

## From Impressionism to Modernism

### The Chester Dale Collection



National Gallery of Art / January 31, 2010–July 31, 2011

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**Cover** Auguste Renoir, *A Girl with a Watering Can*, 1876, oil on canvas

**Fig. 1** George Bellows, *Maud Dale*, 1919, oil on wood

**Fig. 2** William Merritt Chase, *A Friendly Call*, 1895, oil on canvas

**Fig. 3** Henri Matisse, *The Plumed Hat*, 1919, oil on canvas

**Fig. 4** Mary Cassatt, *The Boating Party*, 1893/1894, oil on canvas

All works are in the Chester Dale Collection at the National Gallery of Art, Washington



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**Fig. 5** Amedeo Modigliani, *Gypsy Woman with Baby*, 1919, oil on canvas

**Fig. 6** Edgar Degas, *Edmondo and Thérèse Morbilli*, c. 1865, oil on canvas

**Fig. 7** Paul Cézanne, *The Peppermint Bottle*, 1893/1895, oil on canvas

**Fig. 8** Claude Monet, *The Houses of Parliament, Sunset*, 1903, oil on canvas

Chester Dale (1883–1962) was a successful businessman who made his fortune on Wall Street in the bond market. He thrived on making deals and translated much of this energy and talent into acquiring great works of art, a passionate enterprise undertaken with the encouragement and discerning guidance of his wife Maud (1876–1953), herself a trained artist and critic. Together they amassed one of the finest collections of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French paintings in North America, much of it later bequeathed to the National Gallery of Art.

Dale's earliest acquisitions were in the field of American art. Among the artists Chester most admired was the couple's neighbor, George Bellows, whom he described as "one of the greatest painters this country ever had." Bellows' portraits of Maud (FIG. 1) and Chester—completed in 1919 and in 1922, respectively—were among the many works by the artist to enter the Dales' collection. At the same time, the Dales began to make the rounds at the New York galleries and auction houses. By the late 1920s, they had built a significant collection of American art, focusing primarily on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and acquiring works such as the delicate and refined canvas by William Merritt Chase, *A Friendly Call*, of 1895 (FIG. 2).

Dale began to make his first tentative forays into French art beginning in the early 1920s, purchasing a handful of relatively minor works. The turning point came in 1925, when the Dales plunged into the domain of avant-garde art for the first time with their acquisition of *The Plumed Hat*, 1919, by Henri Matisse (FIG. 3). Recognizing that Chester's interest was more than a casual hobby, Maud urged him to channel his efforts into building a more coherent collection focused on French nineteenth- and twentieth-century art. To this, the couple added paintings by earlier artists, whom Maud referred to as "ancestors." By the following year, Chester had begun to make a number of important acquisitions of works by impressionists such as Claude Monet and Mary Cassatt and post-impressionists such as Paul Gauguin and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The years between 1926 and 1934 marked the peak of the Dales' collecting. They purchased avidly both in New York, where they acquired Cassatt's *The Boating Party*, 1893/1894 (FIG. 4), and in Paris, where they made regular excursions up until World War II.

It was Chester who actually purchased the art, but it was Maud who truly shaped the collection, offering advice and steering her husband toward works and artists she considered important. One such artist was Amedeo Modigliani, still relatively unknown when the Dales first began to acquire his paintings in 1927. At Maud's encouragement, Chester

eventually amassed twenty-one of Modigliani's works, including *Gypsy Woman with Baby*, 1919 (FIG. 5), one of six paintings by the artist they acquired in 1928, to form what was quickly recognized as perhaps the finest selection of his art in existence.

Nowhere is Maud's influence more apparent, however, than in the predominance of portraiture in the Dales' collection. "Portraits are the documents by which not only the individual, but his epoch, can be re-created," she wrote. "In portraits one is permitted to view the passing show, and in the images they present of life and art we catch again the echo of their times" — a philosophy that prompted the Dales' acquisition of works such as Edgar Degas's keenly observed portrait of his brother-in-law and sister, *Edmondo and Thérèse Morbilli*, c. 1865 (FIG. 6).

By the end of the 1920s, the Dales were making a splash on both sides of the Atlantic. Maud actively promoted the collection in articles and books that she wrote and in exhibitions that she organized, such as one devoted to Paul Cézanne in New York in 1928 that featured three of the Dales' most recent acquisitions, among them *The Peppermint Bottle*, 1893/1895 (FIG. 7). Chester's activities were also gaining notice. His purchase of Monet's *Houses of Parliament, Sunset*, 1903 (FIG. 8), made headlines for the staggering price it obtained at auction in 1929, just one of many masterpieces to join his collection, which now encompassed more than three hundred works of art.

The stock market crash in October 1929 had a chilling effect on the art market, but while most collectors curtailed their activities, Dale continued to buy. He acquired nearly one hundred works in 1930 alone, most notably Edouard Manet's monumental canvas *The Old Musician*, 1862 (FIG. 9), which was not only one of the largest but also the single most expensive painting he ever purchased. Long admired by the Dales (Maud declared it to be one of the greatest paintings Manet ever created), *The Old Musician* was unquestionably a work worthy of a world-class art museum. It was soon joined in the collection by a number of other grand-scale compositions, including major paintings by Camille Corot (FIG. 10), Degas, and Auguste Renoir.

Dale also pursued key works by important contemporary figures such as Georges Braque (FIG. 11), Matisse, and Pablo Picasso, another favorite of the collector. He purchased eight paintings by Picasso in the 1930s, most notably *Family of Saltimbanques*, 1905 (FIG. 12), the masterpiece of the artist's so-called rose period. Chester took a gamble, buying the painting sight unseen, based solely on a photograph and the strength of the recommendation from a dealer. It was a typically



Diego Rivera, *Chester Dale*, 1945, oil on canvas



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**Fig. 9** Edouard Manet, *The Old Musician*, 1862, oil on canvas

**Fig. 10** Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Agostina*, 1866, oil on canvas

**Fig. 11** Georges Braque, *Still Life: Le Jour*, 1929, oil on canvas



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**Fig. 12** Pablo Picasso, *Family of Saltimbanques*, 1905, oil on canvas

**Fig. 13** Eugène Boudin, *The Beach at Villerville*, 1864, oil on canvas

**Fig. 14** Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *A Corner of the Moulin de la Galette*, 1892, oil on cardboard



audacious move on the part of a collector who approached the art market with the same daring and tenacity that he applied so successfully to the stock market.

Though Dale began to scale back his once-feverish pursuit of works of art, he was poised to embark on a new phase in his career as a collector. In the spring of 1940, David Finley, then the director of the National Gallery of Art, called upon the Dales to solicit their support for the new museum. It was only natural that he turn to the Dales and their celebrated collection, for the museum had few great paintings of the nineteenth century. The Dales initially lent seven American paintings for the Gallery's opening in March 1941; eight months later they lent an additional twenty-five French paintings. This display included many of the jewels of the Dale collection, among them Cézanne's *Peppermint Bottle* (FIG. 7), Manet's *Old Musician* (FIG. 9), and Renoir's *A Girl with a Watering Can* (FRONT COVER), 1876, a work that soon became one of the most popular in the museum. This marked the beginning of a long and rewarding relationship between Dale and the Gallery. In 1942 Chester offered his first of many gifts, and a year later began serving as a member of the museum's board of trustees. He was named as its president in 1955 and was a dynamic force, helping to guide the Gallery's acquisitions and finances.

In the 1940s and 1950s Chester acquired art only modestly—no doubt owing at least in part to Maud's declining health and, later, her death in 1953—but his passion for collecting did not vanish entirely. "Today I buy only when I find a picture that I feel will improve the collection," he once remarked. Paintings such as Eugène Boudin's *The Beach at Villerville*, 1864 (FIG. 13), and Toulouse-Lautrec's *A Corner of the Moulin de la Galette*, 1892 (FIG. 14), both purchased in 1951, are evidence of Dale's discernment and ongoing commitment to the acquisition of great works of art. Dale's later years were also marked by the friendships he developed with contemporary artists such as the Mexican painter Diego Rivera and the Spaniard Salvador Dalí, both of whom painted deeply personal portraits of the aging but still vibrant collector (SEE BACK COVER).

Upon his death in 1962, Dale bequeathed the core of his collection to the National Gallery of Art. More than three hundred works of art came to the Gallery through this single benefactor, including some of the most beloved paintings now in the museum's collection. With his gift, Dale did not merely enrich the Gallery; he permanently transformed the museum in a way few collectors could hope to achieve.

### Film

*From Impressionism to Modernism: The Chester Dale Collection*  
January 31, 2010 –  
July 31, 2011  
West Building  
Project Room  
Monday–Saturday,  
10:00 am–5:00 pm  
Sunday, 11:00 am–6:00 pm  
(with minor exceptions)

Narrated by Gallery director Earl A. Powell III and produced by the National Gallery of Art, this fifteen-minute documentary chronicles Chester and Maud Dale from their early days of collecting to Chester's extraordinary bequest to the nation.

This film is made possible by the HRH Foundation.

### Audio Tour

Paintings in the exhibition that are included on the Director's Tour, available for rental in the West Building, Mall entrance, are marked with an icon.

### On the Web

Visit the Gallery's Web site for highlights of the exhibition and links to other exhibition-related materials and activities: [www.nga.gov/exhibitions](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions)

### Gallery Talks

The adult programs department offers a regular series of introductory gallery talks on the exhibition throughout the duration of the show. Please consult the calendar of events or the National Gallery's Web site for schedule and program information.

### Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated, 164-page catalogue, *The Chester Dale Collection*, by exhibition curator Kimberly A. Jones and National Gallery of Art archivist Maygene Daniels. Published by the National Gallery of Art. Hardcover \$50

### General Information

Hours: Monday–Saturday,  
10:00 am–5:00 pm  
Sunday, 11:00 am–6:00 pm  
Gallery Web site:  
[www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov)

For information about accessibility to galleries and public areas, assistive listening devices, sign-language interpretation, and other services and programs, inquire at the Art Information Desks, consult the Web site, or call 202.842.6690 (TDD line 202.842.6176).

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, unless otherwise noted.

The brochure was written by Kimberly A. Jones, associate curator of French paintings. It was produced by the department of exhibition programs and the publishing office at the National Gallery of Art. Copyright © 2010 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

The exhibition has been organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.