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

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
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Paul Signac, *The Château Gaillard, View from My Window, Petit-Andely*, 1886

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Paul Signac, French, 1863–1935</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td><em>The Château Gaillard, View from My Window, Petit-Andely</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Object Date</strong></td>
<td>1886</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alternate and Variant Titles</strong></td>
<td><em>Le château Gaillard, vue de ma fenêtre.—Petit-Andely.—Juin-juillet 1886</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dimensions (Unframed)</strong></td>
<td>17 11/16 x 25 9/16 (44.9 x 64.9 cm)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Signature</strong></td>
<td>Signed lower right: P. Signac</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Credit Line</strong></td>
<td>The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: acquired through the generosity of an anonymous donor. F78-13</td>
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**Catalogue Entry**

**Citation**

Chicago:


MLA:


Twenty-two-year-old Paul Signac had been a professional artist for only six years when he painted *The Château Gaillard, View from My Window, Petit Andely*. After his father’s premature death in 1880, Signac left school, rented an apartment in the Paris neighborhood of Montmartre, and immersed himself in avant-garde art and literature. In June of that year, he attended Claude Monet’s (1840–1926) inaugural solo show, an experience that convinced him of his own artistic vocation.¹ Over the next half-decade, he befriended established and up-and-coming painters, helped found the Société des Artistes Indépendants in 1884, and—crucially—met Georges Seurat (1859–1891) just as the latter was rethinking his approach to color and developing a bold new painting method known as pointillism, which became the defining feature of the movement now known as Neo-Impressionism.² Signac was among the first to embrace Seurat’s innovative ideas about color and technique, and his extant correspondence from the summer of 1886
attests to his initial struggles. He confided some of his frustrations to Camille Pissarro (1830–1903): “Have you discovered the useful method of dividing [color]? Me, I am having difficulties and wasting time, working a lot without any results. I believe I have made some strides, however.”3 Signac’s assessment of his progress was perhaps too harsh, for changes in his painting practice are already evident in The Château Gaillard. Where previously Signac had emulated the fluid brushwork of the Impressionists, here he utilized dots of unmixed green and yellow pigment for both the foliage in the foreground and the grassy cliffs beyond. Signac used linear strokes for occasional tree branches and roof outlines, but he composed most of the scene with small touches of paint.

Set in Normandy, the Nelson-Atkins landscape depicts the riverfront commune of Les Andelys, birthplace of French classical painter Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Located sixty miles northwest of Paris, this district is divided into two towns: Petit Andely, along the Seine River, and Grand Andely, further inland. Its artistic heritage and proximity to the capital appealed to Signac, who wished to remain near Paris during the summer of 1886 so that he could assist with the second annual exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants.4 He vacationed in Petit Andely from June to September, joined halfway through by Pissarro’s son Lucien (1863–1944), himself an aspiring artist.5 During Signac’s sojourn, he completed ten oil paintings of the town and its environs. The Seine features prominently in this series; only the Kansas City work omits the river from view, focusing instead on the region’s most recognizable monument, the twelfth-century Château Gaillard. This fortress appears in the distant background of just one other picture from Signac’s 1886 campaign (Fig. 1). It seems to have interested him less as a motif than did the rippling water of the Seine, the arch bridges crisscrossing the river, and the buildings lining its shores.

Built by King Richard I of England (1157–1199)—better known as Richard the Lionheart—between 1196 and 1198, the Château Gaillard sits atop a three-hundred-foot limestone crag. Its fascinating history has filled volumes;6 in brief, the English sovereign found his territories threatened by King Philip II of France (1165–1223) and set about constructing an impregnable stronghold that would block his rival’s entry into Rouen. Following Richard’s death in 1199, the castle underwent a prolonged siege by Phillip II’s army, which ultimately succeeded in breaching the inner bailey on March 6, 1204.7 Thereafter the fortress lost its strategic importance, despite being less than a decade old. It changed hands several times during the Hundred Years’ War and occasionally housed notable prisoners, such as Charles II, King of Navarre (1332–1387), but otherwise is rarely mentioned in the annals of history.8 In the late 1500s, the Château Gaillard—like many disused castles—fell prey to armed brigands, prompting locals to call for its demolition. King Henry IV of France (1553–1610) denied this request but did grant nearby residents permission to remove rubble from the fortress and use it to repair town buildings.9 By Signac’s day, the castle was greatly altered in appearance, due both to the original damage sustained during Phillip II’s attack and to seven hundred years of subsequent neglect. An early twentieth-century postcard of the Château Gaillard, seen from the northeast, highlights its ruined state (Fig. 2).
Signac chose a very similar vantage point for the Nelson-Atkins painting, setting him apart from his peers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, numerous artists visited Les Andelys and depicted the famous Château Gaillard. Most portrayed the fortress from across the river, in what is today Les Trois Lacs, allowing them to capture the ruins in all their impressive grandeur, towering over the Church of Saint-Sauveur, the Hospital of Saint-Jacques, and other area landmarks. This predilection was the topic of the 1995 exhibition Château Gaillard: “Découverte d’un patrimoine” (Château Gaillard: “Discovering a Heritage”), organized by the Musée Alphonse Georges Poulain in Vernon, France, another Norman town. Of more than fifty paintings, drawings, prints, and book illustrations of the Château Gaillard assembled by the curators, only five works offered a view comparable to that of the Nelson-Atkins landscape.10 One of the exceptions was Félix Vallotton’s (Swiss, 1865–1925) late-career painting Square in Les Andelys with the Château Gaillard, which represents the fortress looming above some dwellings and an almost empty street (Fig. 3). Like Signac, Vallotton eschewed the more majestic sightline from the opposite bank of the Seine.

The two images differ in one important way, however. Vallotton’s scene might give the impression of replicating a specific vista, but the artist in fact painted it from memory in Honfleur. It is what the exhibition curator, Sophie Fourny-Dargère, termed a paysage recomposé (reconstructed landscape).11 By Vallotton’s own admission, a faithful transcription of reality was not his goal.12 Conversely, Signac executed his picture on site. As indicated by its title—which Signac chose himself—it records a view from the artist’s window.13 While it is unknown precisely where Signac stayed in the summer of 1886, his approximate whereabouts can be ascertained from the painting. In the center foreground, we glimpse a brick house with a mansard roof and dormer windows, partly obscured by trees. Its chimney forms a contrasting vertical with the castle’s latrine tower, which stands to the right of its inner bailey and keep. Still extant today, this residence is identifiable as 7 rue Philippe Auguste, a three-story home less than half a mile northwest of the fortress. Signac must have found
accommodations in its immediate vicinity, possibly renting a room next door at 9 rue Philippe Auguste or at an adjacent mill (Fig. 4). From either location, Signac would have enjoyed an enviable view of the Château Gaillard.

![Map of Petit Andely](image)

Before Signac’s holiday in Petit Andely was over, the second exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants opened on August 21, 1886. Signac, who attended the public debut, showed ten paintings, four of them from his campaign in Les Andelys, including The Château Gaillard. Critics responded favorably to Signac’s Norman landscapes. Félix Fénéon pronounced them “the most luminous” of Signac’s contributions. “The colors rejoice, proclaim themselves, prompt wild chromatic escalations,” he wrote. Another commentator, Robert Bernier, singled out the Kansas City work for particular praise:

The Château Gaillard, View from My Window, Petit Andely is very good. Amid a jumble of greenery appears a large square roof, which undoubtedly crowns some old financier’s house, constructed under Louis XIV. On the sides, some traditional and more modern gables. And on the hill, dominant and still proud, the ruins of the feudal eyrie. Bernier’s description proceeds from foreground to background, from eye level to mountaintop, and from the ordinary to the exceptional, effectively mapping out the scene for viewers. Despite the castle’s dilapidation, he contends, it retains something of its former splendor, imperiously overlooking the homes in its shadow.

![Signac's painting of Château Gaillard](image)

After the exhibition opening, Signac returned to Les Andelys for another month and then spent the autumn of 1886 in Paris. Peripatetic by nature, he traveled often and widely, especially to the French Riviera. However, a full thirty-five years would elapse before he ventured back to Poussin’s hometown. From July to October 1921, Signac retreated to Les Andelys, producing two oil paintings and countless watercolors of the commune during his stay. One of the oils features the Château Gaillard, and this time Signac opted for a quintessential view of the castle from across the Seine (Fig. 5). Flanked on either side by a copse of trees, the fortress gazes down on its own reflection in the placid river. A pinkish cloud forms an aureole around the keep, giving the monument an ethereal air. Nothing could be further removed from the Nelson-Atkins picture, whose naturalistic palette and more mundane sightline ground it firmly in this world. Still a fledgling artist grappling with color theory and pointillism when he painted The Château Gaillard, View from My Window, Petit Andely, Signac would eventually become the movement’s standard-bearer and scribe, bringing myriad artists into the fold and pushing Neo-Impressionism to new heights.

 Brigid M. Boyle  
 September 2022

### Notes

1. The exhibition in question was Le peintre Claude Monet at the Galerie du journal illustré La Vie Moderne, 7 boulevard des Italiens, Paris, which opened June 7, 1880. For the impact of this show on Signac’s career choice, see Marina Ferretti-

2. For the nuances between pointillism and divisionism, see Floyd Ratcliff, Paul Signac and Color in Neo-Impressionism (New York: Rockefeller University Press, 1992), 37–38.


4. Ferretti-Bocquillon et al., Signac, 121. Signac was a member of the hanging committee.


13. The Château Gaillard, View from My Window, Petit Andely is an English translation of the original title, Le château Gaillard, vu de ma fenêtre, Petit-Andely.


14. I am grateful to Françoise Baron, director of the Musée Nicolas Poussin, Les Andelys, for this information. The mill in question is no longer in service; today it is owned by Nicolas Blier, Maçons de tradition, a building company specializing in restoration projects.


17. After 1910, Signac’s output in watercolor greatly exceeded his output in oil. See Ferretti-Bocquillon et al., Signac, 20, 225.

18. This painting last appeared on the market in 2011. See Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale (New York: Sotheby’s, November 2, 2011), lot 49.


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[1] During Signac’s lifetime, he created three chronological lists of his paintings: the cahier d'opus (compiled 1887–1902); the cahier manuscript (compiled 1902–1909); and the pré-catalogue (compiled 1929–1932). The first two inventories contain no provenance information for the Nelson-Atkins painting, but the pré-catalogue lists two owners, “Goldschmidt” and “Rätte Richter Berlin,” in that order. See Archives Paul Signac, Paris.

François Cachin, in her catalogue raisonné of the artist, identified Goldschmidt as Galerie M. Goldschmidt, Frankfurt, a gallery with which Signac entered into contract in 1920. The gallery purchased roughly two dozen works directly from Signac during the 1920s. See François Cachin, Signac: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2000), no. 120, p. 174; email from Marina Ferretti-Bocquillon, independent art historian, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, September 13, 2022, NAMA curatorial files; and email from Charlotte Hellman, great-granddaughter of Signac, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, October 11, 2022, NAMA curatorial files.

The archives of Galerie M. Goldschmidt are presumed lost. A few years after the passing of the gallery’s founder, Marcel Goldschmidt (né Mayer Goldschmidt, 1860–1928), his wife and children scattered to other countries to escape Nazi persecution. Goldschmidt’s living relatives are unsure what became of his business records. See emails from Jennifer Jacobson, great-great-granddaughter of Goldschmidt, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, September 12, 2022 and October 6, 2022, NAMA curatorial files; and email from Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, to Naomi Goodman, great-granddaughter of Goldschmidt, October 10, 2022, NAMA curatorial files.

[2] A partial label on the painting’s verso was confirmed to be a Moderne Galerie Thannhauser label by Brigitte Jacobs van Renswouw, Zentralarchiv des internationalen kunsthandels E.V., in an email to MacKenzie Mallon, NAMA, September 21, 2015, NAMA curatorial files.

[3] See letter from Dana Zargar, agent for Karen Gutmann, to Ralph T. Coe, NAMA, March 29, 1978, NAMA curatorial files, which states that “it was bought from the Galerie Thannhauser in Munich.” This chain of ownership is further corroborated by a typed addendum to the Nelson-Atkins accessioning worksheet, which indicates that Justin Thannhauser sold the painting to Karen Gutmann “per tel. call to Gutmann Frames, NY, 2/17/87.” No further notes concerning this phone call have been found.
According to Françoise Cachin’s handwritten notes in her research dossier on *The Château Gaillard* (compiled as she prepared the Signac catalogue raisonné), the painting belonged to the Gutmanns “depuis 1927” (since 1927). See Archives Paul Signac, Paris. The couple may have purchased the work to celebrate their recent nuptials since they were married on January 8, 1927.

The Gutmanns emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1935 to escape Nazi persecution. They returned to Europe one more time in 1937, and then moved to New York permanently that same year, bringing their art collection with them. The Signac painting remained in their joint possession until Leopold’s death in 1970, after which Karen inherited it. See letter from Leopold S. Gutmann to Françoise Cachin, September 24, 1969, Archives Paul Signac, Paris; and emails from Mark Jacob Sussman, grandson of the Gutmanns, to Brigid M. Boyle, NAMA, October 7 and 12, 2022, NAMA curatorial files.


[5] Zargar, Inc., was owned by Dara Zargar (b. 1941), an Iranian art agent with residences in Manhattan and Miami.

**Related Works**

Paul Signac, *Les Andelys, Lucas Island*, 1886, oil on canvas, 26 x 17 3/8 in. (66 x 44.1 cm), Minnesota Marine Art Museum, Winona, MN, on loan from Mary Burrichter and Robert Kierlin.

Paul Signac, *Les Andelys, Setting Sun*, 1886, oil on canvas, 12 15/16 x 18 1/8 in. (32.8 x 46.1 cm), whereabouts unknown, illustrated in *Art moderne* (Paris: Christie’s, October 18, 2019), 145.


Paul Signac, *The Seine at Les Andelys*, 1886, oil on canvas, 18 x 25 1/2 in. (45.7 x 64.8 cm), Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA, M.1968.27.P.

Paul Signac, *Les Andelys, The Bridge*, 1886, oil on canvas, 13 x 18 1/8 in. (33 x 46 cm), Ise Cultural Foundation, Tokyo.


**Exhibitions**


*Nature as Scene: French Landscape Painting from Poussin to Bonnard*, Wildenstein, New York, October 29–December 6, 1975, no. 60, as *Petit-Andely: Château Gaillard, Seen from the Artist’s Window.*


1990, no. 79, as Château Gaillard, Seen from the Artist’s Window, Petit Andely.


References


Félix Fénéon, “Correspondance particulière de ‘L’Art moderne:’ L’Impressionnisme aux Tuileries,” L’Art moderne 6, no. 38 (September 19, 1886): 301, as le Château-Gaillard de ma fenêtre.


Donald Hoffmann, “The fine art of contributing to the gallery,” Kansas City Star 101, no. 225 (June 7, 1981): 1F.


Gloria Groom and Douglas Druick, The Age of Impressionism at the Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2008), 115 [repr., Gloria Groom and Douglas Druick, The Age of French Impressionism: Masterpieces from the Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010), 129].


Marina Ferretti Bocquillon, ed., Impressionism on the Seine (Giverny, France: Musée des impressionnismes, 2010), 57–58, 65n14, as The Château-Gaillard from my window and Les Andelys, Château-Gaillard, June-July.


Art moderne (Paris: Christie’s, October 18, 2019), 146.

European Art and Old Masters (Philadelphia: Freeman’s, February 18, 2020), unpaginated.