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Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)

Afternoon on the Seine (Matinée sur la Seine)

1897

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Gift of Lord and Lady Ridley-Tree

1999.64

This painting, with its ribbonlike marks, comes from a period when the artist was regularly depicting specific views of the Seine river under widely varying conditions. The scholar Paul Hayes Tucker points out that Monet was rendering an area of the Seine upstream from his home in Giverny, at a point on the river dotted with wooded islands. Like the Forest of Fontainebleau, the Seine remains an indelible part of French national identity, and Monet was painting a quintessentially French subject. His use of bold brush marks anticipates the treatments of water lilies and garden views that would dominate the last 20 years of his career.

Paul Signac (French, 1863–1935)

Herblay – The Riverbank

1889

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Gift of Lord and Lady Ridley-Tree

2001.65

Today, Herblay is part of the outermost reaches of Paris, but in the 1880s and 1890s, it was a mixture of industry and open fields. Signac spent August and September of 1889 near the village, painting alongside Maximilien Luce. At this time, Signac was also illustrating a book by Charles Henry, a scientist who theorized how colors were perceived. Henry discussed optical mixing—that is, placing dots of contrasting colors side by side to create a vivid effect. Here, this can be seen in the dots of pale peach with light blue in the sky and the blue and green in the trees on the opposite bank. This approach, called divisionism, had a talismanic quality for Signac. The artist, a socialist, believed visual art could stimulate social change through its methods of execution. A juxtaposition of colors might prompt people to change their outlook and attitudes, which then would lead to a utopian world. Though difficult for us to understand, this was a sincerely held belief.

Charles-François Daubigny (French, 1817–1878)

The Pond at Gylieu

c. 1853

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.8

Daubigny traveled throughout France and Switzerland painting landscapes, but he is most closely associated with the Forest of Fontainebleau, which he began regularly visiting in 1843. The soil of the forest was sandy, with many shallow ponds like this one, where the groundwater came to the surface. The French art critic Théophile Gautier criticized Daubigny for painting passing clouds and reflections on the surface of a pond, calling these trivial subjects. As the critic said, “His pictures are no more than sketches barely begun.”

Daubigny was inspired by Dutch landscape painters from the 17th century, such as Jacob von Ruisdael. Claude Monet greatly admired his painting.

Narcisse Diaz de la Peña (French, 1807–1876)

Sunset (Coucher du Soleil)

c. 1870s

Oil on mahogany

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.10

Diaz de La Peña was born to Spanish parents but grew up in France. By the 1830s, he had taken up painting and become a member of the Barbizon School, inspired by Théodore Rousseau. Widely admired and collected in his day, he had a retrospective as part of the Exposition Universelle in 1855. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, the famed Impressionist, admired him greatly, calling him “a patron saint.” This moody work is from late in Diaz’s long career and does not resemble the Barbizon landscapes he made decades earlier, replete with trees, shallow ponds, and sometimes figures. Instead, this is an abstract, foreboding landscape with no clear horizon.

Henri-Joseph Harpignies (French, 1819–1916)

The Cottage (La Chaumiere)

1858

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.11

Jules Breton (French, 1827–1906)

Souchez River Leading into the Canal

1859

Oil on panel

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.12

A famous artist in the 19th century, Breton grew up in the French village of Courrières, near this canal. He returned there throughout his career. Canals like this one often had pathways next to them so that horses or mules could tow barges. What might seem here like a dense, impenetrable, overgrown area was actually a human-made and vital means of transport. Moreover, the trees on the left look as if they were planted in rows. As in the Forest of Fontainebleau, the “natural” is inseparable from human intervention.

Charles Émile Jacque (French, 1813–1894)

Sheep in the Forest at Fontainebleau

c. 1873

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.16

Jacque began visiting Barbizon in 1845, and moved his family there in August 1849 because of a cholera epidemic raging in Paris. He focused on painting rustic subjects, and became best known for depicting sheep. While grazing was not allowed in the Forest of Fontainebleau because it was owned by the French government, locals did so anyway. This flock might have been made up of sheep owned by various villagers in Barbizon under the watchful eye of the town's hired shepherds. The mayor of Chailly, a nearby village, is known to have had a flock. The government managed the forests to make money from firewood and timber, so animal foraging as well as gathering of firewood was negotiated.

Alfred Sisley (French, 1839–1899)

Springtime in Sablons, near Veneux-Nadon

(Le Printemps aux Sablons, près de Veneux-Nadon)

1880

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.17

Sisley spent time in the Forest of Fontainebleau during the 1860s with Claude Monet and Frédéric Bazille, and he returned to the region in the 1880s. This painting shows an area on the edge of the forest that has characteristic rock formations, low-lying scrub vegetation, sandy areas, and trees that seem stunted.

In private correspondence to a friend, Sisley once stated his goals:

To give life to the work of art is certainly one of the most necessary tasks of the true artist...the surface, at times raised to the highest pitch of liveliness, should transmit to the beholder the sensation which possessed the artist.

While there is no wind blowing, these roadside trees nonetheless feel as if they are moving amidst the swirling of flecks of pinks, greens, and purples.

François Auguste Ortman (French, 1826–1884)

View in the Forest of Fontainebleau

1872

Watercolor and gouache on paper, heightened with gum arabic

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.20

Ortmans made his first journey to the Forest of Fontainebleau in 1849 and returned in the 1850s. He was a figure of the French artistic establishment, with regular Salon shows from the 1850s to the 1880s. He exhibited his work in Antwerp, Brussels, New York, Cincinnati, New Haven, and London, not to mention the provincial French cities of Bordeaux and Lyon.

While the attention to detail and varied brushwork of this drawing differ from the paintings by Rousseau or Diaz de la Peña, Ortman falls in line with their attitudes about what made for paintable scenery: rocks, scraggly trees, an open area in the middle ground, and a view to the distance partially blocked by trees. This is not a lush, overgrown forest, but one with trees that are beginning to die. Normally, in the managed forests of 19th-century France, these types of trees would have been culled, but artists fought for them to be left standing so that open areas like this one would remain.

Henri-Joseph Harpignies (French, 1819–1916)

The Stream at Saint-Privé

1882

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.24

Harpignies lived to be 97. He was such a renowned landscape painter that the Nobel Prize-winning French writer Anatole France called him “the Michelangelo of trees and the peaceful countryside.”

Harpignies was part of the Barbizon School during its heyday. Though he traveled across France and Italy, he often painted the village of Saint-Privé, where he owned a summer home, which sat on the Loing River. This is a view of the canal that runs alongside the river, with the steeple of the church of Saint-Privé in the distance.

Stanislas Lépine (French, 1835–1892)

Montmartre, View over Saint Denis

c. 1865

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.25

While Lépine was in the first of the eight Impressionist exhibitions, held in 1874 at the studio of the photographer Nadar, his style of painting looked back to the Barbizon artists of the 1830s and 1840s. He never adopted the Impressionists' bright colors or distinctive comma-shaped brush marks. Lépine lived in the Montmartre neighborhood his entire adult life, when it was only partially built up and still full of artists and writers. The neighborhood contained open areas and abutted fields and farms, sprinkled with the occasional factory. This painting captures the rural feel of the landscape on the edges of the city, when the countryside was only a short walk away.

This is likely a pochade, an oil sketch capturing light, color, and atmosphere. Pochades were made on small store-bought canvases so they could be carried and painted outside, *en plein air*.

Théodore Rousseau (French, 1812–1867)

View of the Forest of Fontainebleau

c. 1850

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.26

Rousseau was a member of the Barbizon School of artists, who began painting in the Forest of Fontainebleau in the 1830s. The name Barbizon came from a small village inside the forest. The monarchs of France had managed and hunted in the forest for centuries and often resided there in summer. Its ancient oaks and other hardwoods were symbols of France's long history. By the 1840s, the forest was accessible by train, and had become a destination for day-trippers from Paris and artists seeking inspiration.

In a petition to the French government, Rousseau advocated that parts of the forest be left alone to preserve the beauty of its irregular terrain, aged trees, and open views. He objected to the planting of pine trees, *Pinus sylvestris*, which were harvested as lumber. This painting exemplifies the forest landscape that Rousseau wanted to preserve, with its isolated trees of different ages, some of which look unhealthy, an open vista, and what appear to be the profiles of boulders.

Eugène Boudin (French, 1824–1898)

The Port of Bordeaux

1874

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.27

Boudin is probably best known for his quickly rendered beach and port scenes. He is nearly always spoken about as a forerunner and friend of the Impressionists. He emphasized ever-changing meteorological and light effects, as depicted here in what could be a morning or evening scene, with the light reflecting off the quivering water.

Camille Pissarro (Born St. Thomas, Danish West Indies, active in France, 1830–1903)

Wooded Landscape at the Hermitage Pontoise

1879

Soft ground etching, aquatint, and drypoint

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.28

In the 19th century, artists such as Pissarro and Mary Cassatt experimented with etching and other printmaking processes. This print is the outcome of many different techniques. The lines that resemble fat pencil marks come from soft ground etching. This involves taking a sheet of sticky coated paper and applying it to a metal plate. A stylus is used to draw on the paper. Wherever pressure is applied, the sticky substance clings to the paper rather than the metal plate. When the paper is pulled away, the wax on the plate will be missing wherever the stylus applied pressure. Next, the plate is immersed in acid, and the parts of the metal without wax are etched away. Aquatint, in turn, uses a granular powder that allows for washes of tone. The tree trunks that look as if they were drawn with a crayon are probably aquatint. Pissarro also used drypoint, which involves taking a needle directly to the plate to incise it, a technique that requires great skill but leads to thick, ink-filled lines.

Henri-Joseph Harpignies (French, 1819–1916)

Italian Hillside Landscape, Dusk

1850s

Watercolor and gum arabic over traces of pencil
on paper

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.33

Harpignies lived in Italy several times throughout his career, beginning in the late 1840s. The country exercised an incredible hold on the imagination of French artists in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Prix de Rome, or Rome Prize, offered by the French Academy of Fine Arts, entitled the winner to live in Rome for at least three years. Even artists outside the Academy traveled to Italy to see its ancient sculptures, Renaissance masterpieces, archeological sites, and, as shown in this watercolor drawing, striking rocky topography. The brown leaves indicate this is fall or winter. The two men walking in the center distance seem to be wearing the brown tunics of the Franciscan order of monks, founded by St. Francis of Assisi.

Gustave Courbet (French, active in Switzerland,
1819–1877)

Sunset at the Beach

1867

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.42

Courbet liked to associate himself with the revolutionary working class by wearing a smock, smoking a pipe, and challenging the dictatorship of Napoleon III (r. 1852–70). The artist was also an unapologetic self-promoter, always in search of press attention and avenues for selling his paintings. He submitted works to the annual Salon, intending them to be rejected, then had his friends writing for newspapers bitterly complain. He understood that bad press was better than good press.

Another of Courbet's gambits was selling seascapes like this one to the wealthy Parisians who went to the beach in the summer to escape the heat of the city. In the 1860s, the artist began to visit the beach resort towns of Deauville and Trouville in Normandy. In 1867, the same year as this painting, he had an exhibition with 24 beach scenes. At one point in the early 1860s, he had bragged about completing over 30 seascape paintings in 30 days, dashing each one off in a few hours.

Cecil Gordon Lawson (British, 1849–1882)

A Hymn to Spring

1871–72

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Gift of Lord and Lady Ridley-Tree

1995.25.1

Lawson was part of the Idyllists, who were united by their background in illustration and their idealistic take on subjects that other artists approached in a grittier way. This painting, based on an illustration by Lawson to accompany a poem, displays the Idyllist blend of realism and idealism by including highly detailed foliage and atmospheric effects amid a serene landscape with a perfectly placed white dove. Despite its appealing qualities, the Royal Academy rejected this painting for its 1872 exhibition. Britain's leading art institution declined many of Lawson's works, despite his critical acclaim and success in other galleries and exhibitions.

Childe Hassam (American, 1859–1935)

In Brittany (Pont Aven)

1897

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Gift of Lord and Lady Ridley-Tree

2003.108

Hassam was an American artist who moved to Paris in 1886, after working as an engraver and selling and exhibiting his watercolor drawings in New York City. He studied at the Académie Julian, a private French art school that attracted foreigners, especially Americans. Thereafter, he often returned to Europe, and this painting is from an extended visit he made during the late 1890s. By this time, Pont Aven in Brittany, like Fontainebleau, had been an artist colony for 40 years, and Paul Gauguin had famously painted villagers there in the 1880s. Part of the interest in Brittany lay in the traditional costumes and culture of the Breton people, who speak a Celtic language related to Irish and Welsh.

Henry Herbert La Thangue (British, 1859–1929)

The Shepherd

1890s

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.9

La Thangue was one of many 19th-century artists invested in the idea of depicting rural life and customs that were in danger of being lost, due to the expansion of cities and the introduction of mechanized agriculture. This painting of shepherds driving their flock across a field brings the highly detailed naturalism La Thangue honed during his French travels back to rural England. Here, he takes an almost photographic approach to his subject, keeping the bearded shepherd in the foreground “in focus” while using large square brushes to soften the details further in the background.

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

The Stable of Champfleury

1880s

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.18

Caillebotte came from a wealthy family, and he supported the other Impressionists by buying their work. After participating in most of the eight Impressionist exhibitions between 1874 and 1886, he stopped exhibiting and focused on cultivating elaborate gardens at his home at Petit-Gennevilliers, outside of Paris, and designing sailboats. This painting, which might depict the stable at his home, dates from this period of less urban imagery. The roof beam frames the painting, and the canvas's rectangular shape highlights the architecture of the barn. The plunging perspective gives the sense of the barn being very long, and is reminiscent of his paintings of Parisian boulevards, such as *Paris Street, Rainy Day* (1877; Art Institute of Chicago).



Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris Street, Rainy Day*, 1877. Art Institute of Chicago.

Stanhope Alexander Forbes (British, 1857–1947)

Boy and Ducks

Possibly 1870s or 1880s

Oil on wood panel

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.22

With its densely arranged buildings, muddy path, and group of ducks waddling towards the viewer, this painting captures a charming and rustic atmosphere far removed from the bustling metropolises of London and Paris. Forbes, like his friend and contemporary Henry Herbert La Thangue (also in this exhibition), painted outdoors in rural areas in France and England, and he often included local people in his images. With no known date, and no location indicated in the title, the viewer is left to speculate where and when this country scene took place, and how far removed it might be from modern reality.

Louis Valtat (French, 1869–1952)

Mother and Child

1915

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.41

Mary Cassatt (American, active in France, 1844–1926)

Sara in a Bonnet (no. 1)

c. 1901

Pastel on paper

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.38

The only American and one of few women among the Impressionists, Cassatt also stands out among her peers for her many depictions of mothers and children. This choice was due at least in part to the notably different real-world subjects male and female artists had access to in the 19th century. Whereas men were free to roam public urban spaces and Parisian nightlife, women were more limited and focused on private spaces populated mostly by family members. Sara was one of many family and friends who modeled for Cassatt repeatedly over the years. In other works, she wears the same straw bonnet with a green plum hanging from the brim.

Berthe Morisot (French, 1841–1895)

Young Girl Hanging a Bird Cage in a Tree

1890

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.43

Along with her sister Edma, Morisot pursued art from a young age, firmly supported by their well-to-do parents, who even built a studio for the sisters in the family garden. This level of encouragement for a woman to pursue art seriously, not as a hobby, was unheard of. Morisot's mother also urged her to exhibit and sell her paintings. Morisot married at age 33, late in life by the standards of the 19th century, because she would not allow her painting to be sidelined. While she exhibited in seven of the eight Impressionist exhibitions between 1874 and 1886, she was minimized, if not erased, in many histories of Impressionism until feminist scholars like Linda Nochlin began to publicize her achievements. Unlike Mary Cassatt, who participated in public commissions to celebrate women artists, Morisot did not share such solidarity, but she acutely felt the marginalization, expressing it in letters and diary entries.

Berthe Morisot (French, 1841–1895)

Portrait of Louise Riesener

c. 1885

Charcoal and red chalk on paper

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.44

Morisot hosted a salon on Thursday evenings at her home, attended by such figures as the poets Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry and the painters Claude Monet and Edgar Degas. Valéry occasionally wrote about Morisot's work. Also among her sprawling circles of friends was Louise Riesener, a Parisian socialite and daughter of Léon Riesener, a Romantic painter who was close to Eugène Delacroix. This drawing is surely a study for a painting of Riesener now at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Limoges. It shows that Morisot's seemingly spontaneous way of painting required some planning to achieve.



Berthe Morisot, *Portrait of Louise Riesener*, c. 1888. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Limoges.

Frederic Leighton (British, 1830–1896)

An Athlete Wrestling with a Python

Modeled 1877, cast 1903

Bronze

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by Lord and Lady Ridley-Tree

1997.45

This is a smaller version of Leighton's first major sculpture, now at the Tate Britain. The dynamic nude figure of the athlete battling a snake is likely influenced by the well-known ancient sculpture group known as the *Laocoön*, which features powerful, dynamic nude male forms fighting a snake. Leighton's sculpture pairs a similarly dynamic pose with a theme drawn from antiquity and a highly detailed, naturalistic approach to the human body. The *Athlete* was so popular when it was first displayed in 1877 that it led to a movement—called the New Sculpture by critics—and a sharp increase in interest in sculpture in Britain, particularly in public works projects.



Laocoön and His Sons, also known as the *Laocoön Group*. Marble, copy after a Hellenistic original from around 200 BCE. Found in the Baths of Trajan, 1506. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Walter John Knewstub (British, 1831–1906)

The Card Dealer

c. 1870

Watercolor, gouache, and gum arabic on paper
SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree
2023.25.21

This painting was previously attributed to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, for whom Knewstub worked as a studio assistant in the 1860s. Much like Rossetti's watercolor drawing *The Merciless Lady* (also in this gallery), this painting likely refers to a poem of the same title, by Rossetti himself. The poem's female card dealer is a dangerous seductress, a common subject for Rossetti and many of his fellow Pre-Raphaelites. She leads her opponents to ruin and even death. In Knewstub's drawing, however, the presence of the figure behind her suggests her game is orchestrated by someone behind the scenes, that she does not play under her own power.

*What be her cards, you ask? Even these:—
The heart, that does but crave
More, being fed; the diamond,
Skilled to make base seem brave;
The club, for smiting in the dark;
The spade, to dig a grave.*

*And do you ask, what game she plays?
With him, 'tis lost or won;
With him it is playing still; with him,
It is not yet begun;
But 'tis a game she plays with all,
The game of Twenty-One.*

— Excerpt from Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "The Card-Dealer, or Vingt-et-Un. From a Picture." First published in *The Athenaeum*, October 23, 1852.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (British, 1828–1882)

The Merciless Lady

c. 1865

Watercolor and gouache on paper

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.30

Rossetti's fascination with an imagined medieval past is well-represented in this watercolor drawing. The title likely refers to an 1819 poem by John Keats, "La Belle Dame sans Merci." Whereas Keats's ballad tells of just one magical woman who seduces a knight with her singing, Rossetti's drawing shows a man sharing drinks with two women, enraptured by one's music while the other tries to pull him away. The scenario may reflect Rossetti's own relationship status at the time—his wife, Elizabeth Siddal, had died only three years earlier in 1862, and he was beginning to form an attachment to his friend William Morris's wife, Jane.



Detail of *Mrs. Rossetti* (portrait of Elizabeth Siddal), attributed to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, c. 1860–61. Gouache on albumen print. Walters Art Museum, Gift of the A. Jay Fink Foundation, Inc., in memory of Abraham Jay Fink, 1963, 38.419. Public domain image. John Robert Parsons, *Portrait of Jane Morris* (Mrs. William Morris), negative July 1865, print after 1900. Gelatin silver print. Getty Museum purchase, 84.XP.458.32.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (British, 1828–1882)

Cat's Cradle

c. 1855

Pencil, pen, black and brown ink on paper

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.46

Though this drawing is another clear example of Rossetti's interest in 15th-century aesthetics, the scene it illustrates is unknown. The intimacy of the couple in the foreground and the lounging couple sketched in the background suggest a scene of courtly love and leisure. But the tiptoeing boy at left interrupting the central couple changes the tone entirely. The boy looks at the woman with wide-eyed alarm and points to what scholars of the Rossetti Archive suggest may be a knife in his chest. Only the woman seems to acknowledge him, while her partner continues nuzzling her neck and playing the string game cat's cradle with his fingers. Perhaps this is a scene of lovers discovering their doomed fate, or perhaps it depicts a seduction interrupted.

Norbert Goeneutte (French, 1854–1894)

Portrait of Anna Goeneutte in a Beret

1889

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.34

Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904)

Apotheosis of Berlioz

After 1869

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.35

Fantin-Latour's fascination with Hector Berlioz came after the controversial French composer's death in 1869. On December 15, 1874, after hearing the symphony *Romeo and Juliet*, Fantin-Latour mused in his diary about Berlioz:

It seemed to me that something was required to commemorate him. This unfortunate great artist was just that, an artist, more of an artist than even a musician ... without question, Berlioz it was who first discovered the need to combine modern drama and music.

The idea of combining various art forms—painting, drama, and music—was commonplace at this time. Richard Wagner, the German composer, called this the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art. More modestly, Fantin-Latour wanted to combine the gripping story and empathetic characters of literature, the deep emotional power of music, and the visual colors and forms of painting. This work strives to do that by depicting the happy ending that Fantin-Latour believed was denied Berlioz during his lifetime. Berlioz, deceased, is a dark shadow being heralded by angels; one crowns him while another blows a celebratory trumpet.

Ernest Ange Duez (French, 1843–1896)

Madame Duez

c. 1880

Etching on laid paper

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.29.1 and .2

Pictures of fashionably dressed women were popular in Paris in the 1870s and 1880s. Chic Parisiennes promenaded on city streets, wearing clothes from such newly opened department stores as Le Bon Marché. While this etching depicts the artist's wife, she is also a type, and she personifies the satisfactions and pleasures of shopping and consumerism. The idea of purchasing items to make a statement about identity or to gain affirmation has its origins in the 19th century. Rising incomes and falling prices for consumer goods helped to stoke the mass consumption and fast fashion that is prevalent today.

Jean-François Millet (French, 1814–1875)

Potato Planters

1862

Black Conté crayon with white heightening on buff paper

SBMA, Bequest of Leslie L. Ridley-Tree

2023.25.37

Millet moved to Barbizon with his wife, Catherine, in 1849 and became one of the founders of the Barbizon School. Best known for his pictures of agricultural laborers at work in the fields, he often layered these with biblical references. This drawing focuses on potatoes, which were an easy-to-grow and common food crop. As recently as the 1840s, this crop had succumbed to blight, leading to the Irish Potato Famine (1845–52) and, while not widely remembered today, famine across Europe. This is a picture about not only the precariousness of food but also the dignity of labor and the people who work the land.