

Mary Cassatt

(American, 1851 -1912)

Summertime, 1894

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Hammer International Foundation, L.2022.2.1

This is one of two related variations painted by Cassatt of this subject: a young woman and a child, floating in a boat on a pond, gazing idly at the ducks paddling alongside. As the title proclaims, we imagine it is the height of the summer, especially given the sleeveless frock worn by the young girl. The Philadelphian Cassatt was the only American artist to exhibit with the Impressionists. In this painting, the loose directional brushwork, highly keyed palette, and unconventional cropping proclaim her identity with the group. The other version of this subject, now in the collection of the Terra Foundation, concentrates more closely on the two figures, expanding them to dominate the composition. Given its scale, our painting, however, is likely not a preparatory study for it, but an independent variation of the same motif.

Edgar Degas

(French, 1834-1917)

Laundress Carrying Linen, c. 1888-1892

Pastel on paper

Collection of the Hammer International Foundation, L.2022.2.2

This pastel is an excellent example of Degas's habit of returning to certain themes and figures intermittently over the course of his career. A figure in this precise position first appears in a painting of about 1877, in which it was paired with its mirror image as seen from the front. In this pastel, Degas has focused exclusively on the woman's bodily adjustment, as she balances her own weight against the heft of her burden, assuming an almost balletic pose. The simplification of subject and vigorous use of repeated contouring lines found here are typical of the artist's later work.

Edgar Degas

(French, 1834-1917)

Three Dancers in Yellow Skirts, c. 1891

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Hammer International Foundation, L.2022.2.3

Although Degas exhibited with the Impressionists, he did not share their interest in working outdoors to capturing fleeting effects of light and atmosphere, preferring to concentrate on the human figure. Ballet dancers, either on stage or behind the scenes, were a favorite subject. This painting of young dancers was made late in his career and displays his use of vibrant color, his interest in creating textural effects through an unconventional paint application, and his daring sense of composition. Degas was influenced by the new medium of photography – the dancers’ poses form a sequence of movement, and the left figure is cropped as it might be in a casual snapshot. We encounter not only the hardworking and exhausted bodies of these adolescent girls – even at rest, their feet are turned out in the correct ballet posture – but also the psychological tension in their preparations for the performance.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

(French, 1841-1919)

***Coastline at Antibes*, 1888**

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Hammer International Foundation, L.2022.2.4

During the 1880s, Renoir's art drifted towards classicism, in part due to a renewed engagement with the masters of the Italian Renaissance, such as Raphael. This new phase in his art was characterized by monumental figural subjects, whether female bathers or society portraits. However, the delicate, feathery brushwork he had developed during the Impressionist years of the previous decade is still evident in his landscapes, as in this luscious example. Like Monet, alongside whom he painted outdoors during their excursions to the South, Renoir was attracted to the brilliant light and lush foliage of the Mediterranean coast. The billowing robes and headdresses of the figures, however, appear to be an exoticizing afterthought, probably added later by the artist in his studio to introduce narrative interest. Like the Romantic artist Eugène Delacroix (1798 – 1863), whom he admired, Renoir made repeated trips to Algiers in the early 1880s, in search of exotic subjects.

Camille Pissarro

(French, born St. Thomas, West Indies, 1830-1903)

View of a Farm in Osny, c. 1883

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Hammer International Foundation, L.2022.2.5

This painting was done at the end of what is usually known as Pissarro's Pontoise period (1866-1883), when the artist painted almost exclusively outdoors in the environs of his home in a small town in the Île-de-France. Like many of the landscape specialists of his generation, Pissarro felt compelled to seek out and eventually exhaust the pictorial interest of a particular place. The move to the nearby village of Osny meant a renewed source of Virgilian views of the land such as this one, in which the agrarian harmony of nature harnessed for its bounty is the subject. Although rooted in close observation of the given motif, this composition is also highly constructed. The repeated, feathery flicks of pigment adhere to the flatness of the picture plane, even as their textural variety manages to communicate the soft warmth of sunlit country air and the movement of the wind-blown clouds. This balance between representational efficacy and compositional rigor is a hallmark of Pissarro's art.