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

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor
Camille Pissarro, *Chestnut Grove at Louveciennes*, 1872

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Camille Pissarro, French, 1830–1903</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td><em>Chestnut Grove at Louveciennes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object Date</td>
<td>1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate and Variant Titles</td>
<td><em>Bois de chêtaigniers à Louveciennes; Village derrière les arbres</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimensions (Unframed)</td>
<td>16 3/8 x 21 in. (41.6 x 53.3 cm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signature</td>
<td>Signed and dated lower left: C. Pissarro, 1872</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Catalogue Entry**

**Citation**

**Chicago:**


**MLA:**


**When Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) relocated his family to Louveciennes in 1869, the village had a small town center and approximately one thousand inhabitants.** Its modest population, pre-industrial character, and proximity to Paris appealed to the artist, who preferred country living to an urban environment but maintained...
an atelier in the capital for commercial purposes. If business drew Pissarro to the city, he could take the train from nearby Saint-Germain-en-Laye to the Gare Saint-Lazare, a mere half-hour journey. Indeed, many travel guidebooks boasted of Louveciennes’ convenience and charm. *Paris et ses environs* (1855) described Louveciennes and its neighbor, Marly, as “always delightful” and assured would-be visitors that both towns were easily accessed from the Saint-Germain station via the Route de Versailles. Pissarro rented a three-story house on this very thoroughfare, and he painted the tree-lined street repeatedly. In *Route de Versailles, Louveciennes*, the road is pictured on a serene day in springtime (Fig. 1). The light blue sky, balanced composition, and presence of a farm worker and horse-drawn cart create an impression of Louveciennes as a pastoral haven. Pissarro’s colleagues Claude Monet (1840–1926), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), and Alfred Sisley (1839–1899), all of whom lived or traveled there during this period, shared this perception.

![Image](image-url)

**Fig. 2.** F. David (publisher), *Louveciennes: Perspective des Aqueducs de Marly*, early 20th century. 3 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (8.9 x 14.0 cm), photomechanical print, collection of the author.

The Nelson-Atkins painting depicts a grove of chestnut trees southeast of the Route de Versailles—trees that no longer exist today. Visible in the distance are a row of houses and the aqueduct of Marly, part of a complex waterworks system built in the 1680s to pump water from the Seine River at Bougival to the Châteaux de Marly and Versailles. Numerous artists have represented this conduit over the years, notably Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) in a series of gouache drawings from the late 1820s. It was also the subject of several picture postcards from the early twentieth century (Fig. 2). In the example reproduced here, the aqueduct recedes dramatically from the viewer while a lone figure poses before one of its thirty-six arches. Pissarro was quite familiar with this monument, as it passed within fifty feet of his backyard. French historian Jacques Lévy, a longtime resident of Louveciennes and author of two monographs about the town, believes the house with green shutters in the Nelson-Atkins work is where Pissarro lived. To capture both his home and the aqueduct in the same frame, Pissarro would have stationed his easel somewhere northwest of the forest of Marly, a former hunting estate for French royalty, in an area that is now largely residential.

At first blush, *Chestnut Grove at Louveciennes* seems idyllic. The sun is shining; the air is still; and a woman and child rest beside the trunk of a large tree. However, this appearance of Arcadia is deceiving. When Pissarro completed this painting in 1872, Louveciennes was still recovering from the disastrous Franco-Prussian War. From October 5, 1870, to March 6, 1871, an estimated three thousand to thirty-five hundred Prussian troops occupied Louveciennes, forcing many residents into exile and causing widespread destruction. Pissarro and his family experienced these upheavals firsthand. Following the French defeat at the Battle of Sedan on September 2, 1870, they fled west to the home of fellow painter Ludovic Pissarro (1826–1877) in Mayenne. Later that autumn, they joined relatives in London, returning to Louveciennes only in late June 1871, after the war and the fall of the Paris Commune. During their absence, Prussian soldiers had installed themselves in their home, using the ground floor as a stable and the upper floors as barracks. After the Prussian withdrawal, Pissarro’s sister-in-law Félicie Estruc traveled on foot from Rueil-Malmaison to Louveciennes to assess the damage. What she found was devastating. “The road is impassable for vehicles, the houses are burned, [and] window panes, shutters, doors, staircases and floors are all gone,” she wrote to Pissarro. “As for your home it is uninhabitable.” Only a few pieces of Pissarro’s furniture were salvageable, and, worse still, hundreds of his paintings had been destroyed.

Some of the damage that Estruc encountered on her journey to Louveciennes had been incurred during combat, including a French offensive launched on October 21, 1870. In an effort to regain territory west of Paris, General Auguste Alexandre Ducrot conducted a sortie in the direction of Versailles that involved 10,950 infantrymen, four cavalry squadrons, and ninety-four...
pieces of artillery.\textsuperscript{15} Although the French army had some initial success, its progress was halted by Prussian defenses on the heights of Buzenval, a suburb of Rueil-Malmaison.\textsuperscript{16} A drawing of this attack by Jules Gaildrau (1816–1898) appeared in the French weekly L'Illustration (Fig. 3). In the foreground, hundreds of French troops advance on foot, on horseback, or by carriage towards Prussian forces in Hauts-de-Seine, while, in the background, prominent landmarks are identified for the benefit of the reader. One of the labeled sites is the aqueduct of Marly, giving some sense of just how close the fighting came to Pissarro's home.\textsuperscript{17}

Another possible allusion to recent events is the conspicuously bent tree in the center foreground of Chestnut Grove at Louveciennes. Some scholars consider this tree—which is the defining formal element of the composition—a prime example of Pissarro's "extreme attachment to the real" and evidence of his refusal to "alter the features presented by nature."\textsuperscript{22} While it is certainly true that Pissarro could have discovered his motif in situ, the tree bears a noticeable resemblance to the Vendôme Column falling to the ground during the Paris Commune. Commissioned in the early 1800s by Napoleon I to commemorate the French victory at the Battle of Austerlitz, this obelisk was denounced by the Communards as an antiquated symbol of imperialism, and they ordered its demolition on May 16, 1871. A crowd watched as the perpetrators sawed through the base of the shaft, attached ropes to the summit, pulled...
on those cables using a capstan and sheer manpower, and prepared a bed of twigs, straw, and manure on the Rue de la Paix to cushion the column’s landing. At 5:35 p.m., the monument swayed and toppled to the earth as bands played La Marseillaise and spectators cried “Vive la Commune!”

Pissarro, who remained abroad during the Commune, would have heard of the incident from English news sources. The Illustrated London News published a detailed description and several artistic renderings of the column’s destruction on May 27, 1871. A double-page spread depicted the obelisk silhouetted against the sky during its descent, hovering momentarily above the Ministry of Justice building (Fig. 5). On a purely formal level, this monument has much in common with Pissarro’s bent tree. The base of the Vendôme Column forms an oblique angle to its detached shaft, just as the lower trunk of Pissarro’s chestnut tree does to its upper portion. The ropes affixed to the column’s apex in the Illustrated London News picture have a certain visual affinity with the intersecting branches from adjacent trees in the Nelson-Atkins painting. Even the statue of Napoleon crowning the Parisian obelisk finds its arboreal counterpart in the curved section of tree trunk at the upper right of Pissarro’s composition.

Pissarro’s motivations for including a disguised reference to the Vendôme Column in a painting of rural Louveciennes are complex. Several scholars have demonstrated that the artist’s politics were still evolving in the early 1870s. Born into a bourgeois family in the Antilles, he married a working-class woman and identified with leftist causes early on but did not develop strong anarchist convictions until the 1880s, when he befriended social radicals Jean Grave and Émile Pouget and read newspapers like La Révolte and Le Père Pinard. Additionally, like many Frenchmen with anti-state views, Pissarro had to be circumspect about broadcasting his opinions so as to avoid arrest. Nevertheless, his support for the Commune can be gleaned from a handful of extant writings. In one letter, sent from London in 1871 to Piette, Pissarro refers to the Versaillais as “these assassins of the socialists”; in another, written in 1887 to his son Lucien, he criticizes the late Jean-François Millet (1814–1875) for describing the Communards as “savages and vandals” in some published correspondence. Perhaps most tellingly, Pissarro incorporated a caricature of Adolphe Thiers, the French statesman who violently suppressed the Commune, in his 1874 portrait of Paul Cezanne (1839–1906). These comments and actions suggest that the artist likely sympathized with the Communards’ demolition of the Vendôme Column. Perhaps he intended the bent tree in Chestnut Grove at Louveciennes as a subtle tribute to the fédérés who lost their lives during the infamous semaine sanglante ("bloody week") that ended with the Commune’s defeat.

The Nelson-Atkins painting is among the last works that Pissarro completed before moving his family to Pontoise in July 1872. Ostensibly a tranquil country scene, it nevertheless records a turbulent moment in French history and in the artist’s own life.

Brigid M. Boyle
December 2021

Notes


2. Inaugurated in 1837, the Gare Saint-Lazare soon became an important gateway to northwestern France. Its original line from Paris to Le Pecq was extended to Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1847. See Robert L. Herbert, Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 196. The Chatou station was also easily


4. For more on this landscape, see Sarah Lees, ed., *Nineteenth-Century European Paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute* (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2012), 2:583–86.

5. I thank Bruno Bentz for this information. Bruno Bentz, École Lamartine, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, October 1, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

6. In 1681, Louis XIV commissioned Arnold de Ville and Rennequin Sualem to construct the so-called “Machine de Marly,” a hydraulics system capable of siphoning water 150 meters uphill from the Seine, hoping to solve his water supply problems at Versailles. The apparatus cost an estimated 3,500,000 livres, took three years to build, and required 221 pumps, fourteen massive waterwheels, and more than fifty workers to operate. Although the machine itself was retired from use in 1817, the aqueduct remained operational until 1866, just three years prior to Pissarro’s arrival. For further details, see Ian Thompson, *The Sun King's Garden: Louis XIV, André Le Nôtre, and the Creation of the Gardens of Versailles* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 247–51; and Jacques Lé and Monique Lé, *Louveciennes: Histoire et rencontres* (Paris: Éditions Riveneuve, 2016), 46–51.

7. See, for example, Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Marly Aqueduct*, ca. 1827–1829, gouache, pen, ink, and pencil on paper, 5 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. (14 x 19 cm), Tate Britain, London, D24886. Other artists who have sketched or painted the aqueduct include Auguste Paul Charles Anastasi (1820–1889), Isidore Laurent Deroy (1797–1886), August Alexandre Guillamont (1815–1892), Cécile Marchand (active 1808–1833), Pierre-Denis Martin (ca. 1663–1742), Charles Nicolas Ransonnette (1793–1877), and Jean Louis Tirpenne (1801–after 1878). The best-known rendering of this conduit is Sisley’s *The Aqueduct at Louveciennes*, 1874, oil on canvas, 21 3/8 x 32 in. (54.3 x 81.3 cm), Toledo Museum of Art, 1951.371.


10. I thank Benjamin Ringot for his help in pinpointing Pissarro’s location. Benjamin Ringot, Centre de recherche du château de Versailles, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, September 28, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

11. The woman and child reveal Pissarro’s debt to Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875), who often included diminutive figures in his landscapes. Pissarro listed Corot as his teacher when he submitted work to the Salons of 1864 and 1866. See Joel Isaacson, “Constable, Duranty, Mallarmé, Impressionism, Plein Air, and Forgetting,” *Art Bulletin* 76, no. 3 (September 1994): 438.

12. More than eighty percent of residents fled before the Prussians reached Louveciennes. Those who remained behind were forced to pay exorbitant taxes to the invaders on pain of death. Lé and Lé, *Louveciennes, mon village*, 267–71.

13. The precise date of their arrival in London is unknown, but it occurred sometime after the death of Pissarro’s newborn daughter, Adèle-Emma, on November 5, 1870. See letter no. 12, Camille Pissarro to Louis Retrou, late March 1871, in Janine Bailly-Herzberg, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro* ([Saint-Ouen-l’Aumône, France]: Éditions du Valhermeil, 2003), 1:69n3.


15. For these numbers, see “Rapport du Général Ducrot,” *L’Illustration* 56, no. 1444 (October 28, 1870): 311.

17. The following month, the aqueduct of Marly played another role in the war when Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck himself climbed the aqueduct’s northern tower, known as the Tour du Levant, on November 30, 1870, to gauge some fighting in Nanterre. See Lévy and Lévy, *Louveciennes: Histoire et rencontres*, 49.

18. Pissarro’s brother-in-law Louis Estruc blamed his niece’s early demise on her wet nurse. The artist bemoaned the loss of “le travail de vingt ans de ma vie” in an undated letter to his landlord Louis Retrou, likely sent in late March 1871. See letter no. 12, Camille Pissarro to Louis Retrou, late March 1871, in Bailly-Herzberg, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, 1:69, 69n3.


24. The tree forms a rigid diagonal until its highest extremity, where a concave section of trunk surrounded by patches of bare canvas (as if to highlight this segment of tree) intersects the right margin of the canvas.


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**Technical Entry**

Technical entry forthcoming.

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**Documentation**

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**Citation**

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**Chicago:**

Provenance

With Félix Gérard Fils, Paris [1];
Albert Bellanger, Paris [2];
With Paul Rosenberg, Paris, no. 3729, as Village derrière les arbres or Bois de Châtaigniers à Louveciennes, by February 1937 [3];
Purchased from Rosenberg by Arthur Tooth and Sons, Ltd., London, as Village derrière les arbres, by February 1937–November 9, 1937 [4];
Purchased from Arthur Tooth and Sons, stock ledger 7, no. 7672, as Village derrière les arbres, by Captain Albany ”Barney” Kennett Charlesworth (1892–1945), Whitwell Hall, Yorkshire, England, November 9, 1937–1945 [5];
Inherited by his wife Lady Marjorie Nell “Diana” Charlesworth (née Beckett-Denison, later Lady Cholmondeley, 1900–1965), Whitwell Hall, Yorkshire, England, and Cholmondeley, South Kensington, England, by 1945–at least 1948 [6];
Purchased from Lady George Cholmondeley by Arthur Tooth and Sons, London, stock no. 2441, as Bois des Châtaigniers à Louveciennes, by July 26, 1950 [7];
Purchased from Arthur Tooth and Sons by Sam Salz Gallery, New York, July 26, 1950–March 3, 1952;

Notes


[2] See The Paul Rosenberg Archives, a Gift of Elaine and Alexandre Rosenberg, III.D, Rosenberg Galleries: Miniature Photo and Card Index, ca. 1910–1987, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The photo card says, “Collection Bellanger/ S.D.” Ilda François, secretary to Elaine Rosenberg, suggested the S. D. might be an abbreviation for “Signé Droite” (see email from Ilda François to Meghan Gray, October 27, 2016, NAMA curatorial files). However, the artist’s signature is on the left in this painting. Albert Bellanger bought and sold several works from Rosenberg in the 1950s.


[4] See Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Arthur Tooth and Sons Stock inventories and accounts, Series I, Box 18, Picture Sales no. 6, 1 June 1934–31 December 1937.


Related Works

Camille Pissarro, Chestnut Trees at Louveciennes, Spring 1870, oil on canvas, 23 3/8 x 28 3/4 in. (59.5 x 73 cm), Museum Langmuh, Baden.

Camille Pissarro, Snow Landscape in Louveciennes, 1872, oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 21 5/8 in. (46 x 55 cm), Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany.

Camille Pissarro, Chestnut Trees in Louveciennes, 1879, oil on canvas, 16 1/8 x 21 1/4 in. (41 x 54 cm), Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Exhibitions

Possibly Pissarro, Galerie Durand-Ruel, Paris, 1902, no. cat.


“La Flèche d'Or”: Important Pictures from French Collections; Third Exhibition, exh. cat. (London: Arthur Tooth and Sons, 1937), unpaginated, as Village derrière les arbres.


Leopold Reidebinder, Auf Den Spuren der Maler der Ile de France: Topographische Beiträge zur Geschichte der französischen Landschaftsmaleri von Corot bis zu den
Fauves (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1963), 49, (repro.), as Kastanienbäume in Louveciennes.


Impressionist and Modern Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture (Part 1) (New York: Christie’s, November 11, 1997), 60–61, (repro.), as Bois de châtaigniers à Louveciennes.

Eva-Maria Preiswerk-Lösel, ed., Ein Haus für die Impressionisten: das Museum Langmatt (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001), 110, (repro.), as Bois de châtaigniers à Louveciennes.


Rebecca Dimling and Bobbie Leigh, “100 Top Collectors Who Have Made a Difference,” Arts 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.


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), 73, (repro.), as  *Chesnut Grove at Louveciennes*.


David Frese, “Inside the Bloch Galleries: An interactive experience,”  *Kansas City Star* 137, no. 169 (March 5, 2017): 1D, 4D.


Eric Adler and Joyce Smith, “H&R Bloch co-founder, philanthropist Bloch dies,” *Cass County Democrat Missouri* 140, no. 29 (April 26, 2019): 1A


Paloma Alarcó, *The Impressionists and Photography*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2019), 58, (repro.), as *Chestnut Grove at Louveciennes (Bois de châtaigniers à Louveciennes)*.

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.