

Claude Monet

(1840-1926)

Above Vétheuil, Spring Effect

(Au dessus de Vétheuil, effet de
printemps)

1880

signed bottom right: „Claude Monet“

undated

Oil on canvas

h 60,1-60,4 cm x b 99,8 cm

WRM 3620





Brief Report

Monet's 'Above Vétheuil, Spring Effect' [Wildenstein no. 587] was painted on a commercially primed and stretched canvas, albeit not one that can be assigned to any of the French standard sizes. Monet chose a very fine, closely woven canvas with a pale pink ground, the colour apparently corresponding to what was then available from suppliers under the name of *rosé* or *rosé gris* [Callen 2000, p. 66] (figs. 10, 13). He used the pale pink of the ground as the basis for the general colour effect of his picture and through his open painting technique allowed it to remain visible in many places in the manner of an underpainting (figs. 7–9). Without any discernible compositional planning or underdrawing, the artist filled the whole surface of the picture with brisk brushstrokes – horizontal, vertical, diagonal or zig-zag, or dabbed, as in the area of the foliage, depending on the desired effect. Applied wet-in-wet, but also wet-on-dry, those paint applications touching the elevations in the structure are all there is to indicate that Monet painted this picture in more than one working session (figs. 7, 8). Characteristic of the painting, in addition, are the colour mixes created incompletely on the palette, which only visibly blend in the applied brushstroke (figs. 7–9). The handwritten signature 'Claude Monet' was added to the dry paint layer in the bottom right-hand corner in reddish-brown paint (fig. 9).

The technological examination of the painting also revealed beyond doubt that later additions have been made in the area of the sky. These paint applications, executed by a different hand, imitate the flow of Monet's horizontal brush-strokes and can be seen clearly under UV (figs. 4, 15, 16). These additions are hardly noticeable in visible light, and their extent and manner suggest that they are not retouching measures intended to compensate for losses in the paint layer, but rather, presumably, constitute a deliberate addition to areas where the ground was visible, reflecting as it were Monet's loose and sketchy manner of painting. Another later addition is the present varnish (fig. 10). The painting gives no indication that there was ever an original varnish. Stuck on to the reverse of the centre bar of the stretcher is a label of the art-dealer Durand-Ruel, at whose auction on 24 May 1899 the painting, hitherto in the Camescasse Collection, was sold to the Paris art dealer Bernheim-Jeune (fig. 12).



Picture support canvas

Standard format	not a standard format (the closest standard format is Marine 40 at 65 x 100 cm)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characterization	vertical (warp) 26, horizontal (weft) 22/23 threads per cm; very fine, regular and dense weave resembling <i>toile fine</i> ; vertical warp threads are generally thicker in diameter than the horizontal weft threads; there is a selvage along the right-hand edge of the canvas (fig. 11)
Stretching	original stretching is largely extant and supplemented by a few more nails; some nails have been replaced (fig. 10); the intervals between the original fastening points measure between 4.5 and 10 cm (on average app. 8–9 cm); the foldover edge evinces a few further holes that presumably served as provisional fastening points, perhaps for the framing among other things; six small holes through the paint layer and the canvas are apparent <i>recto</i> along the right-hand and left-hand edges of the picture; these have no obviously recognizable purpose (fig. 14)
Stretcher/strainer	the canvas is mounted on its original stretcher with vertical centre-bar, softwood, mortise-and-tenon joint, bars bevelled towards the inside, breadth of bars: 5.2 cm
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.5 cm
Traces left by manufacture / processing	canvas was cut largely along the line of the threads, and is app. 8 cm higher and app. 12.5 cm broader than the stretcher; there are marks left by the tensioning device at all four corners of the foldover (fig. 11)
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	<p>a label on the stretcher centre bar printed in black, and filled in by hand in brown ink, reads:</p> <p>‘DURAND-RUEL/PARIS, 16, Rue Laffitte/NEW-YORK, 389, Fifth avenue/ C Monet No 5269/ Les Bords de la Seine“, H 3.5 x B 6.5 cm (fig. 12)</p> <p>Durand-Ruel's New York branch moved to Fifth Avenue in 1890, first to no. 315 and a little later to no. 389 on the corner of 36th Street [Regan 2004, p. 39]</p>



Ground

Sizing	presumably no sizing; there are numerous small holes/air pockets in the ground layer that are probably due to the absence of, or inadequate, sizing [cf. WRM Dep. FC 673] (fig. 13)
Colour	pale pink
Application	the ground was applied before the canvas was cut and stretched; probably applied in two layers; the canvas edge with no ground on the right-hand foldover derives from the stretching of the large-format length of canvas during the industrial priming process: there are six traces of nails 7.5–10.5 cm apart in the form of large holes with, in places, corroded halos (Ø of the original nail-heads app. 1.2 cm) and associated cusping, which reach far into the painted area; clearly visible edges of marks left by a scraping tool (priming knife) (fig. 11)
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	very thin, smooth and even application; the structure of the canvas is visible beneath (figs. 3, 13); microscopically homogeneous layer with white oval pigment inclusions (lead white?) as well as isolated black and fine red particles

Compositional planning/ underdrawing/ underpainting

medium/technique	no underdrawing was detected either stereomicroscopically or using infrared reflectography
Umfang/Charakter	–
Pentimenti	–



Paint layer

Paint application/ technique and artist's own revisions

loose, sketchy painting technique with lively brushwork; the painting was evidently completed in two or three sessions; both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry brushstrokes are discernible (figs. 7–9); the pale pink ground plays a conspicuous role in determining the general coloration of the painting and in the spirit of an underpainting was left uncovered in many places, or else visible through subsequent semi-transparent and dry paint applications; in chronological order, first the sky was added, using pale, thinly applied loose horizontal strokes, the tree zone being coarsely reserved at this stage; the paint applications in the foreground followed equally briskly, the areas occupied by the various elements being mutually reserved; when the first paint applications had dried, the elaboration of the branches and foliage was carried out very largely wet-in-wet, while finally the last colour accents were added; characteristic of the painting style are brushstrokes that come across as dry, touching only the elevations of the structure, as well as brushstrokes in which the colours mixed only perfunctorily on the palette flow visibly into each other

Painting tools

flat brushes of various widths; the width of the strokes ranges largely between 1.5 and 2.0 cm; here and there we see narrower strokes (0.5 cm) in the area of the branches (figs. 7–9)

Surface structure

predominantly thin paint applications without much body, so that the structure of the canvas remains evenly prominent all over; here and there we find more impasto and dabbed paint applications in the area of the tree

Palette

on the basis of visual microscopic inspection: white, medium yellow, dark red, medium blue, dark blue, medium green, dark green, purple (blend of white, red and blue pigments, reddish fluorescence under UV, cf. fig. 4), brown, black (only in blends)

Binding medium

presumably oil



Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition now varnished; the varnish however is not original (fig. 10)

Signature/Mark

When? applied with a brush using homogeneous reddish-brown paint on the completely dry paint layer following completion of the painting (Fig. 9)

Autograph signature in its orientation and letter formation, the signature matches Monet's signatures at this period [David 2006]

Frame

Authenticity not original; made in 2009

State of preservation

All in all, the painting is in a good and stable condition; the centre bar is marked; there are slight deformations of the canvas in the corners (fig. 3); there are some painted additions by another hand in the sky, presumably intended to intensify the paint application and cover over the pale-pink ground, which shows through in places; the delicate pale-blue horizontal added brushstrokes display a characteristic greenish fluorescence under UV (see above, Summary/Features) (figs. 4, 15, 16); a loss measuring app. 4 x 3 cm in the paint layer on the right next to the tree has been filled and retouched; in the corresponding place *verso* is a canvas patch measuring 6 x 7 cm stuck on with whitish adhesive: this suggests damage to the canvas (figs. 2, 4); there is another loss in the paint layer measuring app. 4 x 2 cm along the top edge of the painting on the left; this has likewise been filled and retouched (fig. 4); the varnish is slightly yellowed; there is a fine craquelure, but pronounced only in places



Further remarks

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Literature

- Callen 2000: Anthea Callen, *The Art of Impressionism, Painting techniques and the making of modernity*, New Haven/London 2000
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- House 1986: John House, *Monet. Nature into art*, New Haven/London 1986
- Regan 2004: Marci Regan, *Paul Durand-Ruel and the market for early modernism*, MA thesis, Louisiana State University, May 2004 weblink: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/123/
- Wildenstein 1974: Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet. Biographie et catalogue raisonné*, Lausanne/Paris 1974, vol. 1: 1840–1881 (Peintures), no. 587
- Wildenstein 1996: Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet oder der Triumph des Impressionismus. Catalogue Raisonné*, Cologne 1996, no. 587

Source of illustrations

All illustrations and figures Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud Köln



Claude Monet – Frühlingsstimmung oberhalb von Vétheuil
Kurzbericht zu Maltechnik und Zustand

Examination methods used

- v Incident light
- v Raking light
- v Reflected light
- v Transmitted light
- v Ultraviolet fluorescence
- v Infrared reflectography
- v False-colour infrared reflectography
- X-ray
- v Stereomicroscopy
- VIS spectrometry
- Wood identification
- FTIR (Fourier transform spectroscopy)
- EDX (Energy Dispersive X-ray analysis)
- Microchemical analysis

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Claude Monet – Above Vétheuil, Spring Effect
Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Abb. 1
Recto



Abb. 2
Verso
with dealer's mark





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Abb. 3
Raking light



Abb. 4
UV fluorescence





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Abb. 5
Infrared reflektogram



Abb. 6
False-colour
IR reflectogram





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Abb. 7
Detail of centre of
picture: open, sketchy
painting technique



Abb. 8
Detail of foreground:
open, sketchy painting
technique





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Abb. 9
Detail of signature



Abb. 10
Details of right-hand
turnover edge with
traces of the varnish
application





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Abb. 11

Detail, verso, right-hand top corner, unprimed edge of canvas on the right-hand turnover edge is due to the stretching of the large-format length of canvas during the industrial-scale priming process



Abb. 12

Detail, verso, label of the art dealer Durand-Ruel stuck on to the centre bar of the stretcher, terminus post quem: 1890





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Abb. 13

Microscope photograph,
right-hand edge of pic-
ture with pink ground,
in places with very small
holes (M = 1 mm)

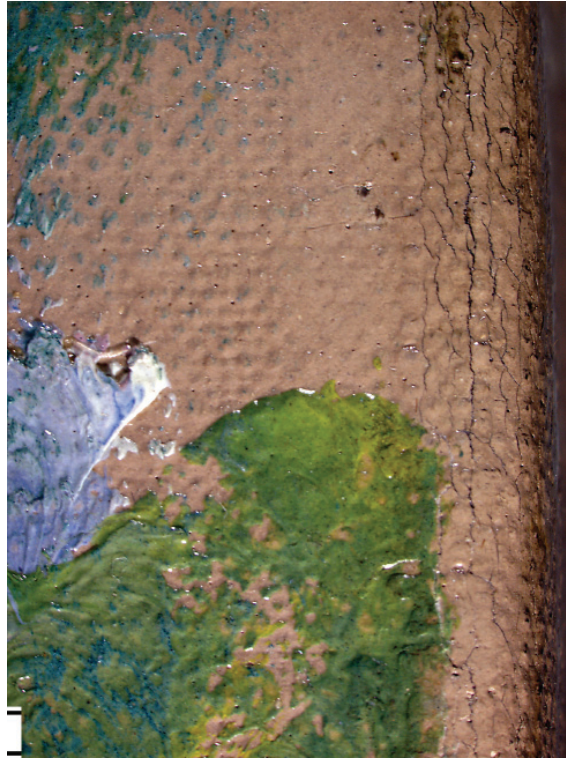


Abb. 14

Microscope photograph,
top right-hand corner,
one of the six apparent-
ly purposeless holes in
the paint layer, ground,
canvas and stretcher
(M = 1 mm)





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Abb. 15

Microscope photograph, sky, later painted additions in the same colour as the surrounding original paint layer, presumably intended to 'intensify' the areas where the ground was showing through (M = 1 mm)



Abb. 16

Microscope photograph of the detail in fig. 15 under UV stimulation; the additions, which colourwise are barely distinguishable in visible light fluoresce greenish under UV (M = 1 mm)

