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MELBOURNE WINTER MASTERPIECES®

FRENCH IMPRESSIONISM

FROM THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

6 JUN – 5 OCT 2025
EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

This fact sheet provides information specific to the NGV Melbourne Winter Masterpieces® exhibition *French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* to support the following Learning Outcomes of VCE Art Making and Exhibiting:

Unit 2: Understand, develop and resolve, Area of Study 1, Outcome 1

Unit 3: Collect, extend and connect, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

Unit 4: Consolidate, present and conserve, Area of Study 3, Outcome 3

For a more detailed overview of exhibition preparation, presentation and conservation at the NGV refer to Exhibiting Artworks at the NGV: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting | NGV

(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

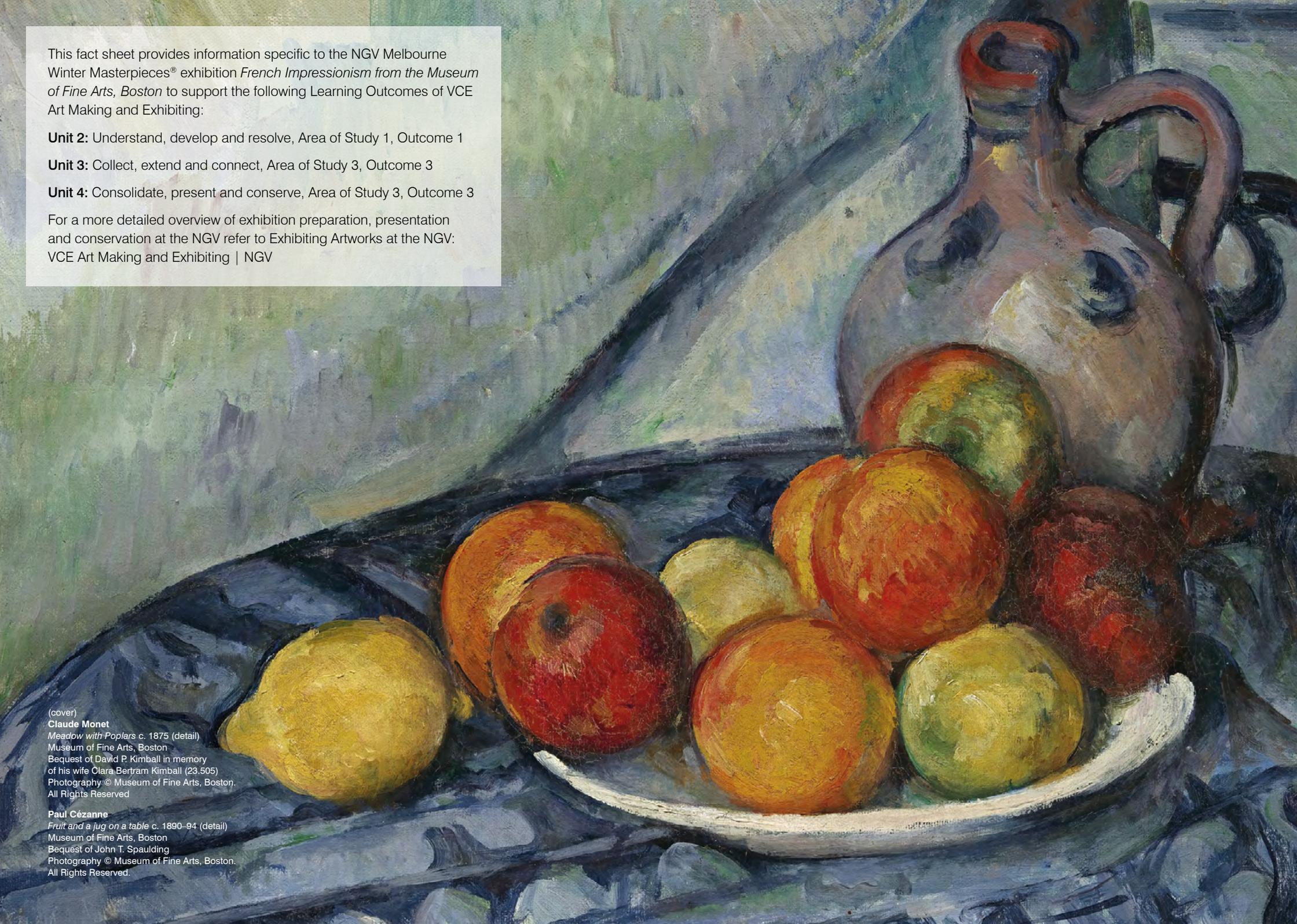
Fruit and a jug on a table c. 1890–94 (detail)

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 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), in partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). The MFA is an institution renowned worldwide for its rich holdings of Impressionist paintings. This exhibition 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.

NUMBER AND TYPE OF WORKS

More than a hundred paintings and fourteen works on paper are included in the exhibition.

KEY ARTISTS

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

KEY TEAM MEMBERS

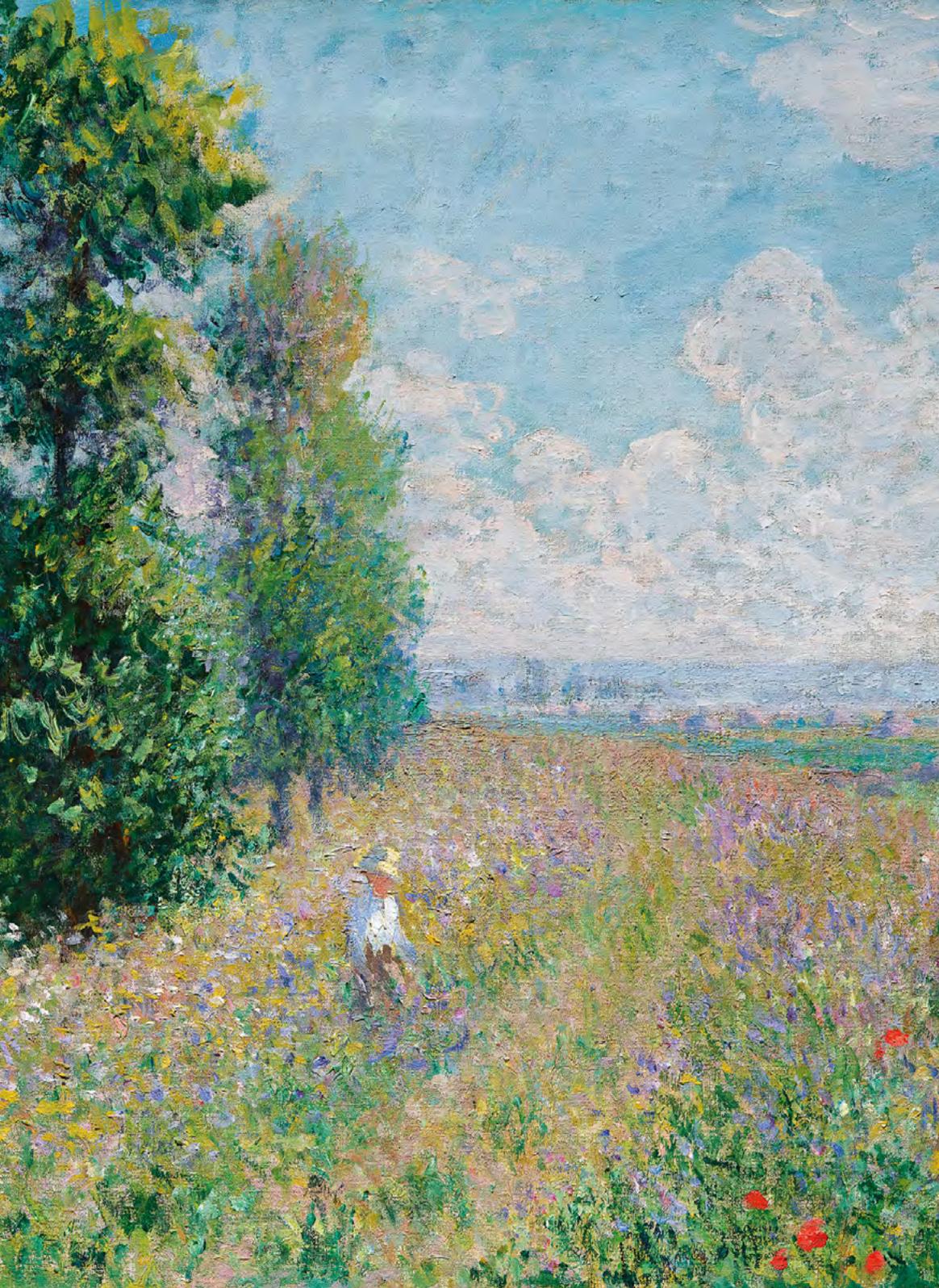
NGV exhibition curators: Dr Ted Gott, Senior Curator, International Art; Dr Miranda Wallace, Senior Curator, International Exhibitions; and Meg Slater, Curator, International Exhibition Projects

MFA curator: Dr Katie Hanson, William and Ann Elfers Curator of Paintings, Art of Europe; Julia Welch, Arthur K. Solomon Assistant Curator of Paintings

NGV Senior Conservator for Exhibitions: Catherine Earley

NGV Exhibition designers: Thom McCarthy, Senior Designer; Annika Toohey, Exhibition Designer

Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Woman with a parasol and small child on a sunlit hillside c. 1874–76 (detail)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of John T. Spaulding (48.593)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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CURATORIAL RATIONALE

French Impressionism offers audiences the opportunity to experience the hallmarks of Impressionism: distinctive brushwork, vivid use of colour, innovative viewpoints, and depictions of subjects and places dear to the artists from a new perspective.

Evoking the artistic energy and intellectual dynamism of the period, the exhibition places an emphasis on the thoughts and observations of the artists themselves. Their words, as captured through letters, journals and articles, feature prominently in wall and label texts throughout the exhibition. The exhibition also places an emphasis on the collecting efforts, stories and grand homes of Bostonians, some of whom visited the artists in France during the movement's height and whose collecting efforts helped shape the MFA's French Impressionist holdings. With a focus on the artists' voices and an exhibition design inspired by the collectors' grand residences, *French Impressionism* will present familiar works anew.

French Impressionism is arranged into ten thematic sections and charts the trajectory of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in late nineteenth-century France. It starts at the beginning of this revolutionary movement and traces its development throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Claude Monet's work bookends the exhibition, appearing at the beginning along with a work by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and again at the end, where the final section is dedicated to his work. The curatorial team displayed Monet's work in this way to emphasise the artist's profound influence on this celebrated movement in art history.

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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EXHIBITION DESIGN

French Impressionism has been designed, in part, to evoke the grand nineteenth-century residences of affluent Bostonian collectors – where works such as those in the exhibition would have been displayed.

The exhibition design includes: an entry corridor or vestibule, a salon or parlour for hosting guests, a drawing room, a conservatory space as well as a series of ballrooms culminating in a grand ballroom where Renoir's *Dance at Bougival* is displayed.

Each of these sections features a different design approach to wall colour, mouldings and architraves, wall panelling, custom wallpaper and joinery, soft furnishings, rugs and antique furniture. Over fifty different mouldings, plaster profiles and elements that adorn the exhibition have been sourced or custom made. Over thirty-two paint colours have been used, mirroring the Impressionists' use of bright broken colour.

Sources of inspiration included several homes owned by significant collectors of the time as well as Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman's 1897 publication *The Decoration of Houses*, a manual for interior design that shaped early twentieth century American interior styles. Ensuring that the level of embellishment and grandeur did not overshadow the artworks themselves was critical to the design of the exhibition. Audiences will be able to engage with the historical furnishings, creating a tactile exhibition experience.

The exhibition design team also drew inspiration from the display settings preferred by the Impressionist artists themselves. In the second last section of the exhibition, *Printmaking*, etchings are displayed in a gallery painted purple with yellow mouldings. This design choice recalls the fifth Impressionist group exhibition in 1880, in which Camille Pissarro presented prints with yellow mats and purple frames, in a room painted lilac and finch-yellow.

The final section of the exhibition is a homage to the curved walls that Monet designed to permanently display his *Nymphéas* [*Water Lilies*] cycle at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. The section is called *Monet in Situ* and features sixteen of the artist's paintings.

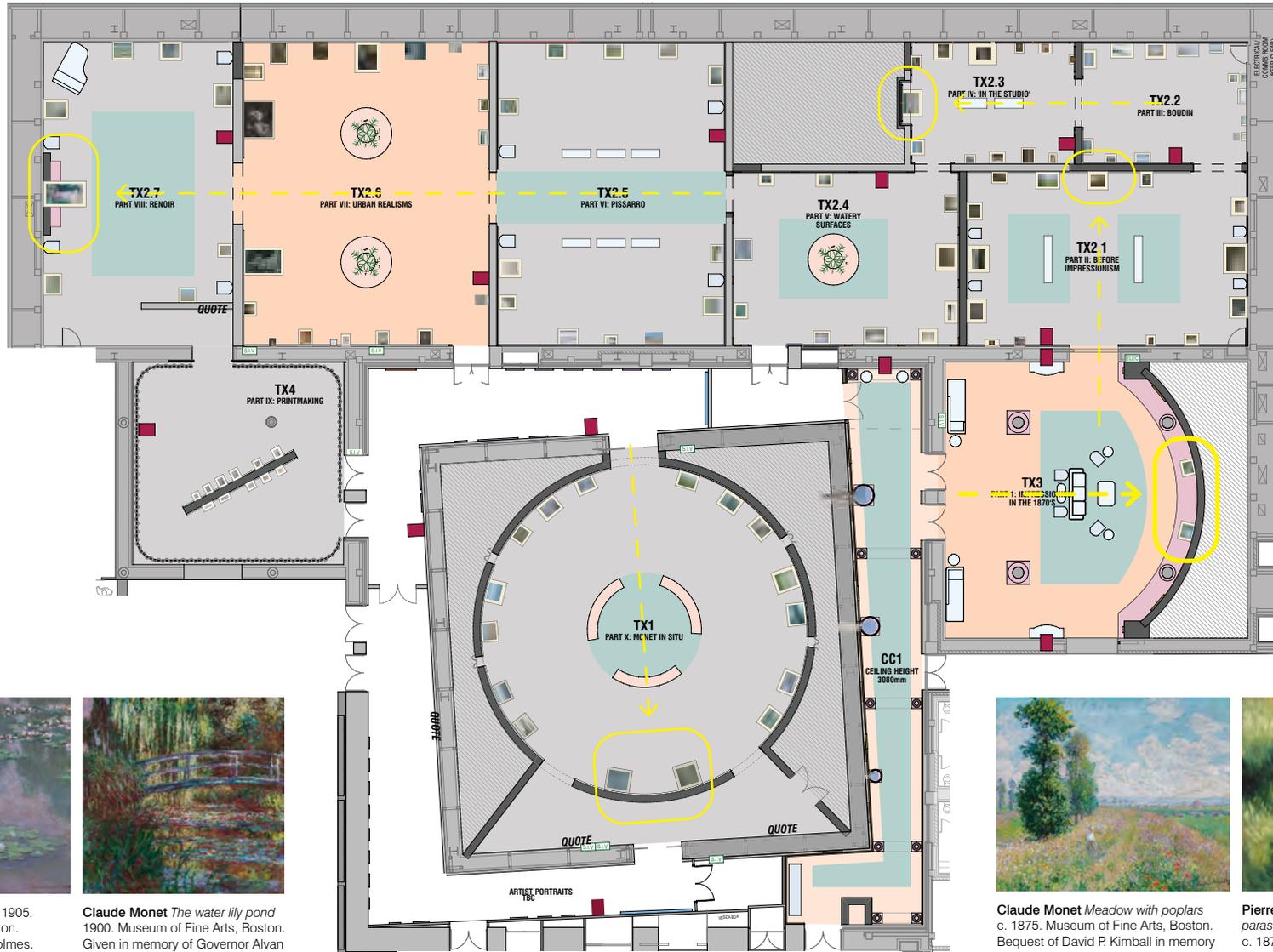
Edgar Degas

At the races in the countryside 1869 (detail)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 1931
Purchase Fund (26.790)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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EXHIBITION DESIGN WITH SIGHT LINES TO KEY WORKS



Pierre-Auguste Renoir *Dance at Bougival* 1883. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Picture Fund. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved



Gustave Caillebotte *Fruit displayed on a stand* c. 1881–82. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Fanny P. Mason Fund in memory of Alice Thevin. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved



Théodore Rousseau *Edge of the woods (Plain of Barbizon near Fontainebleau)* c. 1850–60. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Mrs. David P. Kimball. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved



Claude Monet *Water lilies* 1905. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Edward Jackson Holmes. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved



Claude Monet *The water lily pond* 1900. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Given in memory of Governor Alvan T. Fuller by the Fuller Foundation. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved



Claude Monet *Meadow with poplars* c. 1875. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of David P. Kimball in memory of his wife Clara Bertram Kimball. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved



Pierre-Auguste Renoir *Woman with a parasol and small child on a sunlit hillside* c. 1874–76. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of John T. Spaulding. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved

CONSERVATION



Most of the artworks featured in *French Impressionism* have travelled to Melbourne from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in Massachusetts, USA. Making sure that these rare, sometimes fragile masterpieces arrive safely is vitally important. When shipping artwork, by plane in this instance, MFA Boston sent a staff member as a courier with each consignment to closely monitor the artwork's movements. Shipping agents oversaw each journey, touching base with the courier at each landfall and overseeing the transport to the gallery.

Each work was packed for transport in specially fabricated wooden crates, which are designed to minimise the impact of movement, moisture and sudden climatic changes. The crates were painted as a further barrier to moisture and constructed from heat-treated timber, which reduces the risk of spreading or introducing pests. The works were unpacked under the eyes of the MFA Boston courier and NGV conservator, who checked the condition of each work against its condition report to make sure there were no changes to condition after the journey.

The display conditions of the gallery spaces align with the standard International Museum Environmental Conditions and lighting levels for oil paintings on canvas and works on paper.

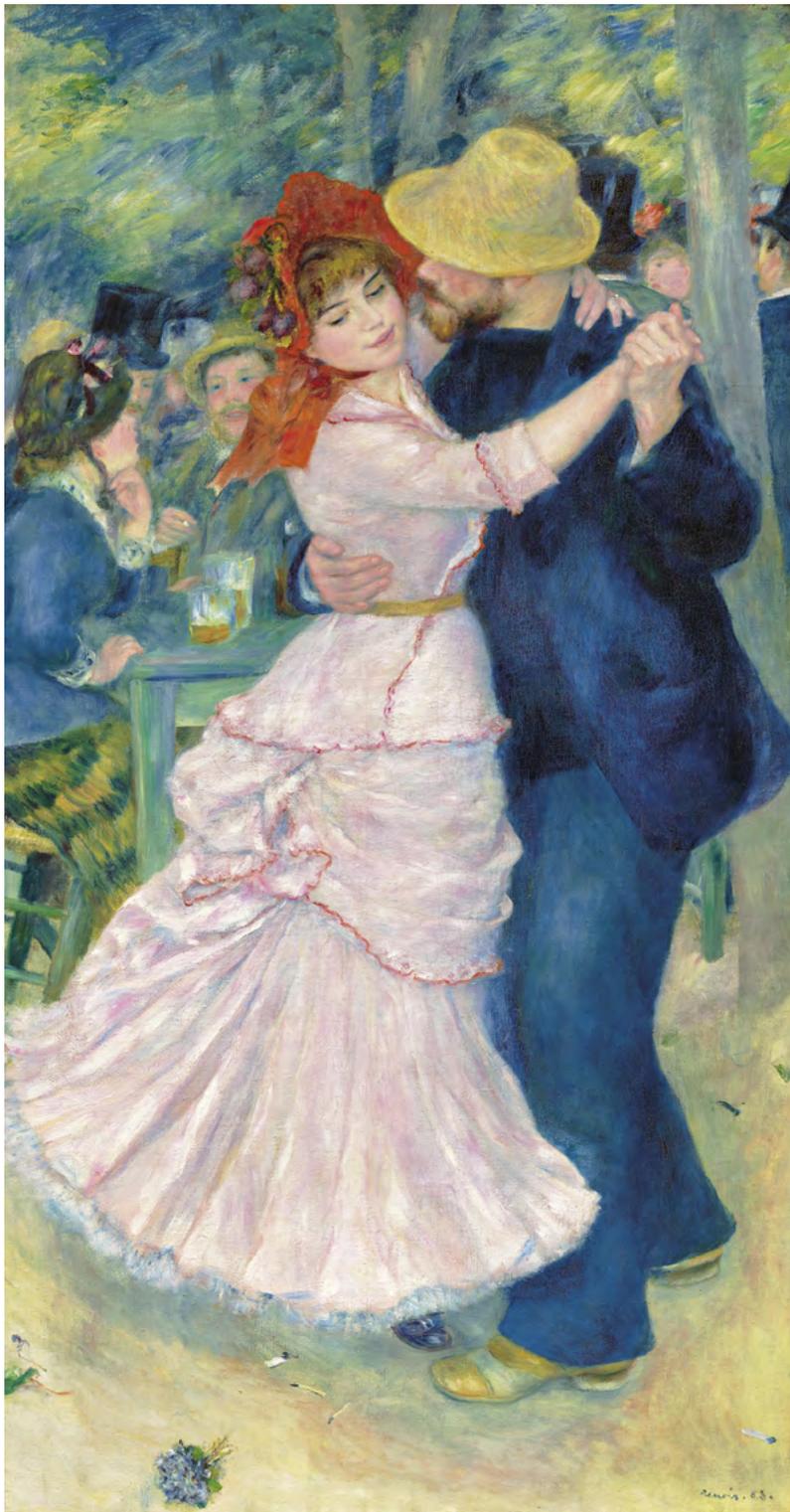
With the introduction of antique display furniture, conservation checked and approved each addition to ensure that the objects were pest free and safe for display with the artworks. Exhibitions from a single lender such as the MFA Boston are among the simplest to manage, as preparation of the works is generally assured by the lender in advance, and specific display requirements are agreed to in the contract.

Berthe Morisot
White flowers in a bowl 1885
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of John T. Spaulding (48.581)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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SELECTED WORKS



Claude Monet
*Fisherman's cottage on the cliffs
at Varengeville 1882 (detail)*
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of Anna Perkins Rogers
Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
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PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR

Dance at Bougival 1883

ABOUT

Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Dance at Bougival*, 1883, captures a pair of happy dancers in a leafy café 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 stronger forms (rather than traditional Impressionist techniques).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Exhibition curators and designers created a forty-metre-long sightline uninterrupted by any other object to ensure that *Dance at Bougival* is the first work visitors see when they enter the section called *Renoir and experimentation*. In fact, the floorplan has been developed with a series of aligned and increasingly wide doorways down the centre of the connecting rooms to place emphasis on this work, building anticipation and a sense of drama. The final doorway is the widest and features swag and tail curtains which from a distance frame Renoir's work.

A gilt wood and marble console table sits underneath *Dance at Bougival* while French Louis XV Ormolu wall lights are positioned on either side of the painting and console table.

In the corner of this room, a 1900s Erard grand piano sits. Sourced from a piano restoration business, a blocker has been placed under the piano keys to minimise noise.

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.

The walls are painted Dulux *Very Cherry*, with plaster enrichments, timber mouldings and satin damask fabrics to match. As the third ballroom in the exhibition, this one is the grandest reflecting Renoir's affluent patrons along with the wealth and success that he experienced in his career.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

French 1841–1919

Dance at Bougival 1883

oil on canvas 181.9 x 98.1 cm

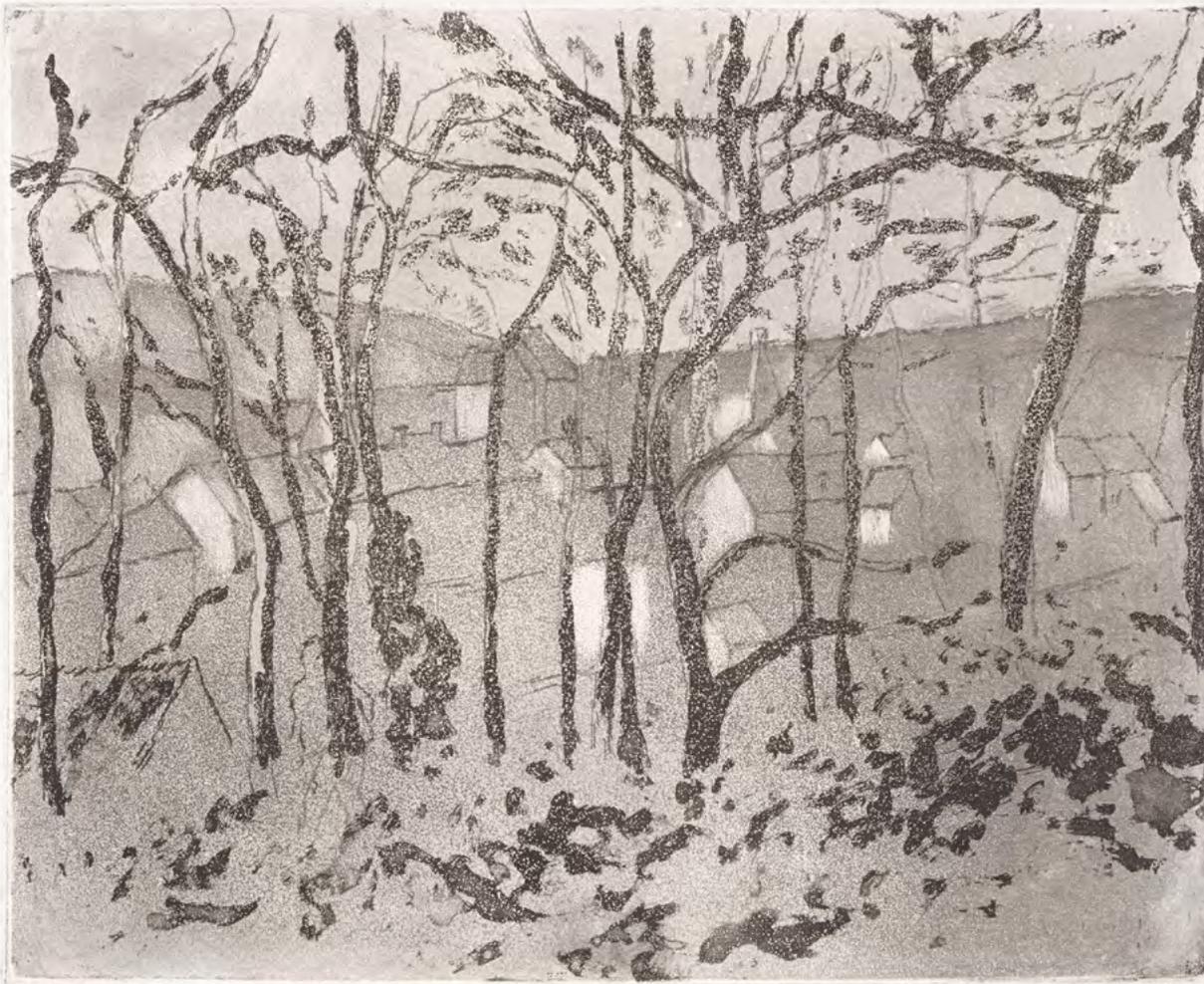
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Picture Fund (37.375)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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CAMILLE PISSARRO

Wooded landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise 1879



ABOUT

Wooded landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise, 1879, is a 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

Pissarro's etching is displayed in the *Innovative Printmaking* section of the exhibition alongside works by his contemporaries Edgar Degas and Mary Stevenson Cassatt. In this room the designers have drawn inspiration directly from the display settings preferred by the artists at the time. These prints are displayed in a room painted lilac with finch/canary-yellow borders. These colours and display settings were documented in a letter Pissarro wrote to his son in 1883. He wrote: 'The fact is that we ourselves made the first experiments with colours; the room in which I showed was lilac, bordered with canary yellow'. In *French Impressionism* these walls are painted Dulux *Lilac Secret*, with the cornices and skirting painted Dulux *Lemon Delicious*.

As a work on paper, Pissarro's etching *Wooded landscape at the Hermitage, Pontoise* is light sensitive. To ensure its stability and preservation it must be exhibited with a low lighting level of 50 Lux.

Camille Pissarro

French (born in the Danish West Indies)
1830–1903

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



ABOUT

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.¹ *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. Monet's paintings, including *Grainstack (snow effect)*, are displayed on a circular shaped wall; in homage to the curved walls that Monet designed to permanently display his *Nymphéas* [*Water Lilies*] cycle at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. This design creates an immersive experience for visitors, surrounding them with Monet's paintings. Three curved benches, forming a circle in the centre of the room provide opportunities for visitors to sit and contemplate the works. With the aim of mirroring the unguided experience at the Musée de L'Orangerie, the NGV exhibition design team have created several entrances to the room.

Since the works in this section 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.

The walls are painted Dulux *My Chinchilla*, with accents of Dulux *Pink Bubble* on the purpose-built seats and architraves.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Grainstack (snow effect) 1891

oil on canvas 65.4 x 92.4 cm

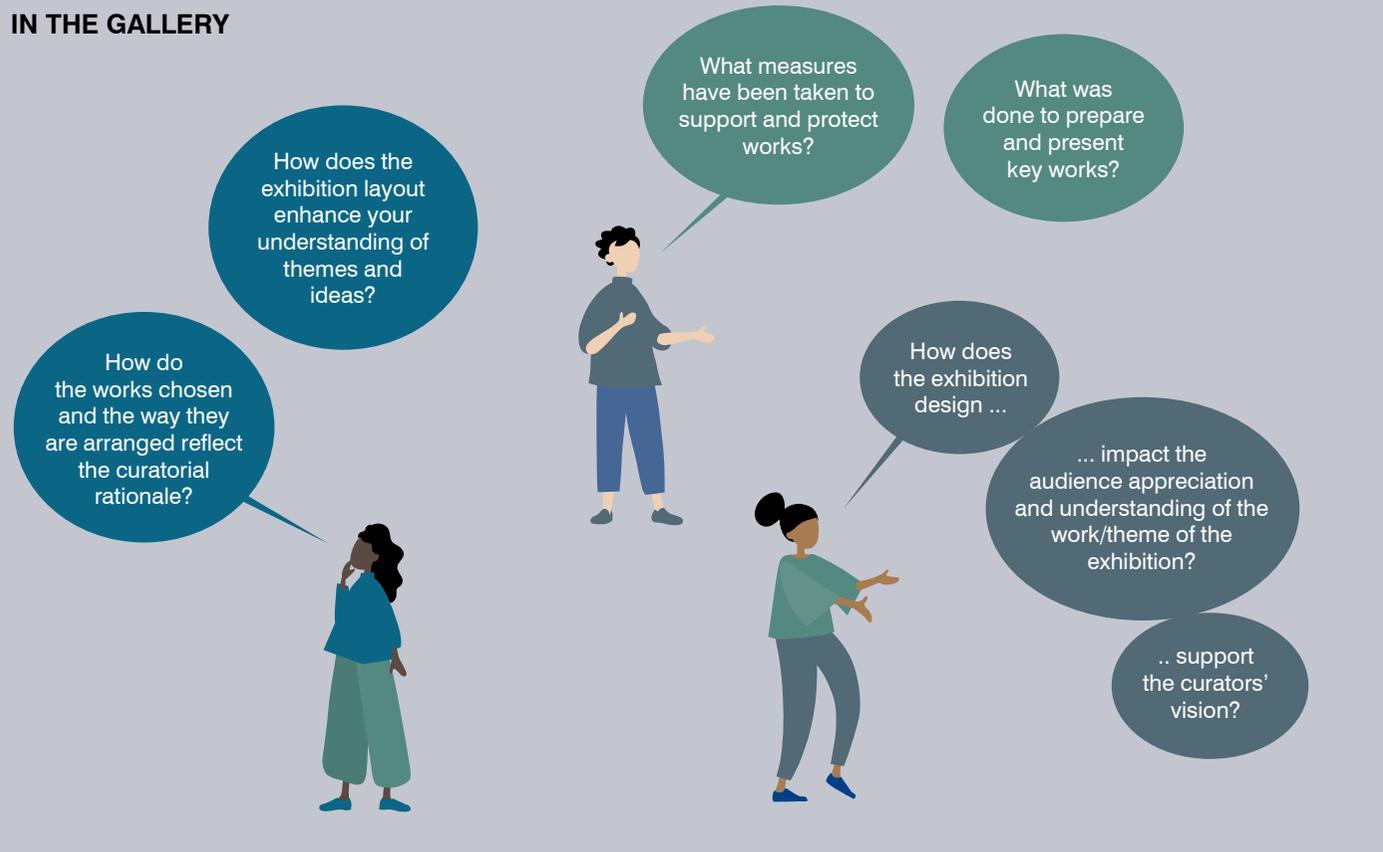
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

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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IN THE GALLERY



FURTHER RESOURCES

Exhibiting Artworks at the NGV: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting | NGV

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting – Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Explore Conservation | NGV

Katie Hanson, Julia Welch, Ted Gott & Miranda Wallace (eds), *French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2025.

NOTES

1. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2021, *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, <<https://www.mfa.org/>>, accessed 16 March 2021.

PRESENTING PARTNER

MELBOURNE
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PRINCIPAL PARTNER

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EXHIBITION PARTNER

MFA Boston
► Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

EXHIBITION ORGANISED BY THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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