



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME TWO

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
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Details:

TITLE PAGE: Camille Pissarro, *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* (cat. 253)

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carriage would presumably have held a single driver. So small are these details within their respective pictures, however, that their significance barely registers in the larger scene.

2. PDR 138.
3. For the Walters canvas, see *Paris–New York 1994–95*, p. 447, where evidence for its 1869 date is recorded.
4. PDR 238–41.
5. For the same reason, Pissarro has limited the depth of the foreground in the Clark painting. Close comparison also shows that his vantage point was moved laterally by a step or two, slightly tilting the perceived line of the right-hand margin of the road.
6. Variations in the shape and height of trees are hard to justify in terms of elapsing time, though such matters have traditionally been more subject to artistic whim; the significance of Pissarro’s willingness to modify trees and branches at this period is discussed in Brettell 1990, pp. 5–7.
7. Additional light is shed on Pissarro’s approach to this motif by the *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes* in the Musée d’Orsay, Paris (PDR 224), dated 1872, where this same vista is shown with significantly fewer trees. In Shikes and Harper 1980, pp. 83–84, it is speculatively argued that this change was made to “enhance the effect of a cool evening light on the facades of the houses,” but another explanation is possible. Between the painting of the Clark and Musée d’Orsay versions, Louveciennes had been occupied by the Prussian army in the fierce winter of 1870–71, when wood was much in demand for fires and defenses. Richard Thomson, in *Birmingham–Glasgow* 1990, pp. 21–23, discusses some of the losses to the town during the war and it might be suggested that the disappearing trees in the Orsay’s *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes* should be added to them.
8. While the shadows on houses, walls, and road are strikingly light and clear, they are still painted in descriptive local color, rather than in the purer, fragmented hues of mature Impressionism.
9. The lower part of the picture was once more green and X-rays have suggested that a plain, squat building was formerly situated left of center. It is possible that the lost painting was a variant of Pissarro’s early factory motif, such as PDR 130.
10. In the Paul Rosenberg Archives, there is an undated letter from Lucien Pissarro to Paul Rosenberg, sent to 15 East 58th Street, New York (the Hotel Madison), an address Rosenberg used only from 1940–41. In it, Pissarro describes arrangements for shipping three paintings to Rosenberg from London, one of which is titled “La Route de Versailles à Louveciennes.” Although no further documentation identifying this work was found, it may correspond to the Clark painting. See *The Paul Rosenberg Archives*, a gift of Elaine and Alexandre Rosenberg, II.A.23. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

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Oil on canvas, 46 x 55.7 cm
 Lower right: C. Pissarro. 1873
 1955-554

Vividly evoking the sensations of a summer landscape, this small canvas has nevertheless been cited most frequently for its one anomalous feature: the cluster of buildings and chimneys in the middle distance. We know from Richard Brettell that these structures were loosely based on the factory complex of Chalon et Brenot, situated on the eastern bank of the River Oise outside the town of Pontoise.¹ The Clark picture has thus been included among the earliest depictions in Western art of such “symbols of industrialization,” which were previously considered “unworthy of an artist’s attention,” in John Rewald’s phrase,² Pissarro completed three other compositions at this site in the same year, each of them engaged with the visual equilibrium of the flat local terrain and the natural and man-made forms rising out of it.³ Closely similar in size, these works vary considerably in tonality and emphasis, at one extreme showing a somber, close-up view of the factory itself (fig. 247.1),⁴ at the other, the



Fig. 247.1 Camille Pissarro, *Factory near Pontoise*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 65 cm. The James Philip Gray Collection, Michele and Donald D’Amour Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts



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predominantly pastoral expanse of *The River Oise near Pontoise*. Resembling a miniature sequence or series, the four paintings can also be seen as successive encounters between a moving viewer and a stationary subject, or as repeated responses to a single pictorial challenge. Faced with the horizontal thrust of the countryside, Pissarro answered it with ingenious permutations of vertical walls, chimneys, trees, and reflections, variously suggesting a near-classical calm and a more dynamic interaction between technology and nature.

Everything about *The River Oise near Pontoise* indicates that it was painted rapidly and directly, with few second thoughts. No evidence of drawing has been found on the white-primed canvas, which is still visible in places where Pissarro's improvised technique left it uncovered. Across much of the surface his brushwork was crisp and decisive, as he simultaneously determined the structure of the composition, its range of values, and the density of touch appropriate to the textures of its elemental components. While there are

signs that the sky was partially reworked as the picture advanced, there is little doubt that this vibrant image resulted from a sustained period in front of the motif, possibly confined to a single day (see Technical Report). Especially effective is Pissarro's account of shifting focus as his eye roved across the scene, from the scudding clouds to the warm foreground haze, from the sharply geometric rooftops to their blurred echo in the water. Color intensifies this visual progress, fixing our attention on the easily overlooked orange-brown boat at center, carrying the gaze across the chocolate and terra-cotta buildings, and directing us downward through variegated hues in the river to the lemons, greens, and pinks of nearby wildflowers. Intense as a sensory experience, the picture is also exceptionally compact and finely resolved, a bravura achievement of nascent Impressionism.

A telling detail in all four variants of the motif is the eruption of smoke from the high factory chimneys, merging to a lesser or greater extent with the

cloudscape in question. Again, the Clark picture is the least insistent in this respect, its modest chimneystacks relegated to the side of the composition and their whitish and sooty plumes disrupting the sky only marginally. In the other three works, dark-hued stacks can attain half the height of the canvas and all send out diagonal trails of effluent across the pale sky. To varying degrees, therefore, we might see the smoke and the large-scale structures from which it emerges as tokens of mass production and its impact on the countryside. The temptation to include the socially conscious Pissarro among the advocates of industrial progress, however, or even among the first opponents of pollution, has its hazards. In 1963, Rewald saluted the originality, even the heroism of *The River Oise near Pontoise*, proposing that “it took courage to select a motif where smokestacks ‘marred’ an idyllic site on the banks of a quiet river.”⁵ A decade later John Russell went further, suggesting that “Pissarro in this painting pioneered the idea that the industrial scene was not necessarily an affront to the dignity of art but could, in the right hands, be made to look as beautiful as any other,” placing him “ten years ahead” of the work of Seurat.⁶ Brettell’s more subtle and extended study of 1990 has exposed the diversity of attitudes to such issues at this period, finding that “most mid-nineteenth century intellectuals were ambivalent in their responses to the realities of industrial life.”⁷ Noting Pissarro’s “prolonged and fascinating relationship with the image of the factory,” as well as his rare verbal references to their significance that are “essentially negative without being clear negations,” Brettell concluded that canvases such as those in Williamstown and Springfield represent a far from dogmatic “struggle to comprehend and to unify different aspects of modernity by a painter who never fully accepted it.”⁸

The local circumstances behind the making of *The River Oise near Pontoise* amplify this story without resolving it. In the mid-1860s, Pissarro had painted at least one picture of a small-scale manufactory, or *fabrique*, in a rustic setting, where both the crude architecture and associated chimney rhymed gently with adjacent houses and trees.⁹ But in 1873, he was confronted by the altogether vaster establishment of Chalon et Brenot, whose premises had only recently been completed in a “large field purchased by M. Chalon for his purpose.”¹⁰ Situated just across the river from Pissarro’s home in the L’Hermitage district of Pontoise, the new factory represented the first

incursion of substantial industry into the town and must have formed an insistent part of his visual environment. Comprising a distillery for making chemicals from agricultural products, the project had involved straightening a length of the river to provide docking facilities for craft such as the *péniche* shown in the Clark canvas. Pissarro’s attitudes to this incursion into the verdant periphery of Pontoise and its significance for the local workforce are unknown, beyond the mute witness of his paintings. It might be argued that the Springfield *Factory near Pontoise* gave powerful expression to the magnitude of the new undertaking, notably in the austere, pyramidal mass of the main building as it rises above the horizon. By the same logic, however, the factory in the Clark picture seems absorbed by its lush context: the various edifices spread haphazardly across Chalon’s field could belong to a large farm, screened from the town by trees that almost overwhelm it with greenery. Just as he explored the structural novelties of the motif from painting to painting, Pissarro seems also to have articulated a range of feelings about “the realities of industrial life.”

Support for this experimental approach can be found in Brettell’s observations on the depiction of the factory buildings themselves, which differ to a surprising extent in this suite of works. Evidently regarding such matters as subservient to larger compositional concerns, Pissarro altered the pitch of roofs and the positions of the narrower chimneys, modified alignments and apparently introduced houses into the vicinity that never existed.¹¹ Topography was clearly not his priority, any more than it was in the many other views of Pontoise from these years that have been evaluated by Brettell. Even as the Chalon et Brenot factory prompted “the most systematic investigation of the industrial image undertaken by any landscape painter of the Impressionist group,” Pissarro appears to have balanced this audacious project against the imperatives of his new painterly language.¹² RK

PROVENANCE Maurice Rémy, Paris (in 1928);¹³ Édition Garcin, Paris (by 1936); [Jacques Lindon, New York, probably by Sept. 1941, sold to Salz];¹⁴ [Sam Salz, New York, sold to Durand-Ruel, 3 Dec. 1942]; [Durand-Ruel, New York, sold to Clark, 3 Feb. 1945]; Robert Sterling Clark (1945–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1928a, not in cat.;¹⁵ Paris 1936b, no. 14, lent by Garcin; New York 1943c, no. 16, ill.; Williamstown 1956a, no. 122, pl. 39; New York 1967, no. 28, ill.; London–

Paris–Boston 1980–81, pp. 95–96, no. 30, ill., as *The Oise on the Outskirts of Pontoise* (exhibited in Boston only); Williamstown 1988c, no cat.; Portland 1991, pp. 56–57, no. 27, ill.; Hanover 1994, no cat.; Stuttgart 1999–2000, pp. 67, 188, no. 20, ill.; London–Amsterdam–Williamstown 2000–2001, not in cat. (exhibited in Williamstown only); Montgomery and others 2005–7, no cat.; Williamstown–New York 2006–7, pp. 98, 100–101, fig. 90.

REFERENCES Pissarro and Venturi 1939, vol. 1, p. 109, no. 218, vol. 2, pl. 43, no. 218; Jedlicka 1950, pl. 12; Natanson 1950, pl. 12; Frankfurter 1956, pp. 42–43, ill.; *Sele Arte* 1956, p. 58, ill.; Faison 1958, p. 172, fig. 9; Rewald c. 1960, fig. 21; Rewald 1963, pp. 94–95, ill. (concise ed., pp. 72–73, ill.); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 97, ill.; London 1968, p. 10, fig. 7; Russell 1974, p. 24, fig. 34; Bellony-Rewald 1976, pp. 136–37, ill.; Brettell 1977, pp. 139, 145, 152, 154, fig. 53; Faison 1979, under no. 40; Harris 1979, p. 204, ill.; Shikes and Harper 1980, p. 130; Vaizey 1981, p. 58, ill.; Brooks 1981, pp. 50–51, no. 21, ill.; Faison 1982, p. 320, fig. 255; Piper 1984, pp. 150–51; House 1986b, pp. 18, 26–27; Shikes 1986, p. 46; Brettell 1990, p. 83, pls. 67, 75; Reid 1993, pp. 76–77, ill.; Frascina et al. 1993, pp. 53, 131, 136, pl. 127; Kern et al. 1996, pp. 62–63, ill.; Boardingham 1996, pp. 44–45, ill.; *Antiques* 1997, p. 529, pl. 17; Ferrara 1998, p. 32, fig. 25; Clark 1999, p. 56, pl. 22; Stockholm 1999–2000, p. 107, ill.; Adler 2000, p. 257; Christie's 2000a, p. 31, ill.; Fried 2002, pp. 81–82, fig. 49; House 2004, p. 85, pl. 67, as *The Oise on the Outskirts of Pontoise*; Cahill 2005, p. 58, ill.; Pissarro and Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005, vol. 2, pp. 30, 236, no. 300, ill., as *Factory on the Banks of the Oise, Saint-Ouen-l'Aumône*; Christie's 2006, p. 20, ill.; Campbell 2006–9, vol. 1, p. 368, fig. 95a; Kansas City 2007, pp. 74, 76, ill.; New York 2007–8, pp. 3–4, fig. 3; Rome 2010, pp. 61, 65, fig. 2.

TECHNICAL REPORT The painting is executed on plain-weave linen of medium weight (19–22 threads/cm), with prominent vertical threads. The five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher may be original, although the picture has an old glue/paste lining, and the original tacking margins have been removed. There is a small repaired three-corner tear in the sky and a small repaired hole in the foliage of the right lower quadrant. These are visible in infrared and ultraviolet light and explain the existence of the lining. Old retouches along the edges fluoresce the same yellow-orange as the tear area and may contain zinc white. Small additional inpainting strokes are visible from a 1979 cleaning. There are scattered age cracks, especially in the thicker white-containing colors, but no continuous network. Pale, stiff artist's brush hairs are embedded in the lower left portion of the image. The surface records flat hog's bristle brush sizes from 0.3 cm to 0.5 cm, and possibly the use of a round-tipped brush as well. A few higher impastos are slightly flattened at their tops.

The commercially prepared ground layer is off-white in color and is visible in a few areas near the center buildings.

There is no evidence of any underdrawing. The paint was applied in a slightly dry manner, with some of the sequencing visible. The final sky brushstrokes were done after the skyline of trees and buildings had been established. Artist's color changes can be seen in the center, where the boat was altered from a dark to a lighter shade by the addition of several broad strokes. Most of the surface appears to have been painted wet-into-wet, indicating that the picture was probably completed in one sitting. A few details seem to have been added after the majority of the surface paint had set. This is especially noticeable in the two narrow smokestacks at the left, where the strokes skip across the dried impastos of the clouds. The purplish signature in the lower right was also applied after the painted surface had hardened.

1. Brettell 1990, pp. 23–25, 80–81.
2. Rewald 1963, p. 94.
3. PDR 297–99.
4. PDR 298.
5. Rewald 1963, p. 94.
6. Russell 1974, p. 24.
7. Brettell 1990, p. 76.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.
9. PDR 130. See the present catalogue for the suggestion that a similar scene lies beneath *The Route de Versailles, Louveciennes* (cat. 246).
10. Brettell 1990, p. 81.
11. Some of these houses are visible at left in the Springfield canvas, where the cluttered, seemingly shallow foreground, the steep factory roof, and the placement of the principal chimney are difficult to reconcile with the forms of the Clark picture.
12. Brettell 1990, p. 73.
13. In a letter to the Clark dated 28 Aug. 1979, Charles Durand-Ruel states that this painting was deposited with Durand-Ruel Paris on 28 Feb. 1928 by “a Mr. Rémy, and returned to him after being photographed.” He also notes that Durand-Ruel, New York, bought the painting from Sam Salz in 1942 and sold it to Clark in 1945. There is no invoice from Durand-Ruel to Clark for this painting.
14. According to the *New York Times*, the Gallery of Modern Art opened in Sept. 1941 with Jacques Lindon as its president. The initial display included a painting by Pissarro called *Bank of Oise*, which is likely to be the Clark painting. See Jewell 1941, p. 26.
15. See Pissarro and Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005, vol. 1, p. 375, and vol. 2, p. 236.