

THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Fact Sheet

Piette's House at Montfoucault by Camille Pissarro



Title:	Piette's House at Montfoucault: Snow Effect
Maker:	Camille Pissarro (1830-1903)
Medium:	Oil on canvas
Date:	1874
Dimensions:	h. 60 x w. 73.5 cm
Museum No:	PD.10-1966
Gallery:	5

Key Dates for Pissarro

1830	Born St Thomas, Virgin Island, West Indies
1842	Sent to boarding school at Passy, near Paris
1853	Goes to Venezuela with Danish artist Fritz Melbye
1855	Studies in Paris with Anton Melbye and others
1857	Pissarro spends summer at Montmorency with family and paints from nature following Corot's advice
1869-70	Paints with Monet, Sisley and Renoir along Seine
1869	Franco-Prussian War – Pissarro goes to London with family
Early 1870s	Paints in Impressionist style, range of subjects from factories, peasant population of Brittany and landscapes
1874	First Impressionist Exhibition Visits friend Piette and PAINTS THIS LANDSCAPE
1881	Visited by Cézanne, Gauguin and Guillaumin
1884	Moves to Éragny-sur-Epte
1885	Meets Signac and Seurat
1886	Eighth and last Impressionist exhibition – Neo-Impressionist room contained works by Pissarro, Seurat, Signac and son Lucien Pissarro
1889	Produces album of anarchist drawings <i>Turpitudes Sociales</i>
1890s	Gradually abandons Neo-Impressionist style preferring style which allowed him to capture sensations of nature
1903	Dies in Paris

This picture was painted in the autumn of the year after the first Impressionist exhibition. It had been a tough year for Pissarro: his nine-year old daughter had died, the critical response to the exhibition had been draining, and he was very short of money. His friend Ludovic Piette-Montfoucault, invited him to stay at his farm in Montfoucault, a tiny hamlet in the east of Brittany. Piette had encouraged Pissarro to come and stay on his farm as early as 1871:

'What splendid things to do ... in these places one could think that one is thrown 1,000 or 2,000 years back: no traces of man left, it is just as wild after a century or two of flood; trees and rocks of such colour.'

This stay in 1874 gave Pissarro the opportunity of a retreat and also the possibility for a close examination of rural life. During this visit Pissarro painted eighteen pictures of the house, its inhabitants and immediate surroundings, five of which show the effects of the snow. This particular image has no people in it, but there is a sense of human presence in the melting tracks in the snow.

Pissarro was a superb painter of snow and frost. Their luminous quality, and the changing colours and distinctive forms that the landscape assumed under a blanket of frost fascinated him. He varied his palette to register the different weather conditions from the warm mauve undertones of freshly fallen snow in sunlight, to the chill, slate-grey earth colours where the snow has begun to melt, which is what we can see here. The paint has been applied in broad brushstrokes, in different directions, and displays the 'oblong of colours' that Monet suggested the artists use to describe form:

'When you go out to paint, try to forget what object you have before you – a tree, a house, a field, or whatever. Merely think here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact colour and shape, until you have your own naïve impression.'

During this period Pissarro had a very close working relationship with Paul Cézanne. In paintings from the mid 1870s there are certain features which appear in the work of both artists namely, the use of the palette knife, the limited range of the palette itself, the reduction of the composition to basic elements and a renewed appreciation for the texture of paint. There are a

number of portraits from this time which both artists painted of each other, which also reflect the importance of their friendship.