

Microscopy Analysis of Alexander Nasmyth

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Introduction

This project looks at two paintings by Alexander Nasmyth which are featured in the exhibition, *Old Ways New Roads, Travels in Scotland 1720-1832*, at The Hunterian. The focus of the project is to consider and discuss *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire* and *Dumbarton Castle and Town with Ben Lomond*, in relation to Nasmyth's career and oeuvre. This poster presents the technical examination of *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire*, using microscopy to gain further insight into Nasmyth's painting techniques. An in-depth technical examination of Nasmyth's works has not taken place prior to this project, therefore, the technical findings will provide valuable insight into the artist's working methods.

Artist's Background

Alexander Nasmyth (1758-1840) was a Scottish portrait and landscape painter who was a key figure in the Picturesque movement in Scotland. Nasmyth was trained by James Cummying, Alexander Runciman and then by the portrait painter, Allan Ramsay, before he left in 1782 to complete his artistic training in Italy. His time in Italy had a significant influence on his approach to painting landscapes. Nasmyth also had a great interest in engineering and architecture, he made contributions in both fields, as well as setting up a landscaping consultancy for the Scottish nobility and a school of art in Edinburgh.

Microscopy

Examination of *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire* using light microscopy allows for the artist's brushstrokes, the layering of paint and the surface of the painting to be observed in closer detail. These details may provide valuable information regarding the artist's approach to painting and the identification of characteristic techniques. The macrographs may also help to establish the condition of the painted surface and allows for a closer examination of the canvas support which is visible through the paint and varnish layers.

Results

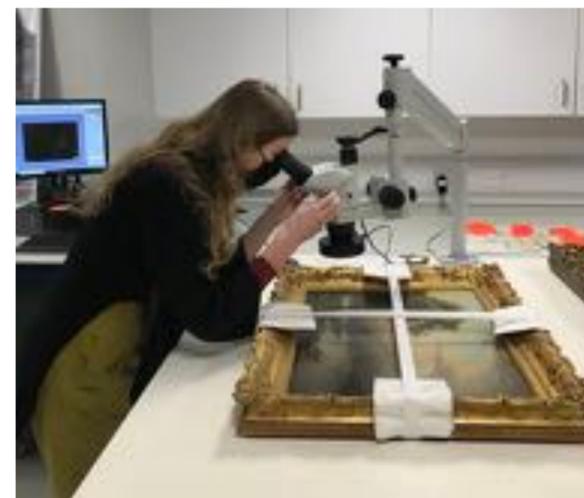
The macrographs show Nasmyth's brushwork is detailed, delicate and smooth. Nasmyth appears to have applied the paint in relatively short brushstrokes, layering the paint to produce the illusion of depth. This can be viewed most clearly in his painting of foliage (fig. 2). The detail of Ardencaple Castle (fig. 3) is architecturally accurate, in keeping with Nasmyth's interest and involvement in architectural projects. The detail of the figure on the boat (fig. 1) reveals that Nasmyth applied the yellow paint lastly to highlight the figure's clothing.



Alexander Nasmyth, *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire*, 1816, oil on canvas, 44.5 x 60 cm. Private collection. Photo: Sotheby's



Microscopy analysis of Alexander Nasmyth, *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire*. Photo: Alexandra Marchant Wink



Examining the condition of *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire* and the artist's techniques and application of materials. Photo: Alexandra Marchant Wink

Further Analysis and Conclusion

The technical examination of *Dumbarton Castle and Town with Ben Lomond* using microscopy would allow for the findings produced from *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire* to be compared. This would help to determine characteristic techniques of the artist. However, it has been possible to comment upon Nasmyth's brushwork and to identify certain techniques and approaches to painting.

Macrographs



Figure 1. Alexander Nasmyth, *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire*. Detail of figure, macrograph. Photo: Alexandra Marchant Wink



Figure 2. Alexander Nasmyth, *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire*. Detail of foliage, macrograph. Photo: Alexandra Marchant Wink



Figure 3. Alexander Nasmyth, *Ardencaple from Roseneath, Dunbartonshire*. Detail of Ardencaple Castle, macrograph. Photo: Alexandra Marchant Wink

References

- Cooksey, J. C. B. *Alexander Nasmyth 1758-1840: A Man of the Scottish Renaissance*. Scotland: Paul Harris, Whittingehame House Publishing, 1991.
- William Charles Maughan, *Annals of Garelochside: An account historical and topographical of the parishes of Row, Rosneath and Cardross*. Paisley: A. Gardner, Paisley, 1897. Accessed April 3, 2021. <https://archive.org/details/annalsofgareloch00maugiala/page/170/mode/2up?q=nasmyth>
- "Alexander Nasmyth," *National Gallery, Scotland*, Accessed April 3, 2021. <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/artists/alexander-nasmyth>