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

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor
Alfred Sisley, Rue de la Princesse, Evening, 1875

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Artist</strong></th>
<th>Alfred Sisley, English, born Paris, 1839–1899</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>Rue de la Princesse, Evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Object Date</strong></td>
<td>1875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternate and Variant Titles</strong></td>
<td>Rue de la Princesse, Winter; Route de la Princesse (le soir); La Route de la Princesse en hiver, hameau de Voisins, Louveciennes; Une Rue à Louveciennes – Le Soir; Rue de la princesse, l’hiver</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dimensions (Unframed)</strong></td>
<td>24 x 19 5/8 in. (61 x 49.9 cm)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Signature</strong></td>
<td>Signed and dated lower right: Sisley. 75</td>
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</tbody>
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On January 3, 1908, the fourth posthumous retrospective of Alfred Sisley’s oeuvre opened at Galeries Durand-Ruel. It included more than fifty pictures produced between 1871 and 1888, among them Rue de la Princesse, Evening, which was being exhibited for the very first time. Reactions were largely positive. Art critics Louis Vauxcelles and Georges Meusnier wrote flattering articles for Gil Blas and the Journal des artistes, and painter René François Xavier Prinet’s (1861–1946) review was nothing short of a panegyric. Prinet singled out Rue de la Princesse, Evening and several other works for particular praise:

> Viewing a painting by Sisley is a purely physical pleasure; it’s a feast, a satisfied craving. . . . Beginning in 1874, his brushwork became looser, purer, and bolder, just as he was discovering less common effects and more delicate tones; this progress is already discernible in The Seine, 1874, in Route de la Princesse, 1875, and above all in Route de Marly at Port Marly, 1876.

For Prinet, as for many contemporary scholars of Impressionism, Sisley was at his strongest and most innovative during the mid-1870s. A common assertion in the literature on Sisley is that his pictorial output
dipped in quality after 1880, though MaryAnne Stevens and others have pushed back against this idea, arguing for the importance of his late-career series.\(^6\)

The Kansas City picture is one of three paintings by Sisley depicting a two-story home at 2 rue de la Princesse, Louveciennes, which he and his family rented for approximately two and a half years. Two of the pictures are winter scenes, while the third represents late summer or early fall.\(^7\) Sisley’s dates of residence in Louveciennes have long been disputed. François Daulte claimed that Sisley took refuge there during the Commune in the spring of 1871; Stevens believed that he arrived in the fall or winter of 1871; and Richard Shone thought it likely that the artist settled there in late 1872.\(^8\) The timing of Sisley’s move from Louveciennes to Marly-le-Roi has also been debated, with most historians favoring the winter of 1874 or early 1875.\(^9\) These conflicting opinions reflect Sisley’s total absence from the Louveciennes municipal archives. He is missing from the town censuses of spring 1872 and spring 1876, and his children, being too young for formal education, are not listed in the school enrollment records.\(^10\) Ronald Pickvance proposed the most plausible period of habitation: August 1872 to February 1875.\(^11\) This timeframe is consistent with the census data and also accounts for the dating of the Nelson-Atkins painting, which is clearly inscribed “75” in the lower right-hand corner (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, confusion persists, as evidenced by a commemorative plaque in Louveciennes marking the site of Sisley’s erstwhile home (Fig. 2). It reads: “Alfred Sisley, Impressionist painter, lived here from 1870 to 1874.”

Louveciennes appealed to Sisley due to its affordability and small-town charm. A village of fewer than two thousand residents,\(^12\) it had no post office of its own until 1872.\(^13\) The street on which Sisley lived was a simple dirt path, as seen in the foreground of the Nelson-Atkins landscape; it was not until 1890 that Jules Beer, owner of the nearby Château de Voisins, paid for the road to be paved.\(^14\) As Pickvance noted, the street was named for an earlier inhabitant of this château, Louise-Elisabeth de Bourbon, princesse de Conti (1696–1775), who lived there from 1729 to 1775.\(^15\) Sisley’s house was located on the western extremity of the rue de la Princesse, directly south of the Château du Barry (Figs. 3, 4). It is unclear when or for whom his dwelling was built. Pickvance, who visited Sisley’s abode before its demolition in 1978, heard rumors that Jeanne Bécu, Comtesse du Barry (1743–1793), had constructed the house for her servant, Louis Benoît Zamor (1762–1820), but Louveciennes historian Jacques Laÿ later refuted this possibility.\(^16\) Sisley’s landlord is also something of a mystery. The building at 2 rue de la Princesse was put up for sale in July 1860,\(^17\) twelve years before the artist’s tenancy began, but its eventual buyer remains unknown.\(^18\) Whoever owned it, the house proved to be a recurring source of inspiration for Sisley, who portrayed it from multiple angles and in different seasons.
*Rue de la Princesse, Evening* is the last of the three paintings featuring Sisley’s home in Louveciennes. The first (ca. 1873; Phillips Family Collection) is a horizontal picture realized in late summer or early fall from the same vantage point as the Nelson-Atkins work. The second, a vertical landscape dated 1874, faces the opposite direction and depicts a recent snowfall (Fig. 5). In the latter, fresh powder bleaches the road, clings to the roofs and Sisley’s corner awning, and weighs down the plants overhanging Sisley’s veranda. These telltale signs of winter give way to subtler indications of the time of year in the Nelson-Atkins work. A smattering of snow at the foot of Sisley’s house and denuded tree branches on the opposite side of the street signal that spring is still months away. Unlike his neighbor the painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), who disliked the cold and generally eschewed snowscapes, Sisley appreciated the way snow and frost could transform a familiar setting. His ability to represent meteorological conditions of all kinds earned him many admirers. The *New York Times* critic John Russell remarked that “Sisley was as deft with deep snow as he was with high summer and sunshine.”

Sisley was also skilled at capturing different lighting. In *Rue de la Princesse, Evening*, lighting plays a dramatic role in an otherwise undramatic painting. Two-thirds of the composition is in shadow, but part of the house’s façade and its second-floor cistern catch the sun’s rays, as does a sliver of wall across the street. Sisley chose a soft cantaloupe color for the illuminated areas and teal hues for the shaded surfaces, juxtaposing warm and cool tones to great effect. He also placed wispy strokes of yellow-orange pigment along the tree limbs, indicating that they, too, are warmed by the sun. Although one scholar described this picture as an “early morning scene,” it in fact depicts the glow of evening. Sisley was facing southeast when he painted the Nelson-Atkins landscape, such that the setting sun was behind him and to his right. Moreover, when Sisley offered this work for sale at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris on March 24, 1875, mere weeks after completing it, he titled the painting *Route de la Princesse (le soir)* (evening). The Nelson-Atkins recently renamed the picture to honor this original title.
Much has changed on the rue de la Princesse since Sisley’s period of residence. Peeking through the trees in the Kansas City work is a second house, which at other times of year was blocked from view by the surrounding foliage. This building is still extant but greatly altered. Its sides are now beveled, with concomitant modifications to its gable and roofline. No longer a private residence, it serves today as the local Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture (Center for Youth and Culture, or MJC), an educational facility that offers everything from music lessons and painting classes to homework assistance. In the photograph reproduced here, it appears on the right side of the paved road, looking down on the parked vehicles (Fig. 6). To the right of the MJC, above the pedestrian wearing salmon-colored trousers in figure 6, is a two-story building that did not exist in Sisley’s day. Another addition is the short section of plaster wall—strongly disliked by some locals—behind the streetlamp and speed limit sign. It replaced the wooden fence seen at far right in the Nelson-Atkins picture. When Sisley lived in the village, this fence turned ninety degrees and continued on the rue de l’Etarché, as seen at left in Snow at Louveciennes (Fig. 7).

Directly opposite this wooden enclosure was Sisley’s dwelling, roughly where the crosswalk terminates today. After the house at 2 rue de la Princesse was razed, the Association Sportive de Louveciennes (Sporting Association of Louveciennes) reconceived the vacant property as an entrance to their members-only tennis club within the Parc des Granges du Barry (see Fig. 4). The abovementioned plaque honoring Sisley overlooks this new entrance. While it is regrettable that the artist’s house was not preserved for future generations, its memory lives on in Rue de la Princesse, Evening and other pictures from the 1870s, painted when Sisley was at the height of his creative powers.

Brigid M. Boyle
June 2022

Notes

1. The show closed on February 8, 1908. Previous retrospectives had taken place at Durand-Ruel Galleries, New York (February 27–March 15, 1899); Galerie Rosenberg, Paris (November 7–24, 1904); and Bernheim-Jeune et Cie, Paris (December 2–14, 1907).

2. Throughout this essay, different historical titles are used for the Nelson-Atkins painting. Originally
The census was held every five years for most of the nineteenth century, but the Franco-Prussian War caused the 1871 census to be delayed until 1872.


18. Jacques and Monique Lay described Sisley’s house as “une dépendance de la propriété du littéraire Francis Wey” (an annex to the property of Francis Wey).
Wey, man of letters) since Wey lived next door, at 1 rue de la Princesse. See Laÿ and Laÿ, Louveciennes, mon village, 54. Pickvance took this statement to mean that Wey probably leased the house to Sisley; see Pickvance, “Sisley’s House at Louveciennes,” 239. The situation is not so clear-cut, however. As Jacques Läy explained to the present author, “Aucun document en mairie ne précise le nom du propriétaire de la parcelle de terrain dans laquelle se trouvait la maison où demeurait Sisley” (No document in city hall identifies the owner of the plot of land where Sisley’s house was located). Xavier Läy (on behalf of Jacques Läy) to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, April 19, 2022, NAMA curatorial files.


20. For Renoir’s aversion to snow, see Daulte, Alfred Sisley, 45.


22. Sisley’s inclusion of the cistern—an unusual architectural feature that also appears in the Phillips Family painting of his home—reflects the artist’s keen interest in the mechanisms of water drainage and transport. This interest manifests itself in riverfront scenes like The Lock of Saint-Mammès (2015.13.24), too.


25. Both the 1959 and 2021 catalogues raisonnés of Sisley’s oeuvre maintain le soir in the painting’s title. See François Daulte, Alfred Sisley: Catalogue raisonné de l’œuvre peint (Lausanne: Éditions Durand-Ruel, 1959), no. 168, unpaginated; and Brame and Lorenceau, Alfred Sisley: Catalogue critique des peintures et des pastels, no. 166, p. 94. Previously, the Nelson-Atkins used Rue de la Princesse, Winter as the painting’s title because Durand-Ruel identified the work as La Route de la Princesse en hiver, hameau de Voisins, Louveciennes (Route de la Princesse in Winter, Hamlet of Voisins, Louveciennes) in its stock books.

26. For comparison, see Brame and Lorenceau, Alfred Sisley: Catalogue critique des peintures et des pastels, no. 79, p. 65.

27. Laÿ to Boyle, April 19, 2022.

28. Xavier Laÿ described it as “cet horrible mur avec crêpis” (this hideous plaster wall). Laÿ to Boyle, April 19, 2022.

29. Laÿ to Boyle, April 19, 2022.


Technical Entry

Technical entry forthcoming.

Documentation

Citation

Chicago:


MLA:

Provenance

Purchased from the artist at his sale, Tableaux et aquarelles par Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, A. Renoir, A. Sisley, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, March 24, 1875, no. 63, as Route de la Princesse (le soir), by Galeries Durand-Ruel, Paris, 1875 [1];

John Burke, London, by April 4, 1899;

Purchased from Burke by Galeries Durand-Ruel, Paris, stock no. L 5125, as La Route de la Princesse en hiver, hameau de Voisins, Louveciennes, April 4, 1899—no later than 1901 [2];


Estate of Durand-Ruel, 1928—1949 [3];


Purchased from Mr. and Mrs. d’Alayer de Costemore d’Arc by Sam Salz Inc., New York, 1964—no later than January 12, 1966 [5];


Estate of Barbara Lloyd Michel, 1978—February 2, 1979 [7];

Purchased from the Michel estate by William Beadleston, Inc., New York, as Une Rue à Louveciennes—Le Soir, February 2—April 16, 1979 [8];


NOTES:


Durand-Ruel confirmed this purchase, as per their annotated sales catalogue, but cannot find the Nelson-Atkins painting in their stock books until 1899, when they reacquired the picture from John Burke. See email from Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel et Cie., Paris, to Meghan Gray, NAMA, February 16, 2016, and email from Flavie Durand-Ruel to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, April 6, 2022, NAMA curatorial files.

[2] For the purchase date, see emails from Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel et Cie., Paris, to Nicole Myers, NAMA, January 11, 2016, and to Meghan Gray, NAMA, February 16, 2016, NAMA curatorial files. The precise date of sale to Joseph Durand-Ruel is unknown, but the painting was in his possession by 1901. See email from Flavie Durand-Ruel to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, April 19, 2022, NAMA curatorial files.

[3] After Joseph Durand-Ruel’s death on December 30, 1928, his art collection was retained by his estate and gradually distributed to heirs over the course of two decades. See emails from Flavie Durand-Ruel, Durand-Ruel et Cie., Paris, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, April 20, 2022, NAMA curatorial files.


[5] Sam Salz (1894–1981) sold Rue de la Princesse, Evening to Clifford and Barbara Michel sometime prior to January 12, 1966, when the couple loaned the painting to Knoedler Gallery’s exhibition Impressionist Treasures from Private Collections in New York (January 12–29, 1966). Per Betsy Michel (née Shirley, b. 1942), daughter-in-law of Clifford and Barbara Michel, her in-laws purchased their entire art collection from Salz. Verbal communication from Betsy Michel to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, March 11, 2022; see notes in NAMA curatorial files.


NAMA curatorial files. The memo bears a handwritten note dated February 2, 1979, which states: “Agreement reached to sell the 14 items (12 paintings and drawings and 2 sculptures) as a single lot.” See also emails from Dr. Martin Morad, University of South Carolina, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, March 14, 28, and 29, 2022, NAMA curatorial files, confirming William Beadleston’s purchase of Rue de la Princesse, Evening from the Michel estate.


Related Works

Alfred Sisley, *Sisley's House, rue de la Princesse, Louveciennes*, ca. 1873, oil on canvas, 15 x 21 1/4 in. (38 x 54 cm), The Phillips Family Collection, United States.

Alfred Sisley, *Rue de la Princesse, Louveciennes*, 1873, oil on canvas, 22 x 18 1/2 in. (55.9 x 47 cm), Dallas Museum of Art, The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., bequest of Mrs. Eugene McDermott.


Exhibitions

*Exposition de tableaux de feu Sisley*, Galeries Durand-Ruel, Paris, January 3–February 8, 1908, as *La Route de la Princesse*.

*Cent Ans de Peinture Française: Exposition au Profit du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg*, 18, Rue de la Ville-l’Évêque, Paris, March 15–April 20, 1922, no. 155, as *La route de la Princesse en hiver*.


*Chefs-d’œuvre de l’art français*, Palais de Tokio, Paris, June 25–October 1937, no. 417, as *Route de la Princesse, à Louveciennes, le soir*.

*Landscape in French Art, 1550–1900*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, December 10, 1949–March 5, 1950, no. 256, as *The Route de la Princesse in Winter*.


*New York Collects*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, July 3–September 2, 1968, no. 210, as *La Route de la Princesse à Louveciennes*.

“One Hundred Years of Impressionism”: A Tribute to Durand-Ruel; A Loan Exhibition For the Benefit of the New York University Art Collection, Wildenstein, New York, April 2–May 9, 1970, no. 26, as *Une Rue à Louveciennes*.


References

Catalogue des tableaux et aquarelles par Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, A. Renoir, A. Sisley (Paris: Hôtel Drouot, March 24, 1875), 14, as *Route de la Princesse (le soir)*.


Vittorio Pica, *G’Impressionisti Francesi* (Bergamo, Italy: Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, 1908), 7, 138, (reprod.), as *Una via di sera a Louveciennes*.

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Marie-Amynthe Denis, Jacques Laÿ, and Monique Laÿ, *De Renoir à Vuillard: Marly-le-Roi, Louveciennes, leurs environs . . .*, exh. cat. (Louveciennes: Musée-Promenade de Marly-le-Roi-Louveciennes, 1984), 97, as *Une rue à Louveciennes, le soir*.


MaryAnne Stevens, ed., *Alfred Sisley*, exh. cat. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1992), 37, 118, 264, as *Street in Louveciennes: Evening*.


Rebecca Dimling Cochran and Bobbie Leigh, “100 Top Collectors who have made a difference,” *Art and Antiques* 28, no. 3 (March 2006): 90.


Nancy Staab, “Van Gogh is a Go!” 435: Kansas City’s Magazine (September 2015): 76.


Hampton Stevens, “(Not Actually) 12 Things To Do During The Big 12 Tournament,” Flatland: KCPT’s Digital Magazine (March 9, 2017): http://www.flatlandkc.org/arts-culture/sports/not-actually-12-big-12-tournament/.


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.

