

DORE, Gustave (1832-1883)

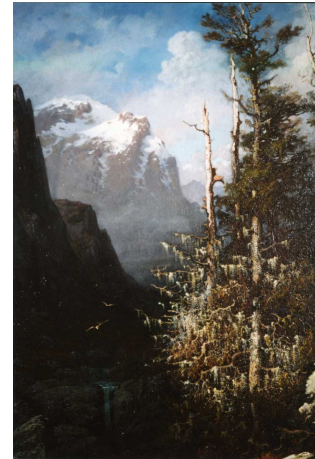
Souvenir des Alpes; Paysage

Date: before 1857

Technique: oil on canvas

Dimensions: H. 195 cm W. 131 cm

Inventory No. 868.1.46



HISTORY

This work, left to the museum in 1868 by Alfred Bruyas, has an original history. In 1941, according to the museum archives, the canvas was showing signs of wear. There were a number of holes that had a negative visual impact on the landscape. In 1952, during a move, a mover lost his balance and stuck his foot through the canvas. Irreparably damaged, the work was consigned to the museum storage facility.

In 1977, the painting was inspected and found to be in poor condition and not suitable for display. Cracks and tears in the paint layer required the use of facings (very thin Japanese tissue glued to the painted surface). The tears were repaired with temporary patches on the back. These were just provisional measures, however, and a complete restoration and conservation process was clearly necessary. Moreover, the stretcher had been damaged by wood-eating insects.

The painting then remained in storage until 2002, when it underwent a full restoration. The process was complex due to the severe damage to the canvas and the paint layer. It took a great deal of research to find out what the work looked like in its original state. A glass plate photo from the 1940s showing the painting in its entirety was used to perform the basic restoration, and specifically the reconstruction of this Alpine Landscape.

OVERVIEW

Doré's painting was in very poor condition and was difficult to handle without causing further damage. It was deemed necessary, and even vital, to restore the painting.



Fig.1: Full view, before restoration



Fig.2: Full view of the reverse, before restoration

DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT

The paint layer: The foreground is done mostly in dark tones, applied in thin layers. Conversely, the highlights are done with heavy impasto and their tones range from light to dark grey with bright touches of orange, yellow and blue.

Once the impasto* (see Glossary for words followed by an asterisk) was dry, a reddish glaze (layer of highly diluted paint) was spread over the rocks, and then wiped off. It is visible only in the hollows of the paint, which accentuates the textured effect.

A light sky appears between the mountain and a group of dark trees. In the sky, we can see traces of the artist's brushwork.

In general, the work is characterised by the use of heavy impasto, with an atmosphere marked by strong contrasts in the light and shadows (chiaroscuro) (See detail Fig. 3).

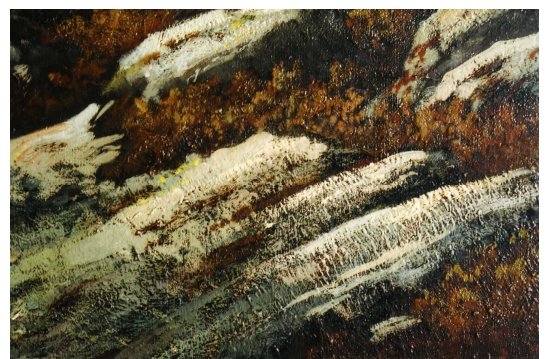


Fig.3: Example of the artist's technique. A first olive-green layer was applied and allowed to dry. A thick white tint was then applied and wiped off. (Only the ridges are coloured).

The paint layer shows widespread age cracks. This is accentuated by the fact that the support (canvas) has become deformed and affected the paint layer. Several zones also present drying cracks that likely occurred when the original paint dried (specifically in the central area around the tree).

The paint layer in the thickest parts shows significant cupping (Fig. 4). In areas, the paint layer shows poor adhesion on the support (canvas) or even paint losses* of various sizes. On

the lower part of the painting, there are extensive paint losses resulting in missing design elements.

Restoration work has already been performed, with some repaints on the left part of the painting. The paint layer is on a thin layer of white ground that is in good general condition. It is protected by a layer of varnish (not original) that is highly oxidized* with a yellowish colour that has a negative visual impact.

The photos taken under raking light show the problems mentioned above. (See figures 5 and 6).

The support is linen canvas. The canvas is highly oxidized and brittle, and the edges tend to crumble. It is almost impossible to handle the canvas. It has numerous distortions. It is further weakened by the many tears and paint losses, and it has lost much of its original tension. On the reverse, the canvas is deformed by the network of cracks in the paint. (See figures 5 and 6).

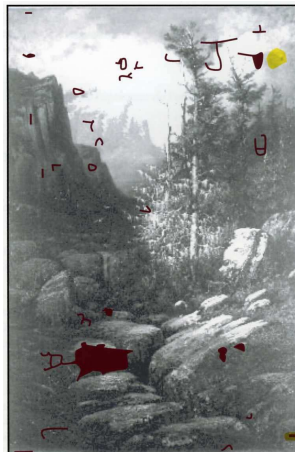


Fig.5: Tears, holes and repaints



Fig. 4, Close-up of the front in raking light. The paint layer is very thick. Extensive cupping can be seen.

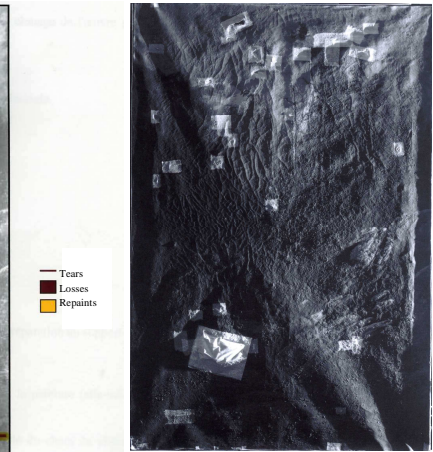


Fig.6: raking light (black and white)

The stretcher* had been used before and is in very poor condition. It is a stretcher frame with two crossbars* and it is chamfered*. It has traces of old nails, a brace (Fig. 7) was added to reinforce one of the members, and there are numerous traces of paint. It has some small holes caused by wood-eating insects that create tunnels for their larvae. The horizontal crossbar is split. The lower crossbar assembly is broken and was reinforced by a metal plate attached with screws. The wedges were pushed in too far, and all of the angles are open by 4 or 5 mm.



Fig.7 : Close-up of the stretcher before replacement, showing a brace added in a previous restoration procedure.

CONSERVATION TREATMENT

The paint layer was consolidated where necessary, by applying facing to stabilize the tears. The adhesive was applied with a brush under heat. A heated spatula was used on the surface to consolidate the bond.

The stretcher was replaced by a new custom-built stretcher. It is a chamfered wood stretcher frame with wedges to regulate the tension.

The painting was removed from the stretcher. The tacks were removed with a tack remover.

The dust was removed from the canvas using a suction device. The tissue that had been applied over the tears was removed mechanically. The traces of wax adhesive were also removed. The edges of the stretcher had created creases in the canvas, so the tacking edges were flattened by applying a damp cloth with a heated spatula.

The tears were repaired. They were consolidated by gluing the edges thread by thread, using a synthetic adhesive. The threads used were taken from the edge of the original canvas. They were coated with adhesive and heat was then applied with a heated tip to activate the bond. The paint losses were infilled.

The surface distortions were flattened gradually in a humidity- and temperature-controlled chamber. The canvas was dried on a suction table.

It was necessary to add a rigid lining, in light of the extensive tears and the severe distortions caused by the thick paint layer. This consists of gluing a canvas on the reverse of the painting to reinforce the original canvas. The lining is made of surface-coated polyester reinforced with an interleaf (very thin fabric) placed between the two canvases. The interleaf solidifies the adhesive bond between the original canvas and the lining. Because the canvas is very fragile, we first lined the back with a non-woven support fabric that will make the lining easier to remove, if necessary. The painting was then replaced on its new stretcher.

RESTORATION TREATMENT

The paint layer was cleaned to remove dust and grime.

The varnish was removed using solvent mixtures designed to dissolve natural resins.

The repaints and infills from previous restoration procedures were removed mechanically using solvent mixtures.

Paint losses were infilled with a fill material applied with a spatula. Once the fill was dry, the edges of the paint losses were cleaned with water. Finally, the infilled areas were worked so as to perfectly match the surrounding areas.

The paint losses were inpainted with powdered pigments mixed with retouch varnish. This was done after a preliminary step consisting of tinting the fill material and varnishing the painting. A reference photograph was used to reconstruct the design of the large area of loss. Although the photo was in black and white, it was nonetheless possible to restore the paint loss without inventing design elements.

A layer of varnish was applied with a spray gun to protect the surface.

GLOSSARY

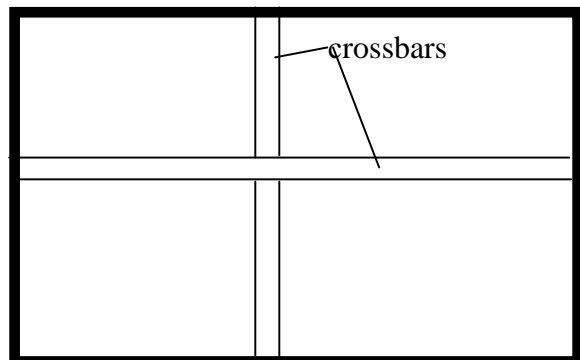
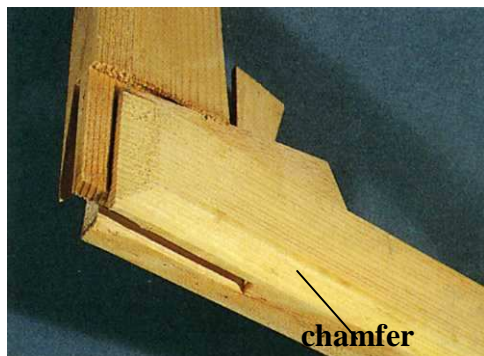
Chamfer: A bevelled surface to eliminate an otherwise sharp corner on a stone or frame, etc. (based on “*Préserver les objets de son patrimoine, Précis de conservation préventive*” MARDAGA 2001, p 255)

Oxidation: The action of oxygen on a material results in oxidation. (Based on “*Préserver les objets de son patrimoine, Précis de conservation préventive*” MARDAGA 2001, p 255)

Lining / Relining: a new piece of fabric attached to the reverse of a canvas painting, providing additional support for the painting. It is applied with adhesive (glue paste: flour mixed with hide glue, 17th century; wax: mixture of wax as a diffuser and resin as an adhesive, 19th century; modern resin and vinyl adhesives in solution or emulsion, last third of the 20th century. Usually, the adhesive penetrates the original fabric and consolidates the ground layer of the painting. When the adhesive does not pass through the old canvas (thermoplastic resins), it is called double canvassing. Lining is the operation consisting of gluing a new canvas on the back of a work painted on paper or hide (parchment or leather) Relining is a when an old lining is replaced. Blind lining consists of stretching a new piece of fabric behind the original fabric, without the use of adhesive.

(Based on “*Préserver les objets de son patrimoine, Précis de conservation préventive*” MARDAGA 2001, p 256-257)

Chamfered stretcher frame with two crossbars.



6. “*La dégradation des peintures sur toile*”, Ecole nationale du patrimoine, 1997, p 14

Non-woven fabrics: Non-woven fabrics, developed by the textile and chemical industries, have provided contemporary artists with new supports for painting. These fabrics are made by overlapping fibres in the form of a mat. The manufacturing method is similar to that of paper. They have anisotropic behaviour, with greater formability in the transverse direction than the machine direction. Non-woven fabrics reinforced by heat-bonding are obtained from a single hot-melt fibre. Non-woven fabrics reinforced by gluing use different types of fibres and adhesives.

Due to their chemical nature and manufacturing method, non-woven fabrics have very different ageing behaviour than woven fabrics. (Based on “*La dégradation des peintures sur toile*”, Ecole nationale du patrimoine, 1997, p 20)

Drying cracks: Drying cracks form as the paint dries, and indicate the use of a faulty technique or technology. They occur when incompatible materials are used and when there are drying problems. (Based on “*La dégradation des peintures sur toile*”, Ecole nationale du patrimoine, 1997, p 43)

Cupping: Aged paint, loosened by cracking, with edges curling to create cup-like formations. Strong cupping of cracking paint can distort a support. (Based on “*La dégradation des peintures sur toile*”, Ecole nationale du patrimoine, 1997, p 45)

Paint losses: Paint losses are areas of missing paint. This is a final stage of damage when the paint no longer adheres to the canvas. For the support, a loss designates a missing part of the painting. Losses can often cause distortions and shrinkage of the canvas, and may be the starting point for new tears. (Based on “*La dégradation des peintures sur toile*”, Ecole nationale du patrimoine, 1997, p 68, 92)