Camille Pissarro
(1830-1903)

Orchard in Pontoise at Sunset
(Verger à Pontoise, soleil couchant)

1878
dated and signed bottom right: “Pissarro. 1878”
Oil on canvas
h 46.7 cm x b 55.2 cm
WRM Dep. FC 712
brief report

This picture was previously owned by Dr. George Viau (1855-1939), a Parisian dentist who was one of the earliest collectors of Impressionist paintings [Pissarro/Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005, p. 373, cat. no. 541]. This is also confirmed by a sticker verso (figs 2, 8). For the depiction of the orchard, Pissarro chose a twill-weave canvas pre-primed in a warm light-grey (fig. 7) [cf. Pissarro, WRM 319]. As in another, much later depiction of an orchard by Pissarro in the Wallraf collection, what we have here is a canvas in the standard F10 size, but turned through 90 degrees [cf. Pissarro, WRM Dep. 850]. The ground can be seen under raking light and in the X-ray photograph to have conspicuous scratches, which must have been present before the picture was painted, but whose cause is unknown. The painting was executed, without any discernible compositional planning in the form of underdrawing or underpainting, in short, often shallowly diagonal brush-strokes, the colours often only blending when placed on the canvas (figs 10, 11).

Mostly Pissarro applied the paints wet-in-wet and fairly impasto, but in the region of the sky or on the left-hand edge of the picture in the trees the paint is more spread out and thus has less body. There are hardly any places in the picture which have been left unpainted to reveal the ground. The signature in the bottom right-hand corner was added immediately, or at least shortly, after the painting was complete (fig. 6). The surface relief of the painting was largely destroyed by an early lining measure, which in this case can, thanks to an exhibition sticker, be dated to before 1930. On the lining canvas verso is a stencil with the name and address of R. Gerard, Paris, who may have been the restorer responsible (fig. 9).
### Picture support canvas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard format</strong></td>
<td>F10 (55.0 x 46.0 cm) horizontal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weave</strong></td>
<td>twill weave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canvas characteristics</strong></td>
<td>vertical and horizontal app. 20 threads per cm; the repeat consists of at least 3 weft or warp yarns, each vertical yarn passing over 2 horizontal yarns and then under a further horizontal yarn; fine, albeit loosely, woven fabric with yarn thickness of 0.2-0.5 mm; Z-twist (fig. 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stretching</strong></td>
<td>not authentic; re-stretched after lining; intervals of the original tacking app. 3.0 to 5.0 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stretcher/strainer</strong></td>
<td>stretcher with crossed centre bars; presumably not original, but post-dating the lining of the canvas; stretcher 0.5 cm larger all round than indicated by the edge of the painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stretcher/strainer depth</strong></td>
<td>2.0 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traces left by manufacture/processing</strong></td>
<td>there are fine markings at the corner-joints to indicate the position of the grooves for the wedges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manufacturer’s/dealer’s marks</strong></td>
<td>none visible on account of the lining</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Ground**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sizing</th>
<th>present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colour</td>
<td>warm pale grey (similar to gris clair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>primed before cutting-to-size and stretching, thin, one or two layers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binding medium</td>
<td>presumably oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>very even and homogeneous; pigmentation visible under the microscope: mix of different-sized particles of red ochre, black and occasional coarse lead-white (fig. 13); under raking light and in the X-ray, scratches in the ground can be seen, whose origin is unknown, but they may have been caused by the ground’s having been applied by a palette knife during manufacture, or else possibly represent manual damage that occurred after Pissarro acquired the canvas and could not be repaired before painting commenced (figs 3, 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium/technique</th>
<th>–</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extent/character</td>
<td>neither microscopy, UV fluorescence nor IR reflectography give any hint of any compositional planning in the form of an underdrawing or underpainting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentimenti</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Paint layer**

**Paint application/technique and artist’s own revision**
largely wet-in-wet, but also wet-on-dry (e.g. tree at left-hand edge); at the top edge there is some partial orange-pink underpainting beneath the visible colours of the sky; the paint is in places extremely coarse-grained (for example the transparent milky green) and was often only blended on the canvas itself (fig. 11); the brushwork often takes the form of short, shallowly diagonal strokes; no sequence of application can be discerned, as the paint-layers are superimposed alternately, while in addition the lining procedure also heavily flattened the paint.

**Painting tools**
brushes of various breadths; the presence of both bristles and hairs embedded in the paint suggests the use of both hair and bristle brushes.

**Surface structure**
highly variable, from impasto (foreground, vegetables, fig. 10) to widely spread out (sky); on the peripheries the diagonal structure of the canvas is just discernible; however the lining resulted in the almost total flattening of the surface relief (figs 3, 12).

**Palette**
visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, pale yellow, red-orange, pale red lake, dark red lake, dark blue, medium green (milky-transparent);
Vis spectrometry: pale red lake could not be determined, carmine(?), iron-oxide red(?), cobalt blue, copper-based green.

**Binding mediums**
presumably oil

**Surface finish**

**Authenticity/Condition**
varnished, not authentic; remains of two different older yellowed or greyed coats can be discerned in the crevices.
**Signature/Mark**

When? immediately after the painting was complete (fig. 6)

Autograph signature certain, as the inscription “Pissarro. 1878” in blue paint with a brush, mixed with red lake and white, was applied wet-in-wet to the paint layer in the bottom right-hand corner (fig. 6)

Serial –

**Frame**

Authenticity not original

**State of preservation**

Canvas lined before 1930 (exhibition label verso establishes terminus ante quem), presumably by “R. GERARD / 4, Aue de Messine / PARIS” (stencil on lining canvas verso) (fig. 9), with marked flattening of the surface structure and some heat damage (figs. 3, 12); material: grey lining adhesive, lining canvas in tabby weave, 20 x 25 threads/cm, lining canvas coated verso (easily visible under UV); marked horizontal damage to the paint-layer in the foreground, where there are extensive wax(?) fillings and retouching e.g. in the line of vegetables (fig. 4); in places serious abrasion of the paint-layer, presumably due to inexpert surface cleaning or varnish removal (fig. 13).

**Additional remarks**

Pissarro was one of the Impressionist painters who at an early date preferred white frames [Cahn 1989, p. 65]. Although there is no evidence of this for this painting, it is nonetheless conceivable. For this reason, at the exhibition “Painting Light – The hidden techniques of the Impressionists” it was displayed in a reconstructed white frame for didactic reasons [Schaefer/von Saint-George/ Lewerentz 2008, p. 182, ill. 191, Mendgen 2008, p. 329-334, ill. 3-5].
Literature

- Pissarro/Venturi 1939: Ludovic Rodo Pissarro, Lionello Venturi, *Camille Pissarro, son art, son œuvre*, Paris 1939, cat. no. 440, pl. 88

Source of illustrations

All illustrations and figures: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud
Examination methods used

- Incident light
- Raking light
- Reflected light
- Transmitted light
- Ultraviolet fluorescence
- Infrared reflectography
- False-colour infrared reflectography
- X-ray
- Stereomicroscopy

- VIS spectrometry
  - Wood identification
  - FTIR (Fourier transform spectroscopy)
  - EDX (Energy Dispersive X-ray analysis)
  - Microchemical analysis

Author of examination: Katja Lewerentz  Date: 1/2005
Author of brief report: Katja Lewerentz  Date: 12/2008
Camille Pissarro – Orchard in Pontoise at Sunset
Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Fig. 1
Recto

Fig. 2
Verso, lined (cf. fig. 9)
Fig. 3
Raking light

Fig. 4
UV fluorescence
Fig. 5
X-ray

Fig. 6
Signature and detail of the letters “Pi” in incident light (top) and under UV stimulation (bottom); the blue paint partly blends with the underlying paint-layer wet-in-wet, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)
Fig. 7
Visible area of the original twill-weave canvas microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

Fig. 8
Label verso of the Dr. George Viau collection
Fig. 9
Stencil verso on the lining canvas, presumably of the restorer who carried out the lining

Fig. 10
Detail, wet-in-wet impasto paint applications
Fig. 11
Paints of various colours applied wet-in-wet blending in the brushstroke, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

Fig. 12
Heavy flattening of the surface structure, detail under raking light
Fig. 13
Abrasions of the paint-layer and ground right down to the canvas, due to inexpert varnish removal or surface cleaning, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)