

FRENCH IMPRESSIONISM

FROM THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

ARTWORK LABELS

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French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

In 1874, a group of artists in Paris formed a society for the purpose of exhibiting their work independently of the Salon, the official exhibition program the French government established in 1748. This new group staged eight public exhibitions between 1874 and 1886, revealing an approach to painting that privileged 'impressions' – often painted en plein air (outdoors, directly in front of the subject) – over what the selecting judges for the Salon considered 'finished' works, which were highly academic in style and painted entirely in the studio. In critical responses to these independent exhibitions, this daring, varied and ambitious new painting became known as Impressionism.

The Impressionists were united by a common belief that they should respond to and represent the world around them. This was not a world populated by traditional art historical subjects, such as gods and goddesses, biblical figures or heroic military leaders. Instead, their attention was on the world in which they lived and worked, with a primary focus on nature.

Drawn from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, this exhibition presents more than 100 artworks, including many that exemplify Impressionism at its highpoint in the mid 1870s with such characteristics as luminous colour palettes, distinctive brushwork and scenes of the French countryside.

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Introduction

Social connections among the artists played an important role in the development of Impressionism. These artists knew each other and each other's work, and held strong opinions on the aims, limits and directions of their own art and the art world of their time. They wrote to and about one another, they sometimes painted side by side, and they exhibited together. Throughout the exhibition are extracts from letters, journal entries and other primary sources, which connect the artists' voices to the fresh and inspiring vision for which Impressionism is so celebrated.

The role of artistic camaraderie is evoked in this pair of quintessentially Impressionist paintings by Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Monet and Renoir met as art students in Paris, and undertook numerous painting excursions together in the 1860s. Both artists loved to capture radiant outdoor light and vegetation, painting scenes suggestive of leisure and ease. Although their foci differed, both Renoir and Monet were committed to painting the world around them as they saw it, directly in front of the subject and en plein air (outdoors).

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Meadow with poplars

c. 1875

oil on canvas

Bequest of David P. Kimball in memory of his wife
Clara Bertram Kimball, 1923

23.505

Don't you think that directly in nature and alone one does better?

– Monet

This painting, and the work by Renoir displayed adjacent, is a classic example of Impressionism at its high point in the 1870s. Both are domestic in scale, and have surfaces characterised by each artist's light, bright palettes and idiosyncratic brushwork. Although their foci differed, both Renoir and Monet were committed to painting the world around them as they saw it, directly in front of the subject and en plein air (in the open air). Monet and Renoir met as art students in Paris, and undertook numerous painting excursions together in the 1860s. Both artists loved to capture radiant outdoor light and vegetation, painting scenes suggestive of leisure and ease.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Woman with a parasol and small child on a sunlit hillside

c. 1874–76

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.593

An artist, under pain of oblivion, must have confidence in himself, and listen only to his real master: Nature.

– Renoir

Renoir's model for this painting was likely Camille Monet, wife of his fellow Impressionist Claude Monet. Renoir painted her on several occasions between 1874 and 1876. Here she sits on a hillside, her white dress dappled with pink and blue in the shade. Her grace and composure stand in marked contrast to the child who wanders off into the background at right, oblivious to the painter's presence. Renoir's feathery brushstrokes contrast with the thicker dabs and dashes used by Monet in the painting displayed adjacent. His painting style was judged harshly by some fellow artists, such as Edgar Degas, who disdainfully remarked, '[H]e paints with balls of wool'.

Before Impressionism

The Forest of Fontainebleau was a popular destination for artists during the 1820s–1870s. Just over fifty kilometres south-east of Paris, it offered an abundance of natural motifs including rock formations and plains, as well as old-growth trees. The railway connection built at mid century made the famed forest just over an hour's journey from the capital, enabling easy access by tourists and artists.

The nearby villages of Chailly and Barbizon offered lodgings that attracted many artists and fostered a creative community, which shared ideas or travelled together on painting excursions. After moving to Paris to pursue his artistic training, Claude Monet and his peers, who admired these artists and their direct engagement with the land, visited Barbizon and Chailly for extended painting sojourns in the early 1860s, their formative years as aspiring artists.

The name School of Barbizon was applied to artists who flocked to the small village of the same name in the 1830s and brought their paintings of rugged nature back to Paris, influencing the next generation of artists the Impressionists.

Paul Huet

French 1803–69

The Forest of Compiègne

c. 1830

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 2002

2002.124

Huet had first studied nature seriously as a teenager on the Île Seguin (an island in the Seine river) on the outskirts of Paris, then explored the forest of Compiègne, north of Paris in 1826, at the age of twenty-three. His first forays in the forests of Fontainebleau took place somewhat late in his career, in 1850, and were thereafter transformative for his art. 'I am amazed by this forest of Fontainebleau', he wrote in August 1850, 'which is quite different from Compiègne in its savagery and variety'. His regard for the vibrancy of nature is apparent in these five sketches, each capturing a view of the forest near the Château of Compiègne.

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

French 1796–1875

Twilight

1845–60

oil on canvas

Bequest of Mrs. Henry Lee Higginson, in memory of her husband, 1935

35.1163

Although he began painting outdoors in Fontainebleau as early as 1822, drawing directly from nature was only part of Corot's creative process. He also specialised in *paysages composés* (constructed landscapes) that combined naturalistic details with imaginative flourishes, which recalled the lyrically artificial landscapes painted by Claude Lorrain in the seventeenth century. *Twilight* is a classic example, with its delicate balance of light and shadow capturing the precise atmospheric effect of twilight as two young women gather fruit in a clearing. Darkly silhouetted trees frame the last glimmer of sunlight caught on the surface of a lake or pond.

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

French 1796–1875

Souvenir of a meadow at Brunoy

c. 1855–65

oil on canvas

Gift of Augustus Hemenway in memory of Louis and Amy Hemenway Cabot, 1916 16.1

Brunoy is situated halfway between Paris and Fontainebleau. Corot's painting, as the title suggests, is nostalgic. In the 1850s and 1860s, Corot began to use the word 'souvenir' (meaning 'memory') in the titles of his paintings, indicating that they were not to be read as direct transcriptions of observed nature. The artist's light touch, the feathery quivering leaves and silvery tones of the sky, reinforce the atmospheric, evocative quality of the landscape. Flowers created with dabs of pigment, figures gathering plants or ambling down a wooded path, as well as a cow gazing docilely towards the viewer, adds visual variety to this peaceful, pastoral scene.

Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña

French 1807–76

Clearing in the forest

c. 1855–70

oil on panel

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.537

In 1863 Diaz encountered a young man, wearing the distinct smock of a porcelain painter, struggling to compose a painting in the Forest of Fontainebleau. This was Pierre-Auguste Renoir, who received on-the-spot lessons in how to lighten his palette, which he never forgot, leading him to declare Diaz as his ‘grand homme’ (great hero). In this scene, the bright sky illuminates the trees and water beyond the shadowy foreground, elements that would have been instructive for Renoir. Diaz’s support of the younger artist continued through to the following decade, when Diaz visited the very first Impressionist group exhibition, held in Paris in 1874.

Théodore Rousseau

French 1812–67

Pool in the forest

early 1850s

oil on canvas

Robert Dawson Evans Collection, 1917

17.3241

This forest view is typical of Rousseau's style during this period: shadowy trees appear silhouetted against a sunlit field, as reflections of autumnal colours ripple in the watery surface below. Rousseau liked to immerse himself completely beneath or near to the forest canopy, allowing the limits of his peripheral vision to naturally frame a chosen setting, and to study the uneasy truce between cultivated land and untamed nature at the forest's edge. One commentator recalled how he 'had a cult for Fontainebleau's old trees'.

Théodore Rousseau

French 1812–67

Edge of the woods (Plain of Barbizon near Fontainebleau)

c. 1850–60

oil on canvas

Bequest of Mrs. David P. Kimball, 1923

23.399

I will never get old, as long as I have my eyes to see.

– Rousseau

Direct observation from nature in the forests and clearings of Fontainebleau lay at the heart of Rousseau's work. He first settled near the Forest of Fontainebleau for a sustained painting campaign in the winter of 1836–37. Entranced by the region, he also spent the next three autumns and winters in Barbizon, enjoying these seasons when most other artists and tourists had left, and he could be alone in the nearby forest. His preference for autumnal subjects contributed to his renown as a colourist, as did his mastery of an immense palette of greens, russets and browns.

Jean-François Millet

French 1814–75

Shepherdess leaning on her staff

c. 1852–53

oil on canvas

Robert Dawson Evans Collection, 1917

17.3245

While Millet at times painted idyllic rural landscape scenes, he was primarily interested in documenting the daily lives of the poor workers in Barbizon and Fontainebleau. The image of a solitary shepherdess tending her flock became a favourite motif in Millet's depictions of French peasants and labourers. Seemingly lost in thought, her cloaked figure stands quietly beside an embankment, separated from the grazing sheep. Small-scale canvases like this were attractive to private collectors; this work was sold by Millet to prominent American artist William Morris Hunt, who painted alongside Millet in Barbizon in the early 1850s.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Woodgatherers at the edge of the forest

c. 1863

oil on panel

Henry H. and Zoe Oliver Sherman Fund, 1974

1974.325

Théodore Rousseau made some very beautiful landscapes ... Daubigny, now there is a fellow who does well, who understands nature! The Corots are unadorned marvels.
– Monet

This early work reflects Monet's admiration for the landscape painters of the previous generation, centred around the village of Barbizon on the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau, whose commitment to direct observation, and ability to find beauty in commonplace scenes, set the precedent for Impressionism. Monet painted this in 1863, when he travelled to Fontainebleau in search of new motifs. Monet's choice of subject matter and darker colour palette echo the rural labourers and tranquil forest views of Millet and Rousseau. The baton of plein-air (outdoors) painting was therefore handed down to a new generation of painters, nurtured in the sylvan glades of Fontainebleau.

Charles François Daubigny

French 1817–78

Road through the forest

c. 1865–70

oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Samuel Dennis Warren, 1890

90.200

It's in the memory [of nature], or the sight of it, that we sometimes become crazy and it's then that we make good paintings.

– Daubigny

Daubigny was criticised in his day for his often sketchy treatment of the landscape. The size of this painting and the artist's signature confirm it as a finished work, not a preparatory sketch. In 1861, critic Théophile Gautier lamented: 'it really is a pity that this landscapist, having so true and so natural a feeling for his subject, should content himself with an "impression" and neglect detail to a great extent. His pictures are mere sketches, barely begun'. By the late 1860s, Daubigny would become a champion for the younger generation, including Cézanne, Monet, Pissarro and Renoir.

Constant Troyon

French 1810–65

Sheep and shepherd in a landscape

c. 1854

oil on canvas

Bequest of Thomas Gold Appleton, 1884

84.276

Go to the country from time to time and make studies, and above all develop them. Do some copying at the Louvre. Come and see me often: show me what you're doing and with enough courage you'll make it.

– Claude Monet's account of advice received from Troyon, 1859

Troyon was both a landscapist and an *animalier* (animal painter). This landscape combines the artist's interests by featuring a rural worker riding a donkey and herding a flock of sheep in a luminous country setting. Troyon experimented with light effects, with the cloudy sky casting a dramatic shadow in the mid-ground of the landscape. A wide variety of brushstrokes and an array of greens enlivens the lush setting. The young Monet was so impressed by Troyon's work when he first encountered it at the Paris Salon of 1859 that he approached the older artist for advice. Ultimately, however, Monet did not follow Troyon's recommendation that he take life-drawing classes and focus on figure studies.

Jean-François Millet

French 1814–75

Millet's family home at Gruchy

1854

oil on canvas

Gift of the Reverend and Mrs. Frederick
A. Frothingham, 1893

93.1461

Millet initially intended to be a portrait painter. However, in 1846 he met the landscape artists Constant Troyon and Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña, with Diaz later helping him to sell works through the Parisian dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. The following year Millet befriended Théodore Rousseau, which further cemented his commitment to painting the French countryside and the rural labours of its peasant occupants. Acting on the advice of Diaz, Millet settled in Barbizon with his wife and children in the summer of 1849. Millet started this painting when the artist returned to his childhood home in Gruchy on the Normandy coast in 1854 after his mother's death.

Jean-François Millet

French 1814–75

End of the hamlet of Gruchy

1856

oil on canvas

Gift of Quincy Adams Shaw through Quincy Adams Shaw, Jr.,
and Mrs. Marian Shaw Haughton, 1917

17.1501

My goal was to show the habitual peacefulness of the place, where each act, which would be nothing anywhere else, here becomes an event.

– Millet

Although Millet left his birthplace in Normandy as a young man to pursue his artistic training in Paris, he retained deep emotional connections to his hometown of Gruchy and to this vista in particular; he painted several versions of this composition over a number of years. Describing the impact of this view, Millet reflected: ‘going down toward the sea, suddenly one faces the great marine view and the boundless horizon. Near the last house, an old elm stands against the infinite void. How long has this poor old tree stood there beaten by the north wind?’.

Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña

French 1807–76

Pool in the forest

1858

oil on canvas

Bequest of Miss Elizabeth Howes, 1907

07.137

The composition of Diaz's *Pool in the forest* bears a striking similarity to the Théodore Rousseau painting of the same title completed about eight years earlier, on display nearby. Diaz first met Rousseau in Parisian art circles around 1831, when Rousseau was only nineteen and Diaz twenty-three. After 1836, Diaz regularly encountered Rousseau at Barbizon and he quietly followed Rousseau into the woods of Fontainebleau, watching from afar as the younger landscapist painted en plein air (outdoors). Gradually a friendship grew between the two men and Rousseau shared the secret of his colour palette with Diaz, particularly the use of emerald green and Naples yellow pigments.

Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña

French 1807–76

Path through the forest near Fontainebleau

c. 1875–76

oil on panel

The Henry C. and Martha B. Angell Collection, 1919

19.105

I go to Barbizon to make Diaz paintings.
– Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Diaz painted moody forest views throughout his career using dense and thickly applied paint. He favoured stormy and shadowy settings, in which the light trunks of the forest's beech and birch trees shone almost as if illuminated by lightning. Writing in 1873, the critic Jules Claretie mused: 'Who better than Diaz knows how to steal one of the sun's rays, in order to walk it cheerfully through the deep forests, on paths covered with moss, through the silver trunks of birches, on the lush foliage of oak trees?' Diaz's attention to the dappled play of light in the forest had a profound effect on Monet and Renoir.

Boudin, exemplar to the Impressionists

Both Eugène Boudin and Claude Monet grew up in Normandy and maintained a lifelong friendship after meeting early in their respective careers. Boudin encouraged Monet, who was sixteen years his junior, to paint outdoors, telling him 'a work painted directly on the spot has always a strength, a power, a vividness of touch that one doesn't find again in the studio'. Boudin's paintings feature a unifying focus on water and sky – a fascination shared with Monet and the younger Impressionists.

Monet would credit Boudin with his artistic formation, recalling how: 'One day Boudin said to me: "Learn to draw well and appreciate the sea, the light, the blue sky". I took his advice and together we went on long outings during which I painted constantly from nature. This was how I came to understand nature and learned to love it passionately ... I have said it before and can only repeat that I owe everything to Boudin and I attribute my success to him'.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Fashionable figures on the beach

1865

oil on panel

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John J. Wilson, 1974

1974.565

I shall do other things but I shall always be the painter of beaches.

– Boudin, in 1865

The advent of train travel in the 1850s brought seaside holidays within reach for middle-class Parisians, who flocked to new resort towns on the Normandy coast. Boudin painted scenes of fashionable urban beachgoers in 1862 and found a steady market for luminous, light-hearted pictures like this one. His acute power of observation conveys details of up-to-the-minute trends in women's fashion and also captures subtle, yet distinct, qualities of light and weather. Committed to painting en plein air (outdoors) rather than in a traditional studio, Boudin encouraged his young friend and pupil Claude Monet to work outside – from nature, in nature.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Ships at Le Havre

1887

oil on panel

Gift of Miss Amelia Peabody, 1937

37.1212

As an adolescent, Boudin had a year of schooling in Le Havre before working in a printer's shop and then a stationer's store, which also exhibited works by visiting painters. In this way, he came to know the Barbizon School artists Jean-François Millet and Constant Troyon, whose work influenced him. But it was not so much the town and its shops, as the harbour and its ships, which interested Boudin. The delicate strokes portraying the ships' masts and rigging vibrate here against the brushy clouds. Tiny figures occupy rowboats and the wharf, diminutive by comparison to the towering ships and sky.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Harbour at Honfleur

1865

oil on paper mounted on panel

Anonymous gift, 1971

1971.425

There's a large number of us here in Honfleur at this point ... [Johan] Jongkind and Boudin are here, we get along famously and don't leave each other's side.

– Claude Monet, 1864

Throughout his life, Boudin repeatedly spent summers in the town of Honfleur, where he was born – it was an ideal setting for his seascapes and harbour views. Typically, these works depict the Honfleur harbour and coast, rather than the open ocean. Boudin, like the younger Monet, admired and learnt from the Dutch marine painter Johan Jongkind (whose works are displayed in the next gallery), who had moved permanently to France in 1860 after living there between 1846 and 1855. With his consistent focus on the sky and its varied effects, Boudin also liked to employ unexpected compositions. Here, the quay juts into the foreground, its triangular shape drawing our eye towards the horizon.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Port scene

c. 1880

oil on panel

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.521

When Boudin and Monet were introduced in the late 1850s, Monet was still a teenager, sketching caricatures of local personalities in Le Havre. Boudin soon convinced the younger artist to attempt painting en plein air (outdoors) and, following Boudin's example, Monet abandoned his caricature drawings and devoted himself to painting. Boudin's marine paintings were intimate in scale and were popular souvenirs among the middle-class Parisian tourists who became a driving force in the art market in the late nineteenth century. Despite its scale, this painting captures the sweep and expanse of the seaside and sky, while its subtle palette evokes the closeness of moist sea air on a cloudy day.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Harbour scene

c. 1888–95

oil on panel

Gift of Mrs. Henry Bliss, 1967

67.906

Boudin painted ships in port under virtually all-weather conditions. In this variation of one of his favourite views of sailing vessels along a wharf, he creates a more sombre view with subtle shades of grey. Boudin painted hundreds of pictures like this one, with myriad effects of watery reflections and sunlight through the clouds – each a unique expression of a particular place and moment in time.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Port of Le Havre

c. 1886

oil on canvas

Bequest of Miss Elizabeth Howard Bartol, 1927

RES.27.90

According to the poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), Boudin's remarkable skills of observation made it possible to 'divine there the season, the hour, the wind. I don't exaggerate!'. His exactitude in depicting particular conditions of light, weather and atmosphere is readily apparent in this view of the bustling harbour of Le Havre, a prominent port city on the English Channel, where both Boudin and Monet grew up. A three-masted ship dominates the foreground, its French flag flying proudly in the breeze, as small rowboats bring passengers to and from the large ships anchored in deeper water.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Trouville, jetties at low tide

1885

oil on panel

Bequest of Forsyth Wickes – The Forsyth Wickes Collection, 1965

65.2638

This quiet view of the harbour at Trouville in Normandy belies the bustling crowds of the popular beachside town. Depicted at low tide, sailboats moored in the harbour have become stranded, while a fisherman in a tiny rowboat takes advantage of the calm waters. Even in this small painting, Boudin draws attention to the vastness of the sky, the vertical masts drawing the viewer's attention skyward. A narrow passageway between the jetties hints at the open ocean just beyond, as distant sailboats list in the wind.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

The inlet at Berck (Pas-de-Calais)

1882

oil on canvas

Bequest of Mrs. Stephen S. FitzGerald, 1964

64.1905

Many of Boudin's paintings depict the fashionable Parisian tourists who flocked to Normandy starting in the 1850s. By the latter part of the 1860s, however, he had grown disenchanted with the crowds of chic Parisians, writing: 'one feels almost ashamed at painting the idle rich'. In this view of Berck, a fishing and resort town, he instead explored the strand itself, bordered by simple houses, scattered with fence posts and tufts of seagrass. Boudin, who was aptly nicknamed 'King of the skies' by fellow artist Camille Corot, fills nearly three-quarters of this composition with a delicately nuanced view of grey clouds.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Deauville at low tide

1897

oil on canvas

Bequest of Mary H. J. Parker, 1981

1981.719

Here we are in Paris. Time to pack our bags and then back to Deauville ... yes, indeed! I must admit I am looking forward to seeing our beaches again and our overcast skies.

– Boudin, in 1894

In this late work, tiny strokes of paint skilfully denote figures along the inner shoreline and at the water's edge, as blue sky peeks through a span of textured clouds. Boudin emphasises the expansive stretch of dunes and beachfront that recedes into the distance. Tiny sailboats dot the sliver of ocean at right, beneath a sweep of billowing clouds tinged with delicate purple shading.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Juan-les-Pins, the bay and the shore

1893

oil on canvas

Gift of Eunice and Julian Cohen, 1999

1999.584

Boudin turned his attention to Venice and to the French Riviera in the 1890s. The Mediterranean coast was then, as now, a popular resort during winter. Monet had visited Juan-les-Pins in 1888, staying in nearby Antibes from January to May; fellow Impressionist artist Mary Cassatt brought her ailing mother to Antibes in 1894 and could see the small town of Juan-les-Pins from the window of their rental. Boudin includes figures seated on the embankment, with parasols near the trees, as well as small boats resting at the coastline, all suggestive of the rest and leisure to be enjoyed in this area.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Venice, Santa Maria della Salute from San Giorgio

1895

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1925

25.111

At the age of sixty-eight, Boudin travelled to Venice for the first time, returning there in the summer of 1894 and again in 1895, and painted at least two other versions of this scene. He made only slight variations from one painting to the other in the placement of boats and human figures. The real difference between the works and what interested him most was the cloud formations in the sky, the light and the atmosphere, which captured different effects of light and season on the same subject.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Washerwomen near a bridge

1883

oil on panel

Bequest of David P. Kimball in memory of his wife
Clara Bertram Kimball, 1923

23.512

As in most paintings by Boudin, great attention is given here to the texture and colour of the cloud-filled sky and the rippling surface of the water as well as the interplay between the two. Less characteristic is the focus on women labouring at the water's edge, the bright white of clean laundry gleaming atop the heaps in the baskets behind them. People loiter and horse-drawn carriages move across the bridge, their sketchier rendering contributing to the sense of movement.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Figures on the beach

1893

oil on canvas

Bequest of William A. Coolidge, 1993

1993.32

Three brushstrokes directly from nature are worth more than two days of work in the studio.

– Boudin

A storm is looming: diagonal strokes at the horizon line indicate wind and rain. Yet bathers wade at low tide on the Normandy beach, seemingly untroubled by the approaching weather. Their parasols and hitched skirts are conjured with a few deft dots of paint. Boudin's treatment of fleeting light and weather effects and the bold spontaneity of his pictures exemplify the influential role he held for Impressionist painters, most notably Claude Monet. In 1869 the critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary wrote perceptively about Boudin's work: 'This is the ocean and you can almost smell the salty fragrance'.

Eugène Louis Boudin

French 1824–98

Harbour entrance

1873

oil on canvas

The Henry C. and Martha B. Angell Collection, 1919

19.98

By the 1870s, Boudin's marine paintings shifted away from crowded beaches to focus on views of harbours, ports and coastlines. Beneath the subtle shimmer of the water's surface in this unassuming harbour scene, Boudin reveals a quiet energy as the sun's warm light breaks through the clouds. Quick brushstrokes animate the placid reflections of the boats, while the nearly monochrome palette mirrors grey skies in the silvery water below. By 1873, when this work was completed, Boudin had found a clientele who appreciated the subtlety of his velvety grey images of overcast harbours.

Watery surfaces

Flickering colour and light on rippling watery surfaces were favoured subjects for the Impressionists and their friends. Direct engagement with the fleeting and momentary nature of water is paired with innovative compositions, in which the viewer appears to hover above or float on the surface of a body of water. Édouard Manet dubbed Monet the 'Raphael of water', his achievements in capturing its many moods and appearances overshadowing those around him.

Charles François Daubigny, an older artist who was a great champion of Monet's work, first created a studio boat, or floating atelier, for painting rivers on location. Like Boudin, Johan Barthold Jongkind, a Dutch marine painter who spent much of his career in France, also encouraged the young Monet's interest in marine painting. Monet's peers took a variety of approaches to waterways: some, like the Norwegian Frits Thaulow, revelled in rippling colours and reflections; and others, like Paul Cézanne, used an expanse of pond water to challenge perception of depth and space in his composition. Alfred Sisley also experimented with compositions and effects, describing the river Loing, a regular subject in his work, as 'so beautiful, so translucent, so changeable'.

Charles François Daubigny

French 1817–78

Woman washing clothes at the edge of a river

c. 1860–70

oil on canvas

Gift of Louisa W. and Marian R. Case, 1920

20.1864

We are only bothered by the steamboats, and there are a lot of them going back and forth.

– Daubigny

By the late 1860s, the Barbizon School painter Charles Daubigny would become a champion for the younger generation, including Cézanne, Monet, Pissarro and Renoir. Monet wrote to Boudin enthusiastically about Daubigny: 'Here is one who does well, who understands nature!'. In this painting, Daubigny captures the way that colours seem abnormally bright on a clear day, which places the viewer in the middle of the river itself – the placid water spreads nearly from edge to edge. Daubigny realised this immersive composition through his inventive use of a boat repurposed as a floating studio, an idea later taken up by Monet in the 1870s.

Johan Barthold Jongkind

Dutch 1819–91

Harbour scene in Holland

1868

oil on canvas

Gift of Count Cecil Pecci-Blunt, 1961

61.1242

[Jongkind] asked to see my sketches, invited me to come and work with him, explained to me the why and the wherefore of his manner, and thereby completed the teachings that I had already received from Boudin.

– Claude Monet

Jongkind, although of Dutch origin, studied and painted in France from the mid 1840s onwards, later meeting Monet and Boudin, among other artists, during repeated stays in Normandy in the 1860s. While Jongkind moved permanently to France in 1860, he periodically returned to the Netherlands for visits throughout the decade, with this painting made on one of his final visits. It underscores Jongkind's lively touch – the complex arrangement of light and shadow sparkling upon the water's surface, with small dabs of paint creating a palpable sense of movement and energy throughout the bustling harbour.

Johan Barthold Jongkind

Dutch 1819–91

Harbour by moonlight

1871

oil on canvas

The Henry C. and Martha B. Angell Collection, 1919

19.95

[There is] always something to gain from studying Jongkind's landscapes because he paints what he sees and what he feels with sincerity.

– Claude Monet

In the 1870s, Boudin and Monet both visited the Netherlands, not only to study the accomplishments of seventeenth-century Dutch painters, but also undoubtedly to appreciate firsthand the watery landscape familiar to them from Jongkind's works. Although Jongkind did not return to his Dutch homeland after 1869, elements reminiscent of it continued to appear in his works. A windmill here, identifies this as a Dutch setting. The main subject of this painting, though, is the scintillating moonlight playing amid the clouds and across the surface of the water.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Grand Canal, Venice

1908

oil on canvas

Bequest of Alexander Cochrane, 1919

19.171

When I looked at your Venice paintings with their admirable interpretation of the motifs I know so well, I experienced a deep emotion [...] I admire them as the highest manifestation of your art.

– Paul Signac

Venice, Monet once told his wife, was ‘too beautiful to paint’. But when he accepted the invitation of an American friend to stay at her rented palazzo on the Grand Canal in 1908, he set to work, painting thirty-seven canvases over the course of his visit. This view, taken from the boat landing of the Palazzo Barbaro, captures the baroque church of Santa Maria della Salute and its reflection dancing on the water. Unlike many painters of Venetian views, Monet showed less interest in representing famous monuments than in capturing the play of light and reflection on the city’s waterways.

Alfred Sisley

British (active in France) 1839–99

The Loing at Saint-Mammès

1882

oil on canvas

Bequest of William A. Coolidge, 1993

1993.44

Every picture shows a spot with which the artist has fallen in love.

– Sisley

Between 1880 and 1885, Sisley painted nearly 300 scenes of the riverside town of Saint-Mammès, located sixty kilometres outside Paris. This quiet bend of the Loing River is lined with poplar trees, boats, houses and an arching railway viaduct that spans the distant horizon line. Sisley was particularly attached to this river, a tributary of the Seine River that meets it at Saint-Mammès, writing about 'the waters of the Loing, so beautiful, so translucent, so changeable'. Of note here is what Sisley called the 'variation of surface within the same picture', which he felt was crucial to 'rendering a light effect'.

Alfred Sisley

British (active in France) 1839–99

La Croix-Blanche at Saint-Mammès

1884

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1939

39.680

This painting, titled for the grand seventeenth-century manor La Croix-Blanche shown at the right, illustrates Sisley's masterful blending of light and colour throughout all elements of the landscape. 'The sky must be the medium,' he wrote, 'the sky cannot be a mere backdrop'. Here, the bright sky graduates from delicate blue at the upper left to a nearly white glow at centre – while the water's distant, pale tones deepen to navy as the river approaches. Although Sisley's vision may begin with the sky, the water's surface also subtly connects land, water and sky in the finished work.

Alfred Sisley

British (active in France) 1839–99

Waterworks at Marly

c. 1876

oil on canvas

Gift of Miss Olive Simes, 1945

45.662

The artist's impression is the life-giving factor ... the surface, at times raised to the highest pitch of liveliness, should transmit to the beholder the sensation which possessed the artist.

– Sisley

Although less celebrated than some of his colleagues, such as Monet, Sisley maintained an emphatically Impressionist sensibility throughout his career. *Waterworks at Marly* exemplifies Sisley's enduring efforts to translate his 'sensation' to canvas. From the rippling water to the rustling foliage of burnt orange and ochre, Sisley ignites the senses in a view of what may otherwise be a rather unremarkable subject – a pumping station that provided water for the fountains at the Palace of Versailles.

Frits Thaulow

Norwegian 1847–1906

Abbeville

c. 1894

oil on canvas

Deposited by the Trustees of the White Fund, Lawrence, Massachusetts Courtesy
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

I will remain... the naturalist that I always was: I will always attempt to produce the illusion that I observed in nature.
– Thaulow

Although he did not participate in their group exhibitions, Thaulow knew many of the Impressionists, including Monet, having spent much of his career in France. He visited Paris in 1882–83, exhibited at the 1889 Exposition Universelle and moved to France definitively in 1892. He visited Abbeville, a commune in northern France on the Somme River, in 1894. Thaulow conveys the subtle swirling of the river's surface with astonishing variety. Luminous blues and greens represent the sky's reflection on the moving water, while touches of additional colours, reflected from the architecture, glow near the river's edges. The overcast day provided a captivating quality of light, lending mysteriousness to the simple, familiar waterway.

Frits Thaulow

Norwegian 1847–1906

River view

c. 1890–1900

oil on canvas

Deposited by the Trustees of the White Fund, Lawrence, Massachusetts
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Time and again, Thaulow painted waterways, as though from a boat or precariously close-range on land, revelling in the moving surface of the water. He created immersive compositions, such as this one, in which no other intruding vessels or visitors interrupt the luminous, shimmering tableau. Glistening ripples extend across the river to the edge of the canvas in this late autumn scene. The last orange-red leaves drift upon the river's surface; above, glimmers of sky, clouds and trees swirl together. A contemporary critic applauded how 'the mass, the fluidity and the depth' within such works surpasses the mere flickering sensations of Impressionist painting.

Paul Cézanne

French 1839–1906

The pond

c. 1877–79

oil on canvas

Tompkins Collection–Arthur Gordon Tompkins
Fund, 1948

48.244

From far off one often gets an entirely different idea of things. But likewise when one is too close one sees nothing; you can't see a Cezanne by holding it against your nose.
– Camille Pissarro

Paul Cézanne exhibited in two of the eight Impressionist exhibitions, including the first one, held in Paris from 15 April to 15 May 1874. He worked closely alongside his elder colleague Camille Pissarro in the 1870s and emulated his technique of using regular, directional brushwork. The rhythmic, even brushstrokes of *The pond*, particularly visible in the hillside and the tree at right, create a feeling of solidity rather than depth or movement.

Still life as studio practice

While they spent much time painting outdoors, the Impressionists also worked in the studio, for many reasons, such as creating still-life paintings. 'I'm astonished that these painted studies of flowers find any takers, it is such a painterly feeling I'm always astounded that anyone but painters has a taste for them', confided Henri Fantin-Latour about his still-life paintings. For some of the Impressionist painters, however, their still-life paintings found a ready market, possibly because their compositions were more conventionally appealing than their landscapes.

In practical terms, still-life subjects were easier to arrange and light – a creative alternative to the vagaries of weather when working en plein air (outdoors). Still life also allowed the artists to work towards their painterly goals, as Berthe Morisot observed: 'To catch the fleeting moment – anything, however small, a smile, a flower, a fruit – is an ambition'. Others, like Cézanne, were more specific and enthusiastic: 'As to flowers, I have given them up. They wilt immediately. Fruits are more reliable. They love having their portraits done'.

Henri Fantin-Latour

French 1836–1904

Roses in a vase

1872

oil on canvas

Frederick Brown Fund, 1940

40.232

Unlike his friend Manet, Fantin-Latour remained committed to the more conservative realist tradition, capturing a level of naturalistic detail – particularly in his compositions of roses in glass vases – that Manet never sought to record. In these relatively austere still lifes, Fantin-Latour concentrated on the specific forms of the individual flowers, adopting a short, feathery brushstroke to render the petals. Fantin-Latour was the late nineteenth-century's undisputed master of the rose. Here, a rough, scumbled background offsets the delicacy and fleshy softness of these overblown blossoms, so real we can almost smell their perfume.

Henri Fantin-Latour

French 1836–1904

Roses in a glass vase

1890

oil on canvas

Bequest of Alice A. Hay, 1987

1987.291

I'm astonished that these painted studies of flowers find any takers, it is such a painterly feeling I'm always astounded that anyone but painters has a taste for them.
– Fantin-Latour

During an extended visit to London in 1861, Fantin-Latour was introduced to the collectors and art enthusiasts, Mr and Mrs Edwin Edwards, who subsequently brokered many sales of his paintings in England. The artist's many compositions of roses in glass vases were particularly successful with private collectors in England, where the cultivation of roses had surpassed that of France. Minutely observed still lifes of flowers, like this one, are among Fantin-Latour's most celebrated works. These share the Impressionists' interest in direct observation and domestic intimacy, but they also possess a hushed, timeless quality far removed from the instantaneity of Impressionist landscapes.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Mixed flowers in an earthenware pot

c. 1869

oil on paperboard mounted on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.592

Some Impressionist artists strived to bring highly naturalistic and 'living' effects to their still lifes, representing the textures, colours and vibrancy found in nature using idiosyncratic brushwork and bright palettes. This is reflected in Pierre-Auguste Renoir's painting, which captures both the subject – an arrangement of dahlias, asters and sunflowers in a stoneware pot alongside a selection of apples and pears – and its surrounding atmosphere. The painting marks Renoir's closest collaboration with Monet; the young artists painted the same subject, sitting side by side before the arrangement. Monet's version of the composition is now in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

Gustave Courbet

French 1819–77

Hollyhocks in a copper bowl

1872

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.530

I am coining money out of flowers.

– Courbet

Despite their profitability, Courbet painted very few still lifes in his career, and those he did were often created out of necessity. In September 1871, he was sentenced to six months in the prison at Sainte-Pélagie for his involvement in the destruction of the Vendôme Column during the popular uprising known as the Paris Commune earlier that year. During this period, Courbet was denied both live models and access to the prison roof to paint landscapes, so his subjects became the fruit, fish and flowers delivered by his sister. The context of isolation within which he was working explains several of this painting's compositional elements, including the dark, sombre background engulfing the hollyhocks.

Édouard Manet

French 1832–83

Basket of fruit

c. 1864

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.576

The still life is the touchstone of the painter.
– Manet

While Manet observed the conventions of traditional still-life painters, he paid equal attention to transcribing the world around him, claiming that 'one has to belong to his own time and reproduce what he sees'. Using innovative and experimental pictorial techniques, Manet countered the symbolic and decorative traditions long associated with still-life painting. Painted early in Manet's career, this still life is characterised by loose, abbreviated brushstrokes. Despite the ridicule Manet received for the flatness, brevity and abstract quality of his painting style, he deemed this work sufficiently finished to include in his first one-person exhibition in 1867.

Henri Fantin-Latour

French 1836–1904

Flowers and fruit on a table

1865

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.540

Fantin-Latour met Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas at the Louvre Museum, where they went in the late 1850s and early 1860s to copy Old Master paintings. Fantin-Latour quickly fell in with their avant-garde circle but refused to join in the Impressionists' group exhibitions of the 1870s, choosing instead to continue showing his work at the official Salon. He produced still lifes often with very casual compositions like this one, and once claimed to 'put a great deal of thought into the arrangement of random objects' to give 'the appearance of a total lack of artistry'.

Henri Fantin-Latour

French 1836–1904

Plate of peaches

1862

oil on canvas

M. Theresa B. Hopkins Fund, 1960

60.792

Fantin-Latour often selected commonplace, domestic subjects, as is demonstrated in this early, informal composition of three peaches, a plate and a fruit knife. This unusually small composition betrays Fantin-Latour's debt to Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, the eighteenth-century master of still life who regained popularity among artists and connoisseurs in the early 1860s. Although Fantin-Latour's approach to still-life painting remained relatively conservative, the nuanced transitions from shades of yellow to red to brown in *Plate of peaches* underscore the artist's great attention to colour and subtleties of light effects, a fascination he shared with his Impressionist contemporaries.

Alfred Sisley

British (active in France) 1839–99

Grapes and walnuts on a table

1876

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.601

Sisley painted only nine still lifes, remaining committed to landscape painting throughout his career. This work is believed to have been painted with the encouragement of his friend Monet. Like the still lifes of his fellow Impressionists, Sisley's painting captures both the objects on display – a selection of fruit on a plate, walnuts, a knife and a nutcracker – and the changing atmospheric conditions. The casual arrangement of the items across a crisp white tablecloth resembles forms found in a natural landscape, a subject that Sisley and many of his fellow Impressionists more readily embraced.

Paul Cézanne

French 1839–1906

Fruit and a jug on a table

c. 1890–94

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.524

I want to astonish Paris with an apple.
– Cézanne

Described by critic Thadée Natanson as the ‘master of still life’, Cézanne, like Manet, dedicated roughly a fifth of his oeuvre to the genre. While his practice was informed by the Impressionists’ aims, his vision was fundamentally distinct from theirs. Rather than seeking to capture ephemeral impressions, Cézanne’s chief objective was to investigate form, structure and colour, and the relationships between these compositional elements. Still life was the central subject matter through which he conducted his research. His dedication to still-life painting produced complex, carefully sculpted compositions laden with inanimate objects.

Berthe Morisot

French 1841–95

White flowers in a bowl

1885

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.581

Morisot was introduced to the Impressionist circle in 1869 by Manet, her close friend, mentor and eventual brother-in-law. She quickly became a core member of the group and participated in all but one of the eight Impressionist exhibitions. As an upper middle-class woman, Morisot was unhindered by financial hardship. Unlike Monet and Renoir, her livelihood did not depend on the sale of her paintings. As a result, she was able to produce highly experimental works. This still life exemplifies Morisot's immediate and direct approach to painting, with its sweeping brushstrokes that capture the subject with a minimum of loose, fluid lines and forms.

Gustave Caillebotte

French 1848–94

Fruit displayed on a stand

c. 1881–82

oil on canvas

Fanny P. Mason Fund in memory of Alice Thevin, 1979

1979.196

Caillebotte found his subject for this modern still life in the display of an upmarket fruit seller, likely near the independently wealthy artist's Paris home. In traditional still-life paintings, fruits are arranged on tables near dishes or cutlery, suggesting a domestic setting; here, white wrappers and the distribution of fruits by kind makes evident that these are commodities for sale.

Caillebotte's unconventional choice of subject matter was praised in 1882 by writer and critic Joris-Karl Huysmans, who described the artist's depiction of fruits of varying shape, size and colour on their 'white paper beds' as 'extraordinary' and heralded the painting as a 'still life freed from its routine'.

Renoir and experimentation

Learning, experimentation and the acceptance of missteps on the path to improvement, were central tenets of Renoir's artistic life, and brought about numerous transformations in his work. 'I am suffering from the illness of experimentation', Renoir confided to his dealer Paul Durand-Ruel in 1881. This was the year of the Impressionists' sixth independent exhibition, and a year before Durand-Ruel would offer Renoir the opportunity of a solo exhibition of his work, from which paintings would travel from Paris to London and New York. Nevertheless, Renoir worried that he had undertaken insufficient artistic training in his youth, and was not adept enough as a draughtsman.

In the 1880s, Renoir experimented with a range of pictorial effects. In landscapes and figural works, scenes of suburban Paris or more far-flung destinations, Renoir pursued an ongoing self-education. By the end of the decade, the artist's friends feared he had gone too far. 'Renoir, lacking a gift for drawing, lacking the beautiful colours that he instinctively felt before, becomes incoherent', Camille Pissarro complained. While certainly not indecipherable, as Pissarro stated, Renoir's range of painterly touches across works and within single compositions urges careful, sustained consideration.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Algerian girl

1881

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1939

39.677

It is the artist who makes the model.
– Renoir

Renoir travelled to the French colony of Algeria twice in 1881, seeking the dazzling light and subject matter made famous (and marketable) in France by the Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix some fifty years before. In a manner typical of many European artists who sought to capture the ‘exoticism’ of North Africa around this time, Renoir’s creations bore little relationship to the place itself or its inhabitants, reflecting instead the pervasive tropes of colonial fantasy. The model is unknown; however, during this time Renoir often employed French nationals living in Algeria as models, dressing them in local costume and darkening their hair on his canvas.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Grand Canal, Venice

1881

oil on canvas

Bequest of Alexander Cochrane, 1919

19.173

In October 1881, Renoir departed on an extended trip to Italy, where he felt himself and his art transformed by encounters with masterpieces by Titian in Florence and Raphael in Rome. He brought all of the deftness of Impressionist technique to this glittering view. Renoir's Venetian pictures generated some hostility from critics when first exhibited, since they constituted a radical departure from traditional Venetian *vedute* – detailed paintings emphasising the architecture of the city's famous monuments. Here, Renoir's radical vision dissolves Venetian landmarks into a vibrant experiment in colour and light.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

The Seine at Chatou

1881

oil on canvas

Gift of Arthur Brewster Emmons, 1919

19.771

Painted in Renoir's signature fluttering brushwork, this picture offers a quintessential expression of his high Impressionist style. This springtime view of Chatou, a boating spot in the Paris suburbs, quivers in a profusion of colour and light. Delicate wisps of green and yellow suggest a breeze in the grass; a crowd of white and pink flecks, a flowering tree. Renoir portrays a young girl gathering flowers in the same carefree manner as he does her lush surroundings. The predominance of complementary yellow/greens and lilacs here may reflect the colour theories of Michel Eugène Chevreul from the 1850s – namely that neighbouring colours influence one another's appearance.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Rocky crags at L'Estaque

1882

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1939

39.678

I am in the process of learning a lot. ... I have perpetual sunshine and I can scrape off and begin again as much as I like.

– Renoir

In January 1882, Renoir visited Cézanne in L'Estaque, a village on the southern French Mediterranean coast to the west of Marseille. This region, where Cézanne had painted regularly since the 1860s, was favoured by artists for its strong light and dramatic geological features. The two artists worked in harmony here in 1882, Cézanne painting the same view, but in a more radically abstracted manner. This rocky hillside betrays the depth of Renoir's admiration for Cézanne, whose more structured, architectonic treatment of rock Renoir emulates here, while maintaining his own idealised vision of nature.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Landscape on the coast, near Menton

1883

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.596

An artist, under pain of oblivion, must have confidence in himself, and listen only to his real master: Nature.

– Renoir

Renoir was often troubled by his perceived artistic shortcomings in the face of natural splendour. In December 1883, he travelled with Monet along the Mediterranean coast from Marseille to Genoa. Overcome by the beauty of the scenery in the French Riviera, he wrote to his patron Paul Berard, 'alas our poor palette can't match up to it'. Yet with characteristically sensuous brushstrokes and luminous colour, he set out to capture the landscape nonetheless, creating this vision of a windswept grove on bluffs overlooking the sea at Menton, near the Italian border.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Girls picking flowers in a meadow

c. 1890

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1939

39.675

I'm struggling with trees in flower, with women and children, and I don't want to look at anything else.

– Renoir

Renoir spent the summer of 1890 at the country house of fellow Impressionist Berthe Morisot and her husband Eugène Manet, Édouard Manet's brother. Renoir asked their daughter, Julie, to pose for him, along with her fair-haired cousin, Jeanne Gobillard. Renoir gives the girls – their bonnets elaborately ruffled and ribboned – the fanciful air of shepherdesses in a Rococo pastoral scene, taking his cue from the eighteenth-century artist François Boucher and his airy, make-believe scenes. With its flowering sapling at left, the picture also reads as an allegory of budding maturity. Such exuberantly pretty works were received with mixed enthusiasm by Renoir's contemporaries.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Dance at Bougival

1883

oil on canvas

Picture Fund, 1937

37.375

I discovered, about 1883, that the only thing worthwhile for a painter to study is the museums.

– Renoir

After his study of the Renaissance masters such as Raphael in Italy, Renoir became increasingly preoccupied with the lucidity and discipline of line drawing and the purity of form. Upon his return to Paris, he resumed copying from the Old Masters at the Louvre Museum. He now applied his luminous palette and expressive range of touches to a new style of painting that also emphasised form, line and volume. In his monumental figure paintings from around this time, this hybrid approach is applied on a grand scale. This work depicts a pair of happy dancers in the village of Bougival, near Paris, a popular recreation spot for city dwellers.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Children on the seashore, Guernsey

c. 1883

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.594

In the summer of 1883, Renoir spent several weeks sketching on the island of Guernsey in the English Channel, then a fashionable holiday destination for Parisians. The subject of this painting is among Renoir's favourites – a group of rosy-cheeked children on a sunny beach, with swimmers cavorting in the luminous water. The sense of relaxation and informality inherent in the scene is mirrored in the artist's long, flowing brushstrokes and the unfinished sections of canvas at the right and upper edges. This work was not painted outdoors, however, but back in Renoir's Paris studio, from studies he had made during his stay in Guernsey.

Pissarro as mentor and mentee

Camille Pissarro was the oldest member of the Impressionist group and among its most daring innovators. He was a dedicated family man, living outside of Paris where costs were more manageable, but despite living away from the artistic centre, Pissarro remained abreast of new directions and was sought out by others for advice. He was also open to learning from others. In the latter half of the 1880s, Pissarro experimented with Neo-Impressionism, having been introduced to its younger practitioners by his son Lucien.

His interest in this new painting technique, which abandoned the wet-on-wet application of harmonious tones preferred by Impressionism in favour of placing strong, opposing blocks of colour side by side was, however, short-lived. His own distinctive vision demanded a less rigorously theoretical approach. By 1895, Pissarro was exasperated with critics who derided superficial similarities between his works and others': 'In Cézanne's show at Vollard's there are certain landscapes of Auvers and Pontoise that [they say] are similar to mine. Naturally, we were always together! But what cannot be denied is that each of us kept the only thing that counts, the unique "sensation"!'.

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

French 1796–1875

Turn in the road

c. 1868–70

oil on canvas

Gift of Robert Jordan from the collection of
Eben D. Jordan, 1924

24.214

Pissarro always acknowledged the great debt his work owed to the Barbizon School painter Camille Corot. In the late 1850s Pissarro had been a regular visitor to Corot's studio, and he declared himself a 'pupil of Corot' when first submitting works to the Paris Salon exhibitions.

Here, the tall spindly trees, dappled foliage and silvery, cool palette are typical of Corot's late work, which often stemmed more from the artist's imagination, imbued as it was with years of landscape study, than an actual view of the outdoors. The figures populating this quiet woodland scene are all stock characters Corot re-used in many different compositions.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Morning sunlight on the snow, Éragny-sur-Epte

1895

oil on canvas

The John Pickering Lyman Collection—
Gift of Miss Theodora Lyman, 1919

19.1321

In April 1884, Pissarro moved to Éragny-sur-Epte, where he would mostly reside until his death in 1903. In this painting, a peasant woman trudges through the snow, her back to the viewer, her arms taut with the weight of two buckets. Pissarro combines here his sympathy for rural labourers with his interest in winter landscapes. Committed across several decades to humble rural scenes and flickering brushstrokes, Pissarro varied his touch from the broader Impressionist stroke to a more methodical Neo-Impressionist dot and back again. From the late 1880s, Pissarro suffered from an eye condition that made it difficult to work out-of-doors for long periods. He probably painted this scene from the window of his studio, a converted barn in Éragny.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Pontoise, the road to Gisors in winter

1873

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.587

Pontoise, a sizeable rural town roughly thirty kilometres north-west of Paris, was Pissarro's primary base for close to twenty years. From the 1860s through to the early 1880s he painted some 300 views of the town's centre and his favourite corners of its less densely populated outskirts. France experienced unusually harsh winters and heavy snowfall in the early 1870s. This street scene shows residents sweeping up a light dusting of snow beneath a sky that promises more, the town's rural architecture and the lowering sky evoked with short, broad strokes of juxtaposed, unblended colour.

Paul Signac

French 1863–1935

View of the Seine at Herblay

1889

oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. Charles Sumner Bird
(Julia Appleton Bird), 1980

1980.367

Signac's variety of brushstrokes – dots, dabs and dashes – helps to suggest different textures and also gives the composition here a visual energy, an optical quiver. The pale grey of the primed canvas is evident between strokes, especially in the water and sky, creating a silvery mid tone and a sense of the work being rapidly made. Drawn lines at the water's edge and crest of the hill, as well as the thoughtful use of colours opposite each other on the colour wheel (like orange and blue in the reflection of the foliage), reveal the artist's careful premeditation and planning.

Paul Signac

French 1863–1935

Port of Saint-Cast

1890

oil on canvas

Gift of William A. Coolidge, 1991

1991.584

In front of a divided picture, it will be advisable first to stand far enough away to perceive the impression of the whole, then stop and come closer to study the play of coloured elements.

– Signac

Signac was a keen sailor who owned more than thirty different boats during his lifetime. He was drawn to the French coast, where he applied the Neo-Impressionist technique to capture startling stretches of iridescent water. *Port of Saint-Cast* is one of a series of four seascapes that Signac painted along the coast of Brittany. The idea of working in series may have come from Claude Monet. Signac's composition is spare and carefully balanced, with the painstaking method of applying dabs of paint enlivened by vibrant colour and light. The subtlety of his attention to colour and touch evokes the granular texture of the sand and the shimmering surface of the water as it ripples toward shore.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Two peasant women in a meadow (Le Pré)

1893

oil on canvas

Deposited by the Trustees of the White Fund, Lawrence, Massachusetts
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

How can one combine the purity and simplicity of the dot with the fullness, suppleness, liberty, spontaneity and freshness of sensation postulated by Impressionist art?
– Pissarro

In this seemingly simple depiction of peasant women conversing and cows grazing, Pissarro worked through complex technical concerns. His use of a variety of brushstrokes enlivens the composition and suggests the differing textures of grass, fabric and foliage, as well as the movement of a breeze. Suffering from an eye ailment, Pissarro worked less directly before nature in this period, applying Georges Seurat's new scientific theories of colour and optics to paintings completed principally in his studio.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Spring pasture

1889

oil on canvas

Deposited by the Trustees of the White Fund, Lawrence, Massachusetts
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The great problem that has to be solved, is the matter of relating everything in the picture, even the smallest details, to the overall harmony.

– Pissarro

Pissarro's art moved into an entirely new phase in October 1885, when he met the young painters Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, who were exploring scientific theories of colour and optics, in works that became known as Neo-Impressionism (also known as Pointillism, after the French word for 'dot', point). Painted with countless tiny, palpitating strokes, this painting reflects Pissarro's experimentation with Neo-Impressionism. Placing dabs of colour side by side, according to Pissarro, 'stirs up more intense luminosities than does mixture of pigments'. Here, the vibrant greens and cool blues employed by Pissarro evoke the freshness of spring.

Vincent van Gogh

Dutch (worked in France) 1853–90

Houses at Auvers

1890

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.549

In Antwerp I did not even know what the Impressionists were, now I have seen them and though not being one of the club, yet I have much admired certain Impressionist pictures.

– Van Gogh, 1886

When Van Gogh arrived in Paris in February 1886, his aesthetic was still guided principally by seventeenth-century Dutch Old Masters and French landscape painters of the Barbizon School. His brother, Theo, an art dealer in Paris, had been urging him for some time to introduce more light and colour into his work. Once in France, Van Gogh achieved this. In May 1890 Van Gogh moved to Auvers, north-west of the capital, at the recommendation of Pissarro. Auvers was favoured by artists he admired and was also home to Dr Paul Gachet, described by Pissarro to Theo as ‘a man who has been in touch with all the Impressionists’.

Paul Gauguin

French 1848–1903

Entrance to the village of Osny

1882–83

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.545

[Pissarro] looked at everybody, you say! Why not? Everyone looked at him, too.

– Gauguin

Gauguin was a young stockbroker and ex-merchant marine and French naval officer who began to paint, with little formal instruction, in 1873. He first exhibited with the Impressionists in 1879, and in the same year he visited Pissarro in Pontoise for the first time, painting alongside him en plein air (outdoors). While he was still working as a stockbroker in 1882, Gauguin frequently travelled to Pontoise on Sundays, to visit with Pissarro and paint his own views of the town. This composition, a complex depiction of a hamlet some fifty minutes' walk from Pontoise, was probably painted during one of these weekend visits.

Paul Cézanne

French 1839–1906

Turn in the road

c. 1881

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.525

Pissarro was a father to me. He was a wise counsellor and something like God Almighty.

– Cézanne

Debate over the importance of representational accuracy in landscape painting, versus alterations for the sake of compositional interest, fascinated both Pissarro and Cézanne. Cézanne was a young art student when he first met Pissarro in 1861. From late 1872 until mid 1874 Cézanne lived in Auvers-sur-Oise, just under ninety minutes' walk from Pontoise, in order to work more closely with his elder friend and mentor. Cézanne lived in Pontoise itself from May to October 1881, and returned there again the following summer, painting outdoors alongside Pissarro. This work was painted during this time of direct dialogue between the two artists.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Sunlight on the road, Pontoise

1874

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1925

25.114

Do not forget, one merely has to be oneself! But what an effort this requires!

– Pissarro

Pissarro was an important mentor to many of the mostly younger artists with whom he associated, and to whom he offered advice on painting and lessons on life. In this scene of a village road beside a river in Pontoise, Pissarro used the cool, blond palette and buttery style of paint application typical of his early work. He has saturated the composition with spots of lush colour, which are used to great effect to capture shimmering water and dappled sunlight playing over earth and grass alike. Both Cézanne and Gauguin worked alongside him as they developed their artistic careers, adopting characteristic features of his work into their own. Gauguin also collected Pissarro's work and lent to exhibitions during the artist's lifetime.

Urban realisms

While much Impressionist art celebrates natural light and outdoor suburban or coastal scenes, certain artists thrived on the energy and rapid change of urban life and, in turn, on the regular interaction with other artists that the city afforded. They were enthralled by Paris's lively entertainments, motivated by the accessibility of professional models, and absorbed by the everyday experiences of the city streets and the way people lived. As Edgar Degas wrote of his home and the source of his subjects, 'Paris is charming and is not work the only possession one can always have at will?'

Increasing urbanisation and industrialisation brought rapid change to social customs and fashions. In Paris, such spectacle both attracted and repelled, creating interest as well as anxiety. The Impressionists and their circle reflected these changes in their scenes of urban subjects. Édouard Manet's childhood friend Antonin Proust recalled that Manet revelled in the modernisation of Paris under Napoleon III, and saw art and artistry in the renewed city precincts, its grand boulevards and great stone edifices: '[W]ith Manet, the eye played such a big role that Paris has never known a flâneur [one who walks the streets, observing the crowd] like him nor a flâneur strolling more usefully'.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

French 1864–1901

Carmen Gaudin in the artist's studio

1888

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.605

Although he was only a child when the first Impressionist exhibitions were held, by 1882 Toulouse-Lautrec was an art student in Paris. This portrait of Carmen Gaudin, a professional artist's model with distinctive red hair, is unlike the caricatural depictions of cabaret and circus performers that dominate Lautrec's works from around 1890, belonging more to the 'Impressionist realism' of Degas and Manet. The life of a professional model was difficult and fraught with social stigma, her employment dependent on whether her look fitted an artist's vision. When Gaudin changed her locks from red to brown, Toulouse-Lautrec no longer hired her.

Gustave Caillebotte

French 1848–94

Man at his bath

1884

oil on canvas

Museum purchase with funds by exchange from an Anonymous gift, Bequest of William A. Coolidge, Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, and from the Charles H. Bayley Picture and Painting Fund, Edward Jackson Holmes Fund, Fanny P. Mason Fund in memory of Alice Thevin, Arthur Gordon Tompkins Fund, Gift of Mrs. Samuel Parkman Oliver—Eliza R. Oliver Fund, Sophie F. Friedman Fund, Robert M. Rosenberg Family Fund, and funds donated in honour of George T. M. Shackelford, Chair, Art of Europe, and Arthur K. Solomon Curator of Modern Art,
1996–2011, 2011

2011.231

This monumental painting, one of only two nudes Caillebotte painted, presents a man towelling his pale, muscular body after evidently stepping out of the nearby bathtub. It is an unusually intimate scene from everyday life at the grand scale once reserved for formal history subjects. The tin tub and discarded nightshirt at right, the neatly folded clothing and emphatically contemporary boots make this man less nude in a Classical sense than frankly naked. The muscular tension, dishevelled hair and wet footprints on the parquet reinforce the sense of a real rather than idealised depiction of the male body.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Nude woman standing, drying herself

1891–92

lithograph, transfer from monotype, crayon, tusche, and scraping

Katherine E. Bullard Fund in memory of Francis Bullard,
by exchange, 1983

1983.313

Degas exhibited pastels (some over monotype) of women bathing at the 1877 and 1886 Impressionist exhibitions. Mary Cassatt and Gustave Caillebotte both owned such works made by their friend. Some critics observed that his bathers were viewed as though through a keyhole and this later lithograph likewise presents a private moment as if surreptitiously viewed. As the woman leans to the side, drying herself, her hair falls dramatically. Its inky mass is repeated in two hairpieces on the tufted chaise next to her. The domestic setting confirms that this is a modern woman attending to her ablutions rather than a nymph or goddess.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

After the bath III

1891–92

lithograph

Schorr Collection

Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Often in Degas's artistic practice, it is art that generates art, rather than direct observation of a phenomenon. This lithograph relates closely to *Nude woman standing*, also displayed here, the familiar figure and setting now in reverse. The printmaking process afforded Degas the opportunity to repeat, rework and revise figures and entire compositions, resulting in extended groups of similar scenes. This was particularly pertinent for depictions of repetitive activities, like bathing or rehearsing a dance, that are themselves experienced in life as iterative, recurring often with only subtle variation from time to time.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Portrait of a man

c. 1865–70

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.532

Although his father, a successful banker, encouraged him to focus his artistic energies on the potentially lucrative genre of portraiture, Degas never made a career for himself as a portraitist. He restricted his work in this vein to close friends and family members, of which the unidentified sitter for this picture is almost certainly one. The young man's elegant attire and searching, melancholy gaze mark him as a member of the artist's rarefied social circle.

Édouard Manet

French 1832–83

Music lesson

1870

oil on canvas

Anonymous Centennial gift in memory of
Charles Deering, 1969

69.1123

[Manet], though he made a boast of slavishly copying nature, was in fact the most mannered painter in the world, never making a brushstroke without first thinking of the masters.

– Edgar Degas

In his pursuit of a more truthful vision of modern life, Manet ironically looked to the historic example of seventeenth-century master of Spanish painting, Diego Velázquez, whose influence can be seen here. Manet's interest in Spanish painting was itself a reflection of the contemporary trend in French society for all things Spanish. In this painting, a couple are seated in a dark interior with a richly patterned Moorish rug at their feet. The guitar teacher was modelled by the poet, painter and noted hispanophile Zacharie Astruc, while the unidentified woman's black lace gown and hair ornament evoke traditional Spanish dress.

Édouard Manet

French 1832–83

Victorine Meurent

c. 1862

oil on canvas

Gift of Richard C. Paine in memory of his father,
Robert Treat Paine 2nd, 1946

46.846

While Manet never participated in the so-called 'Impressionist exhibitions' held between 1874 and 1886, he was a friend and mentor to Degas, Monet and other Impressionist artists. Victorine Meurent was Manet's great model and muse in the 1860s. Her oval face, russet hair and grey eyes appear in many of the artist's most ambitious paintings of the period, including *Street singer*, on view nearby. This smaller portrait was probably his first painting of Meurent, made when she was still a teenager. It conveys a sense of wary intimacy far removed from his subsequent large-scale works.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Ballet dancer with arms crossed

c. 1872

oil on canvas

Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 1948

48.534

What's underneath is no-one's business. Works of art must be left with some mystery about them.

– Degas

Degas completed a great number of sketches at the opera and theatre – the urban playgrounds that inspired his most acclaimed works. This painting demonstrates his method of sketching contours and then building mass and form with colour and tone. Found in Degas' studio after his death in 1917, this work is evidently unfinished, yet captures the artist's most distinctive painterly traits. Partial focus, selective intensity of vision, unconventional perspective and figures caught unposed or in movement – these are some of the aspects that tether Degas' images to a specific instant in time, giving them their sense of realism.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Edmondo and Thérèse Morbilli

c. 1865

oil on canvas

Gift of Robert Treat Paine, 2nd, 1931

31.33

[There are] feelings one cannot convey out of propriety, as portraits are not intended for us painters alone.

– Degas

This is one of a series of portraits Degas painted of his sister Thérèse, both before and after her marriage to her cousin Edmondo Morbilli in Naples in 1863. The sombre quality of this particular portrait, and in particular Thérèse's somewhat distraught expression, have been linked to the tragedy of miscarriage, which had reportedly befallen the couple. As he did so often in his early work, Degas here combined traditional elements with modern ones – the dignified frontality and green curtain of a sixteenth-century Italian court portrait with the intimate, overlapping pose of a daguerreotype photograph. The result is an unusually penetrating likeness.

Édouard Manet

French 1832–83

Street singer

c. 1862

oil on canvas

Bequest of Sarah Choate Sears in memory of her husband,
Joshua Montgomery Sears, 1966

66.304

A picture like this, over and above the subject matter, is enhanced by its very austerity; one feels the keen search for truth.

– Émile Zola, writer

The street singer was a character familiar in the streets of Paris in the 1860s. During an afternoon stroll near his studio in the Batignolles area on the north-west edge of Paris, Manet and his friend Antonin Proust encountered a woman holding a guitar leaving a 'louche cabaret'. Struck by her appearance, Manet enlisted his favourite model, Victorine Meurent (whose portrait is displayed nearby), to recreate the scene. The singer is caught on the canvas hovering at the entrance to a bar or cafe, clutching a guitar and some cherries held in a twist of yellow paper.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Visit to a museum

c. 1879–90

oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John McAndrew, 1969

69.49

Degas sometimes attended the opera, theatre, museum or racetrack with his great friend, the American painter, horsewoman and keen observer of fashion Mary Cassatt. The standing figure here has been identified as Cassatt, and the seated figure is perhaps her sister Lydia. Both women examine the gilt-framed paintings that surround them, in what is probably the Louvre, with the aid of a guidebook. Their attitudes suggest interest but also exhaustion brought on by a long day at the museum. Degas produced a series of paintings and prints on the theme of women in museum galleries during the 1880s.

Mary Stevenson Cassatt

American 1844–1926

Ellen Mary in a white coat

c. 1896

oil on canvas

Gift of Charles, Hope, and Binney Hare in honor of
Ellen Mary Cassatt, 1982

1982.630

Despite being an outsider by virtue of her nationality, Philadelphia-born Cassatt became an insider among the French Impressionists, and exhibited with the group in 1879, 1880, 1881 and 1886. This painting depicts Cassatt's two-year-old niece, dressed in a stiff white coat with brown trim and matching bonnet secured with a preposterously large bow. She appears to be waiting patiently for an excursion. Her feet are barely sketched at all – a mere outline indicates where they 'should' be. All focus is on her face, which is an exquisite depiction of infant solemnity, and on her fashionable attire.

Édouard Manet

French 1832–83

The races

1865–72

crayon lithograph on chine collé

Gift of W. G. Russell Allen, 1923

23.1325

Damned Manet! Everything he does he always hits off straight away, while I take endless pains and never get it right.

– Edgar Degas

From its debut in 1857, horseracing at the Longchamp track was a seasonal social event luring fashionable crowds to the Bois de Boulogne, a park to the west of Paris. Here horses gallop directly towards the viewer, intense clusters of squiggles indicating a throng of spectators on the right. Some figures rise above this crowd, training their field glasses on the charging horses; we sense the tension and excitement and anticipate the thunder of hooves passing close by. In this celebrated lithograph, Manet matches the speed of his drawn lines to the speed of the horses.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Racehorses at Longchamp

1871, possibly reworked in 1874
oil on canvas

S. A. Denio Collection–Sylvanus Adams Denio Fund
and General Income, 1903

03.1034

No art was ever less spontaneous than mine.
– Degas

Horseracing, a luxury sport imported from England, enjoyed a vogue in nineteenth-century Paris. Built on the western edge of the city in 1857, the Longchamp racetrack drew fashionable spectators, including Degas, whose love for horses was matched only by his attachment to the ballet. This sport provided both Degas and Manet with an opportunity to explore the visual spectacle that defined the experience of modernity. Here no race is evident at all; instead, we see mounted jockeys assembling in their colourful racing silks.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

At the races in the countryside

1869

oil on canvas

1931 Purchase Fund, 1926

26.790

This picture appeared in the Impressionists' first joint exhibition, held in Paris at 35 Boulevard des Capucines in 1874. The subject is at once a landscape, a scene from everyday life and a family portrait. The driver of the carriage is Degas's friend Paul Valpinçon, who sits beside his wife, their wet nurse (her bare breast exposed) and – in the nurse's lap – the couple's infant son, Henri. Degas loved to study the movement of horses at Valpinçon's property in Normandy. Despite the context of horseracing, this is a calm scene – the carriage faces away from the action of the track, far in the background.

Innovative printmaking

By May 1879, at the close of the fourth Impressionist exhibition, discussions were underway between Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, Camille Pissarro and others about publishing a new journal of original etchings, to be titled *Le Jour et la nuit* (Day and night). Intense activity continued in late 1879–80, with Degas leading the charge, encouraging his friends, sharing technical advice and even printing some of their plates. For reasons not fully known the journal itself was never realised, yet the project inspired Cassatt, Pissarro and Degas to make a group of etchings that are some of the most inventive prints of the late nineteenth century.

By combining different techniques and working their plates through multiple states, the artists created a new pictorial language for printmaking that was as complex and nuanced as that used in their Impressionist painting, and equally responsive to conveying their new vision of the world. The proof prints made for *Le Jour et la nuit* provide insight into the creative minds of these artists at a moment of great experimentation in their printmaking, and also into the subjects they presented in their paintings.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Landscape panorama (Paysage en Long)

1879

aquatint, printed from a zinc plate, 1st of 3 states

Museum purchase in honor of Barbara Stern Shapiro
with funds from the Katherine E. Bullard Fund
in memory of Francis Bullard

2004.131

The Impressionists liked experimenting with different formats and materials. Pissarro adopted an unusual panoramic format for this print that allows for an unexpected composition. The central stand of trees is truncated by its extreme foreground location. Buildings are tucked into a valley in the middle ground that rises abruptly to the horizon line with distant trees and a diminutive building. It is the same location, Pontoise, as shown in his etching *Wooded undergrowth at the Hermitage, Pontoise* (displayed nearby), but a markedly different vantage point and effect.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Landscape panorama (Paysage en Long)

1879

etching and aquatint, 3rd of 3 states

Ellen Frances Mason Fund, 1934

34.580

The tonal contrast is stronger in this print than in the neighbouring panorama as a result of the different metal plate from which each was printed. Degas alerted Pissarro that the zinc used for the first state of his *Landscape panorama*, displayed adjacent, yielded a print with an overall grey tone, whereas a copper plate would allow for more defined contrasts. Hence, Pissarro transferred the composition to a new copper plate to achieve the desired play of light and dark in this final version of the work.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Wooded landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise

1879

softground etching and aquatint on cream wove paper,
1st of 6 states

Lee M. Friedman Fund, 1971

1971.267

Pissarro based his etching for the journal *Le Jour et la nuit* on a heavily textured painting he created in 1879. Pissarro retained the painting's composition without alteration, and instead concentrated on translating its broken brushwork, unified surface texture and dappled light into the print medium. He used a range of printmaking techniques to achieve more painterly effects than are seen in the prints made by Cassatt and Degas. Pissarro exhibited four of the six 'states' (successive prints made during the process of creation) in the fifth Impressionist exhibition in April 1880, presenting the works on a yellow backing sheet in a single purple frame.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Wooded landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise

1879

softground etching and aquatint on beige laid paper, 5th of
6 states

Lee M. Friedman Fund, 1971

1971.268

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies) 1830–1903

Wooded landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise

1879

softground etching and aquatint on cream Japanese paper, 6th of 6 states

Katherine E. Bullard Fund in memory of Francis Bullard, Prints and Drawings Curator's Discretionary Fund, Cornelius C. Vermeule III and anonymous gifts, 1973

1973.176

Pissarro's translation of painterly innovations into graphic form is seen in his use of different states of this etching to show the different moods of a subject. The first state of Pissarro's print, displayed adjacent, appears as a winter scene, the trees' bare limbs ghost-like against misty veils produced by the aquatint process. In this final state, however, the flickering articulation of luxuriant undergrowth and foliage gives an impression of the dappled light and shade of a high summer's day.

Mary Stevenson Cassatt

American 1844–1926

In the opera box (no. 3)

c. 1880

softground etching, etching and aquatint,
3rd of 7 states

Gift of Henri M. Petiet, confirmed by his estate, 2001

2001.688

There's someone who feels as I do.

– Edgar Degas, on first seeing Cassatt's work

Here, from right to left, are three prints Cassatt pulled from her copper plate during the early stages of this image's development, and the final print she considered to be finished. Cassatt pulled seven prints in total, successively superimposing layers of aquatint over a base of softground (a soft, sticky ground that protects the plate) to create the hazy atmosphere of the auditorium. She then used protective coatings of stop-out varnish in later states to define the balconies, and scraped back into the aquatint with burnishers and brushes to create the glittering play of light across the young woman's shoulders, hair and fan, and the extraordinary uplighting on her face.

Mary Stevenson Cassatt

American 1844–1926

In the opera box (no. 3)

c. 1880

softground etching, etching and aquatint,

4th of 7 states

Gift of Henri M. Petiet, confirmed by his estate, 2001

2001.690

Mary Stevenson Cassatt

American 1844–1926

In the opera box (no. 3)

c. 1880

softground etching, etching and aquatint,

5th of 7 states

Gift of Henri M. Petiet, confirmed by his estate, 2001

2001.691

She has infinite talent.

– Edgar Degas on Cassatt

The quite new phenomenon of artificial light in the 1880s and its impact upon contemporary entertainments fascinated Mary Cassatt. She explored the theme in a major group of paintings, pastels and prints between 1879 and 1882, in which she depicted her self-assured female subjects in brilliantly illuminated theatre boxes. A painting she had exhibited to much acclaim in the fourth Impressionist exhibition, which showed her sister Lydia in the compressed, mirrored space of the box, backlit by the dazzling theatre chandelier, served as the model for this etching that she prepared for the journal *Le Jour et la nuit*.

Mary Stevenson Cassatt

American 1844–1926

In the opera box (no. 3)

c. 1880

softground etching, etching and aquatint,

7th of 7 states

Gift of Henri M. Petiet, confirmed by his estate, 2001

2001.693

This etching by Cassatt is a tour de force, with the previous printed versions revealing how hard she worked to resolve the image. Its sparkling lighting effects, which intensely illuminate the female subject (probably modelled by Cassatt's sister Lydia), and its complex spatial organisation with sweeping theatre balcony, answer the call of contemporary critic Edmond Duranty for artists to conceive expressive new environments, gestures and physiognomies with which to characterise the modern individual. This final edition of *In the opera box (no. 3)* was intended for the journal *Le Jour et la nuit*, but was never published.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Mary Cassatt at the Louvre: The Etruscan Gallery

1879–80

softground etching and drypoint, 2nd of 9 states

Gift of the Carolyn C. Rowland Trust, 2013

2013.345

Degas ... is no longer a friend, a man, an artist. He's a zinc or copper plate blackened with printer's ink and plate and man are flattened together by his printing press whose mechanism has swallowed him completely!

– Marcellin Desboutin, artist

This etching, which Degas eventually completed and editioned for the journal *Le Jour et la nuit*, shows Mary Cassatt and her sister Lydia in the Louvre Museum's antiquities galleries. The figures were traced from an earlier pastel. In this print, pulled from the copper plate in the early stages of the image's development, only the figures are seen. In the later version, or 'state' (adjacent), Degas has added the background: an Etruscan sarcophagus in a large vitrine, on which are cast complex reflections of light from windows opposite.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Mary Cassatt at the Louvre: The Etruscan Gallery

1879–80

softground etching, drypoint, aquatint and etching,
7th of 9 states

Katherine E. Bullard Fund in memory of Francis Bullard,
by exchange, 1983

1983.310

Here the Etruscan Gallery's dusky light is evoked through aquatint, an etching technique that enables broad areas of continuous tone to be created. Intensity of tone can be varied by successively immersing the plate in the acid bath for deeper blacks in the final print and by using stop-out varnish to protect other parts of the plate so they will remain lighter. Degas used metal tools such as scrapers to burnish highlights into the aquatint, or the needle-like drypoint to scratch in darker lines. He was even known to use his fingers to move the aquatint medium around.

Edgar Degas

French 1834–1917

Mary Cassatt at the Louvre: The Paintings Gallery

1879–80

etching, softground etching, aquatint, and drypoint,
intermediate state between 15th and 16th states (of 20)

Gift of the Carolyn C. Rowland Trust, 2013

2013.346

Degas is without a doubt the greatest artist of the period.
– Camille Pissarro

Deliberately awkward perspectives and cropped elements were an important feature of Degas' art and are evident in this second etching of Mary Cassatt at the Louvre. Rather than the almost square format of the Etruscan Gallery print, this etching has a narrow vertical format influenced by Japanese 'pillar prints', which were widely admired in France at the time. The two figures from the first etching reappear here but are spatially compressed into one silhouette, with the standing figure of Mary Cassatt reversed and positioned immediately behind her seated sister.

Monet in situ

Monet's paintings are specific, about his having experienced the light, the atmosphere – the 'envelope', as he called it – of a particular place. But they are also suggestive: able to evoke in the viewer resonances with her or his own experiences of gardens, fields, coasts or watery surfaces, beyond locations specified in the titles. Monet moved from Paris to Argenteuil, and then progressively further down the Seine before settling in Giverny. He returned time and again to locations dear to him, whether they were within walking distance of his home or further afield. 'I would stop wherever I found nature inviting', Monet described, 'Inspiring motifs could be chanced upon'.

These paintings represent some of Monet's most cherished places: Argenteuil, the Normandy coast, the Mediterranean coast and Giverny, both its fields and the artist's own waterlily garden there. They reveal the immediacy of Monet's approach to painting, balancing a specificity of place with something more universal. Everywhere he travelled, Monet found splendour in the ordinary, making everyday scenes appear dazzling and teaching the modern eye to see the world anew.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Boulevard Saint-Denis, Argenteuil, in winter

1875

oil on canvas

Gift of Richard Saltonstall, 1978

1978.633

The motif is insignificant to me, I am interested in reproducing what is between the motif and me.
– Monet

This snow scene offers an unusually raw (and somewhat unlovely) glimpse of Argenteuil, where Monet lived during the 1870s. At the time, the town was in a process of transformation from a small village to a Parisian commuter suburb. A railway embankment looms at left, separated by an improvised fence from the newly widened boulevard, where pedestrians scurry towards the station, umbrellas tilted against the wind. At right, Monet's own house, with a peaked roof and double balcony, overlooks the snowy street and train tracks. In 1876, Monet described Argenteuil as a place 'where I have been able to live modestly and work so well'.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Seacoast at Trouville

1881

oil on canvas

The John Pickering Lyman Collection—Gift of Miss Theodora Lyman, 1919

19.1314

In this ocean landscape, Monet moved away from established Western conventions of perspective and shading, exploring Japanese compositional techniques to emphasise the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. He blocked the expected vanishing point with an expressively bowed tree and accentuated bands of vibrant colour. The horizon line, effaced in a haze of creamy blue strokes, precludes any sense of recession into the distance. The composition is remarkably similar to a well-known print by *ukiyo-e* master Hiroshige, whose work features heavily in Monet's Japanese print collection, which was later displayed at his home at Giverny.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Road at La Cavée, Pourville

1882

oil on canvas

Bequest of Mrs. Susan Mason Loring, 1924

24.1755

While he sometimes painted distinctive geological formations along the coast, more often Monet's compositions focused on unassuming features, such as this country road turning amid grassy hillocks. In 1883 Monet's friend, the critic Gustave Geffroy, described this work as 'a painting composed of three straight lines, two leafy, grassy slopes whose bases intersect with the sea in the background ... these are effects that have never before been attempted. Everywhere one will admire the colour blended with light in the countrysides of Normandy, prairies with dense grasses; in the summits of cliffs dried by the wind and burnt by the sun.'

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Fisherman's cottage on the cliffs at Varengeville

1882

oil on canvas

Bequest of Anna Perkins Rogers, 1921

21.1331

A native of Normandy, Monet returned to paint the region's coastline throughout his career. In 1882, he spent six months there, along the English Channel, where this lonely house perched on a cliff caught his fancy. Built as lookout posts for customs agents during the Napoleonic Wars, such structures were commonly used in the late nineteenth century as sheds for fishermen to store their nets. Monet turned out fourteen views of this particular shed during his stay. He later recalled: 'I felt the need ... to undertake excursions for weeks at a time to Normandy, Brittany, and elsewhere. It was a period of relaxation and rejuvenation for me.'

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Antibes seen from the Plateau Notre-Dame

1888

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1939

39.672

‘I joust and fight with the sun. And what sun there is here!’, Monet wrote to the sculptor Auguste Rodin in February 1888. Monet’s pale and delicate paintings from his Mediterranean visit that winter are dominated by pink and light blue and a softened light, which he exploited for its unifying properties. The old fort in the town of Antibes was Monet’s favourite motif during this period, but in this work he reduced the structure and its surrounding building to thick, rhythmic touches of yellow and blue paint, choosing to focus on the drama of sunlight and shadow instead of the architecture of the town.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Cap Martin, near Menton

1884

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1925

25.128

On painting trips, Monet often noted that it took weeks for him to truly see the place and conceive of it on canvas. ‘You need to live in a place for quite a while in order to paint it, you need to have worked laboriously to render it confidently’, Monet wrote during his extended working sojourn on the French Riviera in 1884. To paint this picture, he stood on the eastern side of the cape, looking across the bay towards the Maritime Alps. The contours of cloud and mountain are indicated with a few sketchy strokes, suggesting the sky’s airy expanse.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Cap d'Antibes, mistral

1888

oil on canvas

Bequest of Dr. Arthur Tracy Cabot, 1942

42.542

It is so beautiful here, so bright, so luminous. One swims in blue air, and it is frightening.

– Monet

Rather than highlight the historic fortress so prominently associated with coastal views of Antibes, here Monet turned his attention across the bay to snow-capped peaks rising dramatically from the water. The artist painted this particular view three times while visiting Antibes from January to May of 1888, using loose, swift brushstrokes to suggest the effect of the mistral – a strong northerly wind that sweeps through the south of France in spring. For Monet, there was something magical about the atmosphere in Antibes, which he repeatedly described as *féerique* ('fairylke' or 'otherworldly'), reinforcing the enchanting and magical qualities to be experienced in material and specific surroundings.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Antibes, afternoon effect

1888

oil on canvas

Gift of Samuel Dacre Bush, 1927

27.1324

'I am painting the town of Antibes', Monet wrote to his companion, Alice Hoschedé, in January 1888, 'a little fortified town all golden in the sun that stands out against beautiful blue and pink mountains and the eternally snow-capped range of the Alps'. Monet's stay at Antibes, between Nice and Cannes on the French Riviera, lasted from January to May, allowing him to avoid the dreariest months of the year in northern France and to satisfy his dealer's appetite for idyllic, sun-drenched seascapes.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Snow at Argenteuil

c. 1874

oil on canvas

Bequest of Anna Perkins Rogers, 1921

21.1329

Likely inspired by Japanese woodblock prints, this scene of a road near Monet's house in the village of Argenteuil is unusual for its attempt to capture actual snowfall: a screen of drifting flakes, the twilight atmosphere of a snowstorm. Figures clad in black huddle beneath umbrellas to protect themselves from the falling snow. This subject plainly appealed to Monet's desire to capture fleeting effects of light and weather. He likely began the composition outdoors, priming his canvas with pale grey (still visible between the darker strokes in the sky) and then laying down the snowy roofs and bare trees with a more heavily laden brush.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Camille Monet and a child in the artist's garden in Argenteuil

1875

oil on canvas

Anonymous gift in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin S.
Webster, 1976

1976.833

*I have never had a studio, and I don't understand why
people close themselves up in a room.*
– Monet

It was while living at Argenteuil that Monet first became interested in gardening and began to integrate his efforts as a gardener and a painter. Here the riotous colours of a rose bed frame a scene of Monet's wife, Camille, sewing, while a small child plays at her feet. Monet used a wide range of lively strokes to depict the stripes of Camille's summer dress, the blades of grass beneath her, and the screen of petals behind her, lavishing equal care on each area, so that the garden becomes not simply a backdrop for the figures but a subject in its own right.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Poppy field in a hollow near Giverny

1885

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1925

25.106

Seeking lower rent and greater rusticity, Monet moved from suburban Argenteuil to Vétheuil, and briefly Poissy, before settling in Giverny, a small town about 70 kilometres north-west of Paris, in 1883, where he would live until his death in 1926. Before he created his famed gardens and waterlily pond, his paintings primarily explored the countryside surrounding his new home. This picture is one of his first depicting the nearby fields of brilliant red poppies, their form and texture suggested by the size, shape and direction of the brushstrokes, while the juxtaposition of complementary reds and greens gives the painting a vibrant intensity.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Meadow with haystacks near Giverny

1885

oil on canvas

Bequest of Dr. Arthur Tracy Cabot, 1942

42.541

By looking hard I've finally entered into the spirit of this countryside, I understand it now and have a clearer idea of what to do with it.

– Monet

Monet started painting haystacks near his Giverny home in 1884 as a means of exploring variations in light and colour. Sun shining through the adjacent trees casts a speckled pattern of vibrant yellows, blues and purples across the field. 'I am in raptures, Giverny is a splendid region for me', Monet wrote in May 1883. He found both unusual features and visual variety in this simple meadow, seemingly unremarkable in its flat topography, verdant vegetation and boundary lined with trees – all common features of rural fields in France.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Meadow at Giverny

1886

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1939

39.670

The indeterminate and the vague are modes of expression that have a reason for existing and have their own characteristics; through them sensations become lasting.
– Monet

This beautiful scene does not have an obvious focal point: no figure, structure or natural feature attracts the viewer's attention. The high-keyed palette and, especially, the insistence on pattern, further contribute to our sense of it as a decorative painting, in the best sense of the term – as a work concerned, above all, with the qualities of colour and pattern. The only element that breaks from the pattern of horizontals is the tree in the background that frees itself from its neighbours. This tree is isolated, mirroring the position of the viewer looking at this deserted, colourful meadow.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Grainstack (snow effect)

1891

oil on canvas

Gift of Miss Aimée and Miss Rosamond Lamb in
memory of Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Appleton Lamb, 1970

1970.253

No one is an artist unless he carries his picture in his head before painting it, and is sure of his method and composition.

– Monet

From 1890 to 1891, Monet painted the first of his monumental series, a group of pictures representing wheat stacks in the fields near his home under changing conditions of light and weather. Monet exhibited fifteen of these in Paris in 1891 to critical acclaim and commercial success. His friend, the critic Gustave Geffroy, wrote in the exhibition catalogue: 'The grouping together of fifteen canvases of haystacks, each representing the same subject, with a rendition of the same landscape, is an extraordinarily victorious artistic demonstration. For his part, Claude Monet has been able to substantiate the continuous appearance in new aspects, of immutable objects.'

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

The water lily pond

1900

oil on canvas

Given in memory of Governor Alvan T. Fuller by the Fuller Foundation, 1961

61.959

All the money I earn goes into my garden.

– Monet

After first settling in Giverny in 1883 and acquiring his house there in 1890, Monet bought a second plot of land across the road, on which he established his famed water garden with a Japanese-style bridge. One of a series of this particular view, this composition is among his first to emphasise the reflections of the densely packed trees on the flat surface of the water. Nearly omitting any reference to the surrounding landscape, Monet fuses the natural and human-made worlds together, creating an all-encompassing vision of the delicately arched bridge and lush foliage.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Water lilies

1905

oil on canvas

Gift of Edward Jackson Holmes, 1939

39.804

The effect changes incessantly, not only from one season to the next, but minute by minute, because the lilies are not the spectacle; they are only the accompaniment.

– Monet

Beginning in 1903, Monet embarked on a series of paintings depicting his water garden at Giverny. Here, lily pads scattered across the canvas mark the water's surface receding into space. The pattern of light and shadow beneath the lilies suggests reflections of an unseen sky and trees, and the spreading water of the surface of the lily pond expands to cover the entire canvas. Monet exhibited forty-eight of these 'water landscapes' in 1909. Fascinated by their subtle fusion of solid forms and diaphanous reflections, critics compared the paintings to poetry and music.