

# Jan Toorop's early Pointillist paintings

In any study concerning the development of Jan Toorop (1858–1928) the artist's membership of *Les Vingt* will prove to have been of crucial importance. It was in this progressive Brussels circle that Toorop first encountered not only the works of Van Gogh, Gauguin and the Belgian Symbolists but also those of Seurat and Signac<sup>1</sup>.

The present paper will point out some of the problems relating to the early Pointillist works by Jan Toorop making use of new research. It will also describe the atmosphere in which the artist encountered the Pointillist technique, between 1887 and 1891, and felt himself forced to come to grips with its implications. Contemporary letters and newspaper articles are scrutinized and, finally, an analysis is made of the paintings recognized at present as being from this period. This analysis will stress Toorop's personal use of technique and subject matter in the light of more recent interpretations of Divisionism.

In the fall of 1882 Toorop had settled at Brussels. He at first intended to study at the Royal Academy, but soon he came in touch with the founding members of *Les Vingt*. The increasingly close contacts eventually lead to his election in November and his official admission into the society on December 7, 1884<sup>2</sup>. This membership gave Toorop the right to exhibit his works at the prestigious *Vingt* exhibitions which were held at Brussels annually during February.

Originally the Dutch artist aligned himself with the group around James Ensor (1860–1949). But when, in 1887, Seurat's *Dimanche à l'île de la Grande Jatte* was exhibited at *Les Vingt*<sup>3</sup>, the Ensor faction came to be regarded as a lost cause and a gradual loosening of the ties between Toorop and Ensor took place. In fact, in June of 1886, after his marriage to the English woman Annie Hall, Toorop settled at The Hague and he temporarily lost contact with *Les Vingt*<sup>4</sup>. In addition a severe

<sup>1</sup> Seurat exhibited at *Les Vingt* in 1887, 1889 and 1891. In 1892 the society commemorated the artist who had recently died. Signac exhibited in 1888 and became a member in 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Toorop was to remain the only Dutch member of *Les Vingt*. The only other foreigners elected were Signac and Rodin.

<sup>3</sup> On this occasion six other paintings by Seurat of Grandcamp and Honfleur were shown. See: John Rewald: *Post-Impressionism from van Gogh*

to Gauguin, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, second ed. 1962) pp. 103–4 and the *Les Vingt* catalogue of 1887.

<sup>4</sup> It is not known if Toorop visited Brussels to attend the opening of the *Les Vingt* exhibition of 1887. If so he must have met Seurat and Signac personally for they were both in Brussels on the occasion. Toorop himself sent, only on second thought, two works to *Les Vingt* in that year. Compare the first and second editions of the 1887 catalogue of *Les Vingt*.



1  
*La séduction. De verleiding. Schemeravond-idylle. Lueurs du soleil couchant. La déclaration.*  
 Oil on canvas;  
 67 x 77; s.l.l. J. Th. Toorop; d.l.l. 1886.  
 Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller.



2  
*De Nes. Nachtleven. Uit de Nes. Au Nes – Mère et fille.*  
 Oil on canvas;  
 67 x 77,5; s.l.l. Jan Toorop; d.l.l. 1889.  
 The Hague, Gemeente Museum.

illness with a subsequent period of convalescence resulted in an interruption of the artist's creative production during the greater part of 1887<sup>5</sup>.

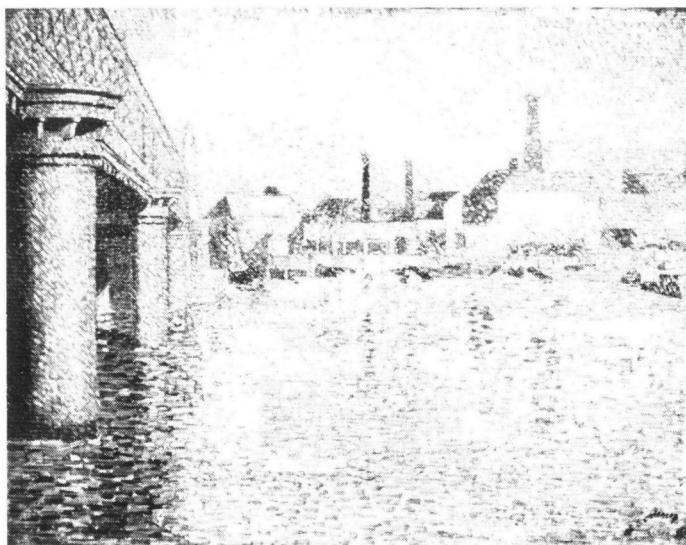
Under these circumstances it is not surprising to find that most of Toorop's entries to *Les Vingt* of 1888 were works dating from 1885 and 1886. Equally understandable are Emile Verhaeren's (1855–1916) remarks at this time that Toorop was 'en retard' and presented 'toujours la même chose'<sup>6</sup>. One of the staunchest supporters of Neo-Impressionism, this same writer had urged his close friend Théo Van Rysselberghe (1862–1926) to see *La Grande Jatte* at Paris and thereby opened the doors of the Belgian society to Seurat and Signac.

From the above as well as other comments made by Verhaeren, we must conclude that before February, 1888, Toorop had not yet employed a Pointillist technique, and, therefore, his Pointillist works should be dated after this time. Even the paintings of the year 1888 itself are still full of contradictions, as Toorop's entries to *Les Vingt* in February, 1889, show. The fifteen works exhibited in that year were so varied in character that visitors and critics alike were left confused. Although Toorop had again settled in Brussels<sup>7</sup>, the paintings had been executed in three different countries: Belgium, England and Holland. Changes of environment always had an immediate impact on the artist and partly account for the variety in his technique, style and choice of subject. Technically the paintings

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Jan Toorop to his parents with the date, Amerongen, September 10, 1887.

<sup>6</sup> Brussels, Royal Library, Mss. V. Cab, 14 V, letter No. 20, to be dated February, 1888.

<sup>7</sup> By September 17, 1887, Toorop had returned to Brussels and soon thereafter was admitted to a hospital. Only towards the end of December was he able to work again.



3  
*Brug in Londen. Spoorbrug over de Theems in Londen. Bridge at London.*

Oil on canvas;

35,5 x 46; s.l.r. J. Toorop.

Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller.



4  
*Mer calme (Devonshire). Gezicht op het eiland Wight.*

Oil on canvas;

35,3 x 45,2; s.l.r. à mon ami Jules J. Toorop.

Rotterdam, Coll. Mr. M. de Bloeme.

presented a wide range including the use of the palette-knife and the adoption of Pointillism. The latter technique was modified in turn by the muted colours found in *De Nes* also known as *Au Nes-Mère et Fille* (Fig. 2), which was executed in Amsterdam, and the bright colours, which informed his seascapes executed in Devonshire (Fig. 4 and fig. 5). Not surprising therefore Octave Maus expressed the hope that: 'La période de transition l'amènera sûrement à une peinture rationnelle'<sup>8</sup>. However, the general accusation of 'la contagion des idées *Grand-jattistes*' was offset by the praise of the Destrée brothers who regarded the artist: 'De tous ceux qui ont adopté la technique néo-impresionniste le micux doué'<sup>9</sup>.

The artist first exhibited paintings in the Pointillist technique only in February, 1889. Indeed, the use of this technique indicates a major change in Toorop's development and it is possibly the result of an artistic re-thinking during his illness of 1887. But not before the spring or summer of 1888 did he take the final step, probably under the immediate impact of fellow members of *Les Vingt*, especially his friend Willy Finch (1854–1930) and Van Rysselberghe. This occurred almost a year and a half after the first exhibition of works by Seurat at Brussels.

A few months later in May, 1889, together with his old friend Guillaume Vogels (1836–1896), Toorop received the prestigious commission to prepare a *Vingt* exhibition at the Panorama Building in Amsterdam. From this we must conclude that his stay in Holland, during 1886–1887, was not without ultimate importance. How far our artist originated the idea of such an exhibition unfortunately can not be determined. *Les Vingt* also intended to propagate their ideas in London and Paris, but it was to Amsterdam that they were invited:

<sup>8</sup> Octave Maus: *Le Salon des XX à Bruxelles, La Cravache*, February 16, 1889.

<sup>9</sup> Jules et Georges Destrée: *Le Salon des XX*,

*La Jeune Belgique*, February, 1889, pp. 71–76 and *Le Salon des XX à Bruxelles, Feuilleton du Précurseur*, February 28, 1889.

Les membres de l'association artistique des XX me chargent de vous écrire qu'ils remercient la Société du Panorama d'Amsterdam de son aimable invitation et qu'ils acceptent<sup>10</sup>.

During this same period Toorop himself was becoming a vital link between the Netherlands and Brussels and in Amsterdam his and Finch's Pointillist paintings received much attention. 'Leur procédé' was regarded as 'Tellement flambant neuf, que l'on se met à douter si oui ou non ils se servent encore de pinceaux'<sup>11</sup>. In particular Toorop's *Broek in Waterland* (Fig. 7) impressed both the public and other artists.

During the year 1889, the artist seems largely to have recovered the position he had held at *Les Vingt* in 1885 and 1886 and which had been lost as a consequence of his return to Holland and the problems resulting from his encounter with Pointillism. In addition his works received increased exposure in the Netherlands during and after the *Vingt* exhibition in Amsterdam.

At the next exhibition of *Les Vingt* in Brussels, in 1890, he did not repeat the mistake of the previous year. This time Toorop sent only four oil paintings, all of which were executed in an equally colourful version of Pointillism with a subject emphasis on landscape. This time Verhaeren wrote half admiringly:

Encore M. Jan Toorop, un sauvage attiré par sa primitivité vers le drame, tant vers le drame des lumières et des formes, que vers le drame humain. Ces ciels couchants sont sulfuriques, ses arbres tordues en pieuvres, ses personnages sortis d'un Arkanzas soudainement transporté en Hollande.

Nevertheless, he had to admit that:

De tous les vingtistes qui pointillent et divisent pigmentairement la couleur, il est celui qui résiste le plus à l'assimilation totale de la technique nouvelle. Du reste artiste réel<sup>12</sup>.

In the spring of 1890 Toorop once more prepared himself for a return to his home country and in April of that year he settled at Katwijk-aan-Zee. Of course, on this second return the artist did not abandon Pointillism altogether. Some of his finest work in this technique was done in the 1890's in Holland<sup>14</sup>. But although the Pointillist technique, with its emphasis on values of light and colour, and the Symbolist subject matter are by no means mutually exclusive in the work of Toorop, at Katwijk his main concern was to be centred on a series of linear drawings in which the Symbolist subject played a more decisive role.

Apart from the paintings themselves, contemporary sources of information regarding Toorop's personal attitude towards Pointillism are scarce. The only person to whom Toorop expressed himself freely in writing was Annic Hall but in June, 1886, she became his wife and their correspondence was discontinued.

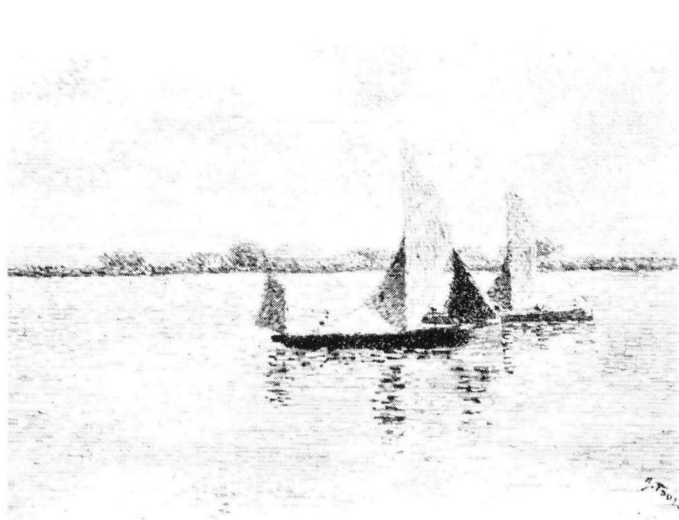
<sup>10</sup> Letter of Octave Maus with the date, May, 1889, Archive de l'Art Contemporain, Brux., Arch. No. 5269 and catalogue *Tentoonstelling van de 'Société des XX' te Brussel*, Panorama te Amsterdam - Plantage, 1889. The exhibition lasted for one month from the middle of May to the middle of June.

<sup>11</sup> Letter of Hubert van Dijk to Maus, discussing the review in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, May 30, 1889, Arch. de l'Art Contemporain, Brux.

<sup>12</sup> Emile Verhaeren: *Les Vingtistes*, *Art et Critique*, February 15, 1890.

<sup>13</sup> The Toorops were entered in the Registry Books of Katwijk on April 12, 1890. They arrived from Ixelles, Belgium. Letter from the Gemeente Secretarie Katwijk, Afdeling Bevolking, with the date, Katwijk, July 2, 1941. Centr. Bur. voor. Geneal., The Hague.

<sup>14</sup> See: A. B. Loosjes-Terpstra: *Moderne Kunst in Nederland 1900-1914*, (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker en Gumbert, 1959).



5  
*Mer calme (Devonshire) Matin.*  
 Oil on canvas;  
 33 x 44; s.l.r. J. Toorop.  
*Wassenaar, Coll. Mrs. M. A. van der Voort-Verwey.*



6  
*Avant la Journée de travail.*  
 Oil on canvas.  
 Auction: London, Sotheby, April 15, 1970, Lot 39.  
 Still at Sotheby in September 1971.

Thus we lack the artist's own views about the new technique for the decisive years between 1887 and 1889. All the same, one letter has been preserved. Written from Katwijk and addressed to Annie who was probably then in England, it provides a most valuable insight. It describes 'la division de ton' as 'un travail de patience' and explains that: '... avant que je commence à peindre sur ma toile ... il faut que j'ai réfléchi [?] toute la conception, 'and' ... je dessine ... une semaine sur ma toile avant que j'ai mis une tache de couleur<sup>66</sup> ...' Toorop continues:

J'ai finis ... quelques tableaux avec la division de ton, je crois que c'est le seul moyen d'arriver à la vraie atmosphère et lumière ... c'est le seul moyen d'arriver à des choses qu'on ne peut pas attrapper avec l'autre manière de peindre. On arrive peut-être à faire du beau, mais faire du vraie atmosphère jamais. Et si on peut arriver à faire du beau avec du vraie atmosphère je crois que ce sera un triomphe mais de la patience ...<sup>15</sup>.

Surprisingly one finds a strong emphasis on the 'vraie', on reality. Nevertheless, for once the subject seems subordinated to the representation. But even in the Pointillist works this is not unequivocally the case, for they can clearly be divided into two groups: the social scenes, where the subject dominates, and the landscapes. Curiously, Seurat's original aim of representing colour and light in a scientifically acceptable method appears overruled in Toorop's painting by an emphasis on atmosphere. Technique is linked to the aims of Impressionism rather than to those of Neo-Impressionism. On the other hand, both the colours and the *taches* of Toorop's Pointillist works have a largely decorative character. This is the reason why one may prefer the term Pointillism rather than Divisionism in describing this initial phase of his Neo-Impressionist activity.

Unfortunately, the date of the Katwijk letter is unknown. The letter reads almost as if the artist was concerning himself for the first time with the division of tone,

<sup>15</sup> The Hague, Royal Library, Toorop Collection C93<sup>2</sup> undated letter to Annie written from

Katwijk in pencil, after April 1890.

which suggests that it was written in the second half of 1888. However, there are no indications that Toorop worked in Katwijk before he moved there in April, 1890, a date long after his first use of the technique.

Additional contemporary sources of information are found in articles in the Belgian and Dutch newspapers. These accounts should be treated with caution but they do indicate some of the origins of the curious mixture of influences seen in the artist's Pointillist work. Gustave Lagye explained the approach as follows in *L'Eventail*:

Toorop ... s'évertue aujourd'hui aux vibrismes tempérés. A coups de hachures bleues, il établit posément ses petites toiles, faisant, chose bizarre, songer à une trinité bien contrastante de mélancoliques, Israëls, Mellery et Léon Frédéric. Toutefois, cependant le sentiment personnel est resté profond et communicatif<sup>16</sup>.

Accordingly Toorop consciously toned down his Pointillism in order to adjust to his subjects. Jules and Georges Destrée go even further by maintaining that the Pointillist technique served Toorop primarily:

A donner après Millet dont la palette ne s'est que trop souvent obscurie de tons roussâtres et fumeux une interprétation nouvelle du Paysan: cette *Harmonie du soir* crépuscule descendant sur l'idylle champêtre, l'étreinte des amoureux derrière lesquels s'étend la douceur des prairies qui fument, cela fait un *Angelus* qui ne doit rien au premier. Il y a là un sentiment profond de la nature et une rare sensibilité des vibrantes harmonies de couleurs<sup>17</sup>.

One searches in vain for the names of Seurat and Signac. Even the sharp eye of Verhaeren was not able to observe an influence from the two French masters beyond the technique itself. In fact, Toorop's subjects were not limited to peasant figures and he painted all the other categories he had used before. However, the type of landscape now often included industrial sites and his social criticism became more emphatic.

Turning to the paintings themselves, it is difficult to uncover a systematic use of colour theory. Of course, the artist could have familiarized himself with the theories of Michel Chevreul, Ogden Rood and others directly from their published texts and at the *Les Vingt* exhibitions of 1887, 1889 and again in 1892 he could have scrutinized Seurat's applications of these theories. But from the beginning Toorop's works showed considerable differences in appearance. Not more than fourteen truly Pointillist paintings are known from the period until 1891, when the artist turned definitively to Symbolism. Eleven of these were exhibited at *Les Vingt*. In those presented in 1889 the use of colour shows little consistency<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Gustave Lagye: Chronique des Beaux-Arts, Aux XX-III, *L'Eventail*, March 2, 1890.

<sup>17</sup> Jules and Georges Destrée: Le Salon des XX, *La Jeune Belgique*, February 1889, pp. 71-76.

<sup>18</sup> The following can be identified as Pointillist works through the titles in the catalogue: No. 2. *Lueurs du soleil couchant* is now known as *Séduction* (Fig. 1) and belongs to the Museum Kröller-Müller. No. 3. *Au Nes - mère et fille* (Fig. 2) is a painting now at the Municipal Museum, The Hague. No. 4. *Après-midi (juin)* is known only through a newspaper description: *J'aime en Toorop, le charme et l'heureuse violence des couleurs claires. De tous ceux qui ont adopté la technique neo-impressionnistes;*

*il me parait le mieux doué. Elle lui sert précieusement pour rendre l'éclatant soleil d'une après-midi d'été à Machelen, le vert tendre et clair des feuillages, les tuiles rouges d'une chaumière et les vagues buées bleues qui s'élevait des bois à l'horizon.*

Jules and Georges Destrée: Le Salon des XX, *La Jeune Belgique*, February 1889, pp. 71-76. Toorop thus worked again at Machelen. No. 9. and No. 10. *Mer Calme (Devonshire)* (Fig. 4) and *Mer Calme (Devonshire) Matin* (Fig. 5) are now respectively in the collections of Mr. de Bloeme (formerly Nijgh, Rotterdam, collection catalogue 1933, No. 137) and Mrs. M. A. van der Voort-Verwey at Wassenaar. No. 11. *La Tamise. Matin* (Fig. 3) also belongs to the Museum

*Séduction* (Fig. 1) and *Au Nes* (Fig. 2) display a generalized tonality with little emphasis on local colour. The former example was painted with a very dense pointille which varies in size from the larger *taches* in the foreground to the smaller ones employed for the distant sky. The tonality of the entire work is mat, blueish-green with some mauve tints at the horizon. *Au Nes* employs a much larger pointille with the strokes flowing one into the other, thus giving an Impressionistic rather than a Neo-Impressionistic effect. The dominant colours are light blue, off-white and grey-blue intermingled with various tones of pink and even at a considerable distance these *taches* do not unite. If one takes literally Professor Herbert's definitions that: 'The essence of Impressionist color was harmony based on similar and related hues; the essence of Neo-Impressionist color was based on contrasting hues'<sup>19</sup>, then these two paintings should be called Impressionist. They show the Dutch atmosphere during a late afternoon in the country and in the rainy streets of Amsterdam. And this is far removed from the clear light and concise forms of Seurat, Signac and their Belgian followers.

*Brug in Londen* (Fig. 3) employs a different approach. The large area of greenish water in the foreground is forcefully contrasted with the reddish-pink hues of the bridge to the left. 'Contrast' is indeed the better word since there is not really a question of complementary colours which enhance each other in intensity. Again the brushwork consists of strokes rather than dots. These horizontal, vertical and diagonal strokes give the painting an expressionistic quality which is increased by the use of strong colours. The remaining two paintings are rather light in tone and also employ more local colour. For the first time one observes some direct use of colour theory. In the Rotterdam *Mer calme (Devonshire)* (Fig. 4), for instance, the sun contains the complementaries, light green and pink, and the upper section of the boat those of orange and light blue. Nonetheless, in the shadows of the mountains the harmoniously related hues, red, purple and blue, are used, while the foreground has a combination of light blue and pink. The sky is a very pale blue-white. The *Mer calme (Devonshire), Matin* (Fig. 5) at Wassenaar is again executed with short strokes of the brush rather than with *taches*. But the little boat seen in the far distance uses an orange-blue complementary contrast.

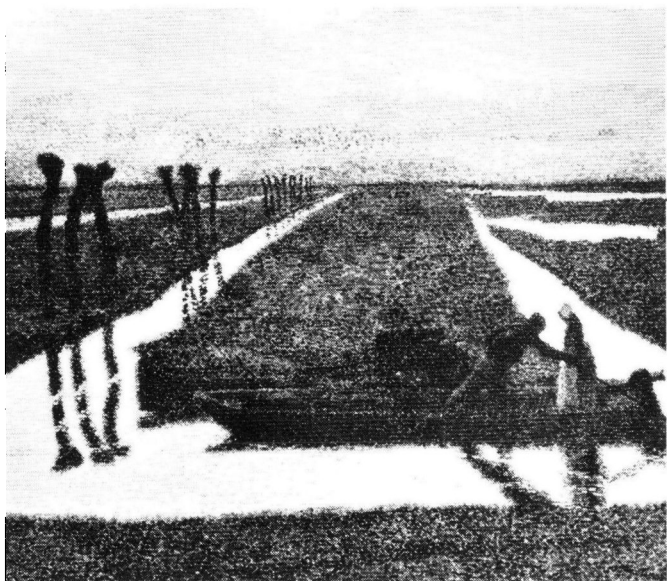
These earliest Pointillist paintings do not easily fit into the Neo-Impressionist category. Of *Séduction* and *Au Nes* one can hardly say that they: 'breathe a spirit of clear order, firm decision, scientific logic and a startling definiteness of structure that constituted an open challenge to the instinctive art of the Impressionists...'<sup>20</sup>. Instead, they feature a tendency towards the colour conception of Impressionism, notwithstanding the use of a Pointillist brush technique. In addition the subject matter is emotionally oriented and 'instinctive' rather than logical. Even *Brug in Londen* and the Devonshire pictures are different from the two works just mentioned in degree rather than in essence. The use of compositions parallel to the picture plane was not new in Toorop, but rather reflects a personal established compositional preference. These three Pointillist compositions, indeed, exhibit a greater clarity and the colours are much brighter, but any 'startling definiteness of structure' is undermined by the large *taches* applied in many different surface patterns. Of all the Pointillist paintings known from this time, at least six do not

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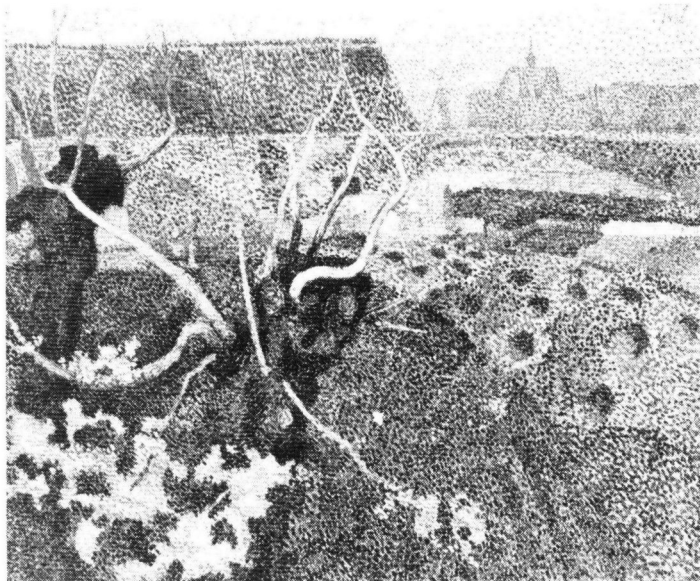
Kröller-Müller under the title *Brug in Londen*, and No. 12. *Machelen* (Fig. 13) is known from an old photograph and was called *Un Jardinier plantant ses choux* by the *Indépendance Belge* of February 4, 1889.

<sup>19</sup> Robert L. Herbert: *Neo-Impressionism*, Exhibition catalogue of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, (New York, 1968), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert: *Neo-Impressionism*, p. 15.



7  
*Broek in Waterland.*  
 Oil on Canvas;  
 65 x 76; s.l.r. Jan Toorop; d..l.r. 89.  
 New York, Private Coll.



8  
*Bloembollenvelden bij Oegstgeest. Boerderij met bollenvelden.*  
*Bulb fields at Oegstgeest.*  
 Oil on canvas;  
 65 x 77; s.l.l. Jan Toorop; s.u.r. J. Th. Toorop; d.u.r. 1885.  
 The Hague, Gemeente Museum.

show the 'mechanical brush work, which deliberately suppressed the personality of the artist'<sup>21</sup>.

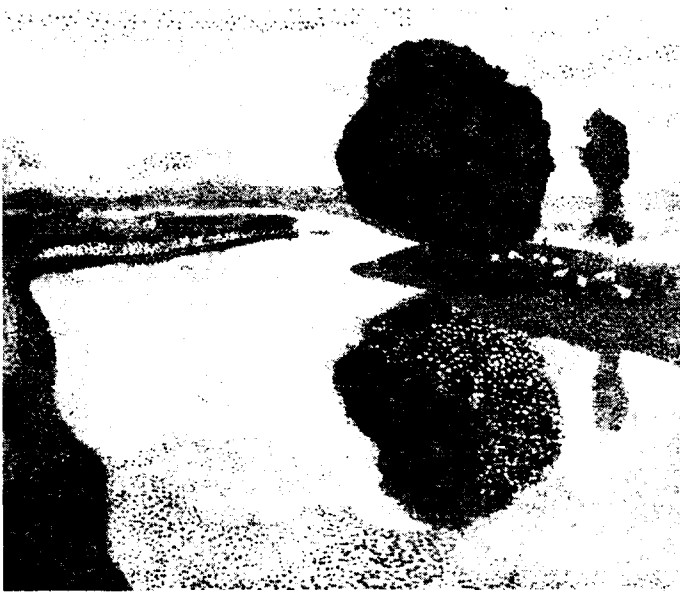
On April 15, 1970, appeared for auction at Sotheby in London a work by Jan Toorop, called *Avant la Journée de travail* (lot 39) (Fig. 6). It is neither signed nor dated and depicts an interior with a peasant couple. It is painted in subdued browns, yellows, greens and blues and the density of the pointill creates a curiously hazy atmosphere which represents very effectively the early morning sun falling through the window and the alternation of lights and shadows on the floor. Since a Machelen scene seems to be represented, and Toorop exhibited other Machelen subjects in the Pointillist technique at *Les Vingt* in 1889, *Avant la Journée de travail* should perhaps be dated to 1888 or early 1889.

In 1889, there are indeed many modifications in the Pointillist technique. To *Les Vingt* of 1890 the artist sent four paintings of which three represented landscape subjects<sup>22</sup>. *Broek in Waterland* (Fig. 7) must be regarded as the earliest of these landscapes, since it already had been exhibited at the *Les Vingt* exhibition of 1889 in Amsterdam. Its colours more closely reflect Neo-Impressionist theory

<sup>21</sup> Herbert: *Neo-Impressionism*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> These are: No. 1. *Les deux Saules*, at the *Eerentoonstelling Jan Toorop* held at Pulchri Studio, The Hague, 1928, No. 30, was exhibited as *Deux Arbres* in pointill technique, it was signed in the lower left corner; J. Th. Toorop, size 31 x 29 cm. and belonged to H. P. Bremmer of The Hague. This painting was undated but in the catalogue it is given circa the year 1890. The painting was exhibited at the Museum Boymans, Rotterdam, at an exhibition titled: *De divisionisten, van*

*Georges Seurat tot Jan Toorop*, 1937, No. 66. This painting has not been seen by the present writer. No. 2. *Le Marronnier*, in the Museum at Dordrecht, and now known either as *Landschap met vaart* or *Vaart met kastanjeboom* (Fig. 9). No. 3. *Broek in Waterland* (Fig. 7). The fourth painting shows figures in an industrial landscape: *Donkere wolken*, it has been identified as *Voor de werkstaking* (Fig. 10). This work has a pendant of the same size in the Museum Kröller-Müller known as *Na de werkstaking* (Fig. 11).



9  
*Landschap met vaart. Le Marronnier.*  
 Oil on canvas;  
 66,2 x 75,7; s.l.r. J. Th. Toorop.  
 Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum.



10  
*Voor de werkstaking. Donkere wolken. Before the strike.*  
 Oil on canvas;  
 65 x 77; s.l.l. Toorop.  
 Lausanne, Coll. Mr. Samuel Josefowitz.

than do any of the earlier paintings. Consequently *Broek in Waterland* is more brightly coloured than is *La Séduction* or *Au Nes*, notwithstanding the fact that all three works depict evening scenes. The *taches* are relatively small and the green dots colouring the meadows are interspersed with yellow-orange dots used for the reflections of the evening sky. In addition the shaded areas of these meadows consist of purplish-blue dots intermingled with, the complementary of green-red and again the yellow-orange reflections of the sky.

During this time Toorop painted a work which was never exhibited at *Les Vingt*. *Bloembollenvelden bij Oegstgeest* (Fig. 8) embraces even more complicated configurations of colour, for the small and differently coloured sections of the flower fields are covered by alternating areas of shadow and light. The sky is divided into purplish-blue, light blue and green bands interspersed with red and orange *taches*. Again the colouration of the fields and the buildings consists of local colours, the reflections of neighbouring areas, the reflections of the sky, in addition to the use of complementaries. But Toorop has overstepped 'the spirit of clear order' of Neo-Impressionism in this *tour de force* which represents one of the most diversely coloured landscapes in modern European painting. The picture consists of an irregular mosaic of strong colours which is covered by the equally irregular branches of the willow trees which project in all directions.

These trees seem to grow out of the picture frame and have little compositional relation to the unusual curves of the fields. In reality the land is very flat. The painting also contains a number of ambiguities. For instance, the shadow of the trees is suddenly transformed into a flower patch, while the shadow on the building in the middle distance functions also as a division between the green and the red fields in the foreground. The plotting of the preparatory drawing is visible on the canvas between the dots of paint. *Bloembollenvelden* should be dated to 1889 because the smaller size of the *taches* places it closer to *Broek in Waterland* than



11  
*Na de werkstaking. After the Strike.*  
 Oil on canvas;  
 65 x 76; s.l.r. Toorop.  
 Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller.



12  
*Alcoholisme. Dilirium. Verso: Unfinished park landscape with lady in white, pointille.*  
 Oil on canvas;  
 73 x 64;  
 Wassenaar, Coll. Mr. B. Meijer.

to earlier Pointillist paintings. The signature in the lower left corner, 'Jan Toorop', must be contemporary with the painting itself, while that in the upper right corner, along with the date '1885', is a later addition. 1885 is a quite unacceptable date for this painting, since Toorop did totally different work in that year; it is inherently unlikely that he worked in a Pointillist manner two years before Seurat exhibited with *Les Vingt*. That the subject indeed reflects a setting near Oegstgeest is proven by the church in the distance to the right. The village is on the outskirts of Leiden which Toorop knew well from his youth, and he had a number of friends there. Broek in Waterland, located near Amsterdam, and Oegstgeest indicate that during 1889 Toorop painted in Holland, although he still lived near Brussels. This probably occurred in the wake of the *Les Vingt* exhibition which was held at Amsterdam during the same year. In *Le Marronnier* or *Landschap met vaart* (Fig. 9) the cluttered linear system of *Bloembollenvelden* has been transformed into the softly undulating lines of the river banks, trees and sky. As a result the picture has an emerging *Art Nouveau* quality which is enhanced by the flatness of the design.

After *Le Marronnier* it is somewhat surprising to find at the *Les Vingt* exhibition of 1890 a work like *Donkere wolken* or *Voor de werkstaking* (Fig. 10). It has a pendant in *Na de werkstaking* (Fig. 11) and both paintings must have been painted in the year 1889. In subject, style and Pointillist technique, if not in colour, they are similar to *La Séduction* and *Au Nes*. Both the former works probably were done immediately after the exhibition of early 1889, although the second of the pendants was perhaps not even finished for the 1890 exhibition, since it was never shown with *Les Vingt*. *Alcoholisme* (Fig. 12) also should be dated to this time, although it



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*Machelen. Un jardinier plantant ses choux.*

s.l.l. Jan Toorop.

Auction: Amsterdam, A. Mak, December 22, 1926.

Photogr. R.K.D., The Hague.

too was not then exhibited. All these paintings have a common theme: namely, the powerlessness of man *vis-à-vis* the forces – natural or social – which rule his life. The emphasis on ‘fate’ has a symbolic meaning and differs from the pleasurable Pointillist landscapes. The two pendants and *Alcoholisme* are much brighter in colour than *La Séduction* and *Au Nes*. These colours, too, may contain some symbolic meaning. For example, the white dress of the little child in *Na de werkstaking* might suggest innocence or purity, while the purple face of the victim signifies death rather than reproduces appearance truthfully. The entire scene reminds one of the traditional Entombment of Christ theme. The green face of the victim in *Alcoholisme* is also hardly an observed natural phenomenon.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Toorop’s Pointillist work is its strong personal element, which is visible in the subjects, the approach to composition and the use of colour. While the artist sometimes is in agreement with the ideals of Neo-Impressionism, he as often is in opposition to them. Toorop’s figural subjects are not descriptive but rather symbolic in conception, representing ideas as much as specific visual phenomena. Yet, his human types are totally unrelated to the classicizing figures of the French or Belgian Neo-Impressionists: neither Willy Finch, Georges Lemmen (1865–1916) nor Théo Van Rysselberghe ever represented comparable types. Toorop’s peasants and labourers, in their heavy and sagging clothes, are the opposite of the people in *La Grande Jatte* where according to Paul Adam:

Even the stiffness of the people, the ready made forms helps give the sound of modernity, the recall of our tight clothing, glued to the body, the reserved gestures, the British manner everywhere imitated.

Their deliberate and disparate movements are entirely contrary to ‘the reserved gestures’ of ‘the British manner’. Nowhere do we notice ‘Egyptian, Greek, Gothic

and early Renaissance' influences<sup>23</sup>. Toorop's figures lack precise anatomical structure and are probably derived from Camille Pissarro and artists like Millet and Jozef Israëls. We have also noticed that Toorop's compositions tended to place figures and objects parallel to the picture plane. In landscapes such as *Broek in Waterland* and *Brug in Londen*, for example, this tendency is continued, now in agreement with Neo-Impressionist usage. The industrial landscape in the latter painting includes long horizontal roof lines that contrast with the tall vertical smoke stacks in a manner which relates to the background in *Une Baignade* by Seurat.

The artist remained attached to notions of local colour even though the new movement eventually led him in other directions. Ultimately, his adjustment to the Neo-Impressionist usage of colour finds its fullest application in the landscapes seen at *Les Vingt* in 1890. At the same time Toorop continued to use the divided colours for his own purposes, for several of his Pointillist paintings depict evening scenes or interiors with muted colours. In these works the artist largely subjected the colour conception to the subject matter in order to create certain moods.

As a consequence it is possible to divide the Pointillist work from between 1888 and 1891 into two categories: first, the figural scenes which in subject and presentation are closer to Toorop's earlier work and, second, the landscapes which are more a reflection of Neo-Impressionist influences undergone at *Les Vingt*. Although the landscape scenes were generally painted and exhibited later, it is clear from our discussion that Toorop was concerned with the two categories simultaneously, as the chronology of these paintings also indicates. In conclusion, one may agree with *La Wallonie* that both types have: 'un sentiment plein de profondeur, de tranquillité et de mystère'<sup>24</sup>.

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All *measurements* of the works of art are given in centimeters. Height always precedes width.

The position of the *signature* is given as follows:

s.u.l. indicates signed upper left corner  
 s.u.r. indicates signed upper right corner  
 s.l.l. indicates signed lower left corner  
 s.l.r. indicates signed lower right corner

In cases where no signature has been found, nothing is stated.

The position of the *date* is given as follows:

d.u.l. indicates dated upper left corner  
 d.u.r. indicates dated upper right corner  
 d.l.l. indicates dated lower left corner  
 d.l.r. indicates dated lower right corner

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<sup>23</sup> Quotations from Herbert: *Neo-Impressionism*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> *La Wallonie*, April 1890, pp. 126-140.