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MELBOURNE
WINTER MASTERPIECES

FRENCH

IMPRESSIONISM

FROM THE
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

4.6-3.10



FRENCH IMPRESSIONISM FROM THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

This fact sheet provides information specific to French Impressionism to support the study of VCE Studio Arts – Art Industry Contexts Unit 4 Outcome 3. For a more detailed overview of exhibition preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion at the NGV refer to ‘Studio Arts: Art industry contexts at the NGV’¹

Cover:

Claude Monet

Meadow with Poplars c. 1875 (detail)

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Bequest of David P. Kimball in memory of his wife Clara Bertram Kimball (23.505)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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Paul Cézanne

Fruit and a jug on a table c. 1890–94 (detail)

oil on canvas

32.4 x 40.6 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Bequest of John T. Spaulding

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston is a major exhibition developed by the NGV in partnership with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), an institution renowned worldwide for its rich holdings of Impressionist paintings. It showcases a remarkable and comprehensive collection of over 100 artworks by well-known and loved Impressionist artists.

French Impressionism is part of the Victorian Government's Melbourne Winter Masterpieces series, which brings major international art exhibitions exclusively to Melbourne each winter. It aims to attract national and international visitors, boost economic activity and generate significant local and global media exposure for Victoria.

KEY ARTISTS

Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Cézanne, Berthe Morisot, Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro, Mary Cassatt, Paul Signac and Alfred Sisley.

NUMBER AND TYPE OF WORKS

More than ninety paintings and fifteen works on paper

KEY PERSONNEL

MFA curators: Katie Hanson, Curator of Paintings, Art of Europe; and Julia Welch, Assistant Curator of Paintings, Art of Europe

NGV exhibition curators: Ted Gott, Senior Curator, International Art; Miranda Wallace, Senior Curator, International Exhibition Projects; and Meg Slater, Assistant Curator, International Exhibition Projects

Senior Conservator for Exhibitions: Catherine Earley

Exhibition designers: NGV Design Studio

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Woman with a parasol and small child on a sunlit hillside c. 1874–76 (detail)
oil on canvas

47.0 x 56.2 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Bequest of John T. Spaulding (48,593)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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CURATORIAL RATIONALE

THEMATIC PILLARS

French Impressionism is arranged into ten thematic sections. It starts at the beginning of this revolutionary movement, highlighting the influence of its immediate precursors – the Barbizon School and Eugène Boudin – and traces the project's development throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Claude Monet's work bookends the exhibition, appearing at the beginning among works by the Barbizon School artists, and again at the end, where the final section is dedicated to his work. The curatorial team distributed Monet's works in this way to emphasise the artist's profound influence on this celebrated movement in art history.

HALLMARKS OF IMPRESSIONISM

The immersive exhibition helps audiences to experience key elements and broad themes of the Impressionists' work and practice; painting en plein air (outdoors and directly from nature), using a lightened palette and quick brushwork to capture the changing atmosphere, and their interest in natural, domestic and urban environments.

CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS

The curators also aimed to make the artists and their personal and professional connections more relatable, presenting familiar works anew and transporting the visitor back to France in the late nineteenth century. They researched the artists and their friends, contemporaries and critics, and integrated their voices into the exhibition narrative. Quotations from correspondence between the artists, journal entries and other materials appear in labels, didactics and audiovisual materials.

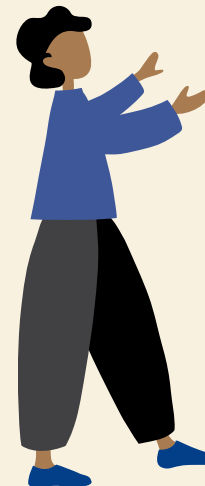
IN THE GALLERY

How do the works chosen and the way they are arranged reflect the curatorial rationale?

What was done to prepare and present key works?

How does the exhibition layout enhance your understanding of themes and ideas?

What measures have been taken to support and protect works?



IN THE GALLERY



EXHIBITION DESIGN

DEVELOPING THE EXHIBITION DESIGN

The final exhibition design and artwork displays have gone through several iterations as curators, conservators and designers collaboratively refined ideas to suit the requirements of the lending institution, MFA Boston.

PAINTING THE WALLS

The exhibition is presented in a predominantly white gallery space. This contemporary approach highlights the colours of the masterpieces on display, making them the feature of the presentation.

SETTING THE SCENE

The gallery spaces are connected by several immersive areas that lead the visitor on a journey through the show. These transitional spaces allude to the Impressionist tradition of painting ephemeral moments en plein air: projections, wallpapers, graphics and lighting all mimic atmospheric elements such as clouds, water, busy city streets or dappled canopy light.

TESTING MATERIALS

NGV conservators also tested the suitability of materials for the exhibition design. For example, the NGV Design Studio team wanted to use vinyl flooring, as it's available in a range of vibrant colours and print designs. Unfortunately, it contains chloride, which can join with hydrogen from the air to form hydrochloric acid, potentially damaging the artworks. However, this product's MSDS (material safety data sheet) noted that a stable coating had been applied to safely seal the chloride so the flooring is safe to use.



Edgar Degas
Racehorses at Longchamp 1871,
possibly reworked in 1874
oil on canvas
34.0 x 41.9 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
S. A. Denio Collection—Sylvanus
Adams Denio Fund and General
Income (03.1034)
Photography © Museum of Fine
Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved.



SELECTED WORKS

PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR *DANCE AT BOUGIVAL* 1883

Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Dance at Bougival*, 1883, captures a pair of happy dancers in a leafy cafe scene in the French village of Bougival near Paris. During the 1870s and 1880s, new places of leisure were springing up around Paris for working-class people to enjoy. Dr Ted Gott, NGV Senior Curator of International Art, notes that 'through this grand scale painting, Renoir elevates ordinary people to the life-size status of formal portraiture'. *Dance at Bougival* was also painted at a time when Renoir was experimenting with more disciplined line drawing and pure forms (rather than traditional Impressionist techniques).²

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Exhibition curators and designers created a long sightline uninterrupted by any other object to ensure that *Dance at Bougival* is one of the first works the visitor sees when they enter the section called 'Renoir and experimentation'.

This section shares a room with the section dedicated to the work of Camille Pissarro and his contemporaries. They are separated by a custom-built blade wall that frames the visitor's view of the artists presented across the vast space. Each side of the wall has been painted in a colour sampled from the artists' respective works: blue frames the work of Pissarro, and green that of Renoir. The outer walls on which the artworks are displayed are white.

Most paintings and works on paper in the exhibition are protected by frames and glazing; *Dance at Bougival* is glazed and therefore quite heavy, so conservators built a supporting bracket underneath to assist in weight bearing.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Dance at Bougival 1883 (detail)

oil on canvas

181.9 x 98.1 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Picture Fund (37.375)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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CAMILLE PISSARRO ***WOODED LANDSCAPE AT THE*** ***HERMITAGE, PONTOISE 1879***

Wooded landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise, 1879 is soft ground etching by Camille Pissarro. He based the work on one of his paintings (of the same name), translating its composition into print form. The etching is one of six states of wooded landscape that the artist produced with one plate. This approach to printmaking was not just a method of reproduction; rather, each state and each print is an individual and unique work of art.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

This print is located within the 'Innovative printmaking' section of the exhibition. In this space, the walls are a soft beige colour and each print is displayed in a custom-built, stainless-steel panel. These tones and materials were used to suggest the printing plate process.

Camille Pissarro

Wooded landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise 1879
soft-ground etching and aquatint on cream wove paper
1st of 6 states
21.6 x 26.7 cm (plate) 31.5 x 45.0 cm (sheet)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Lee M. Friedman Fund (1971.267)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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CLAUDE MONET

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT) 1891

In 1890 and 1891, Claude Monet painted a group of pictures of the stacks of wheat in the fields near his home and exhibited them to great critical acclaim.³ *Grainstack (snow effect)*, 1891, is an example of a work from the series. It demonstrates Monet's explorations of light, colour and form as he perceived them during the winter months.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Grainstack (snow effect) is on display in the final section, called 'Monet in situ', which is dedicated to a monographic grouping of sixteen canvases by Claude Monet produced over a thirty-year period.

The paintings are displayed on a white, oval-shaped wall, a space that mirrors an installation designed by Monet for his *Water lilies* paintings in the oval room of the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. This design gives visitors the sense that they are surrounded by Monet's paintings. There is also an oval-shaped bench in the centre for sitting down to view the works.

The oval space sits within a larger carpeted square room. Like other sections from the exhibition, it has been coloured violet to highlight the prominence of the colour in Monet's work.

Since the works in this room are hung on a slightly curved wall, extra blocks were added to the frames and wall surfaces so the d-ring (a metal ring attached to the back of the painting) could reach the hanger. Additional ledges were attached to the wall to help support the weight of very heavy paintings.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Grainstack (snow effect) 1891

oil on canvas 65.4 x 92.4 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Gift of Miss Aimée and Miss Rosamond Lamb in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Appleton Lamb (1970.253)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

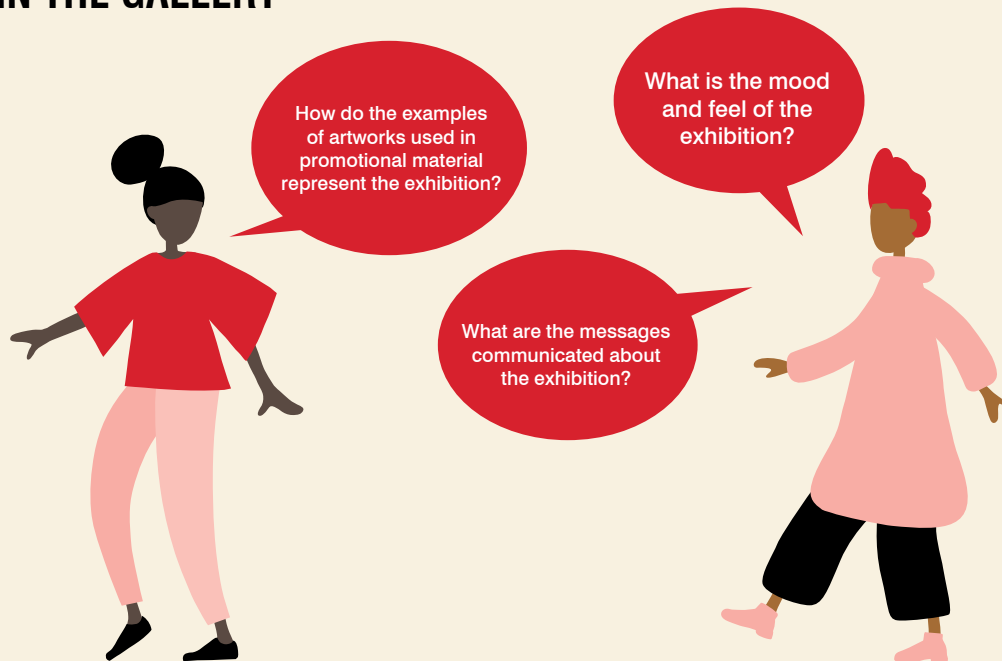
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EXHIBITION PROMOTION

The marketing campaign for *French Impressionism*:

- attracts a broad audience of Melbourne, regional Victorian and interstate visitors to the exhibition
- allows the artworks to shine, while being supported by a simple, contemporary masthead to promote the exhibition
- features a suite of hero images including works by Renoir, Monet and Pissarro that are visually striking and reflect the breadth of masterworks in the exhibition
- includes print advertising, digital and social media, radio, cinema, outdoor static and digital billboards, and public transit advertising
- is visible at NGV International on external building banners, screens and signs
- includes user-generated content that NGV visitors have tagged and shared on social media platforms. For example, NGV marketing might repost photographs uploaded to social media such as Instagram and Facebook onto official NGV accounts
- also promotes public programs and opportunities for NGV Members, schools, families and students
- features a dedicated marketing campaign for NGV Friday Nights. This weekly event includes music, food and access to the exhibition after dark.

IN THE GALLERY



NGV International banners – *French Impressionism*
from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

NOTES

1. National Gallery of Victoria, 'VCE Studio Arts: Art industry contexts at the NGV', 2020, NGV, Victorian Government, https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/school_resource/studio-arts-art-industry-contexts-at-the-ngv/, accessed 29th March 2021.
2. Angela Hesson, "A fantastic, nervous improvisator": Renoir and experimentation', *French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2021, p. 110.
3. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2021, *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, <https://www.mfa.org/>, accessed 16 March 2021.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Katie Hanson, Julia Welch, Ted Gott & Miranda Wallace et al., *French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2021.

PRESENTING PARTNER



PRINCIPAL PARTNER



ORGANISING INSTITUTION



Exhibition organised by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria

PREMIUM PARTNER



MAJOR PARTNERS



LEARNING PARTNER



NGV SCHOOLS PROGRAM PARTNERS



Education and Training



The NGV gratefully acknowledges the Packer Family and Crown Resorts Foundations for their support of the Your NGV Arts Access Program for Students, Children and Families. The NGV warmly thanks Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family for their support of the NGV School Support Program.

