

April in Paris

Join us as we celebrate our world-renowned Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection before it travels to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, as the largest loan in the museum's history. Before the galleries dedicated to these works undergo renovations, wish these treasures a "bon voyage" with a stroll through the collection's Parisian streets and blossoming French countryside.



GALLERY 201

Paris Street, Rainy Day (1877) by Gustave Caillebotte

Gustave Caillebotte's street scene offers a glimpse of the Paris that we still admire today—wide boulevards offering vistas of cohesive neoclassical architecture and plenty of people watching. However, in Caillebotte's time, many lamented this Paris, the result of Baron Georges Haussmann's recent and highly controversial "new" transformation of the city. A contemporary critic complained, "The old, artistic, historic, and political Paris has been demolished," while a leading French journalist, Louis Veuillot, wrote, "A quantity of sumptuous, pompous, colossal things are being built, and they are boring. . . . The inhabitants of the finished Paris will be bored as no one on earth has been bored before."



GALLERY 201

The Artist's House at Argenteuil (1873) by Claude Monet

One might never guess from Monet's intimate, lush garden depiction that Argenteuil, like so many of the suburbs of Paris, had been significantly altered by the industrialization and urban sprawl of the 19th century. No trains lurk in the distance, nor does smoke pollute the brilliant blue sky. Instead Monet's wife, Camille, leans attentively out of the large house while their son Jean plays with a hoop in the idyllic yard. The garden itself, a preview of Monet's celebrated gardens at Giverny, offers freely planted trees, banks of flourishing blossoms, and untrained vines in place of the clipped hedges and shaped trees of the classic French style.



GALLERY 201

Young Woman in a Garden (Jeune fille dans un jardin) (1883)

by Berthe Morisot

Another verdant suburban garden, likely near the artist's family home in Bougival, appears in this portrait by Berthe Morisot. Though Morisot places her subject centrally in the composition, she gives almost equal attention to other elements of the painting—a rake propped against a garden gate, the profusion of garden flowers, and the straw-hatted little girl playing just over the sitter's shoulder. Rather than making her young woman dominate the canvas, Morisot uses brilliant green and blue sweeping strokes to unite the subject with her surroundings. With such broad, loosely sketched brushwork and her out-of-doors technique, Morisot shared a great affinity with Impressionists like Monet.



GALLERY 171

Madame Paul Escudier (Louise Lefevre) (1882)

by John Singer Sargent

Perhaps the most sought-after and prolific portraitist of international high society, American expatriate John Singer Sargent trained in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts and quickly mastered the academic style of portraiture. Yet in his figure studies of the early 1880s, he also explored a looser, more painterly style, influenced by the works of the French Impressionists, then on display in Paris. Such experimentation can be seen in this highly unconventional portrait of Madame Paul Escudier. Placing his subject off center and in a darkened interior, Sargent created a radically asymmetrical, yet balanced, composition, which emphasizes the striking effects of light and dark over a clear depiction of his sitter.



GALLERY 205

The Bedroom (1889) by Vincent van Gogh

With its vivid palette, dynamic brushwork, and dramatic perspective, van Gogh's bedroom appears to positively tremble with nervous energy. It is surprising, then, that in writing to his brother Theo, the artist proposed, "Looking at the picture ought to rest the brain, or rather the imagination." This painting was amongst many van Gogh painted in his studio in the south of France, where he hoped to attract a community of like-minded artists. Though Gauguin stopped through for a few months and was particularly struck with the anxious vitality of this bedroom scene, van Gogh's idealistic artists' colony never materialized, prompting the first of the artist's mental crises.



GALLERY 205

A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884 (1884–1886)

by Georges Seurat

This representation of Parisians at leisure also showcases the emerging social tensions of the late 19th century. Seurat had just completed a more conventional depiction of weekend relaxation with the all-male, solidly working class group of *Bathers at Asnières*, but with *La Grande Jatte*, Seurat radically intermingles both the sexes and classes. Particularly striking are the three figures in the foreground on the left: a working-class oarsman reclining, a middle-class woman reading, and a bourgeois man posing with top hat and walking stick. With their social disparities, they make a rather clashing ensemble. No wonder contemporary critics called the work "bedlam" and "scandal!"

You can continue to marvel at the innovations of Seurat's Pointillist *tour de force*. This museum favorite, along with a few other works from the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection, will remain on view this fall. Or, bring out your inner Impressionist with art classes through the Chicago Park District. Register online at www.chicagoparkdistrict.com.