



AMERICAN IMPRESSIONISM

4 November 2014 to 1 February 2015

Curator: Katherine Bourguignon

Exhibition organised by the musée des impressionnismes Giverny and the Terra Foundation for American Art, in collaboration with the National Galleries of Scotland and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza. With the generous support of the Terra Foundation for American Art

This autumn, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza is presenting the first exhibition in Spain on the dissemination of Impressionism in the United States. Curated by Katherine Bourguignon, curator at the Terra Foundation for American Art and an expert in late 19th- and early 20th-century French and American art, the exhibition, which has already been seen at the musée des impressionnismes Giverny and the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh, will include nearly 80 paintings that allow for an analysis of the way in which North American artists discovered Impressionism in the 1880s and 1890s and its subsequent development around 1900.

While artists such as Mary Cassatt and John Singer Sargent had spent some years living and exhibiting their work in France and enjoyed close relations with painters such as Degas and Monet, it was not until 1886 with the exhibition of French Impressionism in New York organised by the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, that American painters began to make use of the new brushstroke, brilliant colours and themes of modern life characteristic of the French movement, in some cases even visiting Paris to discover it at first hand. The works by Cassatt, Sargent and Whistler on display in the exhibition reveal their role in the development of Impressionism in Europe, while those of Theodore Robinson and Childe Hassam, among other artists who also travelled to France to discover Impressionism, reveal a more gradual assimilation of the new technique. This was also the case with the American painters who, without any direct contact with the Impressionists and from a wide range of different viewpoints, were capable of adapting its ideas and style to national themes and thus captivate

Images from left to right: John Singer Sargent. *Dennis Miller Bunker Painting at Calcot*, 1888. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection; **Mary Cassatt.** *Summertime*, 1894. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection; **Edmund Charles Tarbell.** *Three Sisters – A study in June Sunlight*, 1890. Milwaukee Art Museum.

More information and images: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza – Oficina de Prensa.

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Mary Cassatt. *Autumn*, 1880.
Musée des Beaux Arts de la
Ville de Paris, Petit Palais, Paris

a new public. All these works are shown in the galleries of the exhibition alongside canvases by Monet, Manet, Degas and Morisot, which set them in context and establish an interesting dialogue.

For the American painters who wished to be part of this new, European modernity it was essential to spend time in Paris in order to visit the Louvre and the annual Salon and in some cases to take classes at one of the growing number of studios and academies. James McNeill Whistler was one of the first, followed by Mary Cassatt. In 1874, at the time when Paris was recovering from the Franco-Prussian War, a second wave of American painters arrived, among them John Singer Sargent and Theodore Robinson.

Cassatt, Sargent and the Impressionists

Mary Cassatt and Sargent experienced and were involved in the first wave of Impressionism and had fundamentally European careers. Due to her relations with Degas and Morisot, Cassatt was invited to take part in four of the Impressionist exhibitions between 1879 and 1886: as the only American representative, she received a warm welcome for her paintings of upper middle-class women and children. She also knew Monet, and owned important works by all the Impressionists. Although she had exhibited in previous years at the official Salon, she ultimately shunned it and completely embraced Impressionism, becoming one of the first representatives of the French style on the other side of the Atlantic.

Born in Italy to American parents, John Singer Sargent spent all his life in Europe. In 1883 he began to experiment with a loose brushstroke and less structured compositions and would pursue this direction over the following years, when his friendship with Monet and his visits to Giverny encouraged his increasingly evident application of the new technique, use of themes from modern life and brighter colours. Sargent was notably influenced by the Impressionist exhibitions and played a genuine role in the movement. However, his case is different to that of Cassatt in that he never exclusively opted for the new style and in his commissioned portraits he maintained a smoother and more highly finished treatment of the figures, albeit with an occasional Impressionist touch. In addition, after exhibiting for the first time at the official Salon in 1877, he continued to send works there every year.

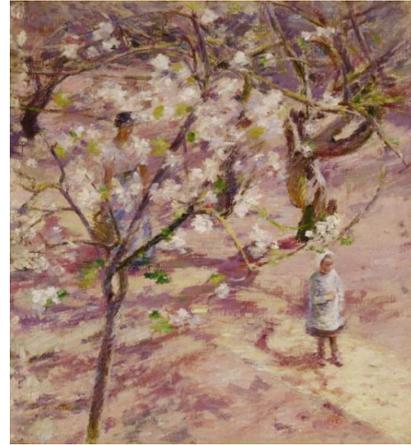


John Singer Sargent. *Two Women Asleep in a Punt under the Willows*, c. 1887. Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa

Americans in Giverny

In the 1880s, other American artists who worked in France at this period began to explore the potential of Impressionism and to paint outdoors in the Forest of Fontainebleau, on the Brittany coast and in Giverny, where they could work close to the master Monet, although the latter only allowed a few of them to set up their easels next to his own. One of them was

Theodore Robinson who, during these *plein air* sessions, began to use lighter colours and to study the changes of light and shadow at different times of the day, although maintaining an academic rigour and meticulous finish in his figures. Robinson also started to use a high viewpoint, particularly in his views of the village, and was fascinated by the effects that this produced. Until 1892, by which date the Giverny colony had grown considerably, he returned there every year from spring to the start of the winter.



Theodore Robinson. *Blossoms at Giverny*, 1891-1892. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection

John Leslie Breck, another regular visitor to Giverny between 1887 and 1891, included innovative elements in his works such as coloured shadows and even produced a series of haystacks directly based on Monet's.

Urban views. New York, Boston, Chicago

Around 1890, various American artists who had returned from Europe began to make use of Impressionism's new subjects, compositions and colours in their works. The public for their paintings was now different to the one that greeted those of their French forerunners twenty years earlier and the movement had evolved in Europe towards new concepts through the work of artists such as Van Gogh, Gauguin, Seurat and Signac. More wide-ranging in its references and deploying greater liberty, their paintings no longer represented a unified pictorial style but rather individual starting points.

Childe Hassam spent three years studying and painting in France between 1886 and 1889 and although he avoided the Impressionist circle, this period had a considerable influence on his technique. His compositions of these years, painted in the studio, already reveal his interest in the effects of light. Hassam only fully committed himself to the new style after his return to the United States in 1889 when, like William Merritt Chase, he painted numerous urban views and garden scenes.



Childe Hassam. *Horticulture Building, World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago*, 1893. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection

Chase, who was one of the key painters in the development of Impressionism in the United States, had received a classical training in New York and Munich. In the 1880s he nonetheless began to make use of lighter colours, modern subjects and innovative compositional structures. His works from this period, set in the public parks of New York and Brooklyn, mark a fundamental change in his career and allowed him to regain the support of critics and collectors.

Whistlerian Impressionism

Whistler spent much of his life in Europe, working in London, Venice and Paris, but he always considered himself American. Although his style corresponds more closely to the approach of the previous generation, his works were admired by many members of the Impressionist group. In the United States, Whistler was always considered a modern, rebellious artist who did not conform to academic norms. His muted, almost monochrome palette, simplified



James McNeill Whistler. *Nocturne: Blue and Silver* - Chelsea, 1871. Tate, London, Bequeathed by Miss Rachel and Miss Jean Alexander



John Henry Twachtman. *Winter Landscape*, 1890-1900. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection

brushstroke and lack of interest in painterly finish relate his Nocturnes to the Impressionists, although he never exhibited with them. More than any other American artist, Whistler was the forerunner of a generation that he inspired and which saw his style as a model to follow. At the end of the century, John Henry Twachtman and Thomas Wilmer Dewing produced works that can be located on

the margins of Impressionism, making use of a soft brushstroke and more muted colours that encourage almost mystical interpretations. For these artists, Impressionism was not limited to sun-filled scenes depicting members of the bourgeoisie at leisure, as was the case with their contemporaries, and they considered that it could also encompass these near-abstract landscapes inspired by Whistler, whom Twachtman had met in Europe in 1880.

American scenes and landscapes

During the 1890s an increasing number of American artists responded to the growing popularity of Impressionism which, by the end of the century, had become one of the prevailing styles; following the advice of art critics, these painters adapted modern art to national themes.

Chase began to spend his summers on Long Island in order to paint the Atlantic coast at first hand, adopting many of the Impressionist ideas such as the observation of nature and the changing effects of light. Scenes of this type also brought success to Childe Hassam who returned from France and focused on *plein air* painting in a brilliant, Impressionist style, spending numerous summers on the Isles of Shoals opposite the coasts of New Hampshire and Maine. These works were extremely popular with collectors.

Around 1890, Dennis Miller Bunker and Theodore Robinson began to be interested in authentically American landscapes. The two artists had started to experiment with the new technique at around the same time but in different contexts: Robinson worked alongside Monet at Giverny, and Bunker with Sargent in Calcot during the summer of 1888. On his return to Boston, Bunker decided to repeat the experience and went to paint outdoors in an area near the city that resembled the English countryside. Here he succeeded in combining European pictorial techniques with American themes. Having returned from France in 1892 on the encouragement of Monet, Robinson also followed the critics' advice to paint typically American views and went to Vermont and to the north of New York State to paint.



Frank Weston Benson. *Sunlight*, 1909. Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana, John Herron Fund

Also in the 1890s, Edmund C. Tarbell and Frank W. Benson produced a series of depictions of women and children bathed in sunlight in gardens or by the sea. While they used family members or friends as models, these images were more than just portraits and the women came to represent a new American ideal. *In the Orchard* made Tarbell one of the leaders of Impressionism in the United States: the work is clearly indebted to the French movement but the female figures represent this new ideal in their gestures, poses and elegant dress. For his part, in 1901 Benson began to spend his summers on an island opposite the coast of Maine. His academic training is evident in his skilled draughtsmanship and respect for the figures, while his interest in Impressionism is reflected in the increasingly lively palette, the manner of applying the pigment and a growing preference for outdoor scenes.



Edmund Charles Tarbell. *In the Orchard*, 1891. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection

In late 1897, Tarbell and Benson left the Society of American Artists to join a break-away group known as the Ten American Painters, which promoted the principles of modern art and individual artistic expression.

Terra Foundation for American Art

The Terra Foundation for American Art is dedicated to fostering exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States for national and international audiences. Recognizing the importance of experiencing original works of art, the foundation provides opportunities for interaction and study, beginning with the presentation and growth of its own art collection in Chicago. To further cross-cultural dialogue on American art, the foundation supports and collaborates on innovative exhibitions, research and educational programs. Implicit in such activities is the belief that art has the potential both to distinguish cultures and to unite them.

Associated activity: One-Day Conference

During the month of December the Museum will be organising a day of lectures on American Impressionism with Katherine Bourguignon, Mary T. Lewis (Art critic and Visiting Associated Professor in Art History at the Trinity College Hartford), Frances Fowle (Senior Curator at the National Galleries of Scotland and Reader at the University of Edinburgh), and Erica Hirshler (Senior Curator of American Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

EXHIBITION DETAILS

Title: *American Impressionism*

Exhibition organised by the musée des impressionnismes Giverny and the Terra Foundation for American Art, in collaboration with the National Galleries of Scotland and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza. With the generous support of the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Venues and dates: **Giverny**, musée des impressionnismes Giverny, 28 March to 29 June 2014; **Edinburgh**, National Galleries of Scotland, 19 July to 19 October 2014; **Madrid**, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 4 November 2014 to 1 February 2015.

Curator: Katherine Bourguignon, Curator at the Terra Foundation for American Art

Coordinator: Clara Marcellán, Department of Modern Painting, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Number of works: 77

Publications: Catalogue with texts by Richard Brettell, Frances Fowle and Katherine Bourguignon, published in Spanish; digital publication from the Thyssen Kiosk app for tablets and smartphones, in Spanish and English (free).

VISITOR INFORMATION

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Address: Paseo del Prado 8, 28014 Madrid. Moneo Galleries, first basement level

Opening times: Mondays to Thursdays and Sundays, 10am to 7pm; Fridays and Saturdays 10am to 9pm

Temporary exhibition:

- Standard ticket: 9 Euros
- Reduced price ticket: 6.5 Euros for visitors aged over 65, pensioners, students with proof of status and Large Families.
- Free entry: children aged under 12 and officially unemployed Spanish citizens.

Temporary exhibition + Permanent Collection:

- Standard ticket: 13.5 Euros
- Reduced price ticket: 8.5 Euros
- Free entry: children aged under 12 and officially unemployed Spanish citizens.

Advance purchase of tickets at the Museum's ticket desks, from its website and on tel: 902 760 511.

More information: www.museothyssen.org

Audioguide, available in various languages

PRESS INFORMATION:

http://www.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2014/impresionismo_americano