French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945
The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

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Camille Pissarro, *Waterworks of the Marly Machine at Bougival, 1871*

**Artist**  
Camille Pissarro, French, 1830–1903

**Title**  
*Waterworks of the Marly Machine at Bougival*

**Object Date**  
1871

**Alternate and Variant Titles**  
*Banks of the Seine at Port Marly, Au bord de la Seine à Port Marly, Barrage de la Seine à Pontoise, Barrage sur la Seine à Bougival, Weir on the Seine at Bougival, The Banks of the Seine at Bougival*

**Medium**  
Oil on canvas

**Dimensions (Unframed)**  
12 3/8 x 17 3/4 in. (31.4 x 45.1 cm)

**Signature**  
Signed and dated lower left: C. Pissarro 1871

**Credit Line**  

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**Catalogue Entry**

**Citation**

**Chicago:**

**MLA:**

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In December 1870, with the help of a loan from friends of his neighbor Ludovic Piette, Camille Pissarro and his family sailed from the French port city Saint-Malo to England to escape the dangers of the Prussian invasion in Paris. Although the time Pissarro spent in England was financially challenging, it proved to be a fertile period for the growth of ideas and the expansion of his subject matter. While there, he took advantage of the opportunity to study English painting by artists such as John Constable (1776–1837) and Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), whose techniques for depicting the mechanization of water through locks, mills, weirs, and dams proved influential. These works, along with the industrial landscapes surrounding London, introduced Pissarro to new subject matter, inspiring his newfound interest in the expansion of France’s industrial suburbs through its waterways. *Waterworks of the Marly Machine at Bougival* was painted shortly after Pissarro’s return to France in 1871.

Water enacts a continual process of transformation and fluidity in the landscape, and its representation in painting showcases the artist’s deep understanding of...
how broader historical and geographical factors play a crucial role in shaping a specific location. The inclusion of rivers and waterways as an aspect of modernity in art—as opposed to the subject of the industrial landscape—has only more recently become the focus of academic study. Throughout the nineteenth century, France underwent a range of infrastructure projects aimed at transforming its river systems to meet the demands of an industrializing economy. Starting in 1838, the Seine River, in particular, underwent significant transformations as riverbeds were dredged, locks and dams were constructed to address its inconsistent depth and tendency to flood, and new canals were established to connect major river systems for the efficient transportation of goods. Improvements such as these in the fluvial section of the river completely revolutionized the system of traction and towage by horses, which was practically abandoned in France by the mid-nineteenth century, with steamers and small motorized boats using internal mechanization to self-propel up the river. These aspects of modern life would become a defining characteristic of Impressionist paintings in the 1870s, and the Waterworks of the Marly Machine at Bougival marks one of Pissarro’s first attempts at incorporating this theme into his own practice. In fact, it was one of at least twenty compositions featuring working aspects of the river that the artist realized in the two years after his trip to London, compared to only three that he had created before he left.

France, about seventeen miles west of the center of Paris. Villages west of Paris, including Bougival, saw rapid and steady change at this time with the extension of the rail line, putting them within easy reach from the Gare Saint-Lazare (Saint-Lazare train station). Although Bougival was still somewhat rural, its proximity attracted bourgeois day-trippers who boated, promenaded, and dined there. Swimming was also popular at the local swimming hole, La Grenouillère, immortalized in paint by Pissarro’s contemporaries Claude Monet (1840–1926) and Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), who set up their easels there in the summer of 1869. In the Nelson-Atkins composition, however, Pissarro looks at the river through the lens of work rather than leisure. He includes a glimpse of the locks of Bougival at the right, in the midground; they were the first to be implemented as part of the canalization project for the Seine in 1838. These altered the flow of water into two channels around the Île de la Loge (Island of the Loge), seen on the opposite bank of Pissarro’s painting with the red-roofed house, and the Île Gautier, at the far right, home to the white mansard-roofed house. To access these islands, one needed to traverse the Seine via a small boat, like several of those featured in Pissarro’s composition, two of which are being maneuvered by standing figures wielding a single oar. Most of the boats are working types, including a canoe moored to the black landing at left; a green Norwegian at center left, which may have been used for fishing; a double bachot to its right, which was used as a work boat for the French public works department, which managed the dam; and a single bachot at far right, which may have been used to ferry inhabitants of the islands across the Seine, which was not possible upstream of the dam. In the foreground, Pissarro includes a prominent wooden rake-like structure which transects the river and the canvas from left to right. Known as a boom or estacade, it formed an extension of the “Marly Machine,” a remarkable hydraulic pumping system used to provide water uphill to the palace and gardens of Versailles during the late seventeenth century.

Fig. 1. Pierre Denís Martin the Younger (French, 1663–1742), Machine of Marly and the Louveciennes Aqueduct, 1722, oil on canvas, 36 3/16 x 50 3/8 in. (92 x 128 cm), Musée de l’Histoire de France, Château de Versailles, MV 778. Alamy Stock Photo

The Nelson-Atkins painting depicts a stretch of the lower Seine in Bougival, a town located in the Yvelines department of the Île-de-France region in north-central
Civil engineering has impacted this section of the river between the town of Bezens, about eight miles upstream of Bougival, and the Marly Machine since the 1680s. Engineered by Arnold de Ville and constructed by Rennequin Sualem (both Flemish natives) from 1681 to 1684 for King Louis XIV (1638–1715), the original Marly machine consisted of fourteen waterwheels driven by the current of the Seine. These waterwheels powered more than 220 pumps that delivered water through a series of pumping stations, holding tanks, reservoirs, pipes, and mechanical linkages uphill to the Marly reservoir, which was 108 feet above Versailles (Fig. 1). In an effort to establish a waterhead powerful enough to achieve the maximum height at which the pump could move fluid against gravity, the Seine was divided into two arms by a series of islands and earth berms connected by timber or rock dikes. After a series of breakdowns and deteriorating parts, the machine was demolished in 1817. Rebuilt not long after with a smaller but still sizeable footprint, it remained an impressive site and became a tourist destination, including for artists like Turner, who visited several times in the 1820s and 1830s and completed a series of watercolor sketches there (Fig. 2). By Pissarro’s era, the Marly Machine was run by a hydraulic system engineered by Xavier Dufrayer in 1859. In Turner’s watercolor, we see a picture-postcard view of the machine in the distance while a group of bourgeois tourists alight on the banks, possibly awaiting passage across the river in one of the boats. Here, the machine becomes a part of the river landscape, in harmony with its surroundings, and the focus is more on the leisure activity of the individuals rather than the machine as a working mechanism for disciplining the river.

Pissarro included the Marly Machine, or aspects of it, in at least two other compositions, including The Marly Hydraulic Works at Bougival (current location unknown), painted in 1869 before the artist’s prolonged exposure to Turner and Constable. This work features the machine in the distance, with the river relegated to a minor role at the left edge of the composition, and two individuals walking along its banks toward the machine. The second painting, Banks of the Seine at Bougival, was completed in 1872 after Pissarro’s return from London (Fig. 3). Its composition recalls Turner’s work, but it highlights the river as a commercial artery, with its barges and factories that line the banks. In the Nelson-Atkins composition, Pissarro chose a less-than-picturesque vantage point of the Marly Machine, looking southeast from the quai Rennequin-Sualem, named after the machine’s original builder. In contrast to the two other works featuring the Marly Machine, here Pissarro eliminates the pumphouse all together, focusing instead on a working aspect of the pump itself—designed to protect the wheels of the machine from floating objects and to prevent boats from navigating too close to the pump. A near-contemporaneous work by the English artist Alfred Sisley (born Paris, 1839–1899), helps situate the boom in relation to the pumphouse (Fig. 4), and it also includes the gate on the boom seen at the far right of Pissarro’s composition. In Sisley’s painting, the gate is closed; however, in the Nelson-Atkins composition, it is open. The gate allowed people to walk out on the boom where they could fish, as seen in another work by Sisley painted around the same time (ca. 1876; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). It is possible that Pissarro set up his easel close to the Marly Machine, just to the left of the boom in Sisley’s painting, but compressed the space somewhat, looking toward the end of the Île de la Loge at left and the Île Gautier at right. The locks of Bougival were in between these islands. A period map provides greater clarity; a red “x” marks where this author believes that Pissarro placed his easel (Fig. 5). The black dashed line to the left of the Marly Machine represents the city boundaries and indicates that the Marly Machine falls somewhat confusingly within the confines of Bougival. Thus, given the position of the boom and the artist’s vantage point, the painting represents Bougival, despite much historical debate.
Pissarro painted this work without any initial sketches on the canvas, possibly in a single session, and it showcases his ability to capture the dynamic interplay of light and shadow as rays of sun make their way through a temperamental sky. The fractured colors of the water’s surface, with dashes of blue, green, white, and red, reflect the houses and foliage on the opposite banks, creating a vivid impression of outdoor light. One also sees the artist’s facture through his use of broken brushwork of varying lengths and thicknesses in the animated strokes of water at midground. The variety of his paint handling is also visible in the scrubby upright poplars, with their haphazard brushstrokes made in left and right upward wisps that convey their texture and unruly branches while allowing patches of sky to show through. Pissarro’s sky, with its turbulent clouds rendered in wet-into-wet swirls of white, blue, dark gray, and hints of pink, is equally varied with brushwork in every direction, as if to indicate the clouds’ movement across the picture plane. The artist’s technical approach, in concert with his subject of the river and its mechanization, call to mind the work of Constable, whom Pissarro and Monet studied during their forced sojourn to England. Pissarro later recalled: “We used to go to the museum. The watercolors of Turner, as well as the works of John Constable, certainly had their effect on us. . . . We were particularly taken by the landscapists who were nearer to what we were seeking in ‘plein air,’ light and fleeting effects.”

Indeed, Pissarro may have been inspired by Constable’s full-scale study for his six-foot canvas, The Leaping Horse.
which was on view at the Victoria and Albert Museum when Pissarro was in London (Fig. 6). Its characteristically English sky, as Malcolm Warner poetically writes, evokes “the promise of rain or rain to come.”22 Constable’s painting depicts traffic on the River Stour, specifically the Float Bridge or Float Jump, with a sluice and a small wooden bridge and barrier.23 While these six-footers were completed in his studio due to their size, they were built up from multiple sketches made en plein air and thus communicated a direct link to nature, as Pissarro’s canvas does. Constable’s paint application was varied, like Pissarro’s, and he “piled up or scraped down, aggressively jabbed or lightly and precisely touched, scratched with the end of a brush, splattered and smeared” his paint across the surface of his canvas, as Jonathan Clarkson has described it.24 Constable used this varied brushwork to recreate the textures he saw in nature, adding to the mood of his completed works. As the title of Constable’s painting suggests, the subject is a horse leaping over a small wooden bridge. The horse would have been used to pull small boats through the locks, and it is seen jumping over the three-foot-high bridge that serves as a crossing between Essex and Suffolk. The barrier kept cattle from straying but allowed barge traffic to continue. This mechanized subject of river traffic clearly held great interest for Constable, as did the boom in the foreground of the Nelson-Atkins painting, which Pissarro would realize immediately after returning home to France in the summer of 1871.

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan  
February 2023

Notes


2. In a letter to his friend Théodore Duret in June 1871, Pissarro wrote, “En fait d’affaires, de vente, je n’ai rien fait, excepté Durand-Ruel qui m’a acheté deux petits tableaux. Ma peinture ne mord pas, mais pas du tout, cela me poursuit un peu partout” (In terms of business, sales, I did nothing, except Durand-Ruel who bought from me two small paintings. My painting does not bite, no, not at all; it pursues me everywhere); Janine Baillly-Herzberg, Correspondance de Camille Pissarro (Saint-Ouen-l’Aumône, France: Éditions du Valhermeil, 2003), 1:64n9. All translations are by Aimee Marcereau DeGalan unless otherwise noted.


8. Paintings created before the artist’s trip to London: The Weir at Pontoise (1868; private collection, CR 129); The Marly Hydraulic Works at Bougival (1869; current location unknown, CR 132); The Seine at Bougival (1870; Bridgestone Museum of Art, Ishibashi Foundation, CR 154). Paintings created in the two years after his trip to London: The Seine at Bougival (1871; private collection, Switzerland, CR 200); Banks of the Seine at Bougival (1871; stolen in the Netherlands, 1993, CR 201); Barges on the Seine at Bougival (1871; private collection, CR 202); Banks of the River (1871; private collection, CR 204); The Seine at Port-Marly, The
Wash-House (1872; Musée d’Orsay, Paris, CR 229); Banks of the Seine at Bougival (1872; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, CR 234); The Seine at Port-Marly (1872; private collection, UK, CR 236); The Weir at Pontoise (1872; Cleveland Museum of Art, CR 243); The Weir and the Lock at Saint-Quen-l’Aumône (1872; private collection, CR 244); Banks of the Oise at Pontoise (1872; private collection, Chicago, CR 249); View of Pontoise, the Timber Raft (1872; private collection, CR 250); Banks of the Oise, Pontoise (1872; private collection, CR 251); Banks of the Oise near Pontoise (1872; private collection, CR 274); Road on the Banks of the Oise, Pontoise (1872; private collection, CR 275); Factory at St Quen-l’Aumône, the Flood of the Oise (1873; private collection, CR 297); Factory at Saint-Quen-l’Aumône (1873; Springfield [MA] Museum of Fine Arts, CR 298); Factory on the Banks of the Oise, Saint-Quen-l’Aumône (1873; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, CR 299); Factory on the Banks of the Oise, Saint-Quen-l’Aumône (1873; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, CR 300); The Factory on the Banks of the Oise, Épiluches (1873; private collection, CR 302); Route d’Auvers on the Banks of the Oise, Pontoise (1873; Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, CR 303).


11. Mont Valérien, occupied by the Prussian Army Corps during the Franco-Prussian War just months before Pissarro’s return, is visible in the distance beyond the houses of Croisy, Joachim Pissarro and Claire Durand-Ruel Snollaerts identified this and several other architectural and geographical features in the canvas in their 2005 catalogue raiisonné. See Pissarro and Durand-Ruel Snollaerts, Pissarro: Critical Catalogue of Paintings (Paris: Wildenstein Institute Publications, 2005), no. 203, p. 2:173.

12. I am extremely grateful for the assistance of Frederic Deleve, associate researcher at the Tempora Laboratory, Rennes 2 University, and president of the Carré des canotiers. Deleve to Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, NAMA, February 22, and 25-26, 2023, NAMA curatorial files. The sketchy nature of the figures in these boats makes it difficult to determine their costume; however, Jean-Louis Lenhof, professor at Université de Caen-Normandiem, feels that at least those in the green boat appear in the bourgeois attire of shirtsleeves and waistcoats, rather than the overalls or plain shirts worn by manual workers. I am thankful for clarifying exchanges with him. Lenhof to Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, NAMA, February 14, 2023, NAMA curatorial files.

13. For information on the Marly Machine and the king’s garden, see Ian Thompson, The Sun King’s Garden: Louis XIV, André Le Nôtre and the Creation of the Gardens of Versailles (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 251.


15. For further details, see Thompson, The Sun King’s Garden, 247–51; and Jacques Lay and Monique Läy, Louveciennes: Histoire et rencontres (Paris: Éditions Rive nueve, 2016), 46–51.

16. This was eventually replaced by electromechanical pumps in 1968, which continued to draw water from the river.


18. I am grateful to Benjamin Ringot, Centre de recherche du château de Versailles, and Jacques Läy, independent historian, and his son Xavier Läy for their help and supplemental images, maps, and photographs in an effort to pinpoint Pissarro’s location. See Ringot and Läy to Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, NAMA, February 13–15, 2023, NAMA curatorial files.

19. See the respective provenance and bibliography sections for this painting completed by Danielle Hampton Cullen. When the painting appeared in the sale of George Feydou in 1903, it was listed as a scene of Pontoise; however, when it was sold in 1933 from Galerie Étienne Bignou to Kunsthandel Paul Cassirer in Amsterdam, it was called The Port
of Marly. In 1959, when it was exhibited at Wildenstein Gallery in New York, it appeared as The Banks of the Seine at Bougival. It was also Bougival in both Pissarro catalogues raisonnés (1939 and 2005). See Ludovic Rodo Pissarro and Lionello Venturi, Camille Pissarro, Son Art—Son Œuvre (Paris: Paul Rosenberg, 1939), no. 125, pp. 1:97, 2: unpaginated, reproduced as Barrage sur la Seine à [sic] Bougival; and Pissarro and Durand-Ruel Snollaerts, Pissarro: Critical Catalogue of Paintings, no. 203, p. 2:173. However, in 2007, Richard Brettell noted two verso inscriptions on the painting’s paper backing that read “Au bord de la Seine à Port Marly” (Banks of the Seine at Port Marly), which he argued was “probably more accurate than its traditional title, Weir on the Seine at Bougival.” See Richard R. Brettell and Joachim Pissarro, Manet to Matisse: Impressionist Masters from the Marion and Henry Bloch Collection, exh. cat. (Kansas City, MO: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2007), 51.


23. Although not formally accessioned into the Victoria and Albert Museum’s collection until 1900, the full-scale study for Constable’s The Leaping Horse, ca. 1825, was on view there since 1862.


Technical Entry

Technical entry forthcoming.

Documentation

Citation

Chicago:


Notes

[1] In both the annotated catalogues for his 1903 sale, it is uncertain how the buyer’s name is spelled: either M. Gobetski or M. Gobeski; see copies in NAMA curatorial files. The buyer may have been a member of the artistic Godebski family, whose name was often misspelled in contemporary journals. Sculptor “Cyprian” Quentin Godebski (1835–1909) or his son and composer, François Joseph Joachim “Cyprien” Godebski (1866–1948) are likely candidates. The younger Godebski was in the same social circles as Peydieu. Other candidates are Cyprien’s daughter and pianist, Maria Sofia Olga Zenaida Godebski (1872–1950; later known as Misia Sert), who was also a friend and model to Pierre-Auguste Renoir; or Cyprien’s eldest son, Cyrién Xavier Leonard Godebski (1875–1937), who was a literary man and friends with the Post-Impressionists.


[3] See email from Walter Feilchenfeldt Jr. to Danielle Hampton Cullen, April 21, 2021, NAMA curatorial files. Walter Feilchenfeldt Sr. was head of Kunstsalon Paul Cassirer, Berlin, from 1926 until 1933, when Hitler’s rise to power forced him to resign from the Berlin firm. The head of the firm became Grete Ring. Feilchenfeldt worked primarily at the Amsterdam branch until 1939, and in 1948, he established his own gallery in Zürich. See http://www.walterfeilchenfeldt.ch/gallery/.

[4] Rudi and Lili Maas were clients of Walter Feilchenfeldt, who looked after their collection, which, beginning before World War II, was in storage with Kunsthandel Paul Cassirer, Amsterdam (the gallery was directed by Dr. Helmuth Lütjens). Rudi and Lili Maas emigrated to California in 1938, but the painting remained in Amsterdam. Feilchenfeldt made notes about the collections he looked after during the war. The Pissarro “Port de Marly” is recorded in the “Maas Collection” twice, in 1937 and 1942. See email from Walter Feilchenfeldt Jr. to Danielle Hampton Cullen, April 20, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

[5] Robert Maas died in 1940. It is not clear when the painting left Paul Cassirer, Amterdam, and if or when it was shipped to his widow; see email from Walter Feilchenfeldt Jr. to Danielle Hampton Cullen, April 20, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

[6] Marlborough Fine Art Galerie identified the collector as “Prof. Dr. Boss, Zürich;” see email from Franz K. Plutschow, director, Marlborough International Fine Art, to Mackenzie Mallon, April 21, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.

This might be Prof. Dr. Medard Boss (1903–1990), Zürich, a renowned Swiss psychoanalytic psychiatrist who was a medical faculty member at the University of Zürich. Boss was also an art collector. In 1959, he was a visiting professor at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; at the University of Washington, Medical School, Washington, DC; and at the University of Madison, WI. That same year, the painting was lent to Wildenstein in New York, although Wildenstein does not have records on the identity of the lender, and the museum is unable to make a direct connection to Medard Boss. See email from Joseph Baillio, Wildenstein and Co., to Mackenzie Mallon, May 4, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.


Related Works

Camille Pissarro, *The Seine at Bougival*, 1870, oil on canvas, 20 1/4 x 32 3/8 in. (51.4 x 82.2 cm), Artizon Museum, Tokyo.

Camille Pissarro, *Barges on the Seine at Bougival*, 1871, oil on canvas, 16 7/8 x 23 3/8 in. (43 x 59.5 cm), illustrated in *Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale* (New York: Sotheby’s, June 23, 2014), 190, (repro.).

Camille Pissarro, *The Seine at Bougival*, 1871, oil on canvas, 17 3/8 x 23 5/8 in. (44 x 60 cm), private collection, Switzerland.

Exhibitions

Possibly *Exposition de tableaux par C. Pissarro*, Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, March 22–April 15, 1899, no. 16, as *Barrage à Pontoise*.

*Contrasts in Landscape: 19th and 20th Century Paintings and Drawings*, Wildenstein, New York, closed October 31,
1959, no. 11, as The Banks of the Seine at Bougival.

Nature as Scene: French Landscape Painting from Poussin to Bonnard, Wildenstein, New York, October 29–December 6, 1975, no. 48, as The Weir on the Seine at Bougival.


References

Possibly Exposition de tableaux par C. Pissarro, exh. cat. (Paris: Bernheim-Jeune, 1899), unpaginated, as Barrage à Pontoise.

Catalogue des Tableaux Modernes, Aquarelles, Pastels, Dessins appartenant à M. Georges Feydeau (Paris: Hôtel Drouot, 1903), 26, (repro.), as Barrage de la Seine à Pontoise.


“Pour les Collectionneurs et les amateurs,” Journal des artistes 28, no. 15 (April 19, 1903): 4093, as Barrage de la Seine à Pontoise.


Contrasts in Landscape: 19th and 20th Century Paintings and Drawings, exh. cat. (New York: Wildenstein, 1959), unpaginated, as Barrage of the Seine at Bougival.


Rebecca Dimling Cochran and Bobbie Leigh, “100 Top Collectors who have made a difference,” Art and Antiques (March 2006): 90.


Alice Thorson, “A final countdown—A rare showing of Impressionist paintings from the private collection of Henry and Marion Bloch is one of the inaugural exhibitions at the 165,000-square-foot glass-and-steel structure,” Kansas City Star (June 29, 2006): B1.

“Inaugural Exhibitions Celebrate Kansas City,” Member Magazine (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art) (Fall 2006):
3.


Alice Thorson, “Museum to Get 29 Impressionist Works from the Bloch Collection,” *Kansas City Star* (February 5, 2010): A1, as *Banks of the Seine at Port Marly*.


Catherine Futter et al., *Bloch Galleries: Highlights from the Collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art* (Kansas City, MO: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2016), 72, (repro.), as *Banks of the Seine at Port Marly*.


David Frese, “Inside the Bloch Galleries: An Interactive experience,” *Kansas City Star* 137, no. 169 (March 5, 2017): 1D, 4D, (repro.), as *Banks of the Seine at Port Marly*.


galleries-feature-old-masterworks-and-new-technology#stream/0.


Eric Adler, “Sold for $3.25 million, Bloch’s home in Mission Hills may be torn down,” Kansas City Star 141, no. 90 (December 16, 2020): 2A.