

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

Deborah Ziska, Information Officer

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CONTACT: (202) 842-6358
Rebecca Coleman, Publicist

**FIRST EXHIBITION EXPLORING ARGENTEUIL AND ITS
HISTORIC ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMPRESSIONISM
AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, MAY 28, 2000 - AUGUST 20, 2000**

Washington, D.C. – Bringing together more than fifty paintings, including many rarely seen outside private collections, The Impressionists at Argenteuil is the first exhibition to examine the seminal role of the small suburban town of Argenteuil in the development of the impressionist movement. The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, where it will be on view May 28–August 20, 2000, and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, where it will be shown September 9–December 3, 2000. With special emphasis on canvases by Claude Monet, who as an Argenteuil resident became the focus of the group, the presentation includes colorful, evocative works by his avant-garde colleagues, Eugène Boudin, Gustave Caillebotte, Edouard Manet, Auguste Renoir, and Alfred Sisley. In the 1870s, these six influential artists worked in the open air, often side by side, recording scenes in and around Argenteuil. Their innovative paintings made Argenteuil synonymous with the style that became known as impressionism, characterized by broken brushwork and divided light and color.

The exhibition is made possible by United Technologies Corporation.

"The dazzling, lyrical paintings that make up this exhibition reflect the richness of the impressionists' responses to the Argenteuil site and the complex dialogue that developed among them as they studied and depicted similar motifs and subjects," said Earl A. Powell III, director National Gallery of Art. "We are extremely grateful to United Technologies Corporation for its support."

"The works of Monet, Manet, and Renoir are as recognized as any in our world today. We are pleased to sponsor this exhibition of the paintings of these and other renowned impressionist masters, including many works held in private collections and rarely seen by the public," said George David, chairman of United Technologies Corporation. "We hope and intend the show to appeal to a wide and interested audience." The Impressionists at Argenteuil will be the sixth exhibition sponsored by UTC at the National Gallery of Art. Previous exhibitions include The Victorians: British Painting in the Reign of Queen Victoria 1837–1901 in 1997 and Johannes Vermeer in 1995/1996.

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Fourth Street at Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20565

(202) 842-6353, *Facsimile* (202) 842-2403

Monet first settled in Argenteuil, a fifteen-minute train ride from the Gare Saint-Lazare in the heart of Paris, in 1871. During his six years there, his impressionist colleagues came to visit, commune, and paint alongside him. Their broken brushwork, heightened color, irregular surfaces, and a sense of fleeting effects, gave physical expression to Argenteuil's towpaths and railway bridges, gardens and factories, sailboats and regattas, and each other and their families. Frustrated by the traditional system of judging and exhibiting works of art in the official Salons each year, the avant-garde artists placed shared goals ahead of individual differences, meeting at Monet's house to lay plans for the independent group show that introduced impressionism in 1874. Examples of their finest canvases highlight the present exhibition.

Monet was not only the central figure in the movement but also the most prolific painter in Argenteuil, completing more than sixty canvases in 1872 alone. Time and again during these pivotal years Monet stood beside one of his artist friends rendering the same scene, such as the Boulevard Héloïse with Sisley or a regatta with Renoir. Among the most celebrated pairs in the exhibition, two versions of Sailboats at Argenteuil were painted by Monet and Renoir, each from the same vantage point in 1874, but differing in details that reflect the individual artist's personality and ideas. Another shared theme is the clump of trees that appears both in Boudin's riverfront view, The Seine at Argenteuil (c. 1866), and at the end of the towpath in Monet's painting from upriver, The Promenade at Argenteuil (c. 1872).

Other highlights include Caillebotte's imaginative rendering of Richard Gallo and His Dog Dick at Petit Gennevilliers (1884) and his characteristically forthright image of a distillery, Factories at Argenteuil (1888). Equally meticulous depictions by Caillebotte and Monet of the highway bridge that crosses the Seine into Argenteuil are also on view. Monet's two sunlit views of The Railroad Bridge at Argenteuil (both 1874), a structure that was expeditiously rebuilt after being destroyed in the Franco-Prussian War, contrast with several lush canvases in which he documented his house, garden, and family in the small town. Particularly memorable is his celebrated Woman with a Parasol—Madame Monet and Her Son (1875), from the National Gallery of Art's collection. Several paintings by Renoir of Monet and his family are among the notable portraits. Manet's view of Monet in his studio boat is an aquatic version of Renoir's portrait of Monet painting in his garden.

Guest curator for The Impressionists at Argenteuil is noted Monet scholar Paul Hayes Tucker. Philip Conisbee, the National Gallery's senior curator of European paintings, coordinated the exhibition in Washington.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

A fully illustrated catalogue written by Tucker and supported by UTC will be available for \$24.95 softcover and \$50.00 hardcover in the Gallery Shops and through the Gallery Web site at www.nga.gov. To order by phone, call (301) 322-9500 or (800) 697-9350.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between Third and Ninth Streets at Constitution Avenue, NW, are open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free of charge. For general information, call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at (202) 842-6176 or visit the National Gallery of Art's Web site at www.nga.gov.

Washington, D.C.

The Impressionists at Argenteuil

Backgrounder

The small town of Argenteuil lies on the banks of the Seine eleven kilometers to the northwest of Paris, a fifteen-minute train ride from the capital's Gare Saint-Lazare. With its railway line and factories, row houses and river walks, it is in many ways typical of the suburban towns on the outskirts of Paris. Yet the contribution it made to the evolution of modern French painting sets it apart from neighboring villages.

During the 1870s and 1880s Argenteuil became an important source of inspiration for the impressionist artists, who immortalized its river views, bridges, streets, and factories in their groundbreaking paintings. Their depictions of Argenteuil, fifty-two of which are gathered together in this exhibition, constitute one of the most exhaustive representations ever made of a single place and present a panorama of the predominant themes and quintessential features of impressionist painting.

Argenteuil is described in nineteenth-century guidebooks as an agréable petite ville. Dating back to the seventh century, when a convent was founded on the site, the community became well known for its superior agricultural produce--grapes and asparagus--and its gypsum deposits, the source of the famous "plaster of Paris." By the 1870s, however, when the impressionists painted there, the picturesque village had developed into a thriving town.

The transformation began in 1851, when a railway line connected Argenteuil to Paris, attracting many new factories and businesses and increasing the town's population. By the second half of the nineteenth century local industries included tanneries and chemical plants as well as the large Joly iron works, one of the major iron fabricators in France.

Despite these developments, Argenteuil retained much of its rustic charm and during the 1850s became a popular destination for day-trippers from Paris, drawn there by the pleasant riverside promenades and boating activities. This spectacular stretch of the Seine, where the river reached its widest and deepest points, hosted a great variety of events, from sailing and steamboat races to water jousts and recreational boating. Argenteuil was therefore a town with many facets, a place that combined leisure and labor, fields and factories, rural beauty and urban life.

It was these contrasts that fascinated the impressionists and provided them with subjects and inspiration for their modern landscape paintings.

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United Technologies and the Arts

The Impressionists at Argenteuil is the second major exhibition UTC is sponsoring this year. The corporation is underwriting its showing at the National Gallery of Art and at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut. Earlier this year, UTC sponsored *Dali's Optical Illusions*, a rare look at the works of the great surrealist, which was seen by record crowds at the Atheneum.

The work of the impressionists enralls and engages visitors in record numbers. *The Impressionists at Argenteuil* brings together some of the most revered of that celebrated group. UTC is pleased to sponsor this exhibition and to provide an opportunity to bring to light new information and views on these giants of modern art.

UTC has sponsored a wide range of distinguished exhibitions – from American folk art to the masterworks of Vermeer. These exhibitions have helped further scholarship as well as public appreciation for humankind's visual heritage. The exhibitions have been held at many museums worldwide, in countries and communities in which we do business.

United Technologies is proud of its two-decade history of support of the arts. This support ranges from direct contributions to museums, libraries, symphonies, theater and dance companies, and other cultural institutions to the sponsorship of exhibitions, the design and production of exhibition catalogues and the funding of performing arts events in music and dance.

UTC is a \$24 billion company that provides high technology products to the aerospace and building systems industries throughout the world. UTC's industry-leading companies include Pratt & Whitney, Carrier, Otis, International Fuel Cells, Hamilton Sundstrand and Sikorsky.

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

**RELATED ACTIVITIES
FOR
IMPRESSIONISTS AT ARGENTEUIL
National Gallery of Art
May 28 through August 20, 2000**

SUNDAY LECTURE

Argenteuil and Modernism

June 25, 2:00 p.m.

Paul Hayes Tucker, professor of art history, University of Massachusetts Boston,
and guest curator of the exhibition
East Building auditorium

PUBLIC SYMPOSIUM

Place, Meaning, and Style

Saturday, June 3

1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

East Building auditorium

The Impressionists at Argenteuil

Paul Hayes Tucker

Gauguin and the Mystery of Brittany

Caroline Boyle-Turner, executive director, Pont-Aven School of Art, Pont-Aven, France

Pissarro's Dystopia

Joachim Pissarro, lecturer in art history, Yale University, New Haven

Monet: Landscape and Imaginary Space

Margaret Werth, assistant professor of art history, Barnard College, New York

FAMILY PROGRAMS

Impressionists at Argenteuil

June 25, July 9, and 23, August 6, and 13

1:00 to 3:00

Ages 6-10 (Registration required)

Discover Argenteuil, a town outside of Paris, through the paintings of six impressionist artists. Families will discuss works on view and will create sketches in the spirit of the impressionists. All programs are free and are designed for children with an accompanying adult. Pre-registration is required. To register for the above programs, please call (202) 789-3030.

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LECTURES

Summer Lecture Series: Artists on Location

The *Summer Lecture Series: Artists on Location* is given by National Gallery of Art staff lecturers. Select lectures in the series will focus on artists represented in the exhibition.

Monet and Pissarro in London

July 23 at 2:00

Eric Denker, staff lecturer
East Building auditorium

Monet at Giverny

August 20 at 2:00

Frances Feldman, staff lecturer
East Building auditorium

SLIDE OVERVIEWS

The Impressionists at Argenteuil (45 min.) Education staff

June 1, 6, 8, 13, 20, 22, 27, and 29 at 2:30

West Building lecture hall

June 7, 9, 14, 16, 21, 23, 28, and 30 at 10:30

West Building lecture hall

July 5, 7, 19, and 21, August 4, 16, and 18 at 10:30

West Building lecture hall

July 14, and 28, August 9 and 11 at 10:30

East Building auditorium

July 6, 18, and 20, August 1, 3, 15, and 17 at 2:30

West Building lecture hall

July 11, 13, 25, and 27, August 8 and 10 at 2:30

East Building auditorium

GALLERY TALKS

Renoir's Women (40 min.)

August 1, 2, and 3 at 12:00

Frances Feldman, staff lecturer

All gallery talks begin in the Rotunda of the West Building.

FILM PROGRAM

During July and August, films will be shown in the East Building auditorium in conjunction with the exhibition. They include portraits of Claude Monet, Edouard Manet, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and *Impressionists on the Seine*, a half-hour survey of life on the famous river as interpreted by impressionist painters, narrated by Jacqueline Bisset, and produced by WETA in HDTV.

Claude Monet

July 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, August 9, 10, and 11 at 12:30

East Building auditorium

Edouard Manet

July 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 at 12:30

East Building auditorium

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir

July 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23 at 12:30

East Building auditorium

Impressionists on the Seine

July 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30, August 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 at 12:30

East Building auditorium

AUDIO TOURS

The Impressionists at Argenteuil

Audio tours offer commentary and music using high-fidelity audio technology in a random access format. Visitors choose the order in which they look at paintings and the length of time they spend with each. Audio tours for special exhibitions may be rented at or near exhibition entrances for \$5.00 for adults and \$4.00 for senior citizens, students, and groups of ten or more. Amplified headsets and scripts are available to visitors with hearing impairments. Narrated by Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The Impressionists at Argenteuil

\$24.95 (softcover)

\$50.00 (hardcover)

Catalogues and other items related to the exhibition may be purchased in the Gallery Shops, from the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov, or by calling 1-800-697-9350.

EXHIBITION BROCHURES

An illustrated brochure and a large-print version accompany the show, and are available at the entrance to the exhibition.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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PRESS CONTACT: (202) 842-6359

Sarah Edwards Holley, publicist