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French Romantic, Realist, and Impressionist Drawings on View at National Gallery Of Art, Washington January 27–May 26, 2013



Edgar Degas, *Two Women Ironing*, c.1885
pastel and charcoal on three joined sheets of brown paper
Dyke Collection

Washington, DC—For the art of drawing, 19th-century France was a remarkably creative period of richness, diversity, experimentation, and inventiveness. On view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from January 27 through May 26, 2013, ***Color, Line, Light: French Drawings, Watercolors, and Pastels from Delacroix to Signac*** presents 100 outstanding works that showcase the broad development of modern draftsmanship during this period. The works are from the collection of James T. Dyke, including sheets he and his wife, Helen L. Porter, have given to the Gallery, as well as others acquired by the Gallery with funds they donated.

"James T. Dyke is one of the most astute American collectors of 19th- and 20th-century French works on paper," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "It is symptomatic of Jim's modesty that his name does not appear in the title of the

exhibition; he prefers that the spotlight be focused on the drawings he has assembled with patience, passion, and joy over a period of more than three decades."

Both Helen L. Porter and James T. Dyke have been committed supporters of the Gallery for a quarter century, and Dyke is currently serving as chairman of the Trustees' Council.

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with the Musée des impressionnismes Giverny.

Exhibition Highlights

The tradition of drawing in France was already centuries old by the early 1800s, but increasingly in the 19th century drawings became widely valued, exhibited, and marketed as independent works of art. Their new status was officially recognized and promoted when they were given a separate category at the official Paris Salon exhibition.

Color, Line, Light is organized chronologically into sections that correspond roughly to five major stylistic movements that flourished during the 19th century: romanticism, realism and naturalism, impressionism, the Nabis and symbolists, and neo-impressionism. The works encompass nearly all the graphic media used by artists during the period, most types of drawings they made—compositional sketches, figure studies, and finished pieces that were complete works of art in themselves—and a broad range of the subjects they treated (landscape, genre, portraits, and interiors).

Romanticism: The romantic movement in French art thrived during the first half of the 19th century, with Eugène Delacroix as its leading practitioner. Color played an important role in romantic drawings, with watercolor, pastel, and colored papers used frequently to heighten the visual effect and elicit strong responses in the spectators. The power and beauty of nature were favorite subjects, whether presented in the form of threatening storms and raging seas, as seen in *Fishing Boats Tossed before a Storm* (c. 1840), a watercolor by Eugène Isabey, or portrayed in a gentler, more contemplative mode, such as *Sunset over a Pond* (date unknown) by François-Auguste Ravier and *Sunset in an Oriental Landscape* (c. 1845) by Gabriel Hippolyte Lebas.

Realism and Naturalism: Simultaneous with the rise of romanticism in France, an interest emerged in drawing the natural world as it truly appeared, as objectively and accurately as possible without idealizing or embellishing the subject. Artists also broadened their subject matter to include virtually every facet of the everyday world and contemporary life. The new approach to landscape drawing in France was developed for the most part by artists who visited and worked in the wild environs of the forest of Fontainebleau, around the hamlet of Barbizon, 35 miles south of Paris. Drawings by several of the key Barbizon artists are on view, including *Nude Reclining in a Landscape* (1844/1845) by Jean-François Millet and *Sunset from the Forest of Fontainebleau* (1848/1850) by Théodore Rousseau.

Toward the end of the century a new form of realism emerged that focused even more intensely on scenes of everyday reality in the modern world. This "naturalist" art coincided with similar themes of naturalism expressed in the writings of Émile Zola and other writers of the time. Key to this new approach was the detailed observation and dispassionate documentation of ordinary life, as in Léon Augustin Lhermitte's 1878 portrait of an elderly peasant woman, whose face is deeply creviced by time and care.

Impressionism: Many impressionist painters were accomplished draftsmen, most notably Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Cézanne. Although they drew in a variety of media, watercolor and pastel allowed them the same degree of freedom as oils and allowed them to express similar qualities of light and bright color. Degas, represented by two works—including a monumental pastel, *Two Women Ironing* (c. 1885)—was the most experimental and innovative of the group. Cézanne's virtuosity as a watercolorist is well represented by a single piece, *A Stand of Trees along a River Bank* (1880-1885), while Claude Monet's *Waterloo Bridge* (1901) shows how effectively and subtly he could capture with pastels the qualities of light and color he sought to express with oils.

Nabis and Symbolists: In the late 1880s, a group of French artists calling themselves the "Nabis," after the Hebrew word for "prophet" sought to create a new kind of art that was no longer centered on the depiction of reality. The Nabis were inspired by Paul Gauguin, who was then experimenting with new approaches to the use of color, using

different, more intense versions of the hues he observed in nature. Among the founding members of the Nabi brotherhood were Édouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard, and Paul Ranson. Their aesthetic was influenced in part by the symbolists, especially Odilon Redon, who transformed natural objects into fanciful visions or combined the natural and the unnatural in mysteriously dreamlike works.

Neo-Impressionism: The neo-impressionists instituted a new form of impressionism based on two theories of color relationships presented by the French chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul (1786–1889): optical mixing, in which two juxtaposed colors can be seen to blend together to suggest a third; and simultaneous contrast, in which the perception of a particular hue is influenced by the ones that are placed next to it. Instead of mixing their paints, the neo-impressionists sought to preserve the brilliance and luminosity of their pigments by juxtaposing small dots of pure color, which would blend optically when seen from a distance. A surprisingly large number of neo-impressionist drawings are tonal compositions rendered entirely in subtly modulated black chalk, black crayon, or charcoal on textured white paper. Georges Seurat, the inventor of pointillism, was the great master of this technique, as seen in *Woman Strolling with a Muff* (c. 1884).

James T. Dyke Collection

James T. Dyke and his wife Helen L. Porter have been collecting drawings since the mid-1970s. Dyke has long been a friend and major donor to the National Gallery of Art. He has assembled several remarkable collections, including an outstanding group of more than 130 individually select works by Paul Signac (which Jim generously donated to the Arkansas Art Center); a wide-ranging collection of several hundred contemporary drawings; and French, German, and American 19th- and early 20th-century drawings, watercolors, and pastels. While the collection of French 19th- and 20th-century drawings also features outstanding examples by many of the great "names" of the century—Delacroix, Manet, Degas, Gauguin, Cézanne, Monet, and Seurat, among them—the Dykes were thrilled to find and acquire prime works by draftsmen whose names they had never heard before, such as Charles-François Eustache, Achille Laugé, Henry d'Estienne, Gabriel-Hippolyte Lebas, and Albert Lebourg.

Curators and Exhibition Catalogue

Margaret Morgan Grasselli, curator and head, old master drawings, and Andrew Robison, senior curator of prints and drawings, National Gallery of Art, are the curators of the exhibition.

Published by the National Gallery of Art and DelMonico Books, an imprint of Prestel Publishing, the exhibition catalogue serves as a perfect introduction to the exquisite techniques and talents of artists whose works continues to inspire and amaze.

Featuring an abundance of color reproductions and six thought-provoking essays by Grasselli, Robison, Richard R. Brettell, Victor Carlson, Elizabeth Easton, and Marina Ferretti Bocquillon, the 180-page catalogue is available in hardcover for purchase in the Gallery Shops. To order, please visit <http://shop.nga.gov/>; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

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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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