

Release Date: May 15, 2008

Two Manet Master Paintings Reunited at the National Gallery of Art Thanks to Reciprocal Loan Program with Norton Simon Museum



Édouard Manet, *Ragpicker*, c. 1865–1869, oil on canvas
The Norton Simon Foundation
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Edouard Manet's powerful *Ragpicker* (c. 1865–1869), a loan from The Norton Simon Foundation in Pasadena, California, will join one of the National Gallery of Art's great masterworks by Manet, *The Old Musician* (1862)—which recently underwent extensive conservation—with the two paintings hanging together in the 19th-century French galleries of the West Building from May 22 through September 7, 2009. This is part of an ongoing program of exchanges between the two museums that began in May 2007

with the loan of Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Boy, "Titus"* from the Norton Simon to the National Gallery.

"It is a pleasure for the curators at the Gallery and the Norton Simon to rediscover important works in one another's collections that relate to masterpieces we each own. It is our hope that visitors will share in our enthusiasm and enjoy seeing these works in new contexts," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

"We are delighted to continue this special exchange with the National Gallery of Art and share with its visitors one of the Norton Simon's most spectacular 19th-century paintings," said Walter W. Timoshuk, president, Norton Simon Museum.

Ragpicker was requested by the National Gallery of Art because of its relationship to *The Old Musician*. The two works share a similar subject—marginal figures in early modern Paris portrayed with Manet's characteristic intelligence and sympathy—and demonstrate the artist's fascination with the old masters, especially the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez, whose art was a major influence on Manet in the 1860s. Although painted just years apart, these two monumental canvases have been exhibited together only once, in the posthumous retrospective of the artist's work in 1884. This will be the first time *Ragpicker* has been exhibited outside the Norton Simon Museum in nearly 30 years, and because the Chester Dale bequest to the Gallery in 1963 prohibits the loan of *The Old Musician*, it is unlikely that these two paintings will be seen together again.

The Gallery has an exceptional collection of works by Manet (15 paintings, 6 drawings, and 42 prints), including several major figural compositions from the 1860s: *The Dead Toreador* (probably 1864), *The Tragic Actor* (Rouvière as Hamlet) (1866), and *The Old Musician*. Norton Simon's *Ragpicker* will join these major paintings from the Gallery's collection.

The exhibition is sponsored by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

Ragpicker

Ragpicker is the largest of a group of seven monumental paintings by Manet that depict single figures against undefined, neutral backgrounds. Three, including this work, were

inspired by the Spanish artist Diego Velázquez's *Philosophers*, portraying Aesop and Menippus and admired by Manet during his 1865 trip to Madrid. The idea that wisdom and poverty were associated was a popular belief in Manet's time, and beggars, ragpickers, drunks, and peasants appeared as subjects in literature as well as painting.

Manet observed that Velázquez's backgrounds were "made up of air which surrounds the subject." Eliminating perspective, Manet has made the floor and the wall merge into one another. The figure rests in a two-dimensional space that a critic once scoffingly compared to a playing card. Nevertheless, the skillfully placed still life of rubbish spilling off the canvas firmly anchors the figure to the ground.

The Old Musician

The Old Musician is also deeply indebted to Velázquez. Painted in 1862, three years before the artist's revelatory trip to Madrid, it was Manet's first major multifigured composition and the largest and most ambitious work he had undertaken up to that point. Long recognized as one of Manet's most important early paintings, it has always intrigued viewers and scholars alike.

The painting will be on view again for the first time in more than two years, following a major treatment in the Gallery's painting conservation studio at the hands of senior conservator of paintings Ann Hoenigswald. The work had been considered dark and somber, with thick layers of old, discolored varnish having obscured the artist's bright colors and vibrant brushwork. Removal of the varnish, which had darkened as it aged, revealed the painting with its intended color harmonies, dynamic paint surface, and visual depth. This remarkable transformation returns the work to its original, pristine state.

Technical examination conducted throughout the treatment led to new discoveries about the artist's materials and methods as well as the development of the composition. X-radiographic and infrared studies identified changes in the figures and have provided a better understanding of the relationship between *The Old Musician* and Manet's earlier painting, *The Absinthe Drinker* (1858–1859, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen). Careful study of related drawings, watercolors, and prints and his use of

photographs have brought exciting new insights into Manet's artistic process.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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