks 2005. Particularly striking in the *Bridge at Clichy* is the dynamic, sketch-like, almost hectic line-drawing of the pencil underdrawing of houses, bridge, reflections in the water, shadows, grasses and figures, which in places has been corrected several times, drawing attention to changes in the position of the roofs and the arch of the bridge. The subsequent paint application was carried out briskly wet-in-wet in one or two layers, and with little use of impasto (fig. 3). It is possible that the artist even felt that the paint in the sky was too thick in places, because here he used a broad palette knife to remove much of the still-wet paint (fig. 8). All in all, the sketch-like character of the paint application means that we can discern all the stages of development of the finished work, beginning with the ground, via the underdrawing to the individual revisions. The use of the perspective frame and the rapid development of the underdrawing and the paint application speak in favour of the conclusion that the picture was painted entirely *en plein air*.



# Vincent van Gogh – Bridge at Clichy

## Brief Report on Technology and Condition

### Picture support canvas

Standard format	F 10 vertical (55.0 x 46.0 cm)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 12/13, horizontal 12/13 threads per cm; very fine, open, almost net-like fabric of pale colour
Stretching	turnover edge and original stretcher removed in the course of lining
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with vertical centre-bar; very likely not original but dating from the time the picture was lined (fig. 2)
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.4 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	–
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none to be seen



## Ground

Sizing	not determined
Colour	white with slight yellow cast (fig. 7)
Application	presumably commercial pre-priming; even application in one to two coats
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	canvas structure remains dominant; homogeneous layer with individual inclusions of yellow-ochre, black and transparent red particles (red lake?)

## Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	two stages in the planning of the picture can be determined: 1) transfer of the contours of the perspective frame in pencil; 2) pencil drawing of the objects
Extent/character	1) right-hand, left-hand and bottom inner edge of the <i>perspective frame</i> along with its rectangular and diagonal cruciform elements were drawn in on the ground in pencil (fig. 6); the frame is centred and takes up almost the entire area of the picture; the intersection of the lines marks the centre of the picture; dimensions of the frame: h 61.0 cm x b 46.0 cm, close to standard P 12 (60.0 x 46.0 cm) size; 2) detailed and sketch-like freehand drawing of the contours of houses, bridge, reflections, shadows, grasses and figures, apart from the pair of figures on the bridge and the adjacent tree-top; characteristic and dynamic lineation, in places corrected a number of times and varying in width and blackening; some shaded areas are laid-in in zigzag hatching (fig. 6)
Pentimenti	the underdrawing contains clear changes of 1 to 4 cm in the position of the roofs and the arch of the bridge (fig. 6); on the footpath along the riverbank the underdrawing has the figure of a man with a hat together his reflection, but in the painting this was obliterated with yellow brush-strokes (fig. 10)



## Paint layer

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

brisk application in one to two paint layers, predominantly wet-in-wet; open painting technique of sketch-like character and obvious unpainted areas leaving the ground exposed (fig. 4); dynamic brushwork involving zigzag hatching, linear strokes and individual dabs of paint; intentionally directional application of individual brushstrokes in order to underscore the three-dimensional effect of houses, bridge and riverbank; in the upper part of the sky, the still wet paint was removed from right to left with a palette knife app. 5 cm broad (figs. 3, 8)

### Painting tools

flat-ferrule bristle brushes of various widths; palette knife for partial removal of paint in the sky (figs. 3, 8)

### Surface structure

brushwork clearly evident, slight impasto (fig. 3)

### Palette

hues revealed by visual microscopic inspection: white, pale yellow, medium yellow, medium red, medium green, dark green, medium blue, light brown, black (only as admixture), in general the colours are seldom pure, but normally mixed  
VIS spectrometry: Naples yellow, chrome yellow(?), cadmium yellow(?), vermillion, copper green (fig. 11), viridian (fig. 11), cobalt blue, Prussian blue

### Binding mediums

presumably purely oil

## Surface finish

### Authenticity/condition

painting is varnished; presumably originally unvarnished



### Signature/Mark

When?	no signature present
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Autograph signature	–
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Serial	–
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### Frame

Authenticity	not original
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### State of preservation

Painting is lined; as a result, turnover edge is missing and there are light pressure marks in the surface structure (fig. 3); presumably increased transparency in the white paint applications.

### Additional remarks

Fingerprint in fresh paint in the middle of the top edge of the picture.



## Literature

- De la Faille 1970: Jacob-Baart de la Faille: The works of Vincent Van Gogh, his paintings and drawings, Amsterdam 1970
- Hendriks/Geldorf 2005: Ella Hendriks, Muriel Geldorf: Van Gogh's Antwerp and Paris picture supports (1885-1888) - reconstructing choices. In: Art Matters, Netherlands technical studies in art, 2, 2005, pp 39-75
- Hendriks 2005: Ella Hendriks: Van Gogh's use of the perspective frame in his Paris paintings. In: ICOM-CC 14th Triennial Meeting, Den Haag, 12. – 16. September 2005, 1, 2005, pp 473-479
- Tempel 1999: Benno Tempel: Such absurdity can never deserve the name of Art, impressionism in the Netherlands. In: Van Gogh Museum Journal, 1999, pp 112-31
- Van Tilborgh/Hendriks 2006: Louis van Tilbourgh, Ella Hendriks: Van Gogh paintings, Antwerp and Paris 1885-1888, Vol. 2, Amsterdam 2006
- Van Tilborgh/Hendriks 2006: Louis van Tilborgh, Ella Hendriks: New views on Van Gogh's development in Antwerp and Paris. An integrated art historical and technical study on his paintings in the Van Gogh Museum = Nieuwe visies op Van Goghs ontwikkeling in Antwerpen en Parijs. Een geïntegreerde technische en kunsthistorische studie van zijn schilderijen in het Van Gogh Museum, 2 Bde., Diss., Amsterdam 2006
- Von Saint-George/Schaefer 2008: Caroline von Saint-George, Iris Schaefer: Bildplanung und Unterzeichnung von Gemälden der Impressionisten und Postimpressionisten aus der Sammlung des Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud. In: Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung, no 2 (2008), pp. 261-273

## Source of illustrations

Fig. 12: [www.vggallery.com](http://www.vggallery.com)

All further 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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Author of brief report:	Caroline von Saint-George

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Fig. 1  
Recto



Fig. 2  
Verso, lined



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Fig. 3  
Raking light from right

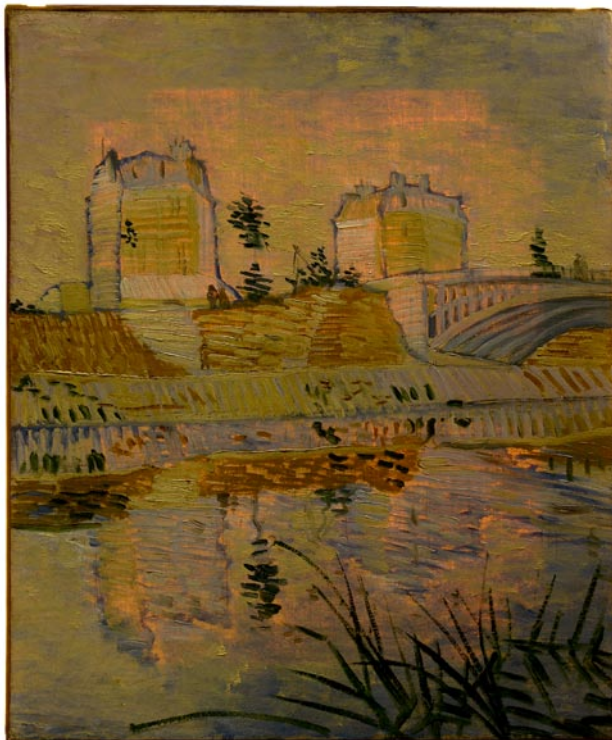


Fig. 4  
Transmitted light





Fig. 5  
UV fluorescence

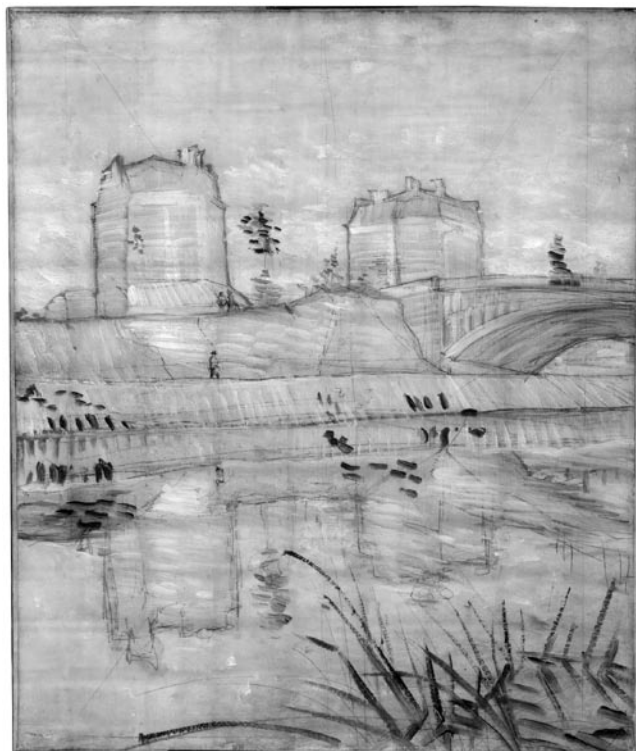


Fig. 6  
Infrared reflectography





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Fig. 7  
Detail of pencil  
underdrawing, reflection  
in the water in bottom  
left-hand corner



Fig. 8  
Raking light, detail of top  
right-hand corner, traces  
of removal of still-wet  
paint (red arrow marks  
where the palette knife  
was applied)





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Fig. 9  
Detail from middle of  
picture, trace of where a  
brush was wiped in the  
wet paint



Fig. 10  
Detail of pencil  
underdrawing, figure  
was gone over with  
powerful yellow brush-  
strokes







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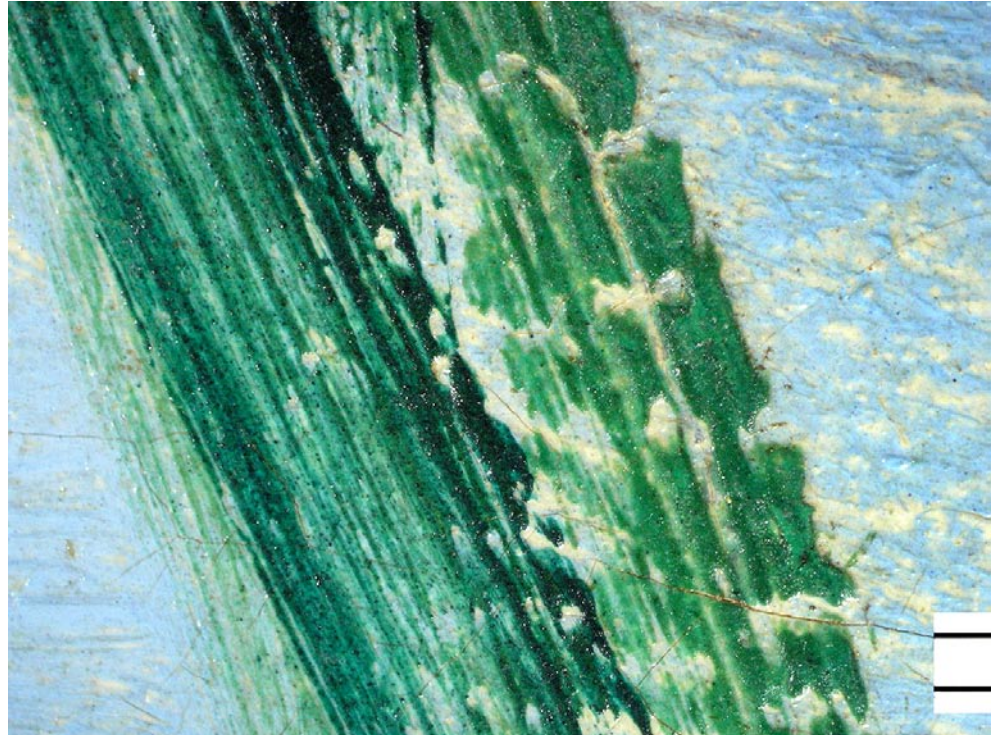


Fig. 11  
Grasses in the foreground, viridian and copper green, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

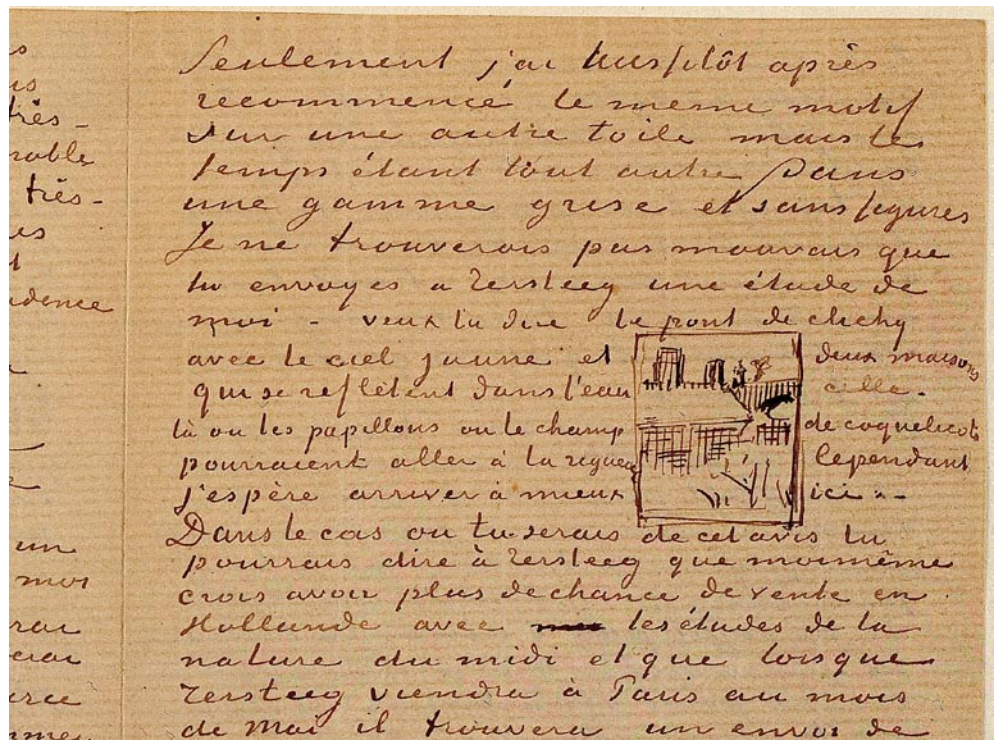


Fig. 12  
Detail of letter to Theo dated 24 March 1888 (LT 471) with drawn sketch of the painting