

TECHNICAL REPORT  The support is a coarse-weave linen (approximately 13 threads/cm), glue-lined to a slightly finer-linen (16 threads/cm). The tacking margins are missing, and the edge is covered with black tape. The six-member pine mortise-and-tenon stretcher may be original. The lining itself seems structurally stable, though the force used during the lining process moistened and fractured some of the impasto areas, including the signature. In 1985, a wax layer and one layer of yellow-brown natural resin varnish were removed. There is a large shift in tone across the entire painting, due to the fading of a purplish red component of the palette. The remnants of this color are visible where the frame rabbet protected the edges. This red pigment may be either carmine or madder lake, both known to be light sensitive. The surface reflectance is slightly matte.

The ground is a yellowish white, commercially prepared layer thick enough to hide the coarse canvas weave in most areas. No underdrawing was found below the paint. The paste consistency paint is applied directly in a broad manner, with unblended, overlapping strokes. The sky is laid in more quickly and sparingly than the sea, using a bristle brush 1.9 cm wide. Occasional brush marks skip across the original canvas weave. Some impastos are looped and draped across adjacent brushstrokes.

1. Jacques-Émile Blanche to Dr. Émile Blanche, 20 July 1881, in Blanche 1949, p. 445: “effet de soleil couchant en dix minutes”; “gâcher de la peinture.”
2. On this in relation to Monet’s work, see House 1986a, p. 159.
3. Information from Durand-Ruel archives. See correspondence of 24 April 2001 in the Clark’s curatorial files.
and the incisive, more linear strokes that describe the crisp green leaves that punctuate them.

The canvas may be compared with a still life of peonies that Renoir executed around 1878 (private collection). In the earlier canvas, the clusters of loosely brushed flowers are set off against a crisp rectilinear framework—perhaps the corner of a framed picture. In _Peonies_, by contrast, Renoir did not resort to an underlying armature within the picture; the complex interplay between flowers and leaves creates a coherent overall structure for the picture in relation to the rectangle of the canvas itself. A comparable fluency of execution combined with lavish color can be seen in Monet’s flower pieces painted in 1880; Renoir’s canvas, however, with its horizontal format filled to the margins with richly colored impasto, creates an overall effect even more fluid and ebullient than Monet’s.

The rich color and blue shadows show how, by around 1880, Renoir was introducing into subjects set indoors the high-key colored palette that he had evolved in the mid-1870s to treat effects of outdoor sunlight. There are no sharp contours in the canvas; the various objects—flowers, leaves, vase, and table—are differentiated solely by contrasts of color and texture. The variety and confidence of his informal, seemingly improvised brushwork were soon afterward to give way to a renewed concern for more traditional notions of form and drawing. 

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**PROVENANCE**

The artist, sold to Durand-Ruel, 6 Jan. 1881; Durand-Ruel, Paris, from 1881; Potter Palmer, Chicago (by 1892–d. 1902); Bertha Honoré Palmer, Chicago, his wife, by descent (1902–d. 1918); Howard Young Galleries, New York, c. 1922; Annie Swan Coburn, Chicago (d. 1932); The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection (1933–42); Knoedler, New York; sold to Clark, 31 Jan. 1942; Robert Sterling Clark (1942–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS**

Paris 1882, no. 158; possibly New York 1886, no. 274; possibly Paris 1892b, no. 84; Chicago 1932, no. 36, as _Flowers: Peonies_; Chicago 1934, no. 231, as _Flowers: Peonies_; Williamstown 1956b, no. 141, pl. 6; New York 1967.
REFERENCES


TECHNICAL REPORT

The support is a fairly coarse-weave linen (12 threads/cm), which was wax-resin lined in 1977 to a linen of similar weight. During treatment, the original five-member pine stretcher was replaced with a redwood four-member ICA spring-corner design. There are wandering age cracks throughout the paint and ground layers. Traction cracks, scattered throughout, are especially noticeable in the blue pigment of the table cover and the upper left background. The alizarin red glaze color is fractured, as if it contains a resinous binder. During the 1977 cleaning, some solvent sensitivity was noted in the reds and greens, and small pockets of the earlier varnish remain in impasto recesses and on the green leaves. The surface has a matte sheen due to a very thin layer of synthetic varnish.

The ground is a two-layered structure, with an artist application over a thin gray commercially applied layer, which barely covers the canvas threads. The very white upper layer was applied with a palette knife. No underdrawing was detected, although the thick paint may hide a paint sketch. The paste-consistency strokes are vigorously applied in multiple passes, creating a very thick paint buildup, four to five layers deep in many areas. The use of both wet-into-wet and wet-over-dry suggests that more than one sitting was used to complete the image. Undiluted reds and greens are layered with white, with almost no true blending except the accidental swirling together of adjacent strokes.

1. Rivière 1921, p. 81: “Cela me repose la cervelle de peindre des fleurs. Je n’y apporte pas la même tension d’esprit que lorsque je suis en face d’un modèle. Quand je peins des fleurs, je pose de tons, j’essaie des valeurs hardiment, sans souci de perdre une toile.”


3. See Tübingen 1996 p. 171, no. 44.

4. W 625, 627.