

Impressionism is probably the style of art that has been given the most attention in the last decades. Driven by the market and by the public, countless museums and exhibition spaces have presented the work of these modern French painters in almost all imaginable combinations. It seems as if everything has already been said and shown. In the field of art history the large-scale and often redundant marketing has become crippling rather than helpful. A small number of specialists keep research alive, although this often yields no more than details. Books and large exhibitions with a good grounding in scholarship have laid the foundation for our broad knowledge: *The New Painting* (San Francisco, 1986) showed how much more art was traded under the name of "Impressionism" than we had thought. Robert Herbert drew our attention to the connexions between urbanisation, social gentrification and the new art. Pat Mainardi analysed the difference between the avant-garde revolutionaries and the allegedly dowdy academicians, showing that it involved more nuances than hitherto believed. This book pursues a different path. It writes the history of Impressionism and Postimpressionism from a technological perspective. The examination of the painting technique may at first seem narrow, but it is at least as legitimate as the stylistic or any other criteria that a particular author would choose to focus upon. We would even venture to suggest that the focus on technique actually brings us closest to the artists. In our opinion, the team of authors have also succeeded in conveying their insights in a highly readable way, making us feel that we have been transported into the daily world of the Impressionist painters. The technical development of an Impressionistic painting is still far from common knowledge in the field of art history. The first light was shed on this question by research at London institutes, whose results were shared with the public in exhibitions and publications of the Courtauld Institute (1987), and the National Gallery (1990). In this context, the National Gallery launched what was soon to become the popular and successful series, *Art in the Making*. They gained great acclaim well beyond the world of restoration with the exhibition subtitled "Impressionism" and the book of the same name. However, only a few institutes followed this up by investigating individual works or groups of works in their collections: in 1992, the Rotterdam Boijmansvan Beuningen Museum in the context of a restoration campaign; once again the London National Gallery in collaboration with the neighbouring Courtauld Institute (2003) followed by the Art Institute of Chicago (2004) with investigations of works by Georges Seurat; the on going systematic studies of Vincent van Gogh's workshop practice that for some years now have been underway at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. The publication of the Amsterdam results is still outstanding. Another milestone in this research is Anthea Callen's book, *The Art of Impressionism* (2000), which combines well-founded knowledge with observations of the paintings themselves. Is, then, the topic of Impressionistic painting technique exhausted? No. Many new and exciting findings are published in this book. The basis of these discoveries is the collection of Impressionist and Postimpressionist works in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud in Cologne. It is the most extensive of its kind in Germany and far beyond. Thanks to the Fondation Corboud the Museum was able to investigate not only individual major works, but entire series of paintings by the one and the same painter. While we are not so presumptuous as to assert that this contribution has now adequately marked out the field, many of the results may also be helpful in the treatment of other collections. The comparative material has grown through this research and has provided conclusions that extend far beyond this museum. Along with this book, the details of all of the results from research carried out on over seventy works will be published online and made available to professional circles. You are cordially invited to visit the internet platform set up for the purpose at www.museenkoeln.de/wallraf-richartz-museum and www.palazzostrozzi.org and to use, discuss and expand the results published there. For ease of reading, the catalogue does

completely without footnotes; however, the extensive and valuable specialist literature that has informed the text is clearly referenced for every chapter in an appendix and recommended for further readings. If this book and the exhibition have succeeded in a wakening an interest in the technology of art in general, we would be very pleased. The work of restorers has certainly changed in recent years. It is no longer the cleaning of paintings, the securing of fragile layers of paint and the filling-in of missing pieces that comprise the main body of this work, but rather an ever increasing attention is given to research into historical painting techniques and their documentation. Some would be moan this, but pausing a moment before the painting cannot hurt, if one considers that the lion's share of the restorer's work consists in repairing the mistakes that his or her predecessors have made, not least for lack of sufficient knowledge of the technology of art. The exhibition and the book thus hope to bring art technology and art history on to equal terms. We, the directors of the institutions involved, have learned a great deal from the preliminary discussions and from reading the manuscripts. Much of what we took for granted suddenly faltered. Our view of the present state of paints, frames, signatures and many other aspects of the development of painting has been sharpened, and not just in respect of Impressionism alone. It is a common place that art works are no longer the same once they have left the studio and that the decades and the centuries leave their mark upon them. But if one is presented with a concrete example, namely that the white poplar wood, which the painter deliberately chose as a light background, later darkened and changed the effect of the painted landscape, then it makes you think. In 1980 the American philosopher Nelson Goodman delivered himself of the opinion that the museum was an institution for the prevention of blindness. We hope that the sharpening of our perspective will also carry across to the public. We have arranged the educational aspect of the exhibition in such a way that visitors may act as detectives along with us in search of historical clues. We even leave a few questions open, not simply as a game, but rather because we ourselves do not know the answers.

Visitors and readers are invited to look and think along with us. Many eyes see more than just a few, after all. Guided by the same conception, the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud in Cologne and the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence together have been guided by the idea that the public can and should be introduced to the work of the art historian and art technologist. We do not wish to practise any form of scientific mystification, but rather to allow our visitors to look over our shoulders and even join in. We are pleased to exhibit the works from the Cologne collection together with the loans, also in Florence, one of the European capitals of art. Our thanks go first to the lenders, for making this show possible. The basis is the collection of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and the permanent loan from the Fondation Corboud. It was the mission of its founder and benefactor, Gérard Corboud, which made it possible for us to research a large quantity of Impressionist and Postimpressionist works in the first place. To this end, the curators have identified works and objects that are of major importance to the understanding of Impressionism and which supplement the Cologne collection. Also exhibited are several original painting tools, which are of course rarer than the paintings themselves, are brought together here. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the lenders. Our staff have built up a large network over the past years. The list of names on our team of consultants reads like a "Who's Who" in Impressionist research. The advisory board included Richard Brettell, Anthea Callen, Douglas Druick, John House, John Leighton, Debora Silverman, Susan Alyson Steinand Richard Thomson. The team of restorers at the museum has for years been co-operating closely and successfully with the Cologne University of Applied Science, and the collaborative research project was what first made this extensive survey possible. We would like to thank rector Joachim Metzner, the heads of the Institute of Restoration and Conservation Studies, Elisabeth Jägers and Hans Portsteffen, who were closely involved in

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the facility manager and director of security, Ulderigo Frusi. Our special thanks go to Graziella Battaglia, Antonella Loiero and Linda Pacifici for the exhibition co-ordination in Florence. Finally, an exhibition with such an emphasis on art technology and conservation would not have been possible in Florence without the collaboration of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, the state institute for restoration and research, to which we owe great thanks. The core of the scientific team were the three conservators from the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud and Cologne University of Applied Science. For five years Iris Schaefer, Caroline von Saint-George and Katja Lewerentz have worked with untiring enthusiasm, a sense of fine judgement and, not least, their microscopes to exhume what was buried among the treasures and reveal what was concealed. Their work is not only useful, but will endure over many years and indeed set new standards. We might also mention here that it is one of the privileges of museum work to experience the latest in sights so rapidly and directly. Each time it was an inspirational climax, brightening up the drab daily grind, just as the paintings of the Impressionists do. Without money, however, not even inspiration can develop. Therefore, the final “thank you” is dedicated to the sponsors. Rhein Energie Stiftung Jugend/Beruf, Wissenschaft sponsored the research project over many years. We would therefore like to cordially thank Rhein Energie Stiftungen Jugend/Beruf, Wissenschaft und Kultur as well as Rhein Energie AG. We are also very thankful for the supporting contributions of Aeroporto di Firenze, Apt, Ataf. In Florence, the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation would like to thank the public and private lenders and sponsors, including the Region of Tuscany, the Province of Florence, the City of Florence and the Florentine Chamber of Commerce, who all provided strong support for the exhibition from the outset. We would also like to thank the Banca CR Firenze, the primary sponsor in Florence, as well as the Associazione Partners Palazzo Strozzi, who generously supported the exhibition in every phase of its development. In co-operation, the efforts of all the helpers come together to form a whole, like strokes and spots of paint on the canvas. The whole is then greater than the sum of its parts and becomes an impression, like the spectrum of light reflected by colours on the canvas.