

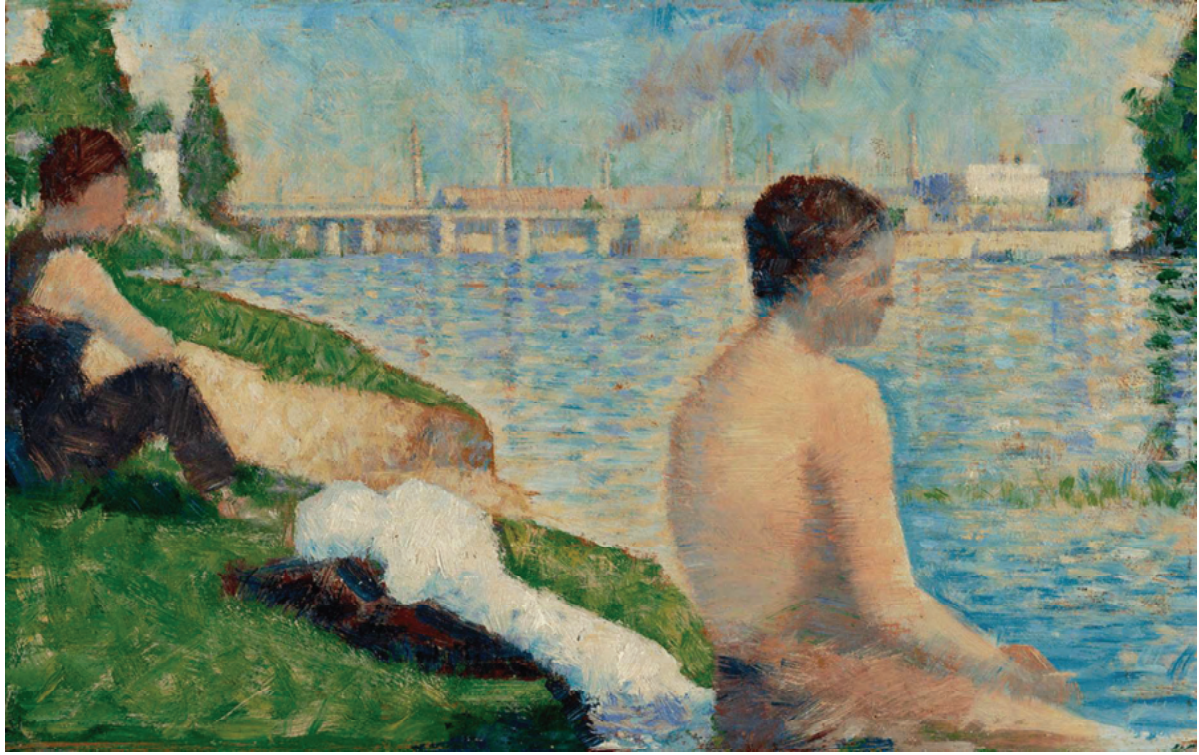
# French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945

The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor



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## Georges Seurat, *Study for “Bathers at Asnières,”* 1883

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<b>Artist</b>	Georges Seurat, French, 1859–1891
<b>Title</b>	<i>Study for “Bathers at Asnières”</i>
<b>Object Date</b>	1883
<b>Alternate and Variant Titles</b>	<i>Study for “A Bathing Place, Asnières”</i> ; <i>Study for “La Baignade”</i> ; <i>Une Baignade, Asnières</i>
<b>Medium</b>	Oil on panel
<b>Dimensions (Unframed)</b>	6 7/8 x 10 3/8 in. (17.5 x 26.4 cm)
<b>Credit Line</b>	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 33-15/3

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### Catalogue Entry

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This small waterside scene carries an impact totally at odds with its modest size. Within its six-by-ten-inch surface is evidence of the issues and methods pursued by the young Georges Seurat at the debut of his career. The Nelson-Atkins sketch is one of thirteen oil panels

and ten Conté crayon drawings made in preparation for the artist’s first major work, *Bathers at Asnières* (Fig. 1), a monumental canvas that he hoped to exhibit at the 1884 Salon in Paris. It reflects the artist’s background and points to the remarkable and enigmatic path that lay ahead.



Fig. 1. Georges Seurat, *Bathers at Asnières*, 1883–1884, oil on canvas, 79 x 118 in. (201 x 300 cm), National Gallery, London, NG3908

Carefully plotting the development of a composition was not a new exercise for the classically trained Seurat, who

began the study of art in his neighborhood school in 1876 before enrolling at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris under the tutelage of academic painter Henri Lehmann (1814–1882) from 1878 to 1879. There he would have learned to follow the academic system of building a work by progressing gradually from drawings to increasingly developed oils. For *Bathers at Asnières*, however, Seurat utilized drawings and sketches with variety, experimenting with color, tone, or composition rather than adhering to a specific sequence.

While some of the preparatory works were executed in Seurat's Paris studio,<sup>1</sup> others were created more spontaneously *sur le motif*, or directly in front of the subject. That motif, Asnières, was a suburb on the northwestern outskirts of Paris, bordering the Seine River. In 1883, Asnières was a growing industrial area populated by an intriguing mix of the *petits bourgeois* (often shopkeepers and clerks), artisans, and members of the working class. Seurat's choice of locale links him to a new generation of painters drawn to the signs of industry and technology that marked their modern era. Similarly, Seurat's characters were not saints and superheroes, or the bourgeoisie depicted by most Impressionists, but working-class men and boys relaxing on the riverbank, at a less-than-fashionable spot on the Seine. A view recorded by an unknown photographer shows a similar scene of men and boys splashing along the shore at Ivry, the port at Anglais (Fig. 2). Other progressive painters who would join Seurat in the remarkable artistic energy of the later 1880s—Post-Impressionists such as Paul Signac (1863–1935), Émile Bernard (1868–1941), and Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890)—also painted in this diverse, bustling suburb.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 2. Photographer unknown, *Ivry, the Port at Anglais*, ca. 1900–1920, photograph, published in Françoise Cachin and Robert Herbert, *Seurat*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 150

Analyzing and comparing Seurat's preparatory works for *Bathers at Asnières* is an intriguing exercise, offering both insight and questions about their evolution. Each oil sketch was executed on a small, lightweight wood panel, available commercially and easily portable.<sup>3</sup> In the Nelson-Atkins piece, two figures sit on the riverbank, looking toward the water, with the factories of the suburb of Clichy in the background. Between them are the swimmer's discarded clothes, and adjacent to the smaller figure is a sandy gully, a specific spot in Asnières where horses and dogs were brought to be washed.

Apparent even in the sketch is the balance that prevails in the clearly delineated composition and the solidity of its figures. This sense of order and balance suggests the fundamental equilibrium of the classical tradition at the heart of Seurat's training. The intense young artist seems to have had an instinct for steadiness and gravitas—even when depicting a casual vignette of leisure.

The figures, setting, and brushwork of the Nelson-Atkins picture indicate that it is one of the later preparatory sketches, and most of its facets were retained in the final work.<sup>4</sup> The seated boy who dominates the finished painting is more defined here than elsewhere, and the still-life of discarded clothing has taken shape. Seurat also added detail to the frieze of smokestacks, factories, and railway bridge supports that close the vista.

The sketch teems with the vigorous brushwork that Seurat explored in the early 1880s, not only in the Asnières panels but also in small agrarian scenes inspired by the Barbizon School. He applied a variety of

broken, hashed strokes at different angles but had not yet devised the dotted, pointillist facture of his later works. Treatment of the larger bather demonstrates the range of Seurat's strokes: fine blue striations shade the face, while broad strokes cross his clothing, chasing the reflections of the brightly lit scene.

Seurat was fully aware of the bright colors used by his Impressionist elders, but more influential for the young artist were the writings on color relationships by aesthete Charles Blanc (1813–1882), which Seurat read as a student, and chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul (1786–1889).<sup>5</sup> Seurat also admired the example of Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) and took notes on how he often separated large areas of complementary color, such as red and green, to make his compositions more vibrant. Demonstrating his growing interest in color perception, Seurat studied how the separation of colors affects their interactions, creating more brilliant effects.<sup>6</sup>

In the Nelson-Atkins study, short, juxtaposed ribbons of blue and rose create the glistening water of the river. The mass of white clothing on the riverbank mirrors Seurat's attention to color behavior: blue strokes indicate the presence of shadows, while flecks of rose are the reflections cast by the attire of the adjacent bather. Seurat defines the form of the boy's right arm by clustering blue hues of the water along the warm edge of his skin (Fig. 3), demonstrating his understanding of the law of irradiation, which holds that when two adjacent areas of unequal tones are juxtaposed, the differences will appear the most pronounced at the edge where they meet. This is one of several principles regarding contrasting color and tone that Seurat went on to develop fully in his mature work.

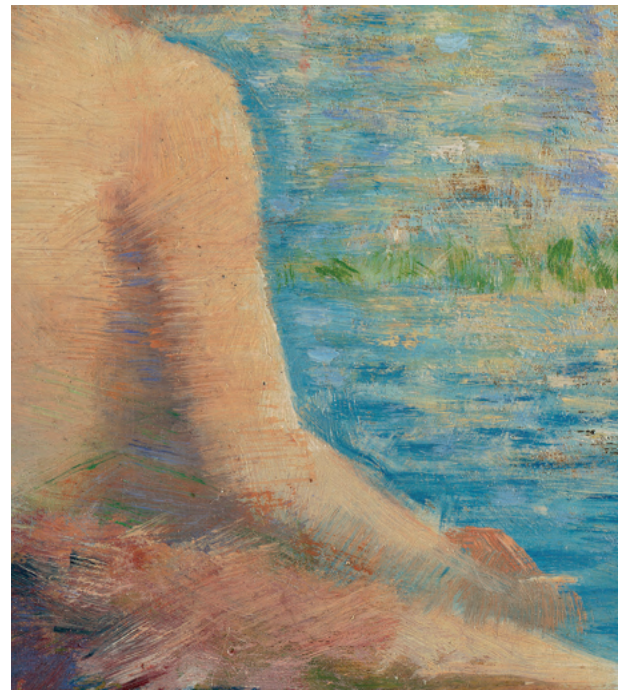


Fig. 3. Georges Seurat, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (detail), 1883

Familiarity with Seurat's methods and his choice of setting, however, does not advance our understanding of the picture's emotional quotient. Suggested in the individual sketches and confirmed by the final composition is the image's curious lack of narrative. In *Bathers at Asnières*, there is no rapport, no sign of community or connection among the stolid figures of Seurat's riverside group. The viewer senses a strong statement but is unable to specify what its meaning might be. This mysterious lack of sociability became a perplexing hallmark of Seurat's oeuvre, growing ever more enigmatic in the artist's observant but detached scenes of public life.

A few months after making the Nelson-Atkins sketch, Seurat submitted the finished work, *Bathers at Asnières*, to the jury of the 1884 Paris Salon. Inextricably linked to the government-sponsored *École des Beaux-Arts*, the Salon was still largely loyal to more traditional painting. While a few commercial galleries and alternative exhibition opportunities had begun to appear in Paris, the Salon remained the preeminent exhibition venue, critical to future sales and commissions, and strategic to unknown artists seeking a reputation.

The jury for the Salon of 1884 rejected Seurat's submission. There are any number of plausible reasons why this beautiful, inscrutable, light-filled canvas was

refused, but the large number of spurned works that year led to the creation of an alternative exhibition, organized independently by the artists with the support of Paris's Republican government. Seurat sent his picture to this juryless venture, called the Groupe des Artistes Indépendants (later the Société des Artistes Indépendants), where he met several of the painters who became his colleagues in the late nineteenth century's emergence of the avant-garde.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 4. Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes, *Pleasant Land (Doux Pays)*, 1881–1882, oil on canvas, 90 1/2 x 170 in. (230 x 430 cm), Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne, 1087. Photo: René-Gabriel Ojéda. Photo Credit: © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

The Indépendants exhibition did provide a degree of exposure for Seurat's ambitious effort.<sup>8</sup> Some critics saw in it the mark of influential muralist Pierre-Cécile Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898), renowned for idealized scenes of serene balance and nobility. His paintings, such as *Pleasant Land* (Fig. 4), where landscapes of antiquity are peopled by figures in classical garb, were certainly known to Seurat. While the classical tradition was an indelible element of Seurat's approach, evident in the structure and poses of *Bathers at Asnières*, his commitment to modern life and fresh experiments with color indicate that he was hardly Puvis's acolyte. Naturally, other observers of the exhibition commented on the canvas's bright colors and emphasis on light, as well as its unusual subject. The range of nineteenth-century responses prefigured the reactions that still puzzle today's viewers, contemplating its intriguing amalgam of tradition and innovation.

After 1884, the Nelson-Atkins panel was not relegated to Seurat's studio. In 1886, it was one of several works exhibited in New York by Impressionist dealer Paul Durand-Ruel (1831–1922).<sup>9</sup> The exhibition, titled *Works in Oil and Pastel by the Impressionists of Paris*, included the piece as one of twelve small sketches assembled in one

frame.<sup>10</sup> That Seurat regarded the study as worthy of exhibition is a ringing endorsement of its significance. The following spring he showed the panel at the annual Société des Artistes Indépendants exhibition in Paris.<sup>11</sup> In 1892, it was included in another important venue for Seurat's work, the annual exhibition in Brussels of the progressive artists' group, Les XX (The Twenty)—this time as part of a posthumous presentation in his memory.<sup>12</sup> The dramatic change in the nature of that brief exhibition history underscores the shock of the young artist's sudden death in March 1891, at the age of thirty-one.<sup>13</sup>

Seurat's small panel changed hands numerous times between the Les XX exhibition in Brussels and its acquisition by the Nelson-Atkins. It was included in a 1918 exhibition that was among the first to showcase French modernism in Norway,<sup>14</sup> where it was purchased by Norwegian shipping magnate Jørgen Breder Stang (1874–1950), who also owned Paul Gauguin's (1848–1903) *Where Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897–1898; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). When Stang started selling his collection in the late 1920s due to an economic downturn, there was no shortage of European dealers eager to acquire his paintings. The study was ultimately purchased by dealer César Mange de Hauke (1900–1965) and Alex Reid & Lefèvre. In a letter to a colleague, De Hauke wrote glowingly of this sketch and another by Seurat, saying: "There are no finer panels than these; they come from an excellent collection."<sup>15</sup>

The Nelson-Atkins study, a shrewd acquisition by the newly opened museum in 1933, is a telling work in its own right and a vital contributor to Seurat's first major undertaking. The Asnières ensemble introduces us to Seurat's dedication to artistic virtuosity and close observation, classical precedent and modern public life. At the upper right edge of the Nelson-Atkins panel is a passage of green strokes casting their reflection in the river. It is in fact the wooded tip of La Grande Jatte, a popular island destination in the Seine and a harbinger of the young artist's next challenge.<sup>16</sup>

Ellen W. Lee  
August 2022

## Notes

1. The ten preparatory drawings for this composition were likely made from models in the studio and certainly interconnect with the oil sketches but are not addressed in this essay.

2. For this and so many of the wide-ranging observations about this body of work, I am indebted to the publication produced by the National Gallery, London: John Leighton and Richard Thomson, *Seurat and the Bathers*, exh. cat. (London: National Gallery Publications, 1997).
3. The long-held belief that Seurat made his sketches on discarded cigar box lids has been thoroughly discounted. In Leighton and Thomson, *Seurat and the Bathers*, 29–30, the authors indicate that Seurat’s mahogany or walnut panels are heavier than the cedar used for cigar boxes, and that it is unlikely the artist would have toyed with removing paper labels when he consistently purchased high-quality materials. Small panels were readily available through artists’ suppliers. See also the accompanying technical entry by Diana M. Jaskierny.
4. Leighton and Thomson, *Seurat and the Bathers*, 61.
5. Michel Chevreul, *De la Loi du Contraste Simultané des Couleurs et de l'Assortiment des Objets Colorés* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Librairie Gauthier-Villars et Fils, 1839); and Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des Arts du Dessin, Architecture, Sculpture, Peinture* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1867).
6. For what remains the most lucid explanation of the precepts of color behavior and divided brushwork, see Robert L. Herbert, *Neo-Impressionism*, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art, 1968).
7. Artists participating in this spontaneous exhibition soon reorganized to create the highly important Société des Artistes Indépendants, which Seurat supported throughout the rest of his life.
8. For a thorough exploration of the critical responses to *Bathers at Asnières*, see “1884: Rejection and Response,” in Leighton and Thompson, *Seurat and the Bathers*, 122–25.
9. Durand-Ruel, the Parisian dealer who was the first to support the Impressionists, organized an exhibition for the New York market, including the Nelson-Atkins sketch, entitled *Works in Oil and Pastel by the Impressionists of Paris*, The American Art Galleries, New York, April 10–28, 1886; National Academy of Design, New York, opened May 25, 1886, no. 133, p. 25. This exhibition was not the first time that Seurat had allowed his studies to be displayed. *Landscape, Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884; private collection), an oil version of the site without any figures, though admittedly far more finished than the Asnières sketch, was shown at the Société des Artistes Indépendants in December 1884, no. 241 (no catalogue has been located).
10. It is possible that the narrow wood strips (fillets) currently on each side of the Nelson-Atkins sketch come from its mounting in the twelve-piece ensemble.
11. *Société des Artistes Indépendants: 3e exposition*, Pavillon de la Ville de Paris, Paris, March 26–May 3, 1887, no. 447, p. 23.
12. *Neuvième exposition annuelle des XX*, Musée d’Art Moderne, Brussels, February 6–March 6, 1892, no. 1, unpaginated.
13. After assisting with the installation of the annual exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants, Seurat fell ill on March 26, 1891. The malady, probably a form of infectious diphtheria, worsened quickly, and the artist died at his mother’s home on March 29, 1891.
14. *Den franske utstilling I Kunstnerforbundet*, Kunstnerforbundet, Kristiania (Oslo), January 19–February 18, 1918, no. 87.
15. De Hauke to James St. Laurence O’Toole, January 23, 1929, Jacques Seligmann & Co. Records, 1904–1978, bulk 1913–1974, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; series 9: De Hauke & Co., Inc., Records, 1925–1949, undated; series 9.1.5: Inter-Office Correspondence, 1926–1930; box 403, folder 1, Paris–New York, New York–Paris, 1929 January–September.
16. Shortly after the completion of the Asnières canvas, Seurat embarked on the ambitious process of developing his next major work, *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884–1886; Art Institute of Chicago).

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#### Technical Entry

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##### Citation

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**MLA:**

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Executed on a small wooden panel, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* was quickly painted with varied and animated brushwork. The measurements of the single panel, 15.7 x 24.9 centimeters, are consistent with those of other Seurat panels, including the other numerous studies for *Bathers at Asnières*.<sup>1</sup> Although his panel sizes varied slightly,<sup>2</sup> Seurat frequently used this common size for painting studies throughout his career, indicating that he may have purchased a series of boards from an artist supplier.<sup>3,4</sup>

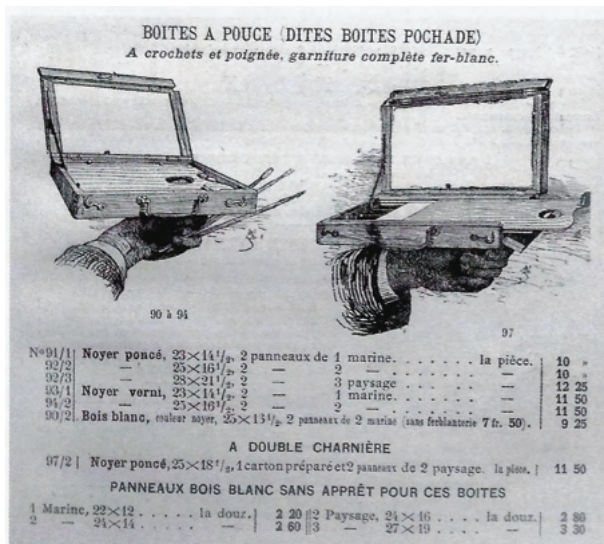


Fig. 5. Bourgeois Ainé catalogue image of *boîtes à pouce*, 1896, reproduced in Anthea Callen, *The Work of Art*, 252

While Seurat completed his large paintings, such as *Bathers at Asnières*, in his studio, his studies were painted en plein air while using a *boîte à pouce*, or thumbnail paintbox, in which the small panels would slide in and could be easily held as the artist worked (Fig. 5).<sup>5</sup>

Equidistant marks associated with a paintbox are visible on the left, right, and bottom edges of the Nelson-Atkins panel, approximately 3 to 4 millimeters from the edge. Along the left and right edges, indentations in the paint layer indicate the panel was pressed in some manner before the paint had fully dried (Fig. 6).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the paint along the bottom edge appears to have been swiped or smeared before drying, which could be the result of the panel being slid into a paintbox holder.



Fig. 6. Photomicrograph with raking light of an indentation in the paint on the right edge of *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883), possibly from use of a *boîte à pouce*, or thumbnail paint box



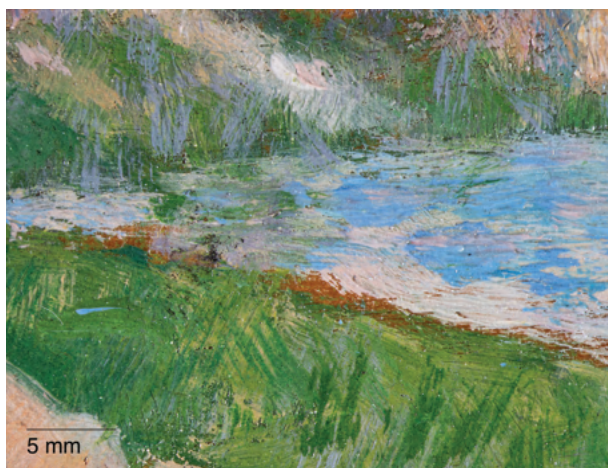


Fig. 7. Photomicrograph of *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883), illustrating the warm brown exposed panel wood

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There is no ground layer present on this panel, and the warm brown color of the wood is visible throughout the composition, most noticeably around and between compositional elements, such as between the water and the riverbank (Fig. 7). Small glimpses of the panel are found throughout the painting, including within some elements such as the distant bridge, indicating that there was limited blocking-in before the composition was completed. The absence of a ground layer was not uncommon for Seurat on his study paintings.<sup>7</sup> While some of his panels were purchased with the wood grain filled to smooth the surface,<sup>8</sup> in the case of *Study for "Bathers at Asnières,"* skips in the paint emphasize the natural fissures and horizontal grain of the unprimed wooden support (Fig. 8).

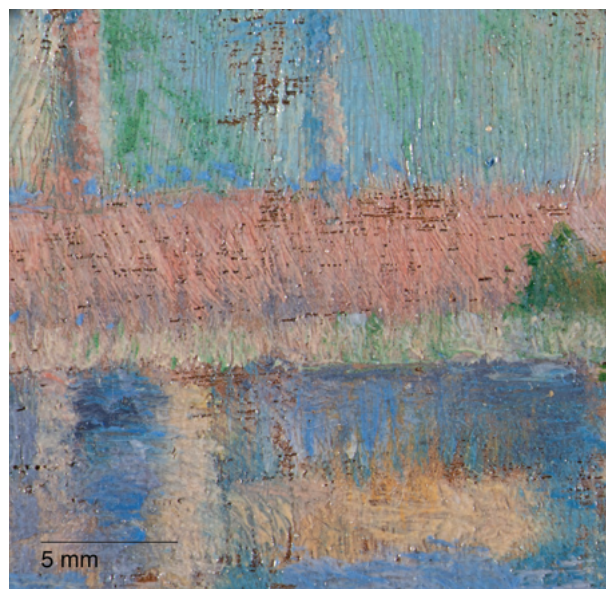


Fig. 8. Photomicrograph of paint skips over panel fissures in *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883)

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No underdrawing was identified through infrared reflectography (IRR) or examination with a microscope. While it is possible that Seurat used a non-carbon material to complete an underdrawing, it is unlikely that one is present, as no drawing is visible over the exposed panel in the gaps of paint between compositional elements.<sup>9</sup> Instead, it appears that Seurat blocked in the major components of the composition to establish the image.<sup>10</sup> In the central portion of water, between the two figures, a white lower layer was initially laid in, possibly emphasizing the texture found within this region. This layer was not uniformly applied within the water, varying in thickness and allowing the wooden board to remain visible in some instances (Fig. 9).<sup>11</sup> In the figure on the left, there appears to be a pale yellow underlayer, while in the figure on the right, a pale pink tone was laid in along the right side of the figure's body and a dark pink tone along the left (Fig. 10).<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 9. Photomicrograph in raking light of underlying paint textures within the water of *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883)



Fig. 10. Detail of a pale pink lower paint layer on the right side of the figure and dark pink lower layer on the left side, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883)

With the major forms laid in, Seurat began working throughout the composition, applying the paint in a primarily wet-over-wet application with varied brushwork. The sky and the foreground were created with loose, crisscrossing brushstrokes, referred to as *balayé* (swept) due to their appearance of being swept back and forth like the motion used with a broom (Fig. 11).<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the glittering appearance of the water was constructed from wet-over-wet and wet-into-wet short, horizontal brushstrokes of light and dark blues, with contrasting yellows, oranges, and pinks to depict the reflection of the distant bridge and buildings (Fig. 12).



Fig. 11. Detail of *balayé* brushwork in the foreground of *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883)



Fig. 12. Photomicrograph of dashed brushwork of the water in *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883)

There is an indistinct quality to the perimeters of many of the compositional elements, perhaps most obviously on the left side of the right figure. Here, feathering of the figure's edge blends softly into the water at points. This figure also illustrates Seurat's interest in creating tonal contrast around forms, an optical technique in the nineteenth century referred to as "irradiation," in which the light side of a form is placed against a dark background, or vice versa. While this is more diffused on the figure's left side with the less defined edge, Seurat enhanced this technique on the figure's right, sharpening the contour of the arm by adding darker blue paint where it meets the water (Fig. 13).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, this irradiation technique is seen where the riverbank meets the water, here using the lighter lower layer of the water to create contrast against the darker greens of the riverbank (Fig. 14).

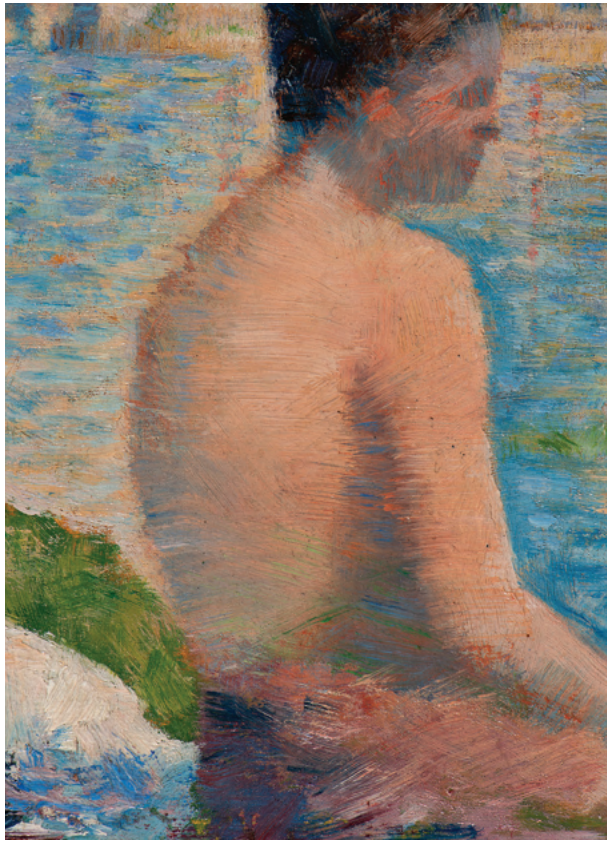


Fig. 13. Detail of the right-side figure, illustrating the irradiation painting technique on both left and right, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883)

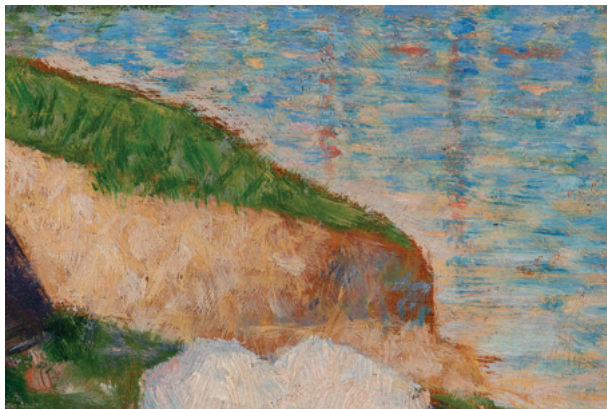


Fig. 14. Detail of Seurat's use of the irradiation painting technique where the water's edge meets the riverbank, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883)

Prior to entering the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art collection and likely early in the painting's history, a cradle was affixed to the reverse of the panel, which conceals portions of its reverse. With this addition, wooden fillets were added to all four sides to enlarge the dimensions of the painting and allow the entire scene to be viewable when framed. A conservation treatment was completed at the Nelson-Atkins in 1988, which included

removing an aged natural resin varnish and addressing a paint loss in the sky.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the painting is in excellent condition, and there is little retouching present.

Diana M. Jaskierny  
December 2022

## Notes

1. John Leighton and Richard Thomson, with David Bomford, Jo Kirby, and Ashok Roy, *Seurat and The Bathers*, exh. cat. (London: National Gallery Publications, 1997), 52–63.
2. Variations in size were usually within a few millimeters. *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* is close in size to the standard-size panel format no. 2 *paysage*. Jo Kirby, Kate Stoner, Ashok Roy, Aviva Burnstock, Rachel Grout, and Raymond White, "Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 24 (2003): 18.
3. In a survey of Seurat's techniques, the National Gallery of London and the Courtauld Institute of Art published an analysis of fifteen of the artist's study paintings, all of which have approximately the same dimensions as the Nelson-Atkins painting. Kirby et al., "Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology," 5.
4. No supplier stamps are visible on the reverse of *Study for "Bathers at Asnières,"* so it cannot be established through whom they were purchased.
5. Anthea Callen, *The Work of Art: Plein-Air Painting and Artistic Identity in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 252–54.
6. Similar marks of displaced paint were identified on Seurat's *Figure in a Landscape at Barbizon* (ca. 1882; Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne). Katja Lewerentz, "Georges Seurat—Figure in a Landscape at Barbizon, Brief Report on Technology and Condition," in Research Project: Painting Techniques of Impressionism and Postimpressionism, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and Fondation Corboud, Cologne, 2008, [https://forschungsprojekt-impresionismus.de/bilder/pdf/45\\_e.pdf](https://forschungsprojekt-impresionismus.de/bilder/pdf/45_e.pdf).
7. Kirby et al., "Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology," 5.

8. Priming in which the texture of the panels' grain is filled is referred to as *rebouchés*. Kirby et al., "Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology," 18.
9. While other large-scale paintings and accompanying studies by Seurat were found to have a grid underdrawing to assist in transferring compositions, no such system was found on *Bathers at Asnières* (1884; National Gallery, London) or in the Nelson-Atkins study. Kirby et al., "Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology," 19.
10. Similar blocking-in has been observed in other Seurat paintings, including the final version of *Bathers at Asnières* (1884; National Gallery, London). Kirby et al., "Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology," 20–21.
11. It is difficult to determine if there is an underlayer in the sky, but a cream-colored layer appears to be present, similar to what is found beneath the water.
12. Both these regions appear lean, and it is unclear if they extend beneath the entirety of each figure.
13. The term *balayé* is a derivative of the French word *balayeur*, or "road sweeper." Anthea Callen, *The Work of Art: Plein-Air Painting and Artistic Identity in Nineteenth-Century France*, 250.
14. Hermann von Helmholtz, "L'optique et la peinture," in *Principes scientifiques des beaux-arts*, ed. Ernst von Brücke (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière et Cie., 1878), 207–9. See also Kirby et al., "Seurat's Painting Practice: Theory, Development and Technology," 13–14.
15. Forrest R. Bailey, treatment report, September 3, 1988, Nelson-Atkins conservation file, 33-15/3.

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## Documentation

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### Citation

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#### MLA:

Boyle, Brigid M. "Georges Seurat, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières," 1883,"* documentation. *French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945: The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, edited by Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2023. doi: 10.37764/78973.5.724.4033.

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## Provenance

With the artist, Paris, 1883–March 29, 1891 [1];

Inherited by the artist's common-law wife, Madeleine Knoblock (ca. 1868–1903), Paris, 1891–March 6, 1892 [2];

Purchased from Knoblock by Jean-Baptiste Degreef (1852–1894), Auderghem, Belgium, 1892–no later than December 19, 1894 [3];

Possibly with Bernheim-Jeune, Paris [4];

With Walther Halvorsen, Paris, by January 19, 1918 [5];

Purchased from Halvorsen by Jørgen Breder Stang (1874–1950), Kristiania (Oslo), Norway, 1918–December 18, 1928 [6];

Purchased from Stang through Dr. Alfred Gold, Berlin, by de Hauke and Co., Inc., Paris and New York, stock no. 3353, on joint account with Alex Reid and Lefèvre, Ltd., Glasgow and London, stock nos. 283 and 348/28, 1928–March 6, 1929, as *Study for La Baignade* [7];

Purchased from de Hauke and Co., Inc., and Alex Reid and Lefèvre, Ltd., by M. Knoedler and Co., New York, stock no. A565, as *Study for La Baignade*, March 6–20, 1929 [8];

Purchased from M. Knoedler and Co. by Stephen Carlton Clark, Sr. (1882–1960), New York, 1929–August 31, 1931 [9];

Bought back from Clark by M. Knoedler and Co., New York, stock no. A1379, as *Study for La Baignade*, 1931–January 28, 1933 [10];

Purchased from M. Knoedler and Co. by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1933.

## Notes

[1] On May 3, 1891, one month after Seurat's sudden death, Madeleine Knoblock, Émile Seurat, Paul Signac,

Maximilien Luce, and Félix Fénéon gathered to inventory the contents of the artist's atelier. They annotated the verso of each artwork with a number and the initials P. S., L., or F. F. However, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* was one of twelve panels displayed in a single frame, so it did not receive initials or an individual number. See C[ésar] M[ange] de Hauke, *Seurat et son œuvre* (Paris: Gründ, 1961), 1:XXX.

[2] Per Madeleine Knoblock's handwritten list from May 3, 1891, she received the "panneaux encadrés" (framed panels) as part of her inheritance. See C[ésar] M[ange] de Hauke, *Seurat et son œuvre* (Paris: Gründ, 1961), 1:XXVIII.

[3] Knoblock loaned the twelve framed panels to the *Neuvième exposition annuelle des XX*, Musée d'Art Moderne, Brussels, February 6–March 6, 1892; see Robert L. Herbert, *Georges Seurat, 1859–1891*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 127–28. Degreef purchased all twelve sketches during the course of the exhibition; see "Clôture du Salon des XX," *L'Art moderne* 12, no. 11 (March 13, 1892): 83. He died two years later, on December 19, 1894.

[4] Bernheim-Jeune appears in the provenance of *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* in the Dorra-Rewald catalogue raisonné but not the de Hauke catalogue raisonné. See Henri Dorra and John Rewald, *Seurat: L'Œuvre peint; Biographie et catalogue critique* (Paris: Les Beaux-Arts, 1959), no. 96, p. 95; and C[ésar] M[ange] de Hauke, *Seurat et son œuvre* (Paris: Gründ, 1961), no. 91, p. 52. A consortium of Paris dealers, including Bernheim-Jeune, lent works to *Den franske utstilling i Kunstnerforbundet*, Kristiania (Oslo), January 19–February 18, 1918, in which *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* was included (see endnote 5). It is possible that Bernheim-Jeune lent the Nelson-Atkins painting to this show.

[5] Walther Halvorsen (1887–1972) was a *marchand en chambre* (dealer without a gallery) in Paris who helped introduce French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism to Scandinavia. *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* was in his possession by January 19, 1918, when an exhibition he co-organized with Norwegian museum director Jens Thiis opened in Kristiania (Oslo); see *Den franske utstilling i Kunstnerforbundet*, exh. cat. (Kristiania [Oslo]: Centraltrykkeriet, 1918), p. 29, cat. 87. It is unclear whether Halvorsen owned the Nelson-Atkins painting outright or was acting as a broker for a Parisian dealer (see endnote 4). Halvorsen's business records do not survive; according to his first wife, Greta Prozor (1886–1978), he destroyed them himself; see Christel H. Force, ed., *Pioneers of the Global Art Market: Paris-Based Dealer*

*Networks, 1850–1950* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 152n42.

[6] Stang purchased *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* during the Kunstnerforbundet exhibition; see Nils Messel, *Den Stangske Samling: Jørgen Breder Stangs franske bilder* (Oslo: Messel Forlag, 2020), 24. The painting remained in his collection until December 18, 1928, when he consigned it and one other panel painting by Seurat to the dealer Dr. Alfred Gold (1874–1958) in Berlin; see letter from Gold to César M. de Hauke, December 18, 1928, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, 1904–1978, bulk 1913–1974, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Series 9.1.3, Box 394, Folder 18 (hereafter cited as Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records).

[7] The Nelson-Atkins painting was previously misidentified as de Hauke and Co. stock no. 3352; see Robert L. Herbert, *Georges Seurat, 1859–1891*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991), 159. However, stock no. 3352 is actually Seurat's *The Seine with Clothing on the Bank*, 1883–1884, oil on panel, 6 3/4 × 10 3/8 in. (17.1 × 26.4 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2014.18.56.

When Stang consigned his two Seurat paintings to Gold on December 18, 1928, the dealer had already negotiated the sale of both pictures, as attested by correspondence with César M. de Hauke from earlier in December and an invoice to de Hauke and Co. dated December 18, 1928; see letters exchanged between Gold and de Hauke, December 4, 1928 and December 6, 1928, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, Series 9.1.3, Box 394, Folder 18; and invoice from Gold, December 18, 1928, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, Series 9.7.2, Box 412, Folder 8.

De Hauke and Co. purchased the two Seurat paintings on joint account with Alex Reid and Lefèvre; see letter from A. J. McNeill Reid to César M. de Hauke requesting an invoice for Alex Reid and Lefèvre's half-share in the pictures, which the French dealer Étienne Bignou had secured in their name, December 27, 1928, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, Series 9.3.1, Box 406, Folder 1. De Hauke and Co. billed Alex Reid and Lefèvre for their half-share on January 8, 1929; see invoice dated January 8, 1929, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, Series 9.3.2, Box 406, Folder 4. The invoice stipulates that de Hauke and Co. and Alex Reid and Lefèvre would share the profits fifty-fifty after de Hauke and Co. had deducted their 10% seller's commission.

Bignou had no ownership share in *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*. In a memorandum to James Saint Laurence O'Toole, gallery manager of the New York branch of de Hauke and Co., César M. de Hauke states that "Bignou is not entitled to anything in these pictures, because he did not buy them"; see memorandum from de Hauke to O'Toole, February 25, 1929, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, Series 9.2, Box 405, Folder 10. However, Bignou likely received a finder's commission; see email from Christel H. Force, independent art historian, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, September 7, 2021, NAMA curatorial files. The Nelson-Atkins painting appears in two Bignou photo albums with the stock number 1285; see Musée d'Orsay, Albums Bignou, ODO1996-29, Bobine N°23, Boîte 27, Seurat, Clichés 444 à 559; and Wildenstein Plattner Institute, Galerie Étienne Bignou Photo Archive (ca. 1909–1950), Georges Seurat.

In mid-February 1929, de Hauke and Co. transferred *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* and Stang's other Seurat panel from Paris to their New York office. The paintings arrived in New York by March 2, 1929; see letter from de Hauke to Lee Simonson, March 2, 1929, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, Series 9.1.7, Box 405, Folder 4. Four days later, M. Knoedler and Co. purchased *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* and two other works by Seurat (not including the second picture from Stang); see invoice dated March 6, 1929, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, Series 9.7.2, Box 411, Folder 1. Once M. Knoedler and Co. had paid their balance, de Hauke and Co. compensated Alex Reid and Lefèvre for their share in the profits; see debit dated May 14, 1929 on page 153 of de Hauke and Co.'s cashbook for 1926–1930, Jacques Seligmann and Co. Records, Series 9.7.1, Box 408, Folder 3.

For the first Alex Reid and Lefèvre stock number, see *Pictures Sold*, 1926–1934, sheet no.177, Alex Reid and Lefèvre records (TGA 200211), Tate Library and Archive, London; and email from Darragh O'Donoghue, Tate Library and Archive, to Glynnis Stevenson, NAMA, October 30, 2018, NAMA curatorial files. For the second Alex Reid and Lefèvre stock number, see email from Alexander M. D. Corcoran, Lefèvre Fine Art Ltd., to MacKenzie Mallon, NAMA, March 18, 2019, NAMA curatorial files.

[8] For the purchase date of March 6, 1929, see M. Knoedler and Co. Records, approximately 1848–1971, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, accession no. 2012.M.54, Series I.A, Box 8, Painting stock book 8, page 71 (hereafter cited as M. Knoedler and Co. Records). For the sale date of March 20, 1929, see M. Knoedler and Co.

Records, Series II, Box 75, Sales book 15, page 65. The stock number A565 appears twice on the verso of *Study for "Bathers at Asnières,"* both as a paper label and a handwritten inscription.

[9] For the return date of August 31, 1931, see M. Knoedler and Co. Records, Series II, Box 73, Sales book 13, page 219. In other documents, the return date is listed as September 1931; see M. Knoedler and Co. Records, Series IV, Box 163, inventory card for A1379. We have defaulted to the earlier date. At the time of return, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* was assigned a second stock number, A1379, which appears twice on the painting's verso, both as a paper label and a handwritten inscription.

[10] For the purchase date of January 28, 1933, see M. Knoedler and Co. Records, Series II, Box 75, Sales book 15, page 159.

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### Related Works

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Georges Seurat, *The Riverbank, Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, ca. 1882–1883, oil on panel, 6 5/16 x 9 13/16 in. (16 x 25 cm), Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, 2422.

Georges Seurat, *Bathers, Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883–1884, oil on panel, 6 1/4 x 9 7/8 in. (15.9 x 25.1 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2014.18.54.

Georges Seurat, *Horse and Boats, Study for "A Bathing Place, Asnières"*, 1883–1884, oil on panel, 6 1/4 x 9 7/8 in. (15.9 x 25.1 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2014.18.55.

Georges Seurat, *Horses in the Water, Study for "A Bathing Place, Asnières"*, 1883–1884, oil on panel, 6 x 9 3/4 in. (15.2 x 24.8 cm), private collection, on long-term loan to The Courtauld, London.

Georges Seurat, *Clothes on the Grass, Study for "A Bathing Place, Asnières"*, 1883, oil on panel, 6 3/8 x 9 3/4 in. (16.2 x 24.8 cm), Tate, London, on loan to the National Gallery, London, N04203.

Georges Seurat, *The Seine with Clothing on the Bank, Study for "A Bathing Place, Asnières"*, 1883–1884, oil on panel, 6 3/4 x 10 3/8 in. (17.2 x 26.4 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2014.18.56.

Georges Seurat, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883, oil on panel, 6 1/8 x 9 13/16 in. (15.5 x 25.0 cm), Musée d'Orsay, Paris, RF 1965 13.

Georges Seurat, *The Rainbow, Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883, oil on panel, 6 1/8 x 9 5/8 in. (15.5 x 24.5 cm), the National Gallery, London, NG6555.

Georges Seurat, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, ca. 1883–1884, oil on panel, 6 3/16 x 9 13/16 in. (15.7 x 24.9 cm), Cleveland Museum of Art, 1958.51.

Georges Seurat, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883–1884, oil on wood, 6 x 9 13/16 in. (15.2 x 25 cm), the National Gallery, London, NG6561.

Georges Seurat, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, ca. 1883, oil on panel, 6 1/4 x 9 7/8 in. (15.9 x 25.0 cm), National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, NG 2222.

Georges Seurat, *Final Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883, oil on panel, 6 1/4 x 9 7/8 in. (15.8 x 25.1 cm), Art Institute of Chicago, 1962.578.

Georges Seurat, *Echo, Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883–1884, Conté crayon on Michallet paper, 12 15/16 x 9 7/16 in. (31.2 x 24.0 cm), Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, 1966.80.11.

Georges Seurat, *Seated Nude, Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883, Conté crayon on cream paper, 12 1/2 x 9 3/4 in. (31.7 x 24.7 cm), National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, D 5110.

Georges Seurat, *Boy Seen from Behind, Study for "A Bathing Place, Asnières"*, 1883–1884, Conté crayon on paper, 12 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (31.8 x 24.1 cm), private collection, cited in John Leighton and Richard Thomson, *Seurat and The Bathers*, exh. cat. (London: National Gallery Publications, 1997), 65.

Georges Seurat, *A Pair of Legs, Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883–1884, Conté crayon on paper, 9 7/16 x 12 in. (24.0 x 30.5 cm), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMH 50/2014.

Georges Seurat, *Hat, Shoes, and Undergarments, Study for "A Bathing Place, Asnières"*, 1883–1884, black chalk on off-white modern laid paper, 9 5/16 x 12 3/16 in. (23.6 x 30.9 cm), Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA, 1993.231.

Georges Seurat, *Bust of a Sleeping Man, Study for "A Bathing Place, Asnières"*, 1883–1884, Conté crayon on Chamois paper, 9 7/16 x 11 13/16 in. (24.0 x 30.0 cm), Berggruen collection.

Georges Seurat, *The Sleeper, Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883–1884, Conté crayon on paper, 9 3/8 x 12

3/16 in. (23.8 x 31.0 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris, RF 29539, Recto.

Georges Seurat, *Reclining Man, Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883–1884, Conté crayon on Michallet paper, 9 5/8 x 12 3/8 in. (24.5 x 31.5 cm), Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Inv.50.1.

Georges Seurat, *Seated Boy with Straw Hat, Study for "A Bathing Place, Asnières"*, 1883–1884, Conté crayon on Michallet paper, 9 1/2 x 12 1/4 in. (24.1 x 31.1 cm), Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, 1960.9.1.

Georges Seurat, *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*, 1883–1884, Conté crayon on paper, 12 3/4 x 9 1/2 in. (32.4 x 24.1 cm), location unknown, cited in *Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale* (London: Sotheby's, February 3, 2015), 80–81.

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## Exhibitions

*Works in Oil and Pastel by the Impressionists of Paris*, The American Art Galleries, New York, April 10–28, 1886; National Academy of Design, New York, opened May 25, 1886, no. 133.

*Société des Artistes Indépendants: 3e exposition*, Pavillon de la Ville de Paris, Paris, March 26–May 3, 1887, no. 447.

*Neuvième exposition annuelle des XX*, Musée d'Art Moderne, Brussels, February 6–March 6, 1892, no. 1.

*Den franske utstilling i Kunstnerforbundet*, Kunstnerforbundet, Kristiania (Oslo), January 19–February 18, 1918, no. 87, as *La Seine à Courbevoie*.

*First Loan Exhibition: Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, Van Gogh*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 7–December 7, 1929, no. 62, as *The Bank of the Seine*.

*Since Cézanne*, Valentine Gallery, New York, December 28, 1931–January 16, 1932, unnumbered, as *Étude pour la Baignade*.

*24 Paintings and Drawings by Georges-Pierre Seurat*, The Renaissance Society of the University of Chicago, February 5–25, 1935, no. 4, as *Study for "The Bathers"*.

*One Hundred Years: French Painting, 1820–1920*, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, March 31–April 28, 1935, no. 52, as *Study for "La Baignade"*.

*From Paris to the Sea Down the River Seine: An Exhibition for the Benefit of l'École Libre des Hautes Études*, Wildenstein, New York, January 28–February 27, 1943, no. 25, as *Study for La Baignade*.

*Seurat, 1859–1891: Paintings and Drawings; Loan Exhibition for the Benefit of the Home for the Destitute Blind*, Knoedler Galleries, New York, April 19–May 7, 1949, no. 3, as *Etude pour La Baignade*.

*An Exhibition of French Painting: David to Cézanne*, The Norton Gallery and School of Art, West Palm Beach, FL, February 4–March 1, 1953; The Lowe Gallery, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL, March 11–31, 1953, no. 20, as *La Baignade*.

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*Three Centuries of French Painting*, Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, KS, May 9–23, 1954, no. 21, as *Study for "La Baignade"*.

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*Impressionism: Selections from Five American Museums*, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, November 4–December 31, 1989; The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, January 27–March 25, 1990; The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, April 21–June 17, 1990; The Saint Louis Art Museum, July 14–September 9, 1990; The Toledo Museum of Art, September 30–November 25, 1990, no. 75, as *Study of A Bathing Place, Asnières*.

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*Seurat and The Bathers*, The National Gallery, London, July 2–September 28, 1997, no. 12, as *Two Seated Figures: Study for "Bathers at Asnières"*.

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