Eugène Delacroix (French, 1798–1863)
***The Last Words of Marcus Aurelius*,**
after 1844

Oil on canvas

The Asch van Wyck Trust

This is an autograph reduced replica of a monumental history painting (1844, now preserved in the Musée des beaux-arts, Lyon) depicting the famous deathbed scene of the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius. The dying Emperor, aware of the political turmoil that his heir Commodus would soon confront, beseeches his most trusted advisors to counsel his impetuous young son, whose arm he grasps with his left hand. Alas, Commodus would turn out to be one of the most reviled emperors in Roman history, unlike the revered Marcus Aurelius.

In this relatively early work, we see Delacroix's color theory at work. The calculated dispersal of complementary hues, for example in the fiery red of Commodus's robe and the signature teal green of the gold-fringed robe at the dying emperor's midsection, generate an intensity that Van Gogh would eventually learn to achieve and even surpass in the radiantly luminous canvases of the last two years.

Eugène Delacroix (French, 1798–1863)
***Winter: Juno and Aeolus*,** 1856

Oil on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase, Ludington Antiquities Fund and Ludington Deaccessioning Fund

This oil sketch was done as a preparatory step for one of four decorative panels commissioned for a private home, organized around the theme of the four seasons. Echoing earlier Rococo masters, Delacroix summons the idea of winter through the mythological story of the Roman goddess Juno, who is shown commanding the god of the winds, Aeolus, to unleash violent storms intended to destroy the Trojan warrior Aeneas and his ships.

Delacroix was in the habit of relying upon studio assistants to accomplish large scale interior decorations for public buildings, such as the Chambre des Députés of the Senate in Paris. Sketches like this by the master would have served the assistant as the model by which to execute the corresponding large-scale version. This oil sketch exhibits a painterly freedom typical of Delacroix's late work, which anticipates the lack of finish characteristic of the Impressionists. Form is suggested rather than fully defined, as in the swirl of teal green pigment emanating from Juno's cloud that fittingly conjures the shape of her attribute, the peacock.

Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)

***View of Bennecourt*,** 1887

Oil on canvas

Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, Gift of Howard D. and Babette L. Sirak, the Donors to the Campaign for Excellence, and the Derby Fund

The resort town of Bennecourt is within easy commuting distance from Paris by rail. The writer Émile Zola had recommended it to Monet as a cheap getaway. Monet depicted this stand of trees on the banks of the Seine, through which the town can be glimpsed, in various seasons, including the dead of winter and in the spring, as shown here. As Van Gogh remarked admiringly in a letter written in early May 1889: "Ah, to paint figures like Claude Monet paints landscapes. That's what remains to be done despite everything, and before, of necessity, one sees only Monet among the Impressionists…"

Eugène Boudin (French, 1824–1898)
***Camaret, Boats in the Harbor*,** 1871–73

Oil on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Gift of Harriet K. Maxwell

It was at the encouragement of the Dutch painter Jongkind that Boudin took up the practice of painting outdoors. Boudin is credited with having transmitted the same practice to a young Claude Monet, whom he met in 1857. Marinescapes like this were Boudin's specialty, as well as the charming beach scenes in his native Trouville that he made in endless variations of a small and collectible format. Though officially not part of the Impressionist group, Boudin shared their dedication to the direct observation of nature—an aesthetic to which Van Gogh passionately subscribed.

Alfred Sisley (French, 1839–1899)
***Saint-Mammes, Banks of the Seine*,** 1885

Oil on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Bequest of Katharine Dexter McCormick in memory of her husband, Stanley McCormick

Though he was born and lived primarily in France, Sisley was the son of British parents and retained their nationality throughout his lifetime. While studying in the studio of Charles Gleyre, he met and befriended the aspiring artists Frédéric Bazille, Claude Monet, and Auguste Renoir. He exhibited with the Impressionists and like Pissarro, remained a dedicated landscape specialist throughout his career.

In this airy landscape, Sisley's typically deft brushwork, applied in small dashes of vivid pigment, captures the windblown clouds and flowing waters of the Seine. Van Gogh considered him "the most tactful and sensitive of the Impressionists." Sadly, Sisley was the only Impressionist who did not earn the financial rewards of critical recognition during his lifetime, and his art became highly sought-after only after his death in 1899.

Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)
***Villas in Bordighera*,** 1884

Oil on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Bequest of Katharine Dexter McCormick in memory of her husband, Stanley McCormick

The 1880s were a decade of transition for Monet, both personally and professionally. In 1883, Monet began what would be a life-long partnership with Alice Hoschedé, the wife of one of his patrons, Ernest Hoschedé, who had abandoned his family following his bankruptcy several years earlier. The next year, Monet made his first trip to Bordighera on the French-Italian border, where he painted this ravishing view of a group of sun-drenched villas. Monet's letters to Alice during this trip reveal his single-minded obsession with faithfully recording his visual sensations while painting outdoors and his constant frustration with his inability to capture quickly enough the explosion of color revealed by the brilliant but ever-changing Mediterranean light.

Van Gogh experienced a similarly ecstatic response to the resplendent Mediterranean light of Provence when he first began to paint outdoors in Arles in the early spring of 1888.

Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)

***Waterloo Bridge*,** 1900

Oil on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Bequest of Katharine Dexter McCormick in memory of her husband, Stanley McCormick

Monet often selected motifs that allowed him to capture mingled atmospheric effects, both natural and man-made. This is one of some twenty canvases he painted in his room at the Savoy Hotel in London, looking downstream along the Thames. In this apparitional canvas, trails of factory smoke against an early morning sky are made opalescent by the London fog.

Although Van Gogh did not paint in series, like Monet and Pissarro, he often chose views that contrasted nature with man-made interventions, such as bridges and railroads.

Camille Pissarro (French, 1831–1903)
Meadow at Éragny, 1895

Oil on canvas

Private collector

Pissarro moved to the small village of Éragny in northern France in 1894 and would reside there, making paintings like this one, for the remainder of his life. Like Van Gogh, Pissarro experimented with Seurat's and Signac's pointillism, which he then adapted into a more versatile, less time-consuming technique of dashes and dots of pure color, as we see in this verdant meadow scene.

Pissarro was one of the most generous supporters of his fellow artists and had a direct impact on the evolution of the art of Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and most certainly, Van Gogh. It was Pissarro who suggested that Van Gogh seek the medical attention of Dr. Gachet in Auvers-sur-Oise, where Vincent went to stay after being treated at the asylum in Saint-Rémy.

Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890)
***Les Vessenots in Auvers*, May 1890**

Oil on canvas

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

In a period of astonishing productivity, Vincent produced seventy-two paintings, thirty-three drawings, and one print in the two months before his premature death, most of them landscapes. This striking canvas captures Vincent's mature approach to landscape in this period, synthesizing the network of artistic influences he found in Auvers.

A small village with an outsize artistic reputation, Auvers attracted painters such as Charles-François Daubigny, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Cézanne several decades before Van Gogh arrived in 1890. Vincent's approach to working directly from nature in Auvers drew on the essence of his hero Daubigny's artistic practice, who famously painted from his floating studio, nicknamed "Le Botin" (the little boat). At the same time, the unusually high horizon line and vibrant yellow stippling in *Les Vessenots* call to mind the more avant-garde landscapes of Pissarro and Cézanne, whose works Vincent recorded seeing at Dr. Gachet's house.

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Daubigny working on his "Botin" near Auvers-sur-Oise*, 1860. Oil on canvas. Princeton University Art Museum

Maximilien Luce (French, 1858–1941)
***Rue des Abbesses*,** 1896

Oil on canvas

Collection of Robert and Christine Emmons

Luce's career traversed the generation of Van Gogh's "Petit Boulevard" painters well into the first half of the 20th century. This painting was made long after Van Gogh's death in 1890, but we can already see the application of a pointillist technique in the service of a more clinical objectivism. This sensation of detachment and autonomy of the world independent of subjective perception was singled out by the critic Félix Fénéon, who saw it as consistent with a Symbolist interest in universal, transcendental communication. To Fénéon, Georges Seurat was the quintessential 'Neo-Impressionist,' seeking a pictorial technique and idiom that emphasized the eternal and not the transitory, as had the previous generation of Monet and the Impressionists. Luce fell into this camp.

Like Seurat, Luce considered himself an anarchist and was briefly imprisoned along with Fénéon in a government crackdown against suspected insurrectionists. He conceived of his art as in the service of and for the proletariat. The elevated viewpoint and looser adaptation of the pointillist dot in this street scene is reminiscent of the cityscapes of Pissarro of the 1890s. We do know from Van Gogh's letters that, as early as 1888, Van Gogh was recommending the work of Luce to Theo: "I think it excellent that you're taking a Luce. Does he by any chance have his portrait? That's in case there's nothing extraordinarily interesting—portraits are always good."

Vincent van Gogh

***Road to the Outskirts of Paris*,** May-June 1887

Oil on canvas

Private Collection, Larry Ellison

In the spring and summer of 1887, Van Gogh developed a friendship with Paul Signac, who, along with Georges Seurat, was a leading practitioner of the technique known as pointillism, in which small dots of complementary colors are juxtaposed but left unblended to create a heightened intensity of hue. This verdant landscape is an unusual example of Van Gogh's disciplined experimentation with pointillism—a time-consuming technique that he would later adapt into more rapidly applied dashes and dots, somewhat akin to Camille Pissarro's adaptation of pointillist brushwork in the same years. By the time that Van Gogh arrived in Arles in February 1888, he had abandoned the pointillist dot for a rhythmic and textural mark-making that was completely his own.

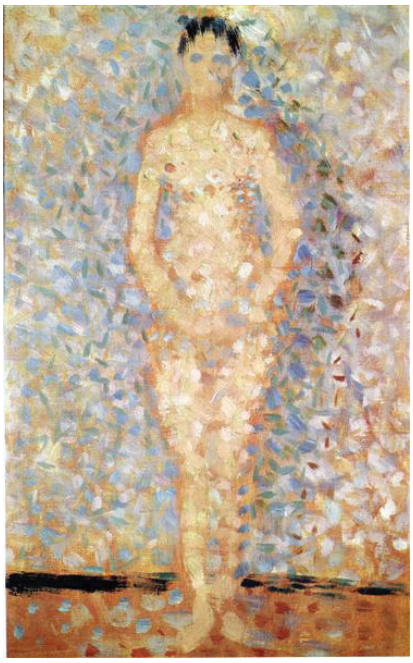
Hippolyte Petitjean (French, 1854–1929)
***Standing Nude*,** ca. 1895.

Watercolor on paper

Collection of Robert and Christine Emmons

Petitjean is a lesser-known artist from the circle of Seurat and Signac. This watercolor exemplifies the rigorous application of divisionist (also known as pointillist) theory, in which dots and strokes of unblended pigment of complementary hues are intended to generate a greater brilliance through the act of perception. The application of the newest theories of color perception informed the enhanced palettes of artists like Petitjean and Van Gogh during these years.

This study of a female nude recalls those done by Seurat in conjunction with his most ambitious multi-figural compositions of the late 1880s.



Georges Seurat, *Model Standing, Front View, Study for "Les Poseuses,"* 1887. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay

Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890)

***Tarascon Stagecoach*,** October 1888

Oil on canvas

The Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation, on loan since 1976
to the Princeton University Art Museum

In a letter to Theo written on October 13, 1888, Vincent described with excitement this very painting—one of some fifteen that he made as a decorative ensemble for the Yellow House in Arles that he had prepared to welcome the painter Paul Gauguin. The subject of this painting was inspired by a specific scene that featured a *diligence* (the French term for this type of stagecoach) in a farcical novel by Alphonse Daudet called *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1872). As Vincent wrote to Theo, "Well, I've just painted that red and green carriage in the yard of the inn [in Arles]. You'll see." As always, reality and fiction were readily interchangeable in Vincent's imagination.

After just eight months in Provence, Van Gogh's art had entered a newly confident phase of execution. Stark complementary contrasts of red and green, blue, and yellow are allowed to reverberate off the canvas. Pigment is visibly slathered on with the brush, so that the entire canvas surface is activated. In his recounting to Theo of this painting's genesis, Van Gogh called out both Claude Monet and Adolphe Monticelli as inspirations for the vivid palette and thickly applied brushwork, respectively.

SCAN ME

Vincent van Gogh

***Roses*,** May 1890

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gift of Pamela Harriman in memory of W. Averell Harriman

Just before leaving the asylum of Saint-Rémy in May 1890, Van Gogh painted a glorious set of floral bouquets—two of irises and two of roses—of which this was the first. The newly flowering garden of the hospital furnished him with just the right subject to salute the arrival of spring as well as his imminent departure, first to Paris (to visit Theo and meet his new nephew, who was named after him) and then on to Auvers-sur-Oise. Little needs to be said about Van Gogh's complete mastery of his medium when it comes to a painting like this one. Even Vincent had the conviction to report as much to Theo when the paintings shipped to Auvers: "Now the canvases from down there have arrived, the Irises have dried well and I dare believe that you'll find something in them; thus there are also some roses."

Due to a chemical reaction, the red pigment that Van Gogh used in these flower paintings has altered over time, so that the complementary red and green scheme no longer has its force of contrast, and the roses appear to be only tinged with pink. We can imagine how the four canvases would have looked together, given the strong complementary colors still present in the bouquet with irises, now preserved at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Vincent van Gogh, *Irises*, May 1889. Oil on canvas. J. Paul Getty Museum

SCAN ME

Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883)
***Peonies*,** 1864–65

Oil on canvas

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, bequest of Joan Whitney Payson, 1975

This floral still life of peonies is likely very similar to one that we know Van Gogh saw with Theo at the auction sale of John Saulnier's collection on June 5, 1886. As he recollected for Theo in a letter from August 23 or 24, 1888: "Do you remember that one day at the Hotel Drouot we saw a quite extraordinary Manet, some large pink peonies and their green leaves on a light background? As much in harmony and as much a flower as anything you like, and yet painted in solid, thick impasto and not like Jeannin. That's what I'd call simplicity of technique. And I must tell you that these days I'm making a great effort to find a way of using the brush without stippling or anything else, nothing but a varied brushstroke. But you'll see, one day."

In the history of art, Manet may be one of the few artists to rival Van Gogh in the modern reinvention of the traditional *vanitas* subject of the floral bouquet. The transitory beauty of the blooms at their peak contains within them the melancholy eventuality of their decay, forever fixed and echoed in the belatedness of paint.

Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904)
***Chrysanthemums of Summer*,** ca. 1887

Oil on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mary and Leigh Block

Fantin-Latour produced hundreds of flower paintings over the course of his career, although his aspirations as a portrait and history painter remained his true ambition. Fantin's undeniable skill at the textural rendering of these colorful blossoms earned him a steady clientele. As Vincent wrote to Theo in March 1885, "I know little by Fantin-Latour, but what I saw I thought *very good*. *Chardinesque*. And that's a lot."

Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890)

Vase with Poppies, Summer 1886

Oil on canvas

Wadsworth Atheneum, Bequest of Anne Parrish Titzell

This floral still life belongs to a group of such studies made by Van Gogh in the spring and summer of 1886, shortly after Vincent joined his brother Theo in Paris. Exhorted by Theo to lighten his palette and under the direct influence of the Impressionists, Van Gogh exploited the opportunity furnished by floral still life to test his growing understanding of color theory. Certainly, the flower pictures of Manet and Monticelli may have set the precedent for the summary handling we see here, in which the decoration of the vase is suggested more than described and the visible movement of the brush generates an all-over visual interest. Though we have no direct evidence to confirm it, the 18th-century precedent of Chardin's unforgettable still life, formerly of the famed Marcille collection and accessible to Van Gogh when he was in Paris, may also have been a source of inspiration.

Jean Siméon Chardin, *A Vase of Flowers*, early 1760s. Oil on canvas. National Galleries of Scotland

SCAN ME

Jean Siméon Chardin (French, 1699–1779)
***Still Life with a Leg of Lamb*,** 1730

Oil on canvas

Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston

In this diminutive but enthralling still life, we see all the signs of Chardin's uncanny anticipation of the kind of soft vision that would enchant 19th-century artists, from Manet to Van Gogh. Chardin, who was also an emulator of Rembrandt, emphasized the phenomenal aspect of subjective vision, in which objects are seen peripherally. The indistinctness of vision and his expressive use of facture (visibly applied brushwork) was imitated by his 19th-century followers, such as Bonvin, Vollon, and the brothers Frère.

Théodule Augustin Ribot (French, 1823–1891)
The Reader, after 1850

Oil on canvas

Collection of Raj and Grace Dhawan

Like Van Gogh, Ribot was attracted to subjects in which isolated figures are caught as if fully absorbed, whether in the activity of reading or internal reverie. In this painting of diminutive proportions, which echo those of Chardin's most famous genre scenes, we are presented with a woman of modest means, indicated by her simple attire, who is seemingly oblivious to our gaze, absorbed by the pages of the book that we cannot make out. The subject and manner of painting, with its economical summation of form through stark contrasts of light and dark, not only recall the work of Chardin, but also that of Rembrandt, two artists who had become elided as representative of a strand of sympathetic realism that had new relevance in the 19th century. If the dark palette would be something that Van Gogh would abandon, the gestural facture, which declares the embodied passage of the brush, and therefore its author, cannot but have resonated.

Pierre-Édouard Frère (French 1819–1886)

***A Pot of Porridge*,** late 1880

Oil on panel

Collection of Raj and Grace Dhawan

In subject and style of execution, this painting intentionally summons the shadow of Chardin, who established himself as the painter of youthful innocence early on in his career. His various versions of, for example, a *Boy Blowing Bubbles*, ushered in a new repertoire of painterly signs that read as subjectively authentic in a way that was unprecedented. By imbuing the image with the imperfections of the experience of vision, rather than its perfected recollection or studio invention, Chardin breathed new life into the repertoire of everyday life that he inherited from 17th-century Dutch and Flemish prototypes. In Frère's work, the boy's humble activity of gently blowing upon the spoonful of hot soup sets the slowed tempo of the scene, a pace that results in our inadvertent bodily recollection of such an ordinary activity. Frère's emulation of Chardin's visible brushwork to evoke the world as experienced shares the same Realist commitment that we see in Van Gogh's mature work.

Jean Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*, probably 1733-34. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art

Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877)

***Still Life with Apples, Pears, and Pomegranates*,** 1871–72

Oil on canvas

Dallas Museum of Art, The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection

This still life is one of some fifteen made by Courbet while imprisoned in St. Pélagie for his role in the toppling of the Vendôme column. Courbet was the leader of the Realist movement, writ large, in France, and an activist whose political sympathies eventually led to his downfall after the fall of the Commune in 1871. Courbet's commitment to the immediacy of vision in the first person and the materiality of things can be felt in the intensity of even the simplest arrays of still life, as we see in this unassuming composition.

Van Gogh refers to Courbet only a few times in the surviving correspondence, but one cannot help but suspect that he would have keenly identified with the compelling gravity of these ordinary declarations of living matter, even in the darkest of times.

SCAN ME

Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli

(French, 1824–1886)

***Flowers in a Copper Bowl*,** ca. 1875

Oil on wood

The Kreeger Museum, Washington, DC

Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli
(French, 1824–1886)
***Amiable Conversation*,** after 1863

Oil on wood

The Kreeger Museum, Washington, DC

Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli
(French, 1824–1886)
***Park Scene*,** 1875–78

Oil on wood panel

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. John D. Graham in memory of Buell Hammett

Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli
(French, 1824–1886)
***Characters from Faust*,** ca. 1872-73

Oil on panel

Private Collection, Topanga, CA. Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

SCAN ME

Courtly scenes like these bear no resemblance to anything produced by better known artists in the generation of Monticelli, which was dominated by Courbet's Realism with its populist message of art of the people, for the people (meaning the bourgeoisie and working class). Monticelli was attracted to the precedent set by the Rococo master Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), who defied Italianate classicism by looking to the 17th-century Flemish colorist Peter Paul Rubens for inspiration in his dream-like masterpiece, *Voyage to the Island of Cythera*. Van Gogh's admiration for Monticelli's artistic independence resembles the esteem in which he held his earlier artist heroes, Millet and Michel, even though Monticelli's art is diametrically opposed to their versions of Naturalism.

The 19th-century Rococo Revival comprised not only the Realist strain of Chardin. It also included artists like Watteau and his follower Nicolas Lancret, who further propagated this gentle and often blatantly unreal vision of the courtly elegance of a bygone era. Certainly, for Monticelli, the widespread revival of interest in these 18th-century painters provided an endless well of inspiration for his own art.

Jean-Antoine Watteau, *The Embarkation for Cythera,* 1717. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre.

Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli

(French, 1824–1886)

***Parade of Acrobats*,** ca. 1877-79

Oil on panel

Private Collection, Topanga, CA. Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

It is impossible to say if this parade of itinerant circus performers (known as *saltimbanques*) is more related to Watteau's famed depictions of melancholy clowns and performers, or to the real-life sideshow performers of Montmartre. The jumble of tiny figures, whose features are indicated by no more than three black dots, are posed in a lively array of activities, from the dark-haired woman beating her drum to the two skirted dancers balancing on stilts and beckoning for our attention. The directional brushwork, roughly applied, energizes this indistinct apparition in a spontaneous rush of energy that surely would have spoken to Vincent van Gogh.

Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli

(French, 1824–1886)

***At Work*,** ca. 1872

Oil on panel

Private Collection, Topanga, CA. Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli

(French, 1824–1886)

***Walk in the Woods*,** ca. 1869

Oil on panel

Private Collection, Topanga, CA. Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

Van Gogh would have recognized Monticelli's mobilization of Delacroix's example in the application of the law of simultaneous contrast in this charming landscape. The heavy impasto throughout dimples the picture surface, so that the painter's touch catches our visual attention, even as we begin to divine the tiny hatted figure, tending cattle at the composition's center. Monticelli's ability to activate the entire surface with his lively brushwork, conjoined with brilliant hues of pure yellow, russet, and orange that contrast energetically with the bright blue of the sky glimpsed through the tangle of trees should certainly remind us of Van Gogh's mature style, albeit in a more restrained color register.

Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli

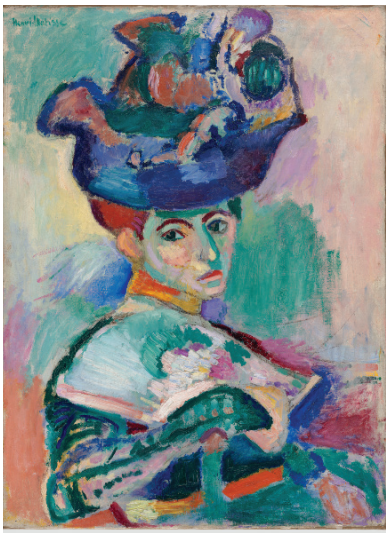
(French, 1824–1886)

***Creek in Cassis*, ca. 1884**

Oil on panel

Private Collection, Topanga, CA. Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

This is an example of Monticelli's late style, in which his brushwork and color increasingly press towards abstraction, for example in the thick impasto of the water, which is made up of bricks of white tinged with rose and gold, aglow with the colors of sunset. The seeming modernity of a painting like this makes it puzzling that Monticelli's art should remain so little known, when it so clearly anticipates the expressive, rhythmic touch of Vincent van Gogh, as well as the later psychedelics of Matisse and the Fauves.



Henri Matisse, *Woman with a Hat*, 1905. Oil on canvas. SFMOMA