

Treatment Report

Artist: William Orpen 1878 - 1931
Title: Welsh Landscape
School/Period: British 1911 (est.)
Support/Medium: oil on wooden artist board
Dimensions: unframed
33.1 cm. W x 23 cm. H x 0.4 cm D
Owner: Old Westbury Gardens
Frame: Wooden frame
Date of Treatment: 1/23/2018

Conservator:
Kimberly Frost, Masters' Candidate,
Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts,
NYU

Supervisor:
Lucie Kinsolving, Conservator in private
practice, Paintings Conservation

Photography:

Nikon D700 and D810 camera with 60mm lens, ISO100, f8.0, shutter speed 1/5 sec.

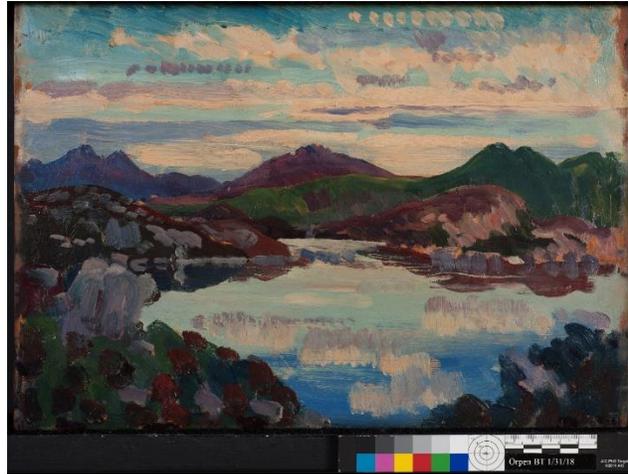
Before treatment – digital photography in normal light and ultraviolet light; front, reverse.

During treatment – digital photography in normal light and ultraviolet light; front.

After treatment – digital photography in normal light and ultraviolet light; front.

Signature, Marks, Labels or Notations:

Reverse – drawing of long shape in upper left corner, at middle left the number 3 inscribed in a circle, at the center right the number 49 repeated twice with a hand-written inscription between: The [lake] J D [June], [Jnnes]? Wales 1911. See documentation photo.



Before Treatment Image



Frame - handwritten inscription in cursive on reverse of the frame in the proper left corner lists possibly a name and date. [...lyn Bar? July, 2? 19?? J. A]



Analytical techniques performed:

Examination under ultraviolet radiation with UV Systems TripleBright II LW370 Lamp, long wave, UV peak: 368 nm.

X-radiography, Phillips MG161 X-ray Radiography system and Carestream INDUSTREX HPX-1 Digital system with 8x10" Flex XL Blue Digital Imaging Plate, 35KeV, 5 mA, 90 sec

Infrared reflectography, FLIR SC2500 Camera and IR Vista software.

Provenance: Acquired by Mr. Phipps as a gift from the artist, after sitting for a portrait in 1931.

Art Historical Background:

Though this small oil painting is unsigned, it is securely attributed by all evidence to the early twentieth century Irish artist, William Orpen who lived and worked mostly in London. In his early career, Orpen taught at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art influencing many young artists such as Seán Keating, Grace Gifford, Patrick Tuohy, Leo Whelan and Margaret Clarke. He was part of the Celtic Revival Movement and a close friend of Hugh Lane, who began to collect Impressionists works under Orpen's guidance. After accompanying Lane on a trip to Europe in 1908, Orpen returned to London and exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy. During this time, Orpen and his family regularly spent the summers at Howth Head on the east coast of Ireland. The headland of the location has panoramic views on to the Irish Sea to the east and Bray Head and the Wicklow hills and mountains to the south. This setting inspired a number of Orpen's most important works, including a series of large watercolors featuring models and gypsies, beach and bathing scenes of his immediate family, and hilltop scenes featuring his wife and daughter.



The Edge Of The Cliff *
 Howth, Sir William Orpen, signed oil, undated.



*View from Howth**
Sir William Orpen,
signed l.l.: ORPEN,
painted in September
1912.
oil on board, 49 by
61cm.



*On the Cliff, Dublin Bay,
Morning**
Sir William Orpen,
signed
l.r.: ORPEN; titled on
the overlap, painted
before 1919.
oil on canvas, 96.5 by
91.5 cm.

*All images from
Sothbys.com

The small painting on wooden artist board in the collection of Old Westbury Gardens, *Welsh Landscape*, shows a similar landscape and technique as Orpen's smaller paintings executed in the immediate vicinity of Howth. A signed oil sketch of his daughter sitting along the cliffs of Howth displays a similar handling of the sky and rocky landscapes, including the use of exposed wooden ground. Another painting, *View from Howth*, dated 1911 seems to show a faint ground applied over the board which is left exposed in patches of the sky. This technique is also observed in the Westbury picture. Finally, despite the shrub-filled foreground, the angular form and peculiar double peak of the horizon strongly suggest a view of the Wicklow mountains across the bay at Howth.

Orpen executed some small sketches and watercolors in plein air. However, in his biography of Orpen, *Orpen: Mirror to an Age*, Bruce Arnold notes Orpen's unease with impromptu painting from nature. More often Orpen kept the sketches and must have used them as aids to

incorporate repetitions of this familiar and well-studied landscape into his studio works. For example, we see a similar horizon repeated in his more finished canvas painting *On the Cliff, Dublin Bay, Morning*. Orpen remained a commercially successful artist who was particularly well known for his skills as a portrait painter of the Edwardian social elite. It is this context which brought his works into the collection of J. S. Phipps who had his portrait painted by Orpen and is said to have acquired this landscape sketch at the time of his sitting for the artist.

Treatment History: Appears to never have been treated.

Examination and Condition Report: Frame

Construction

The frame is made from carved wood with a thick white gesso coating which is then gilded. The frame has a deep cove molding. Its outer raised edge carries a decoration with ribbon and weed pattern. At the interior of the cove an acanthus pattern continues around the interior. The exterior edges have a quarter molding followed by an exterior cove and a decorative molding at the extreme edge.

Along the sides two eye-screws and a wire are attached for hanging the painting. On the reverse, four brass mending plates in the center of each edge secure the panel in place. The rabbet of the frame indicates that it may have been increased on the bottom and right sides using a plane or carving tool to widen the rabbet. This suggests the frame might have been modified to fit the painting, and may not be original to the painting.



Detail of frame condition, before treatment.



Detail on reverse of frame showing reworking along the right edge.

Condition

The frame has collected a heavy layer of dirt and dust, especially along the top and side edges. The gesso ground exhibits active lifting throughout and losses revealing the bare wood below are visible, especially at the bottom right corner. The corner joins have a slight gap, but the frame is stable with no torsion.

Examination and Condition Report: Painting

Support

Construction

The wooden artist board appears to be made from 3 plys laminated together with their cross grain in opposing directions. This can be seen along the beveled edge of the reverse where the grain of the second ply is visible along the edge. A lattice of thin wooden strips (1.2 cm wide and 0.4 cm deep) is held together by staples and was glued directly to the back of the board during its construction. This is confirmed by the fact that areas under the strip are not painted with stain which coats the reverse of the board.

Condition

The panel is in good condition with no damage to the wood. The glue holding the cradle was unevenly applied and very brittle. It was easily dislodged while trying to remove the painting from its frame and appears to not have a structural purpose. There is a slight concave warp to the panel. Facing the front, the left side of the board sits about 0.3 cm raised from the rest.

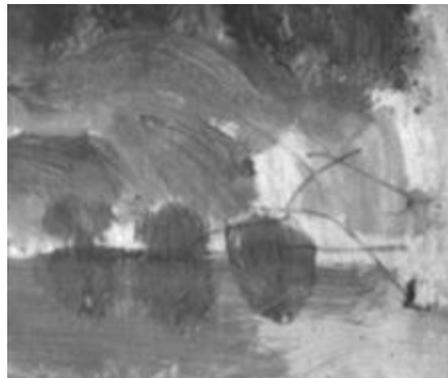
Ground Layer and Underdrawing

Construction

The painting does not appear to have an applied ground layer. Areas of the wooden support remain visible throughout the bottom half of the composition in the landscape of mountains. Near the right edge of the horizon some unpainted areas appear also have the remains of a light graphite drawing or sketch. This suggest the artist drew his composition directly on the wooden support. Examination with infrared reflectography showed that the lines made with carbon containing material also extend under other sections of the landscape.



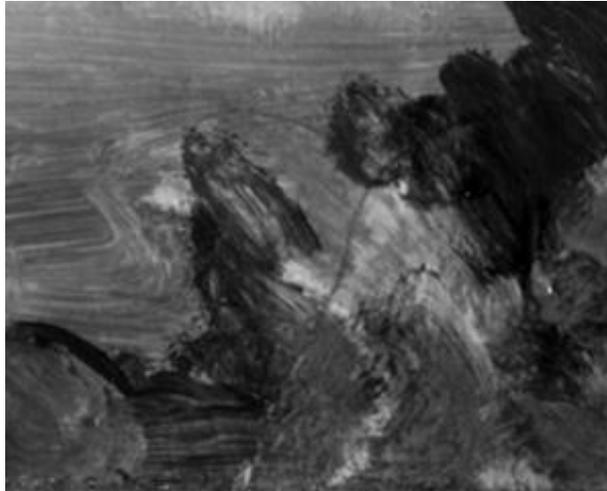
Detail in normal light.



Detail in infrared reflectography.



Detail in normal light.

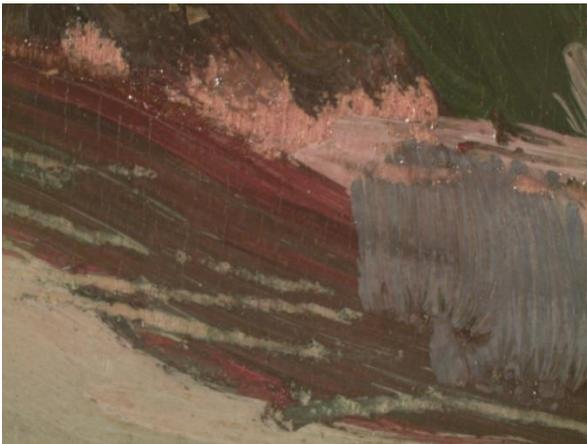


Detail in infrared reflectography.

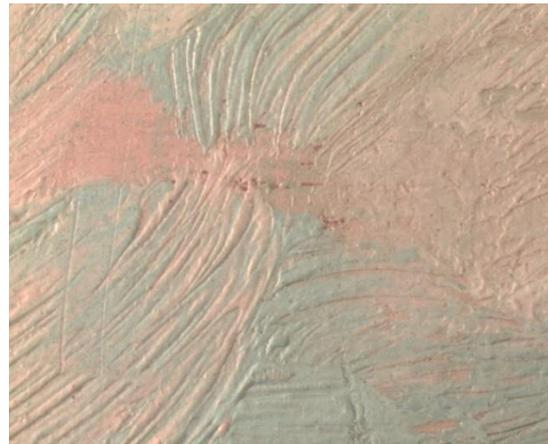
Paint Layer

Construction

The paint layer appears to be oil paint, vigorously applied with a wet-on-wet technique and directional strokes used outline the forms. One exception to the apparent lack of priming might be the sky, which has exposed areas of a light beige color, possibly a partially applied ground, which lies underneath the surface paint without any mixing. In the sky, thickly applied paint with a strong impasto was applied with predominantly horizontal brushstrokes. The artist also used a blunt point to scratch lines into the wet paint surface, seen in the right side of the mountainous horizon.



Detail image of scratching into wet paint.



Detail of exposed preliminary layer in sky.

Condition

The paint layer is in good condition with small areas of loss along the top edge. Patchy areas of bare wood are seen along the vertical edges of the board, particularly at the top right. A fine craquelure has developed vertically across the surface in response to the grain of the wood layer below. This cross-grain craquelure is visible in X-ray images.

Small dents in the paint layer are observed around the perimeter of the painting, which could relate to damage from previous framing methods. Small accretions and damage on some areas of high impasto are visible during examination under the microscope.



Detail of X-radiograph at right horizon line showing woodgrain and craquelure.



Detail at 12.5 X magnification showing deposits on raised impasto in sky.

Varnish Layer

Construction

An even coating of varnish is applied to the painting, covering the whole surface and continuing to the edges of the board, under the frame. The varnish is glossy in character. It fluoresces a light blue under UV examination, suggesting a natural resin coating. It is presumed that this varnish was applied by the artist.

Condition

The varnish is covered by a significant layer of dirt and grime accumulation. The resin has darkened and yellowed over time, altering the bright palette of the painting.

Treatment Report: Painting

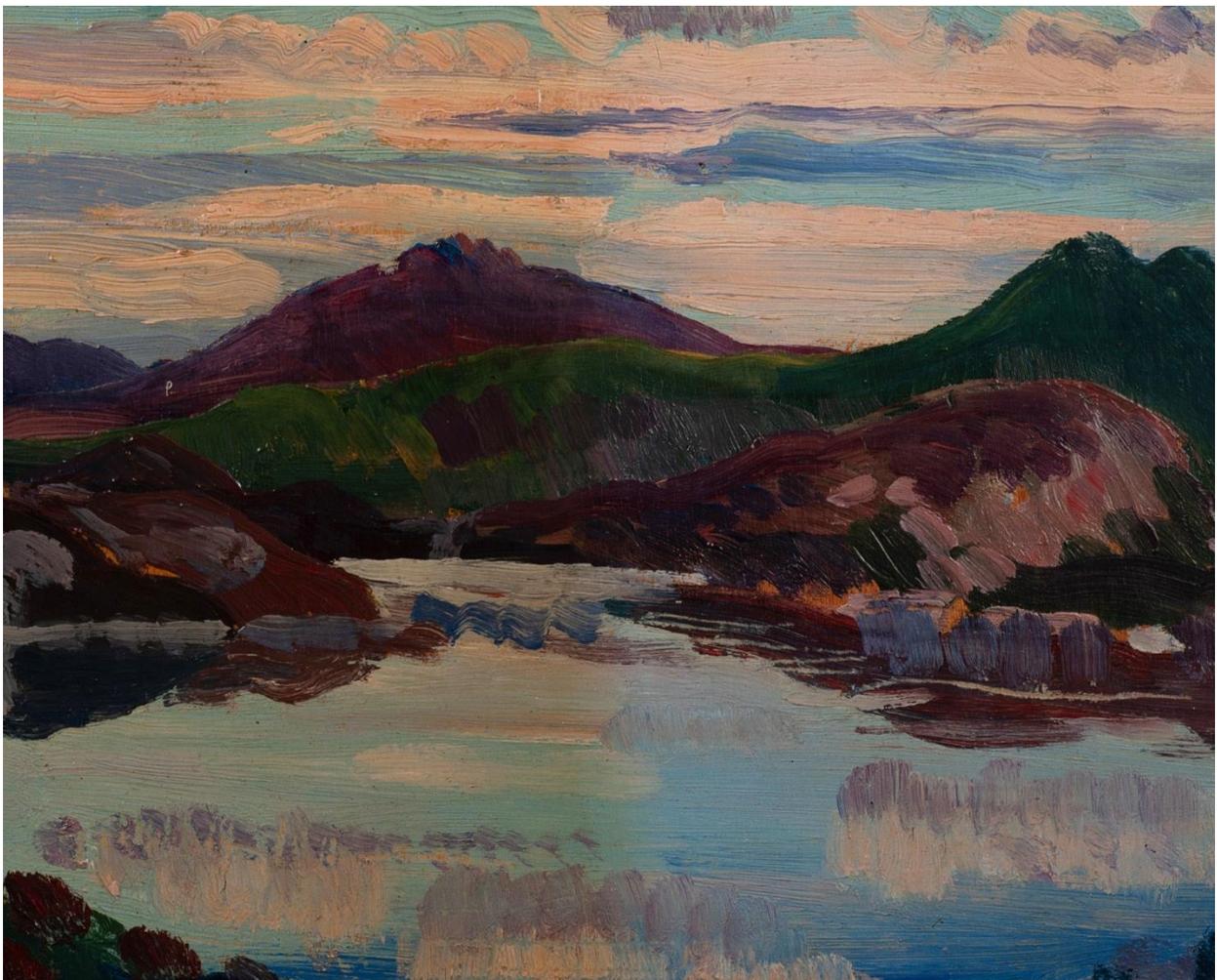
Surface Cleaning

The reverse of the panel was gently dry cleaned with sponges and the front painted surface was cleaned with moistened cotton to remove loose dirt and dust. The discolored varnish was then removed with a solvent mixture of 1:1 Mineral Spirits and Acetone. No pigments were observed to be sensitive to the solvent mixture.



Swab cleaning test before varnish removal.

The removal of the varnish revealed greater textures of the impasto and the contrasting warm and cool tones of the artist palette. The varnish was mostly removed in the first pass, and a second pass was performed to clear the remaining residues from the painting's surface.



Detail during removal of discolored varnish layer.

Fills and Isolating Varnish

An isolating varnish of mastic resin at 8% dilution in triple distilled turpentine was applied by brush. Small holes were observed around the perimeter of the top edge. These damages appear to have been caused by nails used to secure the painting in its frame. The small holes were filled with a reversible acrylic putty, Flugger, and textured as necessary to match the surrounding surface. The small and isolated patches of accretions were reduced mechanically with a scalpel under microscope.



Detail in raking light before treatment.



Detail in raking light while completing fills.



During treatment, cleaning and fills completed.

Inpainting

Filled damages were inpainted to match adjacent areas. Other small areas of damaged impasto were also inpainted to complete the surface brushstrokes. Inpainting was completed using water-reversible and stable QoR watercolors bound in QoR watercolor medium (Aquazol).



Top left corner before cleaning and inpainting



Top left corner after removing varnish and final inpainting

Final Varnish

No final varnish was necessary.

Treatment Report: Frame

Flaking paint and lifting gesso on the frame was consolidated with a dilute solution of PVA Jade emulsion adhesive. After being secured, the frame's surface was cleaned with an aqueous solution of 1% Ecosurf surfactant and 1% tri-ammonium citrate in water. Areas of missing material were filled with a stable acrylic putty, Flugger, to create level surfaces along the moldings of the frame. Fills and other small areas of loss were inpainted using Kremer metallic watercolors.

After stabilization and treatment, the painting was returned to its frame. A thin strip of felt tape was added inside the rabbet to protect the painting's surface. A strip of balsa wood was added to fill at gap in the top of the frame and hold the painting securely in place. The thin cradle remains detached and was placed loosely back in the frame without any adhesive. Six brass mending plates were secured with brass screws along the edges to hold the cradle and painting in the frame.

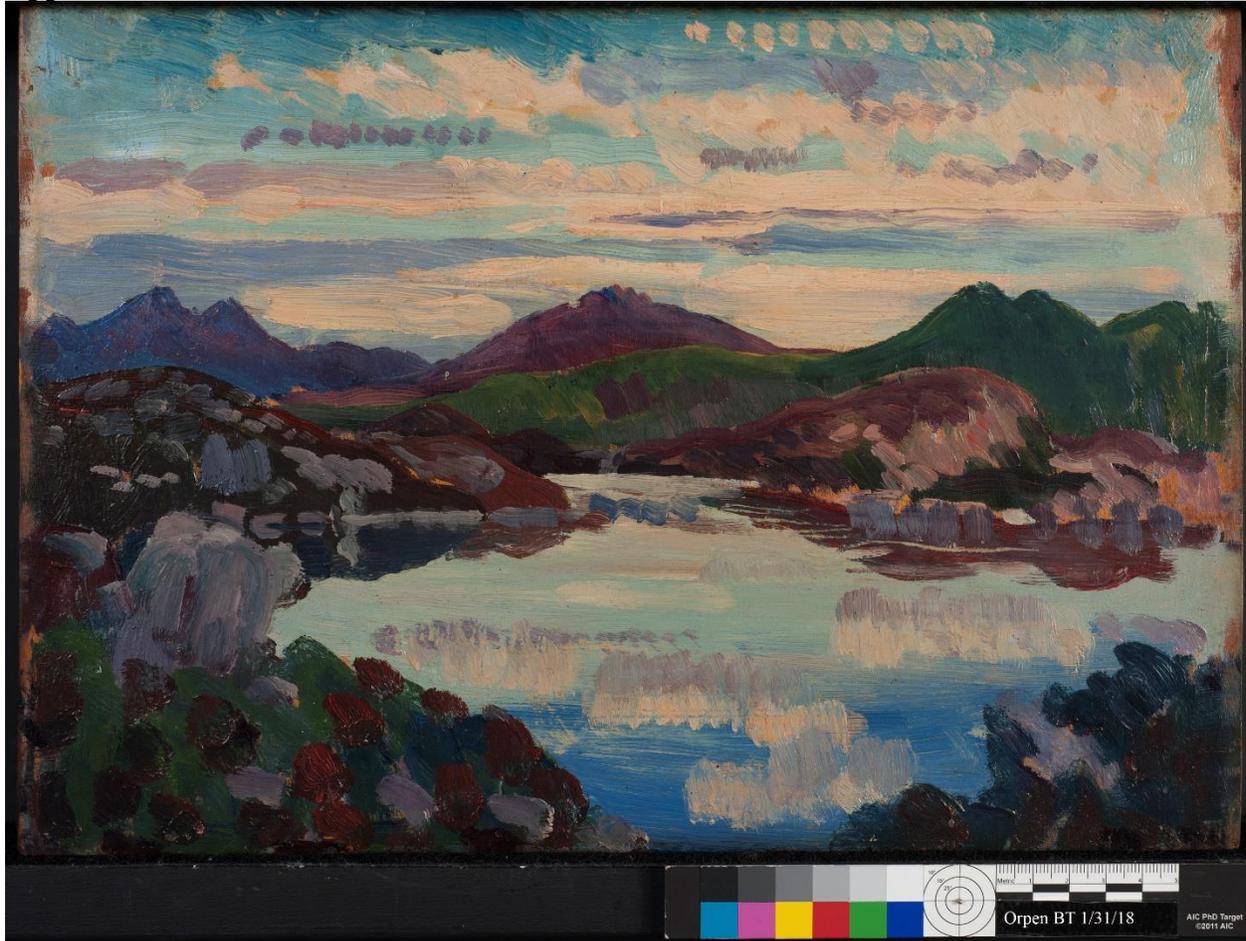


Reverse of frame, before treatment



Reverse of frame, after treatment

Appendix: Documentation



Before treatment, visible light



Before treatment, reverse



Before treatment, reverse, detail of inscriptions



Before treatment, ultraviolet light.



During treatment, X radiograph



During treatment, infrared reflectography image



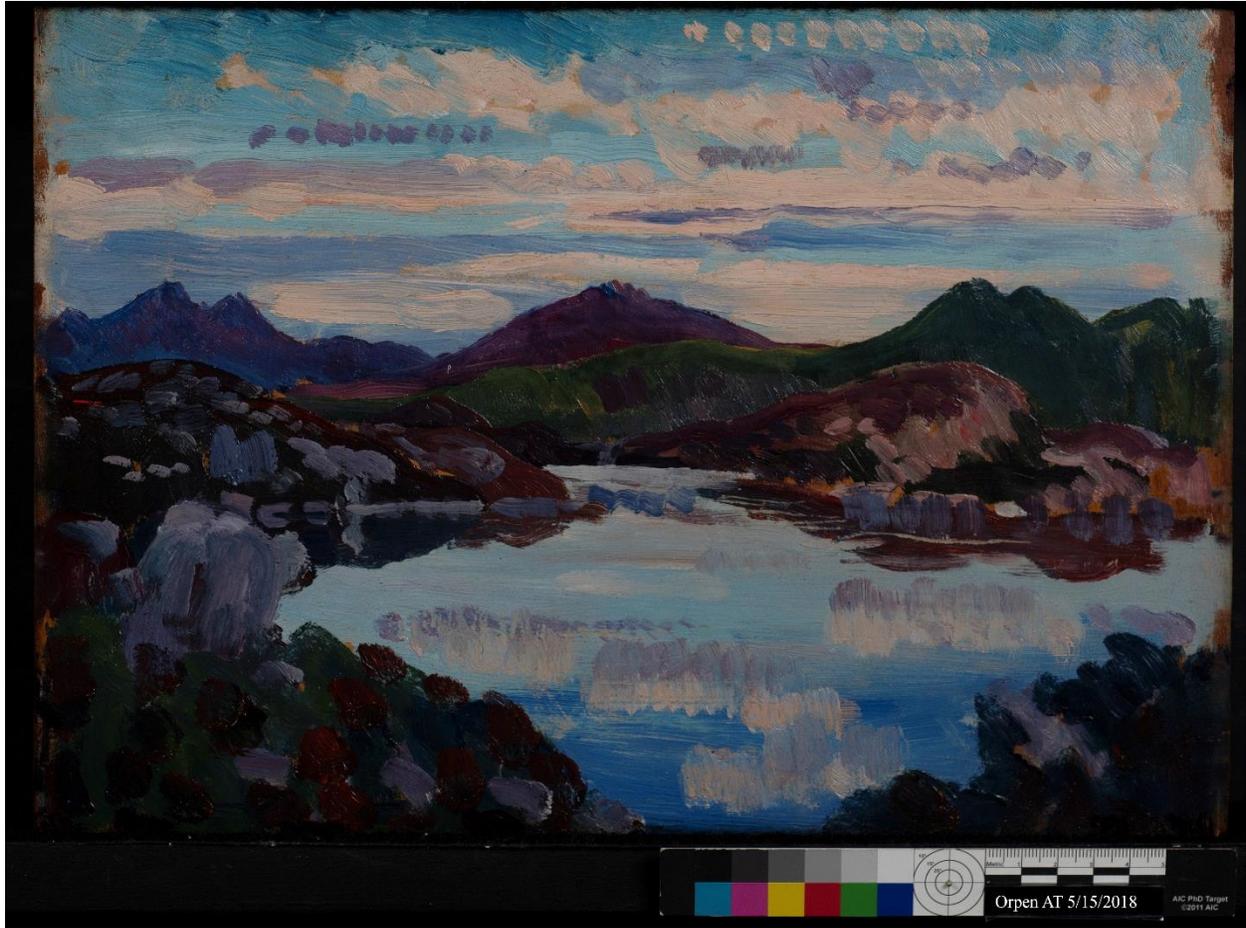
During treatment, varnish removal, visible light



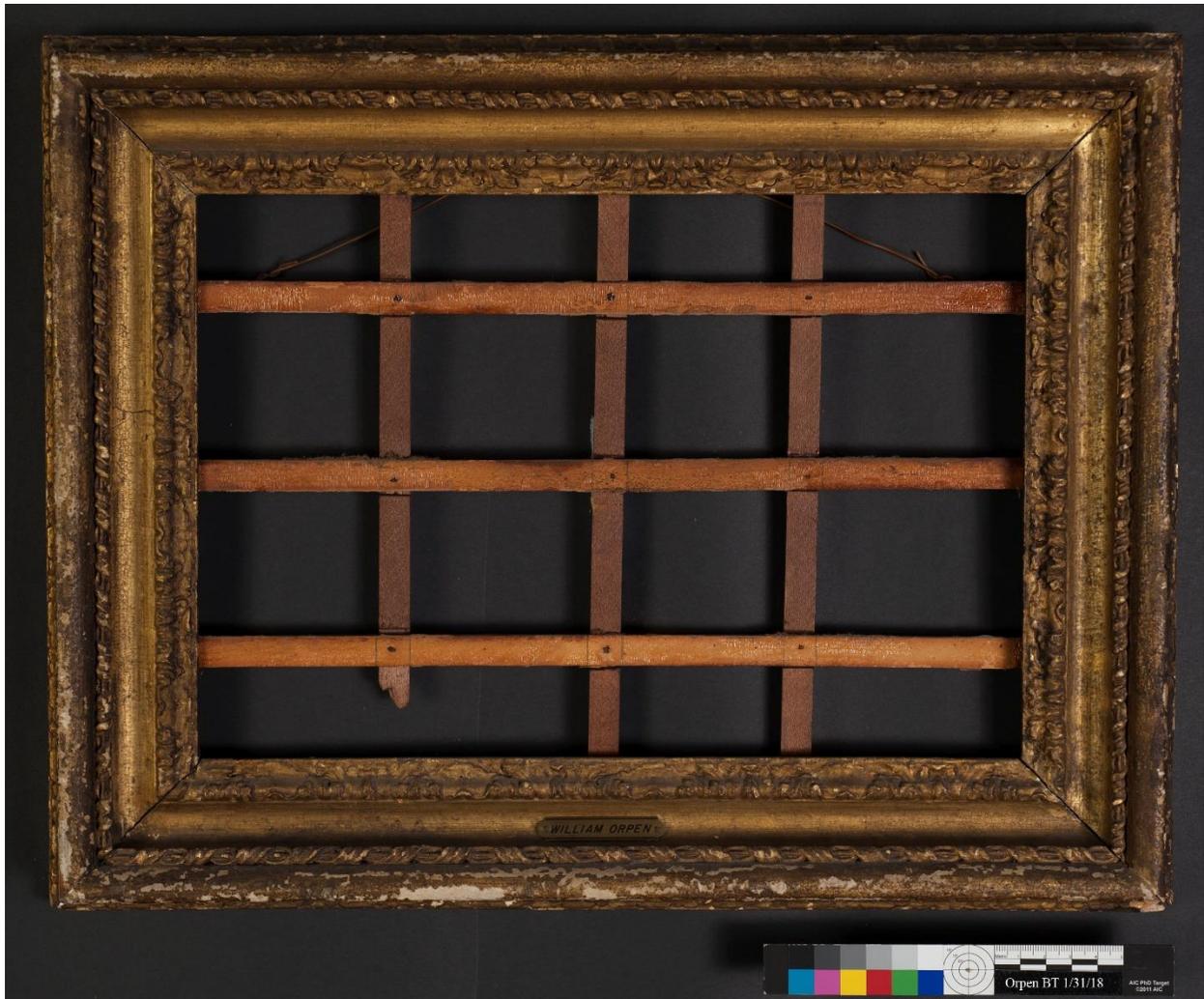
During treatment, varnish removal, ultraviolet light



After treatment, ultraviolet light



After treatment, front, visible light



Before treatment, frame, front



Before treatment, frame, reverse



Before treatment, frame, detail of inscription on reverse



After treatment, frame, front



After treatment, painting re-framed from the front