

French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945

The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor



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Odilon Redon, *The Green Vase*, ca. 1900

Artist	Odilon Redon, French, 1840–1916
Title	<i>The Green Vase</i>
Object Date	ca. 1900
Alternate and Variant Titles	<i>Le vase vert</i>
Medium	Oil on canvas
Dimensions (Unframed)	28 3/4 x 21 1/4 in. (73 x 54 cm)
Signature	Signed lower left: ODILON REDON
Credit Line	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Gift of Henry W. and Marion H. Bloch, 2015.13.19

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Catalogue Entry

Citation

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A magnificent essay in color, *The Green Vase* is one of roughly three hundred floral still lifes that Odilon Redon created during his lifetime. Here, Redon presents a two-

handled, cyan-green vase resting on a reflective red-brown surface. Bold, painterly highlights of vivid white indicate the vessel's glazed finish, while distinct touches of darker blue suggest its three-dimensionality. Filling the vase's narrow opening is a profusion of wildflowers, including red poppies, white and yellow daisies, blue asters or cornflowers, pink and yellow roses, and purple lilacs. Sprigs of orange blooms and foliage at the upper left dissolve into the surrounding atmosphere. This vibrant floral arrangement is set against a subtly complex, two-toned background: the top a mottled array of layered light yellows, greens, oranges, and muted reds; the lower portion a mass of multidirectional strokes of pale gray-blue, tinged with lavender. Redon signals that the surface on which the vase rests is reflective by including a mirror image of the vessel, inverted in the foreground. Nevertheless, any semblance of rational space quickly comes into question as the setting dissolves into three flat, abstract bands, creating a fundamental tension between observed nature and ambiguous or imagined space. The sheer number of floral still lifes that Redon produced reflects not only his awareness of their marketability but also his shifting attitudes toward color and its relationship to the observed world.



Fig. 1. Odilon Redon, *Flowers: Poppies and Daisies*, ca. 1867, oil on cardboard, 7 1/2 x 9 1/4 in. (19 x 23.5 cm), Art Institute of Chicago. Bequest of Mrs. Clive Runnells, 1977.605

Redon painted with oils from the beginning of his career in the 1860s, mostly in the form of small-scale still lifes and plein-air landscape studies, often kept privately in his studio. His early floral compositions recall the dark interiors and illusionism of Dutch still life painting. One example is *Flowers: Poppies and Daisies* (Fig. 1), a small composition painted on cardboard featuring lush red poppies with white and yellow daisies—flowers that also appear in *The Green Vase*. Here, Redon presents them as single flowers in a small brown handled cup, dramatically lit and securely positioned on a legible tabletop. Redon's precise application of oils in this instance acts primarily to describe the textures and colors of the objects as they appear before him.

While many of his Impressionist colleagues were exploring the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere in the 1870s and 1880s in luminous easel paintings, Redon produced hundreds of enigmatic charcoal drawings and lithographs—works the artist referred to as his *noirs*.¹ In these decades, Redon maintained that black was uniquely associated with the internal realms of thoughts and dreams, whereas color was external and connected to material reality.² In his *noirs*—including the Nelson-Atkins charcoal and chalk drawing *Salomé with the Head of Saint John the Baptist*, ca. 1880–1885 (81-30/67)—Redon manipulated his black materials to create tonally complex and richly layered surfaces that contribute to his often mysterious motifs, drawn from such diverse sources as mythology, the Bible, contemporary literature, evolutionary science, and his own subjective fantasies.³ By moving beyond the descriptive tendencies

of naturalism and Impressionism, Redon came to conceive of his art as “suggestive art” and believed that through formal ambiguities rendered in black he could engage the imaginative aspects of his viewers’ powers of perception.⁴

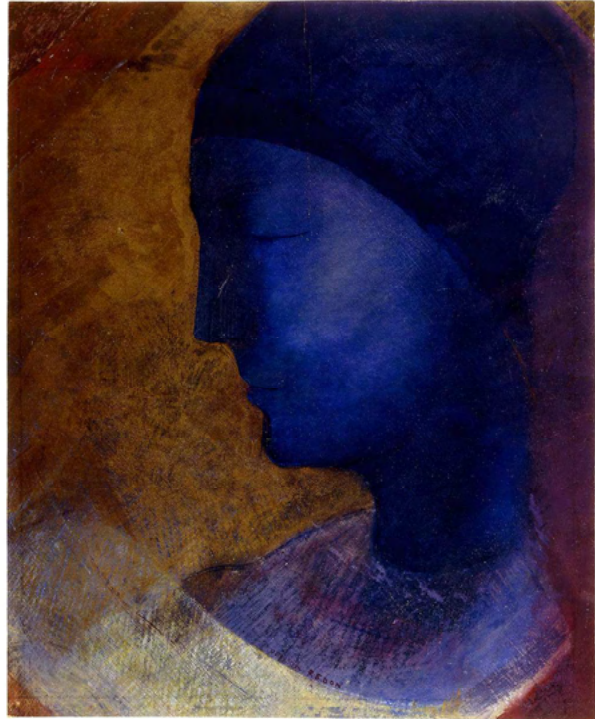


Fig. 2. Odilon Redon, *La Cellule d'Or (The Golden Cell)*, 1892, oil and colored chalks with gold on paper, 11 7/8 x 9 11/16 in. (30.1 x 24.7 cm), British Museum, London, 1949,0411.80

From the late 1880s, however, key encounters with artist colleagues, including Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), pushed Redon toward working more intently, and more publicly, with color.⁵ In Gauguin's art, Redon found an example of color used expressively to harness its allusive and evocative potential, an element that symbolist art critics praised in the early 1890s.⁶ It was around this time that Redon's use of color reached new expressive levels. *The Golden Cell* (Fig. 2), a mixed-media work featuring an ambiguous cobalt blue head in profile, illuminated by a partial aureole, uses non-mimetic color for its affective and spiritual capacity. This exploration of color coincided with the emergence of a younger generation of avant-garde artists, including Maurice Denis (1870–1943), Pierre Bonnard (1868–1941), and Edouard Vuillard (1868–1920), who self-identified as the Nabis and were developing a radical anti-illusionistic, decorative visual

vocabulary. They hailed the older Redon as an influential forerunner to their efforts.⁷

In addition, while some art historians have attributed a further biographical rationale to Redon's shift toward color, arguing that personal circumstances effectively brightened his palette,⁸ others have acknowledged how changing market demands likely instigated this pivot in his artistic practice.⁹ During the 1890s, Redon developed a growing circle of devoted collectors and patrons, many of whom came from the upper echelons of society.¹⁰ With them came not only commissions, in the form of portraits and decorative ensembles, but also a new focus on floral still lifes, a desirable genre for which the demand was high. In the hundreds of still lifes he created in oil and pastel after 1890, Redon featured garden flowers cut and arranged in vases selected from a vast collection (very likely in collaboration with his wife, Camille). A posthumous inventory produced by scholar Agnès Lacau St. Guily details more than eighty vases depicted by Redon; the particular two-handed vessel in the Nelson-Atkins painting appears in at least two other known pictures.¹¹

Redon's rapid production of floral still lifes, along with his tendency to assign vague titles and forgo dating his canvases, makes it challenging to establish firm dates and provenances for works like *The Green Vase*. Thomas Gibson Fine Art provided the present title (*Le vase vert*), a date of circa 1900, and a provenance of "Ancienne Collection, Pompidor, France, thence by descent" when they sold the painting to Marion and Henry Bloch in 1995.¹² Further correspondence with Gibson suggested that "Pompidor" (possibly a Monsieur de Pompidour) lived near Montpellier and received collecting advice from Gustave Fayet (1865–1925), a vintner, artist, and important collector of Redon, Gauguin, Paul Cezanne (1839–1906), and Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890).¹³ Could this be the same Dr. Paul Pompidor who lived in Narbonne and was acquiring paintings by Vincent van Gogh around 1901?¹⁴ Efforts on behalf of Nelson-Atkins researchers and staff to clarify this ownership history have not as yet resulted in further clarity. Complicating matters further, there is neither a painting titled *Le vase vert* nor any reference to "Pompidor" in Redon's account books, which detail his sales.¹⁵

If we nevertheless allow ourselves to proceed under the assumption that the Nelson-Atkins painting was once owned by Pompidor, it is possible that Redon exhibited *The Green Vase* in March 1903 at the Galeries Durand-Ruel as *Vase de fleurs*, a painting listed in the catalogue



Fig. 3. Odilon Redon, *Vision: Vase de fleurs (Vision: Vase of Flowers)*, 1900, oil on canvas, 28 13/16 x 23 11/16 in. (73.2 x 60.1 cm), Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (State of the Netherlands), s0470N1996

as no. 14, belonging to a "M. Pompidor" ("No. 14 C" is inscribed on the verso of the stretcher of *The Green Vase*, possibly referencing this exhibition number).¹⁶ Of the fifteen paintings on view in this show—Redon's third solo exhibition at Durand-Ruel—the majority were still lifes. Among them was *Vision: Vase of Flowers* (Fig. 3), exhibited as no. 2, *Vase de Fleurs*, which belonged to Redon's important Dutch collector Andries Bongers (1861–1936).¹⁷ *Vision: Vase of Flowers* presents a bouquet that is remarkably similar to that of *The Green Vase*: poppies, white daisies, blue cornflowers, stalks of field grass or wheat, and roses. Its tall, colorful vase is one of several owned by Redon that were made by the Russian artist Maria Sergeevna Botkina (1870–1960), known to Redon as Marie Botkine.¹⁸ The strong correspondences between these two works lend credence to the current dating of the Nelson-Atkins composition of around 1900. While the floral arrangements are similar, as is the application of thinly painted pastel colors, in *Vision: Vase of Flowers* Redon's bouquet floats entirely ungrounded in a nebulous haze—as if, like its title suggests, it was glimpsed in the mind's eye—whereas in the Nelson-Atkins composition, as previously mentioned, the vase rests firmly on a highly reflective surface.

In response to the works on display at Durand-Ruel that March, critics commended Redon's ability as a colorist, referencing the "seductions of [his] palette" and the synesthetic "divine joy of his music of colors."¹⁹ While some struggled to reconcile his apparent interest in nature with his tendency toward symbolism,²⁰ others noticed how his still lifes and portraits seemed to exist in a "strange mystery in his vision of the beyond."²¹ This tension between reality and dream, naturalistic description and symbolist suggestion, characterizes many of Redon's floral works—including *The Green Vase*, with both its evidence of careful observation and its spatial ambiguity. Having visited the Durand-Ruel exhibition, Maurice Denis lauded Redon in a review, pinpointing a continuity between Redon's symbolist noirs and his recent color work: "By what miracle, these poppies, these wildflowers—of sap so intense—retain the same strange charm that captivated us in the nocturnal and romantic [charcoals and] lithographs of times past?"²² Indeed, despite its adherence to nature's forms, *The Green Vase* possesses a distinctive, mysterious appeal in its nuanced blurring of the boundaries between reality and dream.



Fig. 4. Odilon Redon, *Flowers in Green Vase*, ca. 1905, oil on canvas, 17 1/4 x 14 7/8 in. (43.8 x 37.8 cm), Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Gift of Mrs. Beram D. Saklatwalla in memory of Beram D. Saklatwalla, 46.21

While Redon had been critical of naturalism's mimetic principles, he nevertheless defended the fundamental role of nature and careful observation in his artistic practice. Writing in 1894 on his creative process, Redon maintained that it was only after copying the "small, particular, fortuitous, or accidental" details of nature that he would become "taken by a torment to create the imaginary."²³ Redon's artistic philosophy owed a great deal to his close intellectual friendship with the plant physiologist Armand Clavaud, whose interest in things that exist "at the edge of the imperceptible world, that life which lies between animal and plant, this flower or this being" was deeply influential for the artist.²⁴ Accordingly, Redon upheld that his flower pictures were concerned with both representation and memory, the real and the imagined.²⁵ Consider *Flowers in Green Vase* (Fig. 4), an inventive still life in which indeterminate floral forms spill out of a dark green vase. At first glance, some of the flowers appear recognizable: a sunflower at the top right and a pink peony at the upper left. Others seem born of the artist's imagination, and—as in the purple bloom in the center or the cascade of off-white buds at the right—have the potential in their indeterminacy to morph in form according to a viewer's interpretation.

Redon preferred a matte surface for his paintings, to achieve an effect similar to that of pastel or charcoal.²⁶ Like many of his avant-garde contemporaries, including Gauguin, Redon avoided varnish.²⁷ Doing so urged viewers to notice his mark-making and materials, and to pay attention to the "action of those secret traces."²⁸ Redon's relatively economical application of paint is evident in the background of *The Green Vase*; despite a thin layer of varnish added at some point after its completion, the painting retains Redon's desired tactile elements.²⁹ His varied brushwork is still visible: dry, wispy strokes in the plumes of grass; swift dabs forming the purple lilac-like clusters; reds painted wet-into-wet in the poppies; and areas of strategic buildup in the yellow roses. Through this intentional materiality, Redon sought not just "color that is seen," but rather "the supreme and so pure beauty of color that is sensed."³⁰ Such color sought to invoke all the senses, not just sight.

Redon's approach to color secured his artistic legacy among key twentieth-century artists, including Henri Matisse (1869–1954), Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), and André Masson (1896–1987). Matisse notably collected pastels by Redon,³¹ and Duchamp claimed that Redon's sense of ambiguity in his color work was his own "point

of departure."³² For Masson, Redon productively drew from nature's mystery, especially in his floral still lifes, using his "botanist's arsenal": "Even his most reassuring bouquets suddenly will tear through their apparent repose, become astral vertigo, spurt and decline—a mystery."³³

Kirsten Marples
June 2022

Notes

1. On Redon's noirs, see, among many others, Barbara Larson, *The Dark Side of Nature: Science, Society, and the Fantastic in the Work of Odilon Redon* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). For a technical study of the charcoal noirs, see Harriet K. Stratis, "A Technical Investigation of Odilon Redon's Pastels and Noirs," *The Book and Paper Group Annual* 14 (1995): 87–103.
2. See his short essay titled "Réflexions sur une exposition des impressionnistes," April 10, 1880, in Odilon Redon, *A soi-même, journal (1867–1915): Notes sur la vie, l'art et les artistes* (Paris: H. Floury, 1922), 155–56. He wrote about his turn to pastel as giving a degree of "extériorité" to his dreams in Odilon Redon, "Confidences d'artiste," *L'Art moderne*, no. 34 (August 25, 1894): 270. Later, he wrote about the color black: "Il est agent de l'esprit bien plus que la plus belle couleur de la palette ou du prisme" (It is the agent of the spirit much more than the splendid color of the palette or of the prism). See Odilon Redon, "De soi-même: quelques notes de Odilon Redon," in *Odilon Redon*, by André Mellerio (Paris: Secrétariat, 1913), 67. Translated in Odilon Redon, *To Myself: Notes on Life, Art, and Artists*, trans. Mira Jacob and Jeanne L. Wasserman (New York: George Braziller, 1986), 103.
3. It has been suggested that this work was the charcoal drawing titled "Salomé" that Redon included in the eighth Impressionist exhibition in 1886. See Douglas W. Druick et al., *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams, 1840–1916*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1994), 453.
4. Redon, "Confidences d'artiste," 269.
5. Margret Stuffmann, "Odilon Redon: Paths to Color," in *Odilon Redon*, ed. Raphaël Bouvier, exh. cat. (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2014), 69. Redon likely met Gauguin around 1886, the year of the eighth and final Impressionist exhibition, to which they both contributed. Over the next few years, they benefited from a reciprocal exchange of letters, art, and aesthetic ideas.
6. See, for example: Albert Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin," *Mercure de France*, no. 15 (March 1891): 155–65.
7. The mutual influence between Redon and the Nabis is discussed in Ursula Perucchi-Petri, "'Jeunes Peintres, Mes Amis': Odilon Redon and the Nabis," in *Odilon Redon: As in a Dream*, ed. Margret Stuffmann and Max Hollein, exh. cat. (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 103–11.
8. Druick and Zegers suggest that, in part, Redon's embrace of color was due to his "increased success, marriage, and fatherhood," causing him to ultimately become more "inclusive." Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, "In the Public Eye," in Druick et al., *Odilon Redon*, 173.
9. Redon wrote to Andries Bonger in January 1900 about his increased output of pastels, noting "people want them, and they take them from me as soon as they are made." Quoted in Kevin Sharp, "Redon and the Marketplace after 1900," in Druick et al., *Odilon Redon*, 258.
10. On Redon's patrons and collectors, see, among others, Gloria Groom, "The Late Work," in Druick et al., *Odilon Redon*, 305–52.
11. See the "Inventaire des formes des vases" and catalogue nos. 1440–42 in Alec Wildenstein and Agnès Lacau St. Guily, *Odilon Redon: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, vol. 3, *Fleurs et paysages* (Paris: Wildenstein Institute, 1996), 8–10, 62, 68–69. The other two paintings remain in private collections.
12. Thomas H. Gibson to Henry Bloch, July 19, 1995, NAMA curatorial files.
13. Aphrodite O'Sullivan, assistant to Thomas H. Gibson, to Nicole Myers, April 27, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.
14. This is purely speculative. See the provenance for no. F 663 and F 664 in J.-B. de la Faille, *The Works of Vincent van Gogh: His Paintings and Drawings*, rev. ed. (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff International, 1970), 261–62, 637. See also the provenance for *Champs*

- près des Alpilles* (F 663) when it sold at Christie's, May 11, 2022, <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-6368787>; and Douglas Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection: A Catalogue and Introduction* (London: Athlone Press, 1954), 69n1.
15. Odilon Redon, "Livre de raison," published as a CD-ROM in Rodolphe Rapetti, *Odilon Redon: Prince du Rêve, 1840–1916*, exh. cat. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2011).
 16. *Pastels et peintures d'Odilon Redon*, exh. cat. (Paris: Galeries Durand-Ruel, 1903), unpaginated. See also Sophie Pietri to Brigid Boyle, January 13, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.
 17. On this painting, see catalogue no. 28 in Fleur Roos Rosa de Carvalho, *Odilon Redon and Andries Bonger: 36 Works from the Van Gogh Museum Collection* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2022), 136–43, online edition.
 18. Rosa de Carvalho, *Odilon Redon and Andries Bonger*, 136–37. Redon listed this painting in his account book in June 1901 as "*Fleurs, dans un vase, peinture (toile 20). Vase de Marie Botkine.*" See Redon, "Livre de raison."
 19. For "les séductions d'une palette", see Roger Marx, "Petites expositions: Exposition Odilon Redon," *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* (March 21, 1903): 95. For "la joie divine de ses musiques de couleurs", see Charles Morice, "Revue du mois: Pastels et peintures de M. Odilon Redon," *Mercure de France* 4 (April 1903): 239. All translations are by Kirsten Marples, unless otherwise noted.
 20. Renée-Marc Ferry, "Beaux-Arts: Les petites expositions.—Chez Durand-Ruel: M. Odilon-Redon," *La Liberté*, March 21, 1903. "Les peintures, qui représentent pour la plupart des fleurs ou des fruits et n'ont rien de symbolique . . ." (The paintings, which represent for the most part flowers or fruits and contain nothing symbolic . . .).
 21. G. M., *Le Journal des Artistes*, March 11, 1903. ". . . un mystère étrange dans sa vision de l'au-delà."
 22. Maurice Denis, "Œuvres récentes d'Odilon Redon," *L'Occident* (April 1903): 256. "Par quel miracle ces coquelicots, ces fleurs des champs, de sève si intense conservent-ils tout de même le charme étrange qui nous passionnait dans les nocturnes et romantiques lithographies d'autrefois?"
 23. Redon, "Confidences d'artiste," 269. "J'ai toujours éprouvé la nécessité de copier la nature en des objets menus, particuliers, fortuits ou accidentels. C'est seulement après un effort de volonté pour représenter minutieusement un brin d'herbe, une pierre, une branche . . . que je suis pris comme d'un tourment de créer de l'imaginaire" (I have always felt the need to copy nature in its small, particular, fortuitous, or accidental objects. It is only after a determined effort to meticulously represent a blade of grass, a stone, a branch, . . . that I am taken by a torment to create the imaginary).
 24. Redon, *A soi-même*, 19. "Il cherchait . . . sur les confins du monde imperceptible, cette vie intermédiaire entre l'animalité et la plante, cette fleur ou cet être." Translated in Redon, *To Myself*, 14. On Clavaud and Redon, see Barbara Larson, "From Botany to Belief: Odilon Redon and Armand Clavaud," in Stuffmann and Hollein, eds., *Odilon Redon*, 95–101.
 25. Redon, *A soi-même*, 115. "Fleurs venues au confluent de deux rivages, celui de la représentation, celui du souvenir" (Flowers at the confluence of two river banks, that of representation and that of memory). Translated in Redon, *To Myself*, 99.
 26. Harriet K. Stratis, "Beneath the Surface: Redon's Methods and Materials," in Druick et al., *Odilon Redon*, 376–77.
 27. Maryanne Stevens, "Redon's Artistic and Critical Position," in Druick et al., *Odilon Redon*, 287.
 28. Redon, "De soi-même," 70. Translated in Redon, *To Myself*, 107. ". . . l'action de ces linéaments secrets . . ."
 29. See examination report by Scott Heffley, May 6, 2015, NAMA curatorial files. He notes that the painting "almost looks unvarnished."
 30. Redon, *A soi-même*, 169, from an essay on Delacroix, dated 1878: "Tâchons au moins de donner à la couleur *vue* la beauté suprême et si pure de la couleur *sentie*; tout l'art moderne est là" (Let us at least try to give to color that is *seen*,

the supreme and so pure beauty of color that is sensed: all of modern art is there).

31. See Marie-Pierre Salé, "Redon et ses collectionneurs," in Rapetti, *Odilon Redon*, 51; Raphaël Bouvier, "Odilon Redon and the Art of the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to the Exhibition" in Bouvier, ed., *Odilon Redon*, 16.
32. Marcel Duchamp to Magda and Walter Pach, June 24, 1927, quoted in Bouvier, "Odilon Redon and the Art of the Twentieth Century," 20.
33. André Masson, "Redon: Mystic with a Method," *Art News* 55, no. 9 (January 1957): 61.

Technical Entry

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Fig. 5. Detail of the left and right tacking margins, displaying the original picture plane past the turnover edges, *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)

The Green Vase was executed on a finely woven plain-weave canvas, affixed to a five-member stretcher.¹ The dimensions of the canvas were altered at an unknown date, reducing the original width.² The original left turnover edge is retained on the tacking margin, narrowing the image on this side by 1 centimeter. On the right side, 2 centimeters of the original picture plane are present on the current tacking margin edge, and there is no sign of the original turnover edge. (Fig. 5). If one assumes that little to no original paint was cropped from the right side of the canvas, based on the central placement of the still-life, the original dimensions appear to correspond to the LeFranc & Cie no. 20 *portrait* standard-format support (73 x 59.6 centimeters).³ On the reverse of the canvas, there is a black stamp marking "20," further indicating the originally intended vertical orientation (Fig. 6).⁴



Fig. 6. Canvas reverse, *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)

The canvas was commercially prepared with a thin, opaque, white ground layer, which extends to the edges of the tacking margins.^{5,6} While the ground layer does not play a major compositional role in this painting, small skips in the paint application allow the ground layer to remain visible throughout, most noticeably within the lower left side of the table and within brushwork in the bouquet (Fig. 7).

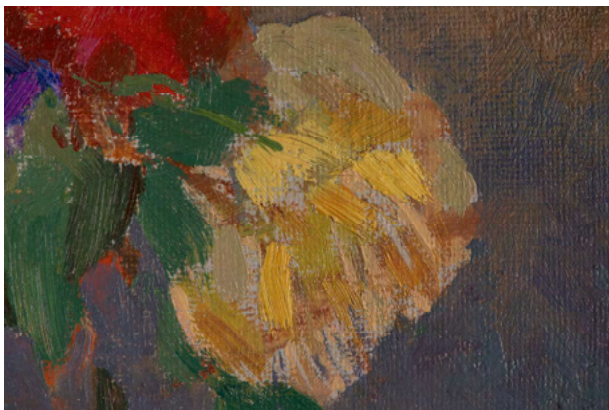


Fig. 7. Detail of exposed ground within the flowers, *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)

Above the white ground layer, the composition was laid in with an underpainting comprised of varying shades of orange and yellow. Loosely brushed across the canvas, the underpainting transitions from pale yellows in the top half of the painting to deeper oranges moving downward. Because Redon favored opaque paints,⁷ it is unclear just how extensive this underpainting is throughout the background; however, some of the underpainting does extend beneath the flowers, discernible through the open brushwork of the bouquet (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Detail of underpainting extending beneath a flower (blue arrow) in comparison to the exposed ground in the same flower (yellow arrow), *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)

same warm tones to loosely define the flowers, and more specifically, to place the vase. Peeking between the paint of the background and the handles of the vase, the painted sketch remains visible (Fig. 9). In parts of the bouquet, it appears that Redon also used these tones to lay in the general placement of the flowers, such as in the blooms to the right, where a number of loosely painted strokes of translucent warm red were applied before the purple petals were added (Fig. 10). As with the background's underpainting, it is unclear how comprehensive this painted sketch is, as the overlapping paint strokes may conceal much of the preliminary layers of the bouquet.



Fig. 9. Detail of the reddish-orange underpainting of the vase, *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)

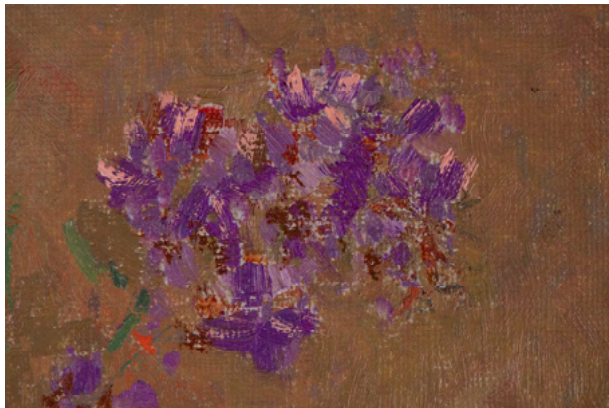


Fig. 10. Detail of underpainting within the right-side purple flowers, *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)

The composition was further developed with additions of thin, primarily opaque paint, with little impasto. Once the loose background underpainting and the placement of the vase were established, Redon blocked in much of the background with short, multidirectional brushwork, leaving reserves for the flowers. The tabletop was likely

completed during this stage, first blocked in with a brick red color. The same muted blue from the background was then layered on top of the table, dryly brushed in horizontal and vertical strokes (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Detail of the pale blue, dry brushwork over the tabletop, *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)



Fig. 12. Detail of wet-over-wet paint application around flower perimeter (blue arrow), *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)

Once the majority of the background was in place, the vase and flowers were completed, with overlapping layers of short brushstrokes creating the illusion of volume within the center of the bouquet. Redon returned to the background, alternating between refining the flower perimeters with the background and adding petals, often resulting in wet-over-wet paint application (Fig. 12). At the top left of the bouquet, it appears that the small red flowers were initially placed high on the canvas, but were later brushed into the background. These were added again, though slightly lower, with small dabs of paint forming the blossoms. As a final step, Redon added the thin stems and leaves to both the right and left sides, with the paint skipping over the already dried background (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Detail of the red flowers in the top left and a possible related artist change (blue arrow), along with wet-over-dry paint application of the stems, *The Green Vase* (ca. 1900)

The painting is in good condition. It has had no history of conservation treatment at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art; however, the adjusted dimensions signal that the painting has been fully treated in its past. The canvas is somewhat slack. The varnish, estimated to be a synthetic resin, does not appear to be significantly discolored. There is little retouching visible when the painting is examined with ultraviolet radiation.

Diana M. Jaskierny
June 2022

Notes

1. The stretcher is non-original, and a second set of visible tack holes on the stretcher indicates that it was previously used.
2. In its current state, the painting is close in size to a no. 20 *paysage* standard-format canvas (73 x 56.7 centimeters), rotated ninety degrees. The vertical dimension has retained its original size of 73 centimeters, consistent with all no. 20 standard-formats.
3. The *portrait* format is the widest of the standard-formats, and therefore the original picture plane was likely not greatly cropped. David Bomford, Jo Kirby, John Leighton, and Ashok Roy, *Art in the Making: Impressionism* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 45.
4. Although the stretcher crossbar does have a stamp for the supplier Durand, because this stretcher is not original to *The Green Vase*, it is unlikely that this stamp relates to this painting.

5. While Redon frequently primed his canvases himself for his symbolist paintings, his flower still lifes were commonly painted on commercially prepared canvases. René Boitelle, Klaas Jan van den Berg, and Eva Goetz, "A Technical Examination of Odilon Redon's Paintings from the Bonger Collection, Van Gogh Museum," *ArtMatters: Netherlands Technical Studies in Art 3*, ed. Erma Hermens (2005): 71.
6. The ground layer is visible along the top, bottom, and left tacking margins, where the original tacking margins remain extant.
7. Boitelle, van den Berg, and Goetz, "A Technical Examination of Odilon Redon's Paintings from the Bonger Collection, Van Gogh Museum," 71.

Documentation

Citation

Chicago:

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Provenance

Monsieur de Pompidor, near Montpellier, probably by March 12, 1903 [1];

By descent to his daughter, near Montpellier [2];

Inherited by an anonymous private collector, near Montpellier and near Lausanne, by 1993 [3];

Purchased from the latter through Julian Barran Ltd, Bath, England, by Thomas Gibson Fine Art Ltd., London, November 3, 1993–July 18, 1995 [4];

Purchased from Thomas Gibson Fine Art Ltd. by Marion (née Helzberg, 1931–2013) and Henry (1922–2019) Bloch, Shawnee Mission, KS, July 18, 1995–June 15, 2015;

Their gift to The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 2015.

Notes

[1] A collector identified as “M. Pompidor” lent a painting titled *Vase de fleurs* to the exhibition *Pastels et peintures d’Odilon Redon*, Galeries Durand-Ruel, Paris, March 12–26, 1903, no. 14. The loaned work was likely *The Green Vase*; see email from Sophie Pietri, Wildenstein-Plattner Institute, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, January 13, 2021, NAMA curatorial files. Little is known about Monsieur de Pompidor, but he is thought to have solicited advice from French painter Gustave Fayet (1865–1925) when building his collection; see email from Aphrodite O’Sullivan, Thomas Gibson Fine Art Ltd, to Nicole Myers, NAMA, April 27, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.

M. Pompidor may have been Dr. Louis-Paul-Léon-Michel Pompidor (1862–1956), who collected paintings by Vincent van Gogh and other avant-garde artists in the early 1900s. He resided in Narbonne, France, sixty miles from Montpellier. We thank Kirsten Marples for her provenance research on this constituent.

[2] If Dr. Louis-Paul-Léon-Michel Pompidor was indeed the owner of the *The Green Vase*, his daughter was Marie-Louise-Suzanne Pompidor (1895–1975), also of Narbonne, likely inherited the painting on May 6, 1956. We thank Cécilia Gazel, Direction Archives, Ville de Narbonne, for her assistance with genealogical research.

[3] According to British appraiser and dealer Julian Barran, “the collector inherited the work from the late daughter of de Pompidor and moved with the collection after the Second World War to Switzerland.” This information was relayed secondhand in an email from Aphrodite O’Sullivan, Thomas Gibson Fine Art Ltd, to Nicole Myers, NAMA, April 28, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.

Barran’s account conflicts with the Redon catalogue raisonné, which claims that *The Green Vase* belonged to an anonymous collector in Sutherland, Scotland, from circa 1920 to 1995; see Alec Wildenstein and Agnès Lacau St. Guily, *Odilon Redon: Catalogue raisonné de l’œuvre peint et dessiné*, vol. 3, *Fleurs et paysages* (Paris: Wildenstein Institute, 1996), no. 1440, p. 69. This latter provenance is likely erroneous, however. See emails from Aphrodite O’Sullivan, Thomas Gibson Fine Art Ltd,

to Nicole Myers, NAMA, April 27 and 28, 2015; and email from Sophie Pietri, Wildenstein-Plattner Institute, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, January 13, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

[4] For dates of ownership, see email from Thomas Gibson, Thomas Gibson Fine Art Ltd, to Nicole Myers, NAMA, April 27, 2015, NAMA curatorial files. Barran’s client consigned *The Green Vase* to him shortly before he facilitated the sale to Gibson; see email from Julian Barran, Julian Barran Ltd, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, February 3, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

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