



Exhibition Guide

# *A Day in the Country*

*Impressionism and the French Landscape*

June 28-September 16, 1984

Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
Frances and Armand Hammer Wing













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## Introduction

To the nineteenth-century city dweller, a day in the country—spent boating, walking, picnicking, or just sitting—was a novel experience. In their paintings, artists such as Eugène Boudin, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Georges Seurat, Alfred Sisley, and Vincent van Gogh recorded that experience in a fresh, innovative style. *A Day in the Country: Impressionism and the French Landscape* is a visual tour of the sites and subjects painted by the Impressionists in the second half of the nineteenth century. We travel to the towns just outside Paris where the style was born, to Paris itself; along rivers, roads, and train tracks to tiny villages, through fields and gardens, to coastal resorts and provincial retreats. We see France through the Impressionists' selective eyes in paintings that not only capture a specific time and place but also reflect the cultural attitudes of the period.

Wars, revolution, and industrialization propelled nineteenth-century France into the modern age. The birth of Impressionism coincided with an especially tumultuous period in French history. The first Impressionist exhibition was held in 1874, just a few years after the country's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and the ensuing turmoil of the Commune (1871).

Yet this was also a time of progress. Paris had become a center of technology, commerce, and culture. Its great river, the Seine, linked the city with all of France and Europe. The locomotive, or steam-driven train, was probably the single most important invention of the age. Comparable to the airplane or the computer in our century, the train revolutionized travel, communication, industry, and commerce. For many Frenchmen, the Impressionists among them, the railway lines connecting Paris to the provinces were a symbol of progress and national unity.

The expansion of the railroads enabled the French, who were becoming increasingly nationalistic, to experience France in person. There was considerable interest in the country's natural beauty and great curiosity about her local traditions and historical monuments.



Guidebooks, maps, and specialized periodicals flooded the market. By mid-century, newspaper caricatures were satirizing the frenzied crowds jamming the trains bound for the countryside, and critics were complaining that the countryside had been overrun by armies of amateur and professional landscape painters intent on capturing France's wonders on canvas. To understand Impressionist art, it is essential to realize that the Impressionists were as much a product of their own culture as they were creators of it. They were the ultimate tourists of their day.

### *The Cradle of Impressionism*

In 1869 Monet, Renoir, and Pissarro worked together for the first time at rendering the same outdoor views. They were inspired by the artists of the Barbizon School, who had painted *en plein air* earlier in the century near the towns of Barbizon and Marlotte and in the forest of Fontainebleau. These artists depicted a primeval France, isolated from the modern world, frozen in time. At the beginning the Impressionists even chose the same sites as their Barbizon predecessors. Later, to test the theories of painting they had formulated in Paris, they selected a different landscape to create an art that would be firmly rooted in the present.

A look at a map of Paris and its environs tells us that the place names that appear most often in the titles of Impressionist works of this period correspond to names of suburbs along the Seine to the west of Paris. Bougival, Louveciennes, Voisins, Marly-le-Roi, Port-Marly, and Saint-Michel were all accessible from the capital by train or steamboat. They were towns where middle- and working-class Parisians could enjoy their leisure.

La Grenouillère, a restaurant that literally floated on the Seine near Bougival, was a favorite site of Monet and his colleagues. It was noisy and inexpensive, and it offered the pleasures of eating, drinking, boating, and swimming. People could flirt and otherwise

cavort in relative anonymity. In Monet's painting of the restaurant, *Bathing at La Grenouillère*, 1869 (cat. no. 14), the view is decidedly mundane. Instead of presenting a predictable, formal rendering of the restaurant building itself, Monet selected a random, casual glimpse of its walkway, rowboats, and changing rooms. All is seen from a modest distance, through the blur of trees in the foreground. Echoing this informality, the surface of the painting vibrates with bold brushwork; its tactility and sketchiness create an illusion of immediacy. The painting surface appears fresh and wet.

Looking at this painting, Monet's contemporaries knew that just beyond the picture frame, not far from this island of bourgeois leisure, village women still washed their clothes along the river bank. In their suggestion of the present pleasantly coexisting with the past, Monet and other Impressionists demonstrated their enthusiasm for modern life.

### *The Urban Landscape*

For the Impressionist artists, embracers of the new, Paris was a subject to observe and paint from countless viewpoints. Recently redesigned into a grand scheme of elegant boulevards, public parks, and newly constructed apartment buildings, or *hôtels*, Paris had become a truly modern city.

The Impressionists painted the raw material of urban experience: the surging crowds of fashionably dressed people, carriages, and trolleys on the boulevards and in the parks; the billowing of locomotive steam against the steel and glass of train stations; the silhouettes of buildings against the sky; the movement of barges along the river. From the Louvre and its garden, the Tuileries, on the quais of the Seine, or from a window overlooking a busy street, they captured the excitement of city life.

The area around the Saint-Lazare train station was especially appealing to the Impressionists. Both Manet and Caillebotte



painted the station from the bridge directly above it, the Pont de l'Europe, in the early and mid-1870s. In 1877 and 1878, Monet produced seven views of the station, three of which are included in this exhibition (cat. nos. 30-32). While the former artists chose to paint the station from an elevated vantage point, concentrating on human figures and only hinting at the presence of the train by rendering smoke, Monet descended to the level of the tracks and made the train itself the subject of his paintings. His approach was an audacious one, and it was matched by his technique, in which the surface of the painting is energized by complex scumbling and impasto. Fascinated by its power and beauty, Monet elaborated upon the train's latent iconography as a symbol of the commercial and public life of the nineteenth century.

### *Private and Public Gardens*

In nineteenth-century France the proliferation of tourist guides and other travel literature was perhaps only equaled by the profusion of publications on gardening, which were produced in response to an almost obsessive interest in the subject. Many types of gardens were cultivated: ornamental or pleasure gardens filled with flowers; utility gardens for food, herbs, and medicinal purposes; indoor hothouse gardens; botanical gardens; and in Paris, public pleasure gardens on the unprecedented scale of the Tuileries.

The garden offered endless attractions for the Impressionists: contrapuntal passages of blazing sunlight and shade, a riot of color, and opportunities for decorative exuberance disciplined by precise observation. The private garden had great significance in the lives and work of several artists. Monet, for instance, bought his Giverny estate in 1883 and devoted himself to transforming and expanding its extensive gardens. The garden was not merely a source of imagery for Monet; he came to see it as a work of art in itself.



Caillebotte's garden at Petit-Gennevilliers was to him what Giverny was to Monet. In *Roses, Garden at Petit-Gennevilliers*, c. 1886 (cat. no. 87), the artist's companion, Charlotte Berthier, tends the flowers along a well-maintained garden path. The rising perspective is similar to that later used by Pissarro in *The Place du Théâtre Français*, 1898 (cat. no. 36), and is indicative of the influence of Japanese prints and contemporary photography on Impressionism. The little dog sitting on the path adds a touch of warmth and humor to this scene.

### *The French Landscape Sensibility*

During the nineteenth century, landscape painting reached an unprecedented level of popularity, parallel to the new interest in exploring France firsthand. Unlike the more formal and traditional genre of history painting, landscape painting was highly accessible, and it appealed to the growing ranks of middle-class collectors.

With the first wave of urban visitors to the French countryside came a group of artists who sketched directly from nature, out of doors, or *en plein air*, near the town of Barbizon and other sites only moments away from Paris by railroad. The Barbizon School (as this group later became known) included Jean-François Millet, Théodore Rousseau, Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, Charles Daubigny, and Gustave Courbet. Their approach was romantic and subjective. Technically, these artists were extraordinarily advanced. Courbet used a palette knife and bold brushwork to create powerful compositions. Corot's vision was quieter and more lyrical. His sketchy, liquid surfaces had a fresh, unfinished look. These qualities were among those that appealed to the next generation of artists, who in the Barbizon spirit would come together to paint *en plein air*, and who would later be termed *impressionnistes*.

Sisley's *Avenue of Chestnut Trees at La Celle-Saint-Cloud*, 1867 (cat. no. 10), is a transitional work. While the influence of the Barbizon



painters is evident in its surface pattern, deeply saturated color, and proportions, this painting displays something new, a sense of detachment and objectivity. The Impressionists would strive to eliminate the sentimental, the historical, and the anecdotal from their paintings.

### Rivers, Roads, and Trains

Since the 1600s a series of well-planned roads and highways had linked Paris with the rest of France. Over the years, this national system had been expanded by the gradual addition of canals and railroads, and by the mid-nineteenth century, France was endowed with the most advanced system of transport and communication in the world.

The Impressionists painted every aspect of this transportation network, from the major rivers, canals, and highways to the minor local roads and obscure country paths. They sought to communicate the sensation of movement through a landscape. In this regard, the seventeenth-century Dutch painters were influential. While earlier French and Italian landscape painters had used roads and rivers as compositional devices to move the viewer's eye into a painting, Dutch artists made such motifs their primary subject. The Impressionists' knowledge of the work of the earlier Dutch masters was crucial to the development of their compositions depicting movement through landscape.

This kineticism is evident in Armand Guillaumin's *Environs of Paris*, c. 1874 (cat. no. 52). A sun-drenched road snakes through the foreground. This is a new road, carefully constructed, bordered by recently planted trees placed at regular intervals. As it winds into the pristine countryside, the road doesn't interfere with nature; it complements it. Guillaumin's painting applauds man's improvements upon nature, which have made the landscape more attractive and infinitely more commodious.



## *Pissarro, Cézanne, and the School of Pontoise*

During the 1870s and 1880s the Impressionists continued to socialize with one another in Paris but tended to work in isolation outside the city. For a period, Monet remained in the large suburban town of Argenteuil along the Seine, often painting the urban bourgeoisie at leisure from a boat outfitted as a studio. Renoir, Caillebotte, and Sisley remained near Bougival, where the Impressionist style was first developed.

Pissarro, however, went inland to Pontoise, where he painted the milieu of peasants, farmers, and factory workers. The great teacher of his generation, he surrounded himself with a group of younger artists that included Cézanne and Gauguin, forming the school of Pontoise.

These painters articulated the rugged textures and monotonous, but enduring rhythms of village life through images of thatched cottages, orchards, fields, village paths, farmyards, and gardens. Cézanne's *Auvers, Panoramic View*, 1873-75 (cat. no. 69), depicts a cluster of eighteenth-century dwellings, some with new red tile roofs. The artist expresses his strong enthusiasm for rural life by emphasizing the rugged textures of the landscape. His exuberant brush strokes are as rustic in feel as his subject.

This timeless village world spurred Cézanne toward an incisive, analytic approach to nature; it inspired Gauguin to seek an even wider range of primitive iconography elsewhere, initially to the north in Brittany and ultimately in the South Seas.

## *The Fields of France*

The fields of France were a source of great national pride in the nineteenth century. France was above all else an agricultural nation,



and its fields were a symbol of abundance and prosperity. The Barbizon artists had mythologized France's farmlands and her people, depicting a vanishing pastoral landscape. The Impressionists, conversely, approached their subject matter with down-to-earth positivism. Free of sentimentality, they perceived the relationship between humanity and nature as healthy and beneficial.

Although they were probably aware that a revolution in agricultural technology was underway at the time, the Impressionists nevertheless omitted all signs of that revolution from their paintings. Wheat fields, orchards, and farm buildings appear in the cyclical context of planting, blooming, tilling, and harvesting; their beauty is set against the natural poetry of morning, afternoon, evening, and night.

In Monet's interrelated series of paintings of grainstacks (cat. nos. 104-112), a commonplace object takes on mythic significance. For the farmers of northern France, the grainstack had great meaning. Composed of reinforced layers of grain, it was intended to last throughout winter, spring, and summer until the next harvest, providing nourishment and profit. With their looming, protective silhouettes, Monet's grainstacks are reminiscent of primitive architecture, and their self-contained efficiency suggests survival and continuity. Seen under varied seasonal and temporal conditions, the grainstack becomes a compelling symbol of man's ability to control nature.

### *Impressionism and the Sea*

Holidays by the sea were still a novelty in the Impressionists' era. Trains from Paris destined for the Normandy coast towns of Dieppe, Etretat, Trouville, and Deauville teemed with tourists, who later in the century turned their attention south to the French and Italian Rivas. For the city dweller in particular, a holiday by the sea was an opportunity for spiritual and physical renewal. Restaurants,



casinos, and hotels soon displaced permanent fishing and farming populations.

Eugène Boudin's genius for capturing the atmosphere and experience of a day at the sea is apparent in his paintings of elegant vacationers promenading near the Normandy coast. His sketchy silhouettes form human bas-reliefs, punctuated at intervals by that indispensable feminine accessory, the parasol. Like the seventeenth-century Dutch seascape painters who influenced him, Boudin was able to articulate the moisture of the air and the presence of the wind in canvases that seem to resound with color.

The depiction of "atmosphere" was an increasingly important aspect of the Impressionist aesthetic in the 1880s. The clearly defined contrasts between the land, the sea, and the sky inspired a more formal, geometric approach to composition, particularly in the works of Monet, Renoir, and Seurat. In Monet's *Cliff Walk at Pourville*, 1882 (cat. no. 117), forms seem disembodied by the humid atmosphere, and the human figures are quite distant and depersonalized. Undulating single blades of grass contrast with the solid triangles of cliff, sails, and clouds and the flat surface of the sea. Seurat's silhouette view, *Seascape at Port-en-Bessin, Normandy*, 1888 (cat. no. 124), is even more geometric and atmospheric in approach. Both works indicate the shifting concerns of Impressionism during the 1880s.

### *The Retreat from Paris*

The growth of travel and tourism accelerated even more rapidly during the 1880s and 1890s. Thanks to advancements that made transportation faster and easier than ever, tourists of ordinary means could explore outlying regions of France. Parallel to this general trend in travel, the Impressionists sought new subject matter in distant locales, demanding of their art a greater profundity and intellectualism. Gauguin, Seurat, Signac, and Van Gogh traveled to



the relatively primitive regions of Brittany in the north and the Midi and Provence in the south. Although Monet and Pissarro remained close to Paris, their work became more personal and cerebral.

Cézanne perhaps best exemplifies the artistic separatism that characterized the waning years of Impressionism and the advent of Post-Impressionism. Returning to his home in Aix-en-Provence in the south of France in order to be free from all distractions, he proceeded to refine the highly disciplined approach to landscape painting that he had first explored under Pissarro's tutelage in the village of Pontoise. His *The Bay of Marseille, Seen from l'Estaque*, 1883-85 (cat. no. 128) is one example of Cézanne's exploration of a single motif from subtly varied viewpoints. Through this process he developed an art that was based as much in imagination and intellect as in reality. A similar evolution is apparent in the work of such artists as Seurat, Signac, and Gauguin. No longer interested in the faithful rendering of specific sites, they painted landscapes of their own invention.

## Related Events

Related events for this exhibition are funded in part by grants from The IBM Corporation and the California Arts Council.

A series of lectures, films, and community workshops will be presented throughout the summer.

As an introduction to the exhibition, docent tours of nineteenth-century French paintings in the permanent collection will be offered at 11 a.m. daily.

An audio tour of the exhibition, narrated by Museum Director Earl A. Powell III, will be available at the entrance to the exhibition for a rental fee of \$2.75.



### *Lectures*

All lectures take place on Sundays at 3:30 p.m. in the Leo S. Bing Theater. Admission is free to museum members and is included in the *regular* admission fee for the general public.

July 8—Richard Brettell, curator of European Painting and Sculpture at The Art Institute of Chicago, and Scott Schaefer, curator of European Paintings and Sculpture at the museum, will jointly present a lecture entitled, "*A Day in the Country: The Genesis of an Exhibition.*"

July 22—Alexandra Murphy, assistant curator of Paintings, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, will speak on "Rivers and Roads: The Other Side of Renoir's Impressionism."

August 5—Dr. Joel Isaacson, professor of art, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, will speak on "Figures in the Garden: Manet, Monet, and Renoir in the 1870s."

August 19—Dr. Paul Tucker, associate professor of art, University of Massachusetts, Boston, will discuss "Monet's Day in the Country: A Social Point of View."

September 16—Dr. Martha Ward, assistant professor, Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, will speak on "The Silhouette of a Day: Seurat and the French Coast."

### *Film Series: Parisians!*

Films will be shown on six successive Wednesday evenings at 8 p.m. in the Leo S. Bing Theater. Tickets are \$3 for museum members, students with I.D., and senior citizens; \$4 for the general public. Tickets will be available at the Bing Theater Ticket Office during regular museum hours or one hour before each screening. For mail order and other information, call the Ticket Office at 857-6201.



Program

July 25

*Une Partie de Campagne (A Day in the Country)*

France, 1936, 40 minutes, black-and-white

Produced by Pierre Braunberger

Written and directed by Jean Renoir,

from the story by Guy de Maupassant

Cast: Sylvia Bataille, Georges Darnoux, Jeanne Marken,  
Gabriello, Jacques Brunius, Jean Renoir, Pierre Lestringuez,  
Marguerite Renoir, Paul Temps

*Paris 1900*

France/U.S.A., 1950, 76 minutes, black-and-white

Produced by Pierre Braunberger

Scenario and preparation by Nicol Verdes

Conceived by Pierre Braunberger

August 1

*Douce (Love Story)*

France, 1943, 106 minutes, black-and-white

Produced by L'Industrie Cinématographique

Directed by Claude Autant-Lara

Written by Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost,

based on the novel by Michel Davet

Cast: Odette Joyeaux, Marguerite Moreno, Jean Debucourt,  
Madeleine Robinson, Roger Pigaut

August 8

*Madame De... (The Earrings of Madame De)*

France/Italy, 1953, 102 minutes, black-and-white

Produced by Franco-London Films/Film Indus/Rizzoli

Directed by Max Ophuls

Written by Marcel Achard, Annette Wademant, Max Ophuls,

based on the novel by Louise de Vilmorin

Cast: Danielle Darrieux, Charles Boyer, Vittorio de Sica,  
Jean Debucourt, Mireille Perey



August 15

*Le Plaisir/House of Pleasure*

France, 1952, 97 minutes, black-and-white

Produced by Stera Films/CCFC

Directed by Max Ophuls

Written by Jacques Natanson and Max Ophuls,

from three stories by Guy de Maupassant

Cast: Claude Dauphin, Gaby Morlay, Jean Gallard, Daniel Gélin,  
Jean Servais, Simone Simon, Madeleine Renaud, Danielle Darrieux,  
Ginette Leclerc, Mila Parély, Jean Gabin, Pierre Brasseur

August 22

*Gervais*

France, 1956, 116 minutes, black-and-white

Produced by Agnes Delahaie Productions/Silver Films/CICC

Directed by Rene Clement

Written by Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, from the novel,

*L'Assommoir (The Dram Shop)*, by Emile Zola.

Cast: Maria Schell, François Perier, Suzy Delair, Armand Mestral,  
Jacques Harden, Mathilde Casadesus, Micheline Luccioni

August 29

*Gigi*

U.S.A., 1958, 119 minutes, color

Produced by Arthur Freed

Directed by Vincente Minnelli

Written by Alan Jay Lerner, based on the novel by Collette

Cast: Leslie Caron, Maurice Chevalier, Louis Jourdan, Hermione  
Gingold, Eva Gabor, Jacques Bergerac, Isabel Jeans, John Abbott

*A Day in the Country Workshops*

A series of workshops for families will be offered at public libraries throughout Los Angeles County. For further information, please call 857-6141.

## You Are Invited to Join the Museum

Basic membership benefits and privileges include:

- Free admission to the museum
- Invitations to special exhibition previews
- Free monthly *Members' Calendar*
- Discounts in the Museum Shop
- Discounts for our film and education programs
- Access to the museum's slide and research libraries
- Members' Travel Program and Art Rental Gallery privileges

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Beyond these personal benefits, members enjoy a sense of pride and accomplishment in knowing they are helping to fund a major cultural center that will enrich the lives of generations of Southern Californians to come.

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