

Recovering the light: the restoration of Waterloo Bridge



The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza is presenting the technical study and restoration of *Waterloo Bridge* by *André Derain* (1906), undertaken following a crowdfunding campaign organised thanks to the support of Mastercard, which created the donation platform and the communication of the campaign. The restored painting can now be seen in a special installation in Room 33 of the Permanent Collection until 23 June.

The restoration of the work has involved an exhaustive process which, over the course of 15 months, aimed to recover the colour and luminosity with which it was created by the artist. In order to fully understand the painting's state of conservation and Derain's working method the museum's restoration team undertook a scientific research project using techniques such as radiography, infrared reflectography, photography with raking light, infrared transmitted photography and materials analysis.

The study of Derain's **pictorial technique** has shown it to be unusual due to the artist's use of brushstrokes of almost pure colours next to zones in which the canvas shows through and there is a total absence of paint. The visible preparatory layer also increases the work's luminosity thanks to a higher concentration of lead white, together with calcium carbonate and silica.

The painter's palette has a wide range of reds (vermilion, naphthol red and red earth), zinc yellow and chrome orange, almost pure and applied in juxtaposed brushstrokes. In such a luminous work there are barely any shadows as Derain used colour contrasts to achieve the volume and depth he desired.

The application of **photography with raking light** made it possible to observe the volume of the brushstrokes that Derain applied to the canvas. The densest areas are those in the sky, particularly in the upper right corner where the artist represented the intensity of the sunlight, making use of vertical strokes. In the central area of the horizon with the bridge and buildings the paint is thinner, smoother and almost continuous, which creates depth, while in the river area the artist again applied more pigment.

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Detail of the artist's brushstroke

The **X-radiograph** confirmed that Derain maintained his initial idea, as it coincides with a preparatory drawing similar in form and colour to the painting and with no visible changes to the composition. The infrared reflectograph made it possible to observe the light application of oil pigment to define the silhouette of the bridge and the city, in contrast to the more heavily impastoed textures of the sky and the river.

Following the technical study, the museum's restorers undertook a complex process of **restoration** to counteract the degradation that the painting had suffered over time. This included reinforcing the canvas, consolidating the paint layer and removing dirt, pollution and old varnish.

The **support** had structural damage, particularly around the perimeter where there were tears in the canvas that could compromise its tension and physical stability. To resolve this, these tears were sutured and the perimeter reinforced. Furthermore, in the upper right zone an area of old damage was detected in the canvas that had been repaired in the past by applying a thick patch. This patch has been retained since it does not affect the pictorial layer, which remains stable.



Detail of a corner, before and after restoration.

Pollution and vestiges of aged rosin varnish had produced superficial dirt on the pictorial layer which distorted the work's atmosphere. The elimination of these materials was



Detail of cleaning the varnish.

extremely complex due to the different volumes and densities of the paint itself. On occasions, each pigment reacts differently to solvents, requiring a meticulous and specific approach to the cleaning process. With the present work the preparatory layer, which is especially sensitive, was exposed, necessitating a different and more careful intervention.

As a result of these procedures Waterloo Bridge has gained greater depth and has recovered the vibrant light and vivid colours which characterise the Fauve works by this great painter, André Derain.

The crowdfunding campaign to contribute to the technical study and restoration of the work, which ran from September 2023 to January 2024, saw the participation of more than 200 individuals and companies. Notable among them were the Patron Friend of the Museum Sabela González and the companies Spain Inside and Tauck, who were the principal donors to the initiative, Mastercard and Idónika, as well as the Friends of the Museum, whose collaboration represented 68% of donations from individuals.