

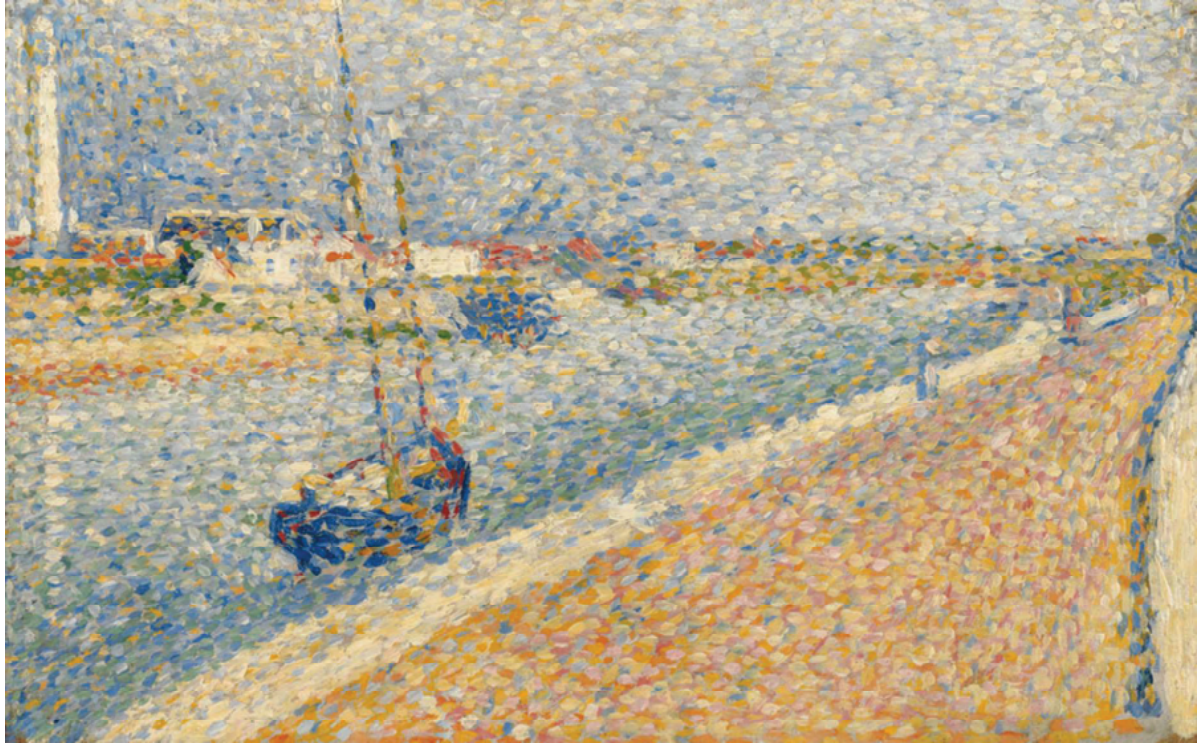
French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945

The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor



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Georges Seurat, *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe,"* 1890

Artist	Georges Seurat, French, 1859–1891
Title	<i>Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"</i>
Object Date	1890
Alternate and Variant Titles	<i>Étude: Gravelines; Étude pour "Gravelines, Petit Fort-Philippe"; Le Chenal de Gravelines: Petit Fort Philippe (Port)</i>
Medium	Oil on panel
Dimensions (Unframed)	6 1/4 x 9 7/8 in. (15.9 x 25.1 cm)
Credit Line	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Gift of Henry W. and Marion H. Bloch, 2015.13.22

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Catalogue Entry

Citation

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MLA:

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Perhaps it is the dominance of *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884–1886; Art Institute of Chicago) in the popular awareness of Georges Seurat's work that has made it more difficult to take stock of the important role that seascapes play in his art. From 1885 through 1890, Seurat completed more than twenty luminous coastal views—products of his solitary trips to the French seaside. These quiet vistas, devoid of human presence, coexist with Seurat's ambitious scenes of Parisian public life.

In the few years he had to establish it (before his untimely death at age thirty-one), Seurat formed a pattern of intense activity devoted to creating major works in his Paris studio during the autumn, winter, and spring. Summer was reserved for excursions to the French coast of the English Channel.¹ From 1885 through 1890, Seurat visited five locales: Grandcamp, Honfleur, Port-en-Bessin, Le Crotoy, and Gravelines. Honfleur is the only destination that could be considered at all fashionable or popular with his colleagues. His escapes from Paris had nothing to do with holidays or camaraderie. Indeed, Seurat's summer destinations were noteworthy for their isolation. Poet Emile

Verhaeren (Belgian, 1855–1916), a friend of Seurat and arguably his most insightful critic, reminisced about how Seurat spent his summer sojourns:

Then, in summer, to wash his eyes of the days in the studio and to translate as exactly as possible the vivid sunlight, with all its nuances. An existence divided in two, by art itself.²

Seurat's correspondence suggests that he arrived in Gravelines in late June 1890.³ In this small seaport, he painted the Nelson-Atkins sketch in preparation for what became his last series of seaside pictures. As such, this panel is the ideal complement to the museum's other Seurat sketch, the study for his first monumental figure painting, *Bathers at Asnières*. The palette, brushwork, and composition of the Gravelines work offer valuable insights into the conception of Seurat's final seascapes.



Fig. 1. *Gravelines (Nord), Petit-Fort-Philippe, Chenal à marée basse*, ca. 1910, postcard, courtesy of Raymond Delahaye

Gravelines is situated between Calais and the Belgian border, where the English Channel meets the North Sea (Fig. 1). Its chief industry was fishing. Seconding Seurat's choice of a quiet community, the 1894 edition of Baedeker's *Handbook for Travellers* describes it as "an uninteresting town with 5952 inhab."⁴ The area does have a long military history, with fortifications more than four hundred years old and two small neighborhoods named Grand and Petit Fort Philippe, in honor of King Philip IV of Spain (1605–1665).⁵

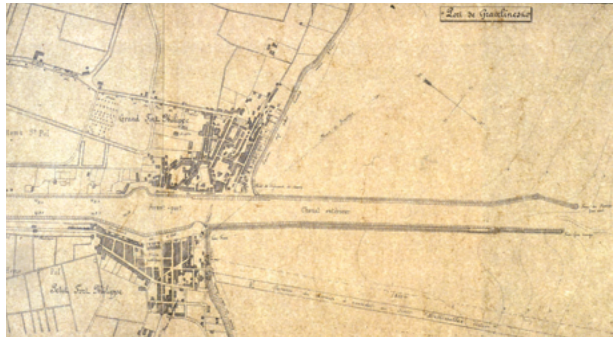


Fig. 2. Map of the port of Gravelines, 1908, showing Grand Fort Philippe, the Gravelines channel, and Petit Fort Philippe. Just west of the channel is the cruciform indicating the signal mast (Mât de Signaux de Marée), and east of the channel is the rectangle marking the site of the lighthouse (Phare). Image courtesy of Raymond Delahaye

The town no doubt satisfied Seurat's attraction to mild coastal atmosphere and offered the raw materials of beaches, esplanades, and jetties—the angles and shapes that piqued his devotion to surface design. A 1908 map (Fig. 2) depicts the town's port and, by extension, the gamut of Seurat's motifs.⁶ Gravelines is situated on the mouth of the River Aa, and access to its harbor is through a narrow canal or channel (cited as *Chenal extérieur* on the map). Rather than painting the open sea, Seurat confined his subjects to perspectives on the inner channel and harbor (called *Avant-port* on the map). Within this small vicinity, Seurat created the four remarkable views that comprise his Gravelines series.⁷



Fig. 3. Georges Seurat, *The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe*, 1890, oil on canvas, 28 7/8 x 36 1/4 in. (73.3 x 92.1 cm), Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, 45.195. Courtesy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields

The Nelson-Atkins panel is one of only two preparatory works for *The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe* (Fig. 3). Seurat's vantage point was the edge of Grand Fort Philippe, looking away from the sea, across the narrow channel, toward the shore of Petit Fort Philippe and its white lighthouse. The sketch reveals how thoroughly Seurat planned the parameters of the final composition, as the view is already divided into the primary sections of curving promenade, channel, shore, and sky.

Seurat experimented with the placement of elements in the channel harbor, reminiscent of his trial-and-error process with some facets of the Asnières project. The two-masted boat at the promenade, so prominent in the sketch, is absent in the final version.⁸ It is replaced by a sturdy bollard that anchors the foreground, checking the diagonal motion of the promenade and keeping the lower portion free of any narrative distraction. Above and to the right of the boat in the Nelson-Atkins piece is also a cluster of deep blue dots, extending from the channel upward into the sky. This vague nautical suggestion coalesces in the completed work as a listing vessel, moored under the lighthouse.

Unmistakable in the Nelson-Atkins study is the energy of its staccato brushwork. It has the freshness and impetuosity of a sketch rendered on the spot. Even a casual glance reveals that Seurat's famous facture, called pointillism, is actually quite varied here, with dots of pigment of different size, shape, and direction. Rooted in his broken brushwork of the early 1880s, Seurat's pointillist technique emerged in the Grandcamp works of 1885, made during his first seaside excursion. The points of pigment enabled the artist to create both nuance and brilliance. While pointillism has become emblematic of Seurat's signature style, the dots are just one factor in the artist's pioneering application of color theory.

Working in the heady years following the Impressionist heyday, Seurat was one of several progressive painters pursuing new approaches. The Impressionists' brighter color schemes and rapid execution attracted his attention, but the methodical Seurat wanted to replace their spontaneous practice with stable compositions and a less intuitive treatment of color. Seeking a rational basis for his color choices, Seurat turned to practices grounded in science. The effort to "reform" Impressionist practice led the fascinating critic of the avant-garde, Félix Fénéon (1861–1944),⁹ to name Seurat's style Neo-Impressionism, or new

Impressionism, in 1886. This term has endured to describe Seurat's fully conceived approach and that of his followers in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Given his choice, Seurat would have preferred chromoluminarism, a word that emphasized the color and light at the core of his agenda.

The later nineteenth century was a heyday of scientific exploration, and studies of optics and perception were no exception. Interpreting treatises by aestheticians and scientists,¹⁰ Seurat built his approach to color using principles of contrast and optical mixture (*mélange optique*). Both principles are cited in a rare statement of theory Seurat sent to a critic in August 1890.¹¹ There he specified his theories on the roles of complementary colors (opposites on the color wheel) and optical mixture as it occurs in the viewer's eye. According to optical mixture, the dots of pigment on a canvas reflect colored light that blends in the eye to produce the viewer's color perception. This method of creating color was found to be capable of producing more vibrant effects than the traditional practice of mixing pigments on the palette before applying them to the canvas. (An inelegant, simple demonstration of this distinction can be found by mixing all the colors in the standard watercolor box to discover the resultant muddied brown color. However, scientific experiments of Seurat's era indicated that mixing the whole spectrum of colored light produces a clear, clean white.) Thus Seurat considered his dotted strokes the vehicles for generating the brighter effects of optical mixture.

In its excellent, unvarnished state, the Nelson-Atkins panel also speaks to the brilliant contrasts central to Seurat's agenda. Fundamental to Neo-Impressionist color schemes were the contrasts of hues, especially complementary colors. Invoking the law of simultaneous contrast, Seurat and his followers held that applying two colors side by side heightens their differences, and if they are complementary colors the effect will be even brighter. A subtle but critical hint of that practice lies in the thin dotted border that surrounds the Nelson-Atkins sketch. While blue is its dominant color, the artist added tiny touches of pigment that vary in hue according to the color of the adjacent passage. Juxtaposed with the rose tones of the lower promenade, for example, are points of a complementary green. Merely suggested in the panel, the treatment is more fully executed in the finished painting, where red complements the green elements of the water on the left before changing to orange when the border meets the blue sky.

The border is also a clear reference to the evolution of Seurat's treatment of frames, another highly original aspect of his pioneering work. The narrow border was conceived as a transitional element, intended to connect to a flat, painted wood frame dominated by the same ultramarine blue. In this way Seurat stimulated another means of contrast, as the delicate tones that shimmer across each of the finished works are enhanced by the dark outer color, emphasizing their gentle luminosity. Unfortunately, none of the dramatic frames for the Gravelines series have survived,¹² but Verhaeren left us this impression of their effect: "It is air and light, even and tranquil, fixed in frames."¹³

The Gravelines sketch yields yet another insight into Seurat's use of contrast. Along the right side of the white lighthouse, the artist has applied a vertical series of blue dots, using irradiation to emphasize the contour and suggest its volume. According to this principle, the differences between two adjacent areas of unequal lightness will be most pronounced at their common edge. Seurat's blue strokes implement this effect.



Fig. 4. Georges Seurat, *The Clipper*, 1890, Conté crayon on Michallet paper, 9 1/4 x 12 3/8 in. (23.5 x 31.5 cm), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 37.718

The artist also utilized this practice in the only other known preparatory work for the Gravelines canvas, a Conté crayon drawing of a small white sailboat, with its light mast emphasized by adjacent dark crayon strokes (Fig. 4). This vessel, absent in the Nelson-Atkins panel, occupies the center of the finished composition. The buildings on the shore beyond the boat have the same outline as the rooftops in the final canvas. This similarity suggests that by the time Seurat executed the drawing

he had made specific plans for the boat's role in the finished composition.



Fig. 5. View of the Gravelines channel with Petite Fort Philippe on the left and Grand Fort Philippe on the right. Photograph by the author, 1990

Seurat's handling of the Nelson-Atkins sketch, together with a photograph of the site taken exactly one hundred years after his stay (Fig. 5), shows how faithfully the artist recorded the actual harbor architecture. He framed his scene where the curving promenade bends into the distance. Across the channel is the lighthouse (now decorated by a red spiral). The photograph's revelation is the shadow cast in the channel, echoing the curve of the quay. It establishes that the dotted cluster of deep blue, evident in both the study and the finished work, is not an imagined decorative element but the artist's accurate recording of late afternoon light in the channel.

The evolution from panel sketch to finished painting shows how Seurat fine-tuned these works by manipulating the variable elements. For the final composition, he formed a gentle pacing of boats across the channel, reinforcing the horizontal of the shore and contributing to the restrained structure of the composition. All the boats, save one in the background, have dropped sail, exposing their masts and repeating the verticals of the lighthouse and bollard. This kind of delicate equilibrium makes the Gravelines works paragons of harmony and suggests the artist's commitment to their underlying geometry.

The Nelson-Atkins sketch is a rarity among the Gravelines corpus of works. Only one of the other three paintings in the series, *The Channel of Gravelines, Evening* (1890; Museum of Modern Art, New York), has a preparatory oil, and for the other two canvases, no studies on panel or paper are known to exist. The

Nelson-Atkins panel was given by Seurat's family to his colleague Maximilien Luce (1858–1941), who first allowed the work to be publicly exhibited in 1905 and subsequently lent it to at least four other exhibitions between 1906 and 1934.

As for the four completed compositions from his 1890 Gravelines sojourn, Seurat submitted them to the annual exhibition of the progressive Brussels group, Les XX (The Twenty), where he had just been elected a member. The exhibition took place in February and March of 1891. Ever loyal to the Société des Artistes Indépendants, he next presented them in Paris, where he assisted with the hanging of the show, which opened on March 20, 1891. They were hanging there, along with his latest studio work, *Circus* (1890–1891; Musée d'Orsay, Paris) when, nine days later, Seurat died in the grip of a sudden infection. His colleague Paul Signac wrote to a fellow painter: "Terrible news: our poor Seurat died yesterday morning after a two-day sickness. . . . I am too desolate to write further."¹⁴

The works inspired by Seurat's last summer sojourn carry the legacy of the artist's intricate methods, but their analysis cannot fully explain the essence of their expressive effect. In the Gravelines series, perhaps the most wistful of the marine pictures, intellectual rigor and disciplined handling, softened by gentle light and atmosphere, leave the viewer sensing the poetry of Seurat's vision. Their firm structure, bearing the lightest of chromatic burdens, breathes a gentleness of spirit and an indelible sense of Seurat's attachment to the sea.

Ellen W. Lee
August 2022

Notes

1. In his monograph devoted to Seurat, Richard Thomson provides a thoughtful analysis of the overall role of marine paintings within his oeuvre. Richard Thomson, *Seurat* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), 157–84.
2. Emile Verhaeren, "Georges Seurat," *La Société Nouvelle* 7 (April 1891): 433, reprinted (with slight variations, as noted by Robert Herbert) in Verhaeren, *Sensations* (Paris: Bibliothèque Dionysienne, Les Éditions G. Crès et Cie, 1927), 199. ("Puis, l'été, se laver l'œil des jours d'atelier et traduire le plus exactement la vive claret, avec toutes ses nuances. Une existence divisée en deux, par l'art lui-même.") For another translation of the full article, see Norma Broude, ed., *Seurat in Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1978).
3. Seurat's correspondence is slight, but on June 24, 1890, he wrote to critic Félix Fénéon: "I am going to the North around Calais?" ("Je vais dans le Nord environs de Calais?") For a facsimile of letter, see C[ésar] M[ange] de Hauke, *Seurat et son œuvre* (Paris: Gründ, 1961), 1:XXIII.
4. Karl Baedeker, *Northern France from Belgium and the English Channel to the Loire, Excluding Paris and Its Environs: Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1894), 5.
5. Many details of the history and geography of Gravelines are available through a publication of the Ministry of Culture, *Gravelines et son patrimoine* (Dunkirk, 1983).
6. On my visit to Gravelines in 1990, Raymond Delahaye, a historian affiliated with the community, generously provided me with this reproduction of the map.
7. The other three works are *The Channel of Gravelines, Grand Fort Philippe* (1890; National Gallery, London), *The Channel of Gravelines, Toward the Sea* (1890; Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo), and *The Channel of Gravelines, Evening* (1890; Museum of Modern Art, New York). For a more thorough discussion of the entire Gravelines series, see Ellen Wardwell Lee, *Seurat at Gravelines: The Last Landscapes*, exh. cat. (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, 1990).
8. The boat removed from the final Indianapolis composition, however, does resemble the sole vessel present in another member of the Gravelines quartet, *The Channel of Gravelines: Grand Fort Philippe* (1890; National Gallery, London).
9. Félix Fénéon, "Correspondance particulière de 'L'Art moderne:' L'Impressionnisme aux Tuileries," *L'Art Moderne* 6, no. 38 (September 19, 1886): 302.
10. Chief among Seurat's sources are Michel Chevreul, *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). Columbia University physicist Ogden Rood placed Seurat's reasoning on an even firmer scientific basis by publishing his findings on color perception based on laboratory experiments: Rood, *Modern Chromatics, with Applications to Art and Industry* (New York: D. Appleton, 1879).

11. A photograph of this letter first appeared in Robert Rey, *La Renaissance du sentiment Classique dans la Peinture française à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions G. Van Oest, 1931). Full documentation of all the versions of this letter can be found in Françoise Cachin and Robert Herbert, *Seurat*, exh. cat. (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1991), 422–23, 429–31.
12. The frame for *Le Crottoy, Looking Downstream* (1889; Detroit Institute of Arts), is one of the few originals not discarded over the years in favor of traditional gilded moldings.
13. Emile Verhaeren, "Chronique Artistique, Les XX," *La Société Nouvelle* 7 (February 1891): 249.
14. "Mon Théo, Une horrible nouvelle: notre pauvre Seurat est mort hier matin après deux jours de maladie. Une angine infectieuse, dit-on. Il laisse une pauvre femme, et ce que nous ne savions pas, un beau bébé de 13 mois qu'il a reconnu. La malheureuse est encore enceinte. Quel épouvantable malheur . . . Je suis trop malheureux pour vous écrire plus longuement" (My Théo, Terrible news: our poor Seurat died yesterday morning after a two-day sickness. An infectious angina, they say. He leaves a poor wife, and what we didn't know, a beautiful 13-month-old baby whom he recognized. The unfortunate woman is pregnant again. What a terrible misfortune . . . I am too desolate to write further). Paul Signac to Théo van Rysselberghe, March 30, 1891. A copy of the letter exists in the Archives Signac, Paris. The entire letter is transcribed in Guy Pogu, *Théo van Rysselberghe: Sa Vie* (Paris: Premiers Éléments, 1963), 10–11.

Technical Entry

Citation

Chicago:

Diana M. Jaskierny, "Georges Seurat, *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe," 1890,"*

technical entry in *French Paintings, 1600–1945: The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, ed. Aimee Marcereau DeGalan (Kansas City: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.37764/78973.5.726.2088>.

MLA:

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Fig. 6. Photomicrograph of sand found in the paint layer of *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* (1890)

Completed late in the career of Georges Seurat (1859–1891), *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* is a small oil work completed on a single-board panel with a horizontal grain. Its measurements are consistent with the majority of other studies by the artist, including *Study for "Bathers at Asnières"* (1883; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art).¹ While there is no clear indication that a *boîte à pouce*, or thumbnail paintbox, was used in this painting's execution, there is evidence on the paint surface that it was completed en plein air.² Scattered throughout the composition, grains of sand are embedded into the paint layer, indicating that the panel was completed, at least in part, near the shore (Fig. 6).³



Fig. 7. Detail of the ground layer on *Study for "The Channel at Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* (1890)

A white or slightly off-white ground layer is easily visible throughout the composition and near the panel's edges. As the ground layer does not extend to the very edge on the bottom corners, it is possible it was brush applied by the artist (Fig. 7). While many of Seurat's panels were similar in size, they varied in preparation, with many of the ground layers being composed of lead white pigment in oil medium.^{4,5} Thinly applied, this ground layer does not entirely block out the color of the panel wood. However, unlike *Study for "Bathers at Asnières,"* the wood color is not an instrumental component of the composition, and instead the light ground layer amplifies the luminosity of the paint.



Fig. 8. Photomicrograph of blue line beneath the lighthouse in *Study for "The Channel at Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* (1890)

No distinct underdrawing was identified on *Study for "The Channel at Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* through infrared reflectography (IRR) or examination with a microscope, nor is there any blocking in of compositional elements as was sometimes seen in Seurat's earlier works. Rather, in the Nelson-Atkins study the artist appears to have planned the composition by sketching in the placement of elements with thinly painted, dashed blue lines. Beneath much of the design, blue dashes reside at the lowest layer of the paint, often directly beneath or adjacent to brushstrokes associated with the final image. Examples can be seen along the lighthouse to the left (Fig. 8) and beneath the distant bollard to the right (Fig. 9). The placement of this bollard was clearly decided on early in the painting's execution, as no portion of the background extends beneath it.⁶



Fig. 9. Photomicrograph of blue line beneath the right-most bollard in *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* (1890)

While this painting is clearly representative of Seurat's style in pointillism, the brushwork found throughout consists of a variety of marks, illustrating the complexity of his technique.⁷ The majority of brushwork is composed of short strokes, with most having been pulled from the same direction, roughly left to right. Exceptions are the lighthouse to the left and the white vertical shape along the right side of the panel, each completed with heavily bodied paint in long vertical strokes.

Throughout the composition, the paint strokes are often directional, emphasizing the scene's receding perspective to the right. In the foreground and middle ground, short, diagonal brushwork moves toward the top right corner, leading the viewer's eye parallel to the direction of the walkway. In comparison, in the left and central portions of the sky, the brushwork alternates between horizontal and vertical short strokes (Fig. 10), while the marks in the right section of the sky are predominantly horizontal. The most haphazard brushwork is found in the water near the boat, imitating the rippling near the hull.



Fig. 10. Photomicrograph in raking light showing the direction of brushwork in the sky on *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* (1890)

Although the Nelson-Atkins panel is a study and was likely executed quickly, it appears it was completed in two campaigns. Raking light reveals wet-over-dry paint applications in which the underlying texture of the paint was undisturbed by subsequent painting (Fig. 11). In spite of the two separate painting sessions, ample amounts of the ground layer remain visible between brushwork, indicating careful deliberation in the placement of each stroke.



Fig. 11. Photomicrograph in raking light illustrating wet-over-dry painting in *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* (1890)

The painting is in good condition, with few losses and little retouching present. There are few cracks and one linear indentation in the upper left quadrant within the boat masts. The paint layer remains in excellent condition. There is minor abrasion in the dark blue paint of the boat and its masts. Along the edges there is minimal abrasion to both the paint and ground layers, particularly along the bottom right edge. Currently there is no varnish present on the painting, and it is unclear if the painting was varnished early in its history.⁸

Diana M. Jaskierny
December 2022

Notes

1. The panel measures 15.9 x 25.1 centimeters.
2. For more information on *boîtes à pouce*, see the technical entry by Diana M. Jaskierny for "Georges Seurat, *Study for 'Bathers at Asnières'*" in this catalogue, <https://doi.org/10.37764/78973.5.724>.
3. Sand particles were also found in Seurat's *Beach at Gravelines* (1890; The Courtauld Institute of Art). *Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Masterpieces: The Courtauld Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), cat. 37.
4. In a survey of Seurat's techniques, the National Gallery (London) and the Courtauld Institute of Art published an analysis of fifteen of the artist's study paintings, including dimensions and preparation layers. 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): 5.
5. No organic or elemental analysis was conducted on *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe."*
6. In comparison, the figure or figures slightly closer to the center were added to the landscape at a later stage in the painting process, after the walkway was completed. The paint of the walkway extends beneath these added elements.
7. Øystein Sjøstad, *A Theory of the Tache in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 105, 112.
8. No conservation treatment has been conducted at the Nelson-Atkins; however, the abrasions in the dark blue paint could indicate a cleaning where an early varnish was removed prior to entering the museum collection.

Documentation

Citation

Chicago:

Brigid M. Boyle, "Georges Seurat, *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe," 1890,"* documentation in *French Paintings, 1600–1945: The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, ed. Aimee Marcereau DeGalan (Kansas City: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.37764/78973.5.726.4033>.

MLA:

Boyle, Brigid M. "Georges Seurat, *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe," 1890,"* 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: 10.37764/78973.5.726.4033.

Provenance

With the artist, Paris, 1890–March 29, 1891 [1];

Probably inherited by the artist's mother, Ernestine Seurat (née Faivre, 1828–1899), or common-law wife, Madeleine Knoblock (ca. 1868–1903), 1891 [2];

Given by Seurat or Knoblock to Maximilien Luce (1858–1941), Paris, 1891—at least January 1934 [3];

Probably by descent to his nephew, Édouard Alexandre Bouin (1897–1988), Paris and La Celle-Saint-Cloud, France, by February 6, 1941—no later than December 6, 1978;

By descent to his son, Jean Bouin-Luce (1920–1999), Paris and Mantes-la-Jolie, France, by December 6, 1978 [4];

Purchased at his sale, *Important Impressionist and Modern Paintings and Sculpture*, Sotheby Parke Bernet, London, December 6, 1978, no. 216, as *Le Chenal de Gravelines; Petit Fort Philippe (Port)*, by Fujii Gallery, Tokyo, 1978—at least November 25, 1990 [5];

Purchased in a private sale from Sotheby's, New York, through Richard L. Feigen and Co., New York, by Marion (née Helzberg, 1931–2013) and Henry (1922–2019) Bloch, Shawnee Mission, KS, July 10, 1996–June 15, 2015 [6];

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

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. *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* bears the verso inscription "P S 138".

[2] See email from Denise Bazetoux, independent art historian, to Meghan Gray, NAMA, May 18, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.

[3] Luce loaned *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* to a series of exhibitions, including the *Société des Artistes Indépendants: 21me exposition* (Paris, March 24–April 30, 1905); the *Ausstellung Franzoesischer Kuenstler* (Munich, Frankfurt, and Dresden, November 1906–January 1907); the *Exposition Georges Seurat (1859–1891)* (Paris, December 14, 1908–January 9, 1909); *Le Néo-Impressionnisme* (Paris, February 25–March 17, 1932); and *Seurat et ses amis: La suite de l'impressionnisme* (Paris, December 1933–January 1934). Luce did not leave behind a final will and testament, and his surviving papers were destroyed by a flood sometime after 1986, so it is unclear whether the painting remained in Luce's possession at the time of his death or whether it had already passed to an heir. See email from Denise Bazetoux, independent art historian, to Meghan Gray, NAMA, May 18, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.

[4] See email from Denise Bazetoux, independent art historian, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, August 27, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

[5] For the purchaser, see email from Lucy Economakis, Sotheby's, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, August 26, 2021, NAMA curatorial files. The seller of record in Sotheby's archives is Denise Bazetoux; however, by her own account she never owned *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* but did advise Jean Bouin-Luce to sell it via Sotheby's if he wished to part with it. See email from Denise Bazetoux, independent art historian, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, August 27, 2021, NAMA curatorial files.

[6] *Study for "The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe"* was offered for sale at *Impressionist and Modern Art, Part I*, Sotheby's, New York, May 1, 1996, no. 34, as *Le Chenal de Gravelines: Petit Port Philippe*, but the highest bidder could not pay for the purchase. As the underbidder, Henry Bloch was offered the painting by Sotheby's. See email from Emelia Scheidt, Richard L. Feigen and Co., to Meghan Gray, NAMA, April 13, 2015, NAMA curatorial files; and notes from telephone conversation between Henry Bloch and Nicole Myers, NAMA, June 4, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.

Related Works

Georges Seurat, *The Channel of Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe*, 1890, oil on canvas, 28 7/8 x 36 1/4 in. (73.3 x 92.1 cm), Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, 45.195.

Georges Seurat, *The Clipper*, 1890, Conté crayon on Michallet paper, 9 1/4 x 12 3/8 in. (23.5 x 31.5 cm), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 37.718.

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