



**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,
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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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PRECEDING PAGE 474: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Onions* (cat. 280)

PAGES 890–91: Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Women of Amphis* (cat. 3)

sweeping brushstrokes were used only in the sky. The paint application is stiff, yet rich enough in medium to create loops and bridges in the impastos. There are a few yellow-green and purplish pink strokes in the foreground that have a crystalline consistency, perhaps indicating that some of the paint was not fully ground and may have been lacking in medium. The picture was signed before completion, as pink and bright orange strokes of paint overlap parts of the name and date. Several small holes through the front in each corner suggest that the painting was executed pinned to a board or another secondary support, and later tacked to a stretcher frame.

1. Camille Pissarro to Paul Durand-Ruel, 6 Nov. 1886, in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 2, p. 75; translation from Rewald 1972, p. 64.
2. For Pissarro's submissions, see Berson 1996, vol. 2, pp. 246–48.
3. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 4 June 1887, in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 2, p. 181; translation from Rewald 1972, p. 115.
4. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 6 Sept. 1888, in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 2, p. 251; translation from Rewald 1972, p. 132.
5. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 11 Dec. 1890, in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 2, p. 373; translation from Rewald 1972, p. 141.
6. For references to Pissarro's eye problems at this period, see Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 3, pp. 9, 11, 111, 113.
7. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 10 June 1891, in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 3, p. 93; translation from Rewald 1972, p. 175. One of the works in question is described as being a size 25 canvas, which measures approximately 81 x 65 cm, the dimensions of the Clark picture.
8. The distinctive device of the peripheral, bisected tree reappears in several paintings dated in the following year, 1892: see, for example, Pissarro and Venturi 1939, vol. 2, nos. 774, 777–79, 794–802.
9. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 23 Oct. 1891, in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 3, p. 140; Rewald 1972, p. 185.
10. According to Pissarro and Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005, pp. 595, 597, Durand-Ruel was first offered *Landscape at Saint-Charles* in April 1891, but declined to purchase it.
11. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 13 Dec. 1891, in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 3, p. 164; Rewald 1972, p. 189.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Although the exhibition catalogue states that the painting was lent by "M[onsieur] L.," a name that cannot be identified, the work had been bought by Durand-Ruel several months earlier.

252 | Port of Rouen, Unloading Wood 1898

Oil on canvas, 74 x 92 cm

Lower left: C. Pissarro. 98

Acquired by the Clark in honor of John E. Sawyer (Institute Trustee 1962–89), 1989

1989.3

During the first three decades of his career, Pissarro famously devoted himself to rural France, becoming a painter of "beautiful landscapes, so calm and so full of a kind of country religiosity that covers the fields of greenery with a melancholy tint," as the critic Georges Rivière wrote in 1877.¹ His rare pictures of Paris, such as *The Outer Boulevards*, *Snow* (fig. 250.1) and *Boulevard Rochechouart* (cat. 250), were the exceptions that proved this general rule, though in retrospect their compositions can seem like models for future exploration. From 1896 until shortly before his death in 1903, however, Pissarro unexpectedly reversed these earlier priorities, producing more than three hundred substantial canvases of the cities of Dieppe, Le Havre, Paris, and Rouen.² Working with remarkable assurance on his new themes, he now embraced the urban and the contemporary, from thronged boulevards to bustling quays, from vistas of factory chimneys and bridges to street processions and busy parks. Almost immediately, this departure was hailed by his fellow artists and endorsed by collectors, prompting Pissarro to return to certain of these sites and to make "more cityscapes than any other major Impressionist," as Richard Brettell has pointed out.³ Rouen was central to this project: after two trips there in 1896 that resulted in almost thirty works, he made a final visit in the late summer and early fall of 1898, when *Port of Rouen, Unloading Wood* and eighteen other canvases were completed. Approaching seventy and in variable health, Pissarro was to see many of these pictures included in successful exhibitions in France and America, and to experience the first period of financial stability in his life.

The genesis of Pissarro's urban panoramas has been carefully traced, both within his own oeuvre and against the background of his many city-painting predecessors and colleagues. In the 1870s, it was Monet, Caillebotte, and Renoir who most clearly prepared the ground, exploring elevated vantage points and steep perspectives, as well as new kinds of notation for the distant human form. Unprecedented motifs, such



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as the railway station and the modern iron bridge, entered the canon and through his links with Seurat, Signac, and their associates in the following decade, Pissarro was encouraged toward a more political view of the modern conurbation. Traveling to Rouen in late 1883, he experimented with distant approaches to the river frontage: in early 1895 he was there again, investigating locations and hotels for a longer painting campaign.⁴ Though his plan matured slowly, Pissarro's ambition to paint a number of "intensely worked" pictures of the city was evidently stimulated in May 1895, when Monet unveiled his *Rouen Cathedral* series to enthusiastic acclaim.⁵ Announcing that he was "carried away" by his colleague's mastery, Pissarro drew attention not only to Monet's skill in capturing the "elusive nuance of effects" but also, more pointedly, to the presence in the cathedral series of "a superb unity for which I have searched so hard."⁶ It has been argued by Joachim Pissarro that aspects of the artist's later oeuvre, especially as it concerns Rouen, can be seen as a subtle dialogue with the comparable output of Monet.⁷ If Pissarro himself did

not elucidate his motives so specifically, within eight months of Monet's exhibition he had installed himself in Rouen and started work, telling his son, Lucien, "I have a splendid view of the port."⁸

Completed toward the end of his relationship with the city, *Port of Rouen, Unloading Wood* encapsulates many of the characteristics of Pissarro's larger enterprise. Just as Monet had chosen to work in premises opposite the cathedral, Pissarro produced all his canvases from one of two hotels beside the river, where second- or third-floor windows protected his ailing eyes from the cold and allowed him to peer down on the vista beneath.⁹ In several crucial respects, however, Pissarro departed from his friend's example. Turning his back on the old quarter where the great church stood, he chose to face south, away from the city center. From here, his gaze swept across the more recent development of Rouen, dominated by warehouses, a succession of bridges, and the brand new train station; declaring in a letter that what he saw was "ugly and banal," Pissarro also insisted that it could be "as beautiful as Venice."¹⁰ Most distinctively of all, he

opted to paint a scattering of different motifs, rather than a single view or edifice. The “unity” that Pissarro sought, therefore, does not seem to be defined by the compositional persistence of Monet’s *Cathedrals*, but rather by a continuity of experience that he expressed in variously overlapping images. Always linked by the ribbon of water and the artist’s own perception, his slowly accumulating “series”—as he began to call it—ranged widely, from the southeast to the southwest of Rouen and across its shifting character. At one extreme were teeming scenes of pedestrian activity around steep, diagonally thrusting bridges; at the other, placid expanses of mist and golden evening light.

Port of Rouen, Unloading Wood is among the most austere constructed of all these paintings, its rectangle divided into four horizontal bands: quay-side, river, warehouses, and a bright, windswept sky. Against this pattern, Pissarro opposed the vertical thrust of masts and chimneys, as well as the upward drift of smoke, creating an informal grid-like design whose simplicity stands out within the Rouen cycle. Facing the river directly from the Hôtel d’Angleterre, he chose to exclude the massive Pont Boieldieu that flanked the scene at left and almost all the human traffic gathered around it. The result is a celebration of the port itself, stripped to its essential architecture and the forms of its working life. Beside the stacked timber and piled barrels on the quay, a handful of tiny figures are dwarfed by the scale of the black and gold ship, whose emphatic lines are arguably the true focus of the painting.¹¹ Yet the broader vision of Pissarro, the anarchist who made illustrations of industrial corruption during this same decade, is anything but bleak, seeming to find energy, radiance, and contrasted textures in every feature of the site.¹² Certain areas of water, for example, have the liquid touch and subtle coloring of Impressionism in the 1870s, while a pervasive salmon-ocher brings warmth to much of the canvas. Most insistently of all, the sheer richness of the paint lifts this mundane spectacle to a high level of sensuousness. Often using a loaded brush, Pissarro dragged fresh color through still-wet layers and added new strokes to already-dry passages, to leave a thrillingly tactile, multi-hued relief. As the picture approached completion, he applied final flourishes to clouds and coarse streaks of black to gantries and rigging, bringing an old man’s deliberation to the craft of painting. Within just a few years, almost identical themes and a similarly bold manner would achieve prominence among the youthful Fauves. RK

PROVENANCE Celina Piñeyro de Álzaga, Buenos Aires (by c. 1903–d. 1911); Orlando and Enrique Williams Álzaga, Buenos Aires, her grandsons, by descent (until 1989); [Alex Reid & Lefevre, London, sold to the Clark, 11 May 1989]; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1989.

EXHIBITIONS Buenos Aires 1932, no. 43; Buenos Aires 1962, no. 53, ill., as *Bateaux à Rouen*, lent by Williams Álzaga; Williamstown, 1990b, no cat.; Dallas–Philadelphia–London 1992–93, p. 42, no. 29, ill.

REFERENCES Thornley n.d., ill. (print after the painting); Pissarro and Venturi 1939, vol. 1, p. 212, no. 945, as *Bateau chargé de bois, Rouen*; GBA Suppl. 1990, p. 59, no. 294, ill.; Kern et al. 1996, pp. 64–65, ill.; Satullo 2002, p. 40; Pissarro and Durand-Ruel Snollaerts 2005, vol. 3, p. 769, no. 1232, ill., as *Unloading Wood, Quai de la Bourse, Rouen, Bright Sky*; New York 2007–8, p. 18, fig. 5.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a fine weight, tightly woven linen (25–30 threads/cm) and the painting is not lined. It retains its original five-member, keyable mortise-and-tenon stretcher. A partial stamp for the artist’s supplier P. Contet, Paris, appears on the left side reverse. The commercially applied ground layer is very thin, exceptionally white, and fluoresces bright yellow under ultraviolet light, confirming the presence of zinc white. Examination by transmitted light was possible due to the thinness of the ground layer, but revealed no evidence of underdrawing. Fine age cracks are visible in the paint, and more strongly apparent on the back of the canvas, where several concentric patterns caused by impacts are revealed. There is some traction crackle in the red and pinkish areas. The painting was probably cleaned just prior to acquisition in 1989, leaving the canvas reverse stained with the solubilized varnish residue along all the cracks. Residues of the earlier coating can be seen in ultraviolet light in the dark hull of the freighter. The present coating is a glossy, slightly yellowed varnish, which under magnification already bears its own separate crack network. Minor inpainting is found at the edges and in a very few touches in the sky.

The ground layer shows through in scattered locations, especially at the freighter’s waterline. Most of the brushwork was applied in one sitting in a wet-into-wet technique. A few details, such as the smoke and additional rigging lines, were added after the paint below had dried. The paint is quite vehicular and fluid, with some impastos of moderate height. In general, the work is executed with medium to large brushstrokes, including some pouncing using the head of a brush. Some larger bands of the image were laid in first, such as the freighter and the foreground. The foreground figures were then added into the wet paint. A four-inch accidental sgraffito line extends through the wet paint in the center of the freighter down into the dock, though it was partially repainted as the artist continued working.

1. Rivière 1877; reprinted in Berson 1996, vol. 1, pp. 182–83: “beaux paysages, si calmes et si pleins de cette espèce de religiosité campagnarde qui couvre d’une teinte mélancolique les champs de verdure.”
2. See Dallas–Philadelphia–London 1992–93.
3. Dallas–Philadelphia–London 1992–93, p. xv.
4. See Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 1, pp. 238–39, and vol. 4, p. 64.
5. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 19 Apr. 1895; reprinted in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 4, p. 64: “tableaux très travaillés.”
6. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 26 May and 1 June 1895; reprinted in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 4 pp. 75, 78: “très emballé”; “l’insaisissable nuance des effets”; “une unité superbe que j’ai tant cherchée.”
7. Dallas–Philadelphia–London 1992–93, p. 3. See also Pissarro 1990, p. 14.
8. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 20 Jan. 1896; reprinted in Bailly-Herzberg 1980–91, vol. 4, p. 153: “une très belle vue sur le port.”
9. For Pissarro’s persistent eye problems, see Marmor and Ravin 2009, pp. 149–51.
10. Camille Pissarro to Lucien Pissarro, 2 Oct. 1896; reprinted in Bailly-Herzberg, vol. 4, p. 266: “beaux comme Venise.”
11. The role of the timber stacks in the painting’s perspective is somewhat unclear. Given the horizontal form of the ship and quayside, it appears that the viewer confronts the scene centrally and directly. Placed at the center of this grid-like arrangement, the timber—if stacked at right angles to the ship—would normally be expected to align vertically in the pictorial design.
12. For Pissarro and Anarchism, see Williamstown–San Francisco 2011–12.

253 | The Louvre from the Pont Neuf 1902

Oil on canvas, 60.8 x 92.5 cm
 Lower left: C. Pissarro. 1902
 1955.558

“Since I’ve been in Paris, unable to go out, I’ve been able to work from my window incessantly; I’ve had winter effects that charmed me in their finesse; the view of the Louvre on the Seine is an absolutely exquisite and captivating subject.”¹ Written in December 1902, the year he signed and dated *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf*, these remarks are characteristic of many made by Pissarro during his long professional life.² Here is his commitment to sustained labor and the frustration

he felt when prevented from working in the open air; his delight in light, color, and atmosphere, and the “effects” associated with the seasons; and Pissarro’s still evolving appetite—shared with Monet, Sisley, and others at the fin de siècle—for a sustained encounter with one site or motif. The Clark painting is the sumptuous outcome of these and other preoccupations, its surface patiently woven from countless touches of the brush, each touch the result of a new perception of the scene at a particular moment in the year and of the developing challenge of his composition. “Finesse” perfectly describes the refinement of the surface, in which milky whites and ochers, and hints of pink and steel blue, are subtly juxtaposed throughout this tapestry-like expanse. One of more than forty variants on his “view of the Louvre on the Seine” made during several sojourns in Paris between 1900 and 1903, it also belongs firmly with Pissarro’s commitment to the “series”—as he frequently called them—at the end of his career.³

Useful though this approach to *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* can be, it overlooks as many aspects of the picture as it describes. Prominent among the issues raised by such late works are the changing, even historically contradictory, priorities of Pissarro’s art in this final phase. His identity as a painter was first defined in the 1860s when he emerged as an obscure follower of Corot and Daubigny, exhibiting “rudimentary” canvases of country life with some of the “roughness of the Spaniards,” in the words of the young Odilon Redon.⁴ Preferring to work in the open air, Pissarro also took issue with the mannered studio procedures of the day and the exaggerated levels of respect for art in the great museums, reportedly calling for the burning down of the Louvre itself.⁵ A stalwart of the Impressionist group in the 1870s and 1880s, he was to broaden his sensitivity to the landscape and develop a more supple and informed technique, but it was not until his sixties that he found material success, notably in the cycles based on French cities that he painted with the encouragement of his dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel. Yet another shift is represented by the sequence to which *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* belongs, whose serene spaces and delicate tones have suggested to one commentator an “aesthetic caress” of the nation’s capital.⁶ Where the angry young Pissarro once imagined the Louvre in flames, his older self could now see this same building as “absolutely exquisite.”

In an immediate sense, Pissarro’s paintings of Rouen and Paris form part of a rich, almost volup-