

Edgar DEGAS (Paris 1834 - Paris 1917)

Landscape with a Path Leading to a Copse of Trees

Pastel over a monotype in oils on paper, laid down on board.
Signed and dedicated à M. Charpentier / Degas at the lower right.
271 x 358 mm. (10 5/8 x 14 in.) [sheet]

Many of Degas's pastel drawings were made over a monotype base, a practice he seems to have begun around 1876 or 1877. A monotype is made by applying either black ink, oil paint, or oil diluted with turpentine to a non-absorbent surface such as copper or glass. The image is transferred onto a sheet of paper by laying it onto the plate and applying pressure, either by rubbing or by passing through a press. While usually only one impression of each print could be made (hence the term 'monotype'), occasionally a second, fainter impression could be pulled before the ink was used up. It would be this second pull that would be extensively reworked in pastel by Degas, although he would occasionally retouch the first pull as well. The artist himself seems to have avoided the term 'monotype', preferring instead to define these works as 'dessins fait à l'encre grasse et imprimé' ('drawings made with greasy ink and put through a press').

The present sheet is one of a group of some three dozen pastel-worked monotype landscapes executed by Degas between 1890 and 18922. It was in October 1890, while staying at the home of the painter and printmaker Georges Jeanniot in the village of Diénay, near Dijon in Burgundy, that Degas began to produce a new series of colour monotype landscapes, many enriched with pastel. Although he had first made pastellized monotypes a decade or so earlier, the ones produced at Diénay, and in the months following, were in a larger format, and were more technically audacious. Degas worked on the plates using diluted oil paint, creating effects by rubbing the medium with cloths or brushes, sometimes using the end of a brush handle or his finger to create lines or other forms.

This landscape was included in Paul-André Lemoisne's catalogue of Degas' oeuvre, but with no dimensions given, which suggests that he may not have seen it in person. It is also described by Lemoisne as being in pastel alone, an understandable error as the composition has been so thoroughly reworked in pastel by the artist that the monotype base is hardly evident. Indeed, as Theodore Reff has recently noted of the present sheet, 'Only parts of the trees and perhaps of the sky seem to remain of the monotype impression, although the intermittently sharp edges of the plate mark along the sides and bottom may also be vestiges of that impression. The surface was then extensively reworked in pastel, applied both in a liquid form (Degas is known to have steamed chalk strokes to liquefy them and then to have reworked them with a brush) and in a dry form once the previous layers had dried.'

This is one of two landscapes executed in pastel over monotype presented by the artist to the publisher and collector Georges Charpentier (1846-1905). The other pastel, similarly signed and dedicated, and

of identical dimensions, is a Landscape by the Edge of the Sea, today in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Neuchâtel in Switzerland. Like the present sheet, it passed from Charpentier to the dealer Ambroise Vollard (1866-1939).

Provenance:

Given by the artist to Georges Charpentier, Paris
Ambroise Vollard, Paris, by c.1905
Galerie Paul Pétridès, Paris
Private collection, Tokyo.

Exhibitions

Possibly Paris, Galerie Durand-Ruel, 1892.

Literature:

Paris, Galerie A. Vollard, Degas. Quatre-vingt-dix-huit reproductions signées par Degas (Peintures, pastels, dessins et estampes), 1914, [reprinted Bernheim-Jeune & Cie., Paris, 1918], pl.XXVII ('Paysage, pastel'); Paul-André Lemoisne, Degas et son oeuvre, Paris, 1946, Vol.II, pp.228-229, no.413 (incorrectly described as in pastel alone, and dated between 1876 and 1880); Franco Russoli and Fiorella Minervino, L'opera completa di Degas, Milan, 1970, p.107, no.440 ('Dosso Alberato'); Richard Kendall, Degas Landscapes, New Haven and London, 1993, p.196, p.289, note 54.