

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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THE JOHN HAY WHITNEY COLLECTION GOES ON VIEW AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. March 24, 1983. Seventy-three paintings from one of the most important collections of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art still in private hands go on view in the National Gallery of Art's East Building from May 26 through October 2, 1983. Assembled by the late John Hay Whitney and his wife, Betsey Cushing Whitney, the collection focuses on the French impressionists and their successors, and includes an unsurpassed group of colorful fauve paintings.

Prior to his death in 1982, Mr. Whitney had served as a Trustee and Vice President of the National Gallery, Trustee and Chairman of the Board of the Museum of Modern Art, and a Trustee of Yale University. The gifts from Mr. Whitney's estate to these three institutions announced on December 18 and 28 and February 16, are included in the exhibition, entitled The John Hay Whitney Collection.

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Mr. Whitney began collecting works of art while a student at Yale in the 1920s. His earliest acquisitions were sporting subjects such as Edgar Degas' The False Start and Before the Races, which related to his own interests in horses and polo. With the purchases of James McNeill Whistler's Wapping on Thames and Renoir's The Ball at the Moulin de la Galette in 1928 and 1929, respectively, Mr. Whitney expanded his collecting interests to encompass important works by other major artists from the nineteenth century to the present. The majority of the collection was formed in the years following World War II. It has been exhibited as a collection only partially once before, at the Tate Gallery in London in 1960, at the close of Mr. Whitney's term as Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

The selections from the Whitney Collection at the National Gallery highlight important developments in the history of modern art. In the second half of the nineteenth century, painters such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and Gustave Courbet rejected history painting in favor of greater realism, and their styles were major factors in the development of impressionism. On view are Corot's View of Morvan (1831) and Courbet's Hound of 1856, an autonomous study for his monumental Burial at Ornans of the same year.

In addition to the paintings by Degas and Renoir, other impressionist works are Édouard Manet's pastel, Woman in a Decolleté Gown, never before exhibited to the public; two paintings each by Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro; and Hide and Seek (1873) by Berthe Morisot, once in Manet's collection.

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The immediacy, broken color and free brushwork of the impressionists led to the post-impressionism of Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh and the more analytical neo-impressionism of Georges Seurat, Paul Signac and others. Highlights of this section of the exhibition include Cézanne's Still Life with Apples, Pears and a Gray Jug and Route tournante a Montgeroult (1898), a late landscape; van Gogh's Self-Portrait of 1889, considered to be his finest self-portrait; and Seurat's The Island of La Grande Jatte, relating to his large composition now in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Fauvism was a short-lived but influential movement, deriving its name from a critic who referred to artists exhibiting in the 1905 Salon d'Automne in Paris as Les fauves, or "the wild beasts." These painters--Matisse, André Derain, Albert Marquet, Maurice de Vlaminck, Kees van Dongen and, later, Georges Braque and Raoul Dufy--liberated color from a descriptive role. They used pure and arbitrary hues, freely brushed, to interpret nature in a personal rather than an objective way.

Among the fauve pictures in the Whitney collection are Matisse's Open Window, Collioure and Derain's Mountains at Collioure, both painted in 1905 when the two artists worked together in the small Mediterranean fishing port. Raoul Dufy's The Beach at Saint Adresse and Fête at Le Havre and Albert Marquet's Posters at Trouville date from the summer of 1906, when these two fauves worked together near

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Le Havre on the Norman coast. Of particular interest is Braque's The Harbor at Ciotat (1907), one of the most important canvases from his brief fauve period.

Multiple examples by individual artists reveal their experiments with a variety of styles and influences. Thus, in addition to the fauve Open Window, Collioure by Matisse, his Study for "Luxe, Calme et Volupté" and Still Life with a Purro of 1904 display his exploration of both neo-impressionist technique and the example of Cézanne. Nine paintings by Pablo Picasso range from Self-Portrait (1901), painted during his first year in Paris, to Tomato Plant Before a Window (1944), in which the growth of the plant symbolizes continuing resistance to the Second World War.

A selection of exemplary works by American artists completes the exhibition. Whistler's Wapping on Thames (1861) and John Singer Sargent's A Venetian Courtyard (c. 1882) were painted abroad where both artists absorbed influences from older European masters. George Bellows' Club Night (1907) and Polo Scene (1910) represent his exploration of two, very different, sports. Club Night is his first boxing oil and captures the dynamic and rhythmic movements of the two fighters. In contrast, Polo Scene focuses on the well-dressed genteel spectators attending the match. Other American paintings are The Oarsmen (1874) and Baby at Play (1876) by Thomas Eakins and Cape Cod Evening (1939) by Edward Hopper.

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Guest curator of the exhibition is John Rewald, noted authority on nineteenth- and twentieth-century art and curator of the Whitney collection. Mr. Rewald has prepared the accompanying catalogue, in which each painting is illustrated and discussed. Staff members at the National Gallery assisting Mr. Rewald are John Wilmerding, Deputy Director, Linda Ayres, Acting Curator of American Art, Deborah Chotner, Assistant Curator of American Art, E. A. Carmean, Jr., Curator of Twentieth-Century Art, David Rust, Curator of French Painting and Florence Coman, Assistant Curator of French Painting.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Marla Price, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, (202) 842-6353.