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's *Wooded Landscape at L'Hermitage, Pontoise, 1879* presents us with a tangled web of trees. At times, this mess of foliage verges on abstraction; it almost completely obscures a small figure in the right foreground, who appears to be trudging through the dense brush. Beyond the trees lies the Hermitage, the oldest section of the village of Pontoise, its white houses with red and blue roofs peeking out between the branches. Pissarro often used this "screen of trees" motif during the late 1870s, placing nature as a separation between the figure (and by extension, the viewer) and the markers of civilization beyond. Trees become a pictorial framework, a veil through which we encounter the rural village society. Pissarro probably developed this visual device from his early mentor Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875). Yet unlike the hazy atmosphere of Corot's idyllic scenes, such as *The Lake* (Fig. 1), Pissarro's picture has a rough-hewn quality. Pissarro created *Wooded Landscape* with a thick impasto. He seems to have reveled in the materiality of his medium, using a similar hatch-marked application of paint across the various elements in the composition—sky, houses, trees, grass, and figure. Later in 1879, Pissarro revisited this composition in a series of prints,
exploring how the graphic medium could be manipulated to highlight different facets of the painting, including its complex brushwork, its ambiguous sense of depth, and the visibility of the figure.

Pissarro was very familiar with this corner of Pontoise by the time he painted this picture. He lived in the Hermitage off and on between 1866 and 1882. Although the rural village was far removed from the bustling art world of Paris, roughly a forty-five-minute train ride away, Pissarro’s life there was hardly an isolated one. Many of his artist friends visited him in the country, often for extended periods of time, including Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), Armand Guillaumin (1841–1927), Francisco Oller (1833–1917), Ludovic Piotte (1826–1877), and Federico Zandomeneghi (1841–1917). Together, these artists formed something of a creative enclave centered on Pissarro’s gentle guidance and encouragement, which has been referred to as the “School of Pontoise.” Members of this informal school spent their days out in the countryside working side by side in nature and learning from one another. In some cases, paintings produced during these outings are so similar that, were it not for the artists’ signatures, it would be difficult to determine who painted them. Pissarro’s son, Georges (1871–1961), then only ten years old, created a drawing of one such excursion in 1881 that includes a self-portrait alongside portraits of his father, Guillaumin, Gauguin, Cézanne, and Cézanne’s wife, Marie-Hortense (née Fiquet, 1850–1922) on the side of a hill in the Hermitage. In addition to their esprit de corps, the “School of Pontoise” is characterized by the artists’ mutual interest in depicting rural life and landscapes, a counterpoint to the scenes of Parisian leisure popular among other Impressionists. Pontoise had a remarkably diverse landscape to recommend it to this crop of young artists, with fields, hills, cliffs, gardens, river views, country houses, markets, forests, and more all in close proximity.

Despite the camaraderie and support of his fellow artists, Pissarro was going through a particularly difficult period as he painted *Wooded Landscape*. In the late 1870s, the artist had mounting family obligations, debts to be paid, and few clients to buy his art. He spent much of his time traveling back and forth to Paris in order to meet with dealers and collectors in the hope of finding a market for his work. Overcome with depression, he wrote to his friend and champion Eugène Murer: “Art is a matter of a hungry belly, an empty purse, of a poor wretch.” At times of extreme financial distress, such as those he faced in the late 1870s, Pissarro turned to a handful of patrons who were early and adamant champions of Impressionist art, including fellow artist Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894) and collectors Eugène Murer and Georges de Bellio (1828–1894). De Bellio was the first owner of Pissarro’s *Wooded Landscape*.

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Fig. 1. Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, The Lake, 1861, oil on canvas, 52 3/8 x 62 in. (133 x 157.5 cm), The Frick Collection, New York, Henry Clay Frick Bequest, 1906.1.23. © The Frick Collection

Fig. 2. Camille Pissarro, *Wooded Landscape* at the Hermitage, Pontoise, 1879, soft-ground etching and aquatint on cream wove paper, first state, plate mark: 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (21.6 x 26.7 cm), sheet: 12 3/8 x 17 11/16 in. (31.5 x 45 cm), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Lee M. Friedman Fund, 1971.267. Photograph © 2023 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Shortly after Pissarro painted *Wooded Landscape*, he revisited the composition as he dove headlong into printmaking as a means of further exploring Impressionist aesthetics and of finding remuneration for his work (Figs. 2–4, all 1879). There was a resurgence of interest in etching in France during the 1860s, and many of Pissarro's contemporaries experimented with the medium, including Marcellin Desboutin (1823–1902), Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904), Edouard Manet (1832–1883), and James Tissot (1836–1902). Of chief concern to Pissarro in these *Wooded Landscape* prints was articulating the visual language of Impressionism that he used so eloquently in his painting. Pissarro explored printmaking as a painter; he largely ignored the history and conventions of the etching medium and freely combined techniques and developed new ones. His experiments investigated how printmaking could contribute to the Impressionist concerns he was already exploring in paint.

Although he had dabbled with printmaking earlier in the 1870s, Pissarro only embraced it in earnest in 1879 in collaboration with Edgar Degas (1834–1917) and Mary Cassatt (1844–1926). Throughout his career, Pissarro made leaps in artistic innovation through his friendships with other artists, and his exploration of printmaking was no different. Together, the three Impressionists worked to launch a journal called *Le Jour et la Nuit* (Day and Night), which would include original fine-art prints suitable for collectors. Originally, along with their own work, they intended to include prints by Felix Bracquemond (1833–1914), Caillebotte, Jean-Louis Forain (1852–1931), Jean-François Raffaëlli (1850–1924), and Henri Rouart (1833–1912). The first edition was scheduled to come out in early 1880, with additional issues to be released irregularly after that. Some of the Impressionists' early backers, namely Ernest May (1845–1925) and Caillebotte, indicated they would support the venture financially, so it is unclear why *Le Jour et la Nuit* did not progress past the first issue. Despite the journal's limited success, this was an intense period of collaboration between Pissarro, Degas, and Cassatt as they taught themselves the complex processes of printmaking. Degas's studio in Paris became the center for this collaboration, and many of Pissarro's early works were printed by Degas himself. Pissarro, who was still predominantly living in Pontoise, stayed informed about Degas's and Cassatt's printmaking discoveries through correspondence. These years were Pissarro's most productive in printmaking, largely due to his colleagues' enthusiasm and encouragement.

Pissarro often reworked his plates, printing different states of the same composition with considerable differences in tone and feel. Pissarro used a mix of printing tools—needles, pens, aquatint grounds, acids, gums—what Cathy Leahy has called "a smorgasbord of intaglio processes." In each printed version of *Wooded Landscape*, Pissarro explored how to translate the

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**Fig. 3.** Camille Pissarro, *Wooded Landscape at the Hermitage*, 1879, aquatint and soft-ground etching with scraping and polishing, second state, image: 8 1/2 x 10 5/8 in. (21.6 x 27 cm), Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of Philip W. Pillsbury, 1959, P.12.795

**Fig. 4.** Camille Pissarro, *Wooded Landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise*, 1879, soft-ground etching, aquatint, and drypoint, sixth state, image: 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (21.8 x 26.7 cm); sheet: 14 x 19 in. (35.6 x 48.3 cm), Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, Purchase: Nelson Gallery Foundation, F83-60
original painting’s impasto texture, knitted brushwork, and dynamic, layered composition into the print medium.

The paint and print versions of this composition allow viewers a glimpse of village life beyond the trees, positioning us alongside the figure trudging through the forest. While the painting depicts a clear spring day, formal variations in the prints present us with the same scene in a variety of times of the day and year. In his first-state print (Fig. 2), Pissarro detangles foreground and background; the figure is evoked by a few small gestures and all but disappears. The composition is pared down to its most basic elements, and the foliage in the foreground becomes almost fully abstract. The trees are dark and bare, and the midtone used across the lower two-thirds of the composition reads as snow that blankets the landscape. Pissarro’s second-state print (Fig. 3), on the other hand, is a study in midtones, giving the print a hazy quality that bears closer resemblance to Corot’s work (see Fig. 1) than Pissarro’s Wooded Landscape painting. Pissarro’s complex mark-making in the foliage at the top and bottom of the composition echo the intricate brushwork of the painting, but without the original’s bright blue sky, the print seems to capture the same scene at dawn or dusk. Pissarro’s sixth-state print (Fig. 4) is full of contrasts, with dark and light moments placed side by side, evoking bright sunlight and making the figure far more visible than in the original painting. With stark contrasts in place of the painting’s lush green coloring, this print seems to depict a crisp day in early autumn.

Pissarro included four stages of his Wooded Landscape print in the fifth Impressionist exhibition in 1880, all displayed together in a single purple frame.19 Showing several of these prints together demonstrated his flexibility, innovation, and skill at printmaking. As several authors have noted, it can also be seen as a precursor to Claude Monet’s series paintings. As in Monet’s haystacks and cathedrals, the prints show the same scene in different moods, seasons, or weather.20 Seen in this light, Pissarro’s Wooded Landscape painting and prints serve as an exceptional case study in the exploration and development of Impressionist aesthetic innovation.

Mia Laufer
November 2022

Notes


7. De Bellio was born in Bucharest to a wealthy family and maintained a modest life in Paris funded by the income from his estate and allowances sent from his family. He began collecting art in 1864 and assembled an eclectic collection with work by Sandro Botticelli (Florentine, 1444–1445–510), Frans Hals (Dutch, about 1581–1666), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806), Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), and the Barbizon painters. He was also an early supporter of the Impressionists, particularly Claude Monet (1840–1926), although he owned around ten works by Pissarro as well. De Bellio practiced homeopathic medicine and treated many of the Impressionists and their families, including the Pissarros. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) later recalled that, “every time one of us was in urgent need of a couple of hundred francs, [that person] would run to the Café Riche at luncheon time with a picture. One was sure to find Monsieur de Bellio there, and he would buy it without even looking at it.” Ambroise Vollard, Renoir: An Intimate Record.


13. A few examples of this trend include Pissarro’s early training with Fritz Melbye (Danish, 1826–1896) in the Caribbean in the 1850s, his experience with the School of Pontoise in the 1860s and 1870s, and his exploration of Neo-Impressionism in the late 1880s and 1890s.


17. Degas made serious efforts to promote *Le Jour et la Nuit*, even writing to friends in England for support. Shapiro, “Four Intaglio Prints by Camille Pissarro,” 133.


**Technical Entry**

Technical entry forthcoming.

**Documentation**

**Citation**

**Chicago:**


**MLA:**


**Provenance**

Probably purchased from the artist by Dr. Georges de Bellio (né Gheorge Bellu, 1828–1894), Paris, by January 26, 1894 [1]; By descent to his daughter, Victorine (née Victorina Bellu, later de Bellio, 1863–1958), and son-in-law, Eugène “Ernest” (1860–1942) Donop de Monchy, Paris, by January 26, 1894;
Possibly purchased by Ambroise Vollard, Paris, no. 3049, no later than 1899 [2];

Emil (1867–1929) and Alma (née Terlinden, 1883–1970) Staub-Terlindien, Villa Alma, Männedorf, Switzerland, as Village ou à travers les arbres, by October 5, 1917–February 15, 1929 [3];

Inherited by Alma Staub-Terlindien, Männedorf, Switzerland, 1929–1942 [4];

Purchased from Staub-Terlindien by Wildenstein and Company, New York, 1942–probably before October 24, 1945 [5];

Purchased from Wildenstein by Andre Kostelanetz (1901–1980) and Alice Joséphine “Lily” Pons (1898–1976), New York, probably by October 24, 1945–1958 [6];


Andre Kostelanetz, New York, 1969–at least July 8, 1976 [8];


Given by Dr. and Mrs. Nicholas S. Pickard to The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1984.

Notes

[1] See circular stamp with faded ink on the painting’s verso that closely resembles the collector’s stamp for Eugène and Victorine Donop de Monchy. The number “106” is handwritten in the center of the stamp. This number corresponds to the painting Le Printemps; maisons vues à travers les branches in the unpublished inventory that was drawn up after de Bellio’s death by his son-in-law, Eugène Donop de Monchy. See “Catalogue des tableaux anciens et modernes, aquarelles, dessins, pastels, miniatures, formant la collection de Mr. E. Donop de Monchy (Ancienne collection Georges de Bellio),” ca. 1894–1897, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, Archives. Special thanks to Claire Gooden, Attachée de conservation, Musée Marmottan Monet.

The 1904 exhibition catalogue (Exposition de l’Œuvre de Camille Pissarro, Galeries Durand-Ruel) in which the painting appears as no. 49, specifies “à M. Donop de Monchy”, but the Vollard label on the verso of the painting indicates that the dealer must have owned the painting as late as 1899 (see provenance note 2).

[2] A label preserved on the verso is similar in style to Vollard labels, and it says “3049.” Two other paintings in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins also have Vollard labels: Gauguin F77-32 was stock number “395[8]” and was owned by Vollard by September 1899; Cézanne 2015.13.6 was stock book A, no. 3526 and was owned by Vollard by December 1899. Since the Pissarro stock number 3049 is before 3958 and 3526, it was probably purchased by Vollard no later than 1899.

However, Cézanne scholar Jayne Warman, does not know of any Vollard stockbooks nor any reference in Vollard’s archives to numbers before 3301. See email from Warman to Danielle Hampton Cullen, NAMA, August 2, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

[3] The Staub-Terlindens began collecting art shortly after their marriage in 1903, but purchased a majority of their collection in 1916–1917 (some of which came from Vollard). They owned the Pissarro at least by 1917, when they lent it to an exhibition in Zurich. The painting is also listed and reproduced in an inventory of the Staub-Terlindens collection; see Carl Montag, “Reproduktionen aus der Sammlung Staub-Terlindens, Männedorf,” ca. 1918, Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft (SIK-ISEA), Zurich, Switzerland.


[5] The painting was exhibited at Camille Pissarro: His Place in Art, Wildenstein and Co., New York, October 24–November 24, 1945, but it was lent anonymously. According to the catalogue raisonné, Wildenstein sold the painting to Mr. and Mrs. Kostelanetz in 1945; see Joachim Pissarro and Claire Durand-Ruel Snollaerts, Pissarro: Catalogue critique des peintures; Critical Catalogue of Paintings (New York: Wildenstein Institute Publications, 2005), no. 614. Kostelanetz may have been the anonymous lender, purchasing the painting from Wildenstein and Co., New York before the exhibition.
[6] An art collector herself, Lily Pons hung the painting in her music library in her Gracie Square apartment (which she first rented in October 1945); see Rosamund Frost, “Lily Pons, Diva in Art,” Art News 45, no. 6 (August 1946): 37.


Related Works

Camille Pissarro, Wooded Landscape at l’Hermitage, pencil, ca. 1878, 8 1/2 x 10 3/4 in. (21.5 x 27 cm), location unknown, cited in Barbizon Impressionist and Modern Drawings, Paintings and Sculpture (New York: Christie, Manson and Woods, July 5, 1968), 17.

Camille Pissarro, Wooded Landscape at l’Hermitage, Pontoise, 1879, softground etching and aquatint on cream wove paper, first state, 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (21.6 x 26.7 cm), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1971.267.

Camille Pissarro, Wooded Landscape at l’Hermitage, 1879, aquatint and soft-ground etching with scraping and polishing, second state, 8 1/2 x 10 5/8 in. (21.6 x 27 cm), Minneapolis Institute of Art, P.12.795.

Camille Pissarro, Wooded Landscape at l’Hermitage, near Pontoise, 1879, soft-ground etching, lift-ground and spit-bite aquatint, and drypoint with scraping and burnishing, third state, plate: 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (21.7 x 26.6 cm); sheet: 11 7/8 x 16 7/8 in. (30.2 x 43 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1941-8-105.

Camille Pissarro, Wooded Landscape at l’Hermitage, Pontoise, 1879, soft ground etching and aquatint on beige laid paper, fourth state, 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (21.6 x 26.6 cm), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1971.268.

Camille Pissarro, In the Woods at the Hermitage at Pontoise, 1879, aquatint, fifth state, 8 1/2 x 10 3/4 in. (21.5 x 27 cm), Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA, M2157.

Camille Pissarro, Wooded Landscape at l’Hermitage, Pontoise, 1879, soft-ground etching, aquatint, and drypoint, sixth state, image: 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (21.8 x 26.7 cm); sheet: 14 x 19 in. (35.6 x 48.3 cm), The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, F83-60.

Exhibitions


Französische Kunst des XIX. u. XX. Jahrhunderts, Kunsthaus, Zurich, October 5–November 14, 1917, no. 156, as Village.

La Peinture Français de XIXe Siècle en Suisse, Galerie de la Gazette des Beaux-Arts, Paris, May–June, 1938, no. 75, as Village vu a [sic] travers les arbres.

Camille Pissarro: His Place in Art, Wildenstein, New York, October 24–November 24, 1945, no. 15, as Paysage sous Bois à l’Hermitage.


Camille Pissarro: The Impressionist Printmaker, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, June 14–October 14, 1973, no. 8, as Paysage sous bois à l’Hermitage (Pontoise).


Impressionism: Selections From Five American Museums, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, November 4–


Bernard Denvir, *The Thames and Hudson Encyclopaedia of Impressionism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 179, as *Wooded Landscape at l’Hermitage, Pontoise*.


George T. M. Shackelford and Fronia E. Wissman, * Impressions of Light: The French Landscape from...
Corot to Monet, exh. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2002), 164n2, as Wooden Landscape at the Hermitage.

Marco Goldin and Rochelle Keene, Da Corot a Monet: Opere impressioniste e post-impressioniste dalla Johannesburg Art Gallery, exh. cat. (Conegliano, Italy: Linea d’ombra Libri, 2003), 64, as Sottobosco all’Hermitage.


Markus Müller, Camille Pissarro: Mit den Augen eines Impressionisten (München: Hirmer, 2013), 14, (repro.), as Blick durch die Bäume auf L’Hermitage, Pontoise.


Christophe Duvivier, Christophe Duvivier, Pissarro à Pontoise (Cergy-Pontoise: Val d’Oise, le département, 2017), 19, (repro.), as Vue de l’Hermitage à travers les arbres, Pontoise.


Christophe Duvivier and Joseph Helfenstein, eds., Camille Pissarro: The Studio of Modernism, exh. cat. (Munich: Prestel, 2021), 81, 83n36.