

SISLEY - CHURCH AT NOISY-LE-ROI: AUTUMN 35.625



CAPTION ONE

This autumnal scene is one of Sisley's finest Impressionist landscapes. It was almost certainly painted in October 1874, shortly after the artist's return to France following a four-month trip to England. The painting shows the small village of Noisy-le-Roi, which lies between Versailles and Saint-Germain-en-Laye, south-west of Louveciennes and Marly-le-Roi, on the edge of the Forest of Marly.

This landscape, made up of unassuming motifs, is a vision of a tranquil rural world. As is typical of Sisley's finest paintings, the artist has subtly and delicately responded to the changing light of the season and to the specific time of the day. He does this by modifying his palette - carefully selecting the colours and tones to be used - and by varying his brushstrokes to help suggest a peaceful, bright, autumn day.

CAPTION TWO

How would Sisley have built up his composition? As few preliminary sketches by Sisley survive it seems most likely that he normally began by drawing the broad outlines of the composition, in either chalk or oil, directly onto the primed canvas before then laying in the colour. Some areas of under-drawing, in both black chalk and thin blue or grey oil paint, can still be made out in this painting.

In terms of the composition itself, Sisley has chosen to paint the church with its belfry - the focal point of the composition - from an unusual angle. Normally we would expect to be led back, visually, to such a focal point but Sisley blocks this possibility. Two fences, two lines of trees and various long blue shadows, lying parallel to the picture plane, keep us firmly in the foreground of the composition.

CAPTION THREE

The Church at Noisy-le-Roi was painted during an important year in the history of Impressionism, 1874. It was in this year that the artists grouped around Monet, Degas, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley finally managed to hold the first of six group exhibitions which we today know as the Impressionist exhibitions.

A critic reviewing this first exhibition coined the term Impressionism. This critic, Louis Leroy, used to the high finish of paintings exhibited at the Salon, was horrified by the appearance of paintings which he considered preliminary sketches, not finished works of art.

CAPTION FOUR

Not all of the critics reviewing the first Impressionist exhibition reacted in such a negative manner. Armand Silvestre wrote that: 'At first glance one has difficulty in distinguishing what differentiates the painting of M. Monet from that of M. Sisley and the latter's manner from M. Pissarro's. A little study will soon teach you that M. Monet is the most adept and daring, M. Sisley the most harmonious and hesitant, M. Pissarro the most genuine and naive.'

Silvestre continued: 'In looking at their painting, what strikes you first of all is the immediate caress which the eye receives from it... What next distinguishes it is the simplicity of the means of harmony. One discovers soon, in fact, that its whole secret is a very delicate and very exact observation of relationships of tone.'

CAPTION FIVE

While his father was alive Sisley had few financial troubles but after 1870 Sisley was forced to make a living from his art. During the rest of his life he was never free of financial hardship. Unlike the works of his Impressionist friends, Monet, Renoir, Degas and Pissarro, Sisley's paintings did not increase in value during his lifetime, although immediately after his death the price of his paintings rose dramatically.

In 1875, in order to raise money, Sisley and his Impressionist friends Morisot, Monet, and Renoir organised an auction sale of their work. Sisley included twenty of his paintings in the auction that took place at the Hotel Drouot, Paris, on 24 March. It is possible that *The Church of Noisy-le-Roi: Autumn* was included in this sale as lot 58, 'Matinee d'automne'. The painting was bought at the auction by the dealer Durand-Ruel for 130 francs.

CAPTION SIX

Like many of the Impressionists, Sisley was supported by the dealer Paul Durand-Ruel (1831-1922) who promoted his work in Britain and America, although with little success. From 1891 Sisley also sold to the Parisian dealer Georges Petit.

After the auction sale in 1875 Durand-Ruel sold *The Church at Noisy-le-Roi: Autumn* to the Parisian collector A. Dachery who owned a number of paintings by Sisley. The painting next came on the market at Dachery's sale, held at the Hotel Drouot on 30 May 1899 (lot 48). It was bought at this sale by Baronne Henri de Rothschild for 8500 francs. William Burrell acquired the painting in 1929 from the dealer Georges Petit for £1450.