



Quire Starter

Multi-Format Publishing

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An Introduction to French Art

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French art consists of the visual and plastic arts (including architecture, woodwork, textiles, and ceramics) originating from the geographical area of France. Modern France was the main centre for the European art of the Upper Paleolithic, then left many megalithic monuments, and in the Iron Age many of the most impressive finds of early Celtic art. The Gallo-Roman period left a distinctive provincial style of sculpture, and the region around the modern Franco-German border led the empire in the mass production of finely decorated Ancient Roman pottery, which was exported to Italy and elsewhere

on a large scale. With Merovingian art the story of French styles as a distinct and influential element in the wider development of the art of Christian Europe begins. ([Faure 1909, 54](#))

France can fairly be said to have been a leader in the development of Romanesque art and Gothic art, before the Italian Renaissance led to Italy replacing France as the main source of stylistic developments until the age of Louis XIV, when France largely regained this role, holding it until the mid-20th century.

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Early Modern Period

In the late fifteenth century, the French invasion of Italy and the proximity of the vibrant Burgundy court, with its Flemish connections, brought the French into contact with the goods, paintings, and the creative spirit of the Northern and Italian Renaissance. Initial artistic changes at that time in France were executed by Italian and Flemish artists, such as Jean Clouet and his son François Clouet, along with the Italians, Rosso Fiorentino, Francesco Primaticcio, and Niccolò dell'Abbate of what is often called the first School of Fontainebleau from 1531. Leonardo da Vinci also was invited to France by François I, but other than the paintings which he

brought with him, he produced little for the French king. ([Rosenblum 1967, 103](#))

The art of the period from François I through Henri IV often is heavily inspired by late Italian pictorial and sculptural developments commonly referred to as Mannerism, which is associated with Michelangelo and Parmigianino, among others. It is characterized by figures which are elongated and graceful that rely upon visual rhetoric, including the elaborate use of allegory and mythology. ([Rosen and Zerner 1984](#)) Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the French Renaissance was the construction of the Châteaux of the Loire Valley. No longer conceived of as fortresses, such pleasure palaces took advantage of the richness of the rivers and lands of the Loire region and they show remarkable architectural skill.

Baroque and Classicism

The seventeenth century marked a golden age for

French art in all fields. In the early part of the seventeenth century, late mannerist and early Baroque tendencies continued to flourish in the court of Marie de Medici and Louis XIII. Art from this period shows influences from both the north of Europe, namely the Dutch and Flemish schools, and from Roman painters of the Counter-Reformation.

Artists in France frequently debated the contrasting merits of Peter Paul Rubens with his the Flemish baroque, voluptuous lines and colors to Nicolas Poussin with his rational control, proportion, Roman classicism. Another proponent of classicism working in Rome was Claude Gellée, known as Le Lorrain, who defined the form of classical landscape.



Nicolas Poussin - *Et in Arcadia ego* Public domain image.

Many young French painters of the beginning of the century went to Rome to train themselves and soon assimilated Caravaggio's influence like Valentin de Boulogne and Simon Vouet. The later is credited with bringing the baroque in France and at his return in Paris in 1627 he was named first painter of the king. But French painting soon departed from the extravagance and naturalism of the Italian baroque and painters like Eustache Le Sueur and Laurent de La Hyre, following Poussin example developed a classicist way known as "Parisian atticism", inspired by Antiquity, and focusing on proportion, harmony and the importance of drawing. Even Vouet, after his return from Italy, changed his manner to a more measured but still highly decorative and elegant

style.

But at the same time there was still a strong Caravaggeschi school represented in the period by the amazing candle-lit paintings of Georges de La Tour. The wretched and the poor were featured in a quasi-Dutch manner in the paintings by the three Le Nain brothers. In the paintings of Philippe de Champaigne there are both propagandistic portraits of Louis XIII's minister Cardinal Richelieu and other more contemplative portraits of people in the Catholic Jansenist sect. In architecture, architects like Salomon de Brosse, François Mansart and Jacques Lemercier helped define the French form of the baroque, developing the formula of the urban hotel particulier that was to influence all of Europe and

strongly departed from the Italian equivalent, the palazzo. Many aristocratic castles were rebuilt in the new classic-baroque style, some of the most famous being Maisons and Cheverny, characterized by high roofs “à la française” and a form that retained the medieval model of the castle adorned with prominent towers.

From the mid to late seventeenth century, French art is more often referred to by the term



Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte by Louis Le Vau. Public domain image.

Through propaganda, wars, and great architectural works, Louis XIV launched a vast program designed for the glorification of France and his name. The Palace of Versailles, initially a tiny hunting lodge built by his father, was transformed by Louis XIV into a marvelous palace for fêtes and parties, under the direction of architects Louis Le Vau (who had also built the château de Vaux-le-Vicomte) and Jules Hardouin Mansart (who built the church of the Invalides in Paris), painter and designer Charles Le Brun, and the landscape architect André Le Nôtre who perfected the rational form of the French garden that from Versailles spread in all of Europe.

For sculpture Louis XIV's reign also proved an important moment thanks to the King's protection of artists like Pierre Puget, François Girardon and Charles-Antoine Coysevox. In Rome, Pierre Legros, working in a more baroque manner, was one of the most influential sculptors of the end of the century.

Rococo and Neoclassicism

Rococo and Neoclassicism are terms used to describe the visual and plastic arts and architecture in Europe from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth

“Classicism” which implies an adherence to certain rules of proportion and sobriety uncharacteristic of the Baroque, as it was practiced in southern and eastern Europe during the same period. Under Louis XIV, the Baroque as it was practiced in Italy, was not in French taste, for instance, as Bernini's famous proposal for redesigning the Louvre was rejected by Louis XIV. Georges de La Tour, *The Penitent Magdalene*, c. 1640. (Berson 1996, 233)



Boiseries of the Salon de la princesse by Germain Boffrand, hotel de Soubise, Paris Public domain image.

centuries. In France, the death of Louis XIV in 1715 lead to a period of freedom commonly called the Régence. Versailles was abandoned from 1715 to 1722, the young king Louis XV and the government led by the duke of Orléans residing in Paris. There a new style emerged in the decorative arts, known as rocaille : the asymmetry and dynamism of the baroque was kept but renewed in a style that is less rhetoric and with less pompous effects, a deeper research of artificiality and use of motifs inspired by nature. This manner used to decorate rooms and furniture also existed in painting. Rocaille painting turned toward lighter subjects, like the “fêtes galantes”, theater settings, pleasant mythological narratives and the female nude. Most of the times the moralizing sides of myths or history paintings are omitted and the accent is put on the decorative and pleasant aspect of the scenes depicted. Paintings from the period show an emphasis more on color than drawing, with apparent brush strokes and very colorful scenes. Important painters from this period include Antoine Watteau, considered the inventor of the fête galante, Nicolas Lancret and François Boucher.



Inspiration by Jean-Honoré Fragonard Public domain image.

The Louis XV style of decoration, although already apparent at the end of the last reign, was lighter with pastel colors, wood panels, smaller rooms, less gilding, and fewer brocades; shells, garlands, and

occasional Chinese subjects predominated. The Chantilly, Vincennes and then Sèvres manufactures produced some of the finest porcelain of the time. The highly skilled ébénistes, cabinet-makers mostly

based in Paris, created elaborate pieces of furniture with precious wood and bronze ornaments that were to be highly praised and imitated in all of Europe. The most famous are Jean-François Oeben, who created the work desk of king Louis XV in Versailles, and Bernard II van Risamburgh. Rooms in châteaux and hôtels particuliers were more intimate than during the reign of Louis XIV and were decorated with rocaille style boiseries (carved wood panels covering the walls of a room) conceived by architects like Germain Boffrand or ornemanistes (designers of decorative objects) like Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier.

The most prominent architects of the first half of the century were, apart Boffrand, Robert de Cotte and Ange-Jacques Gabriel, who designed public squares like the place de la Concorde in Paris and the place de la Bourse in Bordeaux in a style consciously inspired by that of the era of Louis XIV. During the first half of the century, France replaced Italy as the

artistic centre and main artistic influence in Europe and many French artists worked in other courts across the continent.

The latter half of the eighteenth century continued to see French preeminence in Europe, particularly through the arts and sciences, and the speaking the French language was expected for members of the European courts. The French academic system continued to produce artists, but some, such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, explored new and increasingly impressionist styles of painting with thick brushwork. Although the hierarchy of genres continued to be respected officially, genre painting, landscape, portrait, and still life were extremely fashionable. Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Oudry were hailed for their still lives although this was officially considered the lowest of all genres in the hierarchy of painting subjects.



Prometheus by Nicolas-Sébastien Adam. Public domain image.

One also finds in this period a Pre-romanticist

aspect. Hubert Robert's images of ruins, inspired by

Italian capriccio paintings, are typical in this respect as well as the image of storms and moonlight marines by Claude Joseph Vernet. So too the change from the rational and geometrical French garden of André Le Nôtre to the English garden, which emphasized artificially wild and irrational nature. One also finds in some of these gardens—curious ruins of temples—called “follies”.

The middle of the eighteenth century saw a turn to Neoclassicism in France, that is to say a conscious use of Greek and Roman forms and iconography. This movement was promoted by intellectuals like Diderot, in reaction to the artificiality and the decorative essence of the rocaille style. In painting, the greatest representative of this style is Jacques-Louis David, who, mirroring the profiles of Greek vases, emphasized the use of the profile. His subject matter often involved classical history such as the death of Socrates and Brutus. The dignity and subject matter of his paintings were greatly inspired by Nicolas Poussin in the seventeenth century. Poussin and David were in turn major influences on Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. Other important neoclassical painters of the period are Jean-Baptiste Greuze and Joseph-Marie Vien. Neoclassicism also penetrated decorative arts and architecture.

Architects like Ledoux and Boullée developed a radical style of neoclassical architecture based on simple and pure geometrical forms with a research of symmetry and harmony, elaborating visionary projects like the complex of the Saltworks of Arc-et-Senans by Ledoux, a model of an ideal factory developed from the rational concepts of the Enlightenment thinkers.

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Catalogue



The Luncheon on the
Grass



Impression, Sunrise



Reading



The Luncheon on the Grass

Artist Édouard Manet

Year 1863

Dimensions 208 cm × 264.5 cm (81.9 in × 104.1 in)

Medium Oil on canvas

Location Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The Luncheon on the Grass (*Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*)—originally titled *Le Bain* (*The Bath*)—is a large oil on canvas painting by Édouard Manet created in 1862 and 1863. It depicts a female nude and a scantily dressed female bather on a picnic with two fully dressed men in a rural setting. Rejected by the Salon jury of 1863, Manet seized the opportunity to exhibit this and two other paintings in the 1863 *Salon des Refusés*¹ where the painting sparked public notoriety and controversy.² The piece is now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.³ A smaller, earlier version can be seen at the Courtauld Gallery, London.⁴

Description and Context

The painting features a nude woman casually lunching with two fully dressed men. Her body is starkly lit and she stares directly at the viewer. The two men, dressed as young dandies, seem to be engaged in conversation, ignoring the woman. In front of them, the woman's clothes, a basket of fruit, and a round loaf of bread are displayed, as in a still life. In the background, a lightly clad woman bathes in a stream. Too large in comparison with the figures in the foreground, she seems to float above them. The roughly painted background lacks depth—giving the viewer the impression that the scene is not taking place outdoors, but in a studio. This impression is reinforced by the use of broad “studio” light, which casts almost no shadows. The man on the right wears a flat hat with a tassel, of a kind normally worn indoors.

Despite the mundane subject, Manet deliberately chose a large canvas size, measuring 208 x 264.5 cm (81.9 by 104.1 in), normally reserved for historical, religious, and mythological subjects.⁵ The style of the painting breaks with the academic traditions of the time. He did not try to hide the brush strokes; the painting even looks unfinished in some parts of the scene. The nude is also starkly different from the smooth, flawless figures of Cabanel or Ingres.

A nude woman casually lunching with fully dressed men was an affront to audiences' sense of propriety, though Émile Zola, a contemporary of Manet's, argued that this was not uncommon in paintings found in the Louvre; he also felt that such a reaction came from viewing art differently than “analytic” painters like Manet, who use a painting's subject as a pretext to paint.

There is much that we still do not know about the painting, such as when he actually began painting it, exactly how he got the idea, and how and what sort of preparation works he did. Though Manet had claimed this piece was once valued at 25,000 Francs in 1871, it actually remained in his possession until 1878 when Jean-Baptiste Faure, opera-singer and collector, bought it for just 2,600 Francs.

Figures in the Painting

The figures of this painting are a testament to how deeply connected Manet was to *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Some assume that the landscape of the painting is meant to be l'île Saint-Ouen, which was just up the Seine from his family property in Gennenvilliers. Manet often used real models and people he knew as reference during his creation process.⁶ The female nude is thought to be Victorine Meurent, the woman who became his favorite and frequently portrayed model, that later was the subject of *Olympia*. The male figure on the right was based on a combination of his two brothers, Eugène and Gustave Manet. The other man is based on his brother-in-law and Dutch sculptor named Ferdinand Leenhoff. Nancy Locke referred to this scene as Manet's family portrait.

Notes

1. Catalogue des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, gravure, lithographie et architecture : refusés par le Jury de 1863 et exposés, par décision de S.M. l'Empereur au salon annexe, palais des Champs-Elysées, le 15 mai 1863, Édouard Manet, *Le Bain*, no. 363, Bibliothèque nationale de France. ↪
2. Boime, Albert (2007). *Art in an Age of Civil Struggle*. Los Angeles: The University of Chicago Press. p. 676. ISBN 978-0-226-06328-7. ↪
3. Musée d'Orsay, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (*Luncheon on the Grass*). ↪
4. The Courtauld Gallery version. ↪
5. Tucker, Paul Hayes (1998). *Manet's *Le Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe**. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. pp. 5–14. ↪
6. Armstrong, Carol (1998). “To Paint, To Point, To Pose” Manet's *Le Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe*.

Cambridge: Cambridge UP. pp. 93–111. ↪



Impression, Sunrise

Artist Claude Monet

Year 1872

Dimensions 48 cm × 63 cm (18.9 in × 24.8 in)

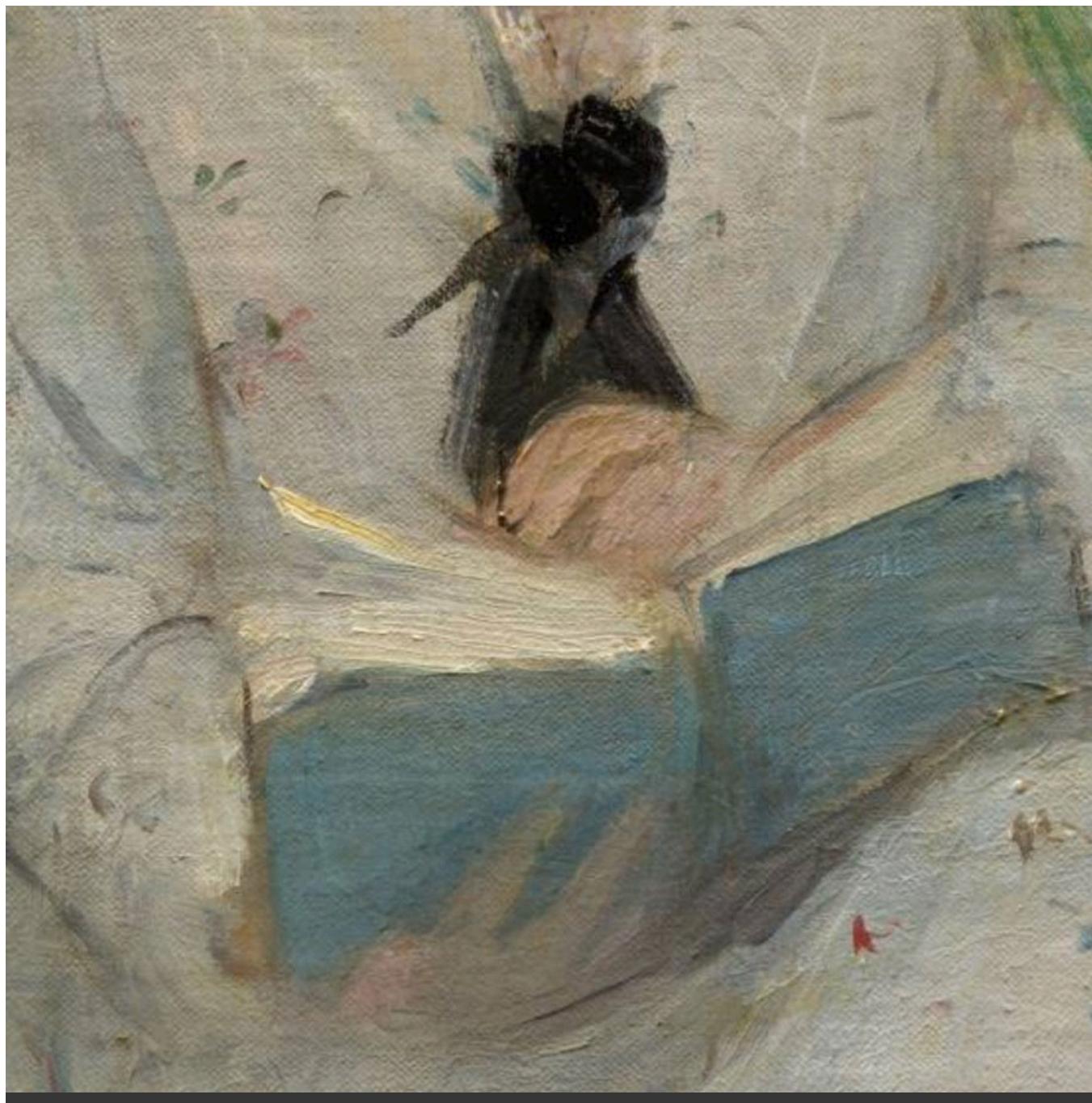
Medium Oil on canvas

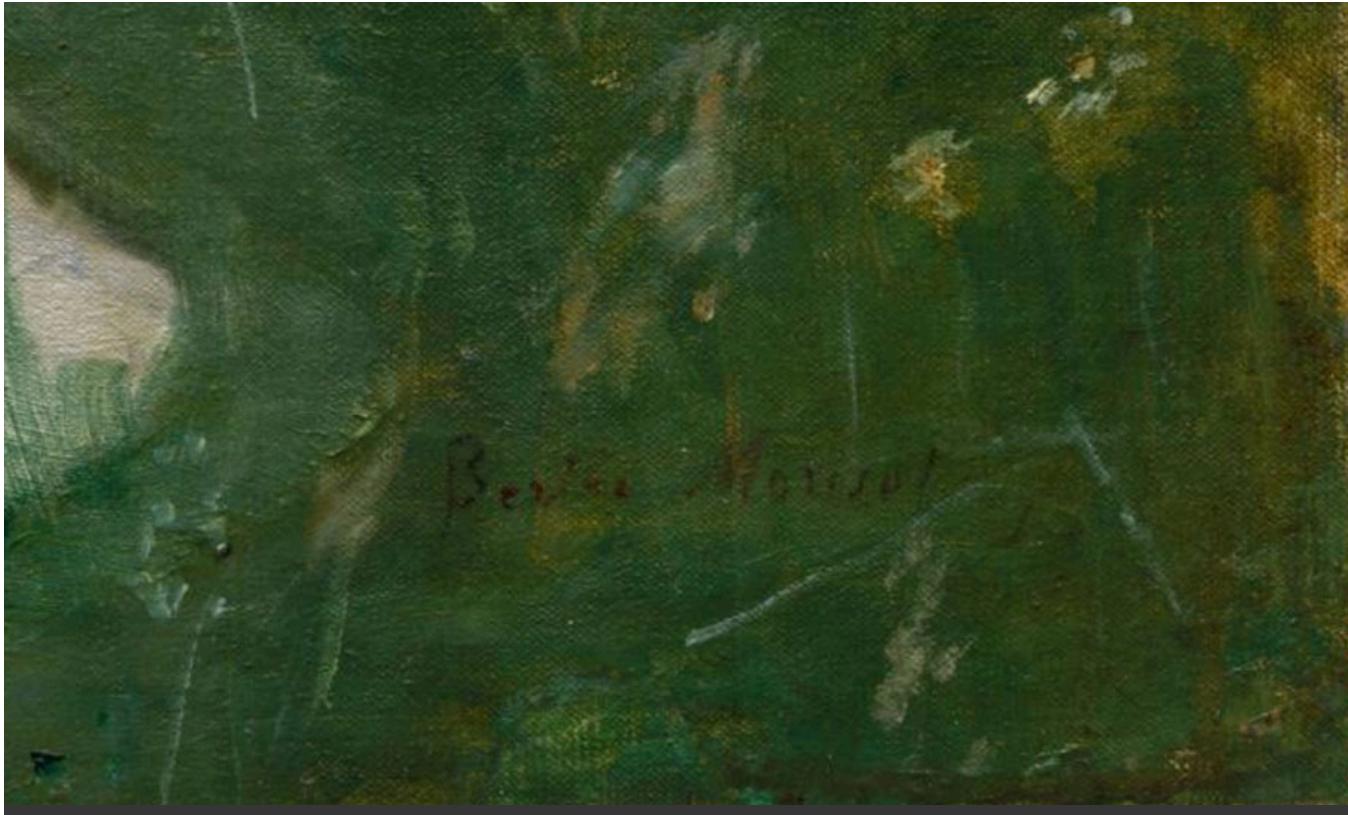
Location Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris

Impression, Sunrise (*Impression, soleil levant*) is a painting by Claude Monet. Shown at what would later be known as the “Exhibition of the Impressionists” in April 1874, the painting is attributed to giving rise to the name of the Impressionist movement.

Impression, Sunrise depicts the port of Le Havre, Monet’s hometown, and is his most famous painting of the harbor.







Reading

Artist Berthe Morisot

Year 1873

Dimensions 74.2 x 100.3 x 12 cm (29 3/16 x 39 1/2 x 4 11/16 in.)

Medium Oil on fabric

Location Cleveland Museum of Art

The fashionable woman seated in the foreground is the artist's sister, Edma. However, the painting is not a portrait. Morisot's principal concern was to render a figure in a natural, outdoor environment. Edma's white dress—the prime vehicle for Morisot's

study of reflected light—is saturated with delicate lavender, blue, yellow, and rose tonalities. Deftly executed with quick brushstrokes, the painting resounds with a feeling of freshness, vibrancy and delicate charm. “Every day I pray that the Good Lord

will make me like a child,” Morisot wrote, “That is to say, that He will make me see nature and render it the way a child would, without preconceptions.”

Morisot, the great granddaughter of the 18th-century French painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard, selected this painting as one of her four works shown in the first Impressionist exhibition of 1874.

Contributors



Denis Diderot

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denis_Diderot

Denis Diderot (5 October 1713 – 31 July 1784) was a French philosopher, art critic, and writer. He was a prominent figure during the Enlightenment and is best known for serving as co-founder, chief editor, and contributor to the *Encyclopédie* along with Jean le Rond d'Alembert.

was a French art historian, member of the French Resistance, captain in the French military, and one of the most decorated women in French history. She secretly recorded details of the Nazi plundering of National French and private Jewish-owned art from France; and, working with the French Resistance, she saved thousands of works of art.



Rose Valland

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose_Valland

Rose Antonia Maria Valland (1 November 1898 – 18 September 1980)

About

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