

AN
IMPRESSIONIST
EYE



PAINTING AND SCULPTURE FROM
THE PHILIP AND JANICE LEVIN FOUNDATION

1 ~ CAMILLE COROT ~ PORTRAIT OF A GIRL ~ CA.1841

2 ~ AMADEO MODIGLIANI ~ HEAD OF A WOMAN ~ CA.1918



PHILIP AND JANICE LEVIN BEGAN purchasing Impressionist paintings in the 1960s. After her husband died, Mrs. Levin remained firmly committed to pursuing their shared passion for art, extending the scope of the collection to include sculpture, as well as works by many of the foremost painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to tracing the personal taste of a single individual, *An Impressionist Eye* offers an absorbing look into the most fertile period in nineteenth-century European art. Paintings by the Impressionists Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, along with works by the *intimistes* Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard – so-called for their sensitive portrayals of people and interiors – and sculptures by the early twentieth-century masters Alberto Giacometti and Pablo Picasso, reveal the stylistic innovations that shaped the art of that time and laid the foundation for the development of modern art.

THE CORE

OF THE EXHIBITION is the work created during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, following the seminal moment in art history when Impressionism emerged. Building upon the remarkable achievements in landscape painting of Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, and Alfred Sisley in the 1870s, the Impressionist movement drew into its orbit a great many painters during the run of its eight exhibitions, from 1874 to 1886. In addition to their similar stylistic preoccupations, the majority of these artists shared a fervent desire for independence from the official French system of exhibitions.

Initially, the Impressionists had hoped that older artists such as Camille Corot and Gustave Courbet, whose interests were similar to theirs, would exhibit with them; they refused however, as did Edouard Manet. Eugène Boudin was the one painter from the previous generation who did agree to show at the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874. In contrast to the history, narrative, and mythological scenes favored by the academic artists of his era, Boudin turned to depictions of everyday life, in particular views of the seaside. During the 1860s, the portrayal of ordinary daily activities in painting was a hotly debated topic in France, striking a note of modernity that attracted the attention of such astute commentators as Charles Baudelaire and Emile Zola. The two small beach scenes by

Boudin, painted late in the artist's career – with their informal depictions of the middle class at leisure – reflect his continuing interest in portraying the experience of daily life. Painted en plein air (outdoors), they capture the light sparkling off the sea and sand and the animated crowds protecting themselves against the Channel breeze. All of these characteristics – Boudin's choice of contemporary subject matter, his method of painting en plein air, and his remarkable ability to render fleeting atmospheric effects – would prove to be highly influential to the Impressionists, particularly Monet.

Well before the advent of Impressionism, Boudin had painted the new holiday resorts of Normandy. Working decades later, many of the Impressionists were drawn, like Boudin, to the countryside as a subject rather than the urban setting of Paris. Monet and Pissarro painted in the small Norman towns of Giverny and Pontoise, respectively, and Renoir eventually settled at Cagnes in the south. All three depicted Normandy with its abundant agriculture, waterways, ports, and seaside resorts. In 1927, Bonnard – a younger neighbor of Monet's near Giverny – painted his early-summer landscape of variegated greens and blues, *The Seine at Vernon*, featuring the Seine in the Norman countryside.

THE EXHIBITION FEATURES SCENES OF PEOPLE ENGAGED IN ORDINARY ACTIVITIES AND IN INFORMAL POSES, such as Cassatt's enigmatic young woman with a handkerchief, Pissarro's workers in an orchard, Toulouse-Lautrec's figures relaxing in an open field, and Vuillard's depiction of his mother setting the table. All are representations of people caught off guard or in a fleeting pose – an artistic strategy reflective of the less formal approach to portraiture in the later nineteenth century. Cassatt's model in *Young Woman Holding a Handkerchief to Her Chin* (ca. 1880–83), for instance, is seen with a handkerchief casually held to her face. Vuillard's treatment of Arthur Fontaine, a collector, patron, and friend of the artist, is perhaps the best example in the exhibition of this newfound sense of relaxation: the subject is pushed to the very edge of the canvas, where he becomes just another object along with his furniture and pictures.

Pissarro's keen interest in figurative scenes is evident in his paintings *Peasant Woman Digging* (1883) and *Apple Gatherers* (1891). During the 1880s, the artist's subjects reflected his growing reverence for Degas's figure drawings and his renewed interest in scenes of agricultural labor painted by

3 ∞ EUGÈNE BOUDIN ∞ CRINOLINES ON THE BEACH, TROUVILLE ∞ 1889

4 ∞ ÉDOUARD VUILLARD ∞ ARTHUR FONTAINE READING IN HIS SALON ∞ 1904





5 ∽ HENRI TOULOUSE-LAUTREC ∽ A COUNTRY OUTING ∽ CA. 1882

6 ∽ PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR ∽ LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES ∽ 1891

7 ∽ CAMILLE PISSARRO ∽ APPLE GATHERERS ∽ 1891

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 MUSEUM OF ART AND YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2008).*

Jean-François Millet (1814–1875). At intervals during the decade, Pissarro's concentration on the figure, involving numerous studies and drawings, culminated in complex compositions. But perhaps more immediately seductive than those works are the artist's modestly scaled depictions of single figures or pairs laboring in the fields or tending kitchen gardens, as seen in the exhibition. The intimacy of his portrayal of peasant life is balanced by a metaphorical charge that is subtly poetic rather than sentimental or dogmatic. Pissarro suggests the binding regime of the yearly rural cycle without idealizing his figures or demeaning them.

Toulouse-Lautrec's *Country Outing* (ca. 1882) is an early work representing a family enjoying the outdoors, lounging between shady banks of what appears to be a sun-burnished cornfield. The comfortable disposition of the three figures (the woman in the center may be his mother, the Countess Adèle) and the alert, little black dog (one of the earliest of several brilliant canines presented in Toulouse-Lautrec's work), as well as the sure handling of spatial recession, suggest considerable sophistication on the artist's part even at this early stage in his career.

MRS. LEVIN WAS OFTEN DRAWN TO ATYPICAL EXAMPLES OF A PARTICULAR ARTIST'S WORK. For instance, Toulouse-Lautrec's subject matter in *Country Outing* is unusual in its depiction of a sunlit landscape rather than one of the lively scenes of Parisian nightlife for which the artist is best known. Likewise, in contrast to his later domestic interiors painted in vivid colors, Bonnard's *Woman in a Blue Hat* (ca. 1903) is an early canvas showing a more somber approach to his depiction of an isolated urban setting, which may be a public park or garden, and in the use of a dark palette of black, blue, and brown. And while another collector might have preferred a later more abstract sculpture by Picasso, in contrast, Janice Levin chose a fairly straightforward portrait. *Head of a Jester* (cast ca. 1925 after composition of 1905) – one of only a few busts and figural sculptures created by the artist at this time – is a precious record of Picasso's earliest sculpture.

From Corot and Boudin to Modigliani and Giacometti, the exhibition presents extraordinary paintings and sculptures that offer a glimpse into one of the most exciting and influential periods in the history of art. At the same time, *An Impressionist Eye* provides the opportunity to appreciate the remarkable legacy of one collector's vision.



LIST OF
ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Camille Corot (1796–1875)

Portrait of a Girl, ca. 1841

Oil on paper laid down on cradled panel
9 ³/₄ in. x 6 in.

The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation
Photo courtesy Sotheby's, Inc. © 2003

2. Amadeo Modigliani (1884–1920)

Head of a Woman, ca. 1918

Oil on canvas, 21 ¹/₂ x 17 in.

The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation
Photo courtesy Sotheby's, Inc. © 2003

3. Eugène Boudin (1824–1898)

Crinolines on the Beach, Trouville, 1889

Oil on panel, 5 ¹/₂ x 9 in.

The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation
Photo courtesy Sotheby's, Inc. © 2003

4. Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940)

Arthur Fontaine Reading in His Salon, 1904

Oil on paper laid down

on canvas, 24 ³/₈ x 24 ³/₈ in.

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5. Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901)

A Country Outing, ca. 1882

Oil on canvas, 18 ¹/₈ x 15 in.

The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation
Photo courtesy Sotheby's, Inc. © 2003

6. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919)

Landscape with Figures, 1891

Oil on canvas, 25 ⁵/₈ x 31 ⁷/₈ in.

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7. Camille Pissarro (1830–1903)

Apple Gatherers, 1891

Gouache on silk on paper, 10 ¹/₄ x 8 ⁵/₈ in.

The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation
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