



Contact: Katrina Carl
(805) 884-6430
kcarl@sbma.net



Edouard Manet, *At the Café* ca. 1879. Oil on canvas. Walters Art Museum.

“Delacroix to Monet” Visit Santa Barbara for West Coast Exclusive

Manet, Sisley, Pissarro, and Degas Among the “Stars” Appearing in SBMA Exhibition

January 30 – May 2, 2010

October 15, 2009 – Assembled over a period of more than 140 years, the collection of the Walters Art Museum (Baltimore, MD) entails one of the finest holdings of 19th-century paintings in the United States. The only West Coast venue for the exhibition, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art is pleased to present ***Delacroix to Monet: Masterpieces of 19th-Century Painting from the Walters Art Museum*** which includes 40 works from this renowned collection, selected for their art-historical significance and superior quality. Although strongly weighted in favor of French painting, this exhibition, like the collection, also includes major works by British, Spanish, and American artists.

Each painting is deeply satisfying on its own and displayed together, make for a ravishing exhibition that well captures the historical breadth and depth of the Walters’ collection, which was formed by father William T. Walters (1819-1894) and son Henry (1848-1931). While William focused his efforts on Barbizon school painting and academic stars such as Paul Delaroche and Ernest Meissonier, Henry sought to balance the collection by adding major works by earlier artists such as Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, as well as by the Impressionists.

The selection reflects the depth and breadth of this collecting area of the Walters’ world-renowned permanent collection. Included are exceptional canvases representing all the major movements of 19th-century French art, from Neoclassicism through Impressionism. For example, Ingres and Delacroix, the leaders of the opposing schools of Neoclassicism and Romanticism, both derived inspiration from the past, but Ingres—the neoclassicist—looked to Greek and Roman antiquity and the High Renaissance in Italy, whereas Delacroix—the romanticist—turned to the Middle Ages and more recent history.



In this, Ingres' perfected, late version of *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1864), the aging artist reinterprets a subject he had first treated in his early maturity: the mythological creature of ancient Thebes grimaces in horror as Oedipus solves her riddle causing the Sphinx to hurl herself onto the rocks below, which are strewn with the bones of her earlier victims. The artist took up this episode from the ancient Greek tale at the beginning of his career and returned to it again several times, including this late version, which has the added poignancy as a personalized allegory of the aging painter's melancholic awareness of his own mortality.

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, 1864. Oil on canvas. Walters Art Museum.



The Walters' exquisite *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* (1854) by the Romantic artist Delacroix, seems to literally rock with the powerful motion of the raging sea. It depicts an incident recounted a number of times in the Gospels of the New Testament. While Jesus and his disciples sail on the Sea of Galilee, crossing this massive lake from one shore to the other to spread Christ's message, a furious storm breaks out. To the disciples' amazement, Jesus calms the wind and the storm, dramatizing the boundless power of Christian belief.

Eugène Delacroix, *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* 1854. Oil on canvas. Walters Art Museum.



The so-called Barbizon school is one of the most richly represented areas of 19th-century French painting in the exhibition. Among the leaders of this group of painters who anticipated the Impressionist compulsion to paint directly "from the motif" outdoors in nature, is Jean-François Millet. The presentation includes *The Potato Harvest* (1855), one of the artist's most moving depictions of the un-idealized, rustic simplicity, and hardship of the peasants living nearby the village of Barbizon, where the artist moved in 1851. Some critics interpreted his paintings of working

Jean-François Millet, *The Potato Harvest*, 1855. Oil on canvas. Walters Art Museum.

farmers as criticism of the injustices in prevailing social conditions. However, it is probably more accurate to say that the artist imbued the subjects with a dignity that elevates them to timeless symbols of man's harmonious union with nature.



Also on view is one of the Walters' most beloved works of art – the ravishing *Springtime* (ca. 1872) by the great Impressionist painter, Claude Monet. During the early 1870s, Monet frequently depicted his wife, Camille, and their son, Jean, in the backyard garden. In *Springtime* Monet was interested less in capturing a likeness than in studying how unblended dabs of color could suggest the effect of brilliant sunlight filtered through leaves.

Claude Monet, *Springtime*, ca. 1872. Oil on canvas. Walters Art Museum.

Another gem on view is *Before the Race* (1882-1884) by Edgar Degas, a colleague of Monet's whose artistic approach, while also rooted in direct observation, is threaded with numerous references to the art of the past, however disguised by the master's unorthodox technique and mobilization of newer technology.



Edgar Degas, *Before the Race* 1882-1884. Oil on panel. Walters Art Museum.

Degas derived the composition in part from Eadweard Muybridge's stop-action photography, which for the first time revealed the actual movement of a horse's legs when at full gallop. In this delicate work on panel, the pigment is so thinly laid down that the grain of the wood is clearly visible. Degas allows the composition to respond to the lines of the wood grain and the sheen of its surface.

In sum, with *Debut to Mont*, SBMA offers visitors the chance to linger firsthand over some of the most important paintings produced by canonical artists of the 19th-century. Whether visitors are in search of a stellar overview of the overarching trajectory of one of the most rapidly changing chapters in the history of Western art, or simply the joy of encountering, in person, paintings of impeccable provenance and quality, this exhibition is a "must-see."

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

***Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.
Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday.
805.963.4364 www.sbma.net***