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THE NEW PAINTING: IMPRESSIONISM 1874-1886  
PRESENTS WORKS FROM ORIGINAL EIGHT IMPRESSIONIST EXHIBITIONS  
AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART IN JANUARY 1986

WASHINGTON, D. C. August 30, 1985. The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886, an extraordinary exhibition of approximately 150 French impressionist paintings, goes on view from January 17 through April 6, 1986 in the National Gallery of Art. The exhibition is made possible by AT&T.

This exhibition is being held at the Gallery in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, the eminent collectors of French impressionist art, and will inaugurate the new suite of daylit galleries that will have just been completed adjacent to the French rooms on the Main Floor Gallery's West Building.

The New Painting, which will be seen only in Washington and at The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (April 19 through July 6, 1986), celebrates the eight impressionist exhibitions held in Paris between 1874 and 1886. Charles Moffett, curator-in-charge of European Paintings at The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, which organized the exhibition, has selected a representative cross section of works which are believed to have been in the original eight shows.

These controversial and now legendary exhibitions contained the most important works by such key artists as Caillebotte, Cassatt, Cézanne, Degas, Gauguin, Monet, Morisot, Pissarro, Redon, Renoir, Seurat and Sisley, and works by such lesser-known impressionists as Bracquemond, Cals, Desboutin, Rouart, and Zandomeneghi.

For the impressionists, painting was no longer an objective rendering in somber tones. They sought realism in a startling, new way: by painting impressions

(MORE)

of natural light in loose brush strokes and brilliant colors. Their choice of subject matter was no less unorthodox than their technique, for they portrayed ordinary people in everyday circumstances, and often painted them from unusual vantage points.

Because their avant-garde style was not acceptable to the jury of the official Salon, Monet called for an alternative exhibition and enlisted Pissarro, Caillebotte, Cézanne, Degas, Renoir, and Morisot, among others, to join him in 1874. Among the works on view from that first epoch-making show is Monet's controversial Boulevard des Capucines, Paris (1873, Willaim Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Mo.) that appeared inept to viewers accustomed to paintings with tightly drawn figures and architecture. For Gelée blanche (1873, Musée d'Orsay), which portrays a misty frost covered field at dawn, Pissarro chose to paint the moment when the first morning light dissolves forms. Also included in the 1874 show was Cézanne's Paysage à Auvers (1873, Philadelphia Museum of Art), which was ridiculed because it seemed so naively imprecise.

The negative public response hardly discouraged these pioneering artists who held a second impressionist exhibition in 1876. On this occasion, Caillebotte presented his Les Raboteurs de parquet (1875, Musée d'Orsay), the depiction of two men scraping a floor, observed from above; and Degas presented his Portraits dans un Bureau (1873, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau) a group portrait of New Orleans cotton brokers reading newspapers and studying ledgers. These paintings, with their photographic detail, embodied an anti-impressionist spirit shared by many artists in the group. But Renoir's Torse de femme au soleil (1875-1876, Musée du Louvre) was considered to be a scandalous parody of classical idealism, because the figure's nude body reflects the sunlight as it filters through the leaves, giving her skin a greenish tint.

The third exhibition of 1877, perhaps the most important of all, contained Renoir's monumental The Ball at the Moulin de la Galette. The large oil sketch for this work (1876, The John Hay Whitney Collection) is one of the most ambitious

examples of the impressionist style. Renoir captured thirty figures conversing and dancing, seemingly unposed, thus demonstrating that the impressionist style could accommodate the most complex subjects. At this show, Degas presented his Café Concert series, which were painted at night and thus opened new opportunities for other artists; and Monet exhibited seven of his closely related views of La Gare Saint-Lazare, four of which are included in The New Painting.

Although the third exhibition was received with far more enthusiasm by the public, sales were rare, and in 1879, Renoir felt obliged to return to the Salon, to be followed by Monet a year later. In an attempt to bolster interest in the fourth exhibition in 1879, a young American painter, Mary Cassatt, was invited to join the others, as was Gauguin. Given the defections of Renoir, Monet and Sisley, Cassatt and Berthe Morisot now became recognized as the standard-bearers of the original impressionist style. Degas made a significant impact in the 1880 exhibition showing unconventional portraits such as Miss La-La at the Cirque Fernando (1879, National Gallery, London) a circus performer hanging by her teeth.

At the sixth exhibition in 1881, Degas unveiled his extremely realistic sculpture of the Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer (1880-1881, Shelburne Museum, Vermont). Another highlight of the 1881 exhibition was Cassatt's Lydia Crocheting (1880, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), but it was Degas' friend, Raffaelli, today little known, who dominated the exhibition with thirty-two realistic paintings of Parisian society.

The photographically detailed bias that marked the fifth and sixth shows was countered in 1882 when Monet, Sisley and Renoir returned with a large number of paintings. Degas was absent from this reunion of the original 1874 group because the others refused to allow Raffaelli to exhibit again.

Degas once again shocked the public at the eighth and last exhibition of 1886 where he exhibited his series of pastels showing nude women bathing, washing, and combing their hair. No less significant were three newcomers who enhanced the final exhibition: Seurat, Signac and Redon. Redon's works were characterized by a

mystical, dreamlike quality, at odds with impressionist realism, while works by Seurat and Signac introduced a scientifically formulated system for the application of light and color, thereby beginning the modern movement.

The exhibition catalogue will include excerpts from a great number of previously overlooked documents, including reviews published at the time, and other significant and critical documentation which has allowed the organizer to identify for the first time many of the paintings that were included in these historic exhibitions.

All of the paintings will be illustrated in color in the catalogue, which contains essays by such leading authorities as Paul Tucker, Hollis Clayson, Richard Brettell, Ronald Pickvance, Charles Moffett, Fronia Wissman, Joel Isaacson, Martha Ward, and Richard Shiff. In addition, the catalogue will include the full texts of Stéphane Mallarmé's essay "The Impressionists and Edouard Manet," and Edmund Duranty's controversial pamphlet, "La Nouvelle Peinture" (The New Painting), 1876.

Paintings are being loaned by private collectors and some seventy North American, European, Japanese, and Australian museums. Approximately twenty paintings will come from the group, formerly at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, which will be exhibited in the new Musée d'Orsay, across the Seine from the Louvre, when it opens to the public later in 1986.

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