Van Gogh Museum Journal 1999

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Let op: boeken en tijdschriftjaargangen die korter dan 140 jaar geleden verschenen zijn, kunnen auteursrechtelijk beschermd zijn. Welke vormen van gebruik zijn toegestaan voor dit werk of delen ervan, lees je in de gebruiksvoorwaarden.
Director's foreword

On 23 June 1999 the new exhibition wing and renovated existing building of the Van Gogh Museum were opened in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix. This was a momentous occasion, marking the beginning of a new phase in our history. From its origins as a showcase for the collections that had been cared for by the artist's family, the Van Gogh Museum has developed into one of the most popular museums in Europe. Over the years, the museum's ambitions have expanded in numerous ways: the collection has been broadened to encompass a wide range of paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints from the period c. 1840-1920, forming a crucial link between the collections of our neighbours the Rijksmuseum and the Stedelijk Museum; changing exhibitions have become an essential complement to the permanent displays; new activities have been added and more emphasis is now placed on education and making the collection accessible to a broad public.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s these ambitions placed increasing pressures on the original building designed by Gerrit Rietveld and his partners, and the need for extra space was urgent. This need was met by an extraordinarily generous donation from the private sector. The Yasuda Fire and Marine Insurance Company Ltd. provided, via The Japan Foundation, the funds which enabled the museum to create a new building to house its temporary exhibitions. This spectacular addition was designed by the Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa. The interiors are intended to be furnished in countless different ways for the changing shows, but the museum did not want neutral and characterless rooms. Kurokawa's architecture, with its fluid forms and breathtaking spaces provides a dramatic setting for our varied programme of exhibitions.

While the new wing was under construction the museum also carried out a major renovation of the Rietveld building, under the auspices of the Rijksgebouwendienst (Government Buildings Agency). Numerous improvements have been made to the fabric and layout of the building, while virtually all the facilities - from the cafeteria to the auditorium - have been upgraded. The permanent collection now occupies the entire Rietveld building in a new presentation which emphasises both the depth of our holdings of Van Gogh and the breadth of our collection of other nineteenth-century artists. As documented in this volume of the Journal, the new displays contain numerous new loans and acquisitions. Especially pleasing is the addition of a major work by Kees van Dongen, the first in the collection, purchased with funds provided by the Great Sponsor Lottery.

Although Van Gogh remains at the heart of our presentations and research, the museum aims to provide a rich overview of many diverse and sometimes contrasting trends in 19th-century art. The Van Gogh Museum Journal is part of that effort. As well as reporting on our activities over the past year and cataloguing the latest acquisitions, the Journal is intended as a vehicle for scholarly research ranging across our area of interest. I would like to thank all the authors for their distinguished contributions. I am especially grateful to Rachel Esner for her skilful editing and management of this publication, and to Benno Tempel and Sjraar van Heugten who assisted her in this task. As before, we have included articles by outside scholars. This publication is the only one of its kind devoted to object-based research on the 19th century, and its continued vitality depends on the participation and support of
the wider scholarly community. Your comments, feedback and proposals for new articles are warmly welcomed.

John Leighton
Director
fig. 1
The exhibition wing of the Van Gogh Museum, spring 1999
The new wing

In recent years the activities of the museum's staff have been dominated by building projects. The creation of a new wing for exhibitions was in itself an ambitious undertaking, but this was carried out in parallel with a major renovation of the existing facility. On 1 September 1998 the museum closed to the public in order to facilitate both construction and renovation. With the successful completion of this work, the museum has virtually doubled in size, and it is no exaggeration to state that, 26 years after it first opened, a new Van Gogh Museum has been created.

In 1991, the Yasuda Fire and Marine Insurance Company Ltd agreed to donate, via the Japan Foundation, a sum of 37.5 million Dutch guilders to finance the construction of a new building for temporary exhibitions. The internationally acclaimed architect Kisho Kurokawa received the commission for its design, and his first plans were revealed to the public in the same year. However, the location - behind the existing building in the Museumplein - was a sensitive one. The process of obtaining approval to add a new landmark to this historically important space took many years and construction work did not begin until early in 1997.

From an early stage it was decided that the new wing should be an independent structure with its own architectural identity, rather than an extension to the existing building. Kurokawa's original idea for a circular pavilion was modified into an elegant oval form in order to accommodate the demands of the new layout of the Museumplein, developed by the Danish landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson. In its final form, almost two-thirds of the building is set beneath ground level. Access to the wing is from the ground floor of the Rietveld building. An escalator (or a panoramic lift) takes visitors down to the basement level where a broad, crescent-shaped corridor skirts a shallow, Japanese-style pool and leads to the exhibition rooms. The thin layer of moving water in the pond reflects the titanium facade, which is pierced by a projecting cuboid print room clad in aluminium. Other parts of the exterior are constructed in deer-brown granite, quarried in Canada and tooled in Italy. The materials are modern.
fig. 3
Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands with Head of Exhibitions Andreas Blühm at the official opening on 23 June 1999

fig. 4
Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands with Kisho Kurokawa and Director John Leighton at the official opening on 23 June 1999

and hard-edged yet take on surprisingly subtle and varied reflections and colours in the everchanging conditions of light and weather.

The interiors are equally dramatic. In addition to service and storage areas, there are three floors offering some 2,293 cubic metres of exhibition space - ample room for the museum's ambitious programme of temporary shows. All the spaces, with the exception of the ‘print box,’ can be illuminated with daylight, but there is also a sophisticated artificial lighting system designed by Georges Berne of L'Observatoire. The first exhibitions have demonstrated the flexibility of these new spaces. Both the modernistic retrospective of Kurokawa's own career and the more traditional presentation of the Theo van Gogh exhibition seemed equally at home in the same building.

Kurokawa's design was enthusiastically received by the press here in the Netherlands and abroad. The architect has been praised for creating a highly-original building, yet one that manages to pay homage to some of the best features of its counterpart designed by Gerrit Rietveld and his partners.

The renovation of the Rietveld building

The other main project of the period under review was the renovation of the Rietveld building, carried out under the auspices of the Rijksgebouwendienst (Government Buildings Agency) and supervised by architect Martien van Goor of the Greiner van Goor partnership. Some of the changes are not readily apparent. For example, numerous improvements have been made to the fabric of the building and the worn-out installations for climate control have been replaced. More obvious is the new layout of the entrance area, which now has a spacious lobby to help improve the flow of
visitors in and out of the building. The cafeteria, the auditorium and shop have all been renovated, and a new office block has been added at the rear of the building.

All the interiors have been upgraded from floor to ceiling. Particular attention has been paid to the lighting of works of art. With Van Gogh's sun-filled paintings in mind, the original building was created to allow the influx of natural light into the exhibition spaces. Unfortunately, this generous allowance of daylight was often at odds with modern standards of conservation, and over the years there have been successive attempts to create a satisfactory lighting system in the Rietveld building. Under the guidance of Georges Berne, a new solution to this problem was developed, combining the lively ambience of natural, changing daylight with a supplementary artificial lighting system of the highest quality.
There is broad consensus that architect Martien van Goor has struck a successful balance between the essential qualities of Rietveld's design and the demands of a modern museum. To quote the critic of the Volkskrant: ‘It has become a more comfortable museum, an airy building with pleasant rooms filled with daylight. More than ever, Van Gogh's works come into their own.’

**The collection during the closure**

During the closure of the museum the entire collection was moved to locations in the Netherlands and abroad. A total of 140 works (of which 90 by Van Gogh) were shown in the south wing of the Rijksmuseum from 19 September 1998 to 16 May 1999, and a group of 20 works was lent to the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede. The closure of the museum offered the opportunity to mount a major exhibition abroad. A selection of 70 works was shown in the National Gallery in Washington D.C. (4 October 1998 to 3 January 1999) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (17 January to 16 May 1999). Entitled *Van Gogh's Van Goghs: masterpieces from the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam*, this exhibition was extremely well received by both the press and public alike. Some 480,500 visitors saw the show in Washington and, after a longer run, 820,000 in Los Angeles. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue written by Richard Kendall, with contributions by myself and Sjraar van Heugten. The Van Gogh Museum works in close partnership with the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, the owners of the majority of the works in the permanent collection. We are especially grateful to Vincent Willem van Gogh, Chairman, and to his fellow members of the Board of the Foundation for their generous collaboration on this exhibition project and for their continued support of the museum and its activities.

**New displays**
The remodelling of the Rietveld building has allowed the museum to develop new ways of presenting its rich and varied holdings. Now the entire Rietveld building can be devoted to the museum's permanent collections. New space has been won for the displays, and the study room on the second floor has been expanded with the aim of keeping as many paintings as possible on view to the public.

The displays follow a broadly chronological span from around 1840 to the first years of the 20th century, and embrace a succession of movements from romanticism and realism through to impressionism and symbolism. Yet rather than provide a simple ‘stepping stone’ review of the history of art - in which one important development appears to lead inevitably to another - our aim is to suggest something of the diversity and dissonance of the period which forms the background to Van Gogh's art. It is a view which recognises the contribution of minor as well as major talents, and which is international in its outlook, acknowledging the importance of Paris as an art centre but including works by artists from all over Europe.

The main displays are divided over the ground, first and third floors. On the ground floor several partition walls have been removed to create a single large space. Paintings are mingled with
sculptures in a manner intended to evoke something of the variety of public exhibitions in the last century, where innovative works frequently had to compete with more traditional ones. The contents of this room range from the precision of artists like Ary Scheffer and Gustave Boulanger to the coarser realism of Courbet or Millet, but very broadly offers an overview of the various strands in academic and naturalist art around the middle of the century. Many of the artists and indeed several of the particular works on view here would have been familiar to Van Gogh, some of whose own pictures have also been incorporated into the hanging.

As before, a chronological display of Van Gogh's works is arranged over the first floor, at the very heart of the building. Arriving at this level the visitor is first confronted by an impressive group of self-portraits, including perhaps one of the most famous in the collection, the Self-portrait as an artist. Extra space has been created on this floor by turning an old depot into a public area, making it possible, for example, to expand the presentation of Van Gogh's early work to include his periods in The Hague, Drenthe and Antwerp. The superb group of pictures from Arles remains a highlight, but in general the pictures have been hung more spaciously than before. This not only helps ease overcrowding around the masterpieces, but also allows some important works by Van Gogh to be hung alongside paintings by other artists elsewhere in the building.

If the ground floor contains mainly works by Van Gogh's predecessors, the third floor is dedicated to his contemporaries and followers. The first room, devoted to impressionism and neo-impressionism, includes works by Manet, Degas, Monet, Pissarro, Cézanne, Signac and Seurat. The works on view here provide an excellent context for Van Gogh's work, in particular his Paris period when he was confronted with the full impact of modern French art for the first time. Some of the paintings are by his friends and acquaintances, and his own paintings of Paris are shown alongside related pictures by Signac and the museum's recently-acquired panel by Georges Seurat (see the Van Gogh Museum Journal 1997-98). Subsequent rooms are devoted to Van Gogh's immediate circle of friends (with works by Gauguin, Bernard and Laval), to symbolist art (Redon, Denis, Böcklin, Stuck), and finally to a display which reflects Van Gogh's influ-
ence on early-20th century art (Picasso, Kandinsky, Sluijters).

Now that there is a wing entirely consecrated to temporary exhibitions, the permanent collection will not need to be reshuffled every time the museum mounts a new show. However, while the displays of the collection will be more stable, it is not our intention that they should become frozen and static. From time to time, new acquisitions and loans will be added to invigorate the displays and the hang will be changed, either to give a new emphasis to a particular movement or period, or to set individual works in different contexts. Most important in this respect is the expansion of the study collection on the second floor. Those paintings which are not included in the main displays will normally be on view here. Alongside the display cases are reading tables with a selection of the museum's catalogues and other publications, as well as computers which give access to the Van Gogh Museum Internet site. Visitors can explore the breadth of the collection in this 'open storeroom' and also have access to detailed information about these and other works. The presentations in the study collection will be enhanced by occasional didactic displays exploring particular themes in the work of Van Gogh and his contemporaries. The first of these is devoted to aspects of Van Gogh's technique. Also on the second floor is a new area for the exhibition of prints and drawings. Selections from the permanent collection of works on paper will be on show here, the first of which was devoted to recent acquisitions of drawings.

**New acquisitions and loans**

The paintings collection has been enriched with several important acquisitions. Arnold Böcklin's *Sleeping nymph spied on by two fauns* is the first work by this artist to enter a museum in the Netherlands. Purchased with the support of the Vereniging Rembrandt and the Prins Bernhard Fonds, this picture adds an important new centrepiece to the museum's representation of later 19th-century symbolism. Rees van Dongen's *The blue dress* is a major work dating from 1910. It was purchased as part of a new initiative whereby the Van Gogh Museum, together with three other national museums are to be beneficiaries of one of the most popular lotteries in the Netherlands, the Grote Sponsor Loterij. Although this scheme was only launched last year, it has already generated sufficient funds to make a substantial difference to the museums' purchasing power.

In addition to the acquisition of the Böcklin and the Van Dongen, we were delighted to receive as a gift one of Hendrik Willem Mesdag's finest paintings, *Breakers in the North Sea*. As Fred Leeman recounts in this volume of the *Van Gogh Museum Journal*, the favourable reception accorded this picture at the Salon of 1870 was an important milestone in Mesdag's career and helped establish his reputation in the Netherlands. The picture was donated by Johan Poort, who has tirelessly documented Mesdag's life and work in numerous publications. Mr Poort has also given a portrait of Jozef Israëls by Mesdag to the Museum Mesdag (which already owns a pendant portrait of Mesdag by Israëls).

The new hangings also include numerous new loans. Many of these are from institutions in Amsterdam, including the Rijksmuseum, the
fig. 7
Arnold Böcklin, *Sleeping nymph spied on by two fauns* 1884, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum
Stedelijk Museum and the Amsterdams Historisch Museum. In recent years we have worked closely with our colleagues in these museums to develop a more logical presentation of the collections in Amsterdam. The result is a new agreement covering those areas of the holdings which overlap, or where there are potential conflicts of interest. Very broadly, with regard to the 19th century, the Rijksmuseum will collect and display Dutch 19th-century art, whereas the Van Gogh Museum will have a more international scope, concentrating on the period 1840-1920. The Stedelijk Museum will devote itself to the 20th century and beyond, and has generously placed the bulk of its 19th-century foreign art at the disposal of the Van Gogh Museum. This agreement has been implemented by a number of loans between the institutions: at the Van Gogh Museum there are now loans of works by Corot, Daubigny and Monet from the Rijksmuseum and, among others, Cézanne, Bonnard and Jawlensky from the Stedelijk Museum.

In another new initiative, the National Gallery in London has lent Cézanne's *Landscape with poplars* for one year in exchange for an early painting by Van Gogh, *A pair of shoes*. The lack of a Cézanne in the permanent collection was keenly felt, and this vibrant landscape from the 1880s provides an excellent comparison with Van Gogh's own southern landscapes. The P. and N. De Boer Foundation has kindly lent eight works by Van Gogh, including a major painting from the Arles period and a view of Amsterdam, as well as a group of fine drawings. Thanks to the generosity of a private collector, an important picture by Manet has been on loan since the reopening. It is a famous study for the artist's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* and is familiar to the Amsterdam public as it was on loan to the Stedelijk Museum for many years before being sold abroad. There are no significant paintings by Manet in Dutch public collections, and this spirited work makes a welcome return to strengthen the impressionist displays at the Van Gogh Museum.
Exhibitions

The museum's new wing opened with two exhibitions. The space on the basement level was devoted to a retrospective of the work of architect Kisho Kurokawa. This show, which had already travelled to Paris, London and Berlin, documented the major steps in Kurokawa's career from the 1960s and the movement he described as Metabolism through to his development of the concept of Symbiosis, a blend of western and eastern ideas and philosophies. Intricately-crafted scale models, drawings and photographs brought many of his major projects to life; of particular interest was naturally the section illustrating the genesis of the Van Gogh Museum's exhibition wing.

The major exhibition for the reopening was devoted to Theo van Gogh (1857-1891). Theo played a crucial role in the career of his brother Vincent, whom he supported over many years. Despite this, he has largely remained a shadowy figure, only attracting attention insofar as his life had a bearing on his famous brother's life and work. The exhibition and accompanying publication focused on Theo's own career, revealing his work as an influential art dealer in the 1880s. As manager a branch of Boussod, Valadon & Cie. on the Boulevard Montmartre, Theo came into contact with many of the leading artists of his time. The show included a broad cross-section of work Theo bought and sold, from established names such as Gérome and Corot to more challenging works by Monet and Gauguin. Previously it had been customary to describe Theo as a fearless champion of impressionism, but both the exhibition and the catalogue offered a more nuanced view, showing how his attempts to expand his firm's business were usually modest and based on a sensible judgement of the future development of the art market. The show was accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue written by Chris Stolwijk and Richard Thomson, with a contribution by Sjraar van Heugten. The show in Amsterdam was supervised by Andreas Blühm and in Paris, at the Musée d'Orsay,
(28 September 1999 through January 2000) by Henri Loyrette and Monique Nonne. A two-day symposium entitled ‘Art trade in the 19th Century’ was held at the Van Gogh Museum on 1 and 2 July 1999. Speakers included Richard Thomson (University of Edinburgh), Linda Whiteley (University of Oxford), Caroline Durand-Ruel Godfroy (Durand Ruel & Cie.), Patricia Mainardi (City University of New York), Martha Ward (University of Chicago), Frances Fowle (Edinburgh College of Art), Madeleine Fidell-Beaufort (American University, Paris), and Chris Stolwijk (Van Gogh Museum). The proceedings will be published in a future volume of the Van Gogh Museum Journal.

**Publications**

The Museum's project to catalogue its entire collection of works by Van Gogh continued with the publication of the first in a series of three volumes devoted to the paintings (the first two of four on the drawings collection have already been published): Louis van Tilborgh and Marije Vellekoop, *Vincent van Gogh: paintings. Volume 1: Dutch period 1881-1885*, Amsterdam & Bussum 1999. All of the 44 paintings in the collection from the artist's years in Holland are documented and described in detail. Each picture underwent a detailed technical examination under the supervision of Cornelia Perez, and the results of this research are described in the entries. The catalogue, which also includes an essay on Van Gogh's materials and a study of how the collection was formed, is published in both Dutch and English editions.

The complete correspondence between Theo van Gogh and Jo Bonger has also now been published: *Kort geluk: De briefwisseling tussen Theo van Gogh en Jo Bonger*, ed. Leo Jansen and Jan Robert, intro. Han van Crimen, Amsterdam & Zwolle 1999. The majority of the 101 letters the couple exchanged were written during their three-month engagement; Theo was then in Paris, while Jo was living with her parents in Amsterdam. The letters offer insights into their plans and dreams as well as the more practical arrangements for their future life together. Theo's role as an active and ambitious young dealer in Paris in the 1880s also comes to the fore. The book is published in Dutch, and an English edition is in preparation.
Published to coincide with the reopening of the museum, *Van Gogh Museum architecture*:
Guided tour at the Museum Mesdag

*Rietveld to Kurokawa* (Rotterdam 1999), traces the history of the Van Gogh Museum building, focusing in particular on the new extension and the renovation of the main building. It is richly illustrated with photographs by Jannes Linders and includes an accompanying essay is by the architectural historian Hans Ibelings. The text sets the new building against the wider context of recent museum architecture and explores the ideas behind Kurokawa's design.

**Education**

The new study area on the second floor (described above) is just part of a new drive to enhance and expand the educational programmes at the museum. Many of the existing explanatory materials, including wall texts, labels and the audio tour have been revised and augmented. A new introductory brochure with an overview of Van Gogh's life and work is available (in seven languages) to all visitors free of charge, and the upgrading of the auditorium offers many new possibilities - for example, a new introductory video on Van Gogh is in currently in preparation.

Most importantly, a range of material about Van Gogh and the museum has been developed to assist teachers and students. A book has been produced aimed at primary level school children entitled 'Vincent en Theo. Broeders in de kuns'; written Frank Groothof it contains notes for teachers. New material for secondary school pupils has also been developed in close collaboration with teachers and experts in the field. This package is designed to complement the students own work as part of their curriculum and, where possible, to supplement it with a visit to the museum. The first in a series of lively Van Gogh 'newspapers’ aimed at this age group has been published, as well as several information packs on particular aspects of the collection. The museum's new website (www.vangoghmuseum.nl) will also be further developed as part of this move to reach and inspire a younger audience. To date this material is available only in Dutch.

**The Museum Mesdag**
The Van Gogh Museum also manages the Museum Mesdag in The Hague. This delightful museum houses the collection put together by the painters Hendrik Willem Mesdag and his wife Sientje Mesdag-Van Houten. Since its reopening after a major renovation in 1996 our efforts have been directed at building up a local and national audience for the museum. There have been several series of lectures on aspects of the collection and other educational activities, including the painting by children of a vast panorama to ‘complement’ Mesdag’s own famous Panorama, located nearby. A new compact guide to the museum has been prepared and will be published in late 1999.

Attendance figures

In 1998 (1 January to 1 September) the Van Gogh Museum was attended by 758,263 visitors. The attendance figure for the Museum Mesdag in 1998 was 11,446.

John Leighton
Director
The renovated Rietveld building
Ground floor and atrium
The exhibition wing
North facade
The exhibition wing
Lower and upper galleries
The exhibition wing
Staircase
The exhibition wing
When I started reading the series of Van Gogh Studies in the *Van Gogh Museum Journal* 1997-98 - this was at the beginning of 1999 - I was surprised to see that the first of these articles was almost entirely devoted to what I had written about Vincent's Arles period. ‘Devoted to’ is, of course, a manner of speaking, because the author, the art historian Roland Dorn, seems to have felt it was his task to correct or condemn most of my findings, at the same time also criticising a few points in the work of Ronald Pickvance. He had therefore given his study the modish subtitle ‘Pickvance and Hulsker revisited,’ using as his main title the even more intriguing ‘Refiler à Saintes-Maries?’ My surprise soon turned to stupefaction when I discovered that all Dorn's supposed ‘corrections’ were, in fact, blatant errors.

Had he published his article in a newspaper I would have reacted immediately. It is at the request of John Leighton, director of the Van Gogh Museum, to whom I sent an extensive survey of all Dorn's mistakes, that I have written the following rebuttal.

There are six main points about my research on the Arles period which Dorn believes to be erroneous:

1. In the manuscript of one of Vincent's letters [624/494], Johanna van Gogh-Bonger changed the words ‘Je refiler à Saintes-Maries’ to ‘Je file à Saintes-Maries.’ According to Dorn, this change makes no difference, as *filer* can also mean *refiler*. It cannot and, moreover, Van Gogh intended to say *refiler* - i.e. *retourner*.

2. According to Dorn, the Yellow House was owned by a certain Mme Vénissac. In reality it belonged to the owner of the building to Vincent's left.

3. Dorn claims that Van Gogh had great difficulty paying the rent on time. The letters prove this was not at all the case.

4. According to Dorn, letters between Paris and Saint-Rémy took two days. Many letters confirm what I had already been told by the French postal service, namely that in Van Gogh's time they took only one day.

5. Dorn states that Vincent's stay in Saintes-Maries took place from 10-16 June 1888. It can be proven that he was actually there two weeks earlier.

6. Dorn was thus also mistaken in his dating of Van Gogh's series of harvest scenes, stating that they were painted in ‘two tranches,’ one before and one after the visit to the coast.

The following is a more detailed account of these questions.

**Linguistics**

Let us begin with the issue Dorn hints at in his main title: the meaning of the word *refiler*. This verb was used in a letter to Theo in the sentence: ‘Si tu m'envoies la prochaine lettre dimanche matin il est probable que je refile ce jour-là à Saintes-Maries’ [624/494]. When Johanna van Gogh-Bonger published the letters in 1914, she changed the word *refile* to *file* (one of many such unfortunate interventions in the original text). The result was that in the English translation, for example, the line now reads: ‘If you send me the next letter on Sunday morning, I shall probably take myself off that day to Saintes-Maries.’ In a long paragraph Dorn explains that for various reasons *refiler* could also be taken to mean *filer*. Therefore, in his view, Jo's ‘correction’ was unimportant; otherwise the sentence would have implied that Vincent had been in Saintes-Maries before, and - according to Dorn - he had not.

This shows that the author has not read the letters closely enough. The fact is that Vincent *had* been in Saintes-Maries earlier and had thus indeed meant to return

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there. This is proven by at least two letters. In 622/499, written to Theo from Saintes-Marie itself, Vincent states: ‘Mais je comporte encore retourner ici’; and in a letter to his friend John Russell (written in English): ‘I have been to the seaside for a week and very likely am going thither again soon’ [629/501a].

This first error and some further discussion of Vincent's stay on the coast leads Dorn to the conclusion: ‘All this seems to indicate that Van Gogh was in Saintes-Marie from 10 to 16 June 1888.’ Well, he was not; far from it. In the middle of June Vincent was actually in Arles, hard at work on his series of harvest scenes. The correct dates of his visit to Saintes-Maries were 30 May to 3 June, and Pickvance (whom Dorn also attacks here) has preceded me by no less than 15 years in citing this period. At the time, he did not explain how he had come to these dates, and readers of today cannot be blamed for wanting some proof of their accuracy. The shortest and simplest way of confirming them seems to be as follows:

We know for certain that letter 615/490 was written on a Saturday; the postscript clearly states: ‘il ne me rest d'argent que pour demain, dimanche.’ That particular Saturday could only have been Saturday, 26 May - and not 19 May or 2 June - as follows from the text of the preceding and following letters. Therefore, the Sunday mentioned in 615/490 must have been Sunday, 27 May. That day Vincent wrote Theo again, this time more urgently: ‘Ecris-moi aussitôt, je n'ai plus d'argent du tout’ [616/491].

The next day - Monday, 28 May - the rescuing letter containing a 100-franc note arrived, confirmed by Vincent with the words: ‘Ta lettre de ce matin m'a fait grand plaisir, je te remercie beaucoup du billet du 100 fr. qui y était inclus,’ and he could now tell Theo: ‘Je compte faire un excursion à Stes Maries pour voir enfin la Méditerranée’ [617/492]. However, as it was the end of the month he had a few payments to make and thus could not start his trip until early in the morning on Wednesday, 30 May.

Dorn erroneously states that the trip Vincent announced in this letter was unexpectedly cancelled. He came to this conclusion on the basis of letter 626/496, which he dates to 5 June (the correct date is 12 June), and where one reads: ‘Je ne suis pas parti pour Stes Maries - ils ont fini de peindre la maison et j'avais à payer et puis j'ai à prendre provision de toiles assez considérable.’ It is unnecessary to point out that this time Vincent was referring to his plan to return to the coast.

**The Yellow House and the rent**

In reference to the so-called Yellow House, which Vincent had rented for four months on 1 May, Dorn assures his readers that Vincent had great difficulty paying his monthly rent: ‘the landlady's agent was apparently on the doorstep on the very first of the month.’ (The rent, it should be noted, was no more than the very modest sum of 15 francs per month.) Again, Dorn is entirely wrong. To begin with, the house

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5 Dorn, op. cit. (note 1), p. 18.
was not ‘owned at the time by the widow Vénissac.’ Vincent's own correspondence confirms that it belonged to the neighbour at his left, who was also in possession of the large building on the same side of the square. He mentions this in the very letter of 1 May in which he announces the rental. It is worth repeating the surprising details about the house he notes, as they also reveal who the owner actually was: ‘Cela te paraîtra drôle que le cabinet d'aisances se trouve chez le voisin dans un assez grand hôtel qui appartient au même propriétaire’ [604/480]. The ‘veuve Vénissac’ was the proprietress of the restaurant located to Vincent's right, across the side street. The artist mentions this establishment in letter 695/543, where he explains: ‘C'est là le restaurant où je vais diner tous les jours.’

As this proves it was not Mme Vénissac, it must have been the owner of the building to Vincent's left who (supposedly) caused him so many problems: ‘As regards the rent, too, Van Gogh had trouble obtaining even the slightest referral.’ In reality, however, the landlord appears to have been extremely generous. Even before the first month was over, Vincent could write proudly to his brother: ‘J'ai obtenu qu'on peindra la maison, la façade, les portes, et les fenêtres à l'extérieur et à l'intérieur à neuf.’ And for all this work he had only to pay 10 francs ‘as his share’ [616/491].

And what of the harassment on the first of every month? Let us take a good look at the letters:

1 June: evidently no problem. Vincent seems to have paid on time, having received Theo's letter (which even contained 100 instead of the usual 50 francs) on 28 May [617/492].

1 July: again Vincent could pay punctually, having gotten Theo's 50 francs on 29 June [638/507]. Later, on 5 July, he did complain a little, writing that he was astonished to already see ‘the bottom of his purse’; this was not surprising, however, because he had begun the month with only 50 francs, and he openly admitted: ‘Il faut bien savoir que si j'en abstrais la nourriture et le logement, tout le
reste de mon argent va encore dans les toiles’ [639/508].

1 August: what happened here is even more interesting. Vincent had certainly received Theo's 50 francs on time - he thanked him for it in a letter of 31 July [656/516] - and yet in his next note he had to acknowledge: ‘Je ne pouvais payer ma loyer le 1er ayant modèle en train pour toute la semaine - j'ai deux portraits du même modèle en train qui sont plus importants pour moi que le reste’ [658/517]. As is well known, the modèle was his friend, the postman Joseph Roulin.

And did this cause a lot of trouble? Quite the opposite. Vincent apparently knew how to handle such a situation. According to letter 658/517, he simply asked ‘the good fellow’ to come back ‘lundi prochain.’ The man, he wrote, had only reminded him that it was Saint Michael's Day - 1 September, the date when rentals were usually renewed or cancelled; and, indeed, on 1 May Vincent had rented the house for four months. But let Van Gogh tell the rest of the story in his own words: ‘Il a dit quelque chose qu'il pouvait trouver un autre locataire pour la maison si je n'étais pas décidé à la garder. Ce qui m'étonne peu puisque moi je l'ai fait réparer et qu'elle y a gagné.’ However, we know that Vincent had already decided to keep the place for a few months more... and that is the end of the undramatic tale told by Dorn under the heading ‘The rent.’

The postal service

In the preceding section (‘Dates and chronology’), Dorn discusses the problem that most of Vincent's letters are undated, and notes that the dates written above them in another hand are often 'debatable'; 8 I don't think there are many scholars who would disagree. He then goes on to examine the reference system I developed based on the regularity of Theo's dispatches of money, declaring that my so-called ‘Saturday theory’ had led me to underestimate the time it took for letters from Paris to reach Vincent in Arles or Saint-Rémy. What Dorn fails to mention, however, is that my writings on this system date from almost 40 years ago. 9 Nor does he allude to the fact that it was thoroughly revised in my Vincent van Gogh: a guide to his work and letters, published by the Van Gogh Museum in 1993. As for Dorn's own ideas about the rapidity (or slowness) of the mail, he here refers back to what he wrote in his dissertation in 1990: ‘Thus, in general Van Gogh only received a letter from Paris after two days, that is on the third day after its composition, and could have counted on receiving a reply to his own letter only on the fifth day after writing it.’ 10

Anyone who has had anything to do with publishing Vincent's letters, or a selection thereof, will immediately recognise how mistaken Dorn is once again. The readers

8 Ibid., pp. 17.
10 Roland Dorn, Décoration: Vincent van Goghs Werkeihe für das Gelbe Haus in Arles, Hildesheim, Zürich & New York 1990, p. 482: ‘In der Regel dürfte Van Gogh also einen Brief aus Paris erst am überraschtesten Tag, also am dritten Tag nach Abfassung erhalten haben, und mit einer Antwort auf einen seiner Briefe konnte er wohl erst am fünften Tag nach Abfassung rechnen.’

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of the present article may even have noticed it for themselves, in connection with the quotations given above: letter 615/490: 26 May; 616/491: 27 May; 617/492: 28 May, while Theo must have written Vincent on Sunday, 27 May since Vincent's reply is from Monday, 28 May.

I would like to give one more example, which might be said to speak for many others. It has to do not with an exchange of letters between Paris and Arles, but rather between Paris and Saint-Rémy, some 25 kilometres northeast (it is worth noting that there still was a railway station in the village in Van Gogh's day). In 1890, when Vincent was in the asylum, Theo and his wife Jo congratulated him on his birthday (30 March). As he was in very poor health at the time, they certainly would not have wanted to risk being late with their good wishes, and yet both sent their letters only the day before, on 29 March. This even follows from what Theo actually wrote: ‘Comme je serais content de pouvoir aller te voir demain pour te serrer la main le jour de ta fête’ [861/T31]. And Jo wrote: ‘Among all the letters you will receive tomorrow from your brothers and sisters, mine should not be wanting to wish you all the best’ [860/T30]. And Vincent's reply? He would probably have thanked them the next day, but he did not; nor did he do so the following day. But that was not because the mail took
more than one day to reach Paris: he was simply so ill that he could not even read
the letters that had arrived for him in the course of that month.11

The visit to Saintes-Marie and the harvest scenes

I now come to the longest chapter of Dorn's study, the discussion of Vincent's series
of harvest scenes, illustrated with ten such canvases or related ones. I am sorry to
say that here, too, I am in complete disagreement with his findings. The problems
surrounding this group of works are not new to me: only recently I wrote a 9-page
reexamination of these questions, which I sent to the Van Gogh Museum in December
1998.

Dorn begins his discussion, published under the heading ‘La moisson en Provence,’
with a long-winded sentence summarising the entire issue and, at the same time -
certainly without realising it - exposing the two points on which he is wrong. It is
the sentence of which I have already quoted the introduction: ‘All this seems to
indicate that Van Gogh was in Saintes-Marie from 10 to 16 June 1888.’ Dorn
continues: ‘The series of paintings known collectively as “La moisson en Provence”
- which Pickvance, based on his new chronology, considered to have been executed
in a single period of work between 4 and 20 June - would then have to be divided
into two tranches, separated by the Saintes-Marie episode, just as they had been
before his rearrangement.’12

‘Would then have to be divided’ may sound a bit hesitating, but let us not be
mistaken - ‘then’ meaning: if Van Gogh really was in Saintes-Marie from 10 to 16
June, as Dorn believes. This becomes perfectly clear when one turns the page and
reads: ‘The first tranche was produced in the week from 3 to 10 June […]. The second
[...] was executed in the days following his return to Arles from Saintes-Marie on
16 June.’13 However, as I have demonstrated, in reality Vincent was not in
Saintes-Marie from 10 to 16 June, and therefore his harvest pictures were not painted
in two separate tranches. I have already noted the proper dates of Vincent's stay on
the coast: 30 May to 3 June. I will now show what the artist himself had to say about
his ‘études des blé’s.’

When he returned to Arles from his excursion to Saintes-Marie, Vincent
immediately set about executing a painting after the drawings of boats on the beach
he had made earlier that morning. A few other paintings after studies from
Saintes-Marie follow. This is confirmed by letter 626/496 of 12 June (the letter
in which he states that he had not gone back to Saintes-Maries). Here we read: ‘J'ai
deux ou trois nouveaux dessins et aussi deux ou trois nouvelles études peintes.’ And,
even more important with regards to the harvest works, he told Theo: ‘J'ai un nouveau
motif en train, des champs à perte de vue verts et jaunes que j'ai déjà deux fois dessiné
et que je recommence en tableau.’ Once this painting was finished he began hastily
working in the wheatfields, which were now in the middle of being harvested.

11 He started writing to Theo again not before the end of April 1890.
13 Ibid., p. 20.
On 19 June he was forced to stop working outside due to sudden torrential rains; all he could do was to console himself with painting portraits in the studio. He reported this to Theo on 21 June, and - fortunately for us - also wrote: ‘J'ai eu une semaine d'un travail serré et raide dans les blés en plein soleil; il en est résulté des études de blés, paysages et - une esquisse d'un semeur’ [631/501]. In addition he reported on his activities to his friend Emile Bernard, and in one of these letters even mentions the exact number of paintings he had managed to produce in these six or seven days of hectic work between 13 and 19 June: ‘J'ai sept études des blés’[636/Bg]. However, he had to confess that they all had been done rather hastily: ‘faits vite vite vite et pressé.’ As an example he referred to the painting Summer evening (F 465 JH 1473), a size 30 canvas: ‘Je l'ai peinte en une seule séance.’

All this information is provided by Vincent himself who gave it to his brother and friends. It is equally certain, however, that neither the famous Harvest (F 412 JH 1440) in the Van Gogh Museum) nor the picture he referred to in letter 627/497 as ‘une ferme et des meules’ were among the seven mentioned in the letters. And let me add: this is not because these two works belonged to ‘a first tranche,’ painted before Vincent made his excursion to Saintes-Maries! It is because they have nothing in common with the others. Une ferme et des meules (F 425 JH 1442) cannot be part of the series because a picture of a farmhouse and a few haystacks is by no means a harvest scene or ‘une étude de blé.’ And The harvest, which Vincent called La moisson, cannot be included because this masterly, wide panorama, with - again - a haystack placed prominently in the middle ground, was not begun before Vincent had thoroughly prepared the composition in two watercolours. It can thus hardly be described as ‘faite vite vite vite et pressé.’
Roland Dorn replies:

My essay explains the premises upon which a dating of the Saintes-Maries episode could be based, and demonstrates that there is an alternative to Ronald Pickvance’s 1984 interpretation, one which - with the exception of a few necessary revisions - corresponds to the reconstruction proposed by Johanna van Gogh-Bonger.

In 1988, Jan Hulsker adopted Pickvance’s point of view; he is certainly free to repeat his belief in its accuracy without adding anything new to the discussion. However, it does seem appropriate to set the record straight on a few points.

In the first place, according to information from the Arles Bureau de cadastre, the veuve Vénissac owned not only the restaurant she ran (lot 400), the Yellow House (lot 398) and the Café de la Gare (lot 401), all located on the Place Lamartine, but also some of the properties ‘to the left,’ situated on the Avenue Montmajour (lot 396, etc.).

Secondly, the recent publication of Theo’s correspondence with his then-fiancée Jo has shed new light on the workings of the postal service: a letter sent from Arles in the morning does indeed appear to have arrived in Paris on the evening of the following day; letters sent later, however, were only delivered the day after that.

Operating with these and other hypothesis developed in the discourse enables work on a scholarly basis - ‘sine ira et studio,’ as it should be, and with that grain of modesty that so impressed Vincent in Meissonier: ‘La science, nul ne l’a.’

Roland Dorn
Zürich, September 1999
fig. 1
‘I kept on thinking about Degas [...]’: Vincent van Gogh and the ‘little lawyer’

Packard Kendall

In January 1889, a few days after his notorious self-mutilation in Arles, Vincent van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo that the wound was ‘healing very well,’ but recalled several days of sleeplessness and anxiety: ‘My suffering from this in the hospital was frightful and yet through it all, even when I was more than a bit drugged, I can tell you that - curiously enough - I kept on thinking about Degas. Gauguin and I had been talking about Degas before, and I had pointed out to Gauguin that Degas had said: ‘I am saving my strength for the Arlésiennes. Now you know how subtle Degas is, so when you get back to Paris, just tell him that I admit that up to the present I have been powerless to paint the women of Arles as anything but poisonous, and that he must not believe Gauguin if Gauguin speaks well of my work, for it has only been a sick man's so far’ [738/570].

Why was it that Van Gogh, at this moment of physical and emotional crisis, ‘kept on thinking about Degas?’ Startling though his outburst is, it can be shown to form part of a pattern of engagement with the art and personality of Edgar Degas in the late 1880s, extending from the time of Van Gogh's arrival in Paris to the period in the asylum at Saint-Rémy. During these years we encounter a succession of references to Degas in Van Gogh's correspondence; evidence of his admiration for specific examples of Degas's art and attempts to emulate certain of his images; and the clearest indications of personal acquaintance between the two men and respect for each other's achievement. In summary, it appears that Degas was important to the younger artist in three distinct ways. The first was as a traditionalist - in Degas's capacity as the pre-eminent draughtsman in impressionist circles and as an advocate of the disciplined study of the human figure. Confusingly, the second function appears to be just the opposite, namely Degas's identification at this date with conspicuously modern subjects and with an urban, literary-based realism. The third category transcends both, concerning Degas's significance as a professional and personal role model in the later stages of Van Gogh's career.
Vincent van Gogh, *Plaster statuette of a female torso*, 1886-87 (F 216g JH 1055), Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

In the long letters written from Antwerp immediately prior to his journey to Paris in February 1886, Van Gogh reveals a still imperfect awareness of the impressionist project and its leading personalities. Curiously, he appears to have been better informed about peripheral or minor associates of the group, such as Manet, Braquemond and Raffaëlli, and about their contemporaries who favoured the Salon, among them Meissonier, Roll, Breton, Besnard and Tissot. Despite
the detailed correspondence with his art-dealer brother in Paris, the names of Monet, Renoir, Degas and Pissarro are still effectively absent from his narrative. He was clearly eager to know more, however, and some of his preoccupations in the city and the works of art he made during his brief stay there seem like rehearsals for the move to the French capital. In his vivid descriptions of the streets and waterfront at Antwerp, we sense the Dutch landscapist recasting himself as a ‘painter of modern life,’ evoking the dockside crowds and busy bars, the spectacle of ‘a sailor being thrown out of a brothel by the girls’ and the ‘Japonaiserie’ of the harbour scene. Pictures already underway included drawings in coloured chalks of dance-halls and theatres, and a painting of ‘a girl from a café-chantant,’ while a letter to Theo speculates that the Café-concert Scala in Antwerp might be ‘something like the Folies-Bergeres.’

Before he left Antwerp, Van Gogh also threw himself with characteristic energy into fulfilling an ambition that had haunted him for several years: to develop his drawing and to work directly from the naked model. Writing of an ‘immense longing to improve my knowledge of the nude,’ he reported his experience of life classes at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts and at an evening drawing club, where he made studies from antique casts and from male and female models. In each situation he was frustrated by the teaching and by the attitudes of his fellow-students, and soon began to dwell on the superior working conditions he believed he would find in Paris. Attempting to persuade Theo of the desirability of this move, he declared his new priorities and revealed an unexpected pragmatism: ‘I greatly prefer to paint the figure, [and] I also think the market might be overloaded with landscapes’ he wrote in December 1885. Above all, he explained, he wanted to study the Old Masters in the Louvre and enrol in a professional studio, such as that of Fernand Cormon, where he could draw from the nude in relative freedom. Still loyal to the past yet anxious to engage with the metropolis, Van Gogh summed up his ambitions when he announced ‘The ancients will not prevent us from being realistic, on the contrary. Of course I am also longing enormously for the French pictures.’

Recalling his arrival in Paris, Van Gogh told the English painter Livens somewhat later: ‘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 admiration for certain impressionist pictures: - a Degas nude figure, a Claude Monet landscape’ His choice of artists is doubly instructive. Consciously or otherwise, Van Gogh had singled out the two leaders of rival factions in the early impressionist group and, at the same time, represented each painter by his most characteristic subject. As early as the 1876 impressionist exhibition, when Degas had shown drawings and paintings on figurative themes and Monet a group of rural canvases, a critic had saluted them as the draughtsman and colourist of the future: ‘Degas will take the place that Ingres holds now, while that of Delacroix is saved for Claude Monet.’ In this sense, Van Gogh's pleasure in the ‘Claude Monet landscape’ is consistent with his known tastes and with a more recent delight in colour that had begun to show itself in his Antwerp pictures. The more unexpected choice of a ‘Degas nude figure,’ on the other hand, seems to correspond to a different Antwerp project, that of the

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1 The drawings in question are F 1350v JH 967, F 1350a JH 968 and F 1350b JH 969.
study of draughtsmanship. Hailed as the successor to Ingres, Degas was already known for his attachment to the Old Masters and for his grounding in traditional skills. In his complex and sometimes confused response to Degas, it is clear that Van Gogh identified him with precisely these qualities and sought to learn directly from them, though his chosen path of study was far from predictable. There is very little evidence, for example, that he followed Degas's lead by copying in the Louvre and, once enrolled at Cormon's, he seems to have worked only sporadically from the live model.

During the time he spent in Paris, however, Van Gogh had exceptional opportunities to acquaint himself with Degas the draughtsman and the master of the human figure, in two important public displays of recent drawings and pastels. Within weeks of his arrival, the eighth and final impressionist exhibition included a much-noted installation of Degas portraits, milliner studies and bathers, the latter described by the artist as a ‘suite de nus de femmes.’ This controversial series of pastels shows women crouched in their bathtubs, standing beside their beds and, in the case of Girl drying herself (fig. 1), occupying herself in the open air. Perhaps incorporating the ‘Degas nude’ that so impressed Van Gogh at this moment, this series represented a crucial statement about Degas's own fusion of the linear and the painterly at a key point in his mid-career. Individual pictures of a similar kind could occasionally be seen at galleries and in private collections, and in January 1888, shortly before Van Gogh left Paris, a second showing of Degas pastels of the nude took place at the Boulevard Montmartre branch of
Boussod, Valadon & Cie. Again the emphasis in the drawings was on domesticity and informality, but this time the exhibition was brought even closer to home in the person of the organiser, a promising young employee of the gallery called Theo van Gogh. Critics responded energetically and variously to both shows, one finding in the 1886 nudes ‘the loveliness and power of a gothic statue’ and another arguing that they were ‘decidedly chaste’ or comparing a figure to a ‘kneeling Venus,’ while others believed them to be depictions of tradesmen’s wives or overweight whores.

For Van Gogh, Degas's 1886 pastels appear to have offered an immediate stimulus to his draughtsmanship. In a scattering of drawings in his Paris sketchbooks, datable to the spring of 1886 and thus concurrent with the impressionist exhibition, we find him tackling the female figure with unprecedented confidence, using energetic lines and boldly emphasising breasts, thighs and even, in one instance, pubic hair. Bizarrely, it seems that even the most vigorous of these studies were not based on living models, which would still have been beyond his slender financial means, but rather on plaster casts of classical sculptures. Away from the unruly Antwerp life classes, Van Gogh was now able to control his relationship with these surrogate bodies, yet was forced to animate them in his imagination and in the alchemy of his materials. The same casts also appear in about a dozen small oil paintings on canvas and card, among them Plaster statuette of a female torso (fig. 2), where the artist has added warm tones and the swelling forms of flesh to the white statuettes in front of him. The links between these works and Degas's pastels are even closer than we might at first suspect. In at least three of the paintings, the casts are positioned to recall poses from Degas's ‘suite de nus,’ the lower abdomen of Plaster statuette of a female torso, for example, replicating closely - albeit in mirror reversal - the body of Girl drying herself. In addition, the use of a fine, hatched brushstroke to build up a pattern of multicoloured modelling on two of the painted studies is strongly suggestive of Degas's handling in the 1886 pastels, which is often characterised by barlike strokes in chromatic opposition. Contradictory though it may seem, one of Van Gogh's most distinctive painting techniques, which first appears in his art at exactly this time, may have originated in his study of Degas's pastels and, by extension, in Degas's current attempts to unite line and colour, the draughtsmanship of Ingres with the painterliness of Delacroix.

The ambiguity of Degas's peers towards his 1886 nudes can be seen in part as a reflection of the artist's own shift, as the decade advanced, from brash contemporaneity to greater elusiveness and a blurring of context. Encountering Degas's art for the first time, Van Gogh was obliged to come to terms with its evolving character, acknowledging the sensuous play of form in the 1880s pastels as well as Degas's command of the urban subjects that had formerly attracted him in Antwerp. Again, Van Gogh's sketchbooks reveal this process of absorption, as he experimented with

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4 See Johannes van der Wolk, The seven sketchbooks of Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam 1987, pp. 103, 108, 143, 144 and 189.
5 The other paired examples are F 216j JH 1059 and Degas's Femme s'essuyant après le bain (St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum), and F 216i JH 1072 and La Boulangère (Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation). This link was first suggested in Françoise Cachin and Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, exhib. cat. Van Gogh à Paris, Paris (Musée d'Orsay) 1988.
materials and themes widely associated with the older artist. Drawing in coloured chalks or crayons, he made a number of rapid studies of musicians seen close-to and from behind (fig. 3), a much-used device in Degas's orchestra and ballet-rehearsal pictures and their supporting drawings. Though he is unlikely to have known Degas's *M. Gouffé* (fig. 4) at first hand, several comparable figures occur in related works and some kind of primary or secondary influence seems probable. Just as speculative, but equally compelling, is the link between Van Gogh's *Nude woman squatting* (fig. 5) and certain of Degas's monotypes of brothel subjects executed in the late 1870s, such as *Woman at her toilette* (fig. 6). The majority of Degas's monotype series - especially those of a more indelicate

6 Degas's drawing was already in a private collection in Paris at this time.
7 Other related images are included in Eugenia Parry Janis, *Degas monotypes*, Cambridge, MA 1968, nos. 153, 190, 191 and 193.
nature - were never exhibited, though some were given to friends and the remainder were occasionally seen by visitors to his studio. So forceful is the resemblance between these two works, however, that some contact with Degas's image - or with comparable studies by urban realists in his immediate circle - seems inescapable.

Recent scholarship has shown the extent to which, while still in Holland, Van Gogh had become an avid reader of naturalist novels, sharing copies or favourite works with Theo and moving eagerly in their subsequent discussions between the visual and the literary culture of the French capital. Familiar also with such texts as Emile Zola's writings on Manet, Van Gogh was well prepared for his encounter with an artist like Degas, who knew a number of the authors concerned and whose work makes reference to their publications at many different levels. In a series of drawings, paintings and prints from the 1860s and 1870s, Degas had given form to specific incidents and characters from the writings of Zola, Ludovic Halévy and the Goncourt brothers, and some of his most celebrated images, such as

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L'absinthe (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) and La petite danseuse de quatorze ans (Upperville, VA, Mellon Collection), had been vilified by the press for their real or imagined links with these and other novels. The curious group of paintings made by Van Gogh depicting contemporary books as components of still life compositions (1887-88), are a touching tribute to a shared taste and represent several volumes that both Degas and Van Gogh are known to have read. In one of these pictures, Still life with books (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum), Van Gogh has meticulously spelled out the title of Zola's Au bonheur des dames, a work that excited a visual, if even more eccentric, response from Degas around this time.

In broader terms, it is difficult to see Van Gogh's Agostina Segatori sitting in the Cafe du Tambourin (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum), completed in 1887, without thinking of Degas's grimly modern L'absinthe - a work that seems to both propose and resist a literary narrative. A number of his other Paris pictures also suggest oblique acts of homage, or at least a common source. A second series of painted nudes point to the brothel rather than the life class,

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10 In Paul Valéry's Degas Manet Morisot (New York 1960, p. 84) Berthe Morisot remembers Degas's suggestion that a special New Year's edition of Zola's book, which deals with a department store, ought to be produced 'with samples of materials and lace on facing pages.'
depicting Van Gogh's far-from-classical subjects reclining on beds and in attitudes of brazen display. Like Degas's monotypes of prostitutes, they have a generic as much as an illustrative relationship with such narratives as Edmond de Goncourt's *La fille Elisa*, but, for all their differences of style and technique, they point to further incursions by the younger artist into territory dominated by his elders, among them Manet, Rops, Forain and Degas himself.

As a relative newcomer to Paris, Van Gogh's most immediate channel of information about Degas's opinions and works of art would inevitably have been his brother Theo. Around this time Theo must have begun his patient courtship of Degas on behalf of Boussod, Valadon & Cie., with a view to acquiring pictures directly from the artist and perhaps establishing a long-term working arrangement with him. Letters show that Theo made regular visits to Degas's Montmartre studio and there are indications that Vincent was alert to the stock that passed through Theo's hands. A critical and often underestimated factor in these contacts would have been the geographical proximity of the brothers' lives to that of Degas. In his first weeks in the city, Vincent shared Theo's small flat in the Rue Laval, later renamed Rue Victor Massé, a street at the lower edge of Montmartre where Degas had lived as a young artist and to which he was soon to return for the remainder of his working.

11 F 328 JH 1212; F 1404 JH 1213; F 330 JH 1214; and F 329 JH 1215.
At the date in question, Degas's apartment was in the Rue Pigalle, a street that crossed the Rue Laval and was only a minute's walk from the building in the Rue Lepic to which Theo and Vincent moved in June 1886. A picture and related study made by Vincent the following year seems to celebrate the quarter they shared, showing the main thoroughfare that bounded the area and simultaneously exploring a number of techniques derived from artists associated with the locality, among them Degas. In the pen and coloured chalk version of *The Boulevard de Clichy* (fig. 7), a broad city space is interrupted in the foreground by an abruptly truncated figure group, a feature that Degas had given its characteristic form in his *Place de la Concorde* of circa 1876 (St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum) and in several monotypes of the same date. Though Van Gogh chose to omit this feature from the final oil of the scene, his experiment speaks eloquently of an early acquaintance with the formal and narrative vocabulary of Degas and his immediate circle.

Theo, too, seems to have turned their location to his advantage, dealing directly and frequently with Degas over such matters as finance, picture-framing and the selection of the artist's works for sale and exhibition, and evidently gaining access to pictures - perhaps including such semi-restricted objects as the brothel monotypes -

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12 For the significance of this area and Degas's residence in it, see *Van Gogh à Paris*, cit. (note 5) and Richard Kendall, *Degas: beyond impressionism*, London & New Haven 1996, ch. 1.
13 See, for example, Janis, op. cit. (note 7), nos. 206, 217 and 264. See also the article by Caroline Igra in this volume of the *Van Gogh Museum Journal*.
that had yet to reach the market. Several short, businesslike letters from Degas to Theo survive from these years, including two that have remained unpublished, adding to our knowledge of Degas's reliance on his dealers for a supply of day-to-day cash and shedding further light on his detailed concern with the presentation of his pictures. In a group of notes discussed by John Rewald, Degas politely reminds Theo of sums still outstanding; urges him ‘to come tomorrow to see the drawing I have made for you’; advises him that a recently acquired painting ‘is too wet: take it out of the frame and dry it a little’; and suggesting that another work be exposed to the air before being put under glass. 14 Always courteous and demonstrably at ease in his practical dealings with Theo, in the unpublished letters Degas again asks him to call (‘ayez, la bonté de passer demain matin à l'atelier, cher Monsieur Van Gogh,’ he wrote in May 1888) or to give a message to his superiors.15 An undated letter, probably from 1887, reads: ‘Voulez-vous prier Mr Etienne Boussod de venir voir le pastel que je vous ai montré l'autre jour. Je ne dois pas, il me semble, l'envoyer rue Chaptal avant sa visite. Avez-vous fait peindre la cadre en bleu? Si vous pouvez passer à l'atelier demain vers 9 h 1/2, j'ai quelque chose à vous dire à ce sujet.’16 During the months of Vincent's stay in the Rue Lepic apartment, Degas's confidence in Theo was expressed by the sale of a number of substantial pictures to Boussod, Valadon & Cie. In 1887, Theo acquired the important oil painting *Woman seated beside a vase of flowers* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), a work completed in 1865 that was among Degas's most audacious early canvases. 17 Depicting an aggressively modern figure cropped by the frame and her surroundings, this picture - although already more than two decades old - would again have brought Vincent into close contact with Degas the portraitist of contemporary life.

A further element in the exchanges between the Van Gogh brothers and Degas during this period was their shared acquaintance with Paul Gauguin. A loyal exhibitor at the impressionist exhibitions since 1879, Gauguin had for some time enjoyed an unusual rapport with Degas that resulted - as was sometimes the case with the older artist, who took an active interest in the work of his juniors - in a period of mutual influence. 18 Vincent got to know Gauguin in the early months of his Paris visit, soon


16 Ibid., letter b 1152 V/1962. Boussod, Valadon & Cie's printing establishment was located at Rue Chaptal. For Degas's preoccupation with coloured frames at this time, an interest that Van Gogh briefly shared, see Isabelle Cahn, ‘Edgar Degas,’ in Eva Mendgen et al., exhib. cat. In perfect harmony: picture & frame 1850-1920, Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) & Vienna (Kunstforum Wien) 1995, pp. 129-38.

17 For sale of the picture by Theo to Emile Boivin is recorded in Rewald, op cit. (note 14), p. 89; see also Thomson, op. cit. (note 14), p. 107.

showing his pictures alongside those of his new friend and coming under the spell of certain of his distinctive ideas. Even as he was pursuing Degas, Theo was also building up a businesslike relationship with Gauguin, buying his first canvas, *Baigneuses* (present location unknown), from the artist in 1887 and exhibiting and selling a number of pictures in successive years. 19 Such contacts would inevitably have led to a casual exchange of information about artists like Degas, whose work was of common concern, and to moments of shared enthusiasm. In January 1888, the exhibition organised by Theo at the Boulevard Montmartre gallery provided just such an opportunity, offering Degas’s latest sequence of bather pastels to an admiring audience of fellow-artists, critics and collectors. 20 Like Vincent two years earlier, Gauguin was quick to register his respect for the Degas nudes, making a sketchbook drawing of several works on the walls and later introducing at least one figure into his own repertoire. 21

More secure in his own draughtsmanship, though still frustrated by a lack of models, Van Gogh left Paris for Provence in February 1888 with a much diminished urge for academic study. More surprisingly, perhaps, the flirtation with urban themes that had begun in Antwerp, found encouragement in the writings of Zola and the Goncourts, and flourished briefly in the shadow of Degas, Signac and Toulouse-Lautrec, also seems to have lost its hold. In the south, it was less Degas the draughtsman and pioneer of

21 The drawing is in the Cabinet des dessins at the Louvre. For Gauguin’s reuse of one of Degas’s figures, see Thomson, *Nudes*, cit. (note 20), p. 170.
realism and more Degas the man who found a continuing resonance in Van Gogh's life. Letters to a variety of correspondents cite Degas as an arbiter of taste and an exemplar of detachment, often couched in terms that suggest considerable intimacy with the older artist's whims and private conversations. During his first weeks in Arles, Van Gogh's knowledge of Degas's rising prices and successful manipulations of the art market prompted him to propose that the more senior 'impressionists of the grand boulevard' - with Degas's name always at the head of the list - should help their younger colleagues in a cooperative venture [585/468]. Although this initiative came to nothing, Van Gogh was able to use his links with Theo to follow Degas's fortunes from a distance, congratulating his brother in the spring of 1888 on the sale of an unnamed picture, and commenting on the group of artists around Jan Veth in Dordrecht who were 'good enough to condescend to Degas and Pissarro, without ever having seen a scrap of their stuff' [623/500]. And, as we have seen, the subject of Degas the portraitist was still very much in Van Gogh's mind.

Gauguin had arrived in Arles more than two months before Van Gogh's experience in the Arles hospital and both artists had been variously involved in making portraits, painting themselves, each other and the people of Arles, and actively debating the problems of the genre. In December 1888 they had travelled together to the museum at nearby Montpellier, famed for its group of portraits of the collector Alfred Bruyas by such artists as Courbet, Delacroix, Cabanel, Couture and Tassaert. Recounting the visit to his brother, Vincent reflected at length on the vexed question of resemblance, concluding with the instruction: ‘Tell Degas that Gauguin and I have been to see the portrait of Brias [sic] by Delacroix at Montpellier, for we have courage to believe that what is is, and the portrait of Brias by Delacroix is as like you and me as another brother’ [730/564]. His statement reads like a continuation of an established dialogue, perhaps originating in Paris with Degas - who had visited the collection at Montpellier - and certainly informed by Degas's affection for Delacroix's art in general and his portraiture in particular. Within a few years of this incident, Degas was able to acquire for his own collection no less than three of Delacroix's oil paintings of male subjects, including one - Baron Schwiter (London, National Gallery) - that rivals the much-admired Bruyas picture in scale and magnificence.22

It was against this background that Van Gogh, a week or two later, ‘kept thinking about Degas,’ and evidently in the specific context of the modern portrait. If Van Gogh's remark that he ‘had pointed out to Gauguin that Degas had said [...] ‘I am saving myself up for the Arlésiennes’ is not immediately transparent, it may be explained by the statement that follows, in which Degas seems to anticipate news of Van Gogh's latest portraits of women of the town. That this intelligence would come from Gauguin is implicit in his text, as is the possibility that Degas was preparing himself for an encounter with the paintings themselves, presumably when they were sent to Theo in Paris. Sadly, the outcome of the story is not known, nor is there any direct evidence of the impact of Van Gogh's portraits on those of Degas at this moment, or vice versa. In his portraiture as well as in his other concerns, Van Gogh was already moving beyond, or stepping back from, his many mentors in Paris.

making fewer direct references to their imagery, theories and techniques. By the time
he entered the asylum at Saint-Rémy in May 1889, he had explicitly rejected many
of the innovations of his former colleagues, such as Georges Seurat and Emile
Bernard, and we find him turning again to the time-tested achievement of figures
like Delacroix, Millet and Degas himself. All three artists embodied an element of
the traditionalism that was still an important factor in Van Gogh's thinking, and all
three seemed to offer guidance as he tried to reconstruct and redirect his career.

In the letters from Provence, Van Gogh often reflected on his physical condition
and the nature of his temperament, citing fashionable notions of inherited weakness
and expressing doubts about the suitability of his constitution for the painter's life.
Once he had moved to the Yellow House in Arles, he told Theo that he was gradually
recovering from the excessive drinking and smoking of Paris, and made a resolution
to mend his ways: ‘I want my nerves steadier [...] a decent establishment and my
own health,’ he claimed. Quoting the advice of a certain Dr Gruby - ‘to eat well, to
live well, to see little of women’ - he added: ‘Degas did it, and succeeded’ [605/481].
On several occasions, he insisted on the vitality of Degas's figures, writing of a nude
in a Rembrandt etching ‘One might call it a Degas because the body is so true, flooded
with animality’ [651/B12]. Some time later, he returned to the theme more frankly
in another letter to Bernard, after warning him of the dangers of historicism and
‘metaphysical meditations’: ‘Why do you
say Degas is impotently flabby? Degas lives like a little lawyer and does not like women, for he knows that if liked them and went to bed with them too often he would become intellectually diseased and would no longer be able to paint. Degas's painting is virile and impersonal for the very reason that he has resigned himself to be nothing personally but a little lawyer with a horror of going on a spree. He looks on while the human animals, stronger than himself, get excited and screw around, and he paints them well, exactly because he doesn't have the pretension to get excited himself [659/B14].

Degas's significance as a model of propriety and constraint was repeatedly stressed in Van Gogh's later correspondence and reinforced by the news he received from Paris. Early in 1890, for example, Theo told him of a recent visit he had made to Degas's apartment, this time in the company of their younger sister Wil. In his reply, Vincent noted rather enviously: 'I think she was lucky to see Degas at his home,' before going on to discuss such related topics as the daily discipline of the artist, his belief that 'a painter really ought to work just as hard as a shoemaker,' and his plans to make careful copies after Daumier, Delacroix and Millet [855/626]. A letter sent directly to his sister repeated his assessment of her visit, and was followed immediately by a remark about 'a portrait of an Arlésienne' that he continued to associate with Degas [582/W2]. It is from Theo's original announcement of the event, however, that the most intriguing details emerge: in this version, we learn that Degas told Wil that 'she reminded him of various figures in the old Dutch paintings and that she made him want to go and see the museums in our native country. He trotted out quite a number of his things, which pleased her greatly. She understood those nude women very well' [853/T28]. While Degas's appetite for Dutch painting has long been acknowledged, his willingness to 'trot out' a succession of works to entertain a young lady he had only just met is distinctly illuminating. Even more striking is the discovery that these pictures included studies of the nude - a subject that seems to have encapsulated Degas's art for the entire Van Gogh family - and Theo's belief that these works which, as we have seen, were sometimes taken to represent prostitutes, had been well 'understood' by the daughter of the Nuenen pastor.

But it was to Degas the private individual, whose resignation to his status as a 'little lawyer' enabled him to intensify his art, that Van Gogh most frequently turned. After he had committed himself to the mental hospital at Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh carried this argument a stage further. Better nourished and following the regular regime of the institution, he wrote from his cell-like room to reassure Theo about his circumstances and his condition. Stressing that his emotions and physical strength were still unpredictable, he nevertheless seemed proud of certain aspects of his new life: 'Degas always says that drinking in cabarets while you are painting pictures is paying too dearly for it. I don't deny it, but would he, like me, then go into a monastery or to church?' [802/605]. In these surroundings, it appears, Van Gogh believed he had actually exceeded Degas in asceticism, renouncing not just the temptations of alcohol, tobacco and the opposite sex but all kinds of distraction outside the studio. Not only does this open up the possibility that Van Gogh's voluntary admission to the asylum was intended, among other things, to replicate the austerity of Degas's life, it also goes some way to explain his calmness, even self-satisfaction, in its very restraint. His extreme self-denial, he felt, had already been beneficial and had
strengthened his painting. In the same long letter he tells his brother: ‘My work is going well, I am finding things that I have sought in vain for years,’ describing portraits in progress and a copy he has just completed, ‘my brain so clear and my fingers so sure that I have drawn that Piéta by Delacroix without taking a single measurement’ [802/605].

Van Gogh's devotion to the work of Delacroix had begun long before he settled in France, but during his stay at Saint-Rémy (1889-90) it found a new and more conspicuous outlet in a series of elaborate painted copies. Though these have no known connection with Degas, they were made with an awareness of a shared admiration for their predecessor and were concurrent - coincidentally or otherwise - with an unexpected revival in Degas's own engagement with the master. In 1889 Degas made a brief pilgrimage to Tangiers, describing in a letter the colours and sensations he encountered, and explaining to a friend: ‘I tell you this because Delacroix passed here.’ 23 Perhaps stimulated by this experience, Degas himself carried out two

transcriptions in oil on canvas of Delacroix pictures, *The Battle of Poitiers* (Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery) and *The fanatics of Tangier* (Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario), and was soon to pour his energies into an obsessive accumulation of Delacroix's drawings, watercolours and paintings.\(^{24}\) Less well-known, but just as pertinent in the present context, is Degas's respect for Millet, an artist he ranked with 'Ingres and the earlier Corot' as the greatest 'among the moderns,' according to Walter Sickert.\(^{25}\) Again, Van Gogh's revived preoccupation with Millet in the Saint-Rémy months offers a parallel rather than an immediate link with Degas, but it is worth noting that it was principally to Millet the figure painter rather than the landscapist that both artists turned: Van Gogh in his painted studies and Degas in his acquisition of Millet's drawings, prints and a single oil.\(^{26}\)

The poignant finale to this surprising tale of artistic affinity took place in the mid-1890s, some four years after Vincent's death and at the time when Degas was at the height of his collecting fervour. Adding paintings by younger contemporaries to his rapidly growing stock of works from earlier generations, Degas showed some of his latest purchases to his young admirer, Daniel Halévy, who recorded the incident in his journal on 22 December 1895. After subjecting Halévy to the history of two recently-acquired portraits by Delacroix, Degas produced yet more pictures: 'Here is my new Van Gogh, and my Cézanne; I buy! I buy! I can no longer stop myself,' he exclaimed.\(^{27}\)

The Van Gogh was one of two of the painter's canvases to enter his collection at this time, *Sunflowers* of 1887 (fig. 8), previously the property of Gauguin but now exchanged with Vollard against two studies of dancers, and *Still life with fruit* (The Art Institute of Chicago) from the same year, again obtained from Vollard.\(^{28}\) Around the same date, Degas also acquired a Van Gogh drawing, entitled *Glaneuse* in the Degas sales catalogue and now provisionally identified with a Nuenen study that remains in private hands.\(^{29}\) What is unmistakeable in all three purchases is the robustness of Degas's taste: *Two sunflowers* is an abrasive, richly patterned composition that seems as much woven from coloured brushstrokes as painted; *Still life with fruit* is even more uncompromising, a hallucinatory confection of bars and striations of paint that explodes outward from its centre; while the solitary drawing is among Van Gogh's most powerful yet touching studies of the human figure. Collectively, they sum up much of Van Gogh's radicalism - his dedication to the commonplace, his passion for colour and line, the physicality of his technique - and their acquisition by Degas must surely be seen as a token of respect and understanding from one uncompromising artist to the memory of another.

\(^{24}\) Degas's copies are *Copie d'après ‘Les convulsionnaires de Tanger’ de Delacroix* (private collection) and *The Battle of Poitiers, after Delacroix* (Zürich, Barbara and Peter Nathan).


\(^{28}\) See Dumas, op. cit. (note 22), nos. 595 and 596.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., no. 597.
fig. 8
Vincent van Gogh, *Sunflowers*, 1887 (F 376 JH 1331), Kunstmuseum Bern

[Om privacyredenen is dit tekstgedeelte niet zichtbaar.]
Appendix
Van Gogh's Sunflowers

This appendix supplies information on all of Van Gogh's sunflower paintings: basic data, letter references, provenance, reproductions, etc. Only the ‘early’ exhibitions (i.e. before the publication of De la Faille's catalogue raisonné in 1928) are given, with no pretension of completeness and with only those exhibitions noted where we can be certain which pictures were shown, particularly those documented in the loan lists. These are kept in the archive of the Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation). The works are catalogued in chronological order. For orientation, a toile de 30 ideally measures 92 × 73 cm. Titles are derived from the correspondence and have been slightly systematised.

Paris 1887

Sunflowers
Oil on canvas (toile de 30 figure), mounted on triplex at a later date, 21 × 27 cm
F 377 JH 1328

Letters -.

Study for the following painting.

Provenance Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; in 1962 transformed into the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and now on permanent loan to the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (s 121 V/1962).


First reproduced in De la Faille 1928.

Sunflowers
Oil on canvas (*toile de 12 paysage basse*), 43.2 × 61 cm
Signed and dated: *Vincent 87*
F 375 JH 1329

**Letters** 740/571: ‘[one of] mes deux tournesols qu'il [i.e. Gauguin] à prises à Paris’; for the second painting see the following entry.

**Provenance** Vincent van Gogh, Paris; given (in December 1887 or January 1888) in exchange to Paul Gauguin, Paris; sold 10 April 1896 to Ambroise Vollard, Paris; sold in 1897 or 1899 to Cornelis Hoogendijk, The Hague; sold at auction 12 May 1912 (directly?) to Alphonse Kann, Paris; sold in November 1917 while on exhibit in Zürich to Richard Bühler, Winterthur; sold 1 October 1928 to Galerie Thannhauser, Lucerne - Berlin (- New York); sold in 1949 to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. 49.41).


First reproduced in De la Faille 1928.
Sunflowers
Oil on canvas (*toile de 12 figure*), 50 × 60.7 cm
Signed and dated: *Vincent 87*
F 376 JH 1331

**Letters** 740/571; see the previous entry.

**Provenance** Vincent van Gogh, Paris; given (in December 1887 or January 1888) in exchange to Paul Gauguin, Paris; sold 9 January 1895 to Ambroise Vollard, Paris; sold 15 February 1895 to Félix Roux, (Paris?); reacquired 23 October 1895 by Ambroise Vollard, Paris; sold 29 October 1895 to Edgar Degas, Paris; sold at auction 26/27 March 1918 to Paul Rosenberg, Paris; sold (directly?) to Arthur and Hedy Hahnloser-Bühler, Winterthur; by descent to Hans R. Hahnloser, Bern; donated in 1971 to the Kunstmuseum Bern (inv. 2140).

**Exhibitions** Winterthur 1922, no. 51; Basel 1924, no. 33 Zürich 1924, no. 32 and 21 (depending on the catalogue edition).

First reproduced in the sale catalogue of the Degas collection 1918.

Sunflowers
Oil on canvas (*c. toile de 40 marine*), 60 × 100 cm
F 452 JH 1330

**Letters** –.

**Provenance** Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; sold in 1908 via C.M. van Gogh, Amsterdam, to Helene Kröller-Müller, The Hague; Kröller-Müllerstichting: on permanent loan to the Kröller-Müller-Museum, Otterlo.

**Exhibitions** On display with other works from the estate in Paris, September 1890, ‘Catalogue’ b 3055 V/1962, no. 84: ‘Soleil (40)’; transferred to Bussum in April 1891; loaned to various exhibitions from 1893 to 1908:


Reproduced while on exhibit in Groningen: Onze Kunst 3 (July 1904), no. 7, plate following p. 6; photographed in Paris, February 1908 (Druet 7200).

Arles 1888

‘Tournesols’ (‘étude d’après nature’)
Oil on canvas (toile de 20 paysage), 73.5 × 60 cm
F 453 JH 1559 (see Dorn 1990, pp. 336-37, pl. 1)

Letters 670/526: ‘1) 3 grosses fleurs dans un vase vert fond clair toile de 15 […]’

Provenance Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; (given to?) Julien Tanguy, Paris; sold in 1891(?) to Octave Mirbeau, Paris; sold (before 1927) to Jacques Doucet, Paris; sold from his estate to Wildenstein, Paris and New York; sold c. 1948 to a private collector.


Photographed while hanging in Mirbeau's dining room (cf. Achille Segard, ‘Octave Mirbeau chez soi,’ Revue Illustrée 13 [1 January 1898], ill.); and while on exhibit in Paris, November 1909 (Druet 7184, 7796 and 21349).
‘Tournesols’ (‘fond bleu de roi’)
Oil on canvas (toile de 25 figure?), mounted on wood and enlarged to 98 × 69 cm
F 459 JH 1560 (Dorn 1990, pp. 344-48, pl. 1)

Letters Initial state of the composition described in letter 670/526: ‘2) 3 fleurs une fleur ensemence et effeuilles & un bouton sur fond bleu de roi toile de 25.’

A sixth flower was added when the painting was enlarged (bottom center).
Provenance Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; sold in July 1908 while on consignment with C.M. van Gogh, Amsterdam, to Fritz Meyer-Fierz, Zürich (and exhibited there); from spring 1919 on consignment with Paul Vallotton, Lausanne; sold in 1920 (via Bernheim Jeune, Paris?) to Koyata Yamamoto, Ashiya/Kôbe; destroyed in February 1945 by fire.


Photographed in Paris, February 1908 (Druet 7206).

‘Tournesols’ (‘fond clair’)
Oil on canvas (toile de 30 figure), 91 × 72 cm
Signed on the vase (below the line): Vincent
F 456 JH 1561 (Dorn 1990, pp. 340-43, pl. 1)

Letters Initial state of the composition described in letter 670/526: ‘3) douze fleurs & boutons dans vase jaune (toile de 30).’
A thirteenth flower was added shortly afterwards, closing a gap in the centre of the flowers above the vase.

Provenance Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; on consignment with Paul Cassirer, Berlin, and sold 20 May 1905 to Hugo von Tschudi, Berlin/Munich; acquired on 25 January 1912 from his estate by an anonymous benefactor and donated to the Neue Pinakothek, Munich (inv. BSG 8672).


Photographed while on exhibition in Antwerp 1892; reproduced in 40 Photocollographies, Amsterdam 1904, pl. 29.

‘Tournesols’ (‘fond jaune’)
Oil on canvas (toile de 30 figure), 92.1 × 73 cm Signed on the vase (above the line): Vincent F 454 JH 1562 (Dorn 1990, pp. 337-40, pl. 1)

**Letters** Initial state of the composition described in letter 672/527: ‘Ce quatrième est un bouquet de 14 fleurs et est sur fond jaune.’

A fifteenth flower was added shortly afterwards, i.e. the bud hanging down to the left of the vase.

Relined in 1942 by Helmut Ruhemann while removed from London due to the war.

**Provenance** Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; sold in January 1924 to the Tate Gallery, London while on exhibit at the Leicester Galleries, London; transferred in 1961 to the National Gallery, London (inv. 3863).


Photographed in Paris, February 1908 (Druet 8170), and in Cologne, summer 1912 (Rheinisches Bild-Archiv 32015, 32411).

**Arles 1889**

‘Tournesols’ (‘fond clair’) ‘repetition’ Oil on canvas *(toile de 30 figure)*, 92 × 72.5 cm Signed on the vase (below the line): *Vincent F 455 JH 1668* (Ronald Pickvance, *Christie's review of the season 1987*, p. 70; Dorn 1990, pp. 455-56, pl. 9)
Provenance  Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; probably on consignment with (or given to?) Julien Tanguy, Paris; sold (directly?) to Ambroise Vollard, Paris; sold 21 December 1896 to the Comte Antoine de la Rochefoucauld, Paris; sold to Paul Rosenberg, Paris and New York; sold 28 July 1928 (under the title ‘Soleils sur fond jaune!’) to Carroll S. Tyson, Philadelphia; bequeathed in 1963 by his widow to The Philadelphia Museum of Art (inv. 63-116-19).


Photographed in Paris, spring 1905 (Druet 2390).

‘Tournesols’ (‘fond jaune’) ‘repetition’
Oil on canvas (toile de 30 figure), enlarged to 95 × 73 cm
Signed on the vase (below the line): Vincent
F 458 JH 1667 (Dorn 1990, pp. 461-62, pl. 9)

Letters 747/574.

Background along the upper edge repainted when enlarged by addition of a strip of wood, 3 cm high; probably restored in January/March 1901 in Paris; relined by Traas in 1961; examined by Ashok Roy in May 1992.
Provenance Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; transformed in 1962 into the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and now on permanent loan to the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (s 31 V/1962).


First reproduced in De la Faille 1928.

‘Tourmesols’ (‘fond vert jaune’)
[colour variant]
Oil on burlap (toile de 30 figure), enlarged to 100 × 76 cm
F 457 JH 1666 (Ronald Pickvance, Christie's review of the season 1987, pp. 70-73; Dorn 1990, pp. 456-61, pl. 9)

Letters -. 

Provenance Estate of Vincent and Theo van Gogh; on consignment with Julien Tanguy, Paris, and sold in March

1894 to Emile Schuffenecker, Paris; sold c. 1903 to his brother Amédée Schuffenecker, Meudon; sold in (late) 1907 to Eugène Druet, Paris; sold in 1910 to Paul von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Berlin; sold to Paul Rosenberg, Paris; sold in 1934 to Sir Alfred and Lady Edith Beatty, London; by descent to Helen Chester Beatty, London; sold at auction 30 March 1987 to the Yasuda Fire & Marine Insurance Company, Ltd., Tokyo, and now on permanent display at the Seiji Togo Memorial Yasuda Kasai Museum of Art, Tokyo.

fig. 1
Vincent van Gogh, *Alexander Reid in an easy chair*, 1887 (F 270 JH 1207), Oklahoma City, Collection of Mrs Aaron Weitzenhoffer
Dispaying Van Gogh, 1886-1999

Andreas Blühm

‘Let the museum curators and administrators do as they like; they are slaves to fashion, and one trend is not worse than the other. I have retained the most wonderful and lasting memories of the works of art from all my visits to museums and galleries, but I do not remember how they were classified, grouped or framed, or the colour of the walls on which they were hung.’

- André Fontainas 1937

Once it has left the easel, a painting is never the same again. Environments, lighting and perception all change over time, and with them the work of art. How a picture has been displayed in the past can thus tell us much about the history of its reception. It is therefore all the more surprising that art historians have regularly failed to address this important aspect in their studies. This is not due to a paucity of sources, but rather to a lack of interest. Scholars often examine the social and theoretical context in which a particular work has been created, but generally ignore its immediate surroundings.

Before the 19th century, a painter could be relatively certain about his work's final destination, particularly if it was a commission. Its eventual place of display was a factor that had to be taken into account. Once the free market began to develop into art's most important forum, however, the artist's chances of influencing his picture's fate diminished. This was already the case in the Netherlands in the 17th century. During the course of the 19th century, the market became increasingly dominant, with the result that traditional locations for works of art - churches, palaces, academies and the Salon - soon lost their relevance altogether.

Presentation was a matter of great importance to artists, as we know from their numerous complaints regarding the hanging of annual exhibitions, where the available

walls were literally covered with pictures. The impressionists rejected not only the Salon juries' selection criteria, but also their principles of display. Fully aware of the commodity value of art, they took matters into their own hands, systematically developing new ways of showing their paintings. Martha Ward's pioneering *Art Bulletin* article, published in 1991, gives an excellent overview of the changes in exhibition practice that began to take place in the 1870s.2 Ward draws a parallel between the liberalism of

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the Third Republic and artistic individualism, whereby painters sought to raise their work above the mass of consumer goods by hanging them in such a way that their uniqueness came to the fore. The impressionists' unusual coloured frames and tinted exhibition walls lent an additional aura to works whose highly ‘personal’ execution already bore witness to a certain self-assuredness. Most importantly, the impressionists recognised the necessity of proper display, which by now had become a central artistic concern.³

Beginning around the middle of the century, exhibitions, galleries and domestic interiors had been joined by a new venue - one which was to become increasingly important: the museum. Public collections, which slowly but surely began to develop an interest in contemporary art, pursued completely different goals than their private counterparts, and their influence should not be underestimated. The traditional patron was soon joined by a class of professional connoisseurs, critics and historians, who looked at art from a very different perspective and sought to classify it systematically. Then there was the anonymous public - amateurs, the merely curious, potential buyers. This multiplication of sites and audiences offered the artist first and foremost a greater freedom of choice. It created new opportunities, but was also potentially dangerous. Artists were suddenly faced with pressing questions: for whom were they painting? Where would their pictures eventually be shown? Every decision in favour of a certain form of presentation was also, necessarily, a decision against another. The risk for the ‘artist-entrepreneur’ was thus greater than ever before.

Van Gogh as viewer

In his struggle for recognition, Vincent van Gogh never looked at art exclusively from the perspective of the maker, but from that of the recipient and consumer as well. Not only was he the nephew of three art dealers and the brother of a fourth, he had also been employed at Goupil's in The Hague, Paris and London (1869-76). In contrast to most other artists, he was thus able to familiarise himself professionally with the wishes of his potential clients. As is well known, Van Gogh made no secret of the fact that their taste and his had nothing in common - which surely did little to advance his career. Even after he had left the business, however, gallery windows remained one of his most important sources of information on contemporary painting. In addition, he was a dedicated museum-goer, visiting the collections of Old Masters in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, The Hague, London and Paris. During his first years in the French capital (1874-76) the newly-opened Musée du Luxembourg - the temple of modern art - was also a major attraction.

Ronald Pickvance has examined the relevant passages in Van Gogh's letters and come to the conclusion that, although he frequently refers to museum visits, no real pattern of behaviour can be established.⁴ Interesting, too, is Pickvance's observation

³ Degas, for example, demanded that paintings at the Salon be hung in only two rows and that artists be allowed to suggest where their pictures should be placed; see Ward, ‘Impressionist installations,’ cit. (note 2), p. 600.

⁴ Ronald Pickvance, ‘An insatiable appetite for pictures: Vincent the museumgoer,’ in Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle (eds.), The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam 1987, pp. 59-67 and 89. Pickvance does not, however, discuss the (rare) passages in which Van
that Van Gogh went to museums more often before he decided to become a painter than after. He found a welcome diversion in art, particularly during his theology studies in Amsterdam (from May 1877) - which certainly contributed to his failing to complete his courses. Johanna van Gogh-Bonger reports that at the time there was even some discussion within the family of Vincent making a career in the museum world.\footnote{See Johanna van Gogh-Bonger's introduction to the 1914 edition of the letters, reprinted in De brieven van Vincent van Gogh, ed. Han van Crimpen and Monique Berends-Albert, 4 vols., The Hague 1990, vol. 1, p. 9.}

As to the frequency of Van Gogh's museum visits, the dearth of letters from the Paris period makes it difficult to make a sound judgement. When he unexpectedly arrived in the French capital at the beginning of March 1886 it was certainly no coincidence that he asked Theo to pick him up at the Salon Carré of the Louvre. In the months that followed Vincent made numerous studies of the museum's treasures, and his drawings after Egyptian sculpture demonstrate the breadth of his interests. After its reopening in April of the same year, the Musée du Luxembourg

once again became a favourite haunt. In the provinces - whether Drenthe or the south of France - and without money to travel, however, there were few opportunities to see original works of art. Only once, in December 1888 and in the company of Gauguin, did Van Gogh venture from Arles to Montpellier to visit what is now the Musée Fabre. Months later, he was still making use of what he had seen.\(^6\)

A true picture of Vincent's artistic preferences can hardly be gleaned simply from the passages in his correspondence devoted to museums. His comments on installations are even more cursory, although he was by no means uninterested in them. On 28 January 1873, in one of his first surviving letters, he wrote to Theo regarding Amsterdam's plans for a new, larger Rijksmuseum: ‘It will be a good thing: the Trippenhuis is too small and the pictures are hung so that one can't look at them properly’ [4/4.]. To Theo, however, the end results were less than satisfactory. His friend Andries Bonger reports on their joint visit to the Louvre and the favourable impression it had made on them when compared to the Rijksmuseum: ‘As we entered the room with the bronze casts [...] we let out a cry: how calm and dignified everything appeared in comparison to those tastelessly decorated rooms in Amsterdam's museum! What a shame that such a huge project is a failure. It will stand for centuries, [...] an annoyance for all posterity.’\(^7\) But even the Louvre was not left uncriticised. In a letter to Vincent of 9 February 1890, Theo describes the rehanging of the Dutch Old Masters, concluding: ‘Anyway, they've finally made some changes - it was about time’ [853/T28].

These remarks might surprise today's viewer of historical photographs of museum interiors, in which the installations always look more or less alike: the pictures hung frame to frame, three or more rows high. However, museum hangings were not only different from those of exhibitions and galleries, they were also more differentiated. The arrangements - according to epoch, school, subject matter, artist and format - were frequently subject to alteration, reflecting new points of view or changing taste. The close proximity of the works to one another was not felt to be disturbing - or even worth commenting upon - until alternatives had been tried.

Art galleries sought to give visitors the feeling of being welcomed into a palace or great house, or to recreate the kind of bourgeois domestic interior for which the pictures were, finally, intended. But there were also enormous differences between the various exhibitions, despite their ‘wallpaper’ hangings: at the Salon, for example, works were arranged alphabetically, while at the Exposition Universelle they were divided into sections according to nationality. Situations which at first glance look remarkably similar were experienced as quite various by contemporaries.\(^8\)

\(^6\) See 801/604.
\(^7\) Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, 25 August 1885, letter b 1820 V/1970: ‘Toen we de zaal der bronzen afgietsels binnenkwamen, [...] ontspanne ons een kreet: hoe rustig en statig in vergelijking van de smakeloos versierde zalen van het Amsterdamsch museum! - Hoe jammer dat zulk een groot gebouw mislukt is. Daar staat 't nu voor de eeuwen, [...] ik denk tot ergernis van het nageslacht.’
Even more than museums, it was through exhibitions that Van Gogh came in to contact with contemporary art. Between March 1886 and February 1888 there were at least 20 shows - and quite possibly many more - that would have attracted his attention. It is hard to imagine that an insatiably curious artist like Van Gogh would have missed a single Salon, or any of the numerous shows held by the impressionists, indépendants, incohérents or at the progressive galleries. In May 1886, for example, he could have visited the eighth and last impressionist exhibition. Before moving to Paris, he had no first-hand knowledge of the these painters' works. The incredible speed with which he absorbed elements of the most recent artistic trends is evident in the development of his own style, and bears witness to the profound impact the modernists had made on him.

In comparison to its predecessors, the final impressionist show was arranged in a rather sober manner, which - as many contemporaries noted - was to the benefit of the works on. For Van Gogh, however, the installation must have been new and exciting. While still in the Netherlands he made (often quite detailed) remarks on mounts, frames

and walls, as well on combinations of his own paintings. There are numerous passages regarding the background colours that would work best with his pictures, on the use of gray mats for the early Hague drawings [215/186] and on acquiring gold frames for the peasant studies and *The potato eaters* (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum): ‘[they would] look just as good against a wall papered the deep colour of ripe wheat’ [501/404].

**Van Gogh as exhibition organiser**

After a year in Paris, in March 1887, Van Gogh began to organise his own exhibitions. We do not know whether the experiments of the impressionists had any effect on the installations. In Agostina Segatori's Café du Tambourin Vincent first put up a display of Japanese woodcuts and later one of his own works. The enterprises were a commercial disaster, whether due to the choice of pictures, the presentation or the location is unclear. These failures did not, however, prevent Van Gogh from trying again, this time at the Grand Bouillon, Restaurant du Châlet, on the Avenue de Clichy. The participants this time included Bernard, Anquetin, Arnold Koning and Toulouse-Lautrec, and perhaps Gauguin, Pissarro and Guillaumin. The show did not attract a large audience, but a few items were sold. In December 1887, finally, Van Gogh, Seurat and Signac showed together in the rehearsal room of the Théâtre Libre d'Antoine. Nothing is known of the installation. 10 Due to the location and a lack of funds there was probably little opportunity for ‘extras,’ such as painting the walls in appropriate colours.

As far as the hanging of pictures in general was concerned, Vincent could naturally take lessons from his brother Theo, or help him with the formulation and execution of his ideas. As manager of a branch of Boussod, Valadon & Cie., Theo had been an active art professional for many years. Of the 12 exhibitions he held at the gallery, two date from before Vincent's departure for the south. In December 1887, he showed works by Gauguin, Guillaumin and Pissarro, and in January 1888 pictures by Degas and Gauguin. Unfortunately, we do not know if, or in what way, Theo's hangings differed from those normally seen at the firm's other venues. In 1890, however, he had electric light installed and allowed Raffaëlli to cover the walls with brightly coloured fabrics. 11 There is yet another indication of the special interest the Van Gogh brothers took in the newest ideas about arranging pictures: it is no accident that the only painting Vincent dedicated to his brother is also the only one in his oeuvre with

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a specially designed frame, namely the *Still life with fruit* of 1887 (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum).  

**Interiors**

The efforts of the impressionists and other progressive artists to extend pictorial space did not end with the frame. The painting's surroundings were increasingly considered as well. The interior - apartment, exhibition hall or gallery - became an integral part of the work of art and vice versa. For Van Gogh, interior and artwork were one, or at the very least should be carefully attuned to one another. Vincent believed that impressionist painting, like the work of the Dutch Old Masters, only came into its own when seen in the proper setting: ‘Just as an interior is unfinished without a work of art, so a painting is incomplete if it fails to form a whole with its unique environment, which must be related to the period in which the work was created’ [781/594].

Van Gogh's own interior was chiefly his studio. His modest means left him with little choice but to hang reproductions and his own studies on the wall, tacked up with drawing pins. However, these woodcuts and lithographs clipped from magazines had more than a merely decorative function: Van Gogh used this poor man's private collection to bolster his visual memory. In Antwerp, he also began to add Japanese prints. Finally, in Saint-Rémy, he painted

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13 Van Gogh had read Maurice de Fleury's article ‘La maison d'un moderniste’ (*Le Figaro. Supplément littéraire* 14 [15 September 1888], no. 37, pp. 146-47) with great enthusiasm, reporting shortly thereafter in detail to Theo on this ‘impressionist house’ in Auteuil, with a façade of glass bricks; see 685/537.
copies after reproductions of paintings by Millet, Delacroix and Rembrandt; as a motive for this exercise he noted that he simply did not wish to be surrounded by nothing but his own works [805/W14].

Albeit to a lesser extent, Van Gogh was also concerned with decoration of the homes of those closest to him. Members of his family were his most obvious ‘customers,’ and he made copies of his works so that his sisters, too, could build up a collection. Likewise, in expectation of Gauguin’s arrival in Arles, the decoration of the Yellow House became a central concern. The ‘studio of the south’ was designed to offer his friend, and those whom Vincent hoped would follow, an appropriate accommodation.

The desire to create a decorative furnishing for the interior was an important incentive to his creative work, particularly in the later period. In principle, Van Gogh's concern for decoration - which he shared with other avant-garde painters, such as Monet, Bernard and Seurat - was not unlike that of more established artists. Even the proponents of historical revivalism had called for the stylistic unity of interiors and had sought to realise this idea in their buildings. The younger men simply followed other models and used them in original ways. The new generation of artists, too, endeavoured to put their novel formal inventions to functional use. From Lucien Pissarro they learned first hand about the new schools in England striving to bring fine and applied art together, and which appeared to have succeeded in uniting the modern aesthetic with practical applications. For both Van Gogh and his friends, the driving force behind this interest in decoration was certainly the need to give some deeper meaning to their activities and poverty-stricken lives, a deep-seated wish to see their much-criticised art become part of society as a whole. Van Gogh, with his cycles, series and decorations, was thus hardly alone in his desire to see his art in an integrated spatial context. The place of the picture thus came to have an importance equal to that of the picture itself.

**Theo's apartment**

When Theo was looking for a flat for himself and his young wife Johanna, his main concerns were somewhat more banal, but he, too, sought to arrange his immediate surroundings in an aesthetically pleasing way. Since his motives and criteria were surely not any different from those of his contemporaries - or, for that matter, from those of newlyweds today - it might seem pointless to subject his inventory to a critical examination were it not for the large number of his brother's paintings it included. The dozens of Van Goghs - works from all phases of his career - must have given the otherwise typically bourgeois interior a very special quality. The pictures belonged to Theo, given in exchange for his regular financial support. Unfortunately,

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14 On these copies see Cornelia Homburg, The copy turns original: Vincent van Gogh and a new approach to traditional art practice, Amsterdam & Philadelphia 1996.

15 See Roland Dorn, Décoration: Vincent van Goghs Werksreife für das Gelbe Haus in Arles, Hildesheim, Zürich & New York 1990. Van Gogh had already considered the pendants Jardins potagers à Montmartre (F 350 JH 1245) and Vue de Montmartre (F 316 JH 1246) as decoration for a dining room or country house when they were shown together at the Indépendants exhibition in 1888; see Van Gogh à Paris, cit. (note 9), pp. 140-43, nos. 51-52.

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despite all the letters, the sources are so meagre that we cannot even be certain what he actually thought of them. We do know, however, that they were not merely stacked against the wall or under the bed, although only a handful of documents give us an indication of which paintings hung where and why.

The only visual record of Theo's living quarters comes from the period when Vincent was staying with him in the Rue Lepic. It shows the brothers' friend, the art dealer Alexander Reid, seated in an armchair (fig. 1). The portrait is closely cropped, but three pictures can still be made out in the background: two by the American painter Frank Myers Boggs, now in the Van Gogh Museum, with, between them, a barely identifiable study of a peasant's head by Van Gogh. This symmetrical arrangement seems to indicate a kind of system, although it is unclear what the relationship between the works is supposed to be. Perhaps the combination was meant to exemplify the common bond between artists, both these two in particular and all those of similar opinions.

In 1889, when Theo went about furnishing his future family's apartment in the Cité Pigalle, Johanna was still in Holland. This separation, as unfortunate as it was,

16 See *Van Gogh à Paris*, cit. (note 9), no. 38.
17 Perhaps F 135 JH 585, now in the Cincinnati Art Museum.
did, however, necessitate written correspondence, giving us a glimpse of the
nest-building process. On 14 March 1889, he wrote Johanna detailing his activities.
Particularly interesting is the passage in which he describes how he plans to hang
his brother's pictures: ‘I'm going to hang all the paintings with dark or gold frames
in the dining room. In the living room will be the ones with the slender, very simple
white frames, which hardly take up any space at all, and then only a few in the
bedroom. In the hallway there will be some drawings. It's not possible to find a good
place for everything just yet, but we can change it bit by bit later, until everything is
seen at its best.’ What is astonishing here is the importance given to the frames; the
pictures themselves, their size, colours and subject matter, appear to have played
only a subordinate role.

The first exhibition

For both brothers, the way pictures were hung in exhibitions was more important
than how they were displayed in the private sphere. Theo and Vincent had detailed
discussions regarding the letter's contributions to various exhibitions. Vincent was
well aware of how paintings could change depending on their ‘neighbours’: in a letter
of June 1888 he describes how one of his new pictures had simply overwhelmed all
the others [627/497]. By the same token, however, certain pictures, when placed
together, could enhance each other. According to Van Gogh, this was true not only
of paintings conceived as series or pendants, and not only of his own work. For
example, he wanted to see his Portrait of Patience Escalier (Pasadena, Norton Simon
Museum) next to Toulouse-Lautrec's likeness of Suzanne Valadon (Poudre de riz,
Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation), which belonged
to Theo: ‘I don't think my peasant would do your Lautrec any harm, and I would
even go so far as to say that the simultaneous contrast would make the latter seem
even more distinguished; mine, too, would improve through this unusual combination,
because his tanned skin would stand out even more when seen next to her white
complexion, the powder and her toiletté chic’ [663/520].

For the 1888 exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendantes, the brothers
chose works with related themes: the pendants Vue de Montmartre (f 316 JH 1246)
and Jardins potagers à Montmartre: la Butte Montmartre (f 350 JH 1245), as well
as Romans parisiens (f 359 JH 1332). In November 1889, Van Gogh received an
invitation from

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18 Kort geluk: de briefwisseling tussen Theo van Gogh en Jo Bonger, ed. Leo Jansen and Jan
Robert, intro. Han van Crimp, Zwolle & Amsterdam 1999, no. 70: ‘In de eetkamer hang
ik op al de schilderijen in donkere of vergulde lijsten. In de salon vooral die van Vincent in
witte heele eenvoudige lijstjes die bijna geen plaats inneemen en in de slaapkamer maar heel
weinig. Dan in de gang een paar teekeningen. Zoo in eens is het niet mogelijk om een goede
plaats voor alles te vinden maar dat veranderen wij dan later nu en dan eens tot dat alles het
best uitkomt.’

Van Gogh Museum Journal 1999
Octave Maus to participate in the sixth Les Vingt exhibition, which was to take place in Brussels from 18 January to 23 February 1890. The only restriction was the length of the wall, a limitation with which Van Gogh was naturally unhappy. Officially, he was given four metres, although in a letter from 16 November 1889 [821/T20] Theo speaks of five to seven metres. On the back of his invitation Van Gogh drew a hanging plan, the only one we know by his hand (fig. 2). In a letter to Theo he detailed the works to be sent [822/614]: two versions of the Sunflowers (as pendants); a picture of ivy with a vertical format, a blossoming orchard, a red vineyard, and a wheatfield with a rising sun - all relatively new, accomplished, and highly colourful works. He confirmed his choice to Maus and apologised for probably having gone beyond the wall space allotted. These paintings, Van Gogh wrote, would give ‘un effet de couleur un peu varié’ [823/614b]. He arranged the work symmetrically: orchard-sunflowers-ivy-sunflowers-wheatfield, with the red vineyard hanging below, like a predella on a winged altar. Motifs relating to work in the fields thus surround and support the still lifes with, in the centre, the view of the park and bench, inviting the viewer to rest.

It is not known what became of Vincent's plan, whether it was carried out or not. There are no surviving photographs, and the contemporary criticism offers no clues. It can be assumed, however, that the artist's wishes were respected, at least to a certain extent. The exhibition catalogue lists the pictures in the order Van Gogh communicated them to Maus, and with the same titles:

19 The pictures are very likely: Orchard bloom with poplars in the foreground (F 516 JH 1685), April 1889, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen; F 454 JH 1647; Trees with ivy (F 609 JH 1693), 22 May 1889, present location unknown; F 456 JH 1561; Enclosed field with young wheat and rising sun (F 737 JH 1862), November 1889, formerly Princeton, Mrs J. Robert Oppenheimer; and The red vineyard (F 495 JH 1626), November 1888, Moscow, Pushkin Museum. The latter was bought by the brothers' friend Anna Boch from the exhibition.

‘Tournesols, Le lierre, Verger en fleurs (Arles), Champ de blé, soleil levant (Saint-Rémy), La Vigne rouge (Mont-Major).’ Nonetheless, it is now impossible to analyse the colour effects, not only because we have no idea which versions of the *Sunflowers* were shown, but also because two of the other four paintings are known only from black and white photographs. In general, though, it seems safe to say that for Van Gogh simply contrasting colours within one composition was not enough; part of his artistic strategy was that the paintings in combination should also relate to one another.

1890 to the First World War

Vincent died only six months after the opening of the Les Vingt exhibition in Brussels. In the aftermath, Theo initially sought to organise a memorial exhibition at Durand-Ruel’s, but his idea was rejected. There was no other choice but to hold the show in his own apartment. Theo, now himself already weakened by serious illness, asked Emile Bernard to help with the installation. The two men distributed around 100 pictures throughout the rooms, where they remained for several months, more or less ignored by the public. On 31 December 1890 the correspondent for the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Johan de Meester, reported that a small number of Dutch citizens had come together to admire Van Gogh's oeuvre ‘in the darkened rooms of an uninhabited apartment in Montmartre.’ Despite the fact that they were displayed in ‘an uncomfortable, cold space,’ the works on show made such an impression on the author that he hoped the artist's native country would soon take notice of one of its greatest sons.\(^{21}\)

As an ‘artist's artist,’ Van Gogh had had some influence on his contemporaries even during his lifetime. How well he was known in progressive circles is demonstrated by the fact that his death was followed by a rash of posthumous invitations to take part in exhibitions. Following Theo's demise, Johanna proved tireless in fulfilling these numerous requests.\(^{22}\) No exhibition of the European avant-garde could do without its share of Van Goghs.

The earliest surviving photograph of a Van Gogh installation dates from 1892 and shows the exhibition of the Association pour l'Art in Antwerp (fig. 3).\(^{23}\) The list of works in the catalogue does not correspond exactly to those illustrated: ‘feu Vincent Van Gogh 1. Fleurs, 2.Abricotier, 3. Tournesol, 4. Nuit étoilée (Rhône près d'Arles),

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21 *Algemeen Handelsblad* (31 December 1890).
Considering that exhibition makers at the time were generally unconcerned with issues of rhythm or dramatic presentation, this rather crowded arrangement was certainly not unusual. There seems to be no systematic organisation according to date, subject or colour.

24 The photograph shows one painting too few: the Café de nuit is missing. It is also uncertain if the small works to the right are drawings. Other photographs indicate that this seemingly arbitrary arrangement was not provisional, but rather represents the actual hanging.
In Van Gogh's native country, artists like Jan Toorop and R.N. Roland Holst, as well as the painter-critic Jan Veth, took up his cause. Roland Holst, for example, was responsible for an exhibition at the Kunstzaal Panorama in Amsterdam in 1892 which included 112 works. The manager of the gallery, Christiaan van Kesteren, sent Jo a floorplan to help her prepare the hanging. Holst was particularly concerned about the installation: he rejected the use of highly-decorated gold frames out of hand, and even borrowed the fabric that had been used in Antwerp to create an appropriate backdrop. Since not enough was available, he took up Henry van de Velde's offer to purchase more.

At the Kunstzaal Panorama the pictures were arranged primarily according to their dominant colours, the blue-toned ones on the left, the yellower ones on the right, with the orchard paintings in between. This exhibition was revolutionary in other ways, too: Holst divided the paintings according the places where Van Gogh had lived and worked. He found it far more important to give the year and location than to invent titles for the paintings. The care taken with the installation proved to be worth the effort. The exhibition was a success with both the critics and the public. The Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (or NRC) praised the choice of works and the arrangement, criticising only the lighting.

For the Parisian art scene, the retrospective held at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune (15-31 March 1901) was the first important Van Gogh event. 71 works were on display, among them - as later became known - several false attributions. Here, however, if one is to believe the correspondent of the NRC, the paintings had to hold their own in a ‘sloppy installation.’ Although this statement gives little real information it does demonstrate the critics' growing awareness of this important aspect of exhibitions.

The most influential of the early one-man shows was certainly the retrospective held at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1905. No fewer than 474 pictures were on view. Both the critics and the public appear to have been overwhelmed by this huge number. As with most of the other exhibitions at this stage, no photographs...
of the installation are known, although the review in *Onze Kunst* reveals that the organisers had carried out their work with exceptional care: ‘The exhibition itself was superbly arranged. The sensitive hanging, which everywhere took account of the decorative effect on the whole wall, was in excellent taste. The same can be said of the choice of frames, although the effect was somewhat spoiled by a few of the older ones, to which the depraved and severe air of the modern German galleries seemed to cling. The problem of installing the difficult long wall in the main gallery was brilliantly solved by a strong arrangement, with a glorious central image formed by the radiant blue-orange self-portrait with two amber-yellow sunflower still lifes at either side. This wall, containing Vincent's late work, the pictures in his *manièr claire*, gave off a brilliant shine, which was reflected, now more silvery and quiet, on the flanking and facing walls. When one considers the bathroom-like colour of the walls and the deathly black of the panelling then what has been achieved here is truly remarkable.’

As at the Panoramagallery show of 1892 the most important geographical stations in the artist's life established the hanging's connecting thread: Nuenen, Paris, Arles, Saint-Rémy, Auvers - an organisational principle still found in the Van Gogh Museum today. The separation of Arles and Saint-Rémy - which could have been joined col-

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31 W. Vogelsang, ‘Tentoonstelling Vincent van Gogh,’ *Onze Kunst* 4 (1905), no. 2, pp. 61-62: ‘De tentoonstelling zelve was voortreffelijk gearrangeerd. De verstandige manier van hangen, die overal ook met het decoratieve effect van geheele wanden rekende, verried een positieven geschoolden smaak evenals de keuze der lijsten, waar die niet door reeds bestaande, sterk naar de pervers-pikante atmosfeer van den modernen Duitschen kunsthandel riekende, exemplaren bedorven werd. De moeilijke opgave bv. om op de lange wand der ongenietbare grote zaal dragelijk te exposeeren, was door de krachtige inding met het blauw-oranje lichtende, door twee barnsteegene zonnebloemstukken geflankeerde zelfportret, als stralend middenstuk, prachtig opgelost. Van die wand, geheel behangen met stukken uit Vincent's lateren tijd, dien van de manièr claire, ging een machtige schittering uit, door de wanden terzijde en tegenover stiller zilverig gereflecteerd. Vooral ook, in aanmerking genomen de badkamerachtige tint der muren en het doodkisten-zwart van het houtwerk en de lambrisering, was wat hier bereikt was bewonderenswaardig.’ This article also appeared in French: ‘Exposition Vincent van Gogh,’ L’Art Flamand et Hollandais 9 (1905), no. 2, pp. 61-71, quotation on p. 64.
lectively under the rubric ‘Provence’ - particularly emphasised the *spiritus loci*. With the publication of the letters, which had already begun in 1893 with Emile Bernard's series of articles in the *Mercure de France*, Van Gogh's life and work were increasingly seen as one. In 1905, the artist was transformed into an historical figure, and this metamorphosis was given expression in the Stedelijk's installation. Not only did many younger artists now recognise him as a father figure, the exhibition also marked his break-through with the general public and was thus extremely significant for the future.

In its show of over 100 works, the so-called ‘Internationale Kunstaustellung des Sonderbundes Westdeutscher Kunstfreunde und Künstler zu Köln 1912’ stressed Van Gogh's role as a pioneer of the modernist movement (fig. 4). Here, at perhaps the most important exhibition of contemporary art to take place on the eve of the First World War - where cosmopolitanism was mixed with dangerous elements of nationalism - Van Gogh was forced to play the role of mediator between the French and German ‘spirit.’ This conflict was typical of the period and of Expressionism in particular, a movement that had just passed its zenith and that looked to Van Gogh for historical legitimation.

The installation broke new ground, and was meant to give form to a new way of thinking. Five rooms were devoted to Van Gogh, four of them located on the building's middle axis, with a central, octagonal gallery around which the rest of modern art circled as around a fixed pole. The fifth room was placed in the middle of the German and Scandinavian sections - rather than near Gauguin and Cézanne - as if to demonstrate the Dutchman's affinities with the Germanic world.

All the rooms were painted white, so that the pictures - as the *Kölnische Zeitung* wrote on 24 May - were given ‘a uniform background.’ In this way, contemporary democratic ideals were applied to art. The paintings were mostly hung in a single row, with the occasional work placed above. The bottom edges were aligned, a not entirely new principle probably dating from the Salon era when a dado had determined the wall's lowest perimeter. Even without panelling, this style remained current until the late 1920s (and sometimes even into the 50s) when pictures began to be hung at


33 Ibid. p. 45. The cataloge also recommended visiting the rooms in a certain order.
average eye-level. As in Amsterdam in 1905, the paintings were hung rhythmically and in a symmetrical arrangement.\textsuperscript{34}

One year later, the legendary Armory Show introduced the New York public to the European avant-garde.


\textit{Van Gogh Museum Journal 1999}
With only 18 works, Van Gogh was much less strongly represented here than in Cologne, although it should be noted that a large number of these loans already came from American private collections. The exhibition was organised and installed with a speed that can hardly be imagined today: 1,300 works were hung in the space of only two days. Artists were given more or less isolated stands. In New York, Van Gogh shared space with Cézanne; at the exhibition's second venue - the Art Institute of Chicago - Gauguin was added, thus returning the artist to the French context. We have photographs only of this latter exhibit, which show the pictures hung close together in two rows (fig. 5).

The Art Institute installation appears to have had no internal or decorative scheme; the same was true of the 1914 exhibition in Antwerp ‘Kunst van heden’ (fig. 6). Here, too, Van Gogh played a major role, with dozens of paintings on display. From the surviving photograph of the hanging there appears to be no system and no relationship between the individual pictures. Interesting, however, is the group of self-portraits at the right, which are arranged as a kind of altar. Here, too, we find the same emotionalism as in Amsterdam and Cologne, with the cult around Van Gogh's person being reinforced by the installation.

**From avant-garde artist to Old Master**

The exhibition-makers of the 1920s and 30s continued in the tradition of their predecessors. In the wake of the Suprematists and Marcel Duchamp innovation would have been difficult, if not impossible, and, with the exception of their revolutionary experiments, ‘linear’ presentation (to borrow Germano Celant's term) remained standard. According to Celant, this type of hanging stresses the aura of the original and replaced the ‘quantitative method’ of the second half of the 19th century. One possible exception may have been the Van Gogh installations.

There were few large-scale Van Gogh retrospectives during the interwar period. The first such notable event was the exhibition ‘Van Gogh en zijn tijdgenoten,’ which took place at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1930 (fig. 7). According to the

keynote speaker, the head of the municipal council on culture, Polak, the show was meant as compensation for the artist, who had remained unrecognised during his lifetime.\textsuperscript{37} What little evidence we have suggests that the works were aligned along their bottom edges and hung against light-coloured walls. The distance between the works was not much greater than the breadth of two frames. As the German critic Walter Cohen reported, the Van Gogh's pictures were positively ‘boxed in by the work of his artistic ancestors and contemporaries,’ the viewer being offered almost too much of a good thing. In his review, he spoke of ‘the noble Dutch penchant for completeness,’ which in this case resulted in the same feeling of satiety caused by ‘almost every Dutch meal.’ On the other hand, ‘since the aim was to reveal both the source and effect of Vincent's art,’ this type of extensive presentation was probably the most appropriate. Cohen also looked back over the history of Van Gogh exhibitions, reminiscing on the now ‘historical’ Sonderbund show of 1912. In contrast to earlier events, the viewer in Amsterdam saw not only the famous works of Vincent's last four years, but also the ‘terribly heavy and labourious [paintings] of his Dutch-Belgian period.’ These pictures, however, did nothing but arouse the critic's pity.\textsuperscript{38}

**Paris, 1937**

During the 1937 Exposition Universelle in Paris a portion of the new Palais de Tokyo was devoted to an largescale Van Gogh retrospective (figs. 8 and 9). The hanging, wall colour and framing were controversial, but it was the extra room containing documents, newspaper clippings, photographs of the places Van Gogh had worked (taken by John Rewald\textsuperscript{39}), and panels with texts pertaining to the painter's life and philosophy which provoked the fiercest

\textsuperscript{37} Quoted after *Algemeen Handelsblad* (7 September 1930).
\textsuperscript{39} John Rewald had already begun taking photographs in Provence in 1933 in the context of his research on Cézanne; see Anne de Margerie (ed.), *Les sites cézanniens du Pays d'Aix: Hommage à John Rewald*, Paris 1996. He resued the Van Gogh photographs in his article ‘The artist and the land,’ published in *Van Gogh: an Art News picture book for the exhibition at the City Museum of St. Louis, the Toledo Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, New York 1953, pp. 23-32. An interesting reversal of circumstances can be seen in Auvers-sur-Oise today, where the local tourist office has set up weatherproof signboards with reproductions of Van Gogh's paintings depicting the town.
response. These reactions, both positive and negative, reflected not only current museological debates, but also the status Van Gogh had now achieved among both specialists and the general public.  

The facts are simple enough: the exhibition was installed in the right wing of the new museum for modern art, while the left wing was occupied by an overview of art in France since the Middle Ages. Clearly, the Dutchman Van Gogh could not be included in this show; nonetheless, he was considered a quintessential representative of French art and so was given his own rooms. In addition, the exhibition was part of a trilogy designed to acquaint the visitor with the latest ideas in museology: the Van Gogh show exemplified the art museum, the ‘French theatre in the Middle Ages’ the historical museum, and the ‘Peasant dwelling in France’ the ethnological museum. The aim of
this enterprise was to answer a number of questions pertaining to the meaning and purpose of museums in general and to their ideal target group - the cultivated elite, the uneducated masses, or both.

Over the years, René Huyghe, curator of paintings at the Louvre and spiritus rector of the Van Gogh exhibition, had been responsible for various museological innovations, some of which he had been forced to eloquently defend. For the 1937 show he painted the walls light green and gave all the pictures of the French period uniform white frames. The different groups of works were organised by theme: ‘L'homme’; paintings; still lifes and nudes; technical development; and drawings.

‘An example of a modern museum installation (De Tijd); ‘Uproar surrounding white frames [...] (De Telegraaf); “An extraordinary installation” (Het Vaderland); “New exhibition style [...]” (Het Nationale Dagblad) - judging by these headlines in the Dutch press, the exhibition organisers had certainly succeeded in one thing: in all the reviews and correspondents’ reports the subject of the installation far outweighed any discussion of the works themselves. On 13 August, Beaux-Arts magazine, published by George Wildenstein, even started a survey among its readers, requesting their opinions on the show. They were asked what they thought of the colour of the walls and the frames; whether it was permissible to display items that usually appeared only in magazine articles; whether source documents should be exhibited separately; if they thought the arrangements were a success; and if they believed a work of art should be admired alone or, on the contrary, provided with explanations and comparisons.

As one might expect, there were already strong disagreements about the colours of the walls and frames. After much experimentation, Huyghe had chosen the green - variously described as ‘tendre,’ ‘vert d'eau,’ ‘ton bleu vert,’ and even as ‘l'azur vert des matinées d'Arles’ - because it harmonised with the majority of the paintings. Readers' opinions ranged from ‘désastreuse’ to ‘agréable’ to ‘excellente.’ Some found coloured walls to be a bad idea in general, as they had a tendency to overpower the works of art. The tenor was similar when it came to the white frames. For many viewers, this desire for unity appeared artificial - despite the fact that Huyghe had sought to illustrate the problem of framing by hanging three differently-framed reproductions in the didactic section, and had based his choice on Van Gogh's own wishes. This was thus undoubtedly the first ‘historically correct’ Van Gogh exhibition, but it failed to convince everyone. Some readers felt that the artist's desires should

41 In addition to Huyghe, the art historians Michel Florissoone and John Rewald, the architect M.J.Ch. Moreaux and the documentalist M. Mazenod were involved in the Van Gogh project's realistation.
play no role in the display, as today's exhibition spaces were different from those of the past; another thought artists were fundamentally incapable of framing their works correctly; and a third even went so far as to declare that every frame was an ‘accessoire incompatible à toute oeuvre d'art peinte.’

The debate was still more heated when it came to the documents and wall texts. Huyghe pointed out (in vain) that this room had been conceived purely as an experiment, and that in four of the five rooms the paintings could be enjoyed undisturbed; furthermore, those with no interest in the sources and photographs were in no way obliged to look at them.

The arguments against Huyghe were naturally ideologically tainted. Many critics, among them Waldemar George, compared his pedagogical method to that of the Soviets (‘sauce marxiste’) and even the Fascists. The aged painter Jacques-Emile Blanché referred to it as ‘la méthode allemande,’ although it is not clear if he was thinking of Hitler's ‘degenerate art’ exhibitions or the new museum education system developed by Alexander Dörner, himself a victim of Nazi persecution.42

At the heart of this discussion lay the fundamental question of whether the museum could - and should - take

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over the role of schools and libraries, a notion that filled most readers with horror. According to them, future generations did not expect to find the artist's words and deeds in the museum, but simply his masterpieces.\textsuperscript{43} The judgements about the installation thus depended strongly on the readers' conception of whom the museum was supposed to serve. Huyghe made no secret of his conviction that art should be accessible to the widest possible audience. For him, true understanding began not with reading about art, but with curiosity, and curiosity needed to be stimulated: ‘Can quality cope with quantity? That is the question of Democracy in general, and it now appears to be that of museums as well.’\textsuperscript{44} Some of his adversaries even went so far as to generally denounce Huyghe's ideal of education for the masses - that ‘monstre anonyme,’ as the Belgian critic Paul Fierens called them.\textsuperscript{45}

Since the debate was limited to experts and the interested public we will never know what the curator's ‘target group’ actually thought of the show. While Huyghe himself was moved by the patience with which spectators studied the textual material, another commentator noted just the opposite in a letter published in Beaux-Arts on 17 September: ‘Just look at the visitor. He decipher the hieroglyphs of the first panel with difficulty, peruses the second distractedly, and does not even bother to stop at the third.’

In the midst of the uproar Van Gogh and his oeuvre were practically forgotten. Paul Fierens complained that the artist had been made into a kind of guinea pig for Huyghe's experiments. However, the ‘experiment’ had already set a development in motion that could not be stopped. In Huyghe's opinion, museums could no longer

\textsuperscript{43} One opponent stated that Van Gogh himself would have so disapproved of this idea that he would have been inspired to cut off his other ear [sic] in protest. As an original alternative to the texts, one respondent suggested the reconstruction of the artist's bedroom in Arles - ‘combien plus émouvante, évocatrice.’

\textsuperscript{44} René Huyghe, ‘Querelles muséographiques,’ Micromégas 2 (10 October 1937), p. 1.

simply concentrate on collection-building and preservation: they had an obligation to mediate and educate. And the future was to prove him right.

**The postwar period**

In the 1957 Paris exhibition, artworks and documentation were clearly separated. The visitor could chose between rapt contemplation and explanation, empathy and insight, and these two approaches were meant to complement one another. The cultural-historical approach, which sought to place the once-autonomous work of art in an appropriate
context, required a change in exhibition aesthetics that is not to be underestimated. In any case, curators now had a greater freedom of choice.

Following the Second World War the public was hungry for pictures. The Stedelijk Museum, where Van Gogh's paintings had been on display from 1930 to the outbreak of hostilities, could finally put them on view again. An exhibition of 153 works opened already in 1945; it was promoted as a ‘documentary exhibition,’ and the installation certainly did justice to this claim. In contrast to Paris in 1937, photographs and paintings were shown together; the museum was so proud of this arrangement that it reproduced a photograph of the installation in the accompanying catalogue.46

In the years that followed, the interest in Van Gogh increased both steadily and rapidly. In the wake of Neue Sachlichkeit and the international ‘classical’ revival of the 1920s, the artists of the Ecole de Paris and ‘informel’ movements were now busy reintroducing the art-loving public to strong colour and gestural painting. In 1947 the Tate Gallery showed 178 Van Goghs, and in 1949 158 works travelled to New York and Chicago. Other exhibitions took place in Sweden, Norway, Great Britain, Belgium and France, and in 1953 the Kröller-Müller Museum and the Stedelijk both organised large-scale retrospectives celebrating the centenary of the artist's birth. The film Lust for life, based on Irving Stone's novel of 1934 and released in 1956, served to cement the connection between Van Gogh's life and work - as well as the public's expectations.

The collection of the Belgian art historian and archivist Mark Edo Tralbaut (1902-1976), which had already formed the basis for the documentation at the 1945 Amsterdam exhibition, was again integrated into a showing at the Villa Hügel in Essen in 1957 (fig. 10). In his introduction to the catalogue, Tralbaut justified his strategy with recent exhibition history. Following the war, art had begun to

travel to the people, an ‘encouraging result’ of cultural progress: ‘Once interest in everything the geniuses of painting and sculpture have given mankind has been awakened, it should be deepened systematically, so as to lead to a more complete understanding of the works admired. We do not believe that the emotions aroused by initial contact - that is, love at first sight! - are enough.’ Regarding Van Gogh specifically, Tralbaut continued: ‘Given today's state of general admiration, the broad masses should be regarded as mature enough to see this art not only from its emotional side, but from other points of view as well. More than any other virtuoso of the palette and pencil, Vincent [is] [...] fated to become the protagonist of educational exhibitions.’

The desire to explain Van Gogh's mysterious, fascinating oeuvre did not, however, dominate presentations everywhere. The exact opposite approach was taken at the first Japanese retrospective, held in Tokyo in 1958. 130 works from the Kröller-Müller Museum were put on display. The illustrated magazine *Wereldkroniek* wrote about the transportation and installation as if reporting on an invasion, and indeed the show was to take the country by storm (fig. 11). For the first time, the Japanese got a closer look at the work of an artist who had sought to internalize their culture like no other before him. The curatorial ‘strategy’ eschewed all attempts at interpretation: the rooms were darkened and the pictures illuminated only by spotlights. The gloom created an almost sacred atmosphere, while the accent lighting not only isolated the pictures from one another, but also made them glow like jewels. This type of dramatic presentation later became standard in the exhibition of archaeological treasures.

**The Van Gogh Museum**

A short time later, in 1960, the Vincent van Gogh Foundation was established. In these years Theo's son, the engineer Vincent Willem van Gogh, began negotiations with the Dutch state for the creation of a museum to house the work of his uncle and his own father's collection. It seems to have been the engineer's wish that the museum be built by Gerrit Rietveld, the ‘Grand Old Man’ of the De Stijl movement. The reasons behind this choice are not precisely known. In addition to the fact that Rietveld was a renowned architect who, furthermore, had already put his stamp on the Kröller-Müller Museum, the ideas of Willem Sandberg, then director of the Stedelijk,
must also have played an important role. The paintings of Van Gogh certainly had a place in his conception of the museum as a light, open venue for the presentation of modern art. In any case, the selection of Rietveld was a declaration of belief in classical modernism, and a recognition of the importance of the museum and its patron.

The hopes placed in Rietveld were to be realised, although not by the architect himself, who only lived long enough to make the first designs. Although a permanent institution cannot really be compared with temporary exhibitions, it is nonetheless interesting to examine the Van Gogh Museum in the context of this article. As the shows in Essen and Tokyo had demonstrated, both the State as patron and the Vincent van Gogh Foundation as owner could choose among various presentational strategies. Moreover, the new museum was more or less obliged to take a position in the current museum debate, not only architecturally, but in terms of content as well. Midway between the radically educational approach and the museum as sanctuary, when it opened in 1973 the Van Gogh Museum presented

The Van Gogh Museum in 1973 itself in a completely new and unprecedented way. It attested not only to the artist as the father of the avant-garde, but also to the notion of the museum as a location available to everyone, where it was possible to wander freely from one experience to the next (fig. 12).

Critics went so far as to refer to the Van Gogh Museum as a ‘turning point in museum design’; its accessibility and popular appeal even led them to call it a ‘non-museum.’ The lack of rooms, doors and the customary museum furnishing, as well as the gleaming white of the interior, were the building's most notable characteristics; the absence of gold frames completed the installation, putting Van Gogh's palette in the proper - that is, bright - light, and freeing the pictures from all distractions. Here, too, we may note the influence of contemporary art, particularly the ‘colour fields,’ ‘hard edges’ and ‘white cubes’ of American galleries, which by now had also reached the Stedelijk Museum next door. A sober almost monastic spirit pervaded the architecture, and Rielveld's design came to
express the notion of the museum as a place for contemplation: as in a cloister, spectators wandered through the various floors around a square, open atrium.

Fashions in museum presentation have not passed the Van Gogh Museum by in the two and a half decades since its opening. In the beginning, Vincent's paintings were strictly separated from those of his friends and colleagues. Due not only to the number of works but also to the presentation, he was the pole around which all the others circled - as at the Sonderbund exhibition in 1912. Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec and Bernard were reduced to the status of mere ‘contemporaries,’ whose role was to underline Van Gogh's genius and his position as the archetypal modern artist. This notion was strongly criticised even at the time, with young artists expressing their disapproval of Van Gogh's new cult status in more or less original ways.

The museum's early years were thus marked by a search for an identity and social function. In an effort to dispel the notion that the institution was nothing but a mausoleum, a programme of exhibitions was developed which ranged from Diane Arbus in 1975 to ‘The image of women in the graphic arts of the GDR’ (1976), to the World Press Photo shows held between 1974 and 1979. These activities had nothing to do with the collection and inevitably led to conflicts regarding the museum's policy, conflicts which were regularly, but usually only briefly, solved by the appointment of a new director. Modifications to the presentation of the permanent collection were rare in these otherwise so volatile times, and slowly but surely the Van Gogh Museum threatened to fall behind international developments.

In 1986 the Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science asked Ronald de Leeuw, curator of exhibitions at the (former) Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, to become director of the Van Gogh Museum. With both caution and persistence, De Leeuw introduced changes that were to have an important effect on the display of the permanent collection. Van Gogh's paintings were to maintain their central position, but were to be more firmly embedded in the art of his time. Predecessors, contemporaries and followers were freed of the Van Gogh straitjacket. An active exhibitions and acquisitions policy brought the work of artists and movements into the museum which had no apparent relationship to the institution's namesake. These efforts led, among other things, to a rediscovery of Van Gogh as an artist of the 19th century.

This historicising approach, which was introduced with the opening of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris in 1986, unintentionally allied ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ art historians. For the latter, rehabilitated academic paintings were documents of an era - their quality was unimportant - while the former could now publicly express their admiration for artists who had been banned from museum walls for decades. One reason for this development may well have been that the avant-garde itself had now become historical and no longer needed father-figures to justify its actions. Van Gogh could now leave this role behind, closing this chapter in the reception of his work.


52 It is no accident that it was at just this time that the history of this reception also became an object of study; see note 1. 1978 saw the publication of Griselda Pollock and Fred Orton's Vincent van Gogh: artist of his time, a book aimed at the general public which, simultaneously, sought to break with the myths and legends about the artist.
This paradigm shift was not without consequences for the Van Gogh Museum, a space for confronting original works of art. Had the museum been conceived a decade later, there is no doubt it would have looked completely different, although perhaps not better. One of the architecture's best characteristics is that it permits the realisation of a variety of museological concepts, and it remains to be seen whether the more playful museum buildings of the 1980s and 90s will withstand changes in taste equally well. With great foresight, Vincent Willem van Gogh factored in the possibility of change: ‘Oh well, this is how we have installed it now, but in 25 years people may have completely different ideas.’

The museum's rediscovery of the 19th century, then, was to take place in - of all places - Rietveld's cement cube. One of the first steps, taken already at the beginning of the 1980s, was to remove the simple protective frames given Van Gogh's paintings during the war and replace

them with gilded examples. Since 1987 efforts have been made to tone down the dominating white of the walls, now felt to be too abstract and cold. In the beginning this was achieved by placing the paintings against a single dark strip of colour (fig. 13), which certainly helped improve the luminosity of the works.\textsuperscript{54}

In the last two decades, the presentation of Van Gogh's paintings outside the Amsterdam museum has changed as well. As the artist's popularity grew, so too did conservational concerns; these came to play an increasingly central role in various permanent collections, with the result that pictures were lent less and less frequently. Large-scale retrospectives hardly seemed possible anymore. As early as 1957 in Essen many had already come to the conclusion that this was probably the last such occasion.

One solution to this problem was to concentrate exhibitions on a specific period or group of works. Thematic selections and in-depth scholarship also helped draw attention back to Van Gogh the artist, and to a certain extent to free his work from the burden of myth. Excellent examples include ‘Van Gogh in Arles’ (1984) and ‘Van Gogh in Saint-Rémy and Auvers’ (1986), both at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and ‘Van Gogh à Paris,’ held at the Grand Palais in 1988 (fig. 14). The latter, curated by Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, adopted quite different policies for the catalogue and exhibition. While the catalogue separated Van Gogh's work from that of his contemporaries, in the show itself they were hung side by side. The arrangements were based on style, topography and iconography. The goal was to create a dialogue between the participating artists, very much in Vincent's spirit.\textsuperscript{55}

1990 marked the centenary of Van Gogh's death and thus offered the opportunity for another retrospective. The Van Gogh Museum and the Kröller-Müller Museum joined forces, with paintings on view in Amsterdam and drawings in Otterlo. In Amsterdam, the exhibition was a pretext for a reinstallation of the museum's first floor. The renowned interior architect Marijke van der Wijst was asked to advise on the designs. One of the major issues was the expected number of visitors. Factors such as exhaustion and spectators' flagging concentration were taken into


\textsuperscript{55} Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov was kind enough to impart this information to me in a letter of 9 April 1998.
consideration, with the result that the paintings were hung closer together towards the end of the exhibition than at the beginning.\textsuperscript{56} By this time crowds had become a persistent problem: the museum had been conceived for only 60,000

\textsuperscript{56} Oral communication from the former director of the Van Gogh Museum, Ronald de Leeuw.

\textit{Van Gogh Museum Journal 1999}
visitors per year but now had to deal with ten times as many. Van der Wijst's structural additions were minimal: the openness of the first floor was slightly reduced, and tourists were gently encouraged to take a specific route. The architectural additions became 'permanent’ features following the show’s closure.

Van der Wijst's most radical intervention had been the use of veneered wooden walls (fig. 15). These had no historical justification and were felt to be foreign bodies in Rietveld's building; they were therefore removed only a few years later. Under the direction of yet another interior designer, Peter Sas, the division of the various floors was further accentuated. Walls were installed, giving the museum rooms and cabinets. The parquet floors that replaced the worn wall-to-wall carpeting proved to be particularly beneficial, the reflections thus added bringing a welcome improvement to the lighting conditions. In addition to practical advantages, the new flooring gives the building a more noble appearance: it has become a bit more ‘classical’ without, however, changing the overall architectural concept.

The present

The construction of the new exhibition wing and the renovation of the Rietveld building have necessitated renewed reflection on the presentation of Van Gogh in the Van Gogh Museum. The experiences of the last eight years have helped formulate the criteria which condition the present and future. Looking back, the extent to which the presentation of Van Gogh's oeuvre was affected by its reception has become clear. With an increase in historical awareness, Van Gogh has developed from father of the avant-garde to an artist who is more and more understood as a man of his time. Although during his life the quality of his works was recognised by only a handful of connoisseurs, today he is assured the admiration of the entire world. The desire to use him to justify artistic positions of any kind has thus been on the wane for several decades

fig. 14
The ‘Van Gogh in Arles’ exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1984
now. If nothing else, this means that the painter's 'unconditional modernity' is no longer the determining factor in the presentation of his work. However, a precise reconstruction of an historical presentation would require decisions that could be both misleading and distorting. For one thing, we know far too little about the past - to say nothing of the banal fact that colours and lighting conditions have long since undergone more or less permanent changes. Moreover, the museum is about the last place Van Gogh would have thought of as a setting for his paintings. The display of his works in a public institution can thus never be anything but interpretation. In addition, it is now clear that an artist's intentions in no way end at the edge of the canvas, but include framing, hanging and environment - something many museums are now increasingly taking into consideration. An art history that takes the word 'history' seriously cannot - and must not - avoid dealing with issues of intention.

A conscious understanding of the possibilities and limits of the display medium gives today's curator both new freedom and confronts him with old restraints. For the Van Gogh Museum, certain lessons have emerged from the history of the presentation of Vincent's oeuvre: the hanging should preserve the dignity of the artworks, increase their significance, and not put them at risk in any way. The moment of a picture's creation can be evoked through historically responsible supporting material, and the sensible and comprehensible arrangement of other works. Frames and wall colours have no value in themselves, but result from this point of view. The wishes and expectations of the visitor are to be taken into consideration, particularly the need for good lighting and factual information. The emotional character a museum visit may have - certainly in the case of Van Gogh - should never be quashed by an overly clinical presentation.

In concrete terms, this means that the first floor of the museum continues to be devoted to Van Gogh; here the visitor can trace his stylistic development. The chronological hanging and division according to the topographical stations of the artist's career have also been preserved, as they offer important points of reference and the opportunity for the viewer to pause and reflect. The various phases announced by Van Gogh's change of location are briefly explained, to help make the visitor aware of artistic shifts and their possible causes. As before, works that are assumed or known to belong together remain grouped. The hanging marks the highlights as such, and the visitor's empathy and understanding are further stimulated by the exhibition of objects from among Van Gogh's possessions in the Study area.
Relatively new is that Van Gogh's paintings are no longer shown only in isolation on the first floor and in the study collection, but are also hung amidst those of the realists, impressionists and post-impressionists (fig. 16). The aim
of these arrangements is to increase the viewer's insight into the works on display, whether by Van Gogh or his predecessors and contemporaries. They stress stylistic or thematic similarities, or underline differences. In this way, and without too much textual explanation, the public will come to a better understanding of the pictures, one which we hope goes beyond the clichés. Here lie the roots of the Van Gogh Museum's new role as a museum of the 19th century, a role which does justice to its namesake precisely by placing him in the context of the art of his time.

Like Van Gogh's reception, opinions about what is desirable and sensible will naturally be subject to further change. Consciously or not, art institutions will adapt to these new demands, whatever they may be. In the relatively short history of museums no one perfect system has yet to be discovered, and probably never will be. Van Gogh, too, agonised over the presentation of works of art. Confronted with the choice between cutting out a series of illustrations from *The Graphic* or leaving them intact, he wrote to his friend Anthon van Rappard in 1883: ‘You'll understand that I'm of two minds about this question. If I cut out and mount the pages they'll look better and I can organise them by artist. But then I'm neglecting the text, which is useful in case I want to look something up [...]’ [306/R24]. It is comforting to know that Van Gogh himself suffered the daily dilemma of the museum curator, who is forced to choose between presenting works of art as autonomous or placing them within their historical context.
fig. 1
Gustave Courbet, *Hanging roe deer*, 1858, The Hague, Museum Mesdag
The painter as prey: Courbet's *Hanging roe deer* in the Museum Mesdag

*Fred Leeman*

In the Museum Mesdag in The Hague hangs Gustave Courbet's *Hanging roe deer* (fig. 1), perhaps the most beautiful painting by this great French realist in the Netherlands. Hunting scenes occupy an important place in Courbet's oeuvre. The *Hanging roe deer* is closely related to the artist's first large hunting scene, *The quarry: deer hunt in the forests of the Great Jura*, which he submitted to the Salon of 1857 (fig. 2). *Hanging roe deer* appears to be a preparatory study for this painting. However, the relationship between the two is considerably more complicated and casts an interesting light on Courbet's working method.

The critics were not particularly enthusiastic about Courbet's new hunt pictures. Both his supporters and detractors had fundamental objections to them, although they appreciated the way they were painted. And yet these subjects remained part of Courbet's repertoire for more than ten years. This was undoubtedly due in part to the fact that they sold well, although this cannot sufficiently explain their significance for the artist - he was far too independent-minded for that. Hunting scenes enabled him to emphasise certain qualities of his artistry that he could not in other genres.

'It would appear that I have been very successful at the exhibition this year,' Courbet wrote on 23 June 1857 from Montpellier. He was referring to the Paris Salon where six of his paintings were on view. The most famous of these - and the most controversial - was undoubtedly the *Young ladies on the banks of the Seine* (Paris, Musée du Petit Palais). But the other two important, large canvases were hunting scenes: *The quarry* and *Exhausted doe in the snow (Jura)* (fig. 3). Both these scenes are full of pathos, showing vulnerable, wild animals entirely at the mercy of their attackers. In a snow-covered landscape, a hunted doe lies breathless on the ground while, in the background, the hounds come running to deliver the final blow; in *The quarry*, the slaughtered roe deer is shown hanging by its hind leg from a tree while, under the watchful eye of the hunter, the hounds wait to be thrown the entrails. In the background, a boy blows a signal on a horn.

These two works form the beginning of a series that continued until the end of the 1860s and which comprised a number of large Salon paintings, such as *Spring rutting: the battle of the stags* (fig. 4) and *L'hallali* (Musée de Besançon). These pictures were extremely important to Courbet, although they have been rather neglected since. The reasons for this are open to question, but it may be interesting to ask why Courbet came upon the subject of the hunt and what these works might have meant to him.  

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2 Klaus Herding has already called attention to the anarchistic qualities in Courbet's love of the hunt, and discussed the suffering of the hunter's prey as a metaphor for political persecution, with which the painter could have identified; see Klaus Herding, 'Equality and authority in Courbet's landscape painting,' in *Courbet: to venture independence*, New Haven & London 1991, pp. 84-88. See also Klaus-Peter Schuster's entries in exhib. cat. *Courbet und Deutschland*, Hamburg (Hamburger Kunsthalle) & Frankfurt/a.M. (Städelisches Kunstinstutit) 1978-79, nos. 247-54. Michael Fried (Courbet's Realism, Chicago & London 1990) has also analysed *La curée* as an allegorical self-portrait of the artist. His interpretation...
First and foremost, Courbet's hunting scenes were based on his own tangible experiences: the artist was a fanatical hunter. He regularly ventured into the Jura forest near his birthplace with his hunting comrades, not only in his youth, but whenever he visited the region. Hunting gave Courbet a great deal of pleasure, and he especially delighted in physical exertion in the land of his roots. He frequently wrote about these hunting parties in letters to his friends, and they contributed to the image of the virile, all-rounder he liked to project. However, his identification with the figure of the hunter went still further: in this ideal role he could personify his own rejection of convention. To him, he was a ‘man with an independent spirit’; he was free. Courbet expressed his intensely romantic feelings for nature in his statements regarding the hunter: ‘he is a wounded soul, with a heart whose languor is fostered by the vague and the melancholy of the forests.’

For Courbet this freedom and independence was closely associated with a challenge to authority. Although it was illegal, he repeatedly went hunting in winter and he was once even arrested by the *gendarmerie* and subjected to a large fine. Many of his scenes, such as the *Exhausted doe* (fig. 3), show hunters in the snow. Based on this painting, the critic Maxime de Camp felt certain that the painter had never hunted in his life; after all, hunting in the snow had been outlawed since 3 May 1844. He also thought one could easily see that the scene was ‘pure fantasy.’ By claiming that the paintings were not realistic, the critic was attempting to deliver a severe blow to Courbet's art. This raises the question of how realistic these paintings actually are and, by implication, how they relate to the artist's own realist aims at this time, around 1860.

Courbet placed himself at the heart of *The quarry* (fig. 2), standing model for the shady-looking hunter leaning with folded arms and downcast eyes against a tree. Although he is the central feature of the composition, he performs the part with a decidedly low profile. It is the figures surrounding him that demand attention: the roe deer; the hesitant hounds as they approach; the minute horn blower with his red vest. Each has been painted with a great deal of emphasis, both in terms of colour and brushwork. The background of woods is rendered schematically, mainly using a palette knife. Despite our admiration for the powerful execution of each individual element, the whole produces a slight feeling of alienation.
It is as if each of these parts has been conceived independently; scale and light seem not so much to follow an overall plan as to have been formulated as the need arose. This lack of perspective and correct proportions was a constant theme in the criticism of Courbet's work. Théophile Gautier praised the artist's ‘exécution,’ but spoke of his insufficient ‘feeling for proportion and ground distances’; Edmond About wrote of his ‘maladresses de perspective.’ Only the painter-critic Zacharie Astruc, the defender of Manet, was able to appreciate these presumed ineptitudes. He argued astutely that ‘no superior human endeavour’ could exist without such ‘imperfections.’ (Horace: ‘[...] sometimes even excellent Homer nods.’) However, it never occurred to any of these critics that Courbet might not have been at all interested in linking his figures and groups ‘properly.’ After all, every graceful arrangement presumed the artist's intervention and is thus an unavoidable form of contrivance. This rejection of artifice had a social and political significance. When one of Courbet's pupils expressed a desire to depict a beautiful view, the master roared with

7 Théophile Gautier, ‘Salon de 1857,’ L’Artiste 3 (September 1857), p. 34.
8 Edmond About, Nos artistes au salon de 1857, Paris 1858, p. 152.
9 Zacharie Astruc, Le Salon intime: exposition au Boulevard des Italiens, Paris 1860, p. 64.
laughter. The student, he said, reminded him of ‘that poor Baudelaire,’ who had once wanted to show him a beautiful sunset at an exquisite location: ‘How bourgeois! What are views exactly? Do they really exist?’

The innocence of an event as it is visually perceived is lost in the selection of picturesque elements. It becomes a theatrical arrangement, constructed by the painter to oblige the spectator, but which nonetheless seeks to give the impression that the scene took place the way it is depicted and no other. Just as using the palette knife to spread colour leaves much to chance, and therefore constantly reminds the viewer that what he is looking at is paint, collage can be used to signal that what is shown is inevitably an arrangement - albeit one that is as accidental as possible. The configured elements are indeed derived from reality, but the whole has been subjected to the will of the artist. An awkward composition, in any case, can give the illusion that the design is not premeditated. In his famous open letter ‘Aux jeunes artistes de Paris,’ published in the Journal de Dimanche, Courbet argued that ‘painting is essentially a concrete art and consists only in the representation of real and existing things. It is an entirely physical language that uses for words all visible objects; an abstract object, not visible, nonexistent, is not of the domain

10 Quoted after Charles Léger, Courbet, Paris 1929, p. 191: ‘Était-il assez bourgeois, hein! Qu'est-ce que des point de vue? Est-ce qu’il existe des points de vue?’
of painting. Imagination in art consists in knowing how to find the most complete expression of an existing thing, but never in conjecturing or creating the thing itself."

This notion can, of course, be well applied to landscape, still lifes and portraits. However, when it comes to figural works, it is very difficult to avoid composition and to rein in the imagination. Courbet's large figure pieces from the 1850s, such as The stonebreakers (destroyed), The painter's studio (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) and A burial at Ornans (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), also consist of juxtapositions of figures that lack dramatic concentration. Although these works were painted in the format of history paintings, the artist avoided all the visual rhetoric usually associated with the genre - composition, choice of moment, expressive body language and revealing facial expression. In terms of this avoidance of the theatrical, Courbet's hunting scenes are in some respects an exception.

As if sensing that something else was at stake in these hunt pieces than in his earlier large canvases, Courbet often emphasised the trouble he had taken in trying to make these monumental works as realistic as possible. His Battle of the stags (fig. 4), for example, was based on rutting scenes he had seen a few years earlier in Wiesbaden and Bad Homburg. 'I am completely sure of their movements,' he wrote and hastened to explain how strong these animals were, even though no muscles show on the surface. This was the terrain he regarded as his own, 'a fact that belongs to me,' and the paintings were to form a series intended for hunters. He added confidently that these pictures brought something entirely new to the history of art: 'they know no equal, either in tradition, or in modern times.' These dramatic tableaux were completely realistic because 'they [did] not contain a grain of idealism.' On the contrary, they stood out through their observed precision: 'in their quality they

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are as precise as a mathematical sum." However, deer are not inclined to pose in their natural habitat in the positions desired by the painter. For the final rendering of the *Battle of the stags*, executed in Frankfurt, he had to turn to two stuffed

12 *Correspondence*, cit. (note 1), pp. 174-75, letter to Francis Wey, Ornans, 20 April 1861.
deer. His admiration for the taxidermist was considerable: 'this is nature caught in the act.'

Because their performance was entirely natural, these deer were ideal actors for Courbet. They embodied everything that made history painting exciting - action, passion, violence - without the artist having to invent anything. The theatricality of history painting - a composition arranged to affect the viewer in a certain way - was thus avoided. The picture was simply a combination of animals and landscape, albeit that the German deer are situated in a spring forest in the Jura. But even here Courbet was able to appeal to realism, stating that 'the event in the painting determines the time of year.' This reveals something of his working method. The animals were done first and the landscape added later: the deer in the Battle of the stags were painted in Frankfurt and the landscape after the artist's return to France. Further evidence is supplied by a photograph (fig. 5) of Courbet at work on the deer at the centre of L'hallali, which shows that the desperate animal was initially painted against a neutral background; there is no evidence of a compositional sketch or plan. The entourage, hounds, hunters and landscape were carried out afterwards.

This cumulative method of working accounts for the lack of composition so criticised by Courbet's contemporaries. The effect is even more accentuated in The quarry (fig. 2), where the artist painted the various parts on five separate canvases, which were subsequently sewn together. The small overlaps between the whipper-in and the hounds are designed to suggest unity, but each of the elements has been painted and lit in a different way. The sections showing the master and the dogs are executed in thick impasto, using bright colours and sharp modelling, while the deer and the hunter are depicted in much softer tones and tempered light. Bruce K. MacDonald has reconstructed the sequence in which the work was made: Courbet first did a study of the hanging deer, to which he then added the hunter; he then supplemented this with two additional canvases, one showing the horn blower, the other the hounds. Finally, a thin strip of landscape was appended on the right. This

13 Courthion, op. cit. (note 4), vol. 1, p. 133.
14 They can be likened to the hounds in Wim T. Schippers's notorious play Going to the dogs, in which the cast consisted entirely of canines.
15 The classical notion of proprietas seems equally valid for both academicism and realism.
16 An earlier version of the landscape had been painted in Frankfurt, but was later overpainted with the scene of the Jura forest; see Courthion, op. cit. (note 4), vol. 1, pp. 134-35.
17 See Bruce K. MacDonald, 'The quarry by Gustave Courbet,' Boston Museum Bulletin 57 (1969), pp. 52-71. The hounds also appear in a picture that was probably painted slightly
was the state of the painting at the Salon of 1857, as we can see from a lithographic reproduction that appeared in *L'Artiste* on 18 July 1858 (fig. 6). It will come as no surprise that Jules Castagnary, who immediately became a great supporter of Courbet's, was full of praise for the painting in his Salon review, although there was one aspect his critique did not spare; he felt there was a compositional error: ‘the later, *Hunting dogs* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Horace Havemeyer, 1933. The H.O. Havemeyer Collection). The German painter Otto Scholderer recalled how he saw Courbet working on this painting in Frankfurt. The hounds were copied from *The quarry*, which he had brought with him from France. The artist bought the hare from a butcher and painted the landscape from memory; see the letter from Otto Scholderer to Henri Fantin-Latour, cited in Charles Léger, *Courbet et son temps*, Paris 1948, p. 69.
painting stops too abruptly at the top." Perhaps in response to this criticism, or at
the request of his dealer, Jules Luquet - who hoped to increase his chances of selling
the painting - an extra piece of canvas was added to the upper edge in 1864, providing
the figures with more air.

At what point do the histories of the painting in the Mesdag Museum (fig. 1) and
_The quarry_ coincide, and what is the relationship between the two paintings? It is
evident that the Mesdag picture shows the same deer, although the landscape is
slightly different. Is it thus a preparatory study, as is commonly accepted? This seems
an obvious conclusion, since the _Hanging roe deer_ shows just part of the composition
of _The quarry_. Three things, however, make their association less straightforward
than it initially appears. In the first place, the Mesdag painting is dated '58,' at least
one year later than _The quarry_. Then there is the question of scale: assuming that the
canvas on which _The quarry_ was begun originally showed only the deer, with the
standing hunter being added later, not only would it have been smaller than that of
_Hanging roe deer_, the proportions of the deer itself would have been smaller as well.
It is, however, highly unlikely that a preparatory study would be larger than the final
painting.

In addition, the rendering of the fur in the Mesdag painting is considerably more
subtle, suggesting that it is, in fact, an _improved_ version of the Salon picture. It was
the exceptional refinement of the painting that struck Paul Mantz when he saw it at
an exhibition in Lyon in 1861: ‘For as long as vigorous brushwork and sureness of
touch are valued in France, the _Roe deer_ will be appreciated.’ He, too, saw a

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19 Jules Luquet acquired the painting in 1862 in an exchange with the Antwerp dealer Van
Isachers, who had bought it in 1858 without paying the full price; see Robert Fernier, _Courbet,
1866. It was reproduced in _Le Magasin Pittoresque_ as a woodcut in 1864 ( _Le Magasin
Pittoresque_ 32 [March 1864], p. 81) and was probably also exhibited at Luquet's gallery
around this time.
20 _The quarry_ measures 210 × 180 cm, the original canvas was 162.5 × 94 cm; _Hanging roe
deer_ is 187 × 128 cm; the animal in the latter work is thus about 10% larger.
connection between the painting and *The quarry*: he thought it was the ‘original study,’ but it also seemed to him that it might be a ‘fragment of the painting [...] that hung at the Salon of 1857.’ The discrepancy between the later dating and its possible function as a preparatory study was spuriously solved by Robert Fernier, who read the date at the lower right as ‘55’; Hélène Toussaint interpreted the date correctly, and identified the Mesdag painting as an indepen-

dent work of art. Like Mantz, she was unable to establish a more precise relationship with *The quarry* other than to say that it was perhaps a *premier pensée*, or a *répétition*. Bearing in mind Courbet's occasional carelessness with dating, she decided to stick with the first interpretation. However, such a stopgap measure is unnecessary when one considers Courbet's working method.

Courbet lived in Frankfurt from the beginning of August 1858, and it was here that one of his pupils, Otto Scholderer, saw the *Hanging roe deer* as a completed picture: "A deer hanging from a tree; the landscape is mirrored in a small stream." It seems plausible that the artist finished and dated the painting in Frankfurt. In the first place, there is a major difference in the way the animal and the background have been painted. It looks as though the deer was attentively painted from nature, literally a *nature morte*, while the background has been applied with virtuoso strokes of the palette knife, one of the artist's technical specialities. In addition, the border between the animal and the background is marked by a dark outline. The following chronology thus seems most likely: the roe deer in the Mesdag picture was painted from life in 1857 or shortly before, perhaps after an animal provided by a butcher in the Rue Montorgueil, where Courbet frequently acquired game for his paintings. A little later he repeated the painting in a slightly smaller format, to which he subsequently appended the various fragments, resulting in the Salon picture of 1857, *The quarry*. He then took the *Hanging roe deer* with him to Frankfurt in 1858, where he filled in the background and dated it. When he decided to add more space to *The quarry*, he took the background from the *Hanging roe deer* as an example for the new bits of landscape. There is also a *réduction* of *The quarry*, which may have been used to assess the effects of the additional parts on the painting.

Hunting scenes provided Courbet with the opportunity to record dramatic events without transgressing the tenets of realism as he himself had defined them. Within his oeuvre, the hunting scene occupies the same position that history painting did in the academic tradition: a large painting with a variety of actors, all of whom are focused on a major, climactic incident. Courbet's realism demanded that the subjects of his paintings, even those of a sensational variety, had to have been observed by him personally, and he knew the hunt like the back of his hand. For him it was a symbol of freedom, and the hunter was a free man who entered into a direct confrontation with his environment. In a certain sense, this was a sublimated form of the confrontation between the painter and nature. The passion of the subject is intensified by the defenceless creature in the immediate foreground, causing the viewer to identify more with the prey than with the hunter. At this point, oddly ambivalent emotions arise, feelings which are difficult to understand for those unfamiliar with the hunt: there is the seductive thrill of catching and killing the victim, but also sympathy, admiration and even love for the captured animal. This love and admiration is manifest in Courbet's hunting scenes. It was not simply the desire to give a free rein to his abilities as a painter that led Courbet to put so much effort into

24 Léger, op. cit (note 10), p. 72.
the *Hanging roe deer*. He was fully aware that hunting was as much about love as it was about sport. He even drew this comparison himself in a scribbled note: ‘during the periods when hunting is not allowed, there are always pretty young girls to be found in the hay.’

It was a game, whose frivolous side he also saw and acknowledged. After all, ‘the hunt cannot be taken seriously in a civilised country. Here it is a game in which one can develop many talents and instincts and expend much energy.’


27 Ibid., p. 39: ‘La chasse en pays civilisé ne peut être prise au sérieux. Dans notre pays c'est un grand jeu où l'on peut déployer beaucoup de talent, d'instinct et d'activité.’
In this sense, the painting manifests a peculiar paradox. The event depicted is the bloodiest part of the hunt, and yet the prey's suffering is not shown. In the Salon piece, a small pool of blood is visible on the ground where the hounds are sniffing, but in *Hanging roe deer*, all references to cutting and disembowelling have been avoided: the deer's sliced-open belly is turned away from the viewer. Yet there had long been a convention in painting which did not eschew blood and gore. Courbet would have had access to Rembrandt's *Disembowelled ox* in the Louvre, which shows the staked-open animal in all its fleshy glory. In Courbet's painting, however, we are only shown the attractive side of the animal which - there is no other way of putting it - has been painted with a great deal of affection. The tragic look in the empty blue eyes is underlined by the animal's powerless pose. In his letters the artist spoke respectfully of the beauty and vitality of deer, and by rendering the creature so discretely he appears to have wanted to save it from any further humiliation. It would seem that Courbet, who, on the whole, never spared his audience, has
here recoiled at a certain point, probably precisely because he did know the realities of the hunt. He has here applied the principle of decorum used in history painting to guarantee the integrity of the human figures, even if the respect he shows was prompted by his reverence for nature rather than the painting tradition.

Courbet's friend and great admirer, the critic Champfleury, author of the manifesto _Le réalisme_, however, had a different view. He found that his hero, the painter of large-scale, democratic, modern history paintings that rejected beauty - _The stonebreakers_ (1849) and _A burial at Ornans_ (1850) - had abandoned his true calling for the sake of commercial success. The writer saw the _Hanging roe deer_ at an exhibition on the Boulevard des Italiens and wrote: 'The roe deer, having been so successful at the Salon [he is here referring to _The quarry_ and the private exhibition on the Boulevard des Italiens, has won over the timid souls who, seeing nothing but a dead animal in a landscape, and relieved no longer to be confronted with frightening human figures, seek to propel the artist towards the second rate.'

This is a fascinating piece of criticism, firstly because it comes from a friend who was gradually becoming alienated from Courbet, and secondly because it contains a germ of truth. Courbet did indeed manage to sell the _Hanging roe deer_ at this exhibition for the considerable sum of 2,500 francs. His _Battle of the stags_ was almost sold at about this time to the Administration des Beaux-Arts, and he was nominated as a candidate for the Légion d'honneur. Appearances therefore certainly suggest that Courbet was being coopted by the establishment of the Second Empire, whereas it had been precisely their rejection of this regime that had tied him to Champfleury. By choosing to paint animals, Courbet had abandoned his role as a militant painter, Champfleury argued, because although 'a great artist [is] capable of rendering worthwhile all that is touched by his brush,' this did not mean that all subjects were equally important: 'man is of greater interest than an animal, and artists who focus exclusively on the representation of fowl and livestock are artists of an inferior kind.'

Ironically, Champfleury, who clearly had no time for _l'art pour l'art_, has here re-introduced the ancient hierarchy of genres, one of the mainstays of the academic theory he utterly detested. He also added a social and political dimension to his criticism, commenting derisively that 'rich landowners should simply invite the artist to decorate the extensive halls of their castles with hunting scenes.'

Champfleury desired a role for artists in society and refused them a personal art. The private significance of these paintings for Courbet becomes apparent in the later

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28 Champfleury, _Grandes figures d'hier et d'aujourd'hui_, Paris 1861, p. 259: ‘Le Chevreuil, dont la fortune a été grande au Salon et à l'exposition particulière du boulevard des Italiens, a ramené les esprits timides qui, ne voyant qu'un animal mort dans un paysage, n'étant plus effrayés par la représentation de l'homme, ont cherché à pousser l'artiste dans une voie de second ordre.’

29 Correspondence, cit. (note 1), p. 178, letter from Courbet to his parents, Paris, late June 1861: ‘J'ai vendu en arrivant à Paris, le tableau du Chevreuil pendu (de l'exposition de Besançon) à l'exposition des boulevards 2500 francs.’

30 Champfleury, op. cit. (note 28), p. 259: ‘Un grand artiste donne valeur à tout ce que touche son pinceau; mais l'homme est plus intéressant que l'animal, et ceux qui se sont voués exclusivement à la représentation des poules et des brébis sont des artistes inférieurs.’

31 Ibid: ‘Qu'un riche propriétaire invite le peintre pour décorer les vastes salles de son chateau de peintures de chasse.’
variation (fig. 7) painted in Switzerland, where he was exiled following the downfall of the Paris Commune. Courbet dedicated the painting to his fellow exile, General Gustave-Paul Cluseret. Human suffering and the suffering of the animal seem here to have been set on a par. Courbet wrote of his friend and compatriot, the poet Max Buchon - who had been forced to flee to Switzerland much earlier, after the coup d'état of 1851 - that ‘he was hunted like a wild beast.’ Courbet also painted himself wounded at the foot of a tree in L'homme blessé (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) - a romantic self portrait as a ‘gasping, dying man.’ Having manoeuvred themselves into the position of victimes de la société, Courbet and his fellow republicans had identified their lot with that of wild prey.

32 Correspondence, cit (note 1), p. 318, letter to Castagnary, Salins, 16 December 1869: ‘Il fut traqué comme une bête fauve.’ See also Herding, op. cit. (note 2), p. 87.
33 Correspondence, cit. (note 1), p. 114, letter to Alfred Bruyas, Ornans, 3 May 1854.
fig. 1
Giuseppe de Nittis, *The Victoria Embankment, London*, 1875, USA, private collection
Spatial engineer and social recorder: Giuseppe de Nittis and the development of 19th-century cityscape imagery

Caroline Igra

The recent sale of Giuseppe de Nittis's *Victoria Embankment, London* (fig. 1), a work that bears a striking resemblance to Monet's *Houses of Parliament* (London, National Gallery), has awakened interest in the influence this lesser-known Italian artist might have had on the evolution of cityscape imagery in 19th-century France. Despite the fact that de Nittis produced numerous cityscapes during his 17-year tenure in Paris, making him one of the most prolific artists in this genre, his role in its development has generally been underestimated. Still, the combination of striking spatial constructions and contemporary subject matter in his works, all dating from the 1870s and early 1880s, compel consideration of his part in the revival of the painted cityscape.

The development of space

De Nittis entered the Parisian art world at the Salon of 1872, with the exhibition of a small, unobtrusive painting entitled *The road from Brindisi to Barletta* (fig. 2). This image of a horse-drawn wagon accompanied by two workers on a lonely country road in southern Italy might have been overlooked due to its modest subject. Instead, the artist's use of a strong, expressive, spatially-aggressive style to depict the quiet country scene captured the attention of many critics. Victor Cherbuliez wrote: ‘This carriage, this horse, these strollers are masterpieces,’ and he forecast great things for the Italian artist - ‘a very young man about whom one can predict, without risk of being mistaken, that if he decides to do so he will go far.’ Writing in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Paul Mantz stated that his name was one that ‘should be remembered,’ and *The road* was later considered to have secured his reputation: ‘Every year since [1872], M. de Nittis has attracted and held the attention of the critics, so powerfully awoken.’

Beyond bringing the Italian instant recognition in Parisian artistic circles, *The road from Brindisi to Barletta* came to play a role in the development of avant-garde landscape painting. While still conforming to a traditional aesthetic (demonstrated by the acclaim it received at the official Salon), the image bore witness to an inventive

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1 New York (Christie's), 5 May 1998, lot 38.
2 De Nittis's work actually premiered at the Salon of 1868 with the exhibition of a work in the costume-piece-à-la-dix-huitième-siècle genre made popular by fashionable artists such as Gérôme and Meissonnier.
stylistic exploration on the artist's part that would be of enormous interest to modernist French painters in later years. De Nittis formulated his composition using a rapidly receding perspective that draws the viewer into the picture at an almost alarming rate, reaching the two figures only after tunnelling through a broad, empty foreground. The construction is so strong that these figures, and indeed the landscape details themselves, seem almost incidental.

7 De Nittis's ability to explore new territory while simultaneously remaining respectful of a more traditional aesthetic was frequently commented upon in the French press: see Ary Renan, ‘Joseph de Nittis,’ Gazette des Beaux-Arts 30 (November 1884), pp. 395-406 and Paul Mantz, Exposition J. de Nittis, Paris (Galerie Berheim-Jeune) 1886.
De Nittis’s early spatial investigations (manifest in a number of other works from the late 1860s) soon influenced both his Italian compatriots and fellow French artists. Their impact on Gustave Caillebotte, for example, can be seen in his Route to Naples (fig. 3), painted while working side by side with de Nittis in southern Italy. In Caillebotte's painting an abandoned horse and buggy are placed along a quiet road (opposite in orientation from that of the de Nittis), which moves backwards into space. The pace of the recession is so fast that the picture's central objects seem almost plastered against the mountain behind. Although obviously meant to be in the far distance, the motion assigned to the road prevents them from occupying correct proportional scale.

Kirk Varnedoe has suggested that artists like Caillebotte and de Nittis were naturally attracted to such spatial constructions in their search for new ways of putting our three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional canvas: ‘In the 1870s, when deep space began progressively to be annulled in painting, and a way beyond naturalism was sought, it is understandable that a new detachment from standard perspective [...] would have led to similar exploration of the peripheral, abnormal possibilities of spatial construction.’

The altered space of Caillebotte's later paintings, including the famous Paris street: rainy day (The Art Institute of Chicago) and The Pont de l'Europe (Geneva, Musée de Petit Palais), demonstrate that the research conducted alongside de Nittis early in his career continued to affect his mature work.

Caillebotte was not the only artist to be inspired by de Nittis. In 1875, while working for Goupil & Cie., Vincent van Gogh was exposed to several of the artist's pictures. Van Gogh's fascination with de Nittis's use of space is evidenced in the corner of a letter to his brother Theo: a thumbnail sketch (fig. 4) of the Italian's Victoria Embankment (fig. 1). While the older artist indicates diminishing perspective via a line of trees marching back into space at measured intervals, Van Gogh exaggerates and hastens the recession by arranging his small, vertical marks at even closer intervals.

Van Gogh's interest in de Nittis's use of perspective also appears in his later works. In his 1887 Parisian cityscape The Boulevard de Clichy (Amsterdam, Van Gogh

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9 For further discussion of the parallels between these two artists see Kirk Varnedoe, Caillebotte, New Haven 1987, pp. 188-89.
10 De Nittis was under contract to Goupil at this date; see Caroline Goldberg [Igra], Giuseppe de Nittis: an Italian perspective on the Parisian cityscape (diss., New York University, 1995), p. 52.
11 J.G. Van Gelder, ‘Vincent van Gogh and de Nittis,’ Vincent 3 (1974), no. 3, p. 7. Leo Jansen has suggested (correspondence of 23 December 1998) that Van Gelder was mistaken in his assertion that Van Gogh is here referring to de Nittis's Veduta di Londra. He suggests that the clearly different orientation of the river in Van Gogh's sketch indicates the influence of a different de Nittis painting. In fact, de Nittis did execute a series of works in the area of the Thames with the same wide-open perspective sketched by Van Gogh. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the line of trees along the banks, so determining in both artists' explorations of space, and the clear evidence that Veduta di Londra was then in Goupil's possession, strongly suggests that it must have been at least partially responsible for Van Gogh's rendering. Jansen's comments, however, raise the possibility that Van Gogh's sketch was based on a composite understanding of several of de Nittis's views.
Museum), Van Gogh gives us a wide, sweeping central area with a tree-lined boulevard branching off to the left. The

fig. 2
Giuseppe de Nittis, The road from Brindisi to Barletta, c. 1872, Italy, private collection

recession of the street is accelerated by the rhythm of the spindly, leafless trees, the light standards, and the vertically-thrusting façades of the surrounding buildings.\textsuperscript{12}

Cityscapes and Parisian monuments

De Nittis's influence on landscape painting was already noted at the time by Paul Mantz. He considered The road from Brindisi to Barletta to have been extremely important for the independent artists just then in the process of creating their own stylistic idiom, writing that it 'had greatly served impressionism, becoming for many seekers the point of departure for studies which continue today.'\textsuperscript{13} De Nittis's role in the development of contemporary art was still further compounded, however, by his interest in the Parisian cityscape. Significantly, his entry into this field

\textsuperscript{12} Van Gogh might also have been influenced by Meindert Hobbema's The alley at Middelharnis (1689), already in the collection of the National Gallery in London by the early 1870s. This work certainly inspired Monet and Pissarro; the latter's Avenue de Syndeham (London, National Gallery) of 1871 explicitly refers to the perspective construction found in Hobbema's work.

\textsuperscript{13} Cited in Sophia Monneret, L'impressionisme et son époque, 2 vols., Paris 1978, vol. 1, p. 175: ' [...] a beaucoup servi l'impressionisme en étant devenue pour quelques chercheurs le point de départ d'une étude qui dure encore.'
dates to that brief period when French avant-garde artists were also exploring this genre. De Nittis's specific urban iconography worked upon his contemporaries in various ways.

De Nittis's cityscapes can be divided almost equally between those depicting Paris's major monuments and those illustrating the social playgrounds of its inhabitants - parks, racecourses and the fashionable boulevards. Those in the first category include such distinguished structures as the Palais des Tuileries, the Institut de France, the Ecole Militaire, the Invalides, the Opéra and the Arc de Triomphe. The significance of these monuments and public buildings in the Second Empire was emphasised by their placement within the physical reorganisation of the city carried out by Baron Haussmann and Napoleon III in the 1850s and 60s. In this plan, monuments were set apart in order to accentuate their function as memorials to the nation's greatness - either historical, military, cultural or artistic. Removed from shadowy sites and arranged as centrepieces within large, open circles, they became embodiments of the 'glories of the French past and her modern destiny,' overwhelming and impressing both foreigner and native alike.

In accordance with Haussmann and Napoleon III's designs, many of de Nittis's cityscapes dramatically isolate a specific structure from its surroundings. In The Pont des Arts (fig. 5), for example, the Institut's 'monumental' character is underlined not only by its central placement and dominating size, but also by the space in which it is situated. It is viewed from a great distance, set back from the foreground, and strikingly preceded by a long path (the bridge itself). This

14 The part played by the city's statues, buildings and other structures in establishing Paris's reputation was already commented on by Alphonse Esquinos in the 1840s. He insisted that rather than being revealed through its museums and academic institutions, it was these physical monuments that pointed 'to the history of the nation and beyond that to the progress of the world'; see Andrew Lees, Cities perceived: urban society in European and American thought, 1820-1940, New York 1985, p. 79.

path, which connects the fore- and backgrounds planes, narrows sharply as it recedes, resulting in a thrusting perspective reminiscent of *The road from Brindisi to Barletta*. This manipulation of perspective, in the form of elongation and extension, pulls the viewer's eye into depth at a stunning speed, accentuating the sense of relief and excitement.

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Vincent van Gogh, sketch in a letter to Theo van Gogh, 24 July 1875 [39/32], Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
at finally reaching the great monument. A cityscape aimed at merely documenting the building's appearance and setting might have depicted it from closer by, diminishing the area in front. De Nittis's emphasis on the foreground demonstrates his intention to move well beyond mere topography. The (over)dramatisation of the path leading up to it suggests his genuine admiration for the magnitude of the structure and, furthermore, his faith in its symbolic significance.

The same sentiments are evident in de Nittis's focus on a monument of great importance to the post-Commune period, seen in his *Place des Pyramides* of 1876 (fig. 6): the Tuileries Palace, burned by the Communards in 1871. De Nittis's decision to include both a pavilion of the palace - covered in scaffolding to indicate reconstruction - and a statue of Joan of Arc - symbol of a triumphant France - has obvious political implications. With this single painting, the Italian expatriate expressed his supreme confidence in the rehabilitation of the nation under the Third Republic.  

De Nittis's images of Parisian monuments stand in stark contrast to the work of the French avant-garde, who generally shunned such obvious subjects and almost always excluded identifiable structures. In Monet's *View of the Tuileries gardens* (Paris, Musée Marmottan), for example, the artist managed to paint a very central area of the city while still confining its strongest element - the burned out Tuileries Palace - to a slim border at the very edge of the canvas. This is not to suggest, however, that his works had no effect on the impressionists. Indeed, although the avant-garde usually turned its back on monumental Paris - seeking to capture the city in its essence rather than its particulars - there are examples in which identifiable locations were purposefully chosen in order to concretise an impressionistic rendering. One of these is Degas's *Place de la Concorde* of 1875 (St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum). Here the French artist focuses on a location much populated by the Parisian bourgeoisie. The site echos that of de Nittis's own *Place de la Concorde after the rain* (Istanbul, Governor's Palace), exhibited earlier that year at the Salon.\(^{17}\) Although Degas's work

\(^{17}\) See Jean Boggs, *Portraits by Degas*, Berkeley 1962, p. 93. fn. 16.
concentrates on the local inhabitants - a fundamental difference in approach - the French artist verbally acknowledged de Nittis's influential role: ‘What is certain [...] is the part he played as an inventor in the world of those painters who describe the streets and Paris in general.’

**Images of the Parisian populace**

De Nittis's interest in depicting the Parisian public, like his fascination with the city's topography, originated not only from a genuine artistic inclination but also from an intense desire to assimilate into French society. Accordingly, his personal and professional moves were carefully calculated to achieve this goal.

Early in his Parisian career, de Nittis realised that no matter how well he situated himself and his family within Parisian society, his best chance of winning its affection would be to make it the centrepiece of his oeuvre. For the most part abandoning his earlier interest in pleinair painting and monumental cityscapes, by the late-1870s de Nittis began to focus on scenes of the Parisian populace engaged in its most typical bourgeois activities.

In an effort to understand the tastes and habits of the period, de Nittis devoted much of his time to wandering through the city's fashionable areas, such as the Champs-Elysées. This avenue had been the most popular parade ground for the city's socially prominent since the Second Empire. De Nittis's awareness of its importance in Parisian daily life is clearly indicated in his diary: ‘Passing along the

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18 Letter from Degas to Mme de Nittis, 21 May 1877; quoted in Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis*, 2 vols., Turin 1990, vol. 1, p. 326: ‘Ce qu'il y a de net [...] c'est l'attitude qu'il a prise d'inventeur dans le monde de peintres qui font des rues et du Paris en général.’ Degas is here writing in reference to de Nittis's *Paris seen from the Pont Royal* (present location unknown), exhibited in 1877.

19 De Nittis's desire for assimilation is explored in the author's article ‘Italian artists in Paris in the late 19th century: the establishment of the Polenta,’ *Storia dell'Arte*, forthcoming 2000.

20 In this context we may again recall the Italian artist's relationship with Gustave Caillebotte. The connection between these painters in the public eye - based on their common interest in hurdlings spatial constructions and the Parisian cityscape - dates to the early 1870s. Significantly, Léon de Lora mentioned de Nittis in his criticism of Caillebotte's work at the impressionist exhibition of 1877; see Léon de Lora, ‘L'exposition des impressionistes,’ *Le Gaulois* (10 April 1877). However, the affinities between the two went beyond their work. They became close friends soon after de Nittis's arrival in Paris, and Caillebotte was a frequent guest at de Nittis's homes in Naples and Barletta, even becoming godfather to Giuseppe's son Jacques in 1872. The close and continuous contact between them is revealed in the anecdotes recorded in the *Taccuino*; see Giuseppe de Nittis, *Taccuino, 1870-1884*, Bari 1964, p. 138. Of further significance, both men were members of the upper class who, through the practice of art, delved into ‘Bohemian’ territory. Although acquainted with a number of artists who had chosen to branch off independently, de Nittis sought to solidify ties only with those from a more aristocratic background. Caillebotte fit this profile: he was a perfect example of how one could exhibit and associate with the ‘fringe’ while still maintaining one's bourgeois social standing; see Goldberg [Igra], op. cit. (note 10), p. 78.

21 An 1878 issue of *L'Univers Illustre* noted the great popularity of ‘les Tuileries, la place de la Concorde, les Champs-Elysées, l'avenue du Bois de Boulogne et le Bois lui-même,’ which had rapidly increased over the past two decades; see ‘Courrier de Paris,’ *L'Univers Illustre* (6 July 1878).
Champs-Elysées I have further proof of the cheerful *bonhomie* that is so typical of the French. 22

Both natives and foreigners understood the significance of this avenue as a symbol rather than as a mere thoroughfare, 23 and it is therefore not surprising to find it featured in several of de Nittis's works. In *The Avenue du Bois with the Arc de Triomphe* (fig. 7), for example, a group of people are depicted clustered under the chestnut trees at a sidewalk café just down from the monumental arch. Henry Houssaye was particularly impressed with the way this painting seemed to capture a real moment in everyday Parisian life: ‘Here, in a painting entitled *Under the chestnut trees*, the circle at the Arc de Triomphe is seen in the light of a beautiful summer's day. On the chairs along the sidewalk we see women showing off their bright outfits, which sparkle in the sun; the carriages file past along the road in front of Rude's bas-relief. It is a reminiscence of the *via appia*, with a sensation of luminous light penetrating and warming you.’ 24

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23 As de Moncan and Mahout write, the Champs-Élysées ‘n'est plus alors une promenade, c'est un symbole. La démocratie coule à pleins bords, et toute cette foule qui marche d'un pas égal semble s'avancer vers un avenir inconnu’; see Patrice de Moncan and Christian Mahout, *Le Paris du Baron Haussmann*, Paris 1991, p. 94.
The accuracy of de Nittis's depiction of Parisians acting out their own mini-dramas under the distant shadow of the Arc de Triomphe makes it an almost literal pictorialisation of the social commentaries written by foreign visitors of the time. It closely echoes the observations of Augustus Hare, who wrote: ‘To a foreigner, half an hour spent on the boulevards [...] has the effect of an infinitely diverting theatrical performance.’

It is not surprising to note that Jean Béraud, another Parisian artist interested in painting modern genre scenes, also chose the Champs-Elysées as a focus of his work. In *The Avenue des Champs-Elysées* (USA, private collection) we find a similar interest in directing our attention to the life of the French bourgeoisie in their characteristic social milieu. Here, the central subject - ‘la femme Parisienne’ - completely fills the left half of the canvas, while the avenue behind (her ‘playground’) awaits her arrival.


De Nittis's cityscapes were extremely significant to modern genre artists, particularly those with a foreign background. Examples include Jean Béraud and Albert Benois from St Petersburg; Luigi Loir from Austria; de Molins from Switzerland; and Boldini, Marchetti and Signorelli from Italy. See exhib. cat. *The Belle Époque: fashionable life in Paris, London and New York, 1870-1914*, New York (Stair Gallery) 1981, p. 3. Boldini is particularly notable as he worked in Paris at the very same time as de Nittis, and briefly dabbled in cityscape. His *Place de Clichy* (Valdagno, Marzatto Collection) offers further indication of de Nittis's influence; both its theme - a well-known Parisian neighbourhood - and style - incorporating an altered type of perspective almost panoramic in nature - strongly recall the latter's work. The works of many of these immigrants highlight the city's buildings and streets, using a scrupulous technique. Another instance is Béraud's *The boulevard: evening in front of the Théâtre des variétés* (Paris, Musée Carnavalet), in which the artist not only chose a well-known and popular location, but also enlivened it with depictions of the kind of Parisians typically found there. The result is a striking illustration of contemporary life: a genre scene *par excellence*. It is not surprising that this type of picture was attractive to foreign artists like de Nittis, particularly when one considers its great appeal to art collectors and dealers; see below.
Of course, the Champs-Elysées was not the only stylish neighbourhood in Paris. Following the expansion of the city's limits under Haussmann, districts formerly considered somewhat remote came to assume a more prominent place in Parisian daily life. One such location was the Bois de Boulogne. Between 1852 and 1858 the Bois was transformed into a public park, offering an assortment of enticing recreational activities intended to attract the flourishing middle classes. Bent on depicting Parisians in their 'natural environment,' de Nittis understandably turned to the excellent material on offer here. His oeuvre includes many promenading scenes, as well as several focusing on the popular activity of horseracing.

Horseracing had burgeoned under the Second Empire. Longchamp and Auteuil became centres of fashion, where crowds of people gathered to see and be seen - and sometimes to actually watch the races. De Nittis's profound understanding of the major role of the racecourse in Parisian social life can be seen in his large triptych The racecourse at Auteuil, exhibited in 1881 at the Cercle de l'Union Artistique (fig. 8). In the left-hand panel we find a woman standing on a chair in order to better see

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27 The renovation of these areas and the establishment of social activities within them was part of the French government's overall effort to overcome the horrors of 1870-71; see Robert L. Herbert, Impressionism, New Haven 1988, p. 305.

28 Several periodicals, such as Le Monde Illustré, documented the activities at the Bois, and most contemporaries confirmed both its essential role in city life and the 'elevated' status of those who used it. Alfred Delvau, for example, noted that the Bois was 'The privileged promenade of a good half of Paris, the richest half, of course'; see his Plaisirs de Paris, Paris 1867, p. 31. Zola also described the Bois's part in (upper) middle-class social life and the way one's presence there was interpreted as a reflection of one's social standing; see Herbert, op. cit. (note 27), p. 146.


30 See Theodore Reff, Manet and modern Paris, Chicago 1982, p. 129. The importance of the racecourse in haute bourgeois leisure life is demonstrated by its prominent place in contemporary literature and art. One artistic example is provided by Manet's inclusion of Longchamp in his suite of paintings devoted to civic themes in contemporary Paris, planned for the Hôtel de Ville.
what is happening on the turf; she is accompanied by a man gazing in the same direction. In the central panel, a small group of people has gathered around a wooden stove filled with hot coals; they are completely immersed in their own conversations and in trying to get warm, and are totally oblivious to the nearby race. Finally, in the right-hand panel we get a glimpse of the track itself, seen from the spectator's viewing box. The woman with binoculars serves to remind us of the ostensible reason for this basically social gathering.

Like any other form of entertainment, these races were as much distractions as attractions, and social convention did not demand constant attention to the main event. Accordingly, the attendees are depicted as engaged in their own spectacles, sometimes entirely ignorant of the official activity taking place before their eyes. Considering
his professed devotion to depicting the Parisian populace, it is not surprising that de Nittis's interest in the observers superseded that in the horses and races themselves.\textsuperscript{31}

A precedent for this particular focus on the spectators as well as the races is provided by the series Manet devoted to the subject in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{32} In works such as *The racecourse at Longchamp* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Art Museums) we are shown both the action along the sidelines and that of the contest itself. Manet, however, does not force our involvement with the crowd, while de Nittis does precisely that. First, he provides a far more energised and vital picture of what is going on in the stands, delineating details of both incident and description. Next, he physically inserts the viewer into the crowd of onlookers by positioning him beside the participants in the drama. For example, standing next to the left panel, the viewer is confronted with a mirror image of himself, depicted almost life size. By situating the viewer among the attendees in this way, the artist also asserts his own presence and position in the crowd, among those who defined Parisian society.

The reception of this triptych, as well as of the other works de Nittis produced on this theme, demonstrates the degree to which they were considered accurate portrayals of the daily life of the Parisian bourgeoisie. The critic for *La Petite Republique Française* wrote: 'Paris! Never has an artist described the grand city with a more loving brush. No one has better understood the *parisienne* than this Italian. At Bernheim's, several of de Nittis's canvases show us the races from a variety of points of view. What movement! What teeming life! That's what it's really like!'\textsuperscript{33} In eager agreement, Mantz remarked that in these works de Nittis had captured Parisian society better than any other artist: 'Never has the picturesque grace of the great city and the physiognomy of its people been so well written, so finely recounted.'\textsuperscript{34}

**The art market and French society**

The way in which these cityscape genre scenes appeared to accurately portray the middle classes going about 'socially-correct' activities made them extraordinarily popular in the art market. The buying public was eager for images in which they could see themselves, and their grand lifestyle, reflected. To meet the growing

\textsuperscript{31} De Nittis's lack of interest in the 'main attraction' is indicated in his memoirs. In a passage concerning Derby Day in London in 1876, he reflects primarily on the pretty women in attendance, and shows ambivalence toward the races themselves, off-handedly commenting: 'Non starò ad descriversi il Derby, perché son tutti eguali, è il giorno che vede in festa tutta l'Inghilterra'; see de Nittis, op. cit. (note 20), p. 124.

\textsuperscript{32} See Jean Harris, 'Manet's racetrack paintings,' *Art Bulletin* 48 (March 1966), p. 79.

\textsuperscript{33} See 'Bonvin-Nittis,' *La Petite Republique Française* (12 May 1886): 'Paris! Jamais un artiste n'a décrit la grande ville d'un pinceau plus amoureux. Personne n'a mieux compris la Parisienne que cet Italien. Chez Bernheim, plusieurs toiles de Nittis nous montrent les courses sous leurs divers aspects. Quel mouvement! quelle vie grouillante! Comme c'est ça!'

\textsuperscript{34} Mantz, *Exposition*, cit. (note 7), p. 11: 'Jamais la grâce pittoresque de la grand ville et la physiognomie des gens qui s'y connoisent n'ont été aussi bien écrites, aussi finement racontées.' The success of these images as documents was also pointed out in the obituary that appeared in *L'Univers Illustré*, in which the author claimed that, like de Nittis's other imagery, 'ses pastels de courses [...] resteront un des plus curieux documents de notre époque'; see ‘M. de Nittis,’ *L'Univers Illustré* (30 August 1884).
demand, a large body of work depicting members of the fashionable elite amusing
themselves on Paris's stylish byways emerged.\textsuperscript{35}

De Nittis was not alone in his attentiveness to this audience. Indeed, many
avant-garde artists catered to it as well, indicating the determining role financial
pressure plays on artistic choice. Renoir's \textit{Morning ride in the Bois de Boulogne}
(Hamburger Kunsthalle), for example, is the artist's conscious attempt to adopt a
more 'pleasing' style. Two well-heeled individuals, outfitted in full riding gear, are
shown enjoying a morning jaunt along the neat bridle paths of the Bois. Robert
Herbert saw this image - so different from Renoir's other works at the time - as an
effort to capitalise on the growing market for this type of picture, and as evidence
of his desire to achieve greater social acceptance.\textsuperscript{36}

By the 1880s de Nittis, now accepted as an independent and accomplished artist,
could begin to concentrate exclusively on producing those records of French society
that would enable him to rub elbows with the Parisian elite. Sometime later, writing
on a series of pastels the artist had executed for the Album de la Société des
Aquaífortistes, Jules Claretie commented: 'He is the vibrant and elegant painter of
modern existence, of all that is feverish, troubled, refined,
of poetry flirted with and ignored, of the daily seductions in our life [...]. Painters like de Nittis who are uniquely inspired by truth and their time are, in effect, bound to last: they give those who come after a testament to the life of the entire epoch, the life of today, modern life, and which tomorrow will be nothing but memory and history."37

De Nittis's appreciation of what the city offered him personally was integral to his ability to capture it as 'experienced fact,' as paint on canvas. As early as 1875, Claretie had insisted on the importance of De Nittis's particular fascination with his subject matter: ‘We speak [...] of the painters who understand the sentiments of modern life, [who depict the] simple and charming scenes which Paris offers us daily. This special feeling, no one possesses it to a greater degree than M. de Nittis. With his sunlit paintings come all the seductions of Parisian “high life,” the elegance of the Bois, the circuit of the Lac, the outfits -warm in winter, light dresses in summer. He is taken with our life, as a Parisian would be taken with a street in Constantinople or a lane in Naples.'38

Through his cityscapes documenting the changing face of the city as it recovered from the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune in the 1870s, and his depictions of the activities along the boulevards and gentrified parks, Giuseppe de Nittis became the unofficial interpreter of Third Republic Paris. Already in 1874 Mantz had remarked: ‘these small paintings by M. de Nittis will become precious one day! They will be documents for our history [...]’39 and some years later he proclaimed the painter ‘the spiritual historian of modern manners and the chronicler of stylishness.’40

Examination of the formal and iconographic aspects of de Nittis's oeuvre alongside those of his artistic contemporaries suggests the significant role he played in the development of French cityscape painting. Whether as inspiration for the mainstream or for the avant-garde, the Italian's work reveals the modern city through its inhabitants - both foreign and native - and, equally, the way the artists' impressions were determined by their personal agendas.

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37 Claretie, op. cit. (note 6), p. 416: ‘Il est le peintre vivant et élégant de l'existence moderne de tout ce qu'il y a de fiévreux, de troubé, de raffiné, de poésie couduyée et ignorée, de séductions dans notre vie de tous les jours [...] les peintres qui s'inspirent uniquement de la vérité et de leur temps, comme de Nittis, sont certains, en effet, de durer: il léguent à ceux qui viendront le testament de la vie de toute une époque qui est la vie d'aujourd'hui, la vie moderne, et qui sera demain le souvenir et l'histoire.’

38 Ibid., p. 327: ‘Nous parlons tout à l'heure des peintres qui ont le sentiment de la vie moderne, des scènes toutes simples et toutes charmantes aussi que nous offre quotidiennement Paris. Le sentiment spéciel, nul ne le possède à un degré supérieur à M.J. de Nittis. Après ses tableaux ensoleillés toutes les séductions du high life parisien, les élégances du Bois, du tour de Lac, des toilettes, frileuses en hiver, des robes légères de l'été. Il a été frappé par notre vie à nous, comme un Parisien le serait par une rue de Constantinople ou un vicolo de Naples.’ See also his comments on p. 402.

39 Paul Mantz, ‘Le Salon,’ Le Temps (10 June 1874): ‘Combien ses petites peintures de M. de Nittis deviendront précieuses un jour! Ce seront des documents pour notre histoire [...] l'historien spirituel des moeurs modernes et le chroniqueur des élégances.’

40 Mantz, Exposition, cit. (note 7), p. 5.
fig. 1
H.W. Mesdag, *Breakers in the North Sea*, 1869-70, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum
Hendrik Willem Mesdag's *Breakers in the North Sea* (1869-70)
Fred Leeman

A generous gift from Johan Poort now enables the Van Gogh Museum to present to the public a painting that not only signified the beginning of H.W. Mesdag's career as a seascape painter, but was also one of the first masterworks of the Hague School. To the surprise of many, *Breakers in the North Sea* (fig. 1) won Mesdag a gold medal at the Salon of 1870. The following will sketch the painting's origins and examine its position within Mesdag's oeuvre. What happened to the painting after its disappearance will only be examined in brief, as this has been extensively written about by others.

Mesdag first mentioned a large seascape he was working on in a letter to his Belgian friend, Alfred Verwée: ‘Impressed by one of those bad days, I have painted over that large marine painting you saw. It is now much improved.’¹ This letter, dated 15 November 1869, was written from The Hague, where Mesdag had moved from Brussels earlier that year. He had spent the summer of 1868 on the German Frisian island of Norderney, where he had discovered his calling as a seascape painter. The various studies made there bear witness to his fascination with the sea. In one of these (fig. 2) he sought to capture the constantly changing shape of the waves, exhibiting a touching confidence in the realist capacities of his art; this study may even allow us a glimpse of what the *Breakers* may have looked like in their earliest state. However, he was well aware that in some respects his work was still rather amateurish and, with typical zeal, he set about improving himself. To properly depict the sea he had to study it day and night, and under different conditions. Mesdag described this period in a later interview: ‘[...] at home I had spent an entire winter fumbling at a work; it was a coastline, but very naively painted. Then I said to myself: “You have to have the sea in front of you, everyday, to live with it, otherwise all this will come to nothing.” And then we went to The Hague.’²

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² J.D. ‘Een Zeerob,’ *De Nieuwste Courant* (9 March 1901): ‘[...] thuis had ik een heelen winter aan een werkstuk zitten scharrelen; 't was een kust, maar zo naïef geschilderd. Toen zei ik: je moet de zee voor je zien, elken dag, er mee leven, anders wordt het niets. En toen gingen we naar Den Haag.’
Mesdag did not think his 1868 seascapes were ready for public display. At the exhibition of the Brussels Société Libre des Beaux-Arts of January 1869, however, he surprised the critics by exhibiting a number of hyper-realist street scenes and landscapes. His submissions to the Paris Salon that spring - two paintings which had probably already
been shown in Brussels - were rejected, and he felt it unwise to take the same risk with the Brussels Salon in July. Both his cousin, Alma-Tadema, and his colleague Verwée advised him against participating, feeling his work ‘was not yet sufficiently resolved.’\(^3\) In the end, though, Mesdag decided to hazard *La saison des eaux, à l’île de Norderney* (present location unknown). Four paintings by Gustave Courbet, the hero of the Brussels realists, were also on view at this event.\(^4\) One of these was a seascape, *Les rochers noirs à Trouville* (present location unknown), confronting Mesdag directly with a great model of marine painting.

Having settled in The Hague, Mesdag immediately began to work on studies of the sea and landscape. The bad weather did nothing to deter him: ‘Nature is so beautiful here, but the weather has been awful so far.’\(^5\) He also immediately involved himself in The Hague art scene, showing at the Tentoonstelling van Levende Meesters. The titles of the pictures on display - *What will become of*
them? (present location unknown) and A pastime: a view from the dunes on Norderney (present location unknown) - indicate that he was immersed in painting marines. This last picture was described by the well-known writer and critic Carel Vosmaer in a way that suggests Mesdag's sober realism seemed odd to his cultivated eye: ‘a piece of beach and sea, vertical and strangely cropped.’ He ironically renamed the other work - ‘a sea with a small boat with shipwrecked people floating about’ - ‘What will become of him?’, a play on the young artist's uncertain reputation. The titles also demonstrate that Mesdag was not averse to including anecdote or narrative in his paintings. To Vosmaer, his entries were ‘an entirely unconditional confession of his faith in realism,’ which attested to ‘an extremely independent, audacious way of seeing.’ However, in order to become true art ‘this unshakeable pursuit’ had to avoid ‘asperity’ and be ‘tamed and controlled by one or more of the Graces.’

This was the image Dutch art critics had of Mesdag from the very beginning, and one can certainly say that his brand of realism was relatively new to them. In Brussels he had moved in the circle of the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts, where the tenets of realism were dominant. Its heroes were Baudelaire and particularly Courbet, who had been made an honorary member. He had exhibited his notorious Stonebreakers (destroyed) at the Brussels Salon as early as 1851. His work had been shown there regularly ever since and he also paid frequent visits to the city. Verwée was even among his friends. It is hard to imagine Mesdag's development in Brussels and later in The Hague had he not been familiar with Courbet's ideas or never seen his paintings.

Unlike the seascapes Mesdag exhibited in The Hague in 1869, there are no anecdotal figures or any other kind of staffage in Courbet's seascapes (fig. 3). Whenever human figures do appear, their minuscule presence merely serves to emphasise the immensity of the space. Having seen one of Courbet's seascapes at the Brussels Salon, Mesdag decided to repaint the ‘large marine painting’, which he had begun at Norderney. His inspiration was the North Sea coast at Scheveningen which, being close to The Hague, he could study to his heart's content. He rented a room in the Villa Elba with a view of the sea. The reworking of this canvas must have been quite radical, and was likely carried out during the last few months of 1869. On 24 January 1870, however, he told Verwée that he had yet to finish this ‘grande marine,’ the work that was to become the Breakers in the North Sea. ‘You wouldn't recognise it,’ he wrote to his friend, who had seen the painting in its previous state on a visit to The Hague at the end of August.

We know that in November 1869 Mesdag had still not decided whether he was going to submit anything at all to the Paris Salon. His hesitation was understandable;

7 See Saskia de Bodt, Halverwege Parijs: Willem Roelofs en de Nederlandse schilderskolonie in Brussel, 1840-1890, Ghent 1995, p. 79.
8 The French painter visited Brussels in 1857, and he stayed there for a few months in 1858; he returned again in 1861. In 1860 and 1864 he exhibited at the Brussels Salon and in 1868 he took part in the Ghent Salon; finally, four works were exhibited in Brussels in 1869 (see note 4).
9 See Poort, op. cit. (note 1), p. 33.
after all, he had been turned down on his previous attempt. It was only in March 1870 that he made up his mind to exhibit two paintings, one of which was to be ‘la grande marine’ - provided of course that they were not rejected ‘like the last time.’

He sent his entries to the French capital via Brussels, where Verwée saw them at the art dealer Mommen's. He was not particularly impressed by the *Journée d'hiver à Schéveningue*, but thought the large seascape was ‘très bien,’ much to Mesdag's satisfaction.

The artist, however, was unwilling to accept his friend's critique of the winter scene, and his defence of the painting says much about his methods and aims. Mesdag questioned whether Verwée had seen the painting ‘in a frame and properly lit.’ He then went on to explain the motif in detail, insisting that everything was true to life: ‘I have studied and painted this subject from nature and have tried to render the subject simply and naively, without attempting to turn it into a painting of dramatic gestures.’ The main effect he hoped to achieve was that of ‘a large space filled with light.’

‘Une grande espace pleine de lumière’ was certainly also what he strove for in the ‘grande marine.’ In the

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12 Ibid., letter to Verwée, The Hague, 19 March 1870: ‘J'ai étudié et peint ce sujet directement d'après nature et j'ai essayé de rendre ce motif simplement et avec naïveté sans penser d'en faire un tableau avec beaucoup d'éclat. [...] une grande espace pleine de lumière.’
first place, he used a wide canvas, complying with the standard proportions for marine
paintings - twice as wide as high - thus creating a panoramic effect.\textsuperscript{13} The same format
reappears a number of times in Mesdag's oeuvre, for example in \textit{A winter's day at
Scheveningen} (fig. 4). This painting corresponds to the description of \textit{Journée d'hiver
à Schéveningue} in the letter to Verwée, and it seems highly probable that it was the
other Salon entry of 1870, the pendent to \textit{Breakers in the North Sea}. Another work
of the same size is a \textit{View of Brussels}, painted in 1868 (fig. 5). It reproduces a
sweeping view from Mesdag's studio, created by first tracing onto transparent paper
tacked to the window.\textsuperscript{14} The broad shape also emphasises Mesdag's hyperrealist
intentions: these works were not carefully considered compositions but rather
representations of the unhindered field of vision as such. There is no support for the
edges of the painting, and the cropping on the left and right seems arbitrary. While
still in Brussels Willem Roelofs had taught him that a landscape should to be cropped
in this way, so that 'the viewer does not notice it has been cut off, so that it continues
in [his] mind.'\textsuperscript{15}

In \textit{Breakers in the North Sea} Mesdag has subtly organised the infinite and elusive
seascape within this broad format. The point of view is low, and the horizon is located
slightly below centre, leaving the breakers to dominate the sea almost completely.
The painting thus represents the sea as seen by someone standing on the beach. The
beach itself is invisible, but the drift in the surf indicates its presence at the viewer's
feet. Mesdag depicts the waves crashing over each other, first in layers and then in
long, diagonal folds. A little further in the distance, as they begin to break, their crests
are blown away by the wind. At the centre, where two waves meet, the foam is
depicted in the brightest white of the whole painting. Above, in a swirling, grey,
stormy sky, an area of light answers to the foaming water below. It is what James
Joyce would have called 'a snot-coloured sea': in its greyness it leaves every
picturesque convention behind. And yet there are two traces of a human presence:
driftwood from a shipwreck in the foam, and a ship clearly in difficulties on the
horizon. While spatial points of reference are largely absent, these elements provoke
reflection on the destructive force of the sea.

Mesdag was probably aware that his choice of motif brought him into direct
competition with his illustrious model, Gustave Courbet. Anna Croiset van der Kop
states in her 1891 biography of Mesdag that '[he] had already heard about it.'\textsuperscript{16}
Courbet had decided to submit a marine painting to the Salon in September 1869,
when he was at Étretat on the Normandy coast.\textsuperscript{17} In his own words, both Courbet's
entries, \textit{The stormy sea} (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) and \textit{The cliff at Étretat} (Paris, Musée

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} The canvas is not, however a standard marine size; a \textit{Toile de 120, marine} is $97 \times 195$ cm;
\textit{the Breakers in the North Sea} measures $90 \times 180$ cm.
\item \textsuperscript{14} See Fred Leeman, 'Mesdag's passion for the boundless,' in Yvonne van Eekelen (ed.), \textit{The
magical panorama. The Mesdag Panorama: an experience in space and time}, Zwolle & The
\item \textsuperscript{15} H.F.W. Jeltes, \textit{Willem Roelofs: Bijzonderheden betreffende zijn leven en werk}, Amsterdam
1911, p. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{16} A. Croiset van der Kop, 'Hendrik Willem Mesdag,' \textit{Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift
1} (1891), p. 437.
\item \textsuperscript{17} See \textit{Correspondence de Courbet}, ed. Petra ten Doesschate-Chu, Paris 1996, p. 312, letter
from Courbet to his parents, Étretat, September (?) 1869.
\end{itemize}
d'Orsay) were ‘un succès monstrueux.’ The reviews were favourable, though partly originating from the artist's own claque. His friend Jules Castagnary, for example, saw a ‘perfect accord between idea and execution’ in these pictures. The more moderate Georges Lafenestre spoke of vigorous brushwork, a grandness of aspect and a breadth of style. The conservative Wolff, however, suggested that these were merely studies and were unripe as works of art.

In contrast the reviews of Mesdag's Breakers in the North Sea were lukewarm. Camille Lemmonier thought that the ‘overwhelming’ sea in Courbet's Stormy sea looked as if it had been ‘sculpted in glorious black marble, shot through with carmine red interwoven with threads of luminescent emerald green.’ Mesdag's waves, on the other hand, ‘lacked substance, and break limply; although they do spew beautiful tufts of foam.’

According to his 1891 biography, Mesdag felt that Courbet's paintings at the Salon of 1870 were ‘clever’ and

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18 Ibid., p. 329, letter to his sister Juliette, [Paris], 29 April 1870. He sold the Cliff at Étretat to the art dealer Hector Brame; see ibid., p. 333, letter to Gustave Poret, Paris, 3 June 1870.
20 Georges Lafenestre, Le Monteur Universel (7 May 1870).
21 Albert Wolff, Le Figaro (10 May 1870).
22 Camille Lemonnier, Salon de Paris 1870, Paris 1870, pp. 208, 211-12: ‘La mer ourougeuse est sculptée dans un admirable marbre noir veiné de filets carminés auxquelles s'entrelacent en trainées lumineuses des verts d'éméraudes’; ibid. p. 214: ‘La vague de M. Mesdag manque de solidité et déferle avec mollesse: en retour, elle s'écrit de bons bouillons d'écume.’
`powerfully expressed [...],' but that they were insufficiently `based on nature.' This, too, seems to indicate that Mesdag was both already familiar with Courbet's marine work and that in 1870 he was purposefully competing with the French painter.

Despite its unenthusiastic reception - and much to everyone's astonishment - Mesdag's *Breakers in the North Sea* was awarded a gold medal. Before it went to press, the *Kunstkronijk* made space available for a `very important announcement,' namely, that H.W. Mesdag had won `the great gold medal.' The misconception that Mesdag had won *the* gold medal has persisted ever since.23 However, the *Livret* of the Salon of 1872 states that he was only one of 40 artists to have received this particular accolade. The honour nevertheless came as a great surprise, not least because the members of the artists' society Pulchri Studio in The Hague - if we are to believe Johan Gram - had objected to Mesdag becoming even a `working member’ only the year before.24 Mesdag's own bewilderment

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23 Poort, op. cit. (note 1), p. 41. Poort has claimed that Mesdag was awarded this gold medal at the expense of Courbet (see idem, `Les brisants de la Mer du Nord,' *Tableau* [November 1991], p. 74), but this was certainly not the case. Because he had won a second-class medal in 1849, and again in 1857 and 1861, he did not qualify for a medal in 1870; see *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie des artists vivants exposés au Palais des Champs-Elysées le 5 mai 1870*, p. ci. As an artist selected to serve on the jury (although he never got further than third on the reserve list) he qualified for a Légion d'honneur; he refused this award, however, after the outbreak of war with Prussia; see *Correspondence*, cit. (note 17), pp. 323 and 326-29. See also Leeman, op. cit. (note 14), p. 48.

is apparent from a letter to Verwée in which he thanked his friend for his good wishes: ‘You must certainly be as amazed as I am.’

Mesdag was keenly interested in the Salon reviews and asked Verwée to keep him closely informed of what was being written. He could hardly wait to hold the medal in his hands and viewed the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war as an irritating inconvenience, perfectly timed to obstruct the sending of his decoration. Finally, more than a year after it had been awarded him, Mesdag came up with the idea that a painter friend of his could bring it with him from Paris; whether or not this plan was carried out is not known. Since the medal is now in the Museum Mesdag (among all the many honours the painter received during his lifetime), however, it clearly made its way to him somehow. Mesdag repeatedly spoke of his award in his letters and insisted on being mentioned by dealers as a medal winner when he showed at their exhibitions.

The artist would have been renouncing his mercantile origins if he had not immediately understood the consequences this award would have for his career and the price of his paintings. He considered it an opportune moment to adjust the values, and even his dealers accepted that the figures would rise as a result of his success. Mesdag sold the winning *Breakers in the North Sea* to ‘un amateur’ for 2,500 francs. The buyer was the genre and portrait painter Charles Chaplin, a member of the 1870 jury. Mesdag expected the sale to add extra shine to his medal in the eyes of the Dutch. He was extremely proud of the brief announcement of his prize signed by the famous painter Jean-François Millet. He had it framed, and it hung in his studio from that day on. Mesdag also received congratulations from Félix Ziem, another member of the jury.

We do not know how or when the painting finally left Charles Chaplin's collection. It was no longer among his possessions by the time the artist's studio was auctioned.

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in 1891. The only trace the heirs turned out to have was a photograph. It was not until 1991 that the researches of Johan Poort and his collaborator Robbert Ruigrok finally bore fruit. Two paintings, which appeared to be of the sea but to which a number of boats had been clumsily added, turned out to be the reworked parts of the original painting. The left half, moreover, had been given a false signature.

31 See *Vente après décès de Charles Chaplin*, Paris (Haro), 28-29 April 1891.
The detailed examination of the materials that preceded the rejoining of the two halves confirmed that both had indeed been primed in the same way, and therefore incontestably belonged together. Furthermore, the various stages of the painting could be seen, and these matched perfectly with Mesdaag's descriptions in his letters to Verwée.\textsuperscript{33} The careful observer can still see a slightly darker stripe slightly to the right of centre that witness to the mutilation of the painting by posterity.

\textsuperscript{33} An extensive account of the history of the restoration can be found in Poort, op. cit. (note 23), passim.
fig. 1
Gustave Caillebotte, *Déjeuner*, 1876, Paris, private collection
‘Such absurdity can never deserve the name of Art’: impressionism in the Netherlands

Benno Tempel

In the Museum Mesdag in The Hague paintings from the French Barbizon School and the Dutch Hague School hang in fraternal fashion side by side. When Hendrik Willem Mesdag donated his collection to the State of the Netherlands in 1903, it was certainly the most up-to-date assemblage of its kind in the country. It was praised not only for its modernity, but also for the quality of its contents: ‘Millet in all his manifestations, Rousseau and Daubigny are the household gods; all the art displayed both here and in Mesdag's museum is almost entirely a paean of praise to the new movement, a plea for impressionism, for a broad and powerful conception.’ 

Visitors today are still struck by the wealth of the collection, but are scarcely likely to describe the paintings as impressionist. From the earliest days of its use in the Netherlands in the last quarter of the 19th century the term ‘impressionism’ elicited remarkable reactions. This article, based on the art criticism of the period, will examine what precisely was understood by this controversial term.

The French impressionists and their exhibitions: Dutch reactions

In 1874 a group of French artists joined together to present themselves to the public under the name ‘Société anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc.’ Their reasons for combining forces were partly dissatisfaction with the annual Paris Salon. However, it was not only a general desire to exhibit that prompted their action; they also wanted to see a more balanced selection of work displayed, together with a more spacious method of hanging. In what was later to become known as the first impressionist exhibition, 30 artists showed a total of 165 paintings. In comparison, that same year there were 3,657 entries on view at the Salon. Unfortunately the new group failed to sell many of their works - which had been a major reason for organising the show in the first place - and the Société was soon disbanded.


2 There is a very large body of criticism which discusses impressionism, but I shall restrict myself here to examples that illustrate how the term was used. It is not my intention to present an exhaustive study of the subject of impressionism in Dutch art criticism.


Nonetheless, its founders re-grouped, and seven more exhibitions followed. From 1877 on, those taking part referred to themselves as ‘impressionistes,’ a name coined by the critic Louis Leroy in an article published in *Le Charivari* on 25 April 1874, after seeing Monet's *Impression: soleil levant* (1872, Paris, Musée Marmottan).}


6 On the history of the term ‘impressionism’ in France see Stephen F. Eisenman, ‘The intransigent artist or how the impressionists got their name,’ in ibid., pp. 51-60.
Beginning in the 1870s, a number of reviews appeared in the Netherlands dealing with the impressionist exhibitions. Paris was the cultural capital of Europe, and both artists and critics sought inspiration there. However, a closer examination of the criticism reveals that Dutch writers often failed to do justice to the movement.

One of the earliest references to the impressionist exhibitions was made by Marcellus Emants, a Dutch literary figure who occasionally reviewed exhibitions in the 1870s. When discussing the new artistic approaches of the Hague School he was moderately liberal, but when it came to impressionism his conservative attitudes prevailed. Emants wrote about the second exhibition (1876), and he was far from enthusiastic. ‘I would find it hard to give a name to what I saw hanging there. Most of the things are certainly not paintings, unless one chooses to call a few sploges of colour a painting. And they are certainly not drawings, for one thing it is even harder to discern a proper line in them than in the channels dug by children in the sand on a Dutch beach after the waves have washed over them [...]’ The critic compared Caillebotte's Déjeuner (fig. 1) to ‘Chinese’ principles of perspective, an interesting - if mistaken - comparison. We may assume he was actually referring to Japanese prints, which, as is well known, had a great influence on the impressionists.

Many characteristic aspects of impressionism are examined in this short article, entitled ‘De “Salon des Refusés” te Parijs.’ As well as perspective, the critic discusses the way in which shapes have been made indistinct, the representation of contingent impressions, and the use of strong complementary colour. In reference to the latter he wrote: ‘Mr Monet paints fiery red and sky-blue ships with brilliant yellow masts, trees that are blue-green, yellow houses and chrome-coloured duckweed on ultramarine water.’ This bothered Emants because, as he saw it, it was a travesty of reality: ‘If perspective does not stand on its head, if trees are not given a blue, green or mauve wash, if our descendants [...] do not paint and whitewash all natural objects, then we may assuredly predict that such absurdity can never deserve the name of Art.’ Emants clinched his arguments with a popular cliché: ‘It is the work of madmen; for even children would not invent such insanity.’ In conclusion he outlined the artists’ intentions: ‘They have an unbounded admiration for impromptu

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8 Marcellus Emants, ‘De “Salon des Refusés” te Parijs,’ Nederlandsche Kunstbode (25 May 1876), p. 75: ‘Wat eigenlijk de naam der dingen is die hier bijeenhangen, weet ik niet te zeggen; schilderijen zijn ’t voor ’t meerendeel in ’t geheel niet, wanneer men ten minste eenige kladden verf niet aanstonds tot een schilderstuk wil verheffen. Teekeningen zijn ’t evenmin; want de sporen van juiste lijnen zijn er moeilijker in te ontdekken dan de kanalen, door de jeugd in ’t Scheveningse strand gegraven, wanneer er een flinke golf over heen is gespoeld.’ This article is based on a letter to the editor of Het Vaderland, published on 22 April 1876, written in response to an anonymous correspondent from the French capital published in the same paper on 11 April. On Emants’s ideas about art in general, see Nop Maas, Marcellus Emants’ opvattingen over kunst en leven in de periode 1869-1877 (diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1988).
9 Emants, op. cit. (note 8), p. 75: ‘Mijnheer Monetschildert vuurroode en hemelsblauwe schepen met hooggele masten, blauwgroene boomen, gele huizen en chromaatkleurig kroost op ultramarin-water.’
10 Ibid., p. 76: ‘[…] indien de perspectief niet op haar kop gaat staan, indien de boomen niet met een blauw, groen of paarsch sop overgoten worden, indien onze nakomelingen niet à l’instar onzer voorvaderen de geheele natuur gaan verven en witten, dan is ’t met zekerheid te voorspellen, dat deze dwaasheid nimmer den naam van kunst zal kunnen verdienen.’
impressions [...] but merely reproducing these impressions of nature faithfully on canvas does not mean they have made works of art.' Although Emants's objections resemble those of the conservative French critics, he based his opinions on his own observations. In this he was exceptional among Dutch art critics.

Two reports on the impressionist exhibitions of 1876 and 1877 reveal much about the Dutch understanding of the subject. They were published in the Nederlandsche Kunsthode, an art magazine, and their tone was decidedly negative. It is worth noting that the anonymous reporter in 1876 refers to a ‘new sect which has developed in the art world and which is known as le groupe des impressionistes’; in fact, the artists themselves only began using this name a year later. The critic was particularly scathing when it came to the unfinished appearance of the works on view at the art dealer Durand-Ruel's: ‘It strikes me that these gentlemen expect a great deal from the viewer, for it is very difficult to detect whether the

11 Ibid.: ‘[...] een onbegrensde vereering van plotselinge indrukken [...] maar als men dergelijke impressies van de natuur getrouw op een doek neerkladt, worden ’t daarom nog geen kunstwerken.’
painter wishes to represent animals, trees, people, or whatever. Indeed, that is not
their intention; they wish to offer the opportunity to fantasise, to embellish, to create
what one will.’ ‘Not surprisingly, of course, this will find an appreciative audience,’
he wrote, ‘for it is an easy life when you are not required to know very much or to
be particularly skilled.’\footnote{12}

Such articles were clearly based on information in the French press, as was freely
admitted in the review of the 1877 exhibition, which the writer in question had not
actually seen. ‘Nature [...] seems to fill these impressionists with melancholy, and -
if we are to believe what we hear and read on the subject - it must be amusing, or
rather pathetic, to see the products of this so-called art,’ the reviewer remarked
cuttingly.\footnote{13} As for the aims of the impressionists, little more was said than that they
wanted to give an impression, something ‘all artists want to do.’

Although it is somewhat hard to understand, it is not at all surprising that critics
formed their opinions without ever having seen the works in question. Obviously, it
is well nigh impossible to avoid blunders under such circumstances. How surrealist
these misconceptions could sometimes be can be seen in an article by J. Zürcher,
who at a fairly early date had made positive remarks in the Dutch daily Nieuws van
den Dag about the Hague School, thus defining himself as a more progressive voice
within Dutch art criticism. He reviewed the 1882 impressionist show. The major
artists represented were, he said, ‘Caillebotte, Gauguin, Guillaumin, Pastels [sic],
Monet, Mme Morisot, Pissarro, Sisley, Renoir, Vignon.’ We must assume that Zürcher
did not actually see the exhibition and constructed his review from reports and the
catalogue,
which explains why he mistook the pastels by Guillaumin for an artist's name (fig. 2). He seems to have been particularly impressed by stories about how the pictures were hung, for he recounts: ‘Their works are usually shown in white frames.’ Although Zürcher classified both the Barbizon School painters, whom he admired, and the Hague School artists, as impressionists, for him the French ‘indépendants’ were a diseased excrescence. He was especially incensed by the fact that they used pure, unmixed colour.\[14\]

14 J. Zürcher, ‘Impressionisten - Artistes Indépendants,’ *De Amsterdammer* (1 April 1883).
The few eye-witness accounts of the Paris art world that appeared in the Dutch press were chiefly written by foreign correspondents. A passage about artistic events was occasionally slotted between items of a political nature. Needless to say, these journalists could not be expected to produce professional judgments on art.\footnote{These writers should not be confused with the real critics, who mainly dealt with topics related to art, although they, too, generally wrote on a variety of disciplines. The critic J.J. van Santen Kolff, for example, wrote about art, music and literature, while A.C. Loffelt reviewed not only exhibitions but also theatre productions.}

In 1879 an article in the Dutch daily *Algemeen Handelsblad* refers to the fourth exhibition: ‘A good 15 years ago a collection of bright lads, convinced of the fact that a cleverly presented paradox could measure up to solid studies, conceived the idea of creating a mini-revolution in the world of painting. The studio closed its doors, the model was dismissed, and in the nearest coffee house the famous theories were developed between two glasses of beer - among them impressionism, which sprang fully armed and ready for battle, like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter.’ It seems that here the anonymous correspondent mistook the 1863 Salon des Refusés as the dawn of impressionism. He continued his ironic commentary: ‘The buyers immediately rebelled against these new whims. Even though it was explained to them that all the painters of history - from Raphael to Rembrandt and from Velazquez to Mr Ingres - were no more than a club of naughty schoolboys; [and] that only a realistic painting has the inestimable advantage that one can hang it up any which way, without it making the slightest difference to one's appreciation of the subject. Nevertheless, the bourgeois folk, as they are slightingly termed, could not be converted to this new way of thinking. The impressionist paintings remained unsold, and the shopkeepers dealing in paint and picture frames began to refuse credit. So, in order to improve the state of affairs, this year our painters changed their

![Fig. 3: 'Chez MM. les peintres indépendants, par Draner,' from *Le Charivari* (23 April 1879)](image-url)
name to *indépendants*. Independent of whom? Independent of what? I don't know; certainly not independent of the public because they present their work to be assessed; presumably independent of each other.'

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The correspondent went on to say more about the exhibition: ‘It is impossible to find anything more absurd, extraordinary or outrageous,’ he wrote. He painted a horrifying picture for the reader. As he saw it, visiting the show was like being let loose in a lunatic asylum. This feeling was generated by the ‘restlessness [...] of that hovering paintbrush, of the inappropiate colours, the absence of shape.’ And indeed, the description he gives of Caillebotte's *Une vache et une chèvre* (present location unknown) suggests it resembled a pickled foetus: ‘calves whose snouts measure 80 centimetres, which would draw the gaping crowds at a Dutch fair’ (fig. 3).

In 1879 there also appeared a brief eye-witness account in the Dutch daily *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*. Although the article was also generally negative, the author did try to clarify the aims of the artists to some extent: ‘The theory of the impressionists, as far as this may be called a theory, is quite simply that they attempt to represent objects and people in a non-idealised manner, as they are in reality. This theory may or may not be valid from an aesthetic point of view, yet it need not prevent an impressionist from producing a beautiful and great work.

Unfortunately, the high priests of this new religion are not among the most gifted of contemporary painters, and the majority of works on view at this year's exhibition could better have stayed at home.’

In particular the journalist criticised the handling of paint, stating that the colour was ‘flung’ onto the canvas in a ‘violent, uncontrolled and slapdash’ manner. The indefinite shapes which resulted created confusion in the viewer's mind - it was no longer clear whether the picture represented a ‘woman or a rose bush.’ However, a few works were ‘undeniably worth looking at’ - in particular *The garden* (St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum) and the two beach scenes by Monet; a landscape by Rouart; and a coastal view by Tillot (present locations unknown).

Overall, the impressionist exhibitions in France attracted little attention in the Dutch press. The reports which appeared were often based on French articles or were sent from Paris by general correspondents. There were very few Dutch who had actually seen the works in question, and those who had were often confused by them. This is demonstrated by the letters Andries Bonger wrote home in the early

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17 Anon., ‘Frankrijk,’ *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (11 April 1879): ‘De theorie der impressionisten, voor zooover men het theorie noemen kan, is eenvoudig deze, dat zij de dingen en de personen trachten weer te geven, niet geïdealiseerd, maar werkelijk zooals zij ze zien. Deze theorie moge uit een aethetisch oogpunt juist of valsch zijn, zij zou niet behoeven te letten, dat een impressionist een schoon en groot kunstwerk voortbracht. Ongelukkig behooren echter de priesters van het nieuwe geloof niet onder de ersten der hedendaagse schilders, zoodat het meerendeel der stukken, die de independenten dit jaar te zien geven, beter thuis waren gebleven.’

18 In newspapers such as the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, *Het Vaderland* and *Algemeen Handelsblad* we find no mention of them, apart from those examined below. The same holds true for periodicals such as *Nederlandsche Kunstbode*, *De Nederlandsche Spectator*, *De Gids*, *De Nieuwe Gids*, *De Konstkroniek*, *Dietsche Warande* and *De Portefeuille*.

19 In the newspaper column ‘Pluksel’ in *De Nederlandsche Spectator* (10 May 1879) an announcement appeared under the title ‘New name for group of artists,’ taken from *Le Charivari* of 23 April 1878. In connection with the opening of the ‘so-called “salon des refusés,”’ it noted, the French newspaper had reproduced ‘a series of caricatures [zincographs by Daumier] of some of these paintings by the “peintres independants,”’ as they like to call themselves [...]. At the centre is a fantastic head representing one such “independent painter” and beneath it the caption reads “exrefusé, ci-devant réaliste, antérieurement impressioniste, intentioniste, luministe, actuellement nihiliste.” The latter appellation is the most appropriate because many of these new-fangled idiocies and eccentricities end up as nothing.’
1880s. In a letter to his parents he reported in detail on the outcry among the public and critics caused by the impressionist painters. He then went on to discuss the exhibitions. The young man's first reaction was fairly positive, particularly with regard to Pissarro's landscapes. But he did not report seeing anything with real backbone. His remarks about the pictures by Raffaëlli and on Eugène Vidal's portrait of George Sand reveal that he chiefly felt attracted to the more anecdotal *tableaux.*

It scarcely comes as a surprise, then, that Bonger failed to appreciate the paintings shown the following year (1881): ‘I had scarcely seen one or two paintings before I began to feel so unwell that I hurried home as quickly as possible. [...] The painters [have become] ridiculous, crazy even. The most indescribable hues of blue and green are used, which cannot be fitted into any category.’

Interestingly, Bonger, a friend of Theo van Gogh's, was later to collect a large number of works by modern French artists such as Cézanne, Redon, Bernard and Vincent van Gogh.

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Impressionism comes to the Netherlands

It was mainly due to Dutch art dealers that the impressionists remained virtually unknown in the Netherlands, despite the efforts of Vincent and Theo van Gogh, who tried to introduce their work. Once he had moved to France, Vincent cherished the dream of making impressionism known in Holland. Initially, he was full of hope, as appears from a letter to Theo of 26-28 February 1888. Theo, he believed, ought to be able to sell about 50 paintings to H.G. Tersteeg, the branch manager of Boussod, Valadon & Cie. in The Hague, particularly ‘in view of the low prices in relation to the importance of these works [...] and, after all, he will have to have some in stock, because if people are talking about these paintings in Antwerp and Brussels then it won't be long before they're being discussed in The Hague and Amsterdam’ [581/465]. These ‘50 paintings’ turned out to be the famous shipment of ten that sat in Holland from 6 April to 10 June of that year, before being returned as un-saleable (fig. 4). The batch contained work by Monet, Sisley, Gauguin and Van Gogh (fig. 5).

The failure of this transaction was not only due to a lack of enthusiasm among Dutch collectors. Tersteeg himself had no notion of impressionism and agreed to have the works sent only because Theo persuaded him. However, when the paintings arrived, he was far from appreciative. In reference to a landscape by Sisley he supposedly remarked: ‘The artist who painted that was a little tipsy.’ But Dutch painters, too, reacted unenthusiastically, as appears from Vincent's letter: he wished that ‘Mesdag and the others [would] stop making the impressionists look ridiculous’ [581/465]. In a letter of circa 22 June he complained to his sister Wil: ‘Theo has sent Mr Tersteeg a shipment of impressionist paintings, including one by me. But the only result seems to have been that neither Tersteeg nor the artists - according to Theo - have got anything out of it. That's quite easy to understand, because it's always the same: people have heard of the impressionists, they have

fig. 4

23 The Hague, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Archief Maison Goupil, inv. no. 40/30-40/47 (Tableaux 186-1917).

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List of works on view at Boussod, Valadon & Cie. in 1888, The Hague, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorisch Documentatie (RKD)

great expectations but [...] when they see the work for the first time they feel deeply disappointed and find the pictures shoddy, ugly, badly painted, badly drawn, bad use of colour - everything poorly done and poorly finished. That was my impression, too, when I first arrived in Paris with my head full of the ideas of Mauve and Israëls’ [633/W4].25 Even an artist like Willem Maris, often compared with the impressionists because of his bright palette, was not taken with these ‘luminists,’ whose work he described as ‘faded postage stamps.’26

The Hague adventure was, in short, a disaster. Years later, however, after Theo's death, the influential but reticent critic A.C. Loffelt recalled the impact these works had made on him: ‘If I see pieces by Sisley or Monet,
I am always reminded of poor Theo van Gogh, who about six years ago showed me an exhibition of their work at Goupil's - the old Pissarro and several moderns. I was not aware of how much he admired this art, and when he asked me what I thought of it, I replied without thinking twice: ‘I suppose Sisley's is the least awful, but I'm very glad that for me nature doesn't appear so monotonous as it does to the others.’ He answered me quite crossly in an offended tone: ‘Well, I am; I'm very glad, that I see nature like that.’

Meanwhile it had become clear to Vincent and Theo that the Dutch were uninformed about what was happening in France. In a letter to Theo of circa 5 June 1888 Vincent wrote: ‘Do you see now what audacity those idiots in Dordrecht have? [...] They are quite happy to busy themselves with Degas & Pissarro, whose work incidentally they've never seen - just as they've never seen any of the others’ [623/500]. By ‘those idiots in Dordrecht’ Vincent meant the artist Jan Veth, one of the organisers of the Nederlandsche Etsclub (Dutch Etching Society), and his friends. The energetic artists-cum-critics associated with the periodical *De Nieuwe Gids* - Jan Veth, Willem Witsen and Maurits van der Valk - defended the painters of the Hague School and their younger offspring active in Amsterdam. These men were much talked of at the time, not least because of their virulent attacks on other critics who, in their opinion, were unqualified and ignorant. The old Joseph Alberdingk Thijm was particularly slated in the 1880s, the period when these maverick writers were striving for a renewal in Dutch art. Thijm had been professor of Aesthetics at the Amsterdamse Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten (Amsterdam National Art Academy).
Academy of Visual Arts) since 1879, and he detested such things as the blurring of shapes and supposedly banal subject matter of the Hague and Amsterdam Schools. Among other things, Veth accused Thijm of not being aware of what was actually taking place in the art world. In addition, the Catholic Thijm felt that a painting should present an uplifting scene or idea, and Veth suspected that he valued this at the cost of technical aspects. However, it seems that the artist-critics of De Nieuwe Gids were themselves unfamiliar with French artists such as Degas, Monet and Renoir. Since Thijm supposedly drew conclusions without knowing the facts, G.H.C. Stemming (i.e. Jan Veth) advised him to read Huysmans's L'art moderne or the 'little brochure' by Felix Fénéon. But it appears that Veth himself had done no more than assimilate the writings of these two Frenchmen, as is demonstrated by

the way the Etsclub's second exhibition was organised.\footnote{On the Nederlandsche Etsclub see Jeroen Giltay, ‘De Nederlandsche Etsclub (1885-1896),’ 
\textit{Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek} 27 (1976), pp. 91-125.}

The society's second annual exhibition, which took place in 1888, included pieces by Degas (a chalk drawing of a dancer, and four lithographs by Thornley after his works), Pissarro and Forain (fig. 6). There were also etchings by artists such as Raffaëlli, who although he took part in their exhibitions, cannot truly be classified as an impressionist. Ironically, now that the Dutch public had the opportunity of seeing impressionist work, this was in the form of graphic art, where the typical characteristics of the style are less apparent. In addition, this show was much less carefully devised than has often been suggested, for the organisers apparently did not know exactly what they wanted to put on display. In a letter to Theo van Gogh, Veth wrote: ‘Couldn't you help out your young compatriots, who always appear to be sitting in an obscure corner? You seem to be right at the heart of things there in France. I read in the May number of the \textit{Revue Indépendante} that you are showing four lithographs by Thornley after Degas. Now that would be something for us. [...] Maybe there's more of this type of thing. Didn't Degas make some etchings? We don't know the proper channels for finding out such things here. Didn't Raffaëlli ever make any etchings? [...] What about etchings by Pissarro or Brown? [...] Of course, our main concern isn't with the very latest and newest. What we'd like to see is what you consider the \textit{best} of this type of work.’\footnote{Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, letter to Theo van Gogh, Dordrecht, 15 May 1888, inv. no. 3573: ‘zou u uw jonge landgenooten die toch altijd een beetje in een achterhoek zitten niet een beetje kunnen helpen? Voor de jonge Fransche kunst zit u geheel aan de bron. Zoo zag ik in de Revue Indépendante van Mei dat u exposeert vier lithografien van Thornley naar Degas. Dat zou bv iets voor ons zijn. [...] In dien geest is er misschien meer. Heeft Degas niet geëtst? Wij weten natuurlijk ganschelijk den weg niet voor zulke zaken. Heeft bv ook Rafaëlli zelf nooit geëtst [...] Heeft u ook soms etsen van Pissaro of van Brown [...] Natuurlijk zijn we niet zoozeer belust op wat nu het ‘t aller nieuwste is. We hadden graag iets van ‘t \textit{beste} der richting die u met zooveel oordeel voorstaat.’ In letters 613/489 and 615/490 Vincent refers to an exhibition in Dordrecht in which drawings by Bernard, Gauguin and Van Gogh himself were to be shown. We may assume that there is some confusion here on the artist's part. In his letterhead, Veth gave Dordrecht as his place of residence; this explains why Vincent (and probably Theo, too) assumed the exhibition would be held there. In fact, the second exhibition of the Nederlandsche Etsclub was held in the building of the society Arti et Amicitiae in Amsterdam; it opened on 1 June 1888.}

Inspired by the exhibition, Veth was to write a positive review of Pissarro's work later the same year, based on
fig. 6
George William Thornley after Edgar Degas, *Dancers*, c. 1889, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum
the small quantity of post-impressionist pieces that had been on view (fig. 7). The conservative critic Alberdingk Thijm was, however, far less jubilant. Referring to the show he wrote: ‘the appalling, childish scribbles of Edgar Degas, the impossible J.L. Forain, the cheap gaudy prints by Lucien Pissarro, the ghostly work by Odilon Redon, the chalk daubs done with the finger by Georges Seurat [...] fill the viewer with such disgust it hardly weighs against the pleasure experienced from seeing the work of now-deceased artists such as Corot, Millet and Lancon.’ Another Dutch critic of the same ilk, David van der Kellen, was damning in his opinion of the entries by Pissarro, Forain, Raffaëlli and Degas: ‘Rather no art than this kind of thing,’ he remarked mournfully.

After the impressionist exhibitions in France were over and the artists had each gone their own way, the Dutch critics gradually became more aware of what the movement was all about. In one of the earliest reviews of the work of Vincent van

33 Alb. Thijn [= J.A. Alberdingk Thijm], ‘Ten-toon-stellingen in Noord- en Zuid-Holland,’ *De Amsterdammer* (17 June 1888): ‘[..] de vreeselijke, schoolkinderachtige krabbelingen van Edgar Degas, de onmogelijke van J.L. Forain, de kermisprenten van Lucien Pissarro, de spookachtige van Odilon Redon, de met den vinger gedane van Georges Seurat (krijtdommeling), [...] brengen meer walging aan, dan wordt opgewogen door het genot dat de werken van de overleden als Corot, Millet en Lancon ons bieden.’ Other than this, before 1900, works by impressionist artists appeared only sporadically on the Dutch exhibition circuit. The following overview provides a clear picture. Haagsche Kunstkring, 8 October - 6 November 1893: Alfred Sisley - *Port Marly; Canal du Loing; Bords de la Tamise*; Claude Monet - *Faiisses de St Adresse; Bocal de pêches; Vue de Hollande; Argenteuil (effet de neige)*; Pierre-Auguste Renoir - Paysage; *Tête d'enfant; Femme au chapeau*; Camille Pissarro - *Palais de Justice à Pontoise; Près de l'étang; Femmes au pied d'un noyer; Effet de neige à Montfoucault* Exhibition at the gallery of E.J. van Wisselingh, Amsterdam, 29 January-15 February 1897: Claude Monet - *Rivière.* E.J. van Wisselingh exhibition at the Rotterdamse Kunstkring, circa 1898: Edgar Degas - *In het atelier: Arti et Amicitiae,* Amsterdam, exhibition of paintings by the modern French School, 1901: Claude Monet - *Les coteaux d'orgemont; La Seine à Vernon; Vue d'Amsterdam; Camille Pissarro - Bazincourt; Paysannes près d'un noyer; Cricket match, Bedford Park; Pierre-Auguste Renoir - *Chalet à Pourville; Jeune fille regardant des gravures; Tête de femme; Alfred Sisley - Le chemin des fontaines; Le canal de Loing.* E.J. van Wisselingh exhibition at Pulchri Studio, The Hague, 1905: Claude Monet - *Le printemps; La falaise de Saint Adresse.* Post-impressionist work by Signac, Seurat and others was exhibited at the Haagsche Kunstkring as early as 1892.


35 Just as in the world of art criticism, it was not until the end of the 19th century that impressionist art really became interesting to Dutch collectors. Around 1900 the collector Cornelis Hoogendijk bought several impressionist works from Ambrose Vollard in Paris; see Herbert Henkels, ‘Cézanne en Van Gogh in het Rijksmuseum voor Moderne Kunst in Amsterdam: de collectie van Cornelis Hoogendijk (1866-1911),’ *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 41 (1993), no. 3-4, pp. 155-295. Mesdag, who was chairman of the artists’ society Pulchri Studio, the bastion of the Hague School, was keen to exhibit part of the collection following a visit to Hoogendijk’s home on the Bezuidenhoutseweg (ibid., p. 167). The board of Pulchri Studio, however, only made a selection from his Dutch Old Masters (ibid., pp. 167-70). According to Henkels, this was because Hoogendijk himself did not yet wish to exhibit any modern French work. This seems highly unlikely since in February 1899 - just one month after the Pulchri exhibition - there was a show at the Haagsche Kunstkring that included French art from his collection (ibid., p. 170). It looks very much as if Pulchri Studio’s lack of interest in contemporary work from the collection was due solely to Mesdag’s own aversion to impressionism.
Gogh to appear in the Netherlands, the writer Frederik van Eeden made some remarks about impressionism. Van Eeden was one of the first Dutchmen to admire Van Gogh; unlike Jan Veth, he had no problems with Vincent's painting. Despite this, he hesitated when it came to the artist's contemporaries: ‘But in France Van Gogh trained in the school of the independents, where the greatest French artists of the moment are to be found, Degaz [sic], Pissarro, Raffaëlli, Monet. It seems that Van Gogh's work most resembles that of Monet - of whom I never saw anything important. But I must admit that what I saw by Pissarro, Degaz [sic] and Raffaëlli never gave me the impression of being beautiful. Sometimes I can understand the superior quality of the work without really appreciating what was meant, and sometimes I do not even see that. I would assume it to be the work of children, although I hear on good authority, from those who are better able to

![Image](image_url)

fig. 7
Camille Pissarro, *The Place de la République in Rouen*, 1883, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz

judge, that it is of high artistic merit.' It is not clear how Van Eeden got to see paintings by the impressionists - possibly in Paris or perhaps at Tersteeg's. However it came about, his disapproval is patent.

Among Dutch artists and critics, the arrival of impressionist work in the Netherlands in 1888 gave rise to chiefly negative comments. But on the whole there were mostly variations on the theme of silence, quite unlike the uproar the movement had caused in Paris. In an article published in De Nieuwe Gids in 1890, Veth did express his admiration for Degas, but he restricted himself mainly to praising the artist as an etcher. He also described the work of Monet, who he said 'was chiefly concerned with the effect of light in the landscape, rendering it by means of setting bright invigorating colours beside each other.'

Otherwise he had little positive to say. It is worth noting that Veth never wrote extensively about the impressionists for the magazine De Kroniek, to which he contributed from the 1890s on, with the exception of some brief remarks in the so-called ‘notes’ section; these were a kind of newsflash item and were frequently taken from other (foreign) magazines or newspapers.

The artist and critic J.J. Isaacson, who lived in Paris from 1887 to 1890, wrote in a positive tone about Monet, Degas and, to a lesser extent, Pissarro in the Dutch periodical De Portefeuille. He was also the first to mention Van Gogh. In a series of articles, Isaacson described the neoimpressionists, among whom he included Monet. Apart from Monet and Pissarro, however, he was unimpressed with this art. It was only worthwhile analysing because one of their number - Monet - was a ‘superior artist’ in whose ‘visions the most delicate brightness of the sun is made visible in a dramatic and understated manner.’ He delineates what can only be described as a mixture of impressionist and pointillist ideas, including the theory of complementary colours, noting that in the paintings by these artists a ‘shadow is


38 Jan Veth, ‘Fransche Schilderkunst van deze Eeuw,’ De Nieuwe Gids 5 (1890), part 2, pp. 326-27. In 1888 Willem Witsen had also made some appreciative remarks about Degas, although at the same time emphasising the ‘ugly’ aspects of his art: ‘Degas is a keen observer [...] a ballet dancer [...] is striking in her huge realism, an ugly woman with an ugly shape and ugly proportions; that's how it is, that's it’; see Verberchem [= W. Witsen], ‘Tweede jaarlijksche tentoonstelling van de Nederlandsche Etsclub,’ De Nieuwe Gids 3 (1888), part 2, p. 431.

39 Veth, op. cit. (note 38), p. 327.

40 See e.g. JV [= Jan Veth], ‘Notes,’ De Kroniek 1 (27 October 1895), no. 44, p. 347. Here he mentions Monet's paintings of the cathedral at Rouen.

41 J. Hulsker, ‘Zijn naam, Vincent, is voor het nageslacht,’ in idem, Van Gogh in close-up, Amsterdam 1993, pp. 11-12.

42 J.J.I. [= J.J. Isaacson], ‘De revolutionaire schildersgroep in Frankrijk I,’ De Portefeuille (10 May 1890), p. 75.
never black but blue.” He also referred to their technique as ‘stippelen’ or painting with small dots, which made their pictures resemble ‘coloured fields of small peas.’ Isaacson distinguishes two revolutionary groups of painters: the neo-impressionists - including Monet, Camille and Lucien Pissarro, Luce, Gausson, Seurat, Signac and Dubois-Pillet; and the ‘emotional impressionists,’ among them Degas, Bernard, Gauguin, De Lothrijk, Van Gogh, Guillaumin, Cézanne and Redon, as well as the ‘inevitable camp-followers Schuffenecker and Zandomeneghi.”

As Isaacson’s articles demonstrate, already in the early 1890s critics were able to provide a reasonably accurate picture of neo-impressionism; their opinion of the impressionists, on the other hand, had hardly changed. A good example is provided by Loffelt's 1891 review of the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Although by then he knew the names of a few of the impressionists, he here classifies them as pointillists. In the same piece he also refers to earlier paintings by Monet and Sisley, which suggests that he even knew their work, probably through the show in The Hague in 1888. And, although his judgment was to become thoroughly negative in 1893, he here appears to at least show some appreciation for the

43 Ibid., p. 76.
44 J.J.I. [= J.J. Isaacson], ‘De revolutionaire schildersgroep in Frankrijk II,’ De Portefeuille (17 May 1890), p. 89.
early Sisley: ‘It would be alright to see one Sisley, or a Monet, but the monotony, the superficiality of the genre when you see a quantity of them together (Sisley has entered several paintings which are hung side by side) is hard to bear: you have the impression of looking at factory work, like Japanese mother-of-pearl objects. Previously Sisley sought to express himself in a range of yellow and grey tones, full of variety and maturity, which perfectly rendered the sunny French city-, town- and riverscapes.’ Naturally, this exhibition no longer showed impressionism in its original form, and indeed, the critic paid most attention to the neo-impressionist work on display.

### Dutch impressionism: a confusing term

Despite the summary references to the revolutionary developments in painting in France and the general rejection of this art, from 1877 on the word ‘impressionism’ may be regularly encountered in Dutch criticism. But there was little understanding of what this term implied. Ironically, it was those very Dutch artists who detested Monet and others whom the Dutch critics classified as impressionists.

The progressive critic J.J. van Santen Kolff is known primarily in Dutch art history as the man who gave the Hague School its name. Indeed, not only was Kolff the first to use this appellation, he was also the first to describe a Dutch painter as an impressionist. In 1877 this honour was bestowed on the now-almost-forgotten F.J. Rossum du Chattel, whom he described as ‘indisputably a thorough-going and completely sound impressionist, as this branch of so-called realists is now being called in France.’ At first glance this passage may not seem strange, but when we read Kolff’s articles it becomes clear that he had no idea what was actually meant by the term impressionism, and that he equated it wholly with the Hague School. In connection with a review of a watercolour by the Dutch painter Jozef Neuhuys in 1878, for example, he cites a passage from an article by Victor Cherbuliez published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* - itself drawn from Théodore Duret’s *Les peintres impressionnistes* [sic] (1878). Speaking of the ‘so-called ‘peintres naturalistes’ or ‘impressionnistes de notre temps’ Kolff quoted: ‘Nous leur devons l’étude du plein

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47 See Blotkamp, op. cit. (note 36), p. 122, fn. 34.

48 J.K. [= J.J. van Santen Kolff], ‘Een nationale vereeniging ter bevordering der waterverfEEKenkunst II,’ *De Banier* 3 (1877), no. 3, p. 463: ‘Hier is du Chattel ontgeenzeegelijk een volbloed en uiterst gezond impressionist, zooals tegenwoordig in Frankrijk een secte der zoogenaamde “réalisten” wordt genoemd.’
air, la sensation vraie non-seulement des couleurs, mais des moindres nuances des couleurs, les tons, et encore la recherche des rapports entre l'état de l'atmosphère qui éclaire le tableau et la lonalité générale des objets, qui s'y trouvent peints.  

This link between impressionism and tonal painting, whereby the weather or an outdoor ‘mood’ is rendered, does indeed seem to relate better to the work of Anton Mauve, Jacob Maris or Jozef Israëls than to that of Monet, Renoir or Pissarro (fig. 8). In fact, the citation used by Kolff bears a striking resemblance to his own description of the art of the Hague School. But even if he did not know Duret's treatise in its entirety, the article by Cherbuliez should have sounded a warning bell. In fact, the passage Kolff quotes is preceded by a sentence referring to ‘la peinture claire, définitivement débarrassée de la litharge, du bitume, du chocolat, du jus de chique, du graillon et du gratin.’ And although he himself would never have described the work of the Hague School as ‘dirty chocolate,’’ he was certainly

aware that some critics considered it just that. He should therefore have concluded that ‘la peinture claire’ - i.e. impressionism - was the very opposite of the Dutch style. However, he had probably never actually seen any of the exhibitions in Paris, and was basing his remarks on foreign articles; moreover, he wished to present the Hague School as an important international movement. He thus reached the wrong conclusion about the term and the ‘impressionist’ group as a whole.

The Hague School set out to modernise Dutch art, in the process causing quite a lot of controversy. The critics accused these painters of neglecting technique; their works were considered sketchy and unfinished. The movement developed in the 1870s - precisely the same moment that witnessed the birth of impressionism in France. This art, too, was associated with sketchiness, loose brushwork, a lack of precise detail and indistinct shapes. From the comments in the French press Dutch critics thus concluded that
there were certain similarities between the two styles, and it is therefore not altogether surprising that the word ‘impressionist’ quickly became associated with the work of the Hague School. The Dutch critics tended to focus on these supposedly identical technical aspects, thereby ignoring issues such as the choice of subject matter and use of colour.

This appears in a review by a certain Francesco written in 1890, based on articles by the French critic Albert Wolff: ‘How much greater then is the artistry of the old Dutch masters compared with the painters of today, whom one may place in the group Albert Wolff scathingly called the School of Impotents, l’école des impotents. “The impressionists and their ilk,” is more or less what he says, “have no understanding of painting; they occupy themselves with it without appreciating finish (l’achevé), shape, line and so forth”; these are the people who compose the School of Impotents.’ Loffelt, too, refers to the Hague painters as ‘the so-called impressionist school, which most people understand to be artists who lack the skill to make a complete and finished work.’ The conservative critic Thijm also let his voice be heard: ‘There are meanwhile many artists and also prattlers and writers who would like us to believe that modern theory and practice are characterised by the (coincidental) qualities that we observe in many paintings by the impressionists, for example, the blurred outlines, the absence of finished detail, the lack of judgment, or, if you prefer, an unconsidered choice of subject taken from nature.’

Another contributing factor to this misuse of the term ‘impressionism’ was the frequent appearance of the word ‘impressie,’ used from the 1870s on by Dutch art critics in connection with the Hague School. ‘Impressie’ implies the rendering of a personal impression, a description which seems perfectly suited to the all-prevailing sense of mood found in the work of these artists, which was generally seen as the result of a reproduction of specific types of weather as seen through the artist's eyes. It is therefore not surprising that in the Netherlands the French term ‘impressionism’ soon became confused with the word ‘impressie.’ Thus we find Alberdingk Thijm writing in 1886: ‘At the heart of things [...] the impressionists are right. Their starting point (even though they don't say it openly) is that art is nature, plus the state of mind of the artist.’ During the 1880s the term ‘impressionism’ cropped up right, left and

50 Francesco, ‘De kunst op de Haagse tentoonstelling II,’ De Amsterdammer (15 June 1890): ‘Hoe stijgt dan de artiesticiteit van den oud-Hollandschen schilder tegenover den moderne, die zoo in alle opzicht-den behoort tot de richting, welke Albert Wolff l’école des impotents, de school der onmachtigen gedoopt heeft. “De impressionisten c.s.” zoo heeft hij ongeveer gezegd, “zij die het eigenlijke schilderen niet verstaan, maar die zich met schilderkunst bezig houden, zonder smaak te hebben voor het voltooien (l’achevé), voor den vorm en voor de lijn enz. maken gezamenlijk de school der onmachtigen uit.”’

51 E.G.O. [= A.C. Loffelt], ‘De aquarellen in de Gothische Zaal,’ Het Vaderland (17 August 1882).

52 Alb. Thijm [= J.A. Alberdingk Thijm], ‘Kunst-tent-toonstelling III,’ De Amsterdammer (17 October 1886): ‘Intuutschen zijn er vele artiisten en ook praters en schrijvers, die ons willen doen geloven, dat de moderne theorie en praktijk zich kenmerken door de (toevallige) eigenaardigheden, die wij in vele schilderijen der impressionisten opmerken: als bijv. het vlottende der omtrekken, het afzijn van uitvoerigheid in de bewerking, het onoordeelkundige, of, wil men, argloze der keuze van het uit de natuur genomene.’

53 Ibid.: ‘In de grond der zaak [...] hebben de impressionisten gelijk [...]. Hun beginsel is (als spreken zij ’t niet uit), dat de kunst is de natuur, plus het gemoed van de kunstenaar.’
centre in Dutch art criticism, but it rarely referred to the French art movement. It soon acquired a general meaning.

The tonal, atmospheric effects - impressions of certain kinds of weather - so prevalent in the work of the Hague and Amsterdam School painters resulted in a dissolution of form and the sketchy character that was so often seen as characteristic of impressionist work. Problems arose, however, because, in fact, all painters seek to render ‘an impression.’ Loffelt, for example, described the colourful work of J.H. Weissenbruch and J.J. van de Sande Bakhuijzen, with their well-defined shapes as follows: ‘The blue of the sky [in Van de Sande Bakhuijzen's Landscape in Overijssel] could have more tone and thereby be deeper, but personally I prefer to see a mistake like this, which is caused by the striving after perfection, than the characterless vague shapes and sketchy effects of the so-called impressionists. These artists wish to give an “impression” of nature, but isn't that exactly what Weissenbruch and Van de Sande Bakhuijzen do in their work? The only difference is that they aim for a powerful statement, an active rendering of a mood, while the others seem to prefer a hazy, vague, passive state. If people ask me who has best managed to convey this “impression” in a plastic form, then I would say that Weissenbruch and Bakhuijzen are the winners.’

In a satirical report in the weekly Amsterdammer a certain Fred J. Verheijst wrote, ‘But we have entered a new age. We are overwhelmed by an inexhaustible urge for colour harmony. Tones and yet more tones - that is what we covet. And if these tones flow here and there over the edges of the objects being represented [...], why we won't bother too much. Impressions of nature are renewed and

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54 E.G.O. [= A.C. Loffelt], ‘De Haagsche “Salon,”’ Het Vaderland (13 June 1887): ‘Het blauw der lucht kon toniger en daardoor dieper, maar ik voor mij verkies zulk een fout veroorzaakt door een streven naar volmaaktheid boven de karakterloze weifelingen en schetsmatigheid van zoogenaamde impressionisten. Willen zoogenoemden een “indruk”, een “impressie” van de natuur geven; welnu, geven Weissenbruch en Van de Sande Bakhuizen dien niet in hun werk? Het enige verschil is, dat zij naar een krachtigen indruk zoeken, een actieve natuurstemming, terwijl de anderen zich meer aangetrokken voelen door een druïlige, wazige, passieve stemming. Vraagt men mij, wie er het best in geslaagd zijn hun “impressionisme” weer te geven in een plastischen kunstvorm, dan zijn volgens mijn waarnemingsvermogen, Weissenbruch en Bakhuijzen de baas.’

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such things as objective accuracy in representation become utterly unimportant. [...] But we have acted without considering the Nemesis of neatness and precision. Recently a talented impressionist, not lacking in genius, made a real mess of his landscape.\textsuperscript{55}

Impressionism thus became synonymous with a certain way of painting: it was swift, shapes were indistinct, the brushstroke was loose and rough. Essential aspects such as the use of complementary colour tones and novel means of presentation - type of frame, background colour of the walls, absence of the final varnish layer - all so elaborately debated and applied by French artists, were never mentioned. Even in the 1890s, when Jan Toorop's neo-impressionist work ensured a reasonable picture of this style,

critics continued to think that impressionism only meant ill-defined shapes: ‘Mrs Mesdag has succeeded in maintaining a certain form, and although her technique is fairly free, she has not been reduced to tasteless shapelessness, which one all too often sees in the work of those who attempt to render an impression. The technique of the impressionists is frequently so crude and unskilful that I can find only one word for it: ugly.’

This equation of looseness of technique and impressionism was deeply rooted and pervasive, and led to sweeping and absurd conclusions; soon even Frans Hals and Rembrandt were included among the happy band of impressionists. In fact, however, when we consider the method of painting, the use of colour and the choice of subject matter, the Dutch art that came to be termed ‘impressionist’ has very little in common with that of its French predecessors.

**International impressionism: a modernist discovery**

From the 1880s on, more and more often critics in many European countries began to refer to much contemporary art as ‘impressionist,’ even when the works had little or nothing to do with the French movement. By this time the name was *de rigueur* for modern paintings, or those that wished to be seen as such. For the critics the spontaneity and individuality of the works began to play a greater role, and more value was placed on expression and originality. As Robert Jensen has observed, however, this is no reason why one should speak of these pictures in terms of ‘impressionism.’ Yet the tendency has been so compelling that even today, at the close of the 20th century, it is hard to eradicate.

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56 E.G.O. [= A.C. Loffelt], ‘De aquarellen in de Academie II,’ *Het Vaderland* (27 August 1891): ‘Mevrouw Mesdag is er in geslaagd haar techniek, hoe breed ook, niet te doen onttaarden in onsmakvolle ruwheid, gelijk men te dikkwijls ziet bij hen, die het indrukwekkende trachten te vertolken. De techniek der impressionistische kunst is niet zelden zoo grof en onbeholpen, dat ik slechts één naam voor zulke kunstuitingen ken: lelijk.’


59 See also De Leeuw, op. cit. (note 3), p. 35. De Leeuw cites a very telling remark by Bernard Dorival: ‘This movement [impressionism] is even so highly regarded that its label is stuck on to artists who do not actually have much to do with it [...]’ More recently, in Norma Broude (ed.), *World impressionism: the international movement, 1860-1920* (New York
Scholars have repeatedly linked the Hague and Amsterdam Schools with the French impressionists.\textsuperscript{60} The confusion that triumphed at the end of the 19th century, when Dutch artists who despised the work of French painters such as Monet, Degas or Renoir were themselves labelled impressionists, has only increased with the continuing (mis)use of the term. Thus, in the 1991 introduction to the exhibition catalogue \textit{The age of Van Gogh: Dutch painting 1880-1895}, a parallel was drawn between the subject matter of George Hendrik Breitner, Marius Bauer, Isaac Israëls and Willem de Zwart and that of their Parisian con-

\begin{itemize}
  \item[1990], Brooks Adams treated the Hague School as a the fore-runner of the modernist work of Van Gogh and Piet Mondrian. Mesdag’s Panorama in The Hague and P.J.C. Gabriel’s \textit{In the month of July} (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) are cited as the foremost examples of Dutch impressionism. The Panorama is most definitely not a good example of impressionist work, but rather of the most precise realism. Within the Hague School, Gabriel was something of a fish out of water, and his art is certainly not typical of the style; furthermore, however, his method of painting - placing mixed colours on the canvas, and then varnishing the work - is a world away from the technique of the French impressionists; see: exhib. cat. \textit{Paul Joseph Constantin Gabriël 1828-1903: Colorist van de Haagse School}, Dordrecht (Dordrechts Museum) & Cleves (B.C. Koekkoek Haus) 1998-99.
  \item[60] The important book by A.M. Hammacher, \textit{Amsterdamsch impressionisten en hun kring}, Amsterdam 1946, contributed to a widespread familiarity with the term in this century.
\end{itemize}
temporaries. Although only Manet is actually mentioned by name, the suggestion is made that there were close ties with other artists as well, for example Degas - after all, Breitner, Bauer and De Zwart also painted ballet dancers. Furthermore, Dutch and French artists apparently shared a love for depicting cafés, theatres and life on the city streets. From this the assumption arose that French impressionism had a profound influence on the Amsterdam School.

Comparisons based solely on subject matter are a dubious business. For one thing, it was not only impressionists who painted these kinds of scenes. The Dutch artists could just as easily have been inspired by a neo-impressionist like Seurat. Far more telling, however, is a comparison with those Salon artists who so often rendered the sophisticated urban life of Paris. Generally speaking, when Dutch artists visited the French capital they made sure not to miss the annual Salons. Jacobus van Looy's *Luxurious summer* (fig. 9), for example, can be better likened to Louis Marie Lemaire's *Matinée de juin* (fig. 10) than - as is so often the case - to work by Manet or Monet. Even if Van Looy did not see *Matinée de juin* at the 1893 Salon he may still have known the work from the reproduction in the Salon catalogue.

It is common practice to draw a comparison between the work of Breitner, Isaac Israëls and Degas, particularly because of their method of cropping figures. However, Degas was certainly not the first to introduce spectacular cut edges. The famous Anglo-Dutch painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema used a similar technique, and his fellow countrymen would certainly have known his work better than that of Degas. The argument that when Dutch artists visited France they went not only to the Salons, the Louvre and the Luxembourg, but also visited ‘impressionist’ dealers such as Durand-Ruel is equally unconvincing. In these artists’ surviving documents we find no mention of the French impressionists.

62 Compare, for example, the composition and placing of the figures in Isaac Israëls’s *Café chantant in a popular quarter in Amsterdam* (c. 1893, Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum) and Seurat's *Parade* (1887-88, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), which was on view at the Les Vingt exhibition in Brussels in 1892. We know that Isaac Israëls attended the exhibition in 1884, when paintings by his father were being shown.
63 *The age of Van Gogh*, cit. (note 61), no. 58. See also exhib. cat. *Jacobus van Looy, 1855-1930: Niets is zoo mooi als zien...,* Haarlem (Frans Halsmuseum) & Helmond (Gemeentemuseum Helmond) 1998-99, no. 24 and *Langs velden en wegen*, cit. (note 22), no. 98.
64 Chris Will has demonstrated that Van Looy often used Salon pictures as models; see Chris Will, ‘Negentiende-eeuwse hispanisten en de flamencodans,’ *Jong Holland* 14 (1998), no. 4, pp. 38-39. Equally, it is not immediately apparent that Breitner’s nudes were influenced by the work of Manet or Degas; both the painting technique and the compositions are more reminiscent of nudes exhibited at the annual Salon, for example Jacquesson de la Chevreuse’s *Étude* (present location unknown), on view in 1885. For a comparison between the nudes of Breitner and Degas see exhib. cat. *De schilders van Tachtig*, cit. (note 28), no. 16.
65 *The age of Van Gogh*, cit. (note 61), no. 12.
On the other hand, there is much praise for the painters of the Barbizon School. Veth and Willem Witsen visited Paris in 1885. Isaac Israëls was also a frequent visitor, on one occasion in 1889 accompanying the writer Frans Erens. That same year they met both Huysmans and Mallarmé, through whom they were introduced to Berthe Morisot, Manet's sister-in-law. At her home they saw and admired the artist's work. They also visited Theo van Gogh's gallery. When writing of their visit they mention Manet,

68 See Anna Wagner, Isaac Israëls, Rotterdam 1967, p. 27.
The Barbizon School, Jean-François Raffaëlli and Giuseppe de Nittis, but say not a word about any of the impressionists. In her monograph on Isaac Israëls Anna Wagner has stated quite rightly that his works have little in common with those of the impressionist group. In fact, they bear a far more striking resemblance to the popular street scenes of de Nittis (figs. 11 and 12).

When it was presented to the State of the Netherlands in 1903 the Museum Mesdag was the first museum for modern art in the country. Despite the fact that it contained no work by the French impressionists, the collection was both fresh and experimental. This was largely due to the extemporaneous works of the Barbizon and Hague Schools it contained. During the 20th century, however, ideas about museum presentation began to change. Seeking to modernise the image of the museum, the interiors were adapted during the 1950s and 60s to conform to these new concepts. Similar modernist attitudes contributed to the notion that The Hague and Amsterdam School painters were impressionists. For only the 19th-century art that could be considered a forerunner of the 20th-century avant garde - such as the work of Vincent van Gogh or Paul Cézanne - was believed to be of interest.

Although the artists of the Barbizon School are now no longer termed impressionists, those of both the Hague and Amsterdam Schools often are. This amalgamation does the Dutch art no good. Indeed, because of this comparison it has been impossible to gain an assessment without prejudices or tags - particularly from abroad. However, by mixing different international schools in museum presentations, as at the Museum Mesdag, it becomes clear that modern Dutch artists were far more interested in the Barbizon School than in their impressionist contemporaries.

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69 Ibid., p. 42.
70 De Bodt, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 43-53.
[Documentation]

Catalogue of acquisitions: paintings, drawings and sculpture
August 1998-July 1999

This catalogue contains all paintings, drawings and sculpture acquired by the Van Gogh Museum from August 1998 to July 1999. Each work has an inventory number made up as follows: the first letter stands for the technique (s = painting, d = drawing, v = sculpture); this is followed by a reference number and then by a capital letter (B = loan, N = State of the Netherlands, S = Van Gogh Museum [after 1 July 1994], V = Vincent van Gogh Foundation) and the year of acquisition.

Paintings

Böcklin, Arnold
Swiss, 1827-1901

Sleeping nymph spied on by two fauns 1884
Oil on panel, 70 × 90 cm
Signed at lower right: AB
s 491 S/1999

The Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin is known for his mystically-tinged work. Besides doom-laden paintings, he also created mythological scenes; often lighter in tone and less symbolically charged, these sometimes even express a certain humour. In the second half of the 19th century, Böcklin gained a prominent position in artistic circles, especially in the German-speaking countries. His work appealed to many of his contemporaries, and also inspired painters of later generations. He was a leading exemplar, especially to the symbolists. His themes are drawn from the Dionysian world of Nietzsche, and tend towards the Teutonic grandiloquence of Richard Wagner. The painter was concerned less with a reiteration of the stories of antiquity than with such human fundamentals as solitude, erotic desire, happiness, angst and longing. It is not the Olympian gods who populate his paintings, but natural forces personified as nymphs, fauns, centaurs and naiads. At times bizarre and fantastical, his pictures can seem somewhat contrived. However, although characteristic, the Sleeping nymph, does not stray into the excesses and exaggerations of some of his other works.

Following a long period in Rome, Böcklin lived in Florence from 1874 to 1885. It was not unusual for German painters to reside in Italy, where they sought inspiration in the country's mythology, past, and unspoiled landscape. Böcklin was the most important of these so-called 'Deutsch-Römer,' whose exponents included Anselm Feuerbach, Hans von Marées, Franz von Lenbach and Adolf von Hildebrand. The international significance of these artists has recently become apparent: numerous symbolists, expressionists and surrealists were influenced by their work. We know from a passage in the diary of Böcklin's student and biographer Rudolf Schick that
the canvas was painted in Florence in 1884. Schick also made a sketch after the work which on many occasions has been attributed to the master himself.

The painting depicts a sleeping water nymph being spied on by two fauns. Although it bears considerable resemblance to Böcklin's *Sleeping Diana spied on by two fauns* of 1877 (Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum), the Van Gogh Museum's painting has far greater charm. Besides the *Sleeping Diana*, no other work in Böcklin's oeuvre is so clearly associated with this picture.

The canvas shows Böcklin at his best. Deliberately wide-ranging, the variety of style brings his artistic qualities to the fore. The hairy bodies of the fauns, the vegetation and the silvery tints of the water all provided the painter with an opportunity to revel in the rendering of texture. Depth is created by the detailed rocks and mosses in the foreground, and the sketchy plant cover in the background. The pale skin of the nymph and the brownish hides of the fauns - a fine contrast - contribute to the scene's spatiality.

Although the work is humorous, a certain empathy is created by the fauns' somewhat stupid facial expressions and their very goat-like limbs. Böcklin is said to have incorporated the features of the artist Franz von Lenbach, his former close friend, into one of the faces. Lenbach's meddling and backbiting had led to strains in the relationship, culminating in a break in August 1877.

The endearing scene also has a lightly ironic undertone. A not-so-subtle sexual allusion can be discerned in the gourd pointing towards the vessel from which the spring flows. But something strange is afoot: while fauns are traditionally known for their licentiousness, here their lust is very restrained. Although the nymph lies asleep - a condition ideally suited to being overpowered - they seem to be resigned to passive staring.

Böcklin's figures fill almost the whole canvas, creating an intimate mood which is only enhanced
Arnold Böcklin
Sleeping nymph spied on by two fauns 1884
by the chiaroscuro. Little is visible of the natural surroundings; nothing in the painting is reminiscent of the kind of classical Italian landscape that played such a pronounced role in the artist's other works. Tree species characteristic of Mediterranean regions, such as cypresses, are absent.

Like his contemporaries Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas and Paul Cézanne, Böcklin frequently based his work on that of Old Masters. Paintings of spied-on nymphs, or of Susanna and the elders, can be traced back to Titian, Rubens and Poussin in particular.

**Provenance** Baron von Heyking, Peking (given on permanent loan to the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, c. 1900); Kunsthandel Eduard Schulte, Berlin (1905); Kunsthandel J.P. Schneider Jr, Frankfurt am Main (1905); Kojiro Matsukata; private collection, Osaka (1960); Fujikawa Gallery, Tokyo (1972); Iwami Furusawa, Tokyo (1973); Jeffrey Deitch, New York; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum with support from the Vereniging Rembrandt, with the help of the Prins Bernard Fonds (1999).


**Bonheur, Rosa**

**French, 1822-1899**

La mare aux fées c. 1870
Oil on canvas, 31 × 38 cm
Signed at lower right (not by the artist): *Rosa Bonheur*
s 492 S/1999

Rosa Bonheur is best known for her realistic animal pieces, which were often painted in a large format. Intimate studies of nature, such as *La mare aux fées*, are fairly rare.
in her oeuvre. This study of a tree was painted in the forest of Fontainebleau, where the artist had withdrawn in 1860. She often drew or painted the trees and clearings she encountered on her many long walks through the woods. The site shown in this painting is known as ‘la mare aux fées,’ i.e. ‘the fairies’ pool.’

The artist Henri Cain once wrote that it was impossible to persuade Rosa Bonheur to come to Paris if she was working on such a study. ‘I can’t leave now,’ she would say, ‘the forest is too beautiful at the moment, flaming with magnificent foliage which is so soon to fade.’

Although the study features a number of trees, only one, that at the centre, has been finished in any detail. Bonheur devoted considerable attention to the play of light falling through the branches and illuminating the trunk.


Desboutin, Marcellin-Gilbert
French, 1823-1902

Self-portrait
Oil on canvas, 40.3 × 32.4 cm
Signed lower right: M. Desboutin
s 490 S/1999

Desboutin was the scion of an aristocratic family. After completing his studies in law, he decided in 1845 to take lessons at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He left the academy already in 1847, due to the uninspiring teaching of his academic master, Louis-Jules Etex. Between 1847 and 1849 Desboutin worked in the studio of Thomas Couture, another of whose students in the same period was Edouard Manet.
Kees van Dongen
The blue dress 1911
As a wealthy young man, Desboutin could devote himself to his passions: writing poetry and plays, and collecting art for his Florentine villa. Only after exhausting his fortune did he return to Paris in 1872, now ready to address the question of seriously applying himself to a career as a painter and engraver.

As someone who moved in impressionist circles, Desboutin posed twice for Degas. He made his name as a portraitist: Degas, Manet and Zola are numbered among his sitters. As well as painting a large number of his contemporaries, known and unknown, he executed several self-portraits.

This work was probably painted when he was in his early 20s and working with Couture. The monotone palette is characteristic of his style. Because of the complete absence of artistic accoutrements, there is no indication of his profession as a painter. The spectator's attention is drawn primarily to the young man's face and his abundant head of hair.

Provenance Gaston Lévy; Private collection, USA; Galerie Partick Derom, Paris (1999); purchased by the Van Gogh Museum (1999).

Van Dongen, Kees
Dutch, 1877-1968

The blue dress 1911
Oil on canvas, 146 × 114 cm
Signed at lower right: Van Dongen
s 493 S/1999

Composed in simple, vividly-coloured planes, this portrait shows Van Dongen's wife, Augusta Preitinger (1878-1946). The couple had met at the art academy in Rotterdam in the 1880s, and had married in 1901. Head raised, hand on hip, Guus - as she was known - is shown in a challenging and self-assured pose. She wears a blue dress with a black openwork vest and has a red ornament (probably a peony) in her hair. Van Dongen had her pose in the bright light of an arc lamp and this accounts for the elliptical shadow in the background. He used strong colours: a glowing crimson for the background, a dark purplish red for the shadow, and deep cobalt blue for the dress.

According to Van Dongen's daughter Dolly, the portrait was painted in the artist's studio on the Rue Saulnier, near the Folies-Bergère music hall. It probably dates from 1911. Van Dongen exhibited the work in December of that year at the Parisian art dealer's Bernheim Jeune, where it bore the title La robe bleue. In Interior with a yellow door, which was painted in 1912 (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen) the work - albeit in a somewhat rudimentary form - is seen hanging over a dresser in his apartment; from this we can conclude that the artist gave it a prominent position in his own home.

In 1912, Roger Fry selected this imposing portrait for his second exhibition of post-impressionists at the Grafton Galleries in London, where a critic described it as 'daring in its contrasted shades of purples and crimson.' As at the exhibition held in
Paris a year earlier, the work was not for sale. At a later date, the portrait passed to Dolly van Dongen. The supposition that she inherited it upon the artist's death, however, is incorrect: it was already in her possession before Van Dongen died in 1968. The absence of further details means that we can only speculate on the provenance of the work. If Dolly did not inherit the canvas from her father, she may have received it from her mother. Augusta and Van Dongen were divorced after the First World War; it probably passed to the former when the property was divided in the early 1920s.


**Literature** Jean Melas Kyriazi, *Van Dongen et le Fauvisme*, Lausanne & Paris [1971], pp. 113, 116; exhib. cat. *Van Dongen*,


**Mesdag, Hendrik Willem**
**Dutch, 1831-1915**

Breakers in the North Sea 1870
Oil on canvas, 90 × 180 cm
Signed at lower right: *HW Mesdag 1870*

In 1870, just four years after he had set out to become a painter, and two after he had decided to devote himself to marine subjects, H.W. Mesdag won a gold medal at the Paris Salon with *Breakers in the North Sea*. Not only did this establish his reputation as an artist, it also helped him make his name as a painter of seascapes.

The source of his inspiration for this canvas was the coast of the North Sea at Scheveningen, which Mesdag was able to contemplate to his heart's content after settling nearby in The Hague in 1869. To carry out his studies, he rented a room with a sea view at the Villa Elba in Scheveningen.

The genesis of the work, however, is quite complex. After visiting the German island of Norderney in the summer of 1868, where he discovered his vocation as a marine painter, Mesdag embarked on a monumental seascape. Then, in Brussels, he
saw a seascape by Courbet, and decided that the work he had begun in Norderney needed to be painted again. This decision was probably taken in late 1869, as one of Mesdag's friends, the
Belgian artist Verwée, had seen the earlier version of the work at the end of August. In a letter dated 15 November 1869, Mesdag indicated that he had modified its subject. On 24 January 1870, he wrote to Verwée that he still had to complete his marine, but that he would have it finished by March in time to submit to the Salon.

The painting was bought at the exhibition by the genre and portrait painter Charles Chaplin, who had been a member of the jury. It is not known when it left his collection; it certainly did not feature in the auction of his studio in 1891. It was only in the 1980s that the work was finally traced by the Mesdag Documentatie Centrum. It was discovered that the picture had been cut in two and partially painted in with ships. These additions have been removed and the two parts reunited; for the first time in many decades, it is now possible to show the painting in its original state. (See also the article by Fred Leeman in this volume of the Van Gogh Museum Journal.)


- Portrait of Jozef Israëls 1872
  - Oil on canvas, 60.5 × 50.8 cm
  - Signed at lower right: *H.W. Mesdag 1872*
  - s 499 S/1999

Although it has been suggested that this work is a counterpart to the portrait Israëls painted of Mesdag, now also in the Museum Mesdag in The Hague, this is by no means certain. The two paintings are certainly different with regard to size. However,
it is possible that Israëls's work, which was created several years after that by Mesdag, was painted in response to the latter.

Israëls was about 48 years of age when the portrait was painted, and already a celebrated painter both at home and abroad. While often portrayed in the literature as a simple and sensitive man guided by his intuition, he was in fact both very widely read and a lover of music. By giving his well-groomed and bespectacled sitter the aura of an intellectual, it is the second, truer, image Mesdag chose to reflect. And while most portraits of Israëls stress his diminutive stature, this is not the case here. Mesdag thus appears to pay homage to the doyen of the Hague School.

**Provenance** Private collection, Scheveningen; Ir Joh. Poort, Wassenaar; donated to the Van Gogh Museum (1999).


**Drawings**

**Denis, Maurice**

**French, 1870-1943**

- Study for the programme of Maurice Maeterlinck's *L'intruse* 1890-91
  - Black chalk, 19 × 13 cm
  - Signed at lower right (vertically): MAUD
  - d 1092 S/1999

This small drawing is a study for the theatre programme of Maurice Maeterlinck's play *L'intruse*. The final work appeared as a lithograph (executed by Paul Fort) in the programme for the première of the play at the Théâtre d'Art on 20 May 1891.

Shown here is the scene in which the three daughters, their father and an uncle meet at the house of the blind grandfather. The grief that is especially legible in the dejected mien of the three sisters is brought about by the uncertainty surrounding the condition of their mother, who lies in...
childbed. Only the blind greybeard seems to understand that his daughter has died only shortly before. A striking feature of the work is its decorative character, which is due in part to the flowing pattern of arabesques.

Despite its different appearance, this drawing is closely related to Denis's painting *The two sisters* from 1891 and now also in the collection of the Van Gogh Museum. While the drawing shows the complete scene from the play, the painting depicts only two of the sisters. Denis had originally made the painting after the work developed for the theatre programme, but he was dissatisfied with the result and cut the canvas into different pieces, transforming the fragment into a work in its own right.

**Provenance** Henri M. Petiet; Paris (Jean-Louis Picard), 4 July 1995, lot 55; private collection; donated to the Van Gogh Museum in memory of Peter Gottmer (1999).


**Hawkins, Louis Welden**

**French, 1849-1910**

- Self-portrait c. 1885
- Black chalk and black ink, 16 × 17.5 cm
- Signed at lower centre: *X L. WELDEN HAWKINS. X*
- d 1088 S/1998

In this small work, just as in the painted self-portrait that has been in the Van Gogh Museum since 1993, Hawkins portrays himself as a gentleman. He wears a smart suit and a bow tie. Another feature this drawing shares with the painting is the presence of art in the background: behind the artist at the right, the drawing shows part of an artwork in an ornamental frame. It depicts a mythical creature, although we do not know if it is a work by Hawkins himself.

Hawkins first drew this self-portrait in black chalk, then used more black to lend extra emphasis to the shading of the face and the outlines of the shoulders, bow tie,
collar and lapels. After rounding off the upper corners of the paper, he laid the work on cardboard, around which he placed a border before adding his signature.

**Provenance** Kunsthandel Schlichte Bergen, Amsterdam; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum (1998).
Eugène Isabey
A shipwreck 1838
Isabey, Eugène
French, 1803-1886

A shipwreck 1838
Gouache and charcoal on paper of irregular dimensions, 29.5 cm (left edge) 29.1 cm (right edge) × 40.4 cm (top edge) 40.3 cm (bottom edge)
Signed at lower right: E. Isabey 1838
d 1089 S/1999

The son of a miniaturist, Isabey was a successful painter of marines and historical pictures. He exhibited regularly at the Salon and was one of the leading court painters to Louis-Philippe under the July Monarchy. His romantic vision was influenced by his contacts with Delacroix and Huet, and by his discovery of contemporary British painting (he travelled to England in 1821 and 1825). He spent much of his career on the Normandy coast, where he helped popularise many of the sites later favoured by Boudin, Monet and Jongkind (who became his pupil).

This recently acquired gouache is a fine example of the kind of theatrical composition that helped establish Isabey's reputation. Although his marine paintings ranged from battle pictures to elaborate naval ceremonies, he became best known for his terrifying scenes of storms and shipwrecks. Here he has depicted the last dramatic moments of a stricken ship. All hope seems lost for the few survivors who cling to the bowsprit of the dismasted hulk as it is forced against the rocks. The dark sky streaked with a vivid yellow in the distance and the hostile coastline reinforce the melodramatic mood.

Isabey attracted much attention for his free and rapid style of painting. Here, his virtuoso technique brilliantly evokes the wind driving through the shrouds, the water pouring off the side of the wreck, and the pounding waves. The massive spray behind the hull is actually unpainted paper with only a few touches of charcoal. Elsewhere he uses fluid, loaded touches of gouache to add highlights of colour and to draw attention to details such as the figures or the broken mast looming out of the water in the foreground.

Isabey produced a great many oil paintings of comparable themes, but it is not known whether this gouache has any direct relation with another picture. In spite of its modest size, it seems most likely to have been produced as an independent work of art rather than a study. A lithograph by Isabey depicting a very similar ship in the aftermath of a storm was published in 1836 and may have served as the basis for this composition.


Literature The work is not recorded in the Isabey literature but its authenticity has been confirmed by Pierre Miquel, author of the major monograph on the artist. On Isabey as a marine painter see P. Miquel, Eugène Isabey et la marine au XIXe siècle, 1803-1886, 2 vols., Maurs-la-Jolie, 1980. For the related lithograph see A. Curtis, Catalogue de l'oeuvre lithographiéed'Eugène Isabey, Paris 1939, no. 84: Brick échoué, 11.8 × 19.7 cm.
Gaston de Latouche received his first art lessons from Manet. At that time he was working in a naturalistic style; later, he specialised in *fêtes galantes* in the manner of Watteau, which brought him a number of commissions for a variety of decorative projects. Latouche also painted portraits of family members and artists, such as Rodin and Puvis de Chavannes.

This pastel shows his other master, the engraver and designer Felix Bracquemond (1833-1914). Holding a book, probably a bible or prayer book, the artist poses under a gothic arch, in front of a sculptural group depicting a Madonna and Child flanked by two saints. It is not certain whether the portrait is set at an altar, or in a chapel or church. The artist's use of yellow pastel to suggest a golden glow seems to indicate that the arch, the horizontal plinth under the statues, and the sculptures themselves, were partially gilded. Bracquemond's attitude suggests that he is deep in thought.

Both in his own time and today, Bracquemond's celebrity rests almost entirely on his work as an engraver. He was involved in the development of new techniques, and was often consulted by such contemporaries as Degas, Manet, Gauguin and Rodin. His position at the hub of the artistic life of his time is suggested by his role as one of the founders of not only the impressionist exhibitions, but also of the Société des Aquafortistes and the Société des Peintres-Graveurs. The Van Gogh Museum owns seven of his prints.

**Provenance** Sotheby's (New York), 5 May 1999, lot 377; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum (1999).

**Literature** Sotheby's (New York), 5 May 1999, lot 377.
Léon Augustin Lhermitte
The harvesters
**Lhermitte, Léon Augustin**  
French, 1844-1925

The harvesters  
Pastel, 22.5 × 30.5 cm  
Signed at lower right: *L. Lhermitte*  
d 1091 S/1999

‘For me, that man is Millet II in the full sense of the word; I am as enraptured by his work as I am by that of Millet himself. I find his genius equal to that of Millet I’ [529/R57]. The man of whom Van Gogh speaks in this passage is none other than Léon Augustin Lhermitte. Like Millet, this artist focused on peasant life in general, and work on the land in particular - themes that were also close to Van Gogh's heart. Vincent knew Lhermitte's work mainly from the reproductions he collected so avidly.

The original collection of the Van Gogh Museum contained nothing by this realist painter; in the last few years, however, this situation has changed. The museum already owns one painting and four drawings; these are now joined by this fine pastel. The work shows a field in summertime, with two men and a woman haymaking. In the background at the right, a fourth figure can be seen, although it is uncertain whether he, too, is a haymaker. The haystack which fills the canvas at the lower left serves as a repoussoir device, drawing the spectator's gaze past the three workers and into the scene. Visible to the left of the two right-hand figures are outlines in pencil and chalk; these no doubt testify to an earlier idea on the part of the artist. The whole sheet is built up with energetically-applied dashes of colour.


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**Voerman, Jan**  
Dutch, 1857-1941

Landscape with cows on the River IJssel near Hattem c. 1895-1900  
Watercolour, 32.5 × 56.6 cm  
Signed at lower left: *JV*  
d 1093 S/1999

Jan Voerman grew up in a farming family in Kampen. From 1876 to 1883 he studied at the Rijksacademie in Amsterdam. During his years in the Dutch capital, where he lived until 1889, he was in close contact with the so-called Tachtigers and with the artists of the Amsterdam School. After his marriage to Anna Verkade, sister of the artist Jan Verkade, he settled in Hattem in 1889, where he was to remain for the rest
of his life. At the same time, he distanced himself from ‘impressionism,’ seeking instead to express the greatest possible purity of feeling in his work. He called this his ‘theoretical period.’ This change in manner was due, at least in part, to Jan Verkade, who had close links with French artists of the Nabis group. This lent his watercolours, in which he used both transparent and non-transparent paints, a drier, more pastel quality. He altered his style of composition as well as his technique, building up his work in flat planes. The result was often a static image with which Voerman sought to express the calm of nature. In the mid-1890s he introduced more colour into his work and slightly relaxed the rigid planning of his compositions.

The watercolour *Landscape with cows on the River Ijssel* - donated to the Van Gogh Museum by Henk van Ulsen, connoisseur and collector *par excellence* of Voerman's work - is undated. But the coloration and the somewhat freer composition suggest it was executed in the years between 1895 and 1900. It is painted entirely in opaque water-colour. Using a very fine brush, Voerman drew the outlines of the cows and of the houses of Hattem in the background.


**Sculpture**
Carpeaux, Jean-Baptiste
French, 1827-1875

Bust of Anna Foucart (‘Anna Foucart aux roses’) 1872/73
Plaster, H 63.5 cm
Signed on the base: J Bte Carpeaux
v 168 S/1999

Anna Foucart, the daughter of Carpeaux's old friend from Valenciennes, the lawyer Jean-Baptiste Foucart, posed several times for portraits but also for other works by the sculptor.

This bust was unknown until its recent publication by Daniel Katz in London. It is an original plaster, as indicated by the metal compass-points that would have served as guides for reproductions in other media. The bust is an excellent and especially lively example of Carpeaux's portraiture. The movement of the head and the delicate rendering of the textures of skin, hair and dress reveal the neo-baroque influences on the artist's style. The expressive gaze and the delicacy of the execution bear witness to the personal relationship between model and sculptor. Typical for Carpeaux is the smile that reveals the sitter's teeth, a modern (re)invention which adds a degree of realism to the portrait which would have been unthinkable in the classical tradition of only a few decades earlier.

Since Daniel Katz found the work in England, he has suggested that it was left there by the artist, which would also explain why there are no versions in other media. Like many of his fellow-artists, Carpeaux had fled the Commune for Britain, where he stayed from 1872 to 1873.


Works on loan to the Van Gogh Museum 1997-99

The following is a list of paintings, drawings and sculptures lent to the Van Gogh Museum between 1997 and 1999. Each work has an inventory number made up as follows: the first letter stands for the technique (s = painting, d = drawing, v = sculpture); this is followed by a reference number and then by a capital letter (B = loan) and the year of the loan. Also included here is a list of works which have been returned to their owners since the last loan list was published (see Van Gogh Museum Journal 1996, pp. 253-59).

Paintings

**Allebé, August**  
Dutch, 1838-1927  
A museum visit 1870  
Oil on panel, 62 × 53 cm  
Signed at lower right: Allebé 1870  
s200 B/1999  
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

**Bonnard, Pierre**  
French, 1867-1947  
L'Estérel 1917  
Oil on canvas, 56 × 73 cm  
Signed at lower right: Bonnard  
s198 B/1999  
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

**Calame, Alexandre**  
Swiss, 1810-1864  
Mountain stream in the Alps (Reichenbach)  
Oil on canvas, 70 × 95 cm  
Signed at lower left: A. Calame  
s177 B/1999  
Loan from the Amsterdams Historisch Museum (Fodor Collection)

**Cézanne, Paul**  
French, 1839-1906  
Still life with apples  
Oil on canvas, 50 × 52 cm  
s193 B/1999  
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam  
Landscape with poplars c. 1883-85  
Oil on canvas, 71 × 58 cm  
s202 B/1999  
Loan from the National Gallery, London
**Corot, Jean-Baptiste-Camille**  
French, 1796-1875  
  
Algérienne  
Oil on canvas, 41 × 60 cm  
Signed at lower left: Corot  
  
s 181 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

**Courbet, Gustave**  
French, 1819-1877  
  
Landscape with rocky cliffs and a waterfall 1878  
Oil on canvas, 61 × 73 cm  
Signed and dated at lower left: G. Courbet 78  
  
s 179 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  
  
Winter landscape  
Canvas on panel, 35 × 45 cm  
Signed at lower right: G.C.  
  
s 180 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

**Daubigny, Charles-François**  
French, 1817-1878  
  
Landscape on the Oise 1872  
Oil on panel, 35 × 58.5 cm  
Signed at dated at lower left: Daubigny 1872  
  
s 182 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  
  
October  
Oil on canvas, 87.5 × 160.5 cm  
Marked on the verso in red with a rubber stamp: Vente Daubigny  
  
s 183 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
Diaz de la Peña, Virgilio-Narcisso  
French, 1798-1863  
The forest of Fontainebleau 1871  
Oil on canvas, 50.5 × 63.5 cm  
Signed and dated at lower left: N. Diaz 71  
s 184 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  

After the bath  
Oil on panel, 24.5 × 18.5 cm  
s 185 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  

Still life with white and red roses  
Oil on panel, 27.5 × 22 cm  
Signed at lower left: N. Diaz  
s 186 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  

Fantin-Latour, Henri  
French, 1836-1904  
Reclining nude 1874  
Oil on canvas, 22.5 × 29 cm  
Signed and dated at lower right: Fantin 74  
s 187 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  

Young woman under a tree at sunset (‘Autumn’)  
Oil on canvas, 38 × 25 cm  
Signed at lower left: Fantin  
s 188 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  

Hommage à Berlioz  
Oil on canvas, 28 × 29 cm  
Traces of a signature (?)  
s 189 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  

Gogh, Vincent van  
Dutch, 1853-1890  
‘La berceuse’ (Portrait of Madame Roulin) 1889  
Oil on canvas, 91 × 71.5 cm  
F 507 JH 1672  
s 168 B/1997  
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Jawlensky, Alexei von
Russian, 1864-1941
Landscape 1914
Oil on canvas, 54 × 50 cm
s 196 B/1999
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Kandinsky, Wassily
Russian, 1866-1944
Bridge in Kochel am See 1902
Oil on canvas, 30 × 45 cm
Signed at lower left: *Kandinsky*
s 195 B/1999
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Manet, Edouard
French, 1832-1883
Study for the ‘Bar at the Folies-Bergère’ 1881
Oil on canvas, 47 × 56 cm
s 201 B/1999
Loan from a private collection

Millet, Jean-François
French, 1814-1875
La cardeuse 1856
Oil on canvas, 89 × 56 cm
Signed at lower right: *J.F. Millet*
s 197 B/1999
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Monet, Claude
French, 1840-1926
The cornice, near Monaco 1884
Oil on canvas, 75 × 94 cm
Signed and dated at lower right: *Claude Monet 84*
s 190 B/1999
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Ribot, Théodule
French, 1863-1891
Still life with fish and a lobster
Oil on canvas, 60 × 74 cm
Signed at lower right: *t. Ribot*
s 191 B/1999
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Toorop, Jan Theodoor
Dutch, 1858-1928
Old oaks at Surrey
Oil on canvas, 63 × 76 cm  
s 194 B/1999  
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

**Vollon, Antoine**  
French, 1833-1900  
Flowers in a red earthenware pot  
Oil on canvas, 79.5 × 60 cm  
Signed at lower right: *A. Vollon*  
s 178 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

**Vuillard, Edouard**  
French, 1868-1940  
Sketch for ‘Mme J. Trarieuxe and her daughters’  
Oil on cardboard, 80 × 76 cm  
Signed at lower right: *E. Vuillard*  
s 199 B/1999  
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

**Whistler, James Abbott MacNeill**  
American, 1834-1903  
Effie Deans: ‘Arrangement in yellow and grey’  
Oil on canvas, 194 × 93 cm  
Signed with a butterfly; inscribed: *She sunk her head upon her hand, and remained seemingly, unconscious as a statue* - Walter Scott - *The heart of Mid Lothian*  
s 192 B/1999  
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
Loans from the Foundation P and N. de Boer

Paintings
Gogh, Vincent van
Dutch, 1853-1890

View of the Singel 1885
Oil on panel, 19 × 25.5 cm
F 113 JH 944
s 174 B/1999

Trees in a field on a sunny day 1887
Oil on canvas, 37.5 × 46 cm
F 291 JH 1314
s 175 B/1999

Wheat field 1888
Oil on canvas, 50 × 61 cm
F 564 JH 1475
s 176 B/1999

Drawings
Digger 1881
Chalk, 31 × 23 cm
Signed at lower right: Vincent
F 860 JH 38
d 170 B/1999

Worn out 1881
Pen, 23.4 × 31.2 cm
Insribed and signed at lower left: Worn out Vincent
F 863 JH 34
d 171 B/1999

Young Scheveningen woman 1881
Watercolour, 48 × 35 cm
Signed at lower left: Vincent
F 869 JH 83
d 172 B/1999

Sower 1882
Pencil, 61.3 × 39.8 cm
F 852 JH 275
d 169 B/1999

Windmill on Montmartre 1886
Loans returned

**Paintings**
Aarts, Johan Joseph, *Le raccard*
Loan from the Josefowitz Collection

Angrand, Charles, *View of the Seine, St Ouen* 1886
Loan from the Josefowitz Collection

Bernard, Emile, *Bathers with waterlilies* c. 1889
Loan from the Josefowitz Collection

Boch, Anna, *Female figure in a landscape* 1890-92
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Bonheur, Auguste, *Animals drinking*
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Bonvin, François, *Still life with oysters* 1858
Loan from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Caillebotte, Gustave, *Paris in the sun* 1880
Loan from the Josefowitz Collection

Carrière, Eugène, *Grief* c. 1900
Loan from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Corot, Jean-Baptiste-Camille, *Woman playing a mandolin (Berthe Goldschmidt)* 1850-60
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Courbet, Gustave, *View of the forest of Fontainebleau* 1855
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Cross, Henri-Edmond, *Fishermen on the Mediterranean* (Var)
Loan from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Diaz de la Peña, Virgilio-Narcisco, *Nymph with cupids* 1851
Loan from the Amsterdams Historisch Museum

Duran, Emile-Auguste-Carolus, *The footman* 1861
Loan from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

The housekeeper 1861
Loan from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Forain, Jean-Louis, *The defence* c. 1900
Loan from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Gestel, Leo, *Girl playing the piano* 1909
Loan from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Hayet, Louis, *Blue hills* c. 1888
Loan from the Josefowitz Collection

Jongkind, Johan Barthold, *River landscape at Rouen* c. 1852
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Mellery, Xavier, *Wintry day*
Loan from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo
Mancini, Antonio, *The poor child*
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Pissarro, Lucien, *Prairie at Thierceville* 1886
Loan from the Josefowitz Collection

Rijsselberghe, Theo van, *Seascape* 1899
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Sluijters, Jan, *Woman in yellow*
Loan from a private collection

Stengelin, Alphonse, *Landscape in Drenthe*
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Vogels, Guillaume, *The Grote Zavel in Brussels*
Loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Weissenbruch, Johannes Hendrik, *Storm on the Zeeland coast* 1900
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

**Drawings**

Fantin-Latour, Henri, *Cupid disarmed by Venus*
Loan from a private collection

Gogh, Vincent van, *Corner of the enclosure behind St Paul's hospital* 1889
Loan from a private collection

Redon, Odilon, *Twisting spider* c. 1881
Loan from a private collection

**Sculpture**

Rodin, Auguste, *St John the Baptist preaching* (bust) 1878/1985
Loan from the Gerald B. Cantor Collection

Compiled by Monique Hageman
Exhibitions in the Van Gogh Museum 1999

Theo van Gogh (1857-1891)
Art dealer, collector and brother of Vincent
24 June - 5 September

(ISBN 90 400 9363 6)

_Kisho Kurokawa, architect: retrospective_
24 June - 14 November
(ISBN 0 947 648 22 6)

_Cézanne to Van Gogh: the collection of Doctor Gachet_
24 September - 5 December
(Organised in conjunction with the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)
(ISBN 0 87099 903 6)

_Jean-François Millet: drawings, pastels, watercolours, paintings_
22 October - 9 January 2000
(Organised by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, in association with the Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh, PA) exhib. cat. Alexandra R. Murphy et al., *Jean-François Millet: drawn into the light*, New Haven & London 1999
(ISBN 0 300 07925 7)

_Prague 1900: poetry & ecstasy_
17 December - 25 March 2000
(The exhibition will travel to the Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt am Main)
exhib. cat. Edwin Becker, Roman Prahl, Petr Wittlich (eds.), *Prague 1900: poetry & ecstasy*, Zwolle 1999
(ISBN 90 400 9391 1)

Compiled by Andreas Blühm
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