THE COURTAULD COLLECTION
A VISION FOR IMPRESSIONISM

FONDATION LOUIS VUITTON
Bernard Arnault  
President of LVMH/Moët Hennessy. Louis Vuitton and President of the Fondation Louis Vuitton

FOREWORD

Samuel Courtauld was one of the greatest art collectors of his time in early twentieth-century London, as well as one of the most active and generous philanthropists. I am extremely proud to welcome his collection to the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris as it begins. This new exhibition resonates with the tributes we have paid to visionary and generous collectors who built extraordinary and emblematic collections that shaped the history of art. Our previous exhibitions include the collection of Sergei Shchukin in 2016–17, and works from MoMA in New York in 2017–18. Through the truly exemplary nature of his collection, Samuel Courtauld gave the United Kingdom a compelling view of 'Continental' art, primarily Impressionist works by French artists. These world-renowned masterpieces are today displayed at the Courtauld Gallery in London, part of the Courtauld Institute of Art, based at the palatial Somerset House complex. Both the Institute and the Gallery reflect the role played by the founder and his trailblazing role in transmitting a taste for the very best of French art from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the United Kingdom. The Courtauld Institute of Art is today unanimously recognized as one of the most prestigious centers for the teaching and study of art history in the world. Samuel Courtauld's enlightened approach clearly distinguishes him as a pioneer and a model for private philanthropy in both the arts and education, and serves as an inspiration for our own commitment. I am thus delighted that the French public will have the opportunity to discover in Paris – some 60 years after the first retrospective dedicated to this exceptional collector at the Orangerie in 1955 – the remarkable works we have enjoyed seeing in London, including A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (1882) by Manet, Young Woman Powdering Herself (1889–90) by Manet, and his trailblazing role in transmitting a taste for the very best of French art from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the United Kingdom. The Courtauld Institute of Art is today unanimously recognized as one of the most prestigious centers for the teaching and study of art history in the world. Samuel Courtauld’s enlightened approach clearly distinguishes him as a pioneer and a model for private philanthropy in both the arts and education, and serves as an inspiration for our own commitment. I am thus delighted that the French public will have the opportunity to discover in Paris – some 60 years after the first retrospective dedicated to this exceptional collector at the Orangerie in 1955 – the remarkable works we have enjoyed seeing in London, including A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (1882) by Manet, Young Woman Powdering Herself (1889–90) by Manet, and Cézanne’s The Card Players (1892–95). These works brought fresh and exciting winds of bold modernity to the decidedly conservative England of the 1910s, where Cézanne himself was not yet recognized as a leading figure in modern art.

Samuel Courtauld came from a family of Huguenot origin who had emigrated to England in the wake of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He oversaw the exceptional international development of his family’s textile business in the early twentieth century and was recognized as one of the leading industrialists of his time. Following a trip to Florence in 1905, he applied the same ardor, talent and passion – which he shared with his wife Elizabeh – to the world of art. Together they created a magnificent collection, emphasizing above all a distinctive sensibility in selecting works. He was inspired by a noble conception of art and its essential role in society, writing that ‘art is universal and eternal: it ties race to race and epoch to epoch. It bridges divisions and unites men in one all-embracing and disinterested and living pursuit.’

For Samuel Courtauld, passion went hand in hand with reason, as shown in our exhibition, which recounts both the story of a man’s passionate commitment to a humanist vision – underpinned by a conviction that the experience of art represents an inestimable richness – alongside that of a philanthropist actively engaged on behalf of the public good. He expressed this in particular in 1903 by establishing the Courtauld Fund for the National Gallery and the Tate in London, enabling British public collections to acquire major Impressionist works such as Seurat’s Bathers at Asnières.

After his wife passed away in 1931, Samuel Courtauld took the radical step of donating his art collection and Home House – his refined residence designed by the celebrated architect Robert Adam – to the eponymous institute dedicated to the history of art and its teaching. Here too he was an innovator, professionalizing a dedicated field of studies for researchers, curators and restorers. His remarkable generosity inspired him to strive to make the experience of art accessible to the broadest possible public, taking the unprecedented step of bringing together both scholars and students.

Anthony Blunt, director of The Courtauld Institute of Art from 1947 to 1974, guided the institution’s ascent as an internationally-renowned centre for art history. Today Lord Browne, its Chairman, and Anthony Evers, its Director, lead the Institute with characteristic talent and intellectual elegance. Ernst Vegelin, Head of The Courtauld Gallery, oversees its outstanding collection and exhibition programme. Accompanied by a remarkable team, they are now delivering Courtauld Connects, an ambitious long-term renovation program that will modernize the Somerset House building and restore the mythic Great Room built by Sir William Chambers between 1756 and 1779 to house the annual summer exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Arts, which featured paintings by Reynolds, Gainsborough, Constable and Turner.

I want to extend my warm thanks to them, as well as to Karen Serres, curator of paintings, for their invaluable contribution to the success of our ambitious undertaking in Paris. The exhibition is made possible thanks to the generosity of the Samuel Courtauld Trust and its chairman, Andrew Adcock, which owns the collection for the benefit of The Courtauld. I would also like to salute the contribution of Suzanne Pagé and the team at the Fondation Louis Vuitton, in particular Angeline Scherf, for the great professionalism and enthusiasm with which they have executed this project in collaboration with the Courtauld Gallery team.

Samuel Courtauld was beyond any doubt a true visionary. His life and work offer us a superb example of far-sighted acumen, accompanied by a generosity that has enriched and brought emotion and pleasure to the public in the United Kingdom, France and the entire world.
The Courtauld Institute of Art is a unique place. Founded in 1932, and now a self-governing college of the University of London, its 500 students gather from around the world for in-depth study of the history of art and conservation. At its heart is one of the United Kingdom’s great art collections, which is on permanent loan from the Samuel Courtauld Trust. Engaging displays and exhibitions, classes, seminars, inspiring lectures, busy research events, the hum of student life, the quiet intensity in the handsome libraries: this open community has immense vitality and is fired by a strong sense of purpose. Over the course of the next few years, our institution will be undertaking an ambitious and far-reaching project, Courtauld Connects. Phase I involves the renovation of Somerset House, The Courtauld’s eighteenth-century home in central London. This has necessitated the temporary closure of The Courtauld Gallery, where display spaces will be upgraded and extended, and improvements made to technical facilities. In Phase II, our focus will shift to The Courtauld’s teaching and research environment, which will be comprehensively modernised for the benefit of a new generation of students. Since it was founded, graduates of The Courtauld have played leading roles in museums, universities, the media and the commercial art world, among others. Courtauld Connects will ensure that this world-class institution, with its rich history, will flourish long into the future.

The architectural centerpiece of Courtauld Connects is the restoration of the Great Room. This famous and imposing space was designed in the eighteenth century for the annual exhibitions of the Royal Academy of Arts. It was here that artists such as JMW Turner and John Constable presented their new work. The Great Room played an important role in the cultural life of Britain, and it will do so again. Its restoration is funded by LVMH as part of the group’s long and noble tradition of cultural philanthropy. The Courtauld is immensely grateful to Bernard Arnault, Chairman of LVMH Moët Hennessy, for this generosity. We also record our warm appreciation of the essential parts played by Jean-Paul Claverie and Daniella Luxembourg in making possible this partnership between our institutions.

The Fondation Louis Vuitton has made an indelible impression since it opened in 2014, and it is the perfect partner to bring Samuel Courtauld’s superlative collection to a new global audience. We hope that those who have known and cherished our magnificent Impressionists in the special historic setting of The Courtauld Gallery will relish the thrillingly different experience offered by the Fondation Louis Vuitton. Conversely, to those who experience the collection now for the first time, we extend a warm invitation to visit The Courtauld of the future in 2021 and enjoy what it has to offer.
Passion is the root of any engagement. In matters of art it ensures lucidity, authoring the creation of the most clear-sighted and incisive collections. Usually, the collector is driven by the compelling desire to convince, and therefore to share. Generosity, therefore, is inevitably part of the story. We can find numerous examples of this all around the world, in the formation of both public and private ‘museum-quality’ collections.

Since its opening, the Fondation Louis Vuitton has had the privilege of presenting many remarkable artworks brought together in ensembles such as these. In 2015, Keys to a Passion showcased a selection of masterpieces that had broken the rules to become foundation stones of modernity, all now held by leading museums and international foundations. Other major ensembles constituted in this way and now kept in public and private institutions have been brought to the Parisian public for the first time by this institution. In 2016–17, there was the collection of Sergei Shchukin, now shared between the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg and Pushkin Museum in Moscow, and in 2017–18, that of MoMA in New York, a private institution based for the most part on individual initiatives.

And this is once again the case with this first presentation in Paris for over sixty years of the collection assembled by the English industrialist and patron of the arts Samuel Courtauld. The first and only previous showing of this ensemble in France was held at the Musée de l’Orangerie in 1955.

The collection is so legendary for its ensemble of Impressionist works and its works are so iconic that, paradoxically, many do not feel the need to visit it in London. Reproduced in all kinds of forms and mediums, the works have been made into simple images, shorn of their ‘aura’. The primary merit of this exhibition is therefore that it reinstates the original vibration of these works; visitors can experience their ‘presence’ in the necessary empathy of a direct viewer/painting relation. The show will do justice to the independence and campaigning spirit of Courtauld the collector who distanced himself from a national scene in which he saw only ‘artifice and convention’ (Denys Sutton). As is well known, ‘masterpieces’ that become recognised as such over time will inevitably have had to assert themselves against the norms and assumptions of their time.
confirming the family’s involvement in the arts. Through this collection formed on the choice of major figures, we follow the development of impressionism from the sites onwards. The sequence is punctuated by the cherished presences of Cézanne and Seurat, alongside Manet, Monet, Renoir, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Modigliani, van Gogh and Gauguin. The excellence and scope of most of these works speak of the perspicacity and mixture of boldness and acumen shown by these collectors, especially with regard to prevailing attitudes in Britain at the time.

Moreover, while Marthe and Marthe at Anjou, which can no longer be moved, is absent, the presence of other works from the National Gallery in London – including Corner of a Café-Concert by Manet and A Whistler’s Portrait by Goyen – reflects their determination to play a role in enriching British national collections.

The motivation and spirit of this collection were decisively shaped by Samuel Courtauld’s economic and family background, and especially his French Huguenot roots on the island of Oléron, from which his ancestors emigrated to London in the late seventeenth century. Originally silvermiths, the Courtaulds created a textile business in 1740. Their innovative spirit took them into viscose production. This revolutionary synthetic fibre brought them huge wealth at the turn of the twentieth century. Samuel learned his trade in the family business and became director in 1946, holding the position until 1946 and turning Courtaulds into a front rank international company. This allowed him, in parallel, to constitute the Courtauld Collection, the Courtauld Fund and, finally, the Courtauld Institute.

Without a doubt, the philanthropy of his parents, Sydney and Sarah, was a decisive influence here. They were committed to educational and social movements which, as historians have noted, were founded on the militant Unitarian brand of Protestantism. These family values ensured that for Courtauld his combat for art was not just a private passion but a social concern: ‘I see art as the most civilized influence that man can find,’ he once said. In parallel with the constitution of his own collection, Courtauld helped to transform the national collections by creating the Courtauld Fund in 1923. Its purpose was to acquire works by ‘modern movement’. From 1923 to 1927, it thus enabled the National Gallery to purchase works from Corot to Seurat, thereby helping to overcome a certain English conservatism with regard to Impressionism.

In 1933, the Institute distinguished itself by saving the Warburg Institute in Hamburg, giving a home to its library. In 1934 in the original décor by seventy-four artworks. A major financial commitment of £100,000 gives a sense of the project’s ambition and openness. This gift was accompanied by the publication of the catalogue of the collection, complete with a critical apparatus written by Paul Moor Turner and E.M. Turner, the adviser and writer. In 1935 the Institute distinguished itself by publishing the Warburg Institute in Hamburg, giving a home to its library and to some thirty of its researchers.
These whom fortune favours—and no honest man can acquire wealth without the aid of luck—should use their money not only for their own natural enjoyment, but to advance the cause of civilization. For instance, they can foster art, music, scholarship and science in many valuable and original directions which are apt to heighten public benevolence. Then, I think, the value of such men to society will be acknowledged by all.

— SAMAUL COURTAULD, 1944

This exhibition marks the first time in over 60 years that the superlative private collection of French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art formed by Samuel Courtauld in the 1920s has been shown in France. Courtauld came from a Huguenot family and he cherished the nation and culture of his French forebears. His championing of French painting in England against prevailing opinion is a remarkable story, a validation of the importance of art for the individual and for society. It is an honour for us to have been able to collaborate with the Fondation Louis Vuitton to bring these outstanding works back to France and to re-examine Courtauld’s role as a collector and philanthropist.

As Chairman of the multinational textiles and chemicals company Courtauld Ltd for 25 years, Samuel Courtauld was a consequential public figure in his own time. However, he left few personal records and, despite his impact on British cultural life, his name is largely unrecognized. And yet today his democraticising legacy is more influential than he could possibly have imagined. The paintings that he acquired for the British national collection, amongst which feature such masterpieces as Van Gogh’s Sunflowers and Seurat’s Bathers at Asnières, drew millions of visitors every year to the National Gallery in London. Equally, in founding the Courtauld Institute of Art and giving his private collection to its Gallery, he created a centre of unparalleled scholarly excellence, a ‘missionary centre’ in his own words, which has had a profound influence on scholarship and public enjoyment of the visual arts. This exhibition is a rare occasion for the first new research on Samuel Courtauld for several decades. It has given us a far clearer picture of his activity as a collector but also of the higher purposes—the aims and ideals—that directed his thought and philanthropy. It is perhaps because of these pronounced concerns that—alongside Courtauld’s unerring eye for great quality—he limited his career to activity in the visual arts, his domination was shown at the Courtauld Gallery, the curatorial and technical teams have collaborated from the very beginning its own collections with teaching at the very highest level, in up the Courtauld Gallery Left Home House for Somerset House, the former venue for the Royal Academy of Arts’ summer exhibitions in London.

It is because the Courtauld is temporarily closing that this exhibition is being shown in Paris. Its renovation, and especially the restoration of the famous ‘Great Room’ will improve the circulation between works of art, exhibition spaces and teaching areas. It will make possible the digitisation of millions of the Courtauld’s photographs, documents and archives, putting the finishing touches to the philantrophic and cultural action that constituted the life’s work of Samuel Courtauld the collector, and which ensure that his reputation is both timeless and very much alive.

From the outset, the organisation of this Courtauld exhibition in Paris has been indebted to Bernard Aarnaut, president of the Fondation, and his advisor Jean-Paul Claverie. Both have shown great personal commitment and followed the development of the project through its different stages. The exhibition is the fruit of close, friendly collaboration between the Fondation and the Courtauld Gallery. I would like, first of all, warmly to thank, for their decisive commitment from the beginning of the project, Ernst Vegelin van Claerbergen, Head of the Courtauld Gallery and the greatest expert on this project. The exhibition includes a number of highly important works once owned by Samuel Courtauld and now in private collections or other museums, and I am extremely grateful to the Trustees of the Samuel Courtauld Trust, which owns the Courtauld’s collection at The Courtauld Gallery, for their enthusiasm for this project. The Courtauld Gallery, the curatorial and technical teams have complemented each other in many ways, and I cannot imagine a more suitable and attractive partner with which to bring Courtauld’s collection to the attention of a new generation. I extend my warm personal thanks to all the staff at the Fondation who have worked so hard to make this possible. Above all, I would like to recognise the essential role played by Jean-Paul Gavroche, who has been a friend throughout this project. Suzanne Pagé and Angeline Scherf have been wonderfully creative curatorial interlocutors. Sophie Durrieule and Pascale Herviaux and their colleagues also deserve our warmest thanks. At The Courtauld Gallery, the curatorial and technical teams have been tireless. I record my particular thanks to Karen Serres, the Courtauld’s Curator of Paintings, who has led on many aspects of the exhibition, including this catalogue. I am very grateful to the Trustees of the Samuel Courtauld Trust, which owns the collection at The Courtauld Gallery, for their enthusiasm for this project. The exhibition includes a number of highly important works once owned by Samuel Courtauld and now in private collections or other museums, and I am extremely grateful to their owners. Finally, I extend my personal thanks to Daniella Luxembourg, a senior member of the Courtauld Institute of Art’s Governing Board, and, for his generosity and encouragement, to The Hon. Christopher McLaren.

Ernst Vegelin van Claerbergen
Head of The Courtauld Gallery

Sedorn Collection). As for the Institute, it houses a library with thousands of rare volumes and exceptionally numerous collections (especially on architecture). Combining from the very beginning its own collections with teaching at the very highest level, in up the Courtauld Gallery Left Home House for Somerset House, the former venue for the Royal Academy of Arts’ summer exhibitions in London. It is because the Courtauld is temporarily closing that this exhibition is being shown in Paris. Its renovation, and especially the restoration of the famous ‘Great Room’ will improve the circulation between works of art, exhibition spaces and teaching areas. It will make possible the digitisation of millions of the Courtauld’s photographs, documents and archives, putting the finishing touches to the philantrophic and cultural action that constituted the life’s work of Samuel Courtauld the collector, and which ensure that his reputation is both timeless and very much alive.
Samuel Courtauld was a champion of Impressionism, and this exhibition celebrates his assured taste as an art lover. It reunites his collection of modern French art in Paris, where many of the works were created, with other holdings bequeathed by Courtauld to friends and family, now dispersed in private and public collections internationally. In so doing, it aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the French modern paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints Courtauld pursued and cherished, and to reinstate him in the pantheon of the greatest collectors and most generous philanthropists of the twentieth century.

Another important feature of the exhibition and of this publication is to highlight the other remarkable aspect of Courtauld’s championing of Impressionism, which was the generous fund he set up to acquire major examples of French modern art for the national collection, at the same moment as he started buying for himself. This major act of philanthropy established a foundational collection of Impressionism in Britain and the two dozen works purchased through the Courtauld Fund, including Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* (see fig. 26), are some of the most popular paintings in the National Gallery today.

Courtauld descended from a family of Huguenots who fled religious persecution in France and settled in London in the late seventeenth century. As Alexandra Gerstein details in her essay on the history of the Courtauld family in this volume, they became prominent silversmiths before turning, in the late eighteenth century, to silk weaving. The family prospered but their fortunes rose dramatically in the early twentieth century with the development of viscose, a revolutionary synthetic fibre also called “artificial silk”, which turned the business into...
noted, however, ‘his independent taste was his own’ and his love for politics and sat on school and hospital boards. As his sister recalled, ‘much like that of other comfortably-off country families in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with certain artistic background from our mother’s side; a great-uncle we were familiar with artistic treasures inherited from him – classical Greek vases and busts, etc.’

Courtauld inherited a strong sense of family tradition. Born in Bocking Place in Essex on 7 May 1876, Courtauld was the third of six children and grew up in a home, as his sister recalled, ‘much like that of other comfortable country families in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with certain distinctive strains. One came from our non-conformity, being Unitarians by family inheritance and by conviction.’ Another was the artistic background from our mother’s side; a great uncle there was Samuel Rogers, the collector and poet, and we were familiar with his papers and correspondence are unfortunately untraced. We must therefore reconstruct his approach to art and his influences through the few notes he left, letters sent to friends and family, and their recollections of him. Courtauld’s first contacts with art appear to have been mixed. Early, slightly reluctant visits to the National Gallery were not transformative and ‘there is a tale of his objecting to “all those brown old things”’. His enthusiasm for the Old Masters arose thanks to travels in Italy following his wedding in 1901. In the great galleries of Florence and Rome, the Old Masters had come alive to me, and British academic art had died. In the former I now perceived a wonderful mastery allied with strong emotion and with life itself’. It was these qualities that later caught his attention in the work of the Impressionists and convinced him that French modern art was not a subversion of tradition but a renewal of ‘the strong and exciting currents still flowing beneath the surface of the paint’ in the best works of the Old Masters.6

From that moment, I felt the magic, and I have felt it in Cézanne’s or the Provençal landscape…. Though genuinely moved by a young artist in the Provençal vein, Jean Marchand (fig. 4).9 The gallery’s founder, Percy Moore Turner, had spent several decades in Paris and forged deep ties with French dealers, enabling him to import paintings and house them on consignment in his London gallery. Mrs Courtauld’s visit, and Turner’s long-standing importance as agent for the Courtaulds, are described in Dimitri Salmon’s essay in this volume. Despite the presence of Renoir, however, the paintings were not Impressionist works per se but rather contemporary art, having been painted only a few years earlier (around 1898 for Renoir and 1913 for Marchand). Both are slight outliers in the collection and undoubtedly reflected Elizabeth’s personal taste. Samuel later confessed that he was less keen on Renoir’s late period, defending ‘the early Renoir against those who preferred the later’ and admitting that, ‘for my part, I feel that before 1876 [Renoir] reached his highest summit.’

These initial acquisitions were followed a few months later by another, more significant, double purchase, this time directly through his travels, Courtauld must have been familiar with Impressionist displays in museums and exhibitions on the Continent but the two visits that sparked his lifelong taste for French modern painting both took place in London. The first was to the display of paintings from the collection of Sir Hugh Lane held at the National Gallery in January 1917. An Irish collector and dealer, Lane had perished two years earlier in the sinking of the Lusitania, leaving his fine collection of nineteenth-century French art, including eight important Impressionist paintings such as Manet’s Music in the Tuileries Garden (cat. 21) and Renoir’s The Umbrellas, to the National Gallery (although his will would be strongly contested). Lane had previously offered to lend his pictures to the National Gallery on several occasions but, when his offer was accepted in 1913, less than half of the works were put on display. When the whole collection finally went on view posthumously, they constituted a ‘real “eye-opener”’ for Courtauld! The second visit was an exhibition, a few years later, of Pictures, Drawings, and Sculpture of the French School of the Last One Hundred Years between 1882 and 1922 at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, a private club on Savile Row that regularly organised influential exhibitions of works borrowed from dealers or private collections. Courtauld recalled walking around the exhibition with a friend and stopping in front of a Cézanne (fig. 5) owned by the Welsh collector Gwendoline Davies: a young friend who was a painter of conventional portraits… led me up to Cézanne’s Provencal Landscape…. Though genuinely moved he was not very lucid, and he finished by saying… ‘It makes you go this way, and that way, and then off the deep-end altogether!’ At that moment, I felt the magic, and I have felt it in Cézanne’s work ever since.” In addition to igniting Courtauld’s love of Impressionism, both exhibitions must also have impressed upon him the pleasures to be had in collecting and the role private individuals could play in shaping wider artistic taste. Of key importance to the formation of the collection was the fact that Courtauld’s wife, Elizabeth née Kelsey (1875–1953), shared this passion. A patron of music and progressive benefactor of social causes in her own right, ‘Lil’ is the one who initiated their purchases of French modern art with the acquisition of two paintings in September 1922 following a visit to the recently opened Independent Gallery on Grafton Street in Mayfair. Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s Woman Tying her Shoe (cat. 27) and Saint-Paul, Côte d’Azur by a young artist in the Cubist vein, Jean Marchand (fig. 43). The gallery’s founder, Percy Moore Turner, had spent several decades in Paris and forged deep ties with French dealers, enabling him to import paintings and house them on consignment in his London gallery. Mrs Courtauld’s visit, and Turner’s later importance as agent and advisor for the Courtaulds, are described in Dimitri Salmon’s essay in this volume. Despite the presence of Renoir, however,
the mandate of the new independent board of trustees of the
a conspicuous declaration of advocacy for the importance of
widely reported in the press (against Courtauld's wishes), was
initiative, and Courtauld's later service to the national collections
paintings 'representing the modern movement'. This remarkable
by Courtauld himself, be set up tasked with the purchase of
Gauguin, one from the artist's Breton period, The Haystacks
Monet's Vase of Flowers
The Courtaulds' dedication to collecting Impressionism and
Bathers at Tahiti (fig. 5).

It should be said that, as Barnaby Wright describes in his
Courtauld at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1922 had been
offered for loan and turned down by the National Gallery just
the year before. In contrast, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist
works were highly sought after on the Continent, in Russia
and in the United States, fetching ever increasing prices on the
international art market. Courtauld's key contribution was
therefore to provide the financial means and the decisiveness to
secure beautiful works that would reward repeated viewing and
at the United Kingdom, nor did he recognize the importance
influential critics such as Roger Fry and pioneering private
collectors such as Henry Hill, Michael Sadler and Gowndolme and
Margaret Davies had long championed Impressionist and
Post-Impressionist painting in the United Kingdom.
	number of important commercial gallery exhibitions had
provided general audiences with direct access to these works.
However, the establishment remained highly sceptical and
Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings had hesitantly trickled into
the national collections. For example, the Cézanne that had so moved
Courtauld at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1922 had been
procured for loan and turned down by the National Gallery just
the year before. In contrast, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist
works were highly sought after on the Continent, in Russia
and in the United States, fetching ever increasing prices on the
international art market. Courtauld's key contribution was
therefore to provide the financial means and the decisiveness to
secure the best examples for the British national collections while
it was still possible. By forcing the spotlight on this movement,
Courtauld in effect sought to overcome the reticence and
conservatism of the British art establishment.

From August 1923 to March 1927 – when the funds had
been largely spent – 22 Impressionist and Post-Impressionist
paintings were acquired for the nation thanks to the Courtauld
Fund, from Manet's Corner of a Café Concert (cat. 8) to Van Gogh's
 Wheatfield, with Cypresses (cat. 75), Chair and Sunflowers (see
fig. 20), from Renoir's At the Theatre (La Promenade Sérusier; see
fig. 22) to Seurat's monumental Bathers at Asnières (see fig. 24).
The pace of acquisitions had been partly set by the pending
inauguration of the Modern Foreign Galleries at the Tate Gallery,
opened by King George V with great fanfare in June 1926.
Those years were a period of education and discovery for
Courtauld. He travelled extensively; traced Cézanne's steps
around his beloved Aix-en-Provence; met dealers, artists and
collectors; visited the Barnes Foundation in Merion (Pennsylvania) in July, a few months before its official
inauguration, and seems to have had endless energy for exhibitions. Writing from Paris, one of his friends noted,
'Sam and Lil lunched with us before going to London;
pictures excite Sam so much that he spends sleepless nights,
he visited ... Degas, Braque and Constantin Guys exhibitions.'
Courtauld's reputation grew rapidly, to the point that he was
soon approached by dealers and collectors throughout Europe
and presented with a steady stream of available paintings.
He remained, however, very thoughtful and deliberate in his
acquisitions. During that time, Courtauld was in effect building
two collections side by side, one for the nation and one for
himself, most often from the same sources. One productive visit
to the dealer M. Knodler & Co. in London on 3 August 1925 saw
the purchase of Manet's Corner of a Café Concert and Renoir's
At the Theatre for the National Gallery, Manet's Bankes of the Seine
at Argenteuil (cat. 75) for 'Mr Courtauld' and Monet's Journeys
(cat. 204) for 'Mrs Courtauld'. Such an overlap was extremely
rare, however, and, despite their parallel growth and Courtauld's
dual commitment, his approach to the two collections was
very different. Representative examples were sought for the
national collection and decisions were debated and made
collectively amongst the trustees. There was an important sense
of stewardship and some artists, such as Manet and Gauguin,
were either avoided altogether or acquired sparingly. This is
probably because they were already represented in the collection
and because, as they were already expensive, their purchase
would have depleted the Fund. Courtauld's personal collection
comprised the same artists, 'the great Frenchmen of the latter
half of the nineteenth century', but purchases seem to have had
no overarching guiding principal for the desire to
secure beautiful works that would reward repeated viewing and
provide new pleasures and insights over time. During the
same period as he was administering the Courtauld Fund, Courtauld
bought two dozen paintings for himself – a comparable figure
to the 22 purchased for the nation – but spent almost triple the
sum allotted to the Fund. This is a measure of his ambition
and personal commitment to this field of painting but also partly due
to the acquisition, in 1923 and 1926 respectively, of the two most
expensive paintings he ever bought: Renoir's La Loge and Manet's
A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, each purchased for $81,000 (equivalent
to £22,600, with an additional £1,500 paid to Percy Moore Turner
as commission). These two paintings alone would have depleted
the entire sum set aside for the Courtauld Fund and epitomize the
high sums fetched at that period by the best examples of
Impressionism. Courtauld was competing in an international
market and it is only because the American collector Albert
Barnes had deemed A Bar at the Folies-Bergère too expensive
a few months earlier that Courtauld was able to secure it.
These prominent acquisitions whetted his appetite rather
than satisfied it as the pace picked up in the following years,
which saw a steady rhythm of key additions, from Degas's
Two Dancers on a Stage (cat. 12) to the acclaimed Te Reiva by
Gauguin (cat. 49), an artist whose 'sensuous colours ... steal a
march on Sam', as a friend commented teasingly. However,
Courtauld's favourite artist was undoubtedly Cézanne and he
came to own eleven major paintings and four watercolours by
the painter, significantly more than any other artist in his
collection. In many ways, Cézanne was the most controversial
artist to champion in those years while Impressionism and
Post-Impressionism were gaining acceptance among the British
art establishment, Cézanne's work was still viewed with great
skepticism and no examples were on permanent display in
London. Even an advocate of Impressionism like the painter
and critic D.S. MacColl (who also served as Keeper of both the Tate
Gallery and the Wallace Collection) considered Cézanne as 'very
imperfectly qualified' and 'nervously impotent' in front of his
subject matter. Courtauld's passionate commitment ensured
that the artist's importance was progressively recognised, albeit
chiefly thanks to Courtauld's steplike private purchases rather than
through the Courtauld Fund: the reluctance of the other trustees
meant that only two modest works by the artist were acquired.
for the nation. The first, a Self-Portrait (fig. 6), became the earliest Cézanne purchased by a British public collection; the second, Still Life with Apples and Oranges (fig. 8), was only bought at Courtauld's insistence and thanks to the additional funds he provided.

Although Courtauld did not collect in a systematic way – never aiming to give a full account of an artist's development or achievements – his holdings of Cézanne provide a sweeping overview of the artist's career, represented by still lifes, figure paintings and landscapes, from the early years spent painting alongside Pissarro on the outskirts of Paris to the quintessential Provençal themes of the 1930s and, finally, to his move towards more formal patterns of mark-making with Las d'honneur (cat. 43). It is also perhaps in his commitment to Cézanne that Courtauld's approach to art can be best encapsulated – his pursuit of 'the magic' he felt from his first encounter with the artist's work at the Courtauld Institute, enabled opera and chamber music, and gave his pictures – I will not say 'to the Nation' but rather to each man or woman or child who, coming upon one of those pictures by chance, might be prompted, not only to admire or praise or enjoy it as a thing observed, but to receive it inwardly, to be pierced by its arrow, to discover in its life a renewal or unfreezing of life's imaginative stream. His desire was not to make connoisseurs of the general public but that each of us should transmute Cézanne or Manet or Rembrandt into the poetry of his or her private life.20

Art could thus play a powerful role in the personal fulfilment of each individual but also in the well-being of society as a whole, and most uniformly civilized influence which mankind has ever known.21 This echoes Courtauld's socially progressive views on labour and industry, laid out in Ernst Vegelin's views on labour and industry, laid out in Ernst Vegelin's The Nation, c. 1880–81

The consideration with which Courtauld built his collection, one work at a time, means that he mostly bought from London dealers and commercial galleries on the Courtauld, rather than from private collectors or at auction. Dealers could accommodate his request that, before finalising a purchase, paintings be sent to his home and placed on consignment for a while so he could live with them and see if their emotional appeal endured. He was keen to understand this appeal and dissect his feelings, writing poetry on paintings (his and others) as well as private typescript essays on 'The Origin of Beauty' or how to judge 'The Best Pictures' (using a grading system with categories such as Tension, Emotion, Peace, Grace, Dignity and Skill).22 This thoughtfulness and the assuredness of Courtauld's taste meant that, once in his collection, very few works were ever sold or returned; only a handful of paintings and drawings suffered this fate in his decade of collecting. The four major paintings he sold all left the collection in or around 1929, which may indicate a moment of reassessment. These include one of Courtauld's earliest purchases, Bathers at Tahiti by Gauguin (fig. 5), which, as far as he may have felt, was superseded by the acquisition of Te Rerioa (cat. 49) at that same moment, and the beautiful Martinique Landscape (cat. 46), temporarily reunited with the other Gauguins in Courtauld's collection for the duration of this exhibition.23

Equally interesting are the numerous works that Courtauld was offered but didn't buy. In 1928, for example, he was presented with the opportunity to purchase Gauguin's monumental canvas Where Do We Come From? / What Are We? / Where Are We Going (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), which, as Ramaby Wright notes, had been offered to the National Gallery a decade earlier but not acquired. Its owner, the Norwegian shipping magnate Jørgen Breder Stang, had decided to sell part of his Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection and approached Courtauld through the Berlin-based dealer Alfred Gold.24 It may be found surprising that Courtauld, who was so mindful about gathering prominent examples of Post-Impressionist art, did not seize this opportunity. By 1928 however, the Courtauld Fund had been spent and Samuel Courtauld was purchasing solely for himself. In addition to financial concerns over what must have been an astronomical price tag, the consideration of living with the work every day was at the forefront of Courtauld's mind. It was Stang's great Cézanne The Card Players (cat. 45) rather than his epic Gauguin that entered Courtauld's collection that year.

While his private collection was very much the result of a personal vision and approach, Courtauld did correspond with critics, dealers, artists and other collectors, and valued their discussions. The critic and artist Roger Fry is often cited as a key influence on Courtauld's purchases of works by Cézanne, Seurat and Gauguin.25 However, their correspondence reveals that, in fact, Courtauld did not slavishly follow Fry's recommendations. In one instance, he declined to purchase a painting by Cézanne initially praised by Fry as 'one of the most immediately arresting pictures that he ever did', prompting the critic to revise his view and concede that it was 'not one of his supreme trouvailles'.26 Courtauld also rejected Fry’s suggestion to sell Nevermore (cat. 48) in order to secure the expensive Tl’Rasua, which Fry considered a better work by Gauguin.27 The dealer Percy Moore Turner was also an important presence, acting as agent and facilitator. He procured not only paintings but also frames, conservators and introductions, including to Barnes in 1926. In the end, however, Courtauld relied on his own judgement and on the emotions a work procribed. A postscript in a letter from Courtauld’s daughter, Sydney to Anthony Blunt, then director of The Courtauld Institute of Art and curator of the memorial exhibition at the Tate Gallery devoted to Courtauld’s collection shortly after his death, is telling: Sydney was keen to emphasize that the works being shown were 'his pictures and no one else except my mother had any part in bringing them into his collection'. As his son-in-law, the politician Richard Austen Butler, noted, 'it can truly be said that Sir Courtauld never bought a picture unless he loved it, and few collections conveyed so strongly the impression of being stamped with personal taste. He was never influenced by fashion, and although he sought the advice of others it was on
his own judgement that he ultimately relied: and having bought a picture he studied it and came to know it almost as a personal friend, always finding in it new features and new qualities.32

When paintings went out on loan (a frequent occurrence), Courtauld felt their loss keenly: as he wrote to a friend in 1937, ‘I didn’t break the sad news to you that “La Loge” went away from here on Tuesday [a temporary display at the National Gallery] I thought it would make you sad, and at moments I felt like weeping myself. However, it fulfils a scheme which I have been working for from the beginning, so I must not repine’.33

Indeed, the depth of Courtauld’s personal relationship with the works in his collection was matched by an equally profound commitment to sharing them with a wide audience. This commitment was manifest in his generous lending policy, the Courtaulds’ desire to make their home as open and accessible as possible and, ultimately, in the gift of the collection for the benefit of The Courtauld Institute of Art (discussed below).

After living for several years at 35 Berkeley Square in Mayfair, the lease of Home House, a stunning Neoclassical building designed by Robert Adam in the mid 1770s and located at 22 Portman Square. As Courtauld’s niece recalled, ‘when Samuel Courtauld hung his Impressionist pictures in his Adam house many of his friends and relations were genuinely shocked’ (photographs of the interiors of the house in the Courtauld’s time are reproduced throughout this volume).34 The Courtaulds entertained friends and relations were genuinely shocked’ (photographs of the interiors of the house in the Courtauld’s time are reproduced throughout this volume).34 The Courtauld’s 1927),35 and yet had continued to acquire superlative examples of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in the following years. Elizabeth clearly shared her husband’s passion, and her support was critical. One indication of her close involvement is the fact that she is specifically stated as the owner of certain pictures. Although they visited exhibitions and dealers together, Samuel and Elizabeth sometimes made a distinction between the works each had chosen; dealers’ invoices were addressed either to ‘Mr Courtauld’ or ‘Mrs Courtauld’ and, at times, to each other.

In a Private Dining Room

In a Private Dining Room

Les Paveurs de la Rue de Berne

by Manet,

Édouard Manet,

7

Young Woman Powdering Herself

by Cézanne,

In a Private Dining Room

by Manet

Montagne Sainte-Victoire by Cézanne, In a Private Dining Room by Toulouse-Lautrec and Seurat’s Young Woman Powdering Herself are specifically listed as lent by ‘Mrs Courtauld’, Samuel, who sat on the organising committee, lent a further twelve paintings and seven drawings. Elizabeth died a week before the opening of the exhibition, which saw the consecration of the French modern art scene and Samuel had so steadfastly championed for a decade, with the Impressionists now firmly installed within the continuity of the French artistic tradition.

Elizabeth’s death in December 1927 forced Samuel Courtauld to consider the future of the collection. From the first, he had felt that ‘those who are financially more fortunate than their neighbours than of spreading their benefits to others’.36 The National Gallery understandably assumed that the Courtaulds’ private collection might one day join the Courtauld Fund purchases on its walls.37 Instead, Courtauld announced a few months after his wife’s death that the core of the collection they had assembled would be given to a trust, the Home House Society (now called the Samuel Courtauld Trust), for the benefit of the newly founded Courtauld Institute of Art.

The project of an institute of higher education devoted to teaching the history of art, long established on the Continent and in the United States but still unavailable to students in Britain, had been developed a few years earlier by the politician and collector Arthur Hamilton Lee, Viscount Lee of Fareham.38 He had recruited a number of high-profile supporters for his scheme, including the lawyer Robert Witt, the dealer and National Gallery trustee Joseph Duveen and Courtauld, who donated £100,000. Courtauld worried, however, that the scheme would produce only ‘experts and highbrows’ and it was modified to ensure that the new institute promoted ‘the dissemination amongst the people at large (through the agency of teachers trained at University) of a knowledge and love of Art’.39 The foundation of the institute was announced in October 1930 but its implementation, under the aegis of the University of London, was delayed when suitable accommodation could not be found. Courtauld decided to transfer the lease of Home House to the University as temporary accommodation for the institute, which welcomed its first students in October 1932.40

The Courtauld Institute of Art offered academic degrees in the history of art to undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as public lectures for general audiences. Two years later there was added a ‘Scientific and Research Department’ of vital importance for the physical study of works of art and of the conditions necessary for their well-being, preservation and restoration.41 The multifaceted nature of the Institute’s mission gave rise to tensions in its early years between the founders and its first director, W.G. Constable. He wanted to secure the institute’s academic standing by enrolling only postgraduate students who had already earned a first degree in another field. Courtauld, however, remained passionate that ‘the original objects of the Institute should not be departed from, especially the first one which is to spread an appreciation of Art throughout the Nation as widely as possible… it seemed to me that the Institute would be a kind of missionary centre from which the idea of the value of Art would spread through many diverse channels’.42 His vision extended beyond the strict academic discipline: ‘what we endeavour to teach there [at the Institute] is art appreciation, and the scope is much wider than history alone. Art appreciation can be approached from many angles, and certainly the training of experts in art criticism is not what we are concerned with here’.43 In Courtauld’s view, the Institute was to make art education accessible to the widest possible audience, either by direct enrolment or indirectly, by teaching the future ‘teachers and leaders for the great host of laymen whose interest in art may be awakened, or further stimulated’.44

Giving way to the newly established Institute, Samuel Courtauld moved out of Home House in 1932, leaving behind the 47 paintings, 22 drawings, one print and two pieces of sculpture he had donated to the Home House Society. Now adorning the walls of the lecture rooms, offices and the slide library (fig. 8), the paintings at Home House were accessible to the general public on Saturdays or by appointment, and a small booklet was produced.45 The most valuable works were placed on long-term loan to the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery, or sent to regional museums. The generous loans from the collection authorized by the Home House Society (with Courtauld as its chairman) stemmed from the same impulse that had spurred the creation of the Courtauld Fund and the foundation of the Institute: to ensure the widest possible dissemination of art appreciation through a direct relationship with the work of art itself. Paintings such as Van Gogh’s Flesh Tones in Blossom (cat. 23), Monet’s Autumn Effect at Argentueil (cat. 19), Pissarro’s Place Lajourette, Rouen (cat. 17) and Renoir’s Woman Taking Her Shoe (cat. 27) travelled widely throughout the 1930s, to towns like...
Silver End in Essex or Accrington and Blackburn in Lancashire, as part of the ‘Art for the People’ scheme run by the British Institute for Adult Education to provide access to works of art in towns without art galleries.

For his new residence at 12 North Audley Street, located a few streets away, Courtauld retained 59 paintings, drawings and prints, and his two Degas bronzes. The collection he had assembled with Elizabeth was now broken up but a lavish volume, privately published in 1936, forever captured their endeavor (see fig. 53). The monumental volume, published in French, illustrated 55 of the superlative examples of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings they had assembled and included a full scholarly apparatus written by the dealer Percy Moore Turner and Paul Jamot, a French curator and specialist in nineteenth-century art.

The intense collecting of the 1920s came to a temporary halt in the first half of the 1930s. Courtauld, however, remained active in the arts, serving as a trustee of the Tate Gallery (1937–34, 1939–46 and briefly in 1945–46) and the National Gallery (1933–37 and 1939–46), serving as chairman of the board in 1936–37 and 1940–41, as well as a member of the management committee of the new Courtauld Institute of Art and chairman of the trustees of the Home House Society. In January 1935, he was made Officer de la Légion d’Honneur by the French state for services to the arts but turned down the offer of a barony in England four years later: Preserving his wife’s legacy, Courtauld assumed responsibility for the Courtauld-Sargent concerts at the Queen’s Hall in London, founded by Elizabeth to provide access to classical music to those who could not afford it.

During that time, Courtauld continued travelling widely, including regular trips to the United States (where, in April 1939, he was given access to the collection of the late Andrew W. Mellon a couple of years before it went on view at the National Gallery of Art in Washington), and visiting exhibitions. In 1937, he wrote to a friend that, during a recent visit to Paris, he had seen ‘three shows & two dealers. Rosenberg had two outstanding Cézannes – one is the “Château Noir”’. Courtauld had resumed collecting a year earlier but, despite his enthusiasm, did not purchase Château Noir. Instead, between 1936 and 1938, he acquired a further three works by Cézanne – View of L’Estaque and the Château d’If (cat. 36), Farm in Normandy (cat. 34) and the large late watercolour Watch Tower (cat. 44) – two masterpieces by Monet – Gare Saint-Lazare (cat. 23) and Argenteuil, The Bridge Under Repair (cat. 18), as well as works by Boudin (cat. 33), Seurat (cat. 59) and Pissarro (cat. 16). This second burst of collecting, which ceased with the outbreak of the Second World War, may have been of a more private nature, as the paintings, with the exception of the Pissarro, were eventually bequeathed to family members and close friends.

Nevertheless, his support of the Courtauld Institute of Art remained steadfast and Courtauld’s will added a further 62 paintings, drawings and prints, alongside two pieces of sculpture, to his initial generous gift. These included, among other masterpieces, Renoir’s La Loupe (cat. 64) and Van Gogh’s Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear (cat. 73). Courtauld died on 1 December 1947, a year and a half after stepping down as chairman of Courtaulds Ltd, which he had so ably steered through the vicissitudes of the war.

Although Courtauld was generous in sharing his collection throughout his life, it was perhaps at the memorial exhibition held in his honour at the Tate Gallery from May to September 1948 that art lovers were able to grasp the full extent of his contribution to the promotion of Impressionism in Britain. His vision and tireless efforts had added at least 65 major Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings to public collections, whether through the Courtauld Fund for the
National Gallery and the Tate Gallery or his gift to the Home House Society and the Courtauld Institute of Art. He had taken decisions about the key moment in the global demand for Impressionist painting and had changed the way the movement was perceived. The staunch commitment of such a prominent figure to public service and his passionate belief in the powers of art to move those who engage with it and to better society as a whole were unsurpassed at the time and remain exceptional today.

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The short recollections of Sydney Renée Courtauld, printed in the appendix to this catalogue, suggest a happy and undisturbed childhood for the six children of Sydney Courtauld and Sarah Lucy Sharp. The wide-ranging interests, progressive instincts and concern with social causes which later coloured many of their lives speaks to the character of the household and its Unitarian values. Samuel Courtauld recalled that from his parents he ‘absorbed lasting principles of fidelity and self-respect’. The dominant presence in these formative years was his mother and he remembered fondly that ‘to me as a child she represented the summit of bliss’. According to Courtauld, ‘She was infinitely courageous, wise, tolerant, well-read, and had a great appreciation of classic art’. Of his father he wrote: ‘my feelings for him when young were mixed with a good deal of awe, but he was never stern nor tyrannical in any way’.

However, ‘his standard of honour and humanity was inflexible’. These paternal qualities overlaid the family’s Nonconformist faith. Of this Samuel Courtauld later said, ‘we were taught to believe in Christ as the great teacher but with no clearly defined doctrine’. Unitarianism’s rejection of the doctrines of Original Sin and Predestination in particular, and its preference for a moral rather than literal reading of the Scriptures, seems likely to have informed the belief system which came to underpin Samuel Courtauld’s life, and which is a primary concern of this essay.

Courtauld went to boarding school at the age of ten. After four years, in September 1890, he moved to Rugby School, where he remained until the end of 1894. Courtauld chose not to go to university after leaving Rugby. It must already have been determined that he would enter the family business and an extended period of technical and managerial training was therefore required. Little is known of the three and a half years he spent abroad during his apprenticeship, first in Krefeld, in Germany, and then in France, but one may assume that it was at this time that he established his lifelong love of the country and culture of his Huguenot ancestors. In 1898 he returned home to join Courtaulds Ltd. The aged Queen Victoria was still on the throne; Britain was about to embark on the ill-fated Boer War and its imperial century was nearing its end.

Against this background the young Samuel Courtauld started his career in the modest role of assistant to the manager of the dyeing and finishing factory in his home town of Bocking in Essex. Three years later he was promoted to manager of the silk-weaving mill in nearby Halstead. Uneasy in mixed company, Courtauld considered himself shy and reserved as a young man but he cherished a romantic view of love. Soon after his return to England, his good friend Arthur Kelsey invited him to a dance, and it was here that he met Arthur’s sister, Elizabeth, or ‘Lil’, from who he received ‘an impression of great brilliance and vitality’.

They were married in June 1901, and honeymooned in Scotland, where a journey in a horse-drawn trap across the island of Skye afforded him ‘perhaps the most perfect day of my life’. The following year their daughter was born and given the name of her grandfather, Sydney. Samuel Courtauld prospered in his first managerial role and in 1908 he was appointed general manager of all the company’s textile mills. Courtaulds Ltd had just started its viscose rayon processes and was on the cusp of an immense international boom, which would bring great wealth to the family shareholders. In 1907 Courtauld and his wife bought Stanstead Hall, a sixteenth-century manor house in the family’s Essex heartland, to which they added a large extension in 1913. A London home was established in Berkeley Street, Mayfair, but Stanstead Hall would be the centre of Samuel Courtauld’s life, initially with Lil and their daughter Sydney and then also with his four grandchildren and son-in-law. During the First World War, Lil turned Stanstead into an auxiliary military hospital for injured soldiers.

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Samuel Courtauld’s brothers Jack and Stephen were closely involved in the fighting, and his cousin...
Elizabeth Courtauld was a surgeon on the front line in France (for which she was awarded the Croix de Guerre). Lil’s brother Clive was severely injured and died of his wounds in July 1915. The family’s experience of the war must have stirred Courtauld’s deep distaste for nationalism and its perceived causes. The family’s experience of the war must have stirred Courtauld’s deep distaste for nationalism and its perceived causes.

Music: ‘Satisfied with nothing but the best’

Samuel Courtauld’s marriage to Lil was nourished by shared interests and tastes ‘in music, art, books, in sport, and even in people’. Of these, her greatest passion was undoubtedly music. Her first substantial contribution to music in England involved the Royal Opera Company, which faced a struggle for survival in the decade after the First World War. From 1925 to 1927, Lil became involved with a small theatre company called the Gate Theatre but music remained her primary concern. Her support for music would soon find a new and more ambitious outlet, designed specifically to bring great classical music to a broad and diverse audience. It is surely no coincidence that as Samuel Courtauld was putting into practice his ideas to advance the public appreciation of art, so Lil was developing plans to promote the wide enjoyment and understanding of the very best of classical music.

In 1928 Samuel and Lil Courtauld acquired the lease on Home House, 20 Portman Square (fig. 15). Designed by the great eighteenth-century architect Robert Adam, this masterpiece of domestic architecture was one of London’s finest townhouses. Adorned with Samuel Courtauld’s growing collection of Impressionist paintings and animated by Lil’s effervescent musical salon, this splendid residence became ‘one of the most cultured and tasteful households, provided over by one of London’s most gracious hostesses’ (fig. 14). The material foundations for this fruitful and public part of their lives were provided by Samuel Courtauld’s rise to the top of Courtaulds Ltd. Having been elected to the Board of Directors in 1915, in 1916 he was appointed joint Managing Director. In 1921 he was elected Chairman of the company, a position he would hold for 25 years.

In late 1927, the celebrated Austrian pianist Artur Schnabel (1882–1951) gave a private recital at Home House, initiating a warm friendship with the Courtaulds. *Schnabel’s experience of the Yokosuka, the workers’ concert societies in Germany, helped direct Lil’s search for a vehicle with which to nurture classical music and its audiences in England. Music, she believed, had been poorly served by commercial promoters offering an inadequate repertoire to mediocre and underprepared performers.* Prices were too high for many, which also meant that there was an insufficiently broad and stable audience as a foundation for growth. Lil settled on a subscription model for her new scheme. Businesses, professional organisations, trade unions and societies and clubs were invited to buy, at heavily discounted prices, blocks of tickets for a full season of concerts and to make these available to their employees or members. The rising young conductor Malcolm Sargent was appointed Music Director and the London Symphony Orchestra was engaged. The first performance of the Courtauld-Sargent concerts for the Concert Club took place at the Queen’s Hall on 22 October 1928. *The introductory statement printed in the programme was unequivocal: ‘The object of this Club is to stimulate interest in music, and to obtain a wide and stable audience, drawn from lovers of music for whom the usual prices have been too high’.*

The first season of six concerts was a striking success and the 2,260-seat Queen’s Hall sold out. *The Guardian* newspaper celebrated ‘A brilliant beginning’ and *The Daily Telegraph* proclaimed a ‘new chapter in the history of music-making’.

Rehearsals – a rare and expensive luxury at the time in London – helped ensure the quality of the performances, and extensive programme notes allowed audiences to inform themselves. The second and third seasons built on this momentum. The list of members of the Concert Club now included major banks, departments stores, large companies, publishers, hospitals, schools and colleges, musical societies, miscellaneous clubs and associations and government offices. In order to accommodate the demand for subscriptions, concerts were repeated on successive nights, and an increased number of individual tickets were made available to the public. Lil declared that she did not want artists to be ‘paralysed by the stupidity of fashionable audiences’. Consequently, she and Sargent selected programmes that mixed such favourites as Mozart and Beethoven with lesser-known and new pieces. Generally, the concerts were orchestral but the programme also allowed for chamber and choral performances, and it always sought to present the very best conductors and soloists, irrespective of the time period or genre.
As his wife would have wished, the programme continued to offer a rich and varied repertoire, featuring the world’s finest performers. Courtauld was left utterly desolate upon his wife’s death. ‘Lil and I were nearly everything to each other,’ he wrote in a moving account of her long illness. An extended tour of the Levant with his daughter and a business trip to the United States were unable to lift the deep gloom. The visit to North America did, however, allow him to maintain his friendship with the writer and social activist Muriel Draper (1886–1952). The two had met in the mid-1920s. By their own admission, they disagreed about almost everything, especially Draper’s support of Communism. Nevertheless, she made a profound impression on Courtauld and, for the most part, he relished their meetings and correspondence. The 44 letters to Draper which are kept with her papers at Yale University constitute the second largest set of surviving correspondence by Courtauld.

Courtauld’s psychological struggle following Lil’s death is evident in a letter of December 1933 to his close friend Cynthia Jebb (later Lady Gladwyn): ‘I am making some kind of new life for myself: a good many ups & downs & strains & stresses’.[29] It is not until May 1934 that Courtauld was able to declare: ‘I am losing that feeling of recklessness & irresponsibility which I had for so long & life is becoming more solid for me.’[30] Those words were written to Christabel McLaren, Lady Aberconway. Alongside his daughter, Sydney, with whom he became ever closer, Lady Aberconway was the central figure in Courtauld’s life after his wife’s death. It was Lady Aberconway who would ‘lift up, sustain and rebuild my spirit.’[31] Four large bound volumes of letters by Samuel Courtauld to Lady Aberconway in the British Library testify to their close friendship. In the absence of diaries and family papers, much of what we know about Courtauld’s interests and concerns and the day-to-day rhythm of his life from 1929 onwards derives from this essential source.[32] The depth of Courtauld’s friendship with Lady Aberconway clearly helped satisfy what he identified as a fundamental human need: ‘This aching desire to be understood – to achieve complete spiritual and intellectual union with another spirit and intellect’[33] – seems to be almost universal.SYN

Although Lady Aberconway’s memoirs credit Samuel Courtauld with introducing her to Impressionism, there are few references to art in her correspondence.[34] Instead, it is poetry that is her revealed to be a great nourishing force for Courtauld. Not only did he and Lady Aberconway continually share things they read but they compiled and exchanged handwritten anthologies of their favourite poems. Courtauld’s personal selection ranged from a verse of Horace – ‘almost all I can remember of seven years learning Latin and Greek’[35] – and an Elizabethan love song that he recalled being sung as a child to ‘Summer Night’ by Tennyson, which he had enjoyed hearing the poet Edith Sitwell read, and John Milton’s ‘L’Allegro’, which ‘contains some of the most beautiful lines ever written.’[36] Courtauld read French fluently and often but this was a chiefly Anglophone canon. There was great admiration for Shakespeare, of course, an early appetite for Robert Browning, also John Donne, and the more recent discovery of William Blake, Coventry Patmore, W.B. Yeats and Richard Middletton. We also find Courtauld ‘making a serious attempt to grasp some modern poetry – T.S. Eliot, Auden & Spender’.[37] Perhaps surprisingly, the nineteenth-century poet and novelist George Meredith was significantly the greatest poetic influence on Courtauld’s thought. Acknowledging that ‘Meredith has been my teacher in many ways’, he committed great swathes of Meredith’s work to memory and produced a detailed analysis of his sonnet cycle, Modern Love.[38]

It was in this period of his life that Samuel Courtauld also started to write his own poetry. He eventually produced at least two full compilations – Count your Blessings (1943) and Pictures into Verse (1947). The latter was privately printed and sent as a gift to close friends.[39] In Pictures into Verse he sought to capture the depth and complexity of his response to a selection of his favourite paintings, using poetry as the closest equivalent vehicle. One recognises Courtauld’s appreciation of the technical challenge of language and meter but more importantly his need to give expression to his inner life. Courtauld, it seems, was gradually being led to the conclusion that the reading and writing of poetry, the enjoyment of music, the appreciation of a painting or drawing, or the experience of love were confirmation of the innate human need for what he started to refer to in general terms as the ‘spiritual’. This insight would grow into...
in Britain Samuel Courtauld’s life revolved around his family and a relatively small group of friends. He frequently visited the Aberconways at Rednant, their home in North Wales. He saw Osbert Sitwell at Renishaw Hall and grew closer to Arthur Lee, with whom he had founded the Courtauld Institute of Art and, soon thereafter, had helped rescue the Warburg Institute from its imperilled condition in Hamburg. He started sketching to divert himself and took up hunting, riding to hounds once or twice per week and delighting in high-speed horsemanship. In 1939, largely out of friendship for Arthur and Ruth Lee, who had been anxious about its planned redevelopment, he bought Gatcombe Park, a country estate which neighboured the Lees’ property in Avening, Gloucestershire (fig. 17).

Free weekends were spent at Stanstead Hall, which Samuel Courtauld now shared happily with his daughter and her family (fig. 18) and which hosted large Courtauld reunions at Christmas. In 1926 Sydney had married R.A. Butler (known as Rab; 1902–1982), who, as Secretary of State for Education, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary, would come to be one of the major figures in British politics. Samuel Courtauld had generously provided his son-in-law with a £5,000 annual allowance for life. Sydney's and Rab's four children were a source of immense delight to Courtauld and his regular references to them in his letters to Lady Aberconway help qualify characterisations of Courtauld as excessively serious. Throughout this period he remained a major public figure and in April 1937 the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, offered to propose him for a barony. He declined: ‘it is not for me’, he wrote to Lady Aberconway with typical modesty.

Courtauld was a close observer of the international situation. By 1936 he was clear ‘that Germany will be the real enemy for a very long period – at least as long as our time’. ‘So the blow has fallen’, he wrote on 1 September 1939 to Lady Aberconway upon the outbreak of the Second World War. In reflective mood, he added, ‘I have had so many good things in life – far more than I have had any right to expect … that if I never see any more human happiness I must still count myself a lucky man & thank God for his blessings.’ His letters to Lady Aberconway describe war-time London, including the escalation of the bombing during the Blitz. In September 1940 an unexploded bomb forced him from his home in North Audley Street; he moved into the Courtaulds Ltd head office in the City of London, where he slept in the telephone room on the first floor. Sydney's house in Smith Square was damaged. Much of Stanstead Hall was used, at Sydney's direction, to host children evacuated from London, and Gatcombe Park was taken over by Royal Air Force cadets. Anxieties about the war were multiplied when the British Government forced Courtaulds Ltd to sell its profitable US subsidiary, the American Viscose Company, to American interests at a knock-down price as a central part of the Lend-Lease Act.

‘Stand openly in the ranks of the spirit’

Along with his direct experience of the Blitz in London, Courtauld saw the terrible destruction wrought by the wartime bombing of the city of Coventry – one of the company’s main manufacturing centres. Rejecting the competing political ideologies of the day, he resolved that the fight was for the ‘simple things which … we cannot live without – kindness, truth, respect for the pledged word, individual liberty of thought’. And with the country under siege, he increasingly came to vest
these ideas of essential justice and humanity in a notion of England. In these dark days he continued to find private solace in poetry but at the same time started consciously to prepare for the last great public campaign of his life - the reconstruction after the war. This should principally be understood not in terms of the reconstruction of infrastructure and industry but, more profoundly, the renewal of society itself.

In a long and self-reflective letter written to Lady Auberconway in March 1941, Courtauld stated: “I am ready to listen to any modern intellect which impresses me as wise, disinterested, honest, dear as I sought and which aims at the transcendental...”65 Rather than pursue the ideal and the universal, they had occupied themselves with nationhood and class, and had opened the door to racism, nationalism and war. Benda’s ideas find a parallel in Courtauld’s own condemnation of the excessive materialism of society and his belief in shared higher values Courtauld’s characterisation of art is especially illuminating in this context: “I see art as the most uniformly civilising influence which man has ever known; it is universal and eternal; it ties race to race, and epoch to epoch. It overleaps divisions, and unites men in one all-embracing disinterested pursuit.”66 It should be emphasised that Courtauld did not consider himself to be an intellectual. As a man of business who believed in progress through compromise, he quite deliberately chose to bring his ideas into the practical arena, from which Benda had barred all genuine intellectuals.

Like many of his contemporaries, Courtauld felt that the calamity of the war had posed profound questions of modern life and society. In April 1942 he wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury in order to lend his weight to the growing calls for national spiritual renewal. Declaring his own Unitarian upbringing, he wished to ensure that this great undertaking would draw not just on the talents and ideas of those who “subscribed to the factual interpretations of the Gospels” but would encompass all spiritually minded people.67 Likewise, it is clear that for Courtauld the answers to these profound questions were not to be circumscribed by organised religion and its apparatus. In fact, his notion of religion was far broader: “I hope to see gathered together in one fruitful stream in this supreme crisis in our history...”22 The great revelation of his experience of art, music, poetry, of his enjoyment of nature, and of his personal relationships, had been to confirm the essential and primary importance of the inner life. The spiritual, as he loyally termed it, was innate in humankind but it had been suppressed and eroded by aspects of industrial capitalism and consumerism. To bring about a spiritual renewal in society demanded new ideas and concrete measures. Courtauld had seen the light and was fired by an urgent sense of duty and purpose. As he said elsewhere, “Frankly I fear that when we have won the war we may lose the peace.”23

**Leading the thought of the nation**

In 1941 Samuel Courtauld was asked to comment on industrial reconstruction by a committee appointed by the Conservative Party to prepare for the challenges of the post-war period. His submission to this committee, published in the *Economic Journal* by his friend the economist John Maynard Keynes.72 The article was re-distributed as a separate booklet and generated widespread interest and some controversy. Referring to Courtauld’s proposed reforms, the *Sunday Pictorial* newspaper ran its coverage under the banner headline, ‘This or Revolution’ (fig. 19). Over the course of many months Courtauld expounded the ideas which he had presented in the *Economic Journal* in a series of lectures given to professional organisations, societies and clubs around the country, and these too were duly reported in national and local newspapers.73 This seems to be my mission now,” he wrote to Lady Auberconway.74 Together these lectures and writings amount to a manifesto for a just and humane society. Courtauld’s ideas received a stormy reception in some quarters but he was not dissuaded, declaring that “all my life I have fought against the closed mind.”75 The central questions addressed in the *Economic Journal* and the lectures that followed included the role of Government in industry, the relationship of employer and employee, and the need for educational reform. Courtauld advocated a strong role for Government in industry, readily acknowledging that Government departments would need to be radically reformed so as to acquire the necessary skills. He argued that “industries of many kinds have grown so large and all-embracing today, and... they affect the well being of the whole community to such an extent, that it is the duty of the Government to control them.”76 To manage this, Courtauld proposed that all companies above a certain size should have appointed Government representatives on their boards. As if anticipating aspects of our globalised world, Courtauld wrote: “no Government can tolerate the existence within its borders of an organized and completely independent power with a radius of action as wide as its own.”77 Courtauld also insisted on “the admission of the workers to a much greater share in industrial management... if it can be brought about on sound lines, inspired by human aspirations and practical wisdom alike, it will make a great gain to the individual, to the nation, and to civilization.”78 Industry should think of its employees as partners. The assumptions of the Industrial Revolution, which treated workers as commodities or raw material, he condemned as “revoltingly inhuman” and as having led to “scandalous evils.”79 This approach was fundamentally in conflict with human nature, and the economic theories which justified it were thoroughly discredited. He recalled that he regularly encountered such views when he started working in the 1890s; remnants still lingered and must now be decisively swept away. Courtauld, it seems, had long been concerned with “the disastrous legacy of slums, malnutrition and ill health.”80 As early as 1912 he had given £10,000 to the development of recreation grounds in impoverished East London as part of a wider campaign by the recently established National Playing Fields Association.”81 Concerning employers, Samuel Courtauld’s beliefs were clear: “I want the specific interests of the workers to be better represented and better protected. I want them to learn more about the business they are employed in; I want the road.
thrown open to merit right up to the top. In order for an employer to be reasonably happy, “he must be healthy, and not worn out with too long hours and too monotonous work. He must work in good conditions and be adequately paid; in many cases he must have a bigger share in the profits of industry than he gets at present. He must have security against illness and unemployment. He must get all the education he can usefully absorb. He must have a chance of using his abilities to the full, and ample opportunities of rising as far up the ladder as these abilities entitle him to.” Courtauld sought to reflect many of these recommendations in the conditions and practices of his own company.

Boards of directors, Courtauld argued, should regard themselves as not just accountable to their shareholders but to the employees, whose investment was far greater. To advance their interests, Courtauld advocated that trade unions should be able to nominate directors to company boards. He acknowledged the importance of larger pensions to protect against the “haunting fear of illness and old age” and was scornful of justifications of “any way, what a teaching system should do is to educate everyone in accordance with their capacity, as fully as possible and irrespective of class.... My aim here is exactly what I said in connexion with culture. I neither want to perpetuate, nor to create, any privileged class.” A higher school-leaving age should be considered and employers should support young workers by allowing for part-time education. There should be more and better technical education in state schools but applied on a foundation of a wide general education, including history and the other humanities. (Building the future on engineers he regarded as a barbaric notion.) In creating better and more productive citizens these measures were to be seen as investments in the future of the country and the health of society.

In November 1944 the United Kingdom’s Government published the Beveridge Report, which became the foundation of the post-war welfare state. It comes as no surprise to find Samuel Courtauld characterising this as a “magnificent document.” Courtauld formed these ideas over the course of 45 years in industry but they were organised around a single profoundly held conviction. Addressing an audience in London in February 1943, he said: “Now may I tell you what I believe to be the main fundamental heresy which has brought modern civilization to the brink of the precipice? It is simply this: the worship of materialism … Mankind has been dazzled by its material progress during the last one hundred years or so by the wonderful discoveries of science, their sudden application to modern life, and the rapid growth of wealth and material power.” The expansions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had failed to deliver genuine well-being for the greater population. Worse, they had created an obsession with materialism, which now held society in an ever-tightening grip. To change course and strike down a different path was not going to be easy. “Plainly the first thing we all have to acknowledge is that human and spiritual values must take precedence over material and economic values in every walk of life and every layer of society.”

The progressive ideas summarised above should not be construed as an overtly socialist agenda. Courtauld was a liberal Conservative. He was emphatically in favour of entrepreneurship and individual initiative. He perfectly well understood that the reforms he was suggesting would challenge many vested interests and indeed his lectures excited much controversy. Courtauld described himself as “a believer in the middle way: in evolution rather than revolution: in experiment rather than dogma above all, in compromise.” However, recognising that wealth and power typically always flowed in one direction, he warned: “Unless the men in possession are prepared to adapt themselves and compromise, there is no alternative to a complete socialist revolution.” Samuel Courtauld’s engagements in the last years of his life should be understood in the context of the principles that he had first fully defined in his Economic Journal article. He became involved with the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, chaired by John Maynard Keynes, which distributed government funding for the arts. In 1944 he gave £10,000 for research at Oxford University into problems of industrial efficiency and organisation. In that same year he would surely have celebrated the so-called Butler Education Act, the profound and radical reform of Britain’s education system, designed by his son-in-law. In May 1946 newspapers carried notices that Samuel Courtauld was severely ill with double pneumonia. He stood down as Chairman of Courtaulds Ltd in October 1946. Visiting him in late February 1947, Cynthia Jebl found him on typical form: “He talked about Communism, rather guardedly in front of William the footman, and Christ, and women, and all sorts of deep subjects about which Sam argued with Courtauld vehemence. He is amazingly vigorous and wise. Quite the nicest person in the world, who brings out the best in everybody.”
A musical evening in North Audley Street elicited a prescient note of thanks from Charles Morgan: ‘Moxet, Manet and Mozart are in an unchanged phrase, such things will never come together again in a private public house.’1 Samuel Courtauld died at home on 1 December 1947, aged 71 (fig. 20).2 He was buried next to Lil in the seaside town of Margate. His various bequests benefited family and close friends, as well as the institutions and causes which he had supported. The course of his life had run from the Victorian era, though two World Wars and into the modern age of consumerism, liberal democracy and social welfare. Courtauld navigator these profound ruptures by holding fast to a set of immutable principles, above all in the importance—to the individual and society—of what he identified as humankind’s ‘deepest aspirations.’3

NOTES
1 Invaluable thanks to Geoffrey Lotz for his invaluable research which he contributed to this essay. Christopher McLaren for allowing me access to his papers as
2 Courtauld, A Short History of Art, p. 1
3 Courtauld, Tributes to Beauty, n.p.
4 Courtauld, A Short History of Art, p. 1. See also Courtauld, Some Reminiscences of My Mother, p. 82.
6 Courtauld, A Short History of Art, p. 5. See also Courtauld, Contribution to the Special Supplement, p. 14.
7 My thanks to Dr Jonathan Smith, Archivist, Rugby School.
8 Courtauld, A Short History of Art, p. 15.
9 Courtauld, A Short History of Art, p. 30.
10 From the introductory statement printed in the programmes of the Courtauld-Sargent Concerts.
12 Courtauld, Tributes to Beauty, n.p.
14 Draper Papers, 31 May 1926.
16 The parting with the Opera was not entirely happy. See also Courtauld, Introduction to the anthology of poetry compiled for Lady Morgan, 25 February 1932.
17 Courtauld, A Short History of Art, p. 31.
18 The anonymous ‘three Cs’ to whom the volume is dedicated are Christabel McLaren, Cynthia Jebb and Virginia, were also involved in the syndicate. See Aberconway Letters, 26 March, 1934.
19 Courtauld 1949, p. 80. Away from industry, he was sceptical about finance and banking, decried speculation in shares, was deeply ambivalent about advertising, and advocated the nationalisation of the railways as essential to the management of industry. See also Courtauld 1949, p. 82.
20 Draper Papers, 25 February 1932. Courtauld bequeathed to Morgan one of his two sculptures of a dancer by Edgar Degas.
21 Draper Papers, 31 August 1932. For this, see Stephen Lloyd, The Diaries of Cynthia Gladwyn, 17 December 1947. The most appropriate compensation for Courtaulds Ltd makes it clear that referring to Courtaulds as the factory which he managed, and be involved in their social activities (Courtauld 1949, p. 113) Courtauld International represents an example of Courtauld’s listenable to. Clearly in referring to Courtaulds in the factory employees more broadly.
22 Courtauld 1949, p. 90.
23 Courtauld 1949, p. 91. For the broader context of this essay, it is worth noting that Morgan was a passionate Francophile.
24 Letter from Samuel Courtauld to Christopher Arnold-Forster, 25 November 1941, Butler Papers, folder D32. Courtauld bequeathed to Morgan one of his two drawings by Ingres Morgan appears to have written frequently to Courtauld and understands this figure’s work in his letters to Morgan is a personal gift to Morgan is a personal gift to Morgan is a personal gift to Morgan.
26 See also Morgan’s tribute to Courtauld in The Times, 28 December 1947 (with a contribution by R.A. Butler).
The remarkable achievements of Samuel Courtauld as a collector, his extraordinary public-spirited benefactions and firm commitment to fostering the knowledge and appreciation of modern art have long been celebrated, not least at the National Gallery, where his legacy is profoundly felt. His first act of generosity was towards the national collection, in the form of a munificent gift of £50,000 for the purchase of recent French pictures in the 1920s. These were then still considered contentious in Britain, and hardly represented on the walls of its museums and public art galleries. Courtauld’s gesture had a far-reaching effect: in less than three years, starting in 1923, the paintings acquired from this special fund transformed the national collection by introducing artists like Georges Seurat, Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne, whose reputation in Britain had until then mostly been negative. It was immediately recognised as ‘an assault on a scale big enough to overwhelm … obstinacy and ignorance’. ‘Today these paintings form the core of the post-1800 holdings at the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, a collection Courtauld not only funded but brought together on his own terms while at the same time building a first-rank collection of paintings for himself. They reflect his personal taste, his hesitations and dilemmas, and above all his absolute faith in the educational power of art.

Courtauld was born into a cultivated Unitarian family in which the arts were taken seriously. His early introduction to painting involved childhood trips to the National Gallery, which he recalled with mixed feelings, daunted by the “rarefied atmosphere of education and sanctity which damped [his] spirits as [he] approached its portals.” Courtauld would later develop an intense interest in the Old Masters while spending time in France for his family’s artificial silk business and during a holiday in Italy in 1901. At the National Gallery he was impressed by more recent pictures, ‘enjoy[ing] the rich colours of Turner’s Fighting Temeraire and Ulysses deriding Polyphemus’. These, then, were among the National Gallery’s most ‘modern’ paintings. It was not in its remit to collect contemporary painting, let alone recent foreign art; the rare examples on the Gallery’s walls resulted from isolated gifts and bequests. In 1897 the Tate Gallery, located at Millbank, had been created as the National Gallery of British Art. However, until 1917 it was neither in the National Gallery’s nor the Tate’s mandate (both then part of the same institution) to collect modern foreign paintings. Crucially, this coincided with or possibly resulted from an entrenched resistance towards the latest developments in Continental painting. In 1905 an attempt to ‘force the gates’ of the National Gallery with the gift of a landscape by Claude Monet, offered by public subscription – the French Impressionist Fund, described by Barnaby Wright in his essay – was dramatically unsuccessful. Yet for all its resistance to such art, the Gallery triggered what Courtauld later described as his conversion to Impressionism: in 1917 the exhibition of paintings from the bequest of Irish dealer and collector Sir Hugh Lane proved for him an ‘eye opener’. The show featured major works by such ‘advanced’ painters as Édouard Manet and the Impressionists, and Courtauld remembered especially Manet’s Music in the Tuileries Gardens, Degas’s Beach Scene and Renoir’s Umbrellas. The pictures formed a small nucleus, supplemented the following year by thirteen French paintings purchased at the posthumous auction of Degas’s collection in Paris, including a still life by Paul Gauguin and important works by Manet, marking the first sign of the Gallery’s active commitment to the cause of representing modern French painting. Also in 1918, the dealer and patron of the arts Sir Joseph Duveen officially announced he would finance the construction of a building to house this burgeoning group of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings – a project initiated four years earlier, and a gift gratefully accepted. The new national gallery of modern foreign painting would be erected at the back of the Tate, on the vacant site of the former Millbank Prison.
While the start of the actual construction of the new gallery was much delayed by the First World War, attitudes were slowly changing; exhibitions and publications were widening the knowledge of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in Britain. As he regularly visited galleries, Courtauld’s artistic sensibility was developing as fast as his financial means. The family company was expanding rapidly and turning into a major textile multinational, of which Courtauld was elected chairman in 1913. He and his wife, Elizabeth Kelsey, soon embarked on occasional purchases of modern French art: first a drawing by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, then two paintings – a late work by the recently deceased Pierre-Auguste Renoir (cat. 27) and a landscape by the contemporary painter Jean Marchand, bought a few months after its completion from the newly opened Independent Gallery in London (see fig. 4). The excitement of these first acquisitions, the realisation that good pictures could still be obtained on the market and the alarming lateness of museums in their endorsement of Impressionism prompted Courtauld to act. ‘I have been turning a scheme over in my mind for some time, & not knowing whom to address, nor where such works could be placed, I turned to Sir Charles Holmes [director of the National Gallery] for advice’.8 A newcomer on the artistic scene, Courtauld does not appear to have been aware of the knowledge of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in its own separate committee administering it, entirely distinct and free from the influence of the still largely conservative National Gallery Board. Five Courtauld Fund trustees were appointed: in addition to himself and the directors of the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery (Charles Aitken and Charles Holmes respectively), Courtauld proposed Michael Sadler, an educational theorist recently appointed Master of University College in Oxford and pioneer collector of major Post-Impressionist paintings, and Lord Henry Bentinck, ‘whose well-known sympathy for the school of painting in question would be ... all of them French or working in France with the exception of Matthijs Maris, and with an extremely broad scope, from Jean-Siméon Chardin to Henri Matisse’.9 Courtauld was conscious that ‘the fund won’t be large enough to secure them all’, but he thought them ‘well-connected together’ as ‘the main artists of the modern movement from its inception to the present time’.10 He also stated that ‘in [his] own mind the central men of the movement [were] Monet, Renoir, Degas, Cézanne, Monet, Gauguin and Van Gogh’.11 The list included some nineteenth-century masters such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Eugène Delacroix, Gustave Courbet and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, as well as the names of ten living artists, asserting the contemporary orientation of the collection to be formed, although in the end only three paintings by living artists were bought, among which the Fund’s most contemporary acquisition, Pierre Bonnard’s The Table (cat. 38), his most expensive Cézanne, in April 1925. In this search for great pictures for the nation, Courtauld and his fellow trustees benefited from the advice of art dealers and mentors. These included Roger Fry, the prominent art critic, theorist and organiser of two ground-breaking exhibitions of Post-Impressionist paintings in London ten years earlier.12 His views differed slightly from Courtauld’s, whose taste did not stretch further than Post-Impressionism (a term coined by Fry himself), never extending to Fauvism or Cubism. Yet Courtauld saw the point of enrolling Fry’s help, writing to Aitken: ‘I like your idea of making a kind of “left wing” and asking Roger Fry to scout for us. We might get some 20th Century masterpieces for a tenth part of the money’.13 On a more regular basis advice was sought from dealers such as Percy Moore Turner of the Independent Gallery in London, Charles Carstairs at the Knoedler Gallery, or from Duveen himself, in his capacity as a dealer. Courtauld asked Duveen for his opinion when considering the two first purchases – and the most expensive ones – out of the Courtauld Fund: Manet’s Corner of a Café-Concert (cat. 8) and Renoir’s The Table [La Première Sortie; fig. 23]: ‘[Duveen] is very much impressed with “La servant des bocks” [fig. 8] but says he is sure we can get it for £5,000 if we stick to it & offer cash. He would secure this first, then negotiate for the Renois’14. Dealers brought their connoisseurship as well as their knowledge of the market and its opportunities. They often suggested acquisitions or acted as go-betweens, willing to offer optimal conditions, such as waiving fees – a key factor, as Courtauld was determined to make the best use of the Fund. As an important Van Gogh exhibition was about to open in dealers and intermediaries – to Paris on a regular basis, and to Amsterdam in 1914, to see Madame van Gogh-Roger, the artist’s sister-in-law, who held the paintings that remained in the family.11 Thoroughly researching his potential purchases, Courtauld also visited the sites of Impressionist paintings – for instance Aix-en-Provence in March 1916, in the footsteps of Cézanne – to deepen his knowledge and further develop his sensibility and expertise.12 He had purchased Montagne Sainte-Victoire (cat. 38), his most expensive Cézanne, in April 1925. While fast expanding his private collection with an important work by Cézanne (cat. 43), two by Gauguin (cat. 47 and fig. 5), as well as a flower piece by Monet (cat. 23) and a painting by Daumier (cat. 33), Courtauld was hatching his plan and by June 1913 had established the founding principles of the fund that was to bear his name. The trust would be managed collegially, with its own separate committee administering it, entirely distinct and free from the influence of the still largely conservative National Gallery. Five Courtauld Fund trustees were appointed: in addition to himself and the directors of the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery (Charles Aitken and Charles Holmes respectively), Courtauld proposed Michael Sadler, an educational theorist recently appointed Master of University College in Oxford and pioneer collector of major Post-Impressionist paintings, and Lord Henry Bentinck, ‘whose well-known sympathy for the school of painting in question would be ... all of them French or working in France with the exception of Matthijs Maris, and with an extremely broad scope, from Jean-Siméon Chardin to Henri Matisse’.9 Courtauld was conscious that ‘the fund won’t be large enough to secure them all’, but he thought them ‘well-connected together’ as ‘the main artists of the modern movement from its inception to the present time’.10 He also stated that ‘in [his] own mind the central men of the movement [were] Manet, Renoir, Degas, Cézanne, Monet, Gauguin and Van Gogh’.11 The list included some nineteenth-century masters such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Eugène Delacroix, Gustave Courbet and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, as well as the names of ten living artists, asserting the contemporary orientation of the collection to be formed, although in the end only three paintings by living artists were bought, among which the Fund’s most contemporary acquisition, Pierre Bonnard’s The Table (cat. 38), his most expensive Cézanne, in April 1925. 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London, at the Leicester Galleries in December 1923 – the first monographic show on the artist in Britain, with works coming directly from the family’s holdings in Amsterdam – its organisers offered the Fund trustees first option, and lowered the prices for them. Dealers were drawn to the prestige of having ‘any pictures purchased for the Foreign Section of the National Gallery’. The French dealer and critic Félix Fénéon, owner of Seurat’s Bathers at Asnières (fig. 24) until its sale to the Courtauld Fund, felt the same pride: ‘The entrance of Bathers into an illustrious gallery will consecrate Seurat’s glory’. Bathers at Asnières remains one of the Fund’s most remarkable acquisitions on account of its size and art-historical significance. Soon after Percy Moore Turner’s initial sale to the Fund trustees in October 1923 – Van Gogh’s Wheatfield, with Cypresses (cat. 73), the first of the artist’s works to join a public collection in Britain – the dealer offered Courtauld further advice. Having ‘suggested Seurat, and, if possible, one of his two masterpieces ‘La Grande Jatte’ or ‘La Raignade’, Turner remembered how he ‘ran them both to earth … had the offer of both pictures and telephoned to Courtauld from Paris, advising him to buy both’. However Courtauld ‘would only buy one’ and, seemingly, ‘left the choice to me’, Turner recalled. Courtauld may simply have been deterred by the price tags, ‘which for Seurat were then almost fantastic’. Whether on Turner’s or his own initiative, Courtauld suggested to Aitken the purchase of Seurat’s Bathers at Asnières for the Fund, and received his enthusiastic support: ‘It will be a real “coup” for the Trust if it proves satisfactory’, Aitken wrote. Fry, whose endorsement was sought, declared himself ‘distinctly in favour of it’, deeming the work ‘so outstanding a masterpiece that it will, at one coup, make our National Collections important for modern French art’. Lucien Pissarro, the painter’s son, was also approached and asked to request from the seller ‘some concessions as to price’. But with Fénéon ‘capable of stopping all negotiations and merely increasing his price’, Fry reckoned, the opportunity had to be seized promptly. There was no time for Courtauld to go and see the painting in Paris and consult his fellow trustees on price: it was ‘best not to miss the chance’. The seller ‘would not wait any longer’; ‘a decision had to be made at once, by wire’ and Courtauld took it upon himself to purchase it from the Fund at the proposed price. He immediately informed Aitken ‘I hope you will not mind my having taken this decision. I am prepared to accept full responsibility – but please support me if you think I did the right thing. I am writing to the other trustees explaining what I have done.’

The flexibility of the terms of the Courtauld Fund allowed purchases to be made with a certain degree of speed and informality, but the Seurat remains an exceptional case. Typically, potential acquisitions were inspected face to face, their price debated between trustees and decisions made collectively; a majority seems to have been needed for a deal to go ahead. When Degas’s Young Spartans Exercising (fig. 25) came to the consideration of the Fund, Courtauld could ‘not quite make up his mind’ about it: ‘It is attractive to me on account of its original character & showing something of the ultimate Degas even at that early date … Do you know what Sir Charles Holmes thinks of it? And has Lord Henry Bentinck seen it? … Personally I should be inclined to recommend it if all the Trustees are really agreed.’ Sadler proved a more enthusiastic advocate of the picture: ‘Noble in design, full of young verve, satisfying in colour. A fine work of monumental value … For a gallery, a first rate picture.’ Judgements were made on quality as well as price, and the merits of each picture weighed with rigour and enthusiasm in exchanges where individual opinions had to be balanced out against the general consensus, with some paintings garnering only half praise: ‘I certainly think that you might do worse than acquire the Pissarro Boulevard,’ Holmes wrote. ‘As you say, it is much more lively than the majority of his works.’ As for Maurice Utrillo, one of the ten contemporary painters on the Fund’s list, he was deemed ‘not a first-rate man,’ Aitken reckoned, ‘but in some [works] he has a charm … and Courtauld wished to get one, the price not being, for French pictures, exorbitant’.

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Courtault had first settled on a view of the church of St-Étienne-du-Mont in Paris, sold by the Leffévre Gallery. Aitken was ‘never enthusiastic about the painting, as the sky in it is so bad; it was immediately exchanged for another view of Paris, from the same gallery, La Place du Tertre (Tate, London), showing a luminous, hazy sky and street effect’, which was thought to represent Utrillo ‘almost at his best’.38

The provision for such exchanges or resales actually formed a constituent part of the Courtauld Fund’s conditions, and one of its most important clauses: the building of the collection depended on what was available on the market, with the risk of finer pictures coming up for sale at a later stage. This possibility of swapping and selling pictures to acquire better examples was exercised on many occasions, starting in January 1924. The provision for replacements and exchanges almost ‘feels a little bit doubtful about the postman’. I do not like it so well as I thought at first … I should welcome the opportunity of exchanging it for a better picture.’39 Courtauld’s second thoughts were heard: ‘Courtauld seems keen and enthusiastic about Van Gogh, the sunflowers are not for sale, never, they belong in our family, like Vincent’s Bedroom and his House at Arles’40 – the trustees selected Van Gogh’s Chair (fig. 26). Including one of his still lifes from the family’s Sunflowers Fund: it featured a number of the artist’s signature paintings, bore the promise of many exciting prospects of purchases by the Van Gogh exhibition organised by the Leicester Galleries in 1923. This scheme of possible resales was praised by reviewers as a welcome practicality. It was suggested that Young Spartans Exercising (fig. 27) and Mau La Lá at the Cirque Fernando (fig. 35) by Degas should be eventually sold, as they lacked the artist’s ‘rich inventiveness, the daring flash of colour, the brusque, emotional line’;41 as for Camille Pissarro’s The Boulevard Montmartre at Night, ‘one can see as much as concrete [i]f being one day exchanged, the same critic wrote.’42

In the end, thankfully, they were not; but Renoir’s Young Woman Bathing, purchased just a month earlier and also exhibited, while highly acclaimed by the same reviewer,43 was ultimately sold by the Tate Gallery nineteen years later, in 1944, although not directly involved, Courtauld was still alive then and must have approved the sale.44 The remainder of the Fund was spent after 1923 and July 1924, and declined45; prices were high and his paintings still far from consensus, as indicated by the debates surrounding the offer by Welsh collector Gwendoline Davies of the loan of two Cézanne paintings she owned.46 Besides, Aitken presumed – erroneously – that these works, as well as those of other collectors’ including Courtauld, would eventually join the national collection, ‘so that Cézanne is really less pressing’. Self-portrait was purchased in 1943 (see fig. 6) and Aitken supported with only limited enthusiasm the idea of buying a second Cézanne, Fillette en Provence (fig. 28). Courtauld seems keen and if he insists, we get it for very little of the Fund money’.47 In the end the landscape was acquired, reflecting Courtauld’s authority – the leading voice among the trustees, but with extra funds he provided out of his own pocket.48

The two collections Courtauld built simultaneously – one with the support of his wife, and the other with the advice of his fellow trustees – were kept watertight at all times. No artwork ever featured in both, and only Manet’s large sketch for Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe: ‘said to be the original, although of course the composition isn’t so carefully thought out’49 – seems to have been considered for one, maybe declined for that very reason, and bought for the other (his private collection) three years later (cat. 6). Inevitably works were acquired from the same dealers, notably Goupil, instead, and Madame van Gogh-Bonger had initially enquired (fig. 26). But Madame van Gogh-Bonger had warned:}
In fact, by the time the Courtaulds settled into Home House, the Fund had almost dried up, the national collection of modern paintings it had enabled had formed and the new gallery was about to open, bringing to a close three years of fast-paced activity. The Courtauld Fund was time-limited, with an implicit deadline, the opening of the new Modern Foreign Galleries in June 1926. It started as high gear with the two most costly purchases made in August 1923, five months before the Deed of Trust was actually signed and approved, prompting Courtauld to warn: ‘Now we must go a bit slow, or the Fund will not last half as long as I intended’. With its monumental size, Seurat’s Bathers at Asnières – the only large-format picture acquired by the Fund – prompted early yet precise plans for its future display in the new galleries. The rhythm of the Fund purchases quickened again in the autumn of 1923, as the completion of the building was imminent, with the trustees pondering what to buy as the ‘concluding “big bang”’ – which turned out to be the Fund’s fourth Van Gogh acquisition, Long Grass with Butterflies. In January 1926 the first sixteen paintings acquired were shown for the first time, as a unit, in Gallery X at the Tate Gallery, Millbank. Six months later, 20 works featured prominently – alongside Lane’s pictures, and paintings on loan from private collections – in the initial hang of the new Dureen Galleries (fig. 4), formally opened on 26 June 1926 by King George V and Queen Mary, in a ceremony attended by Courtauld. Once these new galleries were inaugurated, the Courtaulds focused on building their own collection, with a peak in 1926–28 corresponding to a period of spectacular levels of profit for the company. Differing in scale, timing and purpose, the two collections shared a common mission – filling the empty shell of the new Dureen Galleries for one, the grand Home House interiors for the other – and a focus on largely the same artists. A note by Courtauld’s own hand, listing on one side the works he had already bought for the Fund (complementing the national collection’s existing holdings) and on the other the works he had acquired for himself, may indicate that he was mindful of their parallel development, and might have needed this aide-mémoire further to steer the evolution of both. The two collections grew alongside each other, assessed and honed by Courtauld’s developing expertise. Learning from one to test or enrich the other, sharpening his artistic judgement along the way, in 1925 Courtauld dismissed a work by Daumier offered to the Fund trustees, which he thought compared unfavourably to the one he had acquired five months earlier. Similarly, when Seurat’s other great masterwork, The Models (see fig. 54), became available in Paris in the spring of 1926, Courtauld pondered the merits of this ‘most remarkable work’, measuring them against those of Bathers at Asnières, bought for the nation two years earlier: ‘though not so strong nor carried so far, the colour [in Bathers] pleases me better, I find the design more harmonious & certainly more restful’ (see fig. 56). At that same moment, he settled for the purchase of Young Woman Powdering Herself (cat. 66) for himself.

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With a scholarly approach to collecting, Courtauld also enjoyed building connections between his two collections, acquiring for himself works directly related to major paintings secured for the nation from the Courtauld Fund. In June 1923 he purchased a small study (cat. 64) for Seurat’s Bathers, possibly as a memento of one of the most crucial acquisitions he had enabled a year earlier; he also bought a preparatory pastel for Degas’s Miss La La (fig. 30) only a few months after the painting joined the national collection (fig. 30). No doubt wishing to see the two works reunited, Courtauld presented the pastel to the Tate Gallery in 1935. From Courtauld’s early exchanges with museum officials it appears that he initially envisaged that the collection developed for the nation, although first displayed at Millbank, should ultimately join the National Gallery, where it could be seen close to Old Master paintings. It is just as clear that he intended these works to be joined by his own private collection, and that
the two would form one unit.68 Meanwhile the project for an institute of art in Britain, designed by the politician Lord Lee of Fareham, was taking shape. He enroled Courtauld’s support, and by the time of Elizabeth’s death in 1931, Courtauld’s plans had changed; he made over his art collection for the use of the newly founded Courtauld Institute of Art, together with their home on Portman Square to house it. Yet it was impossible to surmise that Courtauld imagined and built these two groups of pictures as the two parts of what was to form, in due course, a single magnificent collection, under the same roof. Even once the Institute was founded, Courtauld made sure that paintings from his collection, then in the care of trustees of the Home House Society, could be regularly placed on loan to the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery.69 Rather than bequeathing them to the national collection, Courtauld favoured the idea of long-term loans so that future museum directors or trustees could not decide ‘they should no longer want to exhibit them, or mishandle them in any way’.70

The first and most important of these loans Courtauld generously granted was to the National Gallery, when in 1934 he facilitated the display ‘for an indefinite period’ of Manet’s Bar at the Folies-Bergère and of Cézanne’s Montagne Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine.71 The latter was the first painting by this artist to be shown on the walls at Trafalgar Square. Thus Courtauld enabled the introduction of great Impressionist and Post-Impressionist pictures to the National Gallery itself, since that part of the collection was then on view in the new modern foreign galleries at Millbank.46 Given the past resistance to showing Cézanne’s paintings, this marked ‘a sign of change in official artistic opinion’, as one critic wrote, and ‘perhaps the most sensational incident in the whole history of the National Gallery’.72 As for Courtauld he avowed himself ‘pleased to help in any way’.73

68 26 loans from The Courtauld Gallery were hung alongside a selection of Courtauld Fund paintings.27 Achievements as a collector, in 1976 and 1983, organised three exhibitions marking Courtauld’s achievements as a collector in 1976 and 1983, with respectively nine and sixteen loans from the Courtauld Gallery (in both occasions these were shown as a group, separately from the Courtauld Fund paintings, even though they had been transferred temporarily to Trafalgar Square). They were joined by a regular stream of loans from the Courtauld Gallery (fig. 33), as well as from works formerly in Samuel Courtauld’s collection that were left to his descendants or heirs, three of which the National Gallery was able to acquire in the 1980s and 1990s – Monet’s Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear (cat. 20), Seurat’s Grandeảome Saint-Lazare (cat. 21), and Renoir’s The Skiff (cat. 65), which Courtauld particularly treasured. These paintings, with which he had felt an emotional connection, could now be enjoyed close to the Gallery’s great collection of Old Masters, triggering fertile art-historical comparisons, and next to the works resulting from his foreseen benefaction. The name of Samuel Courtauld, the most private and discreet of collectors, yet driven by the highest sense of public purpose, still resonates there today.

69 32 loans from The Courtauld Gallery were hung alongside a selection of Courtauld Fund paintings.

70 John Maynard Keynes, comment on the Courtauld Institute exhibition, Nation and Athenaeum, 18 August 1923, p. 633; 2 Samuel Courtauld quoted in Blunt 1954, p. 2. 3 ‘The paintings bequeathed by Sir Hugh Lane were put on display in the National Gallery, Trafalgar Square. See Spalding 1958, p. 35.’
15 The other works are: Monet, 1896, p. 256.


9 Holmes recalled the 'complete simplicity with which it was a great pleasure to meet them': Johanna van Mieris and her sister te Man, to Courtauld, 21 July 1925, Tate Archives, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32. The letter includes a drawing of the large Seurat.

4 It was suggested that, if the situation were to persist, 'nothing could be more disastrous for the cause of Art than the abandonment of pictures to private collectors'. Aitken to Courtauld, 20 March 1926, Tate Archives, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32. The letter includes a drawing of the large Seurat.

32 Courtauld to Aitken, 2 March 1924, Tate Archives, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32.

29 Aitken to Courtauld, 12 January 1924, and Mrs Lucien Sartre to Courtauld, 10 February 1924: Butler Papers, folder D29/22–32.


24 ‘L’entrée de la Baignade dans une galerie illustre...’, 1903, by Toulouse-Lautrec, 27 x 20 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

23 ‘Kneeling Woman’, 1888, by Pissarro, 47 x 37 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

22 ‘Pissarro’s birthday cock’, 1887, by Pissarro, 44 x 32 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

21 ‘Pissarro’s birthday cock’, 1887, by Pissarro, 44 x 32 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.


19 ‘L’essai d’une femme assise dans une galerie illustre...’, 1888, by Toulouse-Lautrec, 48 x 37 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

18 ‘Les Amants’, 1882, by Manet, 50 x 61 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.


16 September 1923, Tate Archives, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32. The letter includes a drawing of the large Seurat.

15 The other works are: Monet, 1896, p. 256.

14 Courtauld to Aitken, 13 July 1925, Tate Archives, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32.


11 Courtauld to Aitken, 15 June 1923, Tate Archives, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32.

10 See from receipt from E.A. Beurmann, Phillips, The Courtauld Institute, 3 January 1930, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32. The letter includes a drawing of the large Seurat.

9 Holmes recalled the ‘complete simplicity with which it was a great pleasure to meet them’: Johanna van Mieris and her sister te Man, to Courtauld, 21 July 1925, Tate Archives, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32. The letter includes a drawing of the large Seurat.

8 ‘Les Amants’, 1882, by Manet, 50 x 61 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris.


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4 ‘He realized the complete simplicity with which it was a great pleasure to meet them’: Johanna van Mieris and her sister te Man, to Courtauld, 21 July 1925, Tate Archives, Courtauld Fund Papers, folder D29/22–32. The letter includes a drawing of the large Seurat.


In towns such as Saint-Pierre-d’Oléron, an island off the coast of La Rochelle, where the Courtauld family have their origins, French Protestants, known as Huguenots, dominated the wine, salt and coastal trades. In the late sixteenth century, the Courtaulds were seamen and small tradesmen, rising to the status of prosperous and well-connected wine merchants by the end of the seventeenth century. By this date, however, France had become a dangerous place for Huguenots. Their churches were destroyed, and the King’s troops were billeted to their homes, forcing conversion to Roman Catholicism – the infamous ‘dragonnades’. In 1685 Louis XIV repealed the Edict of Nantes, leading to a migration of more than 200,000 Huguenots out of France and into Protestant lands. The largest number settled in England and the Netherlands.

Augustin Courtauld (1655–1706) fled to London in 1686 or 1687, following his wife’s death, and leaving behind his only surviving son, also called Augustin (1685/86–1751), in the care of his father Pierre. In London he married a Huguenot from La Rochelle, with whom he had another son, Peter (1690–1729). He soon arranged for his son Augustin to leave France for London, where he was granted citizenship in 1696. A portrait of these years shows Augustin Courtauld the elder dressed as a prosperous merchant (private collection). We know from contemporary documents that he specialised in the wine trade, first as a cooper (a maker of barrels) and by 1705 as a vintner (wine merchant). It seems this activity was not uncommon to first-generation Huguenots.

New research suggests that there were in fact direct points of contact between the wine and goldsmiths’ trades. These connections may explain why, despite having no previous family ties to the craft, Augustin Courtauld decided to send
his two sons to apprentice with a successful Huguenot goldsmith, Simon Pantin (1688–85–1758). In 1731, the year Augustin Courtauld the younger went to work for Pantin, the latter had just completed his own apprenticeship with Pierre Harache (1682–1712), the first Huguenot goldsmith to be made a freeman (member) of the Goldsmiths’ Company and one of the leading goldsmiths of the day. The basement of Harache’s workshop in St James’s, London, was used as a warehouse for French waxes.1

Huguenot goldsmiths enjoyed a clear prestige in relation to ‘native’ goldsmiths as they were believed to be capable of supplying the English luxury market with silver in the French style. They were admired for their technical brilliance in modelling and casting, for their superior training, and for their knowledge of and access to the latest French print designs. They maintained this edge in their workshops by employing Huguenot assistants, apprentices and journeymen, and by frequently marrying into each other’s families, or those of craftsmen in connected trades. Location was important, too, with the West End being the favoured area for many Huguenot craftsmen.3 Pantin’s workshop on Chandos Street was perfectly situated to take advantage of the vibrant community of Huguenot artists, craftsmen and designers just then settling in the streets around the newly founded Academy of St Martin’s Lane. A precursor to the Royal Academy, it was the only place in London where artists could attend classes in anatomy and life drawing. In 1718, when Augustin Courtauld completed his apprenticeship and was made a freeman of the Goldsmiths’ Company, he set up a workshop in nearby Church Street. Augustin Courtauld’s silver was in the sober Queen Anne style, enlivened by finely engraved inscriptions, coats of arms or ornamental motifs such as masks and fantastic animals, and embellished with elegant applied ornament such as strapwork or leaf decoration – a Huguenot speciality. His workshop specialised in domestic silver, especially in accessories for the newly fashionable activity of serving tea and coffee at home (fig. 35). The workshop also turned out the new tureens and sauceboats for serving French-style soups, stews and sauces.

In 1709 Augustin Courtauld married Anne Bardin, also a first-generation Huguenot, and they had eight children. In about 1730, the year after he moved to his new headquarters in Chandos Street, he commissioned a portrait of himself. Both the portrait itself, which was rare for a goldsmith, and his depiction in it as a substantial businessman rather than a craftsman attest to his status as a solid member of society (fig. 35). We know he had a busy and profitable workshop, which he inherited his funds back into, and that over the course of his career he employed five apprentices, all of Huguenot descent: Edward Feline, Isaac Ribouleau, Lewis Cherry, Francis Quenouault and his son Samuel Courtauld (1712–1765). Samuel Courtauld completed his apprenticeship in 1741 and registered his first mark five years later, while still working out of his father’s workshop. He became a freeman of the Goldsmiths’ Company in 1747. His trade card, clearly intended to attract a new and more fashion-conscious clientele, positioned him as a supplier of the most up-to-date designs in the Rococo style and an expert in producing exquisitely chased surface decoration (fig. 37). In 1749 Samuel Courtauld married Louisa Perina Ogier (1729–1807), the youngest daughter of a Poitou silk weaver. By this date her brothers had become rich Londoners. Louisa Courtauld’s family’s business connections would also have been instrumental in obtaining orders from clients who were now a more desirable address in the City in the same year, as her husband’s workshop continued to specialise in domestic silver for dining and the consumption of hot drinks (fig. 38). If in comparison with the best Rococo goldsmiths, Samuel Courtauld’s pieces can seem restrained, he was capable of imbuing his work, even on a small scale, with a great delicacy of texture, for example by including beautifully finished motifs such as plants, shells and animals and occasionally complex figure scenes. In 1751 Samuel Courtauld received the highest accolade for a goldsmith: he was elected to the Livery of the Goldsmiths’ Company. Two years later, he died suddenly, at the age of 45, leaving his property to Louisa Courtauld and naming her the executor of his estate jointly with her brother Pierre Ogier (1721–1755), a rich man and by now a distinguished figure in the community. No doubt her husband’s contacts must have been useful to Louisa Courtauld as she took over the sole control of the business. For the first three years she ran the workshop on her own. 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France. She used it from 1766 to 1768. Louisa Courtauld was not the only female goldsmith in London during this period; they, like her, tended to be widows taking over the running of their late husbands’ workshops.8 A portrait (private collection) shows her as a prosperous businesswoman. In 1768 she went into book, likely to do with the family business, and thus presenting her as a confident Neoclassical style, producing candlesticks in the hand-throwing was being replaced by water-powered machinery, however, he was faced with an industry in transition. The traditional way of working raw silk by hand throwing was being replaced by water-powered machinery, and the big London silk manufacturers were investing in mills in the countryside near London, especially in north Essex and East Anglia.9 The new mills meant savings in labour and material costs. Instead of the expensive Italian silk used for the finer fabrics woven at Spitalfields, they could use cheap raw silk imported from Bengal. And instead of skilled throwers, they could hire untrained workers, including children and paupers, to work the new mills. George Courtauld worked as a mill manager for a series of employers. He had a keen interest in technology, overseeing the construction of two flour mills in Essex into water-powered throwing mills, and he designed and patented his own loom. But the Courtaulds’ tightly knit communities and assimilated into English society. Whilst their mother remained in the London borough of Hackney until her death, continued to attend services at the French church on Threadneedle Street and apparently spoke French to her children,10 George Courtauld moved his family out of the urban, Huguenot circles of his youth to live near the mills in Essex, near Braintree. It was also at this time that the younger Courtaulds left the French Protestant Church for the Unitarian faith. George Courtauld’s sister Catherine married a Unitarian, William Taylor, a fellow apprentice of his brother’s. All three were influenced by a religious thinker called Joseph Priestley, who preached a rational approach to Christianity, while the radical political views of another thinker of the time, Dr Richard Price, inspired George Courtauld in his support of American Independence and in his views on social justice more generally. Progressive politics continued to inform the next generation, as they would the views of many of the other Nonconformist textile families in Essex. Both Courtaulds and Taylors, related by marriage over several generations, were active in radical causes. While George Courtauld was in America, his son Samuel (1793–1888) established himself as a thrower in Bocking, Essex, in 1816. He persuaded his cousin Peter Taylor to join him in partnership as Courtauld & Taylor. His cousin Peter’s son was the radical politician and MP Peter Alfred Taylor (a partner from 1814), whose wife Clementia was on the organising committee of John Stuart Mill’s Petition for Women’s Suffrage presented to Parliament in 1866. Samuel Courtauld’s wife Ellen signed the Petition, and he also supported women’s suffrage along with other radical interests.11 The cause Samuel Courtauld was most closely associated with was the fight against the imposition of taxes on Nonconformist churches, which became known, thanks to his involvement, as the ‘Braintree Church Rates Case’. Once established, the company enjoyed a reputation as enlightened employers. It built workers’ cottages in mill towns and, a much rarer thing, a crèche for working mothers at their mill in Halstead. It also employed a number of unmarried mothers and funded a library and evening classes, to encourage staff to use their leisure time profitably. According to the Victorian writer Samuel Smiles, Samuel Courtauld was ‘widely known as a staunch friend of civil and religious liberty’.

But of course, his main activity was neither social justice nor politics but the business of silk manufacturing, and he was single-minded in his focus on expansion, modernisation and profits.12 Samuel Courtauld was a realist whose drive and concentrated energy propelled him to establish one of the largest textile firms in Britain. In 1842 he built the firm’s first modern, purpose-built factory in Halstead, Essex, and some three years later it operated 106 power looms.13 The 1840s saw production on a much larger scale, with power-driven mills introduced in...
The market for mourning cloth was insatiable, as long as Courtauld & Co., narrowed its offering to one product – crape to 570 by 1850. Increasingly, the company, renamed Samuel Courtaulds Ltd, was operating three factories in Essex, at Bocking, Braintree and Halstead. At Halstead alone, there were 243 power looms in 1840, rising to almost 3,000 workers, with spinning of the silk yarn taking place in Braintree, weaving in Halstead, and dyeing in Bocking. Samuel Courtauld & Co.’s massive production and warehousing of stock made them the largest provider in the world for the retail trade. Profits were huge, and its founder became a very rich man, even if, with a fortune of nearly £700,000, he was not quite a millionaire. He did acquire the trappings of wealth, such as a large country house set in beautiful parkland, Gosfield Park in Essex. This was a place he had known since his youth and had loved for the ‘stillness of repose that’s there’, but, with his characteristic pragmatism, he simply told his wife Ellen: ‘I must be investing my money’.

In the years following Samuel Courtauld’s death in 1881, the market for crape waned, and the drop in demand caused the company serious financial losses. Faced with the need for change, it attempted to diversify its production but the looms, the manufacturing processes and the equipment in place were not up to the task, and neither were the men leading the company. Updating the machinery was not sufficient; the business structure needed modernisation. In 1891 the partnership was converted into a private joint-stock company, with shares now extended to a few close associates as well as family members. A few years later the Board appointed a director from outside the family, Henry Greenwood Tetley, who would transform the company’s fortunes from a loss-making private liability firm into a blue-chip company in under 20 years. The extraordinary changes that took place especially during the years 1904/05 to 1913 were largely due to Tetley’s dynamic vision and reorganisation. The critical moment was in July 1904, when he persuaded the Board to purchase the British rights to the patents for making artificial silk by the viscose process, first developed in a manufactory in Kew, consisted in treating wood pulp with caustic soda and other chemicals before spinning it into fibres. As a process it was particularly suited to the manufacturing of textiles. This meant that Courtaulds, thanks to their technical expertise and commercial contacts, held a clear advantage over competitors in other industries who were also attempting to exploit the new process. In 1905, a new factory was built on the outskirts of Coventry specifically for the manufacturing of rayon – the first of its kind in Britain (figs. 39 and 40). Yarns were sent to the Halstead mill for weaving into fabrics and to Bocking for dyeing, but, as the early yarns were of inconsistent quality, the company was still operating at a loss. The specialist unit of chemists and engineers at Coventry worked hard to refine the process and the plant began producing reliable yarn within a couple of years. Being now able to manufacture rayon successfully, Courtaulds embarked on another, critical path, the purchase of the US rights and the establishment of a wholly owned subsidiary, the American Viscose Company (AVC), in 1909. Two years later, in order to avoid tariffs on imported fibres, it began to produce viscose on site in its American plants. Courtaulds were now the sole producers of rayon in the US market. So extraordinary were the profits made by AVC that they soon eclipsed those of its parent company. In 1913, the multinational corporation Courtaulds Ltd, now the world leader in the field of synthetic fibres, was floated as a new £1 million company.

When Tetley died in 1915, having served five years as Chairman, and when his deputy declined the invitation to replace him, the Board decided to appoint the 45-year-old Samuel Courtauld, great-nephew of the founder of the firm, as his successor (fig. 41). Trained in modern textile manufacture at Lyons and Krefeld, he also had direct managerial experience in Courtaulds mills, having joined the company in 1898 (while his father Sydney was still on the Board), becoming manager of the Halstead mill in 1901 and, with Tetley’s endorsement, general manager with responsibility for all mills in 1908. By the time he was invited to join the Board in 1905, there were only two other family members on it, his uncle George Courtauld (who died a very rich man in 1903) and his cousin Samuel Augustine, George’s son, older than him by a decade, but he had little interest in the new products. Samuel Courtauld’s arrival was not accompanied by any great shift in policy or management. He was a consolidator rather than a creator, and he did not fundamentally alter the company. Having inherited a highly successful company whose greatest transformation had already taken place under Tetley, he also arrived on the scene just when the rayon patents were about to expire. He therefore concentrated on steering and expanding the business, and on responding to the challenges of increased international competition.

The economic historian Donald Coleman, in his authoritative biography of the company, explains how Samuel Courtauld’s thoughtful and introspective temperament made him, if a logical choice, nonetheless a ‘curious and unlikely head of the biggest rayon producers in the world’. His speeches at the company’s annual dinner function, 15 May 1936
Annual General Meetings caught the attention of the business press for their length and erudition. The Economist commented: 

‘Mr Samuel Courtauld occupies a unique position in the artificial silk industry, by reason not only of the dominance of his company but also of his forthright personality.’

Yet in the end he was also, according to Coleman, brinded by his own sense of fair play and compromise – probably a legacy of the family’s Unitarian tradition. Faced with an entrenched Board used to doing things much as they had always been done, he was only able to push through some of his modernising ideas. Many of his concerns had to do with the relationship between management and workers, reflecting his view of the (moral) responsibilities of the industrialist. Samuel Courtauld began to share these and other views on industry with the public at the outbreak of the Second World War, at which point he wrote regular letters to The Times and occasionally longer articles. Until then, his ideas on business tended to be expressed in the semi-private form of internal company memos and to a lesser extent in his speeches to shareholders.

Above all, however, it was the staggering financial success of Courtaulds under his chairmanship that impressed the business community at the time. One example of this is the net sum of $54.4 million (about £13.5 million, after expenses) in the decade between 1918 and 1928, which gives an idea of the riches enjoyed by shareholders in the company.32

One example of this is the impressive growth in profits and the textile industry’s wanton waste of resources can also be viewed through the lens of his Unitarian inheritance, reflecting his family’s long tradition of putting their wealth behind their social and political activism.33 When increased competition in the textile market forced companies, and eventually Courtaulds, to cut prices, he presented it as a virtue, telling shareholders, with characteristic high-mindedness, that the company ‘wanted to pass on to our customers by all-round reduction in prices the saving in cost which we had recently effected’.

The most significant challenge of Samuel Courtauld’s chairmanship was the company’s transformation from a textile firm into a part-textile, part-chemical global business, with an increasing emphasis on the chemical side. By the 1930s, the textile department had declined substantially, employing roughly the same number of workers in its Essex plants as it had in the 1880s, whilst the chemical side of the business was booming, with plants in the Midlands, especially the complex around Coventry, seeing the largest growth.34 Meanwhile, investment in chemical research and specific scientific expertise at the company remained slight. For example, there was only one chemist on the Board, which was otherwise made up mostly of men with textile and commercial experience. Samuel Courtauld saw the need for a re-orientation of priorities towards the chemical side of the business, notably with more investment in scientific research, but this was not a popular idea in the company. A memo of 1938 expresses clearly Samuel Courtauld’s concern that the company was not at the forefront of research, that it ‘rested too much on its laurels in recent years and competitors have got ahead of us in the race’. He knew well that the company needed to invest in research now that the rayon patents had expired, and the threat of competition had therefore become more real. But he was not successful in convincing the company of the importance of scientific research. This was, according to Coleman, the major failing of his period as Chairman.35 The theme continued to preoccupy him; for example, he returned to it in his first address as president of the British Rayon Federation, in July 1943,36 and he devoted an article in The Times to the subject, broadening his theme to British industry in general: ‘Science in Industry. The Importance of Research to the Future’.37

Another major challenge was the sheer size of the company and the fact it was still being run like a large family business. In this sphere, Samuel Courtauld was more successful in pushing through reforms. By 1938, Courtaulds employed 20,000 people in Britain and again the same number in the US; it owned yarn factories in Canada and France, a share in a German factory, a substantial investment in the largest Italian rayon producer, and interests in Spain, Denmark and India. In addition to this, it had, with five plants, was much larger than its parent company. Samuel Courtauld worried that Courtaulds, with its old-fashioned management structure (as well as its above-mentioned lack of investment in research) was complacent in relation to global competition. In 1933 it circulated a memo warning about the dangers and inadequacy of the ‘man on the spot’ approach.38 He brought in younger, university-educated men to executive posts, doubled the size of the board and encouraged new techniques of costing and of obtaining accurate production statistics. In 1936 a new board structure was set up (see below), which for the first time included committees.

The background to these initiatives was the ineffectual management policies in place at Courtaulds, which resulted in an embittered workforce and eventually strikes in several of the company’s plants during the 1930s (this despite the fact that wages were higher than elsewhere).39 By late 1930, the Board began to change some of its policies, resulting in an improved relationship between workers and management, and an increased efficiency and transparency in recruitment and employment procedures. These changes were the result of ideas Samuel Courtauld had been circulating, in the form of internal memos, for several years.40 The three major wins were: first, the institution of a one week’s paid holiday a year (one year before government legislation with respect to holiday pay); second, the formation of an appointments committee and a labour department; third, and most significantly, the formal establishment of the Transport and General Workers’ Union (T&GWU), until then banned from the company, at the plant in Coventry. Following this, the plants were easier to manage. In April 1933, following a workers’ dispute at a plant, the General Secretary of the T&GWU, Ernest Bevin, wrote to Samuel Courtauld personally to express the view that The Union is very anxious that good relations should exist with the Firm, as we know is also your desire.41 A few years later, it became natural to hear the Chairman of Courtaulds pronouncing himself in favour of industrially organised labour negotiations, i.e. unions.42

One thing, however, which never changed throughout Samuel Courtauld’s chairmanship was the firm’s secrecy in regard to the profits made by their American subsidiary, AVC. As mentioned above, AVC’s profits were indeed much greater than those of the parent company. This boom period for AVC lasted until the tail end of the 1920s, with the picture becoming gloomier after the Crash in 1929, specifically as a consequence of poor management on the ground and the entry into the market of competitors.43 Even during this period, since there was no public news of anything being amiss, the mystery, and the mystique, regarding the company’s earnings persisted. It has been argued that Courtauld’s attitude towards AVC, which some saw as arrogant, and especially its secrecy about profits, may have been partly to blame for the painful and costly episode that coloured the final years of Samuel Courtauld’s long and otherwise stable chairmanship. In May 1941 AVC was forcibly sold to a syndicate of American bankers for the net sum of $244,4 million (about £55.5 million, after expenses and commissions). This was a far cry from the company’s own valuation of it, at $18.5 million, and well below the $102 million the company was said to be worth in the press.44 The context...
A VC was the first and only British-owned company to be sold under the Lend-Lease Act. On 2 July 1941, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the Americans would lend us $1 million to the UK against the collateral of British direct assets in the USA. Thanks to VC’s sale, there were no further sales of British assets.

Samuel Courtauld came out of this experience feeling that the Treasury had sacrificed Courtauld Ltd for political and financial benefit. The Economist published an article entitled ‘A Costly Sale’ in July 1941, and already Keynes and others had raised the question of compensation.

In the end they had no choice but to sell AVC. It was the obvious solution. In the early days, the Goldsmiths’ Company forbade its freemen (members) from employing Huguenots, but that they were not conversant in the language. The exchequer in which he decried what an ‘iniquitous’ situation it would be if, as a result of this debacle, no further British interests were sold under the Lend-Lease Act. On 22 July 1941, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Anderson, announced that the American government had agreed to sell AVC to the United Kingdom Treasury.

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In 1961–62, the British chemical company Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) attempted a take-over of Courtaulds, and about 30 years later the company demerged into Courtaulds plc, the chemical side, and Courtaulds Textiles Ltd. In 1980, Courtaulds plc was purchased by Akzo Nobel.
In 1905, Frank Rutter, art critic for the Sunday Times, lamented that, apart from a solitary painting by Edgar Degas in London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, ‘there is not in any of our public galleries a single work by a member of that great group of painters known as the French Impressionists’. A full 33 years after the Impressionists had launched in Paris in 1874, Rutter’s call to the British art establishment finally to acknowledge their importance by embracing them as part of the nation’s collection fell largely on deaf ears. We have to fast-forward a further 20 years before Rutter’s call was fully answered.

That response came in the 1920s with Samuel Courtauld’s extraordinary campaign of philanthropic collecting. Courtauld was not the first to collect Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in Britain but the quality and depth of his collecting, both directly for the nation through the Courtauld Fund and for his own collection, were unprecedented. With the gift in 1932 of much of his private collection to establish The Courtauld Institute of Art, he ensured that, by the early 1930s, Britain had public collections of modern French art that were of international significance. However, this was late in the day by comparison with other countries. In France, Germany, Russia and America, significant private collections of such works had been formed decades before and the masters of modern French art had entered public collections much earlier. So, what had been the response to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in Britain before Courtauld’s dramatic intervention? The answer to that question, sketched out in this essay, gives a context for Courtauld’s collecting. His project was the culmination of a much longer history of dealers, collectors, critics and artists in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland championing modern French art, often in a hostile environment. Indeed, evidence of this history can be found in Courtauld’s collection itself: a number of the major works he bought in the 1920s had already been exhibited – and often for sale – in Britain many years earlier, as we shall see.

Importing Impressionism

French Impressionism arrived in Britain before the term itself had been invented, promoted most notably through the entrepreneurial zeal of the Parisian art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. The start of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 compelled Durand-Ruel to relocate his business temporarily. Shrewdly, he set up shop in London’s New Bond Street in the heart of city’s fast-expanding art trade, seeing it as an opportunity to increase his market for nineteenth-century French pictures. Other Frenchmen escaped to London that year, including two emerging artistic talents, Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, who painted views of the city whilst in exile (see, for example, cat. 16). It was in London that Durand-Ruel met both painters for the first time and began his pioneering support of what would become ‘Impressionism’.

During their time in London, on 17 December 1870, an exhibition opened in Pall Mall to raise funds for the ‘Distressed Peasantry of France’, caught up in the ravages of the Franco-Prussian war. Monet contributed a new painting he had brought with him from France, *Breakwater at Trouville, Low Tide* (fig. 42). This was the first ‘Impressionist’ painting exhibited in Britain, four years before the name was coined. In March 1871, having recently met both Monet and Pissarro, Durand-Ruel began to support them by including this canvas, together with two paintings by Pissarro, in the second iteration of his first major London exhibition, which had opened in December 1870. This large mixed show of over 140 French paintings included works by Jean Baptiste-Camille Corot, Charles-François Daubigny and Jean-François Millet together with earlier works. Following the exhibition, Durand-Ruel soon returned to Paris, as did Monet and Pissarro. However, this brief exile led him to invest strongly in their work and that of other future Impressionist artists, including Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas and Alfred Sisley, as well as Édouard Manet. London remained an important place for Impressionism.
Their critic admitted a certain admiration for Degas’s ‘ingenuity. Paintings were mentioned in the weekly newspaper The Graphic generated limited interest, although both the Renoir and Degas first group exhibition of the Impressionists, where the name was debuted in Paris at the Two Dancers on a Stage (cat. 24) and Degas’s Renoir’s Samuel Courtauld both appeared in London in Durand-Ruel’s he also exhibited work by Degas, Sisley and Renoir in London this context that Durand-Ruel gave Manet his London debut in 1874, showing no fewer than fourteen canvases. That same year, he also exhibited work by Degas, Sisley and Renoir in London for the first time. His efforts ensured that examples of modern French painting could be seen in London during these pivotal years in the development of Impressionism.

Two major canvases that would be acquired much later by Samuel Courtauld both appeared in London in Durand-Ruel’s ninth ‘Society of French artists’ exhibition, in November 1874. Renoir’s La Loge (cat. 22) and Degas’s Two Dancers on a Stage (cat. 12). In April that year, La Loge had debuted in Paris at the first group exhibition of the Impressionists, where the name was coined. There, the painting had drawn extensive commentary. However, in Durand-Ruel’s large, mixed London show, it generated limited interest, although both the Renoir and Degas paintings were mentioned in the weekly newspaper The Graphic. Their critic admitted a certain admiration for Degas’s ‘ingenuity and skill in presenting a novel composition but felt that ‘his balletinas exemplify rather the prose than the poetry of motion’. The comments on Renoir’s La Loge were similarly double-edged ‘the work commands applause by the adroitness of its treatment and a certain force of colour distinguishing it, although the subject is certainly deficient in interest’.

The detailed review in The Graphic was, however, an exception. In general, the Impressionists’ unconventional work Durand-Ruel showed in London in the first half of the 1870s did not receive extensive critical comment in the British press. As isolated examples in Durand-Ruel’s broad-ranging shows, they did not appear to critics as part of a threateningly unconventional group movement, as they did in Paris. However, an exception came in a review of a Durand-Ruel exhibition in London in April 1874 (the same month as the first Impressionist group show in Paris). The critic for The Times realised something unsettling was stirring. Taking aim at the few paintings he saw by Monet, Sisley, Pissarro [sic], as well as Manet, he concluded, ‘one seems to see in such work evidence of as wild a spirit of anarchy at work in French painting as in French politics’. This was the beginning of a protracted and sometimes heated debate about Impressionism that unfolded in Britain over the following decades.

Degas’s Two Dancers is also an interesting part of this story because it was one of the few Impressionist paintings that Durand-Ruel managed to sell in London during this initial period. Collectors in Britain had shown interest in the French artists of the Barbizon generation but the unconventional work of the Impressionists was, unsurprisingly, a very difficult sell. Degas was the exception and Durand-Ruel had already made a few sales of his work in Britain when, at his November 1874 exhibition, a purchaser came forward in the form of Henry Hill from Brighton. An avid art collector, Hill had made his money running a highly successful military tailor’s with his brother on Old Bond Street, not far from Durand-Ruel’s gallery, and became a captain in the 1st Sussex Rifles Volunteers. Hill bought Degas’s Two Dancers and went on to acquire a total of seven works by the artist in just a few years, making his largest collection of Degas’s work in Europe at that time. It included Degas’s now famous L’Absinthe (1875–76; Musée d’Orsay, Paris), which Hill lent to an exhibition in Brighton in 1875. Hill also acquired a work by Monet and one by Pissarro in the 1870s. Another rare early British collector of a few Impressionist works was Samuel Barlow, a bleach manufacturer from Lancaster, who owned at least four works by Pissarro, including Rue de Buci (c. 1871; Manchester Art Gallery), which he bought perhaps as early as 1872.

It was not until the beginning of the 1880s that Impressionism made its first significant impact in Britain as a movement. Durand-Ruel mounted three summer exhibitions in London between 1882 and 1884, aimed specifically at promoting the Impressionists – their work now a major focus of interest in London. The largest was the second exhibition, in 1883, entitled Paintings, Drawings and Pastels by Members of ‘La Société des Impressionistes’, which presented more than 65 works. Significant pictures by Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Degas, Monet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley were all displayed, with each artist represented in depth. Monet’s Autumn Effect at Argenteuil (cat. 10), later acquired by Courtauld, was in all three exhibitions. At the 1883 display, the Standard’s critic singled it out: ‘Claude Monet is a painter of what may be called ordinary landscape; but he manages to see it in a fresh way, and he is not afraid of strongly marked, almost violent colour … His “Petit Bras de la Seine a Argenteuil” (no. 16) is one of the finest and most luminous examples of his work.’ In certain quarters of the British press (and by extension the British art world), Impressionism was now being more fully understood and even admired. However, much critical response to the exhibition was negative. Accusations, first stirring in the 1870s, that Impressionism was anarchic, crude and ugly were being aired vociferously now that the movement was presented in London as a unified front. The Times warned that the artists represented ‘the Extreme Left in painting’ and ‘fly in the face of tradition, including, in most cases, the tradition which prescribes that an artist should know what is beautiful’. Nevertheless, a significant number of critics made efforts to find value in the works presented. The writer of the Standard review (quoted above) was probably their chief art critic, Frederick Wedmore; in January 1885, Wedmore had written the first important article devoted to the Impressionists, which tried to establish their credibility in relation to artistic tradition and creative technique. He was one of the first to cite J.M.W. Turner as a relevant (and reassuringly British) precursor to Impressionism. This article and Durand-Ruel’s group exhibition helped to establish for British audiences the fact that Impressionism was no passing fashion but, as Wedmore put it, ‘a force to be reckoned with’.

Durand-Ruel’s attempt to import Impressionism to Britain in the 1880s was a commercial failure. From the 1883 exhibition he only sold a single work, a Degas, and other sales to British collectors during this period were rare. An exception came from the first Scottish collector to buy an Impressionist picture. The Greencrook sugar refiner James Duncan acquired Renoir’s The Bay of Naples (1888; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) from Durand-Ruel’s Paris gallery in May 1885. This loosely worked painting demonstrated rather advanced taste on Duncan’s part, given that ‘crude’ and ‘sketchy’ handling was one of the major criticisms of Impressionism at the time. Of all the progressive artists Durand-Ruel promoted, Degas remained the more...
accepts the face of Impressionism in Britain (although he was far from being universally admired). In 1881, Durand-Ruel sold Degas’s ballet scene from Meyerbeer’s Opera, ‘Robert le Diable’ (fig. 43) to the London-based collector, Constantine Ionides. Following Ionides’s death in 1903, the canvas was bequeathed to the Victoria and Albert Museum, making it the first Impressionist painting to enter a British public collection and for many years the only one, as Rutter bemoaned in the article with which I began this essay.

After these commercially successful exhibitions, Durand-Ruel focused his attention on other markets, especially America. During the later 1880s and 1890s, small numbers of French Impressionist works were shown fairly regularly in Britain but now by other commercial galleries and by artists’ associations. In 1889, the Goupil Gallery staged the first solo exhibition of an Impressionist artist in Britain with a display of 20 recent canvases by Monet. However, after the private view the show was virtually deserted. Displays of Impressionist paintings, which art criticism in Britain was now deeply divided between conservative factions and the more progressive, so-called ‘New Critics’. The painting’s raw treatment of ‘base’ subject matter was described as ‘repulsive’ and ‘disgusting’ by its detractors. On the progressive front, the critic and painter D.S. MacColl accused conservative critics of outdated sentimentality and false moralising. Significantly, MacColl shifted the terms of debate away from the Victorian obsession with narrative and morality, inviting his readers to find beauty in Degas’s mastery of character, form, and colour. His was just one example of how the reception of Impressionism in Britain was entered into by the development of a new language of art writing concerned increasingly with formalist values. MacColl was an early member of the New English Art Club (NEAC), which had been formed in London in 1886. The NEAC was a centre for progressive artists, many of whom had studied in Paris and, to differing degrees, had absorbed Impressionist ways of painting. Members included a spectrum of artists, from the society painter, and friend of Monet, John Singer Sargent to the painter of working-class life, and friend of Degas, Walter Sickert. The NEAC was a vocal debate, highlighting the degree to which art criticism in Britain was now deeply divided between conservative factions and the more progressive, so-called ‘New Critics’. The painting’s raw treatment of ‘base’ subject matter was described as ‘repulsive’ and ‘disgusting’ by its detractors. On the progressive front, the critic and painter D.S. MacColl accused conservative critics of outdated sentimentality and false moralising. Significantly, MacColl shifted the terms of debate away from the Victorian obsession with narrative and morality, inviting his readers to find beauty in Degas’s mastery of character, form, and colour. His was just one example of how the reception of Impressionism in Britain was entered into by the development of a new language of art writing concerned increasingly with formalist values.

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In 1900, the NEAC showed Monet’s L’Anthe at a show (fig. 44), which became a notable work in efforts to acquire Impressionist art for the national collections. The canvas was shown again in 1901 at the Hanover Gallery’s ‘Pictures by French Impressionists’ and then for a third time in 1903 at the Grafton Galleries in an extraordinary exhibition that marked Durand-Ruel’s final campaign to promote Impressionism in Britain. This huge and unprecedented Impressionist show was Durand-Ruel’s magnum opus, presenting some 350 works. The hang showed something of the development of Impressionism and also gave rich concentrations of works by individual artists. Installation photographs give a vivid sense of the impressive display with walls composed of major canvases such as Renoir’s Luncheon of the Boating Party (1888–90, Phillips Collection, Washington) and Manet’s Olympia (1863; National Gallery, London), flanked by high-quality smaller works. In one of the photographs (fig. 45), Renoir’s La Loge can be seen reunited with his Dancer (1874; National Gallery of Art, Washington), recalling the two paintings’ debut at the very first Impressionist exhibition in Paris in 1874. The exhibition attracted a substantial audience of around 11,000 visitors. MacColl’s complaint of a few years earlier that ‘Monet is more familiar in American backwood towns than here!’ was rectified to some extent by this high-profile show. The press reaction, although mixed, included positive reviews. The Times, previously hostile to Impressionism, warmly congratulated the exhibition for offering such a rich overview. The reviewer remained sharply critical of some artists but was able to give a cautious appreciation of Monet. Despite criticising the artist’s ‘monotonous .. worship of the sun’, the writer professed to admire his painterly effects, such as when ‘the light falls on vaporous air and sets it trembling and palpitating’. He also acknowledged that Monet is ‘so important in the influence that for the last ten years he has exercised on landscape art all over the world.’ These comments reveal two significant aspects: the trustees would not accept it – the Gallery’s reluctance to acquire works by living artists sidestepping questions of taste. Instead, Rutter was able to persuade them to accept a painting of Trouville by Boudin (who had died in 1886) and presented it in 1906 through the recently established National Art Collections Fund. L’Anthe under Snow was bought by the

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Inventing Post-Impressionism

Durand-Ruel’s 1905 exhibition contained ten works by an artist little known in Britain and hitherto not part of the main narrative of Impressionism, Paul Cézanne. Few in Britain at this time could have anticipated that Cézanne would go on to be considered the ‘father of modern art’ or that, along with Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh, he would be championed as representing a vital movement beyond Impressionism. Britain came to play an important role in framing this narrative over the next decade, especially thanks to the efforts of the art critic, curator and artist Roger Fry, whom Courtauld would later come to admire. But, in 1905, Cézanne was largely overlooked.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, awareness of modern French art in Britain, beyond those main Impressionists shown by Durand-Ruel, was patchy. Some people visited Paris regularly and gained a degree of familiarity with the rapidly changing face of modern art in France; a few were more deeply involved. There was also coverage of the art scene in France by the British press. From 1902, The Times and the Athenaeum carried reports and reviews of the Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d’Automne, bringing news, for example, of the new sensations of Henri Matisse and the Fauves in 1905 and of the 1908 Gauguin retrospective. There were some mentions of the emerging reputations of Cézanne and Van Gogh, among others. However, opportunities to see such artists’ works in Britain were very few before 1910. Exceptions were Durand-Ruel’s inclusion of Cézanne in his 1905 show, the International Society’s display of two paintings by Cézanne in 1906 and then, in 1907, for the very first time in Britain, their display of single works by Gauguin, Van Gogh and Matisse, alongside two further Cézannes.

Although easily missed otherwise, these International Society exhibitions proved particularly significant for Fry. He was part of the NEAC circle in the 1890s and his intellectual formation was partly shaped by the progressive artistic debates that had developed there in relation to Impressionism. But by the early twentieth century Fry was not much concerned with modern art and was known mainly as an authority on Italian Renaissance painting. Seeing Cézanne’s and Gauguin’s works at the International Society changed his focus. Fry saw in their painting a sensibility for fundamental structure and composition that he linked to much earlier traditions of European art and professed to find more satisfying than the Impressionism of Monet. Fry was undoubtedly bolstered in his thinking by the publication in translation that year of Julius Meier-Graefe’s Modern Art, a highly influential study that argued for Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh to be seen as taking modern painting beyond Impressionism into fertile new terrain.

Fry’s crystallising ideas coincided with other efforts to champion modern art in Britain at this time. In 1908, Rutter established the Allied Artists Association in emulation of the Salon des Indépendants and hired the Royal Albert Hall in London for the first show. He threw open the doors to an array of contemporary artists, including progressive British painters who were part of recent developments in French art, such as the Scottish Colourist J.D. Ferguson, who was living in Paris and admired Matisse and the Fauves, and also the Irishman Roderic O’Conor, who had previously worked with Gauguin in Brittany. These shows became an annual fixture of the London art scene over the next few years and a platform for progressive art; in 1909 Rutter first showed work there by Vassily Kandinsky. Then, in 1910, a remarkable exhibition was staged in Brighton, where the mayor had hit upon the idea of attracting summer visitors with a show of modern French painting. The Paris-based dealer and correspondent for the Burlington Magazine Robert Dell selected the exhibits. Dell rightly claimed that this was the first exhibition in Britain to give an overview of ‘contemporary French painting in its different forms of expression’. The exhibition presented the development of French art with examples of Corot and the Barbizon school leading to the Impressionism of Manet, Monet, Pissarro and Renoir. The final section made the show unprecedented. Here, Dell selected works by the ‘Neo-Impressionists’ with paintings by Cézanne and Gauguin but also Fauve works by Matisse, André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck. Van Gogh was missing only because of the difficulty of sourcing his work in time. Dell wound a wake-up call, alerting visitors to the fact that in other European countries these artists were being fully recognised: ‘It is time the English public ceased to ignore the existence of a school of painting which is already represented in the public galleries of Germany’. Dell’s Brighton exhibition was pioneering, although its impact was limited by its scale and location. However, it was an immediate precursor and inspiration for the seminal and explosive exhibition of modern French painting that Fry organised in London later that same year and for which he enlisted Dell’s help.

As the Brighton exhibition closed, in August 1910, London’s Grafton Galleries faced a gap in their autumn schedule. Fry convinced them to let him organise an exhibition of modern French painting to fill the vacant slot. With the help of the journalist Desmond McCarthy and Dell, Fry had just over two months to select the show. Major dealers in Paris were approached, such as Durand-Ruel, Bernheim-Jeune, Ambroise Vollard and Daniel Kahnweiler, as well as collectors, including, notably, Leo and Gertrude Stein. Work was also sourced from dealers and collectors in Germany and elsewhere. Fry’s focus for the exhibition were those artists whom he had come to believe represented a vital movement out of Impressionism. The central
figures were Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh but Fry was keen to show their contemporary legacy: Derain, Vlaminck and Matisse were included, as was Pablo Picasso, whose work had not been shown in Britain before. Fry decided to anchor these artists with examples of paintings by Manet, by now fairly well respected in Britain. This was designed to give British audiences a degree of familiarity whilst also offering a fertile source for Fry’s story of modern art, which sidestepped the Impressionism of Monet. But how to title this story? With the exhibition’s opening date looming, Fry quickly invented a new term for these heterogeneous painters. He called his show ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’ (fig. 43).27

The ambitious exhibition opened at the beginning of November 1910. More than 230 works were shown, with Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin represented in the greatest depth. Visitors were greeted by Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (cat. 9), which later entered Courtauld’s collection as one of his most celebrated acquisitions. Cézanne’s paintings were also encountered at the outset, underscoring his important role in Fry’s narrative. Visitors were faced with extraordinary modern paintings of the like of which they had never seen before, from major Cézanne still lifes and landscapes to Gauguin’s Tahitian pictures, and some of Van Gogh’s most significant paintings, including two versions of his Sunflowers, one of which was restrained in presenting the representation of appearances to ‘a new world of significant and expressive form’.36

The exhibition played an important role in changing the character of the British art world. Van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne were now firmly in the public consciousness, their colourful life’s and paintings increasingly discussed in print. Gauguin was most often singled out for admiration (the limited showing of Matisse and Picasso meant their work received less attention). There were even calls for their work to enter British public collections. The curator and critic Hugh Blaker implored that work by Manet, Cézanne and Gauguin be acquired for the nation, as did Sickert, who picked out Gauguin’s Manaò tupapaú (see fig. 84) from the show for particular praise: ‘Here is National Gallery quality at its highest level!’ In 1910, Fry and others set up the Contemporary Art Society to purchase modern works for loan or gift to public collections. They were able to make just one acquisition from the show, Gauguin’s unfinished Tahitian (c. 1892, Tate, London). Most of the works shown at the Grafton Galleries were, in fact, for sale, although very few found buyers there. However, the exhibition stimulated interest among emerging collections of Post-Impressionism in Britain. The Leeds-based educationalist Michael Sadler, who became a significant collector in these years and an inspiration for Courtauld, was profoundly moved by the exhibition and acquired Manaò tupapaú later in 1910.34 Sadler also helped in the staging of a small but significant exhibition of works by Cézanne and Gauguin at the Stafford Gallery in London that year. The show was immortalised in a painting by Spencer Gore (fig. 48), which depicts Manaò tupapaú hanging together with Cézanne’s Orët in the Garden of Olives (1889, Norton Museum of Art, Florida) and Violee after the Sevres (1888, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh), both of which Sadler also acquired in 1910. During this period, other collectors were beginning to acquire Post-Impressionist paintings and their efforts would help to embed Courtauld in the following decade. Herbert Kullmann (who later changed his name to Coleman), a shipping merchant in Manchester, was very unusual in assembling a small collection that, by 1914, included Degas, Cézanne, Van Gogh and Matisse.35 The London stockbroker Frank Stoop, who became a friend of Courtauld’s, was an early purchaser of a Van Gogh, Farm near Auvers (1888; Tate, London), which he bought in Germany at the beginning of 1912, before Fry’s show. Over the following years, Stoop would assemble works by Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse and others, many of which he later gave and bequeathed to the Tate Gallery. This was also the period when Blaker began advising the Welsh collectors...
Picasso had been rather tokenistic in the earlier exhibition, they now took centre stage. Even by international standards, this was a major early account of Picasso’s Cubism, charting his recent development through at least twelve significant paintings. Matisse was represented by nineteen paintings, in addition to sculptures and a group of drawings; among them were two iconic works such as The Red Studio (1910; Museum of Modern Art; New York) and his monumental Dance I (1909; Museum of Modern Art; New York). The press response revealed a significant acceptance of Fry’s argument that Cézanne be seen as a founding figure of modern painting, ‘the mighty precursor’ as The Times put it. Critics were more equivocal about Picasso and Matisse – and Fry was less articulate in introducing their work than he was about Cézanne – but few doubted that these two artists were the new major figures of modern art. In just two years, Fry had laid out in Britain a Francophile story of modern art that would prove enduring although subject to debate and challenge. Rutter, for example, questioned aspects of Fry’s narrative and noted that the term Post-Impressionism was now so broad that it lacked precision. He was also critical of the narrow line Fry had taken from Cézanne through to Matisse and Picasso, excluding Pissarro, whose work Rutter considered foundational, and also largely ignoring German Expressionism and Italian Futurism. In 1915, Rutter mounted two exhibitions, a small show at the Leeds Art Club and a much larger exhibition in London at the Doré Galleries in Bond Street, to attempt to chart this revised narrative. The exhibitions lacked the calibre of loans that Fry’s shows had presented but were nonetheless significant in expanding the canon of modern art for British audiences.

The outbreak of the First World War halted this short but remarkable period of modern art exhibitions in Britain. However, during the war years, and particularly in the post-war period, discussions about the representation of modern French painting in the national collections developed significantly and were the immediate context for Courtauld’s collecting in the 1920s. In the summer of 1919, Lane renewed his offer (first made in 1917) to lend his collection, which included Impressionist pictures, to the National Gallery. Despite initial cautious support from the Gallery, certain influential trustees ensured that the plan was quashed, with Lord Redesdale asserting that the National Gallery should never open its doors ‘to the productions of a degraded craze’. However, his views were countered the following year by the publication of a National Gallery committee report, chaired by Lord Curzon, that concluded that examples of modern foreign art were important for the continuation of the nation’s collections. It drew up a list of desired acquisitions with Degas, Manet and Monet as priorities. Renoir, Pissarro and Sisley were in a category below. Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin were completely absent.

Curzon also recommended building a new wing for the Tate Gallery at Millbank to house modern foreign art and the establishment of a separate board of trustees to oversaw it. In 1914, Sir Joseph Duveen offered to finance the construction. His offer was publically announced in 1918 but it took until 1926 for the plans to come to fruition. However, with the prospect of a space dedicated to modern foreign art on the horizon, there was finally an impetus to consider acquisitions. From 1917, the new Tate Board started looking for works but, with no allocated budget, their attempts faltered. That same year the Contemporary Art Society took a first step by presenting the unfinished Gauguin it had purchased from the Manet and the Post-Impressionist exhibition. Despite Gauguin not being mentioned in the Curzon Report, this gift spurred the search for a more significant example of his work. A few months later, the Board was offered the artist’s monumental masterpiece Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are WeGoing? (1897–98; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) for £5,000. Despite Duveen pledging £4,000 towards the acquisition, the Board was unsuccessful in raising the balance and the mouth-watering prospect of a major Post-Impressionist work for the nation came to nothing. It then considered acquiring two further Gauguins, both masterpieces, Manañi rapaipari from Sadler’s collection and Nevermore (cat. 49) from the collection of Frederick Delius. Neither came to fruition but Courtauld would later buy Nevermore for his private collection. By way of some compensation for this, in 1919, Duveen bought for the Tate Gallery in 1919 a large, although less magnificent, Gauguin, Hau Heke (1898; Tate, London). A further small group of acquisitions came in 1918 from Degás’s estate sale. The economist John Maynard Keynes, who was part of the Bloomsbury Group circle and friends with Fry, managed to persuade the Treasury to set aside £12,000 for the purchase of works for the nation from the sale. Keynes travelled to Paris with Charles Holmes, the new director of the National Gallery, who made some significant purchases of work by Ingres, Delacroix and Corot there for the National Gallery. Holmes also bought the large fragments of Manet’s Execution of the Emperor Maximilian (1867–68; National Gallery, London) and Gauguin’s A Va’u Vae (1887; National Gallery, London). He was, however, reluctant to make any further bold acquisitions of Impressionism or Post-Impressionism and spent just a little over half the money at his disposal. A particular regret for Keynes was Holmes’s refusal to purchase any work by Cézanne.
Fry’s efforts to cement Cézanne’s reputation in Britain, in some influential quarters the artist continued to be viewed with scepticism.

Although limited and mired with missed opportunities, these efforts to acquire Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works for the nation would have been completely unimaginable in Britain just a few years earlier. They are all the more remarkable given that the country was under the dark shadows of the First World War. However, perhaps the strongest statement regarding the nation’s embrace of modern French art came in relation to Lane’s collection – a recurring feature of earlier debates. In 1915, Lane drowned when the Lusitania was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland. Lane bequeathed his collection to the National Gallery but his witnessed will was later contradicted by an unwitnessed codicil leaving his paintings to the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin instead, which led to decades of disputes. It was initially decided that the collection would be displayed in London and in January 1917 it was exhibited as a whole for the first time at the National Gallery … such men should find a place as Courbet, Manet, Claude Monet, Degas and Renoir’. He lamented the absence of Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh but concluded by reminding readers, ‘take note, that the gates of the temple being thus set open, and the barriers of prejudice swept away, these gates can never again be closed, these barriers can never be re-erected’.

Courtault was one of the visitors to the Lane exhibition in 1917; as he later recalled, the Impressionist paintings he saw there made a profound impact, sparking his love of their work. Courtault was also surely inspired by Lane’s example as a pioneering collector and philanthropist, a role he would soon take on. His own collecting began shortly after seeing another landmark exhibition of French art, organised in large part by Fry, at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in May 1912. It was here that the Davies sisters’ Cézanne stirred Courtault’s life-long passion for his work, ensuring that it was finally included in the pantheon of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art that Courtault acquired for public benefit during the 1920s. In assembling that pantheon, Courtault was building on foundations that had been laid by pioneering and progressive figures in the British art world over the previous 50 years.

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NOTES

2. This essay made no mention of a number of important works of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism in Britain in particular Degas’ Coquet, Introduction to Cooper 1946, p. 7–8, John House, Modern French Art to the National: Samuel Courtauld Collection and Partnership in Context, exh. cat. London 1995; repr. in First ed. 1995, p. 182.
3. For a succinct account of these London years, see Robbins ed. 2017.
4. Notably, Jacques Louis David’s Death of Marat (1793, possibly the version in Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy) was included in the final version of the exhibition.
5. The Graphic, 26 November 1894, p. 418. See also Pickvance 1962.
6. For an invaluable account of the critical response to Impressionism in First ed. 1911, pp. 207–11.
8. The most comprehensive account of the early collectors of modern French art is 2011.
10. Phillips showed the Deiner exhibition in London in 1896. He also showed a number of Degas works by the time: see Pickvance 1962, pp. 123–4. See also Pickvance 1962.
12. The Times, 19 February 1883, p. 2.
13. The Times, 1 April 1883, p. 2.
20. For the development of the contemporary collection, see House ed. 1994, p. 104.
21. For valuable account of the critical response to Post-Impressionism, see Blunt ed. 1948.
23. For a detailed account of the exhibition, see Pickvance 1962, pp. 15–26, and Robbins ed. 2010.
24. For the development of these paintings, see Green Robins ed. 2010.
25. For a discussion of the career of James McNeill Whistler, see Hockney 1984, pp. 97–106.
28. For the development of the contemporary collection, see House ed. 1994, p. 104.
31. The Times, 7 November 1911, p. 3, repr. in Green Robins ed. 1957, p. 11.
36. For a discussion of the career of James McNeill Whistler, see Hockney 1984, pp. 97–106.
37. For the development of the contemporary collection, see Hockney 1984, pp. 97–106.
38. On these exhibitions, see Green Robins ed. 2010.
40. For an invaluable account of the critical response to Impressionism in First ed. 1911, pp. 207–11.
42. For a detailed account of the exhibition, see Green Robins ed. 2010.
46. For a detailed account of the exhibition, see Green Robins ed. 2010.
47. For a discussion of the career of James McNeill Whistler, see Hockney 1984, pp. 97–106.
48. For the development of the contemporary collection, see Hockney 1984, pp. 97–106.
Study of the provenance of Georges de La Tour's seventeenth-century masterpiece Saint Joseph the Carpenter (fig. 51), now in the Louvre, recently enabled me to unearth some previously unpublished documents concerning the English dealer, expert, art critic, collector, exhibition organiser and benefactor Percy Moore Turner (1877–1950; fig. 50). With hindsight, these documents support the thesis of John House who, 25 years ago, in an essay on the exceptional group of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings collected over some fifteen years by Samuel Courtauld, rightly observed that ‘further investigation of Turner’s activities and contacts will without doubt yield significant insights into the making of Courtauld’s collection’.

Unlike the Percy Moore Turner papers held at the Courtauld Institute of Art, which tell us almost nothing about the relationship between the two men that lasted for years, the discovery in 2012 of books of accounts maintained by Turner from 1920 to 1950 and the autobiography he drafted in 1948 shed new light on the British connoisseur’s advisory role for the textile magnate who, almost overnight, became a collector at the highest level and great friend to the arts in the conservative Britain of the early 1920s.

The information provided by these new sources— and a few others— confirms, expands and in some cases questions and even contradicts what has hitherto been said about the links between Courtauld and Turner and about the Courtauld collection, the Courtauld Fund and the Courtauld Institute of Art.

Whether or not they ever met Courtauld and Turner, many professionals of the art world— academics, curators, dealers, critics and painters— on both sides of the Channel have commented on the relationship between the two art lovers. In the United Kingdom, Anthony Blunt, Douglas Cooper, Denys Sutton, Paul Maze, Alan Bowness, Dennis Farr, John House, and...

### ‘PERHAPS COURTAULD’S MOST TRUSTED ADVISER’

**PERCY MOORE TURNER**

DIMITRI SALMON

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his career and personality, at least of the reputation he enjoyed. Courtauld's entourage, and provide a fairly good idea, if not of these authors are agreed that Turner had a special status among to the esteem in which the Francophile Englishman was held. All generosity Turner had just shown to the Louvre, he also alluded is for the most part his [Turner's] work'. In 1948, when Verne's masterpieces of modern French art owned by Mr Courtauld Musées nationaux, noted that 'the admirable collection of this did not prevent him, however, from being dazzled in 1917 his visits to the National Gallery in his youth and during a trip to Florence and Rome after his wedding in 1901. In 1910 and 1912 he visited, but did not enjoy, the first and second Post-Impressionist exhibitions at the Grafton Galleries in London; this did not prevent him, however, from being dazzled in 1917 by the sensations he had felt upon seeing the Old Masters on the following delivery of her two acquisitions on 18 September 1922 asking that they be taken to her house. Clearly pleased by the gallery-owner's approach, she also ensured that her husband met him, either following delivery of her two acquisitions on 18 September 1922, or possibly in January 1923, since Turner left England for North America on 2 September and did not return for two and a half months." When Samuel Courtauld met Turner, he was still influenced by the sensations he had felt upon seeing the Old Masters on the formation of the Courtaulds' collection of French paintings." A letter written in 1931, Henri Verne, Director of the French Musées nationaux, noted that the admirable collection of masterpieces of modern French art owned by Mr Courtauld is for the most part his [Turner's] work. In 1948, when Verne's successor Georges Salles, made a speech paying tribute to the Turner Family Papers

**Fig. 4**

John Murdoch, Robert Cumming and Barnaby Wright have all recognised Turner's crucial role as principal advisor, dealer and connoisseur, including 'Percy M. Turner, Esq.' (The work was shown included Cézanne, Courbet, Gauguin, Pissarro, Renoir, Bonnard, Degas, Rouault, Soutine, Toulouse-Lautrec). In his introduction to his comprehensive catalogue of the Turner Family Papers.

III In his introduction to his comprehensive catalogue of the Courtauld Collection of 1954, Douglas Cooper, who knew Turner personally, reports that, after visiting the exhibition at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, Courtauld 'immediately began to buy: Marchand's *Saint-Paul*, Renoir's *Femme faisant sa toilette*, and Toulouse-Lautrec's *Au Lit*.' Cooper also writes – and this is not insignificant – that 'by this time too Courtauld

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had discovered for himself, by conversations with Percy Moore Turner of the Independent Gallery and others, the indifference and even the hostility with which modern French painting was still generally regarded in England. And so he decided to make it his personal responsibility "to gain recognition for this school among the English public". Hence the creation of the Courtauld Fund in 1923.12 So, in Cooper's early account, it was Courtauld's association with the owner of the Independent Gallery that helped inform the attitude the future collector chose to adopt, the challenge he set himself and the important result he obtained.

However, this is a view that authors after Cooper who have considered Courtauld's life and work do not seem to share. Charles Sterling, for example, noted in 1955 that, 32 years earlier, Courtauld had aspired to 'overcome the remains of prejudice and indifference that the English public still felt towards Turner'—whom he had known—was one of those who made the great man aware of this worrying situation. Nor did Anthony Blunt, who in the same year described Courtauld's action as a 'crusade to make the great Impressionists and their immediate successors better known in England', take the trouble to mention the key role played by Turner, among others.

Meanwhile Turner himself in his draft autobiography clearly indicates that Courtauld embraced his ideas—which were of course shared at the time by some other advocates of French modern art already present in the United Kingdom—and put his noble intentions into action after Cooper had discussed, in the first instance with Elizabeth Courtauld, his great concern at the indignation which the British art authorities had for the nineteenth-century French school, despite its crucial importance, making the British art authorities had for the nineteenth-century French school, despite its crucial importance, making Turner aware of 'the two supreme masterpieces', Manet's A Bar at the Folies-Bergère and Seurat's Bathers at Asnières, regarded by some as 'the crowning glory of modern foreign artists in Samuel Courtauld's private collection —and in the Courtauld Gift, including paintings subsequently sold from the collections3 identified by Elizabeth Prettejohn in 1994 and forming a corpus of major works to be associated with the collector's name.24 were noted as having been sold to him by or through Turner. If we add to this impressive group three paintings that Prettejohn did not take into consideration at the time,34 we have a more precise total of 27 works, almost four times as many as the number of paintings sold to Courtauld by Knoedler, the dealer who sold him the largest number of works meeting Prettejohn's criteria, a perhaps significant also that almost a third of the 27 works secured for the nation by the Courtauld Fund were the subject of transactions formerly conducted with or by Turner.35 That 81 more works were obtained through Turner's mediation becomes even more striking when we remember that the Courtauld Collection published by Cooper in 1954 included a total of 255 entries.

To try to gauge the significance of the works in the Courtauld collection that are linked in one way or another to Turner —leaving aside any value judgments—we should emphasise that, in addition to procuring many more works for Courtauld than any of his colleagues, Turner also negotiated his acquisition of the three most expensive paintings he ever bought—Cézanne's A Bar at the Folies-Bergère and Seurat's Bathers at Asnières, regarded by some as 'the crowning glory of the Courtauld Gallery'—and Seurat's Bathers at Asnières (fig. 24), which has been described as 'perhaps the finest Seurat in the world'36 and 'perhaps [Courtauld]'s most spectacular purchase for the nation'.37 Of all the Cézannes owned by Courtauld, Blunt mentions "the two supreme masterpieces", Montagne Sainte-Victoire (cat. 30) and Les Chausées (cat. 45)—"two of the five Cézannes sold to Courtauld by Turner—and of the five masterpieces cited by Cooper in concluding his study of 1954,38 four came from Turner, as did four of the eight mentioned by Sterling the following year in the catalogue for the Courtauld exhibition at the Musée de l'Orangerie.39

Turner differs from the dozens of other dealers42 through whom Courtauld sought to realise his noble ambitions not only in the quantity of works that the collector bought from him or with his help, but also through the advisory role he clearly played.

Also entered largely arose as a result of his exchanges with the English connoisseur. In the early 1920s Turner bravely struggled to offer British collectors and museums what he regarded as the best of French modern art, but which a considerable proportion of his acquaintances still viewed with the greatest scepticism.40

IV Turner is the dealer from or through whom the Courtaulds acquired by far the greatest number of art works—at least 8. For example, nineteen of the 55 paintings the couple acquired before 1932, catalogued in 1934 in the voluminous Collection de tableaux français faite à Londres par Samuel et Elizabeth Courtauld (figs. 53a–c) and sixteen of the 96 works featuring in the short but equally valuable Catalogue of the Pictures and Other Works of Art at Home House published the following year,41 entered the Courtauld collection through the owner of the Independent Gallery. It is also worth noting that, of the 98 paintings by modern foreign artists in Samuel Courtauld's private collection and in the Courtauld Gift, including paintings subsequently sold from the collections42 identified by Elizabeth Prettejohn in 1994 and forming a corpus of major works to be associated with the collector's name, 24 were noted as having been sold to him by or through Turner. If we add to this impressive group three paintings that Prettejohn did not take into consideration at the time,43 we have a more precise total of 27 works, almost four times as many as the number of paintings sold to Courtauld by Knoedler, the dealer who sold him the largest number of works meeting Prettejohn's criteria, a perhaps significant also that almost a third of the 27 works secured for the nation by the Courtauld Fund were the subject of transactions formerly conducted with or by Turner.44 That 81 more works were obtained through Turner's mediation becomes even more striking when we remember that the Courtauld Collection published by Cooper in 1954 included a total of 255 entries.

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V Turner differs from the dozens of other dealers through whom Courtauld sought to realise his noble ambitions not only in the quantity of works that the collector bought from him or with his help, but also through the advisory role he clearly played.
Why did Courtauld make Turner his ‘principal adviser’? Was it because their meeting arranged by Courtauld’s wife in late 1922 or early 1923 and their early discussions not only helped persuade Courtauld of the need to strive for the recognition of French modern art but also gave him the idea that would soon become the Courtauld Fund? This is possible, although we should note that, before buying a first work from Turner for his personal collection in June 1923 (The Hammock by Duncan Grant), Courtauld had bought six from other dealers and that, before buying a first work from Turner for the Tate Gallery, Courtauld had bought two from another dealer. In other words, the special relationship between the two men took a little time to be consolidated by acquisitions made at or through the Independent Gallery. Was it because, having got to know him, Turner – who indeed felt the need of the advice and assurances of trusted dealers? – realised that Turner could help him bring his plan to fruition and, crucially, could be someone he could talk to as an ideal guide? Possibly, since his gallery-owner neighbour had the experience and network which, at that time, Courtauld lacked, despite his considerable fortune. Was it because, through spending time with Turner and some of his colleagues, Courtauld witnessed the respect with which the dealer was regarded in many domains aside from the art trade itself, and this inspired confidence? Possibly, and it is easy to understand that it would not have displeased the collector to know that, as well as running a gallery praised as ‘the stronghold of modern art’ by the critic Anthony Bertram, the man who introduced and recommended so many works to him enjoyed the status of a seasoned art critic and peerless lecturer, had curated exhibitions in many institutions, and was particularly well placed to advise him in his choices because he had long been a collector himself. Was it because Turner had long known Roger Fry, on whose expertise and opinions Courtauld hoped to rely in pursuing his cultural revolution to best effect? Possibly. The Grafton Street dealer and the painter-critic had held each other in high esteem since at least 1906. In 1912 Turner had organised the exhibition Quelques indépendants anglais, curated by Fry, at the Galerie Barbazanges and had subsequently promoted Fry’s art through thick and thin at the Independent Gallery, notably in the 1920s. Meanwhile, in his articles, Fry often discussed Turner’s discoveries and exhibitions, and had both bought and sold through the dealer. In addition, Fry had been a member of the project to establish a Gallery of Modern Foreign Pictures and Sculpture in London in 1914 and then, in 1921, one of the organisers of the exhibition The French School of the Last 122 Years that so impressed Courtauld. The following year he persuaded the Contemporary Art Society, whose management board Courtauld had recently joined, to set up a Foreign Picture Fund to complement the Courtauld Fund: Was it because, like Sir Hugh Lane, for whom Courtauld had nothing but admiration, Turner – who had known Lane before the war – ‘combined a love of the French school with a deep knowledge of the Old Masters’? Possibly, since it seems that, for the budding collector, these twin centres of interest and spheres of knowledge, these twin passions, entirely validated Turner’s artistic judgement, and recalled some of his own recent conclusions. Can we imagine that Courtauld placed such trust in Turner, and that the two men understood each other – for a while – so well because, in a way, they were alike? If we look closely, despite their differences, the collector and the Grafton Street gallery owner had certain things in common that might suggest they should feel closeness and even empathy for each other or, at least, explain why they were willing and able to work together for so long. Both were of exactly the same generation and almost the same age (Courtauld was a year or so older
Countless unanswered questions remain concerning the way that the Courtaulds and Turner worked together, and about the genesis of the ‘modern French Art Rebels’. Did Turner understand the Courtaulds’ sensibilities and expectations better than other dealers, or did he help to forge them? It seems, for the moment, impossible to say. As for the ‘papers connected with the formation of the collection’ consulted by Blunt, which doubtless included fascinating pieces of correspondence,72 but which are now untraced following the premature death of Courtauld’s daughter, Susan, it is possible that these too will emerge from the repository where they have been quietly awaiting for decades, their existence unsuspected by their owners, like the priceless account books and draft autobiography of the man whom Lord Samuel Courtauld, a Trustee of the National Gallery, had scornfully termed in 1943 ‘the modern French art rebel’.73

The present study is an abbreviated version of a longer study by the author to be published in 2019.


2 Salmon 2017.


8 In his accounts, Turner notes the date ‘15.9.22’ for the sale of these two paintings to ‘Courtauld’ (TFP, A1 290 A3, A4, B1 and B2 – which I was able to read through the Courtauld Fund dossier). I should like to thank Marguerite Lumley for making me aware of this fascinating document.


10 Lord Redesdale cited by House ed. 1994, p. 11.


15 PMTP, 1-11, press cuttings and letters of Alan Bowness, privately printed, 1934.


21 Blunt 1954, p. 10.

22 Salmon 2017, p. 19.

23 Salmon 2017, p. 33.

24 Salmon 2017, p. 38.


26 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

27 Salmon 2017, p. 46.


31 Whinney 1935.


34 The 27 works in question are those mentioned in the ‘List of works acquired from the Courtauld Fund’ (Blunt 1954, p. 3). As for the ‘papers connected with the formation of the collection’ consulted by Blunt, which doubtless included fascinating pieces of correspondence, but which are now untraced following the premature death of Courtauld’s daughter, Susan, it is possible that these too will emerge from the repository where they have been quietly awaiting for decades, their existence unsuspected by their owners, like the priceless account books and draft autobiography of the man whom Lord Samuel Courtauld, a Trustee of the National Gallery, had scornfully termed in 1943 ‘the modern French art rebel’.73

35 Barnaby Wright describes the painting as ‘Courtauld’s most expensive Cézanne purchase, which recently discovered document has revealed to be the Montagne Sainte-Victoire acquired in 1925 for £4,570’ (Blunt 1954, p. 10). It is difficult to see how this document relates to the discovery of a recently acquired work of which Courtauld had no inkling, and for which Blunt is giving the wrong name, Courbet’s Employee of the Courtauld Fund before even receiving an inventory (Blunt 1954, p. 3).

36 As for the ‘papers connected with the formation of the collection’ consulted by Blunt, which doubtless included fascinating pieces of correspondence, but which are now untraced following the premature death of Courtauld’s daughter, Susan, it is possible that these too will emerge from the repository where they have been quietly awaiting for decades, their existence unsuspected by their owners, like the priceless account books and draft autobiography of the man whom Lord Samuel Courtauld, a Trustee of the National Gallery, had scornfully termed in 1943 ‘the modern French art rebel’.73


40 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

41 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

42 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

43 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

44 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

45 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

46 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

47 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

48 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

49 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

50 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

51 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

52 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

53 Salmon 2017, p. 41.

54 Salmon 2017, p. 41.


60 Salmon 2017, p. 19.


63 Salmon 2017, p. 19.

64 Salmon 2017, p. 19.

65 Salmon 2017, p. 19.


70 Lord Redesdale cited by House ed. 1994, p. 11.


72 Blunt 1954, p. 4.

73 Blunt 1954, p. 4.


75 Blunt 1954, p. 3.


79 Salmon 2017, p. 56.

80 Salmon 2017, p. 56.

81 Salmon 2017, p. 56.
On 31 May 1924, the art dealer Percy Moore Turner wrote to the American collector Albert Barnes: 'My dear Barnes, you will perhaps have heard that I have recently purchased for the National Gallery of British art the great painting by Seurat 'La Baignade'. Between ourselves, I can tell you that I had to pay 330,000 francs for it. It is a great success in the Gallery, and I believe, he a lasting benefit to modern art, for I do feel that Seurat is a factor in the upmake of modern art approaching Cézanne, and as he died at the age of 32 and there is a consequent scarcity of his pictures, he can be called the Vermeer of the modern movement.'

Proud of having facilitated the acquisition of Bathers at Asnières (see fig. 24), Turner forgot to mention the patron on whose behalf he had acted. Samuel Courtauld was one of the people who clearly perceived the importance of Seurat for the 'modern movement'. Seurat and Cézanne are the artists best represented in the two collections Courtauld created. The thirteen works by Seurat include the first of the painter's large compositions, two landscapes, a large portrait, eight small panels and a drawing. Bathers was intended for the public collection, while Courtauld's private collection received The Channel at Grandville, Grand Fort-Philippe, The Bridge at Courbevoie, Young Woman Powdering Herself, Horses in the Water, The Angler, Boat by the Riverbank, Beach at Granville, Man painting a boat, Study for 'Le Chahut', Man in a Boat, Fisherman in a Moored Boat and a drawing, Female Nude (cat. nos. 16–63).

The most important deals were done in 1926, with the purchase of four Seurats, including the three major works in the private collection. Courtauld began collecting Seurat at a rapid rate made possible by the unusual presence of the numerous works shown in London that year, including Young Woman Powdering Herself and the Grandcamp, Port-en-Bresin and Granville landscapes, as well as the large painting The Models (fig. 54), shown at the Lefèvre Gallery. For painter whose patient technique of division of tone did not allow him to produce large numbers of paintings – unlike his Impressionist peers – this was an extraordinary group of paintings to arrive in London, and all available to the collector. Courtauld’s purchases were part of a moment of intense trade in Seurat’s works on the international market. As Turner had foreseen, his paintings were particularly sought after because they were rare and their availability limited. During his dozen years of activity, from the late 1870s to his death in 1891, Seurat painted seven large compositions, identified as compositions with figures: Bathers at Asnières (1884), A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte (1886), The Models (1886–88), Circus Sideshow (1888), Young Woman Powdering Herself (1889–90), Le Chahut (1890) and The Circus (1891). To these we can add around 40 easel paintings, mainly landscapes, 160 thumb box panels known as croquetons and over 500 drawings.3 In less than five years, from 1922 to 1926, six of Seurat’s seven large compositions changed hands and were bought by the most active collectors of French modern art. In February 1922, Hélène Kröller-Müller of Otterlo acquired Le Chahut (see fig. 91) for 32,000 francs at the Goetz sale.4 In August of the same year, John Quinn of New York arranged with Paul Signac to buy The Circus for 150,000 francs.5 In March 1924, Courtauld instructed Turner to buy Bathers from Félix Fénéon for 300,000 francs.6 Three months later, Frederic and Helen Birch Bartlett of Chicago bought A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte from Lucie and Edmond Cousturier for $20,000, around 365,000 francs. In June 1926 Albert Barnes of Merion bought The Models from Galerie Barbazanges for 1,875,000 francs.7 In the autumn of 1926 Courtauld bought Young Woman Powdering Herself (cat. 66), almost certainly for his wife, Elizabeth.8 In 1930 Georges Sidney, the last large composition still in France, left the private collection of the Bernheim-Jeunes as a joint purchase by the Reid & Lefèvre and Knoedler galleries. The painting’s exhibition in Glasgow was reported in the press.

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Seurat had become especially valuable – a price of £60,000 was quoted for Circus Sideshow.9 The painting was bought by the Courtauld's decision to buy Bathers and donate it to a major European gallery gave Seurat's painting institutional recognition and encouraged the appearance of his works on the international market. In the race for the large compositions, Seurat had become especially valuable – a price of £60,000 was quoted for his Grande Jatte, but it sanctioned his purchase in the eyes of the director of the institution to which he wanted to donate the painting.6

Several landscapes in the Grandcamp, Honfleur, Port-en-Bessin and Courteilles series, alongside engravings and Conté crayon drawings, were starting to emerge from French private collections. French dealers controlled the market because they were in direct contact with the supply sources. These included Félix Fémillon, who owned the largest collection (of over 240 works);1 the Seurat family, the former Neo-Impressionist and Symbolist circles around Paul Meuvis, Gustave Kahn, Octave Mirbeau, Alexandre and Thadée Nathanson, Paul Signac and the Belgian Vingtistes. All of them owned works, either inherited or given after the death of the artist, or bought at the time Blanche retrospective of 1899.2 After the war, these works were sold at auction;3 or consigned to Seurat's historic dealers, Bernheim-Jeune and Durlet, or to new ones, such as Barbazangeos, Jos Hessel or Ettore Bignou. The works were circulated through commercial relationships that the French had established with foreign partners: Bignou was associated with Reid & Lefèvre in London and Glasgow; Bernheim-Jeune with Turner in London and de Hauke in New York.4 Depending on the supply source and the clientele, some paintings were sold to collectors, such as Joseph Brunner and Knoedler in New York or Alfred Flechtheim and Alfred Gold in Berlin. Bigger dealers, such as Paul Rosenberg and Wildenstein, waited for Seurat's work to become sufficiently valuable for them to make major investments in stock and in organising retrospectives.9

The trade for Seurat's works was primarily turned towards the foreign market. In 1910 Knoedler's Paris director, George Davey, wrote to his superior in New York, ‘in France there are no buyers for Seurat, only sellers’.7 Seurat's works went constantly back and forth between the main centre of the art market. They were shown in Paris, New York and London and in smaller centres such as Chicago, Glasgow and Düsseldorf, finding their way into budding collections. Great Britain and the United States were the main endpoints. DW Fry in Scotland bought five works, including the important landscape Père Fort-Philippe from the Gravelines series.8 Chester Beatty acquired six works for his London collection, including Paysage de la Grande Jatte, La Rade de Grandcamp, The Lighthouse at Honfleur and Port-en-Bessin: le pont de l'île quai.9 Seurat were also present in smaller numbers in the collections of Victor Cazalet, Ivor Churchill, Kenneth Clark, CampbellDodson, William McInnes and Stanley Sykes.

Seurat's reception by British collectors owed much to the influence of the critic Roger Fry.10 Originally unimpressed by Seurat's art, Fry underwent a true conversion during the war years, when he frequented literary and artistic circles in Paris, notably around Edgar de Bergen, Charles Vildrac and Jacques Salomon. Returning from his travels in 1916, he wrote to Vanessa Bell: ‘It's odd how everyone takes the same step at the same moment. You know that De Bergen and I had given our interest in Seurat to the Bloomsbury Group. In an essay on the Keynes collection, Duncan Grant describes visiting the Tate Gallery with Courtauld at his request: ‘In the same room a big picture by Seurat bought with influence of Roger, batters must be the name, masterly and calm and different process from yours’.11 In 1926 Fry published his most important essay on Seurat,12 in which he analysed the artist's main paintings, which had just been revealed to the British public at two major exhibitions. In February 1916, at his French Gallery in Pall Mall, the dealer Henry Wallis presented the exhibition Great Masters of the French 19th Century. Jurors to Peaco, whose catalogue included 46 paintings.13 The exhibition was announced as a presentation of the finest works held by Paul Rosenberg, who had joined forces with Wallis for the occasion.14 In terms of the number and quality of the works on show, this was a major incursion into the London art market on the part of Rosenberg. He was one of the few French dealers capable of organising such an event. Guided by Wallis, the press hurried to cover the exhibition: ‘Braque's Plan de l'amour, Picasso's Femme assise and Seurat's Jeune femme se poudrant are probably the best pictures by these painters to have yet been shown in London’.15 A review appeared in the weekly The Sphere with, on its cover, four portraits chosen for the exhibition.
Roché and, at that time, was on a hunt for Seurats.37 Since 1919 Quinn had been advised by Henri-Pierre it was sold to the collector John Quinn for $5,200, or 65,000 painting then went into the Kélékian sale of January 1922, where before selling it to the antiques dealer Dikran Kélékian. The other works in her possession. He kept it for over twenty years the exhibition but it is a major painting. It shows the painter's, was the only painting by Seurat to feature in La Poudreuse
Woman Powdering Herself was added to a large landscape, Grey Weather, Grande Jatte, soon to be joined by the small version of The Models, View of Le Crotoy from Upstream and, most importantly, The Circus. But Quinn died shortly afterwards. The Circus, Young Woman Powdering Herself and the many Cubist paintings that he had collected went into his estate. The dealers became involved. It was said that The Circus would be bequeathed to the Louvre.38 Roché was discreetly manoeuvring on behalf of Paul Rosenberg and his American associate Félix Wildenstein to persuade the Quinn estate to sell them all the valuable paintings, such as the Seurats, and those whose value Rosenberg was seeking to maintain, such as the Picassos.39 In January 1922, after a period of patient persuasion, Roché finally obtained the desired sale from the estate. It was announced last evening that all of the 52 Pablo Picasso paintings in the collection, together with a small group by Georges Seurat, had been bought by Paul Rosenberg of Paris through Félix Wildenstein of this city.40 The press estimated the total price at over $80,000. The precise content of the lot of Seurats sold to Rosenberg and Wildenstein is unknown. It included at least Young Woman Powdering Herself and View of Le Crotoy from Upstream.41 Wildenstein kept Le Crotoy in New York but Young Woman Powdering Herself was soon sent to Paris, and from Paris to London. On 28 February Rosenberg undertook an insurance of 250,000 francs to send it to Wallis for the imminent exhibition.42 The painting was finally hung alongside some Quinn Picassos with which it had been seen before.

The model’s appearance in Young Woman Powdering Herself is intriguing, as are the relations between her forms and the objects around her. The press and critics were won over. In France the painting became an icon of the Purist movement. The first issue of L’Esprit nouveau, the review founded by Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, opens with a reproduction of Young Woman Powdering Herself alongside a manifesto promoting a ‘spirit of construction and synthesis, order and will in the visual arts.’ Fry was also won over, noting that, behind this ‘grotesque absurdité, Seurat ‘treats the subject with religious solemnity and carries it into a region of abstract beauty.’ Rosenberg and Wallis were hoping to sell the painting to Courtauld, who had come to see the exhibition. Wallis wrote to Rosenberg, ‘I quite appreciate what you say regarding the picture by Seurat, and I trust that on Mr. Courtauld’s return we shall be able to effect the sale of the picture.’ For the moment Courtauld was interested in the other works on show. He paid Rosenberg £4,500 for the portrait Madame Cézanne in Blue for his private collection. From the Courtauld Fund he bought Degas’ Portrait of Élaine Garaud for £5,750 and Van Gogh’s Long Grass with Butterflies for £1,500. In a letter of 19 May Wallis wrote to Rosenberg, ‘I have already written to the Tate Gallery, Mr. Courtauld, and Lord Ive Churchhill for settlements of their accounts, and now I can only wait until the cheques come in.’43 But Rosenberg was anxious about the absence of any news concerning the sale of Young Woman Powdering Herself. He wrote to Wallis on 25 May and again on 27 May, when he also sent him a pneumatic message. Wallis replied the following day, ‘It was only this morning that we were able to get into communication with Mr. Courtauld, and try as we would to get him to come to a favourable decision regarding the Seurat, we regret to say that he has finally decided not to purchase it. We are extremely sorry about this and we must do our best to find something else to interest him.’ Rosenberg then had the painting sent back to Paris.

A few days later a new exhibition opened in King Street, a stone’s throw from Pall Mall. The dealers Reid & Lesfere were launching their new business, with a pointed response to Rosenberg’s dazzling but overwhelming event. Their exhibition was much smaller, with only ten paintings and six drawings, but it was the first in Britain to focus solely on Seurat. It was organised around a masterpiece held for 30 years in the same collection. Count Harry Kessler, one of Seurat’s first foreign collectors, had just let go of his most important piece: Goodbye to my Seurat, Les Poseuses, which I have (alas!) sold to Scotland for a hundred thousand marks. For nearly thirty years I have enjoyed the serene charm of the picture’s delicate tints and masses, so natural in effect. I part from it as I would from an individual dear to me. I should not have agreed to sell it.’44

In March 1926 Courtauld was in Aix-en-Provence. A little later, he visited the King Street exhibition. On 5 May, comparing Bathers (see fig. 24) to The Models (fig. 34), he wrote to James Manson: ‘though not so strong nor carried so far [as Models], the colour pleases me better. – I find the design more harmonious and certainly more restful’ (fig. 56). It is possible that the Courtauld Fund trustees had contemplated buying The Models, which might have required the resale of Bathers, as had happened with some other works: ‘at the time of his magnificent gift … Mr. Courtauld wisely stipulated that any piece that was bought could be sold or exchanged if there was an opportunity by Rosenberg, by Cézanne, Manet, Toulouse-Lautrec and Seurat (fig. 55) Young Woman Powdering Herself (cat. 66), also known as La Poudreuse, was the only painting by Seurat to feature in the exhibition but it is a major painting. It shows the painter’s companion, Madeleine Knobloch. On Seurat’s death she claimed the exhibition but it is a major painting. It shows the painter’s companion, Madeleine Knobloch. On Seurat’s death she claimed the exhibition but it is a major painting. It shows the painter’s companion, Madeleine Knobloch. On Seurat’s death she claimed the exhibition but it is a major painting. It shows the painter’s companion, Madeleine Knobloch.
to acquire another that was more important or characteristic.52 Courtauld clearly did not regard The Models as superior to Bathers and his taste prevailed. The bathers of Asnières triumphed over the models in the Boulevard de Clichy studio. So The Models went back to French soil, not far from Vollard’s gallery from where Kessler had first carried them off in 1898.53 For two weeks, the dealer Barbazanges placed them on display for the Parisian public.54 But paintings of such importance do not remain on the market for long. It was bought by the collector Albert Barnes and left for Merion on 31 July.

Although Courtauld had not been seduced by The Models during their stay in London, he seems to have been taken with the works that Reid & Lefèvre had hung alongside them. In February 1926 the dealer sold to Courtauld The Channel at Gravelines, Grand Fort-Philippe (cat. 68) for £5,122, after which Courtauld lent it to the exhibition. At the end of the show, he bought another landscape, The Bridge at Courbevoie (cat. 65) for £2,850. His choice had fallen on a work portraying a quiet, sunny, winter atmosphere in cold colours.55 With Gravelines he had chosen a landscape with exceptional light and softer colours, reflecting the artist’s later style, which was particularly sought after.

A few months later these two acquisitions were supplemented by an unexpected purchase. Was it Courtauld’s personal taste, or that of his wife Elizabeth, or even the influence of Fry that led the collector to change his mind completely about Young Woman Powdering Herself? On 8 October the dealer Wallis wrote to Rosenberg: ‘we received your telegram about 6 o’clock on Friday evening, asking the name of the ship on which Mr. Courtauld sailed to New York. In reply we wired to you that he had left on the Olympic.’56 Rosenberg was clearly intending to arrange a meeting. There are no archival sources that can tell us what exactly happened after Wallis’s message. Rosenberg probably told Wildenstein that Courtauld was coming to New York; there was probably a meeting and negotiations over a price. For two days later, on 10 October, Wildenstein wrote to Rosenberg: ‘Please be so good as to send to Wallis in London the painting by Seraut, Young Woman Powdering Herself, which you have conditionally from us’.57 The painting, which Wildenstein had acquired when Quinn’s collection was sold, had therefore been, until then, only on consignment with Rosenberg, who had been tasked with selling it. The order to send it back to London signified that a sale had been made, in this case to Courtauld, who is known to have bought the painting in 1926,58 therefore certainly in late October. The purchase of Young Woman Powdering Herself was followed by that of another, smaller Seraut. A croqueton entitled The Angler (cat. 64) was bought from Knoedler in late November. The dealer’s correspondence states: ‘Mr. Courtauld wants to give the picture to his wife for a Christmas present … he does not like the frame … it is so necessary to show every bit of this little picture.’59 In the period 1925 to 1937, when he made his last pre-war purchase, Courtauld collected eight small-format works by Seurat. Often these were studies for larger compositions, such as Bathers and Le Chahut. Their price varied between £400 and £1,000 for the largest study for Le Chahut (cat. 67).60 These were not risky purchases in aesthetic terms but appealed to the collector. Their format meant they could easily be shown alongside larger works. Photographs of the interiors at 20 Portman Square show three panels, Man in a Boat, Study for ‘Le Chahut’ and Man Painting a Boat, above the chimney-piece on either side of Van Gogh’s Peach Trees in Blossom in the Etruscan Room that served as Courtauld’s study. A few of these small works were given to friends and family – his wife as a Christmas present; his niece Jeanne, to whom he bequeathed Man in a Boat; and Lady Aberconway, who received Fisherman in a Moored Boat, Horses in the Water and The Angler.61 These gifts to those close to him show that Courtauld wanted others to share his taste for Seraut.

Among the intense commercial activity around Seraut’s work that took place after the First World War, Courtauld held a special place. The exceptional flow of works to London gave him the opportunity to buy several of the painter’s large compositions and finest landscapes but Courtauld made a careful selection, choosing only those works he regarded as...
John Quinn to Henri-Pierre Roché, 3 August 1922,
The Courtauld Institute of Art is a research centre closely associated with contemporary art. The life of the institution is enhanced through dialogue with artists in the form of exhibitions at the Courtauld Gallery and the creation of works inspired by the collection. Examples of this are the relationships between Bridget Riley and Georges Seurat, between Jeff Wall and Édouard Manet and between Richard Serra and Paul Cézanne, revealing the crucial role of certain earlier works for these contemporary artists.

In 1959, four years after graduating from the Royal College of Art in London, Bridget Riley decided to make a copy of Seurat’s painting The Bridge at Courbevoie (fig. 58). At a time when she was still seeking her way, the study of the Post-Impressionist master and her understanding of his work on colour and perception encouraged her to move towards abstraction.

Twenty years later, in 1979, Jeff Wall reinterpreted Manet’s painting A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (cat. 9) in Picture for Women (fig. 59), after studying at the Courtauld Institute in the years 1970–73. As an exercise in quotation, this work immediately links Wall as a photography artist to the history of modern art and the monumental format of history painting. For him at that time, a reconstruction reacting to the pictorial tradition had to be critical and interrogate the relationship between photographer and viewer.

At the invitation of the Courtauld Gallery, in 2013 Richard Serra made twelve drawings, entitled ‘Courtauld Transparencies’ (fig. 60). The diversity and scope of the gallery’s collection of graphic art, from Dürer and Michelangelo to Seurat, illustrated the development of their techniques and reflected the evolving status and function of drawing. This encounter encouraged Serra to experiment with a new technique for inscribing form in space, in a combination of drawing, engraving and sculpture: ‘I am interested in the mechanization of the graphic procedure; I am not interested in the paint allusion gesture.’

These examples illustrate the continuous connection between artists and the great works of the past, and reveal the contemporary importance of those works and the power of the questions, challenges and renewals they stimulate. Dialogues of this kind have been important in the recent history of the Courtauld Institute, with exhibitions on Bridget Riley and Richard Serra.

Bridget Riley and Seurat

On the advice of Maurice de Sausmarez, who regarded The Bridge at Courbevoie (cat. 65) as an exemplary work by Seurat, in 1959 Bridget Riley made a copy of the painting, using a smaller reproduction found in a 1949 publication on Seurat, because ‘it helps not to be confronted with the overwhelming presence of an original.’

At this time, she was studying variations of light and shade, working on tonal values and pursuing her exploration of Seurat’s method in a series of pointillist paintings, including Vapour, 1970 (fig. 57) and Private collection.

ENCOUNTERS
BRIDGET RILEY, RICHARD SERRA AND JEFF WALL
ANGELINE SCHERF

There are great artists whom one venerates and admires, but to whom one does not turn for guidance. Georges Seurat, on the other hand, created a work that not only is extraordinarily beautiful, but can inspire.’

Bridget Riley, Vapour, 1970
Acrylic on linen, 91.5 x 90 cm
Private collection

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At this time, she was studying variations of light and shade, working on tonal values and pursuing her exploration of Seurat’s method in a series of pointillist paintings, including the copy of The Bridge at Courbevoie, followed by Pink Landscape (1960; private collection) painted in Siena. Studies of the master played a fundamental role in her artistic development, enabling her to understand the use of light in constructing form and forging her convictions concerning the meaning and significance of painting. Seeking to go beyond theoretical approaches, Riley experimented with Seurat’s technique in order better to understand his thought and vision. ‘It became clear that one’s first task as an artist is simply this: to create a way of working, to
discover ‘doing’ and to establish the terms upon which a creative dialogue could be sustained. In short, to start again. From Seurat I took the example of method rather than the method itself.’

On the basis of the skills and knowledge she had acquired and their liberating effects, Riley decided to adopt a strict formal framework that was to determine her art. It provided the basis for the structural grammar that became characteristic of her work, with a vocabulary of repeating, pure geometric forms, a palette of unmodulated colours and a balance between form and formlessness. These seemingly simple procedures gave rise to complex effects, playing on visual perception to create vibrations of light and a sense of movement and space.

In 2015, The Courtauld Gallery invited Riley to revisit this experience in an exhibition entitled Learning from Seurat, in which she selected seven key works that were emblematic of her move to abstraction to be shown alongside Seurat’s painting.

In both Manet’s painting and Wall’s photograph, a key function is given to the mirror, which modifies the space of the picture by revealing an area that is outside the frame. Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère shows a complex space that includes the bar and its reflection – the viewer looks at the barmaid who is standing in front of a mirror that reflects the room in front of her. On the right the painter has included a scene showing a couple, which is an impossible reflection that takes liberties with the representation of visually consistent space. Unlike Manet, Wall has placed both protagonists in front of the mirror, whose area exactly coincides with that of the image, and has photographed the reflection of the scene.

The power relationship between the male artist and the female model, implicit in Manet’s painting, is accentuated in Wall’s photograph by the presence of a woman who is staring strongly out as both subject and viewer of the scene, giving him the idea for the title. In his writings Wall has talked about the many interpretations of this picture, which he describes as a ‘lesson on the mechanics of eroticism’.

Richard Serra and Cézanne

Cézanne’s painting Still Life with Planter Cupid (cat. 40) was a revelation to the twenty-year-old Richard Serra, who afterwards constantly returned to this founding inspiration. The deconstruction of the perspective into different interrupted
areas behind the Cupid influenced Serra’s conceptions of forms and space. ‘Cézanne constructed that space, he invented that space.’ The Courtauld curator Barnaby Wright commented: the work remains a ‘purposefully awkward painting today, forcing us to think about the fundamental nature of what we are looking at.’

Cézanne’s forms convey a sense of weight and balance that Serra subsequently developed throughout his career in his approach to sculpture and drawing, emphasising the physical properties of materials and their placement in space: ‘I have always thought that if I could draw something I would have a structural comprehension of it … The shapes in paper drawings originate in a glimpse of a volume, a detail, an edge, a weight.’

In 2013, at the invitation of the Courtauld Gallery, Serra used the Courtauld’s graphic works. He was particularly struck by the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz is part of the series ‘Pictures of Magazines’, in which he photographs enlarged reconstructions of famous paintings. Muniz’s works include everyday materials such as magazine fragments, chocolate, pigments and modelling clay, referring to an idea of consumption that was already present in Manet’s work.

In 2010–11, following a visit to the exhibition on Cézanne’s construction of the pictorial space of the painting. As we have seen, whether through copying a work in the Courtauld collection or reinterpreting an iconic image in a different medium, contemporary artists maintain intense and diverse relationships with the Masters. For some the ‘encounter’ has been an important milestone in their careers, taking them into a new phase of their artistic development. In a present that is always changing, these examples highlight the resonance of an Institute that is open to research and to different understandings of works of art.

This exhibition also gave Serra an opportunity to study the Courtauld’s graphic works. He was particularly struck by Michielfango’s drawing Christ on the Cross (c. 1560–62), noting how the artist had emphasised the figure’s density by means of many traces of black chalk, rather than by a sinuous line. The ‘Transparencies’ series illustrates this influence and Serra’s concern to emphasise material density in his drawings, removing any distinction between figure and ground and using black ‘as the colour that can assert itself most completely as a material substance without external referent’.

From the outset Serra was interested in extending the traditional limits of drawing, which he studied in terms of both technique and the relationship to the viewer and space. ‘In Transparencies’ he explored the relationship of his graphic work to the exhibition space: ‘I did not want to accept architectural space as a limiting container. I wanted it to be understood as a site in which to establish and structure disjunctive, contradictory spaces.’

Other artists inspired by works in the Courtauld collection, either through copying or discovering new techniques, include Robert Longo and Vik Muniz, who both refer to Manet’s masterpiece.

Having consulted with the conservation department of the Courtauld Institute of Art to view an X-ray image of the painting, as Entitled (X-Ray of A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, 1882, after Manet) (fig. 61), Longo reveals a change to the barmaid’s pose. His use of the iconography of this painting intensifies its interrogation of the place of the woman, previously highlighted in Wall’s work.

A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, after Édouard Manet (fig. 62), by the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz is part of the series ‘Pictures of Magazines’, in which he photographs enlarged reconstructions of famous paintings. Muniz’s works include everyday materials such as magazine fragments, chocolate, pigments and modelling clay, referring to an idea of consumption that was already present in Manet’s work.

In 2011–12, following a visit to the exhibition on Cézanne’s Card Players at the Courtauld, Anthony Caro made three sculptures (see, for example, fig. 63) based on the painting’s composition. Life-size and standing on the floor, these works reinterpret Cézanne’s construction of the pictorial space of the painting. As we have seen, whether through copying a work in the Courtauld collection or reinterpreting an iconic image in a different medium, contemporary artists maintain intense and diverse relationships with the Masters. For some the ‘encounter’ has been an important milestone in their careers, taking them into a new phase of their artistic development.

In a present that is always changing, these examples highlight the resonance of an Institute that is open to research and to different understandings of works of art.

### Notes

1. advisable to refer Barnaby Wright and Kynaston McShine for their illuminating discussion of issues crucial to the study in the catalogues of their two exhibitions Bridget Riley: Learning From Sound and Richard Serra: Drawings for the Courtauld
2. Bridget Riley: ‘Seurat as Mentor’, in Hauptman ed. 2007, p. 188.

### Images


The works in this catalogue are grouped by artist and arranged in chronological order of the earliest work in that group, in order to provide a sense of the development of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism through the lens of Samuel Courtauld’s collection.

AUTHORS

AG  Alexandra Gerstein
BW  Barnaby Wright
KG  Katy Gottardo
KS  Karim Sitre
RG  Rosamund Garrett
RS  Rachel Sloan
This drawing relates to a group of works illustrating the satirical play Le Malade imaginaire (The Hypochondriac) by the French playwright Molière (1622–1673). It appears to illustrate the scene in which Doctor Purgon berates the patient Argan for not using the cure that he had provided. Daumier has deviated from the script, however, as the scene requires Purgon, Argan and a maid, rather than two doctors. In Daumier's caricature, the apparently bedridden patient swathes himself in a blanket up to his chin as if in a shroud, exposing only his face to the visiting doctor and his assistant. Propped up on excessively bolstered cushions and sporting a nightcap with a bow, the patient's impression of fragility instead conveys a sense of the ludicrous. The physicians are no less farcical: the doctor at his bedside raises one hand as if to silence his patient while making his learned pronouncement. Daumier's rendering of the doctor's haughty expression, with his raised brows, downturned mouth and heavy-lidded eyes looking down the bridge of his nose, captures the essence of the physician's self-important lecture. His assistant, meanwhile, squints through his glasses at the patient while holding an oversized syringe for administering an enema. Though Daumier has added the comic element of the myopic doctor wielding an instrument requiring delicacy and precision, he has retained the theatrical origins of the story through the presence of the draped curtains in the background and the lighting, evocative of the illuminated stage. Among Daumier's works illustrating Molière's play are two paintings, The Hypochondriac (Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia) and Dr Dapifére (Bakwin collection, New York), dating to 1860–63 and 1875 respectively. As Daumier did not routinely date his drawings, this sheet cannot be dated with any certainty, but may have been executed around that time.
Apprenticed to a bailiff in his youth, Daumier was exposed to the theatre of the court, an experience that evidently left its mark on the artist as lawyers inhabit an important place in his oeuvre. Here, the defendant in the dock stares at the barrister open-mouthed, as if amazed by the force of the lawyer’s rhetoric. Gripping the hand of his client, the lawyer fervently gestures with his free arm towards a sketchy but recognisable painting that hangs above the judges – Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime by Pierre-Paul Prud’hon (1758–1823). Prud’hon’s painting was originally commissioned in 1804 for the criminal courtroom of the Palais de Justice in Paris but, upon the restoration of the monarchy, was removed and replaced with a Crucifixion, which also features in Daumier’s courtroom compositions. By the time Daumier first saw Prud’hon’s renowned secular tribute to justice, the painting was permanently exhibited in the Louvre. Like Daumier’s schematic depiction of the painting, the judges in the drawing are merely alluded to, efficiently drawn using swift but deliberate pen lines. Grey wash has been exclusively used in the foreground, defining the shadows and contours of the defendant, his lawyer, and the edge of the table that supports the array of papers suggestive of the careful preparation needed before each case. The wash reinforces the relationship between the two figures as the primary focus of the drawing. The handling is used to great effect to accentuate the theatrical gestures: the fluttering robes, the barrister’s shaking arm and his vehement facial expression are rendered with a network of trembling lines that reflect the energy and tension in the courtroom. In the grave face and passionate gaze of the lawyer we see Daumier’s depiction of a pleading at its best.
From the outset of his career, Daumier was drawn to the mock-epic story of the idealistic knight Don Quixote, written by the seventeenth-century Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes. Over the course of 20 years, Daumier created 29 paintings and 41 drawings inspired by the story, the most prevalent subject matter in his oeuvre. In this painting, one of the largest in the series, Daumier has foregone a narrative or adventure-filled scene in favour of an imposing composition focusing on the two protagonists – Alonso Quijano, whose love of romance stories spurred him to revive the chivalry of old and pursue bold adventures as the knight-errant Don Quixote de la Mancha, and Sancho Panza, the practically-minded farmer who became his squire. The image is stripped to its bare essentials while retaining the tragic nobility, wit and pathos of the original tale. With one figure idealistic, brave and enterprising and the other anxiously concerned about his own security and comfort, the pair reflects a dualistic vision of the human psyche and tapped into the social unrest of the late nineteenth century. A renowned caricaturist, Daumier made clever use of the steeds to convey their masters’ character: the horse, Rocinante, appears as gaunt and noble as his rider while Sancho’s plump donkey looks exhausted, world-weary and resigned. Although the comical contrast between the tall, emaciated Don Quixote and his stout servant has its origins in Cervantes’s text, this image was largely shaped in the popular imagination by later prints and paintings, including this one.

The canvas displays evidence of Daumier’s early training as a lithographer: layers of dense, black lithographic crayon have been applied over the ground before the figures were outlined in paint and modelled with a combination of coloured washes and confident, rapid brushstrokes.
ÉDOUARD MANET
1832–1883
ÉDOUARD MANET

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LA TOILETTE c. 1860

Red chalk on laid paper, incised for transfer, 29 x 20.8 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Manet made the drawing representing La Toilette in preparation for the more elaborately worked etching. The outlines of the central figure in the drawing were incised, allowing the artist to transfer his design on to the surface of the etching plate. In certain places, Manet pressed so hard that his stylus cut through the bather’s contours, splitting the paper. The figure was transferred to the etching plate facing the same direction as the drawing but when printed the image was reversed. The model is probably Suzanne Leenhoff, who modelled frequently for the artist and would later marry him. She sits on a pouf with the indication of a basin at her feet while a loosely drawn servant in the background gathers up clothes. Manet captures a moment when, while bathing or drying herself, neither nude nor fully clothed, she catches the viewer’s eye, which causes her to clutch the fabric to her chest and flash a wary look. Manet’s use of red chalk – a once favoured drawing material that by the mid-nineteenth century had become more unusual – and his choice to tackle the time-honoured subject-matter of a bathing nude interrupted in her task reveal his engagement with his artistic predecessors. Unlike depictions of the biblical or mythological bathing figures of Bathsheba, Susanna or Diana, who traditionally avert their gaze, Manet’s figure looks directly out and reacts, emphasising the viewer’s intrusive presence and voyeurism.

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LA TOILETTE c. 1862

Etching, 28.4 x 22.4 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from The Leicester Galleries, London, August 1908; for £25; Courtauld Bequest, 1948
This large sketch relates to one of Manet’s most famous and controversial compositions, Le Bain (The Bath), later renamed Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe (Luncheon on the Grass, fig. 64). Rejected by the official Salon in 1863, it was hung that same year in the Salon des Refusés, a side exhibition that displayed works turned down by the jury. In his painting, Manet set out to rework traditional pastoral scenes such as Le Concert champêtre, held in the Louvre and then attributed to Giorgione (now given to the young Titian). The specific poses of his figures, however, are more directly inspired by the nymphs and river gods in The Judgement of Paris, an engraving designed by another Renaissance master, Raphael, in collaboration with the printmaker Marcantonio Raimondi.

When exhibited at the Salon des Refusés, the painting was met with shock and derision. The presence of two fully clothed men in contemporary dress alongside a naked woman disrupted any redeeming pretext of mythology or allegory. Her direct gaze, drawing viewers in, made it equally impossible to view the scene as a lyrical vision, unlike Titian’s idyllic female nudes presented as allegories of poetry, existing only in the poets’ imagination. Manet’s painting was decried as indecent, and even the female model was attacked as ugly. In addition, Manet had blurred the boundaries of academic ‘high’ art with the painting’s large format: his flagrant depiction of bohemianism was presented on the heroic scale of a history painting.

The status of this sketch and its relationship to the large painting now in Orsay have long been controversial. Exhibiting a bold, loose brushwork, it was originally thought to be preparatory for the final version, which underwent numerous alterations. It was later considered to be a replica executed by Manet for his friend Hippolyte Lejosne. A recent cleaning has, however, revealed several changes to the composition, thus precluding this possibility. It is most likely that it was painted at a critical moment during the long genesis of the Orsay painting, probably as an aide in plotting the composition. Having stayed for decades with the Lejosne family, the large sketch was offered to the National Gallery in 1925 but turned down. It was bought by Courtauld for his private collection a few years later. In its handling and treatment of the figures, it shows striking similarities with Manet’s Music in the Tuileries Gardens (see fig. 23), which made such a strong impression on Courtauld when it was exhibited in London in 1917.
This canvas represents one of Manet's most serious explorations of painting out of doors – the plein air Impressionism championed by his younger fellow artists and friends. It was executed during a summer visit to Claude Monet and his family in Argenteuil. A small, picturesque town located on the outskirts of Paris, Argenteuil had become a popular destination for people seeking to escape the city and, in the 1870s, had come alive with artistic activity. Monet settled there in 1871 and over the next few years Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, Eugène Boudin and Gustave Caillebotte all came to visit and work alongside him.

In this painting, Monet's wife Camille and son Jean pose for Manet on the banks of the river Seine. The artist has abandoned his usual sombre palette, adopting Monet's brighter colours and brisk, broken brushwork to depict the sun-filled landscape and the iridescent ripples on the water. He retained, however, his distinctive use of thick oil paint to lend fluidity and a jewel-like lustre to the surface. Acting as stand-ins for the viewer, his pensive figures contemplate the river, the site of both leisure and industry. The vertical masts of the elegant sailboats in the foreground echo the tall factory chimneys in the distance and their hulls mirror the low laundry barges moored on the opposite bank.
Manet initially planned this canvas as part of a larger work but became dissatisfied with the original composition and decided to divide it in two. The present canvas represents the right side of the painting, while the left side belongs to the Oskar Reinhart Collection in Winterthur, Switzerland. After cutting the canvas in half, Manet extensively reworked both sections of his former design to the point that each became an independent composition. Here, Manet has extended the right side and altered the background, adding both the orchestra and the dancer on the stage. The setting is the Brasserie de Reichshoffen on the Boulevard Rochechouart in Paris, one of the many new cafes emerging in the city at that time. In the foreground, a waitress grasps two glasses of beer in her left hand while serving a worker in a blue smock with her right. She does not look at her client but out of the picture frame, giving the impression that her mind is already on the next interaction. The fast pace demanded of the brasserie workers is in stark contrast with the leisure of her client. Casually at ease, he leans on the marble-top bar nonchalantly smoking his clay pipe and staring into the middle distance, lost in thought or distracted by entertainment on the left side of the stage. His glass is full— he will be there for a while. Surrounded by a faceless and anonymous bustling crowd, the two figures inhabit separate but abutting worlds. Manet's use of loose, rapid brushstrokes adeptly conveys the sense of movement, music and fleeting thought present in the scene, emphasising its ephemerality and the transitory nature of life in the new modern city.

The very first picture purchased by the Courtauld Fund, this painting was bought before Courtauld's gift to the nation was publicly announced, in January 1924. It was also the most expensive acquisition ever made by the Fund.
ÉDOUARD MANET

A BAR AT THE FOLIES-BERGÈRE 1882

Oil on canvas, 96 x 130 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

A Bar at the Folies-Bergère is Manet’s last major work, completed and first exhibited the year before he died. Manet chose to unveil his monumental, highly unusual and enigmatic painting of a glittering slice of modern Parisian life at the Salon of 1882. By this point, Manet was well known for his unconventional submissions to the Salon and he must have anticipated that A Bar would stand out starkly in that context of largely conventional academic painting. Everything about Manet’s painting seems designed to unsettle established artistic conventions, from his novel subject matter of a barmaid at one of Paris’s new palaces of entertainment, the Folies-Bergère, to its disconcerting composition full of ambiguous spatial and interpersonal relationships. The painting has perplexed viewers and inspired lively debate ever since its first public appearance.

The Folies-Bergère, a fixture of Paris’s nightlife from 1869, was a fashionable café-concert and music hall that figured frequently in contemporary literature: Guy de Maupassant, Joris-Karl Huysmans and the Goncourt brothers all referred to it in their books. Manet has highlighted the contemporaneity of his subject by emphasising such potent markers of modernity as the glittering battery of electric lights rendered as full moons on the pillars and bottles of imported Bass beer on the bar – the company’s distinctive label with its red triangle was the first ever logo to be trademarked. Furthermore, he seems to have populated his canvas with some of the Folies-Bergère’s actual patrons; the woman in white with yellow gloves, her elbows propped on the balcony, is thought to be Méry Laurent, a muse and patroness of artists and writers and the mistress of Stéphane Mallarmé, while to her right, gazing up at the acrobats through a pair of opera glasses, may sit the actress Jeanne Demarsy, whose portrait Jeanne: Spring (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles) was Manet’s other submission to the 1882 Salon.

Manet himself was a regular customer and made a number of quick preparatory sketches for the painting on the spot; however, he executed the final painting as well as a large oil sketch (fig. 65) in the studio. A barmaid from the Folies-Bergère named Suzon served as his model, standing behind a re-creation of one of the balcony-level bars laden with bottles. However, as Manet’s friend Georges Jeanniot observed, ‘though painting from life, [he] was in no way copying nature’.

PROVENANCE
Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from the Thannhauser Gallery, Lucerne, through Percy Moore Turner, March 1926, for $110,000 (approximately £23,800) with an additional £1,500 as commission; Courtauld Gift, 1934

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A comparison of the finished painting and the study demonstrates how far Manet had distanced himself from ‘copying nature’. In the study, the barmaid stands with her hands clasped and her body angled to the right and slightly forward; the bowler-hatted customer with whom she interacts can be seen in reflection in the mirror behind her. The pictorial space is logical and coherent and the relationship between the barmaid and her reflection, as well as the customer, is easily understood. Although painted with Manet’s customary verve, little about the study diverges sharply from other contemporary representations of the café-concert by artists such as Gustave Caillebotte and Jean-Louis Forain. In the final work, however, the barmaid – now monumental in scale, with a straight-cut fringe and severe Grecian nose in place of the piled curls and pert, snub nose of her predecessor – and her reflection dominate the scene. This new-found monumentality and frontality were at least in part a nod to the conditions of the painting’s original exhibition setting. At the Salon, pictures had always been hung frame to frame and stacked floor to ceiling: the inclusion of such a large foreground figure, facing outward and placed within a shallow space, was one of Manet’s unfallding strategies for making sure his painting stood out from the mass of its peers. Numerous details difficult to explain today would have been even more challenging for the painting’s original audience. Why has the lavish array of bottles and the luxurious crystal dish of mandarins on the bar been painted with greater finesse and, arguably, greater substance than the more broadly handled figure of the barmaid? For that matter, why are the bottles arranged so haphazardly; why is champagne sitting out at room temperature rather than on ice; why are none of the bottles open, and why are there no glasses visible, ready to be filled? What exactly does the barmaid’s expression convey – melancholy, alienation, bright-eyed coyness, weariness or mere absence? And why does she appear to have become unmoored from her own reflection, which seems to have taken on a life of its own?

This jarring spatial dislocation stands at the heart of the picture’s mystery. As has long been noted, the reflections cannot be logically understood. The barmaid is too far separated from her reflection, and that of her customer is closer to her than would be possible in reality, assuming that Manet intended the viewer to stand in the customer’s place. Even the
reflections of the bottles on the bar do not align properly, and they are on the 'wrong' edge of the bar. So unsettling was this disjunction, remarked upon by numerous Salon critics, that at least one cartoonist produced a 'corrected' version of the composition (fig. 66). Numerous studies have attempted to justify the internal space of the painting, arguing for example that Manet constructed the scene from an 'off-axis' viewpoint to the right of the frame that creates the illusion of a conversation between two figures who are in fact looking in different directions. X-rays reveal endless reworking of the composition at all stages, directly on the canvas, which was typical of Manet's method, and these extensive revisions likely further chipped away at any obvious grounding of the scene in observed reality. The disjunction between the barmaid and her reflection deepens upon extended examination: although dressed in the same uniform, they could easily be two different people. The reflection is plumper than the wasp-waisted woman facing the viewer and the cant of her body suggests that she is listening attentively to the words of her gentleman customer. The barmaid who gazes out at – or past – us stands straighter, and little in her inscrutable expression suggests that she is taking part in any sort of exchange. She seems instead lost in thought, alienated from her surroundings. The ambiguous portrayal of the barmaid has often been said to reflect the status of the barmaids at the Folies-Bergère and other café-concerts: although they were ostensibly there to sell drinks, there was a tacit understanding that they themselves were potentially available to clients. Although it is possible to read her outspread arms with hands bent back at the wrist and propped on the edge of the bar as one of openness and invitation, it has also been noted that the same pose was frequently used in the nineteenth century both for images of the Virgin Mary (particularly paintings of the Immaculate Conception) as well as for Marianne, the allegorical personification of the French Republic. Whether Manet intended his use of this pose for the barmaid as an ironic commentary on contemporary morality remains, however, tantalisingly unclear. The many ambiguities and deliberate distortions that characterise the picture seem above all intended to encapsulate the anxieties expressed by contemporary commentators about modern urban society, in which centuries-old certainties were being swept away at an unprecedented pace. The challenges the painting presents to social conventions are inextricably bound up with its confrontation, and upending, of traditional aesthetic values.

Although it excited lively debate among its original viewers at the Salon, A Bar at the Folies-Bergère remained unsold during the brief remainder of Manet's life. Its first owner was his friend the composer Emmanuel Chabrier, who purchased it from the artist's estate sale. By the time Samuel Courtauld purchased it in 1926, it had passed through collections in Germany, Hungary and Switzerland, and was returning to Britain having earlier figured in the ground-breaking 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' exhibition organised in London at the Grafton Galleries in 1908 by Roger Fry. One of the two most expensive paintings Courtauld ever purchased (the other being La Loge, cat. 24), it has since become the most recognisable icon of the collection. Courtauld's contemporaries commented on the painting's power to stir up 'the artifice inherent in picture-making.' (see fig. 59) explores, much as Manet did, the artifice inherent in picture-making, as well as upending, of traditional aesthetic values. 

NOTES
3 For a detailed study of the presence of contemporary prostitution among female employees of bars and brothels during this period, particularly in relation to the bar painting, see Kate Clayton, Prostitution in Ecofriendly Art, Los Angeles, 2003, pp. 135–46.
The Dutch born artist Constantin Guys began his career as a member of the first generation of illustrators employed by newspapers, documenting wars and political events for broadsheets and magazines including The Illustrated London News and Punch. His work enabled him to travel widely across Europe and beyond, and he witnessed the revolutions of 1848 and the Crimean War. In the late 1850s, Guys settled in Paris, where his sketches of city life, from high society to street workers, earned him great acclaim. In this work, Guys captures the glamour of a momentary encounter. Two fashionable young women take a wintertime stroll, with the long shadows at their feet suggesting that it may be late afternoon. Guys used tentative pencil markings to plan the initial placement of the figures on the sheet before using increasingly pigmented washes of black ink to indicate volume. Discreet areas of watercolour, such as touches of flesh tones on the young women's faces and a little blue for their bonnets and ribbons, enliven the work. The final outlining of the figures with the point of a brush clarifies the details while reaffirming the drawing's graphic qualities. In a manner akin to nineteenth-century fashion plates, Guys describes the women's voluminous coats, paying particular attention to their matching accessories of ribboned bonnets and elegant muffs. His careful observation extends to registering the fineness of the skirt in motion, resulting in the flash of a slender ankle. Guys disliked staged compositions, preferring to capture fleeting moments, in the manner of a reporter. It is this quality that led the eminent French poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire to declare Guys the quintessential 'painter of modern life'.
Degas’s female sitter appears serene yet, according to the English painter Walter Sickert, who knew Degas and later bought the painting, this work was painted around the time of the siege of Paris by the Prussians in 1871. Sickert recalled that ‘Degas said the lady was a sort of loose woman [une sorte de cocotte] who modelled for him and whom he paid with a hunk of meat ‘which she fell upon, so hungry was she, and devoured raw’. Her sombre dress and the tranquillity of the scene belied what must have been her desperation at a moment when the city was suffering from a severe shortage of food.

Instead of conventionally lighting the woman to show off her features, Degas backlit his sitter by staging her before a luminous window. The light dematerialised the figure, leaving only her silhouette visible and recreating the visual effect of walking into a dark room with a strong point of light before our eyes have time to adjust to their surroundings.

This painting is technically one of the artist’s most experimental works. He employed the essence technique, in which the paint is drained of its oil and thinned with turpentine, resulting in a medium with a matt effect that can be handled like watercolour. Degas thus explores the interchangeability of drawing and painting, creating fluid outlines with thinned black paint and matt white highlights. The work also exhibits evidence of smudging and dabbing, possibly with a cloth, in the way that an artist might work with watercolour to soften areas of the composition. Many of Degas’s less formally finished works, such as this one, remained in his studio through his career, but this work is signed, indicating it was intended to be sold or given as a gift.
EDGAR DEGAS
TWO DANCERS ON A STAGE 1874

Oil on canvas, 61.5 x 46 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Degas frequently employed unconventional viewpoints. Here, the viewer looks down on two ballerinas as if from a box beside the stage. The costumes of the dancers indicate that they may be performing the Ballet des Roses, an interlude during Mozart’s opera Don Giovanni at the Paris Opéra. The dancers were dressed as roses and their tutus featured decorations resembling sepals, the green leaf-like elements that extend from the base of a flower, seen here falling from the waistband of the dancer on the right.

Ballet held an enduring fascination for Degas throughout his career. It allowed him to explore both spontaneous and controlled movements of the human figure. Here, the central figure is en pointe, a position requiring considerable technical skill that one can sustain only for an instant before having to shift balance. Degas subtly indicates the strain in her calf muscle and carefully notes the bulge in the toe of her reinforced shoe. This single point, which bears the dancer’s entire weight, becomes the fulcrum of the composition. The dancer to the right is in fourth position, with her arms in demi-seconde. A third dancer is just visible towards the back of the stage; her presence makes it unclear whether this is a performance or a rehearsal.

Degas often evokes the artificiality of ballet, including the mechanics of the theatre; the lines on the stage may represent tracks for the sliding scenery flats depicting foliage. The artist has used free dabs of colour to replicate the broad decorations required for theatre design while modelling the dancers, brightly lit from the footlights, with comparative delicacy.

This painting was shown in London in November 1874, only a few months after its completion, in an exhibition organised by the Parisian dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. Upon seeing the work, a British art critic praised Degas’s ‘ingenuity and skill’ but felt that ‘his ballerinas exemplify rather the prose than the poetry of motion’. It nevertheless found an enthusiastic purchaser in the collector Henry Hill, who was based in Brighton, where the painting remained for the next fifteen years.
Degas's fascination with the movement of the human body extended to the rituals of the everyday, with some of his finest works focusing on the intimate and ordinary moments of women bathing, grooming and dressing. The spectacle of women trying on hats captured Degas’s imagination and he frequently returned to the theme. This elegant woman, seen from a high viewpoint, may be a customer in a milliner’s shop. She raises both arms, perhaps to adjust her hair, which fashion dictated should be pinned up, or, more likely, to place a toque (a type of small, brimless hat) upon her head. Bold charcoal lines and deep shading against luminous pastel render the sinuous curves of her gently twisting torso as she sits before the loosely described mirror. The drawing shows Degas rethinking his initial ideas, as various alterations are immediately visible: a second piece of paper was added to the top of the sheet to extend the figure; the position of her left elbow has been moved; and the curve of her back and right arm have been redrawn. Degas’s summary description of the mirror contrasts with his careful observation of the woman’s skirt, with its dramatically lit folds and precise hatching. Though this pastel may have begun as a preparatory study for Degas’s painting Woman Trying on a Hat (fig. 67), it was likely reworked into its present state either during or after the canvas was completed.  

PROVENANCE
Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from the Leicester Galleries, London, perhaps in 1923, for £237; Courtauld Bequest, 1948
In 1886, at the last Impressionist exhibition, Degas exhibited a remarkable group of pastels of intimate views of women bathing, reaching for a sponge or towel, stepping in or out of their bath, dressing, brushing and combing their hair. Though contemporary opinion was divided, with some critics and fellow artists criticising their obscenity, crudeness and lack of aesthetic value, these pastels were equally praised for their new and realistic representation of the female nude. Degas admitted to having represented women in a voyeuristic manner, observing them in the most private moments as if through a keyhole. Some critics particularly objected to the fact that most of these works appeared to represent prostitutes and their attendants. However, these extraordinary pastels were greatly appreciated by collectors then and since, and certainly were one of Degas’s most fertile artistic obsessions.

Female bathers first appeared in Degas’s monotypes around 1880 (fig. 68). The flexibility and malleability of this medium suited his hunger for unbridled experimentation, and allowed him to study and synthesise the body and its movements that influenced the way he drew. He reworked some of these monotypes, heightening them in pastel and radically transforming the original image: some of these compositions inspired new, fully worked pastels. Between the early 1880s and the end of his career he produced roughly 200 pastels of female bathers. In sheer numbers, the subject occupies the second largest place in his oeuvre, preceded only by dance. The present work was probably executed in the last years of the nineteenth century. In this lavish pastel, dominated by a warm coral-orange tonality, the female figure is depicted alone, seated on a low upholstered chair by a deep bathtub, with her feet resting on a rug. She is drying the left side of her body; her head, partially hidden by the raised arm, is bent while she carefully performs her action.
Liberated from the formal canon of classical academic training, Degas often represented women in unusually contorted positions. In these close-up views of faceless, naked bodies in undistinguished, contemporary interiors with simple elements such as a bath or tub, the artist aspired to represent the modern female nude. The sensual submissiveness of these figures, which recalls Old Master representations of Susanna and the Elders or Bathsheba at her Bath, has also led to a feminist reading of this body of work, which views these figures as depicted purely for the pleasure of the (male) observer.

As in many of Degas’s late pastels of female nudes, the composition of After the Bath is the result of several studies made over the course of an extended period of contemplation and observation, allowing us to witness the gestation of the original idea. Nine related drawings, mostly in charcoal, and a counterproof exist and were included with the present pastel in the sales of the contents of his studio that were organised after his death. Four other variants in pastel elaborate on the composition with only minor changes. Degas also explored the woman’s pose in a small wax sculpture, part of the group found in his studio at his death (fig. 69).

Unsigned and undated, After the Bath displays an extraordinarily wide variety of rich, warm hues, typical of his late pastels, and also exhibits the...
unfinished quality of those works. In the upper right corner, for example, there is very little medium and the surface of the paper is laid bare; a sketchy design in charcoal indicates the shape of an object left incomplete. The pastel is mostly applied in individual strokes over a preparatory drawing in charcoal, and is used without rubbing even when it serves to modulate a tone. To define the figure’s skin, Degas added rhythmic lines of white, green, red and purple over a pink flesh tone. The application is instinctive and spontaneous, especially in the areas covered by webs of parallel lines, cross-hatching, squiggles and energetic zigzags. With the exception of the figure’s right arm and the white towel, there is very little blending.

Towards the end of his life, pastel became Degas’s preferred medium as he found it easier to work with than oil; he seems to have favoured ready-made pastel sticks, in particular those produced by Henri Roché. According to Paul-André Lemoisne’s catalogue raisonné, after 1886 Degas produced 602 pictures, of which only 85 were oil paintings and the remainder were pastels. The role played by this medium neatly distinguishes him from most of his Impressionist colleagues, who often took up pastel at some point during their careers, but for whom this powdery medium never held so central a place in their oeuvre. If the choice of pastel was a natural one in his later years, owing to its ease of handling and quickness of execution, Degas’s use of tracing paper as its main support is less intuitive and is only explained by his characteristically experimental working process. In the 1880s, the artist began to use tracing paper frequently to transfer a design, mainly from one support to another, recommending the practice to his fellow artists: ‘Make a drawing, begin it again, trace it, begin it again, and re-trace it’. The transparency of tracing paper allowed him easily to copy a figure or composition from one sheet to another, reversing it whenever necessary, in a drive to achieve the desired posture or layout. For some of his large compositions, often more than half-a-dozen preparatory drawings on tracing paper exist, all minutely different from one another. The figure in this drawing is most likely traced from another sheet.

In Degas’s late pastels, the tracing-paper support is often altered by trimming or extending with added strips of paper, visible for example along the lower edge of the present work. Because these extensions were mostly added after he had begun work on the main section of the drawing, the overlapping areas where the sheets join are clearly visible, and Degas made little effort to mask them before they were laid down on a more solid support. The extremely smooth surface of tracing paper is not naturally suited to pastel’s powdery, volatile nature and traditionally artists preferred a more textured paper to which the fine particles of pastel would adhere. In order to prevent the loss of medium, Degas applied multiple layers of fixative. This also prevented the merging of hues, while sealing each preceding stage of the drawing. Indeed, Walter Sickert recalled seeing a pastel by Degas which he had ‘fixed and refined … with a ball syringe’. The practice of fixing each layer of pastel created marvellous drifts of colours and graphic eruptions, as well as areas of impasto-like appearance, which have become the defining feature of Degas’s unparalleled pastel technique and offer powerful visual proof of his unique drive for experimentation.

Notes
4 After the Bath was included in the first sale, where it fetched 25,000 francs (Paris, 6 May 1918, lot 281).
6 See Kendall 1996, p. 96. Roché’s heirs are continuing the tradition, producing pastel sticks following the original Henri Roché recipe (www.lamaisondupastel.com).
7 Lemoisne 1946–49.
9 Sitwell ed. 1947, p. 192. The repeated use of fixative and the exposure to light have often been the cause of the discoloration of the tracing paper.
EDGAR DEGAS

DANCER LOOKING AT THE SOLE OF HER RIGHT FOOT

Created in wax, 1890s; cast in bronze, c. 1920, 45.5 x 25 x 19 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

One of Degas’s regular models, Pauline, described the difficulty of holding this pose. Balanced on her left leg, the figure reaches back with her right arm to grasp her foot, tilting her head down to look at it—an action that twists her body into a dynamic position. For more than a decade, the artist returned to this pose, apparently never satisfied he had captured it, reworking it in sculpture as well as in oil and pastel, the two- and three-dimensional works informing each other. Degas modelled countless clay and wax figures in the privacy of his studio but he only ever exhibited one sculpture during his lifetime, Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen (1878–81; National Gallery of Art, Washington), at the Sixth Impressionist exhibition in Paris in 1881. He also never agreed to have his work cast in bronze despite his friends’ encouragement. Dancer Looking at the Sole of her Right Foot is one of the very few pieces he cast in plaster, traditionally an intermediary stage before the creation of a bronze. Contemporaries who visited his studio admired his work in sculpture. Renoir declared Degas, rather than Rodin, France’s greatest living sculptor. After Degas’s death, about 150 clay and wax figures were found in his studio. Of these, his heirs selected 73 for casting in bronze. They contracted the Parisian foundry A.A. Hébrard, known for the high quality of its bronzes, to cast 22 bronzes of each sculpture. The foundry chose the technique of lost wax casting for this because it results in bronzes whose surfaces are as faithful as possible to the originals. However, since the wax originals are usually destroyed during this process, Hébrard, led by the master founder Albino Palazzolo, devised a complex method that allowed them to retain Degas’s precious works. They did this by making a wax duplicate of each figure, which was then used to cast a bronze. This bronze in turn became the model from which the final pieces were cast. This unusually complex project of indirect casting from Degas’s figures both preserved the originals and created a series of beautiful sculptures whose surfaces retain the immediacy of his studio practice, such as traces of his fingerprints and tools and even the vestiges of the found materials he used to add bulk or texture, such as bits of cork or cord.
CAMILLE PISSARRO
1830–1903
Painted from a footbridge spanning the tracks, *Lordship Lane Station* shows a train leaving a station on the Crystal Palace High Level Railway, a line opened in 1865 to serve the rapidly expanding south London suburbs springing up around the relocated Crystal Palace, a popular tourist attraction. Although Pissarro was ostensibly inspired by Turner’s celebrated *Rain, Steam and Speed: The Great Western Railway*, which he had seen at the National Gallery, his rendering of the train and its surroundings – the first Impressionist railway painting, predating Monet’s views of the Gare Saint-Lazare by six years – lacks the powerful dynamism of Turner’s painting. His diminutive train, chugging steadily through a landscape in the process of transformation from countryside to built-up suburb, appears domesticated, even toy-like. Puffs of steam from the engine merge with the overcast sky; the remaining trees have been walled in by a fence at left. Despite these markers of urbanisation, the scene is curiously devoid of human presence. Pissarro had originally included a man mowing the grass on the slope at right, but subsequently painted him out.

Pissarro had arrived in London with his family at the end of 1870, fleeing the Franco-Prussian War, and settled in the south London suburb of Norwood. Although he was one of a number of French artists who sought refuge in London, he distinguished himself from his fellow countrymen with his focus on outlying areas of the city rather than well-known landmarks. He had already explored the industrialisation of the French landscape in 1867 in a series of views of Pontoise, outside Paris, that did not shy away from depicting the factories invading a previously rural area. This experience primed him to tackle what was then highly unconventional subject matter; British painters would not turn their attention to London’s suburbs until the emergence of the Camden Town school some 30 years later.
Having devoted most of the previous decade to rural subjects, in the autumn of 1883 Pissarro undertook a sustained campaign of urban views in Rouen, where he stayed for three months at the invitation of the pastry chef and collector Eugène Murer. Eschewing the picturesque medieval buildings in the old city (which would attract Monet’s attention a decade later), he focused on the modern, industrial aspect of the city. Place Lafayette is one of the thirteen paintings that he completed during his stay. Pissarro set up his canvas overlooking the busy place, near his hotel and beside the Seine. The composition is organised around the strong diagonal of the river and the bank of the Île Lacroix opposite, lined with barges and bristling with factory chimneys. The basilica of Notre-Dame de Bonsecours perches atop the hills in the distance, its spire echoing the verticals of the smokestacks, the masts of the barges and the lampposts in the foreground and middle ground. In contrast to most of the paintings produced during this stay, which seem strangely depopulated, the junction bustles with human activity; however, the small figures are scarcely differentiated from their surroundings and appear almost to melt into the rest of the scene. Blue-grey dominates the palette, from the shadow in the foreground to the lighter band of the river cutting across the canvas to the sky and hills in the distance. Pissarro’s style had by this point undergone significant changes from that of Lordship Lane Station (cat. 16). Place Lafayette is constructed with small dots and dabs of paint which make the surface appear to vibrate with colour and sunlight. Two years later, under the influence of Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, Pissarro would begin to experiment with pointillism; Place Lafayette suggests that his interests were already leading him in this direction.
CLAUDÉ MONET
1840–1926
When Monet moved to Argenteuil at the end of 1871, the town bore visible scars from the Franco-Prussian War, nowhere more so than in the destruction of both of its bridges, which had effectively severed its road and rail links with Paris. By the time he began painting *Argenteuil, the Bridge under Repair*, in the early spring of 1872, major rebuilding works were already well underway.

The bridge depicted here is the road bridge, nearing completion within its casing of wooden scaffolding. A muted palette of blues, greys and browns conjures a leaden sky and a hazy atmosphere made hazier still by the smoke emitted by the steamboat at right. The sky and water are laid in with broad strokes of liquid paint; the contrast with the complex, vibrant handling of *Autumn Effect at Argenteuil* (cat. 19), painted nearly only eighteen months later, is marked. The subtle colour harmonies and the treatment of the elaborate grid of scaffolding covering the bridge—the latter a highly unusual, pointedly un-picturesque, and explicitly modern subject for landscape painting at the time—both evoke comparison with James Abbott McNeill Whistler’s paintings of the old Battersea Bridge and the construction of the new Westminster Bridge of the early 1860s (fig. 70). Monet may have encountered Whistler’s work when he fled to London during the war, or possibly earlier, when Whistler exhibited in Paris.

Treating as it does a shattering recent event, this painting eludes easy interpretation. Some critics have read it as a positive image of France’s rapid renewal following the war, but the stillness and the subdued tonality do not convey energy or optimism, the invisibility of any workers, who might have animated the scene, reinforces this sense of stasis. Instead, the disjuncture between the subject and Monet’s treatment of it creates a sense of ironic distance; this sombre scene seems to question, rather than celebrate, officially promoted notions of France’s recovery.
In December of 1871, following his return from self-imposed exile to London during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, Monet settled in Argenteuil with his wife and son; he would live there until 1879. This riverside town north-east of Paris held a number of attractions for Monet: since the advent of the railway, it was within easy reach of the city, yet the cost of living was considerably lower. As a formerly rural small town in the process of being transformed into a modern industrial suburb as well as a centre of recreational boating, it was not a traditional site for landscape painting, but it offered a rich and unconventional array of subject matter for a painter interested in exploring a new kind of landscape.

*Autumn Effect at Argenteuil* shows the town in the distance, looking upstream along a side branch (the so-called ‘petit bras’) of the Seine between two banks of trees ablaze with autumn foliage; the band of blue running below the buildings represents the main channel of the river.

The unusual vantage point – above the middle of the channel, with the horizon at the midpoint of the composition, in direct contravention of academic practice – suggests that Monet worked from his newly built studio boat, a practice he had adopted from the Barbizon painter Charles Daubigny. Argenteuil itself is treated in a summary fashion that gives rise to ambiguities; the tower just right of centre is the spire of Argenteuil’s church, but, as John House notes, without local knowledge this form might just as easily be read as a factory chimney, which radically changes the experience of the picture. However, as the title (apparently the artist’s own) suggests, the true subject of the painting is less the depiction of a specific location and more the capturing of a particular coincidence of light, colour and atmosphere. Here, in contrast to his earlier work of the 1870s, he abandoned traditional chiaroscuro modelling, working from dark tones to light, in favour of building up the composition entirely from bright, clear colours. The trees, which initially appear a glowing orange, are in fact composed of a dense web of pinks and yellows along with orange, the bold contrast between blue and orange in the sky and trees echoed in the surface of the river and its reflection of the scene. The brushstrokes show great variety, corresponding to the many different textures and effects Monet aimed to capture: broad, smooth strokes form the river in the foreground, broken by short dabs that suggest the rippling of the...
Autumn Effect at Argenteuil occupies a notable place in the fortunes of Impressionism both in Paris and in London. It may have found a purchaser soon after its completion, and featured in the second Impressionist exhibition in 1876. Paul Durand-Ruel had acquired it by 1882, and exhibited it three times in London between 1882 and 1884, in the first exhibitions explicitly devoted to Impressionism in Britain, where it attracted considerable praise; an anonymous critic noted, ‘Claude Monet is a painter of what may be called ordinary landscape; but he manages to see it in a fresh way, and he is not afraid of strongly marked, almost violent colour …. His ‘Petit Bras de la Seine à Argenteuil’ (no. 16) is one of the finest and most luminous examples of his work.’ By the time Samuel Courtauld acquired it in 1924, the painting had crossed the Channel and the Atlantic numerous times and had gone in and out of Durand-Ruel’s hands on several occasions, a key piece in the dealer’s efforts to expand his gallery’s reach beyond Paris.

Quite apart from its innovative facture, Autumn Effect at Argenteuil represents a working method that would come to define Monet’s mature practice: that of painting in pairs or series. It forms one half of a pair of paintings Monet undertook in the autumn of 1873 that depict the same location from near identical viewpoints but to very different effect. The other half of the pair, Autumn on the Seine, Argenteuil (fig. 71), shows the same scene on an overcast day and is notably more subdued in mood, palette and brushwork; it appears to owe more to the example of predecessors such as Daubigny and Corot than does the bolder and more dynamic Courtauld painting. Monet had begun producing such pairs of landscapes, seen from roughly similar viewpoints but in different weathers or times of day, in the 1860s, but the practice came into its own during his years at Argenteuil and seems to presage the great series of the 1890s and beyond. This exploration of a single site from different points of view, or through repetitions of the same view, has also been linked to the Japanese landscape prints in which he evinced a keen interest.

Notes

1 House 2004, p. 82.
3 Spate and Honey 1960, p. 21.
5 Unsigned review, The Standard, 25 April 1883.
In 1877 Monet obtained special permission to paint in the Gare Saint- Lazare. He produced twelve views of the station, train shed and yard of widely varying degrees of finish, seven of which were included in the Third Impressionist exhibition that year. The present painting is one of the sketchier of these views; although it is difficult to determine whether it was included in the exhibition, we know that during this period Monet did not shy away from exhibiting and selling less finished canvases.

Trains and stations were icons of modernity in contemporary art and literature. While Monet had included trains in a number of earlier paintings of the 1870s, the Gare Saint-Lazare paintings represent his most sustained engagement with the theme. The familiarity of the subject may have attracted him; this was the station through which he arrived in Paris from Argenteuil, where he lived at the time.

The glass and steel station roof frames the composition and provides a clear, bold structure, but the treatment of both the locomotive and the crowd on the platform is summary in the extreme. The primary focus of the painting is the play of light through the smoke and steam emitted by the stationary trains. Surviving graphite sketches (Musée Marmottan, Paris) demonstrate that Monet carefully planned the composition, down to the arrangement of the patches of smoke; he even worked out in advance that he should not paint the roof at upper right and instead allow the white ground of the canvas to show through the cloud of steam. Although the weather is cloudy and the overall effect of the painting is of subdued colour, pigment analysis has shown that, in order to achieve this range of greys, Monet mixed in almost all the colours on his palette, including reds and mauves. While the final result feels informal, even rough, the painting process itself was surprisingly complex.
Between 1878 and 1882, for the only extended period in his career, Monet concentrated on still lifes. He was likely motivated in part by financial concerns: opulent flower paintings found a ready market at this time than did his landscapes. The present work is one of 21 floral still lifes he undertook during this time, and contrasts notably with the few paintings of cultivated cut flowers he produced in the 1860s, which adhere more closely to the conventions established for the genre by eighteenth-century painters such as Chardin. The lush bouquet of pink and white mallows – a common wildflower – billows out of a green ceramic vase resting on a table which seems partly to dissolve into an indeterminate background, rendered in overlapping webs of sparkling colour. The slightly off-centre placement of the vase and the unusually high viewpoint make the tabletop and the vase appear to tilt, somewhat disconcertingly, to the left. The blossoms and foliage are rendered in thick, short dabs of paint that, rather than defining their forms, convey a raw, unfiltered impression, very much in keeping with Monet’s interest in vision as the pure sensation of light and colour. However, the heavily worked surface also hints at the difficulties Monet experienced in resolving the painting, which he alluded to in his letters to his dealer Paul Durand-Ruel in 1882. Indeed, he kept the painting in his studio until close to the end of his life, only signing and selling it around 1920. The very stylistic qualities that might have limited its appeal to buyers in the 1880s – the rough surface, the rapid, almost crude paint application and the lack of formal definition – made it attractive to twentieth-century taste, and it is worth noting that it was the first painting by Monet to enter Courtauld’s collection.
Claude Monet made two extended trips to the Mediterranean in the 1880s, staying in Bordighera and Menton in the early months of 1884, and Antibes in the spring of 1888. Both artistic and commercial concerns underpinned his travels: he was eager to experience scenery different from the familiar landscapes of northern France, and was likely also motivated by the coast’s growing popularity as a tourist destination. The present painting depicts a wind-battered pine tree growing on the Cap d’Antibes, looking southwest across the Golfe Juan to the mountain range of the Esterel. The composition, with its slightly off-centre tree seen in silhouette, reflects Monet’s interest in Japanese art; he was an avid collector of Japanese prints and often drew upon his knowledge of them to help him grapple with new landscapes.

On his first Mediterranean sojourn Monet had needed time to acclimatise to the strong light and hot colour of his surroundings, lamenting that he ‘would need a palette of diamonds and jewels’ to capture the effect of sunlight striking the sea and shore. As Antibes demonstrates, he found a solution to this challenge by both heightening his colours and skilfully managing colour contrasts, setting blues and greens against sharp accents of pink and orange. True to his increasing inclination for working in series, he devoted at least seven canvases to the motif of pines on the shore, working in pairs or trios in a manner that has been likened to the rhyme scheme of a sonnet; this painting has a pendant of near identical dimensions and composition (now in a private collection).

Antibes is likely one of ten canvases depicting the environs of the town exhibited in June 1888, shortly after Monet’s return to Paris, at the dealers Boussod & Valadon, then run by Theo van Gogh. Although Theo’s brother Vincent did not see the show himself, his friend and fellow artist J.P. Russell described it to him in detail in a letter, criticising a painting that is probably this one for its lack of structure but praising its colour.
PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR

SPRING, CHATOU c. 1873

Oil on canvas, 59.6 x 73.7 cm

Private collection

Chatou was a small riverside town about ten miles west of Paris that from the middle of the nineteenth century gained popularity with city-dwellers as a destination for weekend outings. In the early 1870s it also became a favourite painting locale for Renoir and the other artists who would soon group themselves under the banner of Impressionism, playing an important role in the development of a suburban, distinctly modern form of landscape painting.

Although this painting has always been known as Spring, Chatou, no specific feature links it to the area, save perhaps for the patch of river glimpsed through a gap in the trees at upper left; the minute fleck of white paint visible within may represent a sailboat. It is, at first glance, a randomly chosen view of a landscape primarily remarkable for its ordinariness. However, this apparently informal view is in fact carefully structured. Renoir used the placement of the saplings to guide the viewer’s eye around the lyrically painted meadow, through the foreground and into the break in the screen of trees beyond. The tiny figure provides a sense of scale and depth, as does the tree beside it, added very late.

Renoir seems to have taken his cue from Camille Corot, who had preceded him and his contemporaries in making such modest scenery an acceptable subject for landscape painting. However, his brushwork is more vigorous and varied than that of Corot, and his use of colour is both subtler and more vivid, particularly in his rendering of the nuances of the sunlit vegetation. This brightening of his palette signals his imminent shift toward the intense, vibrant colour that came to characterize Impressionism. When the collector Michael Sadler saw this work at The Independent Gallery in 1923, he wrote to Courtauld that it was ‘superb in quality … and the very spirit of spring. I hate not being able to take it.’ Courtauld evidently came to cherish it and chose it as a subject for a poem in his Pictures into Verse (1947).
Among the works shown by Renoir at the first Impressionist group exhibition in 1874 was a painting of an elegantly dressed couple seated in a theatre box, matter-of-factly entitled *La Loge* (*The Theatre Box*). The models were Renoir’s brother Edmond and a professional model named Nini Lopez, nicknamed ‘gueule de raie’ (fish face), with whom Renoir frequently worked between 1874 and 1880 and who features, amongst many other appearances, in the central group in *The Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* (1877, Musée d’Orsay, Paris). In an exhibition notable for attracting critical derision, *La Loge*, remarkably, did not become a target for scorn, although a survey of contemporary reviews reveals that critics were baffled as to how to interpret the couple – or, more specifically, the woman. Was she a respectable married woman, a fashionable high-society figure, or a grasping, empty-headed demi-mondaine? The then unconventional subject matter and the way Renoir deliberately blurred social boundaries, particularly through the inherently unstable and fluid lens of fashion, frustrated attempts at a straightforward reading of the scene.

*La Loge* is, above all, a dazzling example of Renoir’s virtuosity as a painter. The bold blacks of Edmond’s evening dress and Nini’s fashionable striped demi-toilette are interwoven with the subtle rendering of white silk gauze and lace, and of pink-tinted flesh under a veil of powder and luminous pearls, shaded with nuances of blue, green and yellow and offset by the reds and pinks of her lips and the flowers on her bodice and hair. The brushwork is delicate and fluent; forms are rendered without crisp contours and the flowers on the model’s bodice are suggested with a minimum of short, dashing brushstrokes. Only the model’s face is executed with a degree of detail and fineness of modelling that may recall Renoir’s roots as a porcelain painter. X-rays show that Renoir made very few alterations to the composition as he worked, apart from painting out a hat initially given to the female model and minor changes to the position of the man’s arm. In 1874, the theatre box – and indeed, scenes of the theatre in general – was a decidedly unconventional subject for a painting, although it was a fixture of contemporary urban life, a popular background for fashion plates, and a common motif in satire, both verbal and visual. Numerous writers and cartoonists used the *lodge* to poke fun at the foibles of fashion and as shorthand for amorous intrigue. *La Loge’s* composition hints at...
these satirical antecedents, appearing to nod to Paul Gavarni’s 1845 cartoon *A Lioness in her Box* (fig. 72), although Renoir defused Gavarni’s cutting irony (his ‘lioness’ is past her prime and her companion’s eye has clearly been captured by a more attractive face) by making his model young and pretty. Devoting such an ambitious painting to a modern and apparently frivolous subject was a daring move in a period when the traditional academic hierarchy of genres still held sway. It is worth noting that, the same year Renoir painted and exhibited *La Loge*, Eva Gonzalès’s similarly audacious (and even larger) *A Box at the Théâtre des Italiens* (fig. 73) was rejected by the Salon jury. Both works seem to answer Baudelaire’s exhortation to the ‘painter of modern life’ to look upon the world with unprejudiced eyes and to focus on the new and the ephemeral, not least in the form of fashion and its potential to obscure previously fixed and explicit social boundaries. Nini, a model of humble background whose unfortunate nickname suggests that she did not conform to contemporary canons of beauty, wears dress and jewellery that would normally be the province of a wealthy married woman; she is heavily made up, in a period when make-up was beginning to gain acceptance and respectability in the context of evening dress but still retained a strong whiff of disrepute.\(^{3}\)

The nature of her relationship to her male companion, as made evident by the range of critical reactions, is ambiguous at best. This ambiguity is heightened by the way he gazes not at her or the stage but upward, toward another box, while she appears to have been posed to receive passively the gazes of the audience, and by extension, the viewer. The impossibility of the viewpoint, which would require us to be hovering in mid air directly in front of the box, underscores the artificiality of the scene and the fact that we are looking at a work painted in the studio. Yet, for all its overt modernity, *La Loge*’s composition and subject – a beautiful woman being presented for the admiration of the viewer – can be seen as a modern response to the sumptuous theme explored in Titian’s *Woman at her Toilet* (c. 1514–15, Musée du Louvre, Paris) and the first art historians to study the painting drew comparisons with the work of Rubens and Velázquez.\(^{4}\)

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3 Paul Gavarni (Guillaume Sulpice Chevalier) *Une lionne dans sa loge* (A Lioness in her Box), from Le Diable à Paris, Paris, 1845–46 Private collection

4 La Loge’s composition and subject – a beautiful woman being presented for the admiration of the viewer – can be seen as a modern response to the sumptuous theme explored in Titian’s *Woman at her Toilet* (c. 1514–15, Musée du Louvre, Paris) and the first art historians to study the painting drew comparisons with the work of Rubens and Velázquez.
La Loge proved to be the first of Renoir’s six paintings on the theme of the theatre box, a theme which was quickly taken up by other Impressionists, notably Mary Cassatt and Edgar Degas. However, Renoir initially struggled to sell it. Shortly after the Impressionist exhibition, he deposited La Loge with Paul Durand-Ruel, who included it in an exhibition of the Society of French Artists in London in November that same year. However, Durand-Ruel did not purchase it and Renoir, apparently in need of ready cash, sold it to a minor dealer, père Martin, in 1875 or 1876 at a fraction of the price he had asked at the exhibition. (In 1875 he sold at auction a smaller version of the composition, probably a replica, now in a private collection.) Durand-Ruel eventually bought the painting decades later, in 1899, from the collector Louis Flornoy, and Courtauld purchased it from his gallery in 1925 through Percy Moore Turner. Along with Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, it was the most expensive work Courtauld ever acquired. He cherished this and other early works by Renoir, admiring ‘the power which Renoir possessed at one period of conveying quietly but very firmly the solid structure beneath a tender and evanescent surface. No other impressionist did this, yet none ever rendered the subtle charm of surfaces, the colour of atmosphere, or the beauties of texture, with so sensitive and rich a brush as he…. For my part, I feel that before 1880 he reached his highest summit, and was already conveying the essence of what he strove for later without sacrificing those rare gifts of visual sensibility which constitute his personal outstanding charm.’

Courtauld devoted a poem to La Loge in his book of poetry, Pictures into Verse, published the year of his death. One may also surmise that Samuel and Elizabeth Courtauld’s long association with the fashionable world of opera and music may have given their enjoyment of this work an added dimension.

Notes
1 There is some disagreement about Nini’s identity but she is generally understood to have been the single model for a large and varied number of paintings Renoir produced during this period: see John House, Modernity in Microcosm: Renoir’s Loges in Context’, in Vegelin van Claerbergen and Wright eds. 2008, p. 32.
4 See Moore-Grady 1993, pp. 41-48; and Damé 1993.
5 Courtauld 1947 p. 62.

Eva Gonzalès
A Box at the Théâtre des Italiens, 1874
Oil on canvas, 97.7 x 130 cm
Musée d’Orsay, Paris
In the 1870s Renoir painted frequently along the Seine to the west of Paris and *The Skiff* probably dates from this period. Although it was sold in 1899 under the title *The Seine at Asnières*, the location is more likely to be Chatou (a centre of recreational boating, especially rowing) than Asnières (an industrial suburb immediately bordering Paris). This identification is reinforced by a related painting made around the same time, *Oarsmen at Chatou* (National Gallery of Art, Washington).

This sunny, tranquil scene of suburban leisure—note the various boats, fashionably dressed rowers, smart new villa and railway bridge in the background—with its sparkling palette and shimmering light, in many ways epitomizes Impressionist painting. The two women in the skiff might have touched off associations in contemporary viewers with sexual intrigue among riverside pleasure-seekers, a common trope in literature (notably Zola’s 1869 novel *Thérèse Raquin* and Guy de Maupassant’s 1881 short story “La Femme de Paul”), but, characteristically, Renoir offers no hint of anything untoward, or even of any discernible narrative, in this serene image.

Renoir achieved this effect of overall shimmering light through remarkably varied brushwork that conveys a wide range of surfaces and textures—the rippling water, the reeds in the foreground, and the soft clouds of foliage in the background. The colour scheme hinges upon the contrast between the blue and green of water and foliage and the bold yellows and oranges of the boat. Technical analysis has shown that Renoir used a very limited range of pigments, few of which are mixed, and completely eschewed black; even the streamers on the left-hand rower’s hat are composed from a mixture of different colours.
Ambroise Vollard (1866–1939) was the most notable contemporary art dealer of his generation, best known today for having given Cézanne, Picasso and Matisse their first solo exhibitions. He first met Renoir around 1894, shortly after opening his gallery; by 1902 he was one of his principal dealers.

Vollard commissioned numerous portraits of himself from the artists he represented, including Picasso, Rouault, Cézanne and Bonnard. Picasso wryly observed that ‘the most beautiful woman who ever lived never had her portrait painted, drawn or engraved more often than Vollard.’ Renoir alone painted five portraits of him; the present work is the third, made during Vollard’s visit to Renoir’s home in Cagnes. It is an idealised depiction, glossing over Vollard’s hulking stature, coarse saturnine features and the mixture of shrewdness and inscrutability that so suited him to his chosen trade. Instead, the painter portrayed Vollard as a connoisseur, thus inscribing him in a type of portraiture with its roots in the Renaissance.

Seated at a table against a warm red and ochre background, his elbows propped up next to pieces of blue-and-white ceramic, Vollard examines a plaster statuette of a crouching female nude by Aristide Maillol, another artist in his stable. Vollard had commissioned Maillol to execute a portrait bust of Renoir around this time, and the inclusion of one of his sculptures may allude to this. More generally, both artists at this date shared an interest in a timeless, monumental classicism conveyed here both by the sculpture and by Renoir’s treatment of the figure of Vollard himself.

According to a will drawn up in 1911, Vollard initially planned to bequeath this portrait to the Musée du Petit Palais, but changed his mind and sold it to Samuel Courtauld after hearing that Courtauld’s collection was to go to the National Gallery. Whether he ever learned that the portrait went instead to the newly established Courtauld Institute of Art is unrecorded.
One of the first two modern French paintings to enter the Courtauld collection, this painting is also one of the last Renoir made. In many ways it encapsulates the major shifts in style and subject matter that Renoir’s art had undergone over the course of a career of nearly six decades. From the 1880s he began to turn his back upon the modern, urban subjects and overriding concern with capturing fleeting effects that characterised Impressionism and sought more timeless themes, ultimately concentrating on the female figure, both nude and clothed, treated in a classicising manner that looked back to the great exponents of figure painting such as Titian and Rubens and also shared common ground with the work of contemporaries such as Aristide Maillol. One of the recurring subjects of his final years was images of women engaged in simple tasks – dressing, arranging their hair, playing music or simply sitting still. These monumental, inexpressive, passive figures have often been cited as reflective of Renoir’s fiercely reactionary views of women as creatures of nature, simple and purely physical beings who existed outside the exclusively male province of the intellect.

Woman Tying her Shoe is typical of Renoir’s late work in terms of both subject matter and technique. The figure, with her lavish curves, dominates her summarily rendered surroundings, including the implausibly tiny chair on which she sits. The background is rendered in loose swirls of warm colour, with pink, red and orange foremost, echoing the tones of the model’s rosy flesh and red hair; her petticoat is rendered in skeins of white paint while finer brushstrokes delineate her skin. In contrast to his Impressionist works such as The Skiff (cat. 25), Renoir no longer used blue to create shadows and had returned to using true black and grey.
Born in Paris to English parents, Sisley left the capital for the suburbs in 1871 and initially settled ten miles west of the city, in Louveciennes. The move marked a turning point for Sisley, who had previously explored the subtle tonalities and darker tones associated with the Barbizon School of painters. After settling in Louveciennes, Sisley increasingly adopted the colour palette, broken brushwork and treatment of light that came to embody Impressionist painting. Sisley painted many views of and around Louveciennes in the 1870s, while his friends and fellow artists Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro worked in the surrounding area.

In this view, a light dusting of snow covers an unpaved road leading into the village with wooded hills in the background. Summally painted figures—local people going about their business—offer a sense of scale while adding life to the scene. Sisley’s textural variation skilfully renders the effects of light on different surfaces on a cloudy winter’s day. The trees framing the right of the composition are strongly backlit, eliminating their surface details. They are described in fluid strokes of dark paint, which contrast with the short, dry brushstrokes used to paint the grassy verge on the left, thrown into relief by the low sun. Broadly painted blankets of snow on the rooftops reflect the luminous winter light. Although this painting was rapidly executed, it is carefully balanced in composition, texture and palette. Sisley has used a ground subtly tinted with ochre and umber; visible through the thin paint layers, it offers a warm tone to contrast with the snow and the blue hills on the horizon.

Painting the seasons held a special appeal for Sisley and he painted the same view in summer (fig. 74). There is, however, no evidence Sisley intended the two works to be seen as a pair.
Alfred Sisley

Boats on the Seine c. 1877

Oil on canvas, laid on panel, 37.2 x 44.5 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Sisley was one of the Impressionists most dedicated to painting outdoors, in front of the motif. He probably painted this view in Billancourt, a commercial and recreational stretch of waterway at the south-west edge of Paris. The port supplied local industries, many of which provided laundering and ironing services for the nearby capital. In the foreground, loosely painted figures unload timber from a river barge while a passenger ferry passes nearby.

However, it is the atmospheric effects of the weather that take precedence. Sisley has devoted two thirds of the canvas to cloud formations over the river Seine. Through an animated application of paint in short dashes, streaks and crescents, he evokes a sunny, breezy day with patches of light breaking through the low cumulus clouds above the gentle chop of the water. The ephemerality of the changing conditions is accentuated by the immediacy of his handling. Sisley rapidly applied fresh paint into fresh paint, leaving no time for previous applications to dry. In fact the present work, including his signature, was evidently largely completed in one sitting. It has a sketchier, less formally finished appearance than Sisley’s other works from the 1870s. The presence of his signature, however, suggests that this was deliberate and that he considered the work completed.

Sisley received his early training in the studio of the academic painter Charles Gleyre and forged a bond there with his fellow students Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Frédéric Bazille. Sisley exhibited with them in the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874 and his enduring fascination with capturing transient effects of light and the changing seasons ensured he remained a significant representative of the group’s ideals.

This painting is the last Impressionist work acquired by Courtauld, purchased the year of his death. Correspondence with the dealer reveals that the painting had been hanging in his house for a while before its acquisition. Courtauld often asked that paintings he was considering for purchase be placed in his home on consignment so he could live with them and determine if they rewarded the repeated viewing and deep engagement he sought.
EUGÈNE BOUDIN
1824–1898
EUGÈNE BOUDIN

THE BEACH AT TROUVILLE 1875

Oil on panel, 12.5 x 24.5 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Boudin began visiting Trouville, a fashionable resort on the Normandy coast a few miles west of his hometown of Honfleur, in 1861 or 1862, and his reputation rests largely on his paintings of its beach and that of the neighbouring town of Deauville. These works are not pure landscapes, but rather a genre he pioneered – modern-life beach scenes that capture both the fleeting effects of Normandy’s changeable light and atmosphere and contemporary dress and mores. As he remarked to his friend Ferdinand Martin, ‘The peasants have their favoured painters … but the bourgeois who walk on the jetty towards the sunset, don’t they have the right to be fixed on canvas, to be brought out into the light?’

Boudin was a passionate believer in working out of doors and is often considered a precursor to Impressionism, although his larger canvases were worked up in his studio. This small panel painting, however, with its loose handling and informal composition, was likely painted on the spot. The seemingly random disposition of the clusters of figures across the beach is typical of Boudin’s work and reinforces the sense of a spontaneous momentary impression. Despite the apparent speed of execution, the technique is surprisingly complex. Boudin first applied two thin layers of blue paint and allowed them to dry before quickly painting the figures wet in wet (without allowing the initial paint layer to dry before adding subsequent brushstrokes). The sky was added last, with small scratches in the wet paint revealing the blue underpainting, which only fleetingly evokes the sea at left. The muted palette of blues and greys is characteristic of Boudin’s work in the 1870s. Despite the painting’s sketchiness, it is signed and dated, which suggests that Boudin considered it a finished work; indeed, there was a demand among collectors for such pochades and he often dashed them off to order.

PROVENANCE
Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from M. Knoedler & Co., London, July 1926, for £50; Courtauld Gift, 1932
In the last decade of his life, Boudin abandoned the dispassionately observed scenes of fashionable holidaymakers that had defined his career up to that point in favour of panoramic views, almost empty of human figures, of the beaches of Trouville and Deauville. The figures in this painting – local fishermen with horses and cart at left, and bourgeois visitors strolling along the water’s edge – are indicated with great economy, as are a handful of buildings in the distance. The work’s principal subject is the sky, which occupies nearly three-quarters of the canvas, and the play of light over the vast expanse of sand and clouds, cementing Boudin’s fame as, in the words of the painter Camille Corot, the ‘king of skies’.

Although Boudin was an important inspiration to Monet, with whom he had previously worked side by side, his own painting shows little sign of the younger artist’s influence. His brushwork is crisper and more graphic and he painted the sky more broadly and thinly, here allowing the brown priming of the canvas to show through in patches to represent shadows within the scudding clouds. The painting is organised around the contrasts of blue sky and sea, yellow sand and white clouds, with minimal touches of green and red to lend animation to the scene. Despite its apparent freshness, close examination shows that the sky was extensively reworked, with areas of scraping or rubbing that were subsequently repainted. This reworking was probably done later, away from the motif. The existence of a very similar painting of the same view, with the same dimensions and only minor differences of detail (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen), also suggests that this canvas as well as its pair may have been wholly painted in the studio.

PROVENANCE
Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from Wildenstein & Co., London, July 1936, for £600; Courtauld Bequest, 1948.
PAUL CÉZANNE
1839–1906
At several points during the 1870s, Cézanne worked closely with Camille Pissarro; the paintings they did side by side show both artists already testing the limits of Impressionism and beginning to formulate new ways of engaging with landscape. Cézanne probably began L’Étang des Sœurs, Osny, during one such session. Although traditionally dated to 1877, on the basis of the recollections of Pissarro’s son Lucien, recent research suggests that it was probably made earlier, around 1875, given its similarities with Pissarro’s Small Bridge, Pontoise (fig. 75), which shows a view of the same park.

Depicting a woodland pond with a path running along its edge, probably in the grounds of a château, this canvas was painted primarily with a palette knife, an implement more commonly used for mixing paint than applying it. The paint is laid down in distinct blocks, creating a dense, textured surface; the more thinly and delicately painted areas, notably the tree trunks, were painted with the edge of the blade. The sky is visible only in tiny patches through the thick foliage; the bright sunlight falling on the bronze-green surface of the pond is suggested instead by the use of yellow-green paint for the foliage of the trees immediately bordering it. The bold diagonal sweeps of the knife, reinforced by the curve of the trunk in the foreground, draw the viewer’s eye across the canvas and deeper into the centre of the clearing.

Painting with the palette knife had an important recent precedent in French art: Gustave Courbet had been the first to make regular use of it in his landscapes, and it carried iconoclastic connotations. Cézanne himself had first experimented sporadically with the palette knife in the 1860s; his return to it around 1875, in Pissarro’s company, allowed him to test out a new way of painting that favoured surface texture and rhythm over traditional notions of drawing and precise contours.
The watercolours by Cézanne in Samuel Courtauld’s collection cover most of the chronological span of the artist’s most sustained engagement with the medium; this sheet is generally considered the earliest. Its subject, however, has long eluded exact identification. The low, ramshackle building partly obscured by dense vegetation has been variously characterised as a cottage, a door in a garden wall, a shed and an outhouse. Whatever the case, this motif is unique in Cézanne’s oeuvre and its site has not yet been discovered, although it is likely to have been situated on the Cézanne family estate of the Jas de Bouffan in Aix-en-Provence.

The uncertainty over the identity of the subject is underpinned by Cézanne’s ambiguous handling of spatial recession; it is unclear which areas of the structure are meant to recede and which are parallel to the picture plane. The use of diagonal hatching to indicate projection or recession is also inconsistent, as is made clear in an infrared reflectogram that reveals the graphite underdrawing in those areas most heavily touched with watercolour. In some areas, vigorous hatching projects forms into strong relief, as with the vine to the right of the door; in others, it serves to flatten forms, such as the section of wall at left. The hatching and the relatively broad and even application of watercolour seem instead intended to create a unified, firmly structured two-dimensional plane rather than an illusionistic rendering of the motif.

Cézanne’s use of colour here is rather restrained; it is largely limited to viridian green and blue-grey (of varying strengths), with some yellow ochre to render shadows as well as the planks of the wooden door. For the most part, the watercolour accentuates the design, but in some instances it takes on a life of its own, especially in the vivid touches of green in the foreground. The even distribution of the watercolour is consistent with Cézanne’s style around 1880, when he was definitively abandoning Impressionism and striking out in a new direction that favoured the construction of what he famously termed ‘a harmony parallel to nature’ rather than attempting to capture a subjective impression of his surroundings.
This work is one of four closely related paintings Cézanne probably made in the summer of 1882 while staying with his patron Victor Chocquet on the farm in Hattenville, Normandy, that Chocquet’s wife had inherited in March of the same year. All four paintings, which appear to show the same location, remained in Chocquet’s collection for the rest of his life.

Although Farm in Normandy is relatively small and unevenly finished, the composition has a monumental, highly structured quality. The well-defined lines of the trunks and branches at left, echoed by the rhythmic placement of the trunks in the background, act as a foundation over which is laid the trees’ lush foliage. This is formed of discrete blocks of subtly varied shades of green composed of narrow parallel brushstrokes, which suggest the texture of breeze-ruffled leaves without describing them in detail. Cézanne used a similar technique in Tall Trees at the Jas de Bouffan (cat. 35). A few touches of red are placed, without naturalistic justification, on some of the trunks and branches; they provide points of contrast with the overall cool colour scheme and draw together the different planes of the picture.

Several areas of the picture appear unfinished. The grass is painted in thin strokes that allow areas of bare canvas to show through; it is unclear whether Cézanne meant these patches to signify sun-dappled areas or whether he intended to paint over them at a later point. What appear to be the crossed trunks of two saplings at right are partly painted out, as if Cézanne intended to erase them. The question of finish in Cézanne’s work is always complex, and he is known to have abandoned many canvases before they were entirely resolved. In the present case, we do not know whether he considered the painting finished and sold it to Chocquet or whether he simply left it behind when he departed from Hattenville.
Pauil Cézanne

TALL TREES AT THE
JAS DE BOUFFAN c. 1883

Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 81 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

The Jas de Bouffan was an estate owned by the painter’s father, the wealthy banker Louis-Auguste Cézanne, located around a mile and a half west of the centre of Aix-en-Provence. From 1866 until it was sold in 1899, Paul Cézanne painted numerous views of the house and grounds. There he found the tranquillity he needed to work, both in the studio he created on the top floor of the house and throughout the gardens.

This canvas exemplifies Cézanne’s technique during that period. He used a cream-coloured primer, which shows through in places, enhancing the luminosity of the work. He then blocked in the essential planes of colour, using thin, translucent layers of paint, before working up the canvas to various degrees with thicker applications of paint. His vibrant colour palette, which carefully balances warm and cool colours, is electrified by accents of strongly pigmented paint, like the daubs of red and yellow on the bark of the trees. Sequences of fast, rhythmic strokes in parallel, a signature of Cézanne’s technique at the time, form the foliage. These marks, which create a shimmering effect and add textural variety to the painting’s surface, are particularly appropriate for rendering the rustling of the leaves in the strong Provençal wind and the dazzling light of southern France. Touches of light green and pale yellow indicate the sunshine filtering through the boughs, culminating in a pool of light on the grass. The blurry indication of fields beyond the treeline, on which our eyes are not permitted to focus, appears to replicate the flicker of a heat haze. Loose suggestions of dwellings beyond harmoniously integrate humanity’s presence within the landscape. Although Cézanne is perhaps best known for his pictures of the Montagne Sainte-Victoire, he painted more pictures of trees of the present kind than he did of that famous motif.
When he began painting this canvas in the mid-1880s, Cézanne had been a regular visitor to L’Estaque, a village on the Mediterranean coast fifteen miles south of his native Aix-en-Provence, for two decades. He often rented a small house there, staying for several months at a time. The surrounding hills offered stunning viewpoints, including this one of tall pines framing a cluster of red rooftops and the limpid sea and sky beyond. On the distant horizon is silhouetted the Château d’If, a fortress built on a small island in the bay of Marseille that famously served as the setting for Alexandre Dumas’s The Count of Monte-Cristo (1844).

View of L’Estaque is one in a series of six landscapes executed between 1883 and 1885 that play on the contrast of the warm orange roofs against the blue sea, which occupies an unusually large portion of the composition. The roofs are treated with methodical brushstrokes that follow the lines of the architecture, while the surrounding vegetation is rendered with a looser array of modulated greens to suggest the shimmer of light on the pine needles. It was famously in L’Estaque that Cézanne, confronted by the blazing sun reflecting off the water, realised that colour could be harnessed to render the full spectrum of light; as he wrote to Pissarro in 1876, ‘the sunlight here is so intense that it seems to me that objects are silhouetted not only in black and white, but also in blue, red, brown and violet. I may be mistaken, but this seems to me to be the opposite of modelling.’

The present composition is remarkable for its vertical format, which is relatively unusual in Cézanne’s oeuvre. In contrast to his expansive horizontal landscapes, this format fosters a novel tautness and monumentality, accentuated by the tall pines that bridge the lower and upper planes of the composition and by the chimneys and smokestacks scattered through the village.

Samuel Courtauld purchased this painting at the same time as Monet’s Gare Saint-Lazare (cat. 20) and the dealer rightly pointed out that these two examples represented the quintessential Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters at their best.
For this delicate watercolour, Cézanne selected a view of the Montagne Sainte-Victoire similar to that he had chosen for the oil painting in The Courtauld Gallery’s collection (cat. 38). Unlike the canvas, which is formed by a rich build-up of planes of saturated colour, the watercolour features large, unworked passages made three-dimensional through Cézanne’s minimal but descriptive pencil lines and delicate hues. Cézanne’s deep familiarity with the Montagne Sainte-Victoire, which he saw as a symbol of his native Provence and was a source of inspiration throughout his life, allowed him to capture the essence of the mountain with exceptional economy of treatment. The face of the mountain has been scarcely modelled with sparse pencil lines, loose hatching and patches of pale blue watercolour. The foothills and the foreground vegetation have been more intensely worked with subtle and restrained touches of greens, blues, yellows and oranges that have slowly been built up in successive layers. Specific landmarks, such as houses and trees, have been left as mere suggestions; the horizontal strip of blue to the right of the composition may refer to the viaduct that is clearly modelled in the Courtauld oil painting. Colour is used to organise this balanced and serene view of the mountain, with highly saturated warm tones used in the foreground graduating to diluted, cool colours in the distance, while dashes of yellow unite the composition. Though he experimented with the medium early on, Cézanne began to work more seriously in watercolour from the mid 1880s and produced more than 650 watercolours over the course of his career. Some served as direct studies for oil paintings while others were executed as independent works.
The silhouette of the Montagne Sainte-Victoire, with its craggy, broken top, dominates the local area around Cézanne’s hometown of Aix-en-Provence. The artist painted the mountain from numerous angles throughout his career as, for him, it embodied the landscape and character of his native region. For this painting, Cézanne selected a vantage point west of the city, overlooking the valley of the river Arc. A pine tree in the immediate foreground frames the landscape, with the branches of this tree and another of which the trunk is out of view echoing the mountain’s contours. Cézanne made three versions of the same view (the other two are in The Art Institute of Chicago and The Phillips Collection, Washington; fig. 76), of which this is the most resolved. It is a composition of great order and monumentality. Cézanne has used colour to suggest expansive distance, from greens and warm yellows in the foreground to soft blues and pinks on the horizon, with the tiny dashes of red between the two creating visual unity. Line also suggests recession through the edges of fields, walls and roads, with a few sharp verticals working to delay the eye as it crosses the canvas. Flat planes of colour, carefully alternating between warm and cool, describe the landscape’s contours. The imposing mass of the mountain and the gentle surrounding landscape offer a sense of permanence and timelessness, but the railway viaduct, visible to the right, is an obvious contemporary intrusion. The canvas was first shown in Aix at an exhibition of amateur artists organised by the Société des Amis des Arts, where the painting was little understood. It was, however, much admired by the poet Joachim Gasquet. Realising that the young man’s appreciation was genuine, Cézanne signed the canvas and gave it to him, making it one of only a small number of paintings signed by the artist after 1880.
Cézanne seldom painted flowers, telling his dealer Ambroise Vollard, ‘I have given up on flowers. They fade straightaway. Fruit is more faithful.’ This deceptively simple still life combines both, although the identification of the plant has fluctuated over the years; often called a primrose, its stiff, lobed leaves more closely resemble those of a geranium. A similar dearth of detail characterises the fruits; the piece furthest forward is clearly a pear, but the two sitting on the plate to their left could be read as apples, pears, or perhaps a quince or a lemon. This lack of description extends to the shapes in the background of the still life. The grid-like form on the right might be the back of a stretched canvas or an easel, but the other strips of colour against the rough plastered wall, particularly the reddish-brown bar behind the flowerpot, elude explanation. The still life itself has been depicted from multiple viewpoints. As for the far edge of the table, it appears at four different levels. These ambiguities in the rendering of form and space force us to read the image less as a representation of real objects in a real room and more as a composition of colours and shapes. Cézanne underscored the importance of the interplay of shapes by adding fine contour lines around the fruits and leaves at a late stage. In other places, boundaries between forms are established instead by subtle changes of colour, such as the soft blushes of pink on the table top bordering the lower contour and the stem end of the pear, and the forms themselves – particularly those of the fruits – are modelled by delicate variegations of colour. In apparently uncomplicated but highly idiosyncratic still lifes such as this, Cézanne found an ideal arena for formal experimentation which he could then apply to other subjects.
Still life was traditionally seen as one of the lesser genres of art but this painting is arguably one of Cézanne’s most complex works. The painter has not just assembled everyday objects but other works of art as well.

In the foreground is a plaster cast of a nude boy, often identified as Cupid. In Cézanne’s day, it was believed to be after the seventeenth-century Provençal sculptor Pierre Puget, which gave it special resonance (it is now thought to be after the Flemish artist François Duquesnoy). Cézanne had a cast of this work in his studio in Aix, along with the cast of a flayed man, traditionally attributed to Michelangelo, which appears as a study on canvas in the top right. Leaning against the wall to the left is one of Cézanne’s own canvases, The Peppermint Bottle (fig. 77), which was painted around the same time. However, Cézanne chose not to make a direct transcription of the various elements composing the scene. The Cupid cast is only 46 cm high but appears significantly larger in the painting, as does The Peppermint Bottle. The apples in the foreground and those in the background are the same size, defying the laws of recession, while the slanted floor distorts our experience of perspective. Cézanne introduced further ambiguity by merging real and painted drapery; morphing the stem of an onion into the painted table leg; and dissolving the base of the cast into the floor. The upper part of the statue of Cupid, framed by a leaning canvas, questions what is sculptural and what is flat. These paradoxes emphasise the artificiality of the composition and foreground the act of painting itself.
In 1891, the writer Paul Alexis gave an account to their mutual friend Émile Zola of his recent visit to Cézanne in Aix-en-Provence: ‘during the day, he paints at the Jas de Bouffan where a worker serves as his model’.1 This snippet is the first and only contemporaneous record of Cézanne engaged in painting Aixois farm workers in the early 1890s. It was a new subject for Cézanne at the time but one that would preoccupy him for a number of years and result in five major canvases depicting peasants playing cards, including the Courtauld Card Players, and a larger number of paintings of individual farm workers, such as Man with a Pipe. There is also a group of related drawings, watercolours and small oil studies which demonstrate the depth of Cézanne’s commitment to painting these local people. The two present canvases are celebrated key works from this series and form a compelling pair, not least because the sitter for Man with a Pipe also appears as the left-hand figure in The Card Players.

The peasants that Cézanne painted were all workers on the Jas de Bouffan estate, which the artist had inherited from his father. Although the specific identity of most of Cézanne’s peasants is not recorded, the name of the right-hand card player in the Courtauld work has come down to us: he is Paulin Paulet, a gardener at the Jas who appears in other works in the group. It clearly suited Cézanne’s artistic and personal temperament to work from models who were well known to him and were part of the fabric of his surroundings in Aix. For Cézanne, these men embodied the deeply rooted, traditional rural ways of life that he valued greatly and considered a profound motif for his art. He later professed to love ‘above all else the appearance of people who have grown old without breaking with established custom’.2

The precise dating and sequence of Cézanne’s paintings of peasants are not known, hence the lengthy date span given for the two Courtauld works. However, Cézanne is thought to have begun painting this motif around 1890, when he produced two similar paintings depicting several figures gathered around a farmhouse table. One of these is the large-scale canvas now in The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (fig. 78), and the other is a smaller work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Perhaps around 1892, Cézanne then embarked upon three further canvases depicting only two peasants facing each other across a table in what looks like a bar setting, although it was almost certainly a room somewhere at the Jas. These three paintings are differently scaled variations of a near-identical composition. Technical research suggests that Cézanne began with the smallest of these, now in the Musée d’Orsay, Paris, and then produced the mid-sized Courtauld painting before working up to a larger version, which is in a private collection.3

The related oil studies, drawings and watercolours are to some degree preparatory for the card-player compositions but their precise role and place in the sequence are unclear. Interestingly, all these studies depict just single figures, such as the watercolour of the left-hand figure in the Courtauld composition (fig. 79). This is evidence that Cézanne did not have his peasant models pose as a group but rather they sat for him individually. He must have composed the group compositions on the canvases by working from the studies and perhaps also again from the individual models. This practice surely underpins the notable and powerful effect in the final card-player canvases of the men appearing monumental and self-contained rather than obviously engaging with one another. The individual peasant portraits, such as Man with a Pipe, share this sense of the monumental and are thought to have been painted alongside the card-player compositions in the first half of the 1890s.
In the late nineteenth century, both the Courtauld canvases would have just about fitted within established categories of painting. *The Card Players* would be considered a genre scene and, despite its unconventional style, prompted association with a long tradition of rustic subject-matter, including card playing, which was often staged in tavern settings. Indeed, Cézanne’s interest in taking up the subject may have been stimulated by one such scene by Mathieu Le Nain, *The Card Players* (c. 1635–40), which he knew well from visits to the Musée Granet in Aix. These earlier scenes, and indeed rural subjects by nineteenth-century painters, were always full of anecdote and intrigue with players carousing or cheating and the pictures offering cautionary or bawdy tales. However, Cézanne’s *The Card Players* departs sharply from this tradition by dispensing with any anecdotal distractions; there is a bottle on the table but no glasses to pour a drink and make merry. Instead, the bottle acts to anchor the composition, which is concerned principally with conveying a sense of solidity and timelessness, the players stilled in concentration.

For contemporaries, *Man with a Pipe* would have been considered a portrait but a very unusual one in its portrayal of an anonymous, lowly farmworker – who would be more at home in a rustic genre scene rather than in a format typically reserved for a sitter of status. Cézanne divorces his sitter from any recognisable setting to focus all attention on his depiction of the man himself. The challenge of the motif for Cézanne was surely breathing life into the austere composition and limited tonal range of browns that comprise the man’s clothes and background. He does so with a myriad of lively short brushstrokes, which, through their tonal variation, subtly animate the picture. Cézanne checks the pace of his brushwork for the man’s face, which he models with short diagonal strokes of varied warm flesh tones, giving him a time-worn and weathered appearance. The result is a portrait of a man who seems to embody the noble qualities of incorruptible rural life that Cézanne admired and idealised in his peasant subjects.

*Man with a Pipe* and *The Card Players* are, of course, more than expressions of Cézanne’s admiration for his rural sitters. They also exemplify his ambition as an artist to create, as he put it, ‘something solid and durable like the art of the museums’.

**NOTES**

1. ‘Les journées, il peint au Jas du Bouffan, là où un ouvrier lui sert de modèle,’ letter from Paul Alexis to Émile Zola, February 1891, published in Paul Cézanne: Correspondance 1878–1906, p. 239.

2. ‘J’aime sur toutes choses l’aspect des gens qui ont vieilli sans faire violence aux usages’: quoted in Jules Borély’s account of a visit to Cézanne’s studio that is dated 1902 but not published until 1926; reprinted in Doran ed. 1978, p. 21.

3. For a detailed account of these works, including their signing, see Brown and Wright eds. 2010–11.

4. ‘quelque chose de solide et de durable comme l’art des Musées’: Cézanne, as quoted by Maurice Denis in *L’Occident*, September 1907.
Writing to a friend, Cézanne described the lake of Annecy in the mountains in the Haute-Savoie region near the French border with Switzerland as a scene one might expect to find ‘in the albums of young lady travellers’. He was reflecting upon his struggle with the picturesque nature of the landscape there, preferring his more rugged native Provence to the romantic views around the lake. Cézanne’s wife, Hortense, and his son, Paul, had requested they take a family trip there, and this is the only oil painting Cézanne executed while on holiday. The view is from the village of Talloires on the shore of the lake, looking south towards the Château de Duingt. Instead of accurately portraying the view, Cézanne has modified certain elements for the benefit of a more harmonious composition. His focus on the castle has made it appear considerably closer than it is from this location, and he has also altered its structure, making the turret appear wider and omitting the crenellations at its top. The much smaller building to the right competes for attention with its shock of orange for the roof, while also indicating recession. These architectural rectilinear forms are underlined by the horizon, defined by the still water of the lake and set against the sweeping diagonals of the mountains, which have been built up through a sequence of planes of colour formed of short parallel brushstrokes. Framing the view is a large tree, a traditional compositional device that recurs frequently throughout Cézanne’s oeuvre. The early morning sunshine touching its trunk and bathing the buildings and the far hills offers warm accents to contrast with the predominantly cool colour range Cézanne has otherwise used.
In his studio in Les Lauves, in the hills north of Aix-en-Provence, Cézanne produced an important group of still-life watercolours, of which this drawing is among the most magnificent. Remarkable for their sense of freedom, imagination and movement, these late watercolours are unsigned and undated, and generally made on a large scale. The group varies in degree of finish and complexity, and is characterised by the use of intense primary colours, with the subtle interplay of overlapping washes allowing for a display of incredibly rich tonalities, from the warmest reds and yellows to cooler blues and greens. It is these masterful contrasts of colours that continue to captivate the viewer.

While still life represented a very small proportion of Cézanne’s work in the 1870s, during the 1880s and 1890s the artist began to engage more closely with the genre. But it was really in the works executed while at Les Lauves that he fully developed his personal vision of the genre, reaching a climax in these watercolours, that demonstrate how he pushed the boundaries of the medium. The skilful dialogue between pencil marks and transparent brushstrokes, as well as the luminosity of the paper reserve, are key features of the late watercolours. To this group belong some 24 still lifes composed of ordinary studio props such as fruits and bowls, bottles and glasses, as well as skulls and teapots, presented on tables and consoles. Some of these objects can still be identified today among the things that were left in his studio (fig. 80). Cézanne moved into Les Lauves in early September 1902, at the age of 63, having worked before then at the Jas de Bouffan, his family residence west of Aix.

Technically, this watercolour is a tour de force of looping, zigzagging, hatching pencil-marks and brushstrokes, all of which form a final composition that gives the impression of having been achieved with great ease. The strokes of colour and the graphite lines create an evocative, decorative effect that distances these objects from reality and moves them into the realm of pure imagination. In his late years, Cézanne told the painter and critic Émile Bernard that ‘to read nature is to see through the veil of interpretation in terms of coloured touches that follow each other according to a law of harmony. These principal colours are analysed through modulations’, thus implying that harmonious applications of patches of colour would shape the forms and ultimately give rise to a
Cézanne seems to have taken up watercolour almost casually, as a break between working sessions on oil paintings. He exhibited watercolours for the first time in 1877 at the third Impressionist exhibition, to which he sent three in addition to thirteen oil paintings. However, it was not until 1907 that his dealer Ambroise Vollard organised the first exhibition solely dedicated to Cézanne’s watercolours. The present work was not included, but it featured in a major exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1915, before Samuel Courtauld acquired it just a few years later. Curiously, ten years earlier, Courtauld had owned another watercolour still life by Cézanne, which he had bought from Percy Moore of the Independent Gallery, and sold back to him a year later. This is made especially clear in the area below the fruits at right, where the artist started drawing a larger round shape (perhaps that of a melon) that he later abandoned. A new feature of these late kaleidoscopic watercolours is the use of graphite applied under the watercolour, contravening the standard practice of covering the underdrawing with wash. Instead, Cézanne redrew and redefined some of the elements of the composition in graphite, often repeating the lines by going over them several times.

In these late drawings Cézanne used colours composed essentially of pure pigments, evident in the ridges formed in areas where the wash is densely applied (fig. 81). The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved. The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved. The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved. The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved. The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved. The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved. The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved. The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved. The extraordinary intense blue that, along with the red, dominates the surface of this work is mainly cobalt blue, emerald green, composed of copper and arsenic, prone to darkening when the sheet is over-exposed to light, is remarkably well preserved.

To achieve this highly complex work Cézanne proceeded by laying out the composition first in graphite before developing it with multi-layered applications of thin and translucent or, at times, thicker washes, with some of the preliminary drawing disappearing under the layers of lush dabs of watercolour. The use of transparent washes also meant that there was little margin for revision. This is made especially clear in the area below the fruits at right, where the artist started drawing a larger round shape (perhaps that of a melon) that he later abandoned. A new feature of these late kaleidoscopic watercolours is the use of graphite applied over the watercolour, contravening the standard practice of covering the underdrawing with wash. Instead, Cézanne redrew and redefined some of the elements of the composition in graphite, often repeating the lines by going over them several times.

The brush moved fluidly on the uniform and even surface of these sheets, uninterrupted by the tooth of more textured papers. A watermark, Canson & Montgolfier, runs along the upper edge of the sheet and is visible to the naked eye, indicating the type of resistant, good-quality paper preferred by the artist. Cézanne was not pursuing the objective reproduction of nature but sought to interpret it and convey his own personal vision of it. The collecting of watercolours is enhanced by the fact that Cézanne was not pursuing the objective reproduction of nature but sought to interpret it and convey his own personal vision of it. The collecting of watercolours is enhanced by the fact that Cézanne was not pursuing the objective reproduction of nature but sought to interpret it and convey his own personal vision of it.
PAUL GAUGUIN
1848–1903
This bust of Paul Gauguin's Danish wife, Mette-Sophie Gad (1850–1920), which was first exhibited at the fifth Impressionist exhibition in 1880, is one of only two works in marble by the artist, the other being a bust of his son Emil as a child (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Of the two busts, only Mette is signed and technically it is the more accomplished piece. Details such as Mette's delicately ruffled collar and especially the thin space between collar and neck reflect a high degree of skill. Marble is a particularly difficult material to carve so it should be assumed that the bust was the result of a collaboration of some kind, with Gauguin at the very least assisted by a professional sculptor. Both busts, of Emil and Mette, were made in the late 1870s, when Gauguin and his family were living on rue des Fourneaux (now rue Falguière) in Paris, in an artists’ district that included a number of sculptors’ studios. Gauguin's landlord was Jules-Ernest Bouillot, a sculptor and praticien, a sculptor's assistant responsible for carving a finished work. He may have played an important role in the execution of the piece, as might another sculptor, Aubé, who was Gauguin's friend and also rented a studio from Bouillot nearby.

Not only technically but stylistically too the work fits uncomfortably within Gauguin's development as an artist. It is much more conventional and idealised than the carved wooden sculpture he was already producing during these years and it does not have any of the vitality and certainly none of the stylisation or bold use of colour of his later sculpture.

Samuel Courtauld acquired the bust of Mette from the Leicester Galleries, probably after seeing it in the ground-breaking commercial show they organised in July 1924. It was the first monographic exhibition on Gauguin in Britain, with over 70 works, many of which came, like this one, directly from his heirs. This remains an unusual purchase for Courtauld, both because he had few sculptures in his collection and because marble sculpture would not have been seen as representative of Gauguin’s oeuvre. Perhaps its appeal lay simply in the tenderness of the subject-matter and the implied intimacy between sitter and artist.
In April 1887, Gauguin set off for Panama with the painter Charles Laval, in a first attempt to leave European civilisation behind and find inspiration in ‘unspoilt’ cultures. As with his later experiences in Tahiti, reality never lived up to his ideals. Gauguin worked for a month, under punitive conditions, on the construction of the Panama Canal before moving to the French island of Martinique in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, this voyage changed his life and proved to be a pivotal experience in his artistic development. Years later, he wrote to his friend Charles Morice: ‘What I experienced in Martinique … is key. Only there did I truly feel like myself, and if you want to know who I am, you must look for me in what I brought back from there, more so than in my works from Brittany’.

During his five-month stay, Gauguin produced around fifteen canvases, including Martinique Landscape. This view of lush tropical vegetation is taken from a headland called Le Trou, high above the city of Saint-Pierre, then the capital of Martinique. In the distance rises Mount Pelée, the volcano whose eruption in 1902 destroyed the city. Gauguin has, however, completely reshaped the landscape in the service of a striking design: he has erased any hint of the bustling city below, enlarged the mountain in the background and lengthened the papaya tree at left to impossible heights in order to ground and unite the composition. Paths of ruddy earth dominate the foreground, while the surrounding rocks and vegetation are rendered as juxtaposed planes of colours. Particularly visible in this canvas is Gauguin’s preference at that period for thin, short brushstrokes, conferring a hatched effect to the composition. This manner is reminiscent of Cézanne, by whom Gauguin owned half a dozen works. He used a similar technique in The Haystacks (cat. 47), executed two years later in Brittany.

This painting is one of only a handful sold by Courtauld. The date and circumstances of its sale are unknown but the painting is recorded in another collection less than four years after its purchase by Courtauld in October 1928. Why he decided to get rid of it remains very puzzling, given the painting’s quality and appeal.

Provenance
Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from Alex. Reid & Lefèvre, London, October 1928, for £3,000; sold by him before 1932; Evan Charteris, London by 1932; purchased (through Wildenstein?) by Mr and Mrs Alexander Maitland, Edinburgh, 1932; presented to the National Galleries of Scotland by Sir Alexander Maitland in memory of his wife Rosalind, 1960.
Paul Gauguin

**THE HAYSTACKS** 1889

Oil on canvas, 92 x 73.3 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Gauguin first went to Brittany in 1886, staying for several months in Pont-Aven, by then an established artists’ colony. When he returned for a second sojourn in April 1889, he found Pont-Aven clogged with tourists and artists and soon departed for the hamlet of Le Pouldu, in whose environs he painted *The Haystacks* during that year’s harvest.

Gauguin was far from the first French artist to travel to this remote and culturally distinct region in search of a ‘pure’, unchanging way of life untouched by the modern age; from the middle of the nineteenth century, the Salon abounded with picturesque genre scenes representing Breton costume and customs. Although he was as guilty as any of his contemporaries of embracing a romanticised stereotype of Brittany that ignored the hardships and complexities of life there, his artistic response diverges sharply from their meticulous and occasionally cloying naturalism.

The subject of *The Haystacks* – peasants harvesting hay and laying it out to dry – might be commonplace but his treatment of it is radical. Forms are simplified and schematic and the palette is clear and bold; in place of the subtly variegated colour and intricately built-up surface of an Impressionist painting, Gauguin opted for broad areas of pure colour, with the yellow of the hay dominant, bounded by strong black outlines. The paint is applied in thin, crisp parallel strokes that barely differentiate between various surfaces and textures. The perspective is flattened, blocking the horizon line and hindering a straightforward reading of the picture space. The depiction of the peasants echoes a passage of a letter to Van Gogh written in December 1889: ‘Here in Brittany the peasants have a medieval look about them and don’t appear to think for a moment that Paris exists and that it is now 1889 ... Here everything is harsh, like the Breton language, and shut away ... The costumes are also almost symbolic, influenced by the superstitions of Catholicism. The backs of their bodices have a cross shape on them, and their heads are enveloped in a black kerchief like nuns. In addition their faces are almost Asiatic, yellow and triangular, severe.’ The peasant women are not delineated as individuals but rather as types arranged in a rhythmic, rhyming pattern that evokes what Gauguin perceived to be the timelessness of life in Brittany and presents their activities as a secular ritual – an approach that he would carry with him to Tahiti and further develop in paintings like *Nevermore* and *Te Rerioa* (cat. nos. 48 and 49).
In a consignment of paintings that Gauguin sent from Tahiti to Paris in March 1897 were two large canvases, part of a series of paintings of large figures in interiors or highly stylised landscapes that had occupied the artist for the previous several months – *Nevermore* and *Te Rerioa*. Painted within weeks of each other, they are linked by their enigmatic subject-matter and their concern for decorative detail, which plays as important a role in suggesting – and frustrating – a reading of the paintings as do the figures themselves.

Gauguin began *Nevermore* first, in February 1897. Its narrow, frieze-like format is unusual in his oeuvre, as is the thick, smooth paint layer, which is the result of his having reused a canvas. (The original composition, a tropical landscape, can be discerned with the aid of an infrared scanner.) The reclining female nude who dominates the composition alludes to European precedents such as Titian's nudes and Manet's *Olympia*, a photograph of which Gauguin had taken with him to Tahiti. The relationship of Gauguin's nude to the two figures conversing in the background has been left deliberately unclear, although the upward slant of her gaze suggests that she is aware of their presence and listening to their conversation. Whether the background figures are human visitors or malevolent spirits is likewise ambiguous. However, the resemblance of the right-hand figure to a *tupapau*, the Tahitian spirit of the dead who recurs throughout Gauguin's oeuvre, sometimes recast in human form, is unlikely to be coincidental; indeed, the nude's pose and expression harkens back to a masterpiece from his first Tahitian sojourn, *Manaò tupapaú* (fig. 84). Describing *Nevermore* to his friend Daniel de Monfreid, Gauguin claimed that he wished, ‘by means of a simple nude, to suggest a certain long-lost barbarian luxury’. This ‘barbarian luxury’ extends to the interior, decorated with stylised vegetal motifs in rich, sombre colours and divided into irregular compartments, which recalls a real interior decorated by Gauguin in 1888 for Marie Henry's inn in Le Pouldu, Brittany. The critic Gabriel-Albert Aurier had described Gauguin in 1891 as ‘above all, a decorator’; this term carries more positive connotations in French than it does in English, and Aurier considered this integral to Gauguin's painting as it freed him from representing the physical world in an objective manner and allowed him instead to explore abstract ideas, the imagination and dreams. In the same letter, Gauguin noted that the title – the sole instance of an English title in his oeuvre – was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe’s poem *The Raven*, but in the next breath denied any explicit connection between his painting and the poem. Although this denial is surely disingenuous, it effectively closes off a straightforward interpretation of the scene using the title as a guide.

*Te Rerioa* was painted in early March; although Gauguin claimed to have painted it in about ten days, apparently spurred by the delayed departure of the ship, its monumentality and the carefully structured composition hint at a longer genesis. Here two imposing women are seated on the floor of a hut decorated with elaborate carved reliefs; a colourful landscape (presumably the view beyond the hut, but possibly a painting within the painting) is visible in the background and an infant sleeps in a sculpted cradle in the foreground. The relationship of the figures to each other is unclear and has been the subject of continual speculation, as has the symbolism of the reliefs, which, like much else in Gauguin's oeuvre, are a creative fusion of motifs from several different cultures. In keeping with his usual practice, the work is thinly painted, allowing the coarse weave of the canvas to show through and in some instances interfere with the legibility of the image; although practical concerns, namely the slow drying
48. Nevermore

49. Te Rerioa
of paint in a tropical climate, may have motivated him, leaving the canvas visible – something he had begun doing during his sojourns in Brittany during the 1880s – also draws attention to the fact that we are looking at a painting which is a work of the imagination, rather than an illusionistic slice of reality. In another letter to de Monfreid, Gauguin stressed the oniric quality of the scene: ‘Everything is dream in this canvas, whether it be the child, the mother, the rider on the path, or perhaps the dream of the painter! All of this has nothing to do with the painting, they will say. Who knows? Maybe not.’ He noted that the title, boldly painted (and misspelled) in red in the foreground, was the Tahitian word for dream. His original Parisian audience would have been unaware that ‘rereioa’ actually means ‘nightmare’, but the sinister figures on the cradle’s footboard (inspired by those he had seen decorating a Maori kumete, or covered bowl, in Auckland en route to Tahiti; fig. 85), the peculiar cropping and perspective of the composition and the sharp slant of the floor all combine to create a sense of disquiet which transcends knowledge of the meaning of the title.

Nevermore holds the distinction of being one of the first of Gauguin’s works to enter a British collection: its first owner was the composer Frederick Delius, who purchased it in 1898. Gauguin was delighted to learn that the painting had gone to a fellow artist and acquaintance (the two had met when Delius lived in Paris) and teased de Monfreid for his prior scepticism regarding the title in a letter dated 12 January 1899: ‘Do you remember you rebuked me for having given a title to this painting: don’t you think this title Nevermore is the reason for its purchase? Perhaps!’ To his regret, straitened finances forced Delius to sell Nevermore after the First World War; it entered Samuel Courtauld’s collection via its second owner, the Manchester merchant and collector Herbert Coleman. Te Rerioa only found a buyer three months after Gauguin’s death, when it was purchased by Gustave Fayet, a collector from Béziers who built an important collection of his work. Fayet’s son sold the work to Paul Rosenberg shortly after inheriting it; Roger Fry saw it in Rosenberg’s gallery in March 1929 and, stunned by this ‘absolute revelation to me of what Gauguin was capable of’, urged Courtauld to buy it, going as far as suggesting that he sell Nevermore to cover part of its ‘colossal price’. Courtauld ultimately decided to keep Nevermore and purchase Te Rerioa and included both in his 1932 gift to the Home House Society.
When Gauguin returned to France from his first sojourn in Tahiti in August 1893, he envisaged publishing a memoir, based on his travel journal as well as local legends and anthropological observations. It was to include poems by Charles Morice, one of his key supporters, and would be illustrated with ten prints. Its ostensible purpose, according to a letter to his wife Mette, was to publicise his adventures and to elucidate for a French audience the paintings he had produced in Tahiti. However, given Gauguin's deep ambivalence toward explaining his work, ‘Noa Noa’ gave rise (perhaps deliberately) to further mysteries. The prints are not illustrations in the conventional sense, and their Tahitian titles would have been incomprehensible to their original viewers (only a single print is titled in French). Not only is the relationship between the prints and text unclear, there also appears to be no recognised order to the prints.

Gauguin worked on the woodblocks for the ‘Noa Noa’ prints from December 1893 through March 1894. Although the publication did not materialise during his lifetime, he exhibited the prints in his studio in 1894. Their imagery relates to sketches in his journal and to the paintings and sculptures he made during his first stay in Tahiti and epitomises Gauguin’s habit of returning repeatedly to the same motifs, reworking them each time for new ends. In spite of his stated purpose of introducing his audience to the customs and mythology of Tahiti, the prints could be more accurately described as a voyage through the artist’s imagination. Indeed, as Morice later wrote, ‘here is the true Tahiti, that is to say faithfully imagined’.

Prior to the ‘Noa Noa’ prints, Gauguin had only produced a single set of prints, the so-called ‘Volpini Suite’ (1889) of zincographs. The ‘Noa Noa’ series is his first foray into woodblock printing and showcases his idiosyncratic approach. Gauguin used small end grain boxwood blocks, typically used for wood engraving — a technique then associated primarily with finely detailed mass-produced illustrations. While he took advantage of the blocks’ tight grain for fine cutting and worked partly with the gravers typically used for wood engraving, he also arated himself of a range of less conventional tools — gouges and chisels more commonly used
50. Noa Noa

51. Auti Te Pape

52. L'Univers est créé
for woodcuts or sculpture (particularly apparent in the rendering of the shore in Auti Te Pape), etching needles, knives, razor blades and sandpaper. In essence, he treated the blocks like low relief sculptures, bringing together sculpture, drawing and various printmaking techniques in a single work (fig. 87).

The sculptural surfaces of the blocks, combined with Gauguin’s preference for varying their inking to produce an array of different effects, made printing a consistent edition from them a complex undertaking. Samuel Courtauld’s set of prints comes from a portfolio printed in Copenhagen eighteen years after Gauguin’s death by his youngest son, Pola. In 1919, Pola purchased eight of the ten ‘Noa Noa’ woodblocks from the dealer Eugène Druet with a view to publishing a new edition. Only after two years of struggle did he and the publisher, Christian Cato, succeed in issuing an edition that captured every element of the blocks’ surfaces; this was achieved by using two different ink rollers, one soft and one hard, which covered the entire printing surface while leaving clear even the shallowest incisions. In contrast to the impressions printed by Gauguin himself, which frequently obscured or totally effaced areas of his designs, these posthumous impressions are faithful documentary records of the blocks, with nothing added or removed.
GEORGES SEURAT
1859–1891
This drawing was likely executed in a private session with a model or perhaps in one of the city’s many open studios, as life classes at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where Seurat studied between 1876 and 1879, were dedicated only to the male body. The figure, whose raised knee and hand suggest she is leaning on a chair, emerges from the network of vigorous crayon marks that have been built up to form a dramatic contrast between light and dark. To achieve the richness of the black in the darkest areas, Seurat selected a coarsely textured white paper, now faded to a pale cream, that would catch the oily Conté crayon as it was dragged across the surface. Seurat avoided harsh outlines, allowing the paper to show through the extensively worked background to create the soft and sensual volume of the figure. Subtle gradations of tone have been further enhanced through his use of stumping, a technique whereby a roll of paper or leather is rubbed on the surface to blend certain areas. The dramatic depiction of a full-length model against a dark background, a type of drawing Seurat would have encountered in his academic training, is also found in studies by other young artists of the period. At this early stage of his career, Seurat may have found the anatomy of the figure challenging, as he has used the dark background to circumvent the need to tackle the more demanding hands and feet, which are left incomplete. It is the extraordinary atmosphere of this drawing, however, that makes this work so distinctive, with the stillness of the figure captured through the dense layers of sinuous lines that almost vibrate with energy.
Seurat made these lively studies along the banks of the river Seine just outside Paris. Swiftly painted on small wooden panels, they show the young artist engaging with the mid-nineteenth century tradition of open-air sketching in oil. The suburban riverside of the Seine was one of Seurat’s favourite subjects, allowing him to capture bathers, anglers, people sailing and promenading. Though the panels were all painted within two years of each other, closer inspection reveals that they are remarkably varied in technique: Fisherman in a Moored Boat contains vigorous bursts of...
60. Man Painting a Boat
61. Boat by the Riverbank
62. Horses in the Water
63. Man in a Boat
crisscrossed strokes in the background, while the gentler small dabs of paint in Boat by the Riverbank attest to the artist’s knowledge of works by Monet and Renoir. Man Painting a Boat, meanwhile, appears more indebted to the palette and measured brushwork of Manet. These studies do not reflect a sequential development of technique but instead show Seurat’s propensity for wide-ranging experimentation. Though passages of these early works reflect the influence of the Impressionist painters that Seurat so admired, they show him already moving beyond the technical innovations of his predecessors. Seurat uses short, precise brushstrokes that foreshadow his practice of using tiny dots of pure colour, which, from a distance, blend in the viewer’s eye to create a highly luminous and vivid effect. Two of these works were used as preparatory studies for Seurat’s larger, finished paintings: Horses in the Water relates to Bathers at Asnières (see fig. 24), purchased by the Courtauld Fund in 1924, and the standing figure of The Angler can be seen in the iconic A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte (Art Institute of Chicago).
The bend of the Seine just north-west of Paris that passes the suburbs of Asnières and Courbevoie inspired several of Seurat's most important paintings in the mid 1880s. While comparatively diminutive in scale, The Bridge at Courbevoie merits mention alongside the iconic Bathers at Asnières (see fig. 24) and A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte (Art Institute of Chicago) as Seurat’s clearest expression to date of the principles of divisionism as applied to landscape. Rejecting Impressionism’s more empirical approach to capturing fleeting effects of light and atmosphere, divisionism sought to translate light and colour into paint in a more systematic, scientific manner, by means of precise dots of paint in contrasting colours which were meant to produce an ‘optical mixture’ in the viewer’s eye when seen from a certain distance.

Seurat painted this view from the island of La Grande Jatte looking across to the bridge and factories of Courbevoie. Unusually, he worked on an unprimed canvas and there is no trace of underdrawing; instead, he prepared the composition with a drawing in Conté crayon (fig. 88) which only differs in a handful of details. The palette is cool, dominated by blues, violets and greens, yellowish in sunlight and blueish in shade, giving an overall impression of subdued light and an overcast sky. Even seen from the supposed optimum viewing distance of about seven feet (three times the painting’s diagonal measurement), the dots are still distinctly visible and do not blend; instead, they appear to shimmer and vibrate, not unlike the sensation produced by sunlight. Despite this sense of vibration, the overall effect of the scene is one of almost eerie stillness and melancholy, the stillness reinforced by the repetition of verticals across the canvas – trees, masts, fence posts, a factory chimney and the three figures, rendered as toy-like ciphers, ranged along the bank.

The Bridge at Courbevoie, Seurat’s first work painted entirely in his mature style, was exhibited at the third exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants in 1887, lent by the critic Arsène Alexandre, who had begun to write favourably about Seurat the previous year and who would become one of his staunchest supporters.
GEORGES SEURAT

YOUNG WOMAN POWDERING HERSELF
c. 1889–90

Oil on canvas, 95.5 x 79.5 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Counted amongst the seven major compositions Seurat completed during his short artistic career, Young Woman Powdering Herself has nevertheless always held a unique position in his oeuvre. The only significant portrait executed by the artist, it has perplexed critics with its unusual subject matter and the perceived comic juxtaposition between the buxom young woman and the delicate vanity in front of her. The classification of the work itself has long been ambiguous: although the sitter, who was also Seurat’s partner, referred to the painting as ‘my portrait’ shortly after Seurat’s death, it is unlikely that the artist meant the work to be a recognisable depiction. The descriptive title the painting has today was the one used when it was first exhibited in Paris, at the Sixth Salon des Indépendants in March 1890. Shown alongside ten other works by Seurat, including the flamboyant Le Chahut (see fig. 91), Young Woman failed to make a lasting impression there despite its subtle, meticulously rendered effects of light and shadow.

The confined space of the painting is occupied by a young woman wearing a corset and full skirt. She is seated in front of a small table whose cramped surface holds a delicate stand with a mirror and two perfume bottles. She looks down at her reflection, concentrated on the task at hand, and uses the puff in her right hand to apply powder. Her towering hairstyle was fashionable around 1890, especially amongst singers and cabaret performers, leaving the viewer to wonder if we are witnessing a simple domestic scene or backstage preparations. This seemingly unusual choice of subject matter is in fact in keeping with Seurat’s exploration of the contrast between nature and artifice, here rendered almost literally with the representation of cosmetics.

Heightening the feeling of artifice is the flat composition, which presses the woman and the small table against the papered wall behind them. Volume is conveyed through the rounded forms of the sitter and of the cabriole legs of the table before her as well as through the use of dots of colour. Applied in varying tones in the woman’s arms and ample skirt for example, they offer some modulation. Seeking a systematic way of rendering light and colour, Seurat turned to the optical theories of his day to devise what he called ‘my method’: instead of blending colours on the palette or on the canvas itself, he applied paint in minute touches of
pure colour. When viewed from a certain distance, these dots mixed in the beholder’s eye. This phenomenon, called optical mixture or optical fusion, was believed to confer a greater vibrancy to the motif and the surface of the works. In practice, however, Seurat’s technique was more empirical and experimental: he first applied broad planes of colour to block out the composition before overlaying them with a ‘skin’ of tight dots.1 Despite Seurat’s exactness and his commitment to this painstaking pointillist method, the dots are not uniform but often elongated and directional: they adapt in scale and shape to the forms they aim to represent. Contributing to the vibrancy of the painting’s surface is the interweaving of cool and warm tones, and the juxtaposition of complementary colours: blues appear next to oranges and the fictive painted frame around the composition lightens and darkens according to the adjacent areas, for maximum contrast and effect.

The young woman depicted in this canvas is the twenty-year-old artist’s model Madeleine Knobloch (or Knoblock; 1868–1903), Seurat’s partner and the mother of his son (born in February 1890, the child died a year later, a few weeks after Seurat himself and probably of the same infectious disease, diphtheria). Tantalisingly, Young Woman Powdering Herself has long been said to contain another portrait, that of Seurat himself. This story was first recounted by the curator and critic Robert Rey in 1931: ‘this painting very nearly included an image of Seurat himself – and it would have been the only one known to us – depicting his own face. Indeed, in the mirror of Young Woman Powdering Herself, in which a vase of flowers is now forever reflected, could initially be seen Seurat’s own head. One of his close friends pointed out that this image in the lady’s mirror could make the viewer sneer. Seurat had to agree.’2 As a result, the artist painted over his only self-portrait. X-radiographs of the canvas taken in 1958 (by the University of Chicago) and in 1987 (by the Courtauld Institute of Art) did indeed reveal a layer of paint underneath the vase of flowers. However, the images were too shadowy to read and curators of the landmark Seurat retrospective in 1991 warned that ‘in view of the time that passed before this story was told and the lack of corroborating evidence, we must treat it with great scepticism.’3 However, significant developments in imaging systems applied to the technical examination of paintings mean that it is now possible
not only to penetrate the layers of paint further but also isolate them in a
distinct way. A recent infrared scan of the upper left-hand corner of the
painting was thus able to provide, for the first time, a clear image of the
composition underneath the vase of flowers (fig. 90). It shows a finished
depiction of a bearded man seated in front of a canvas, holding a long
and narrow object, most probably a paintbrush. The figure’s elongated
face and pointed beard closely resemble Seurat’s known likeness (fig. 89).
It thus not only confirms Rey’s anecdote but expands on it: Seurat has in
fact represented himself in the act of painting. The object above Madeleine
was therefore meant to be a mirror and not a framed picture or a window
as has been suggested. Rey added that the person who advised Seurat to
remove his self-portrait (whose identity he does not reveal) was unaware
of the ties between the artist and the model, and is now filled with
remorse, as we are with regrets.6

Although the painting was on consignment with the Parisian dealer
Paul Rosenberg, whom Samuel and Elizabeth Courtauld knew well, it is
likely that they first saw Young Woman Powdering Herself in London, at
an exhibition organised by The French Gallery in February 1926, Great Masters
of the French 19th Century, with works drawn from Rosenberg’s stock. The
Courtaulds waited until October to acquire the painting (see Sébastien
Chauffour’s essay in this volume). It was distinctly identified a few years
later as belonging to Elizabeth, making it likely that she was the instigator
of the purchase.

1926 was a banner year for the reception of Seurat in the United
Kingdom: it saw the first monographic exhibition on the artist (organised
in April by the dealers Reid & Lefèvre in London) and the publication

STUDY FOR LE CHAHUT c. 1889

Georges Seurat

Oil on panel, 21.8 x 15.8 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

This small panel is the earlier of two studies for Seurat’s painting Le Chahut (fig. 91). Scenes of popular entertainment began to assume a more prominent place in Seurat’s oeuvre in the second half of the 1880s, although Le Chahut is unique in alluding to a particularly risqué aspect of Parisian nightlife: the titular high-kicking dance was notorious for its provocative nature. By having the conductor point his baton toward the raised skirts of the female dancer in the foreground, Seurat highlighted the erotic nature of the performance; yet at the same he undercut the dance’s bawdiness by portraying his troupe of dancers side-on in a way that transforms their bodies into a complex, stylised pattern. However, the subject’s stagy artificiality seems to have appealed to him primarily as a ground for exploring the theories of colour and linear expression so central to his method.

As Seurat noted in a contemporary letter, he considered the dominance of the red end of the spectrum, here heightened by its contrast with the greens and blues used for the background and the looming figure of the bassist, to denote gaiety as, he also believed, did the prevalence of lines and angles flaring upward. Such principles had earlier been formulated by academic theoreticians such as Charles Blanc and more recently by an acquaintance, the aesthetician and scientist Charles Henry, but Seurat treated them more allusively, as signs or symbols of happiness. This allusiveness and arbitrariness chimed with the concerns of the Symbolist movement and appealed to critics like Félix Fénéon, who championed Symbolism and played a key role in promoting Seurat’s work.

The panel Seurat used for this study appears to have been cut down from a larger standard size. The painted blue border only covers three sides of the work; it is possible that the missing side of the border was painted on a supplementary strip of wood nailed to the panel. At many points Seurat allowed the panel’s white priming to show through, further evoking the blaze of artificial light bathing the scene.

PROVENANCE
Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from Ambroise Vollard, Paris, March 1929, for £1,000; Courtauld Bequest, 1948

Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from Ambroise Vollard, Paris, March 1929, for £1,000; Courtauld Bequest, 1948
Seurat spent what would prove to be his last summer seaside painting campaign, in 1890, at Gravelines, a small port in northern France midway between Calais and Dunkirk. Baldly described in the 1894 edition of Baedeker’s Handbook for Travellers as ‘an uninteresting town’, this un-picturesque, workaday settlement was not an obvious choice for a painter of seascapes; indeed, Seurat chose not to paint Gravelines itself but focused on the outlying suburbs of Grand and Petit Fort-Philippe that flank the entry to the canalised river. However, not only was this unequivocally man-made environment attractive to an artist who regularly explored contrasts between nature and artifice in his urban subjects, it offered him a neutral ground on which to experiment with the evocation of the soft and nuanced light of the Channel coast.

The Channel at Gravelines, Grand Fort-Philippe is the first of four large finished canvases resulting from the trip, all of which were shown at the 1891 exhibition of Les XX in Brussels. Each depicts a different time of day; here the blond light and the pale sky convey an early morning. With the tide out and the channel nearly empty, the scene is perhaps more accurately regarded as a landscape than a marine painting. Despite its sparsity and simplicity, the composition is tautly structured, with the buildings, boats and bollards punctuating the strong horizontal axis at rhythmic intervals. The brushwork at first appears uniform but upon closer examination subtle variations emerge: for example, the tiny points of colour are slightly elongated in certain areas, notably the beach, infusing an otherwise static scene devoid of human presence with a sense of movement. Likewise, areas which appear monochrome, such as the sky and the sand, reveal a rich complexity of tone. It was the first of Seurat’s landscapes to be given a dark painted border; the stark contrast with the overall pallor of the painting heightens its luminosity.
Beach at Gravelines, although painted on the small, thin panel Seurat favoured for studies, does not relate to the larger, finished paintings and appears to be an autonomous work rather than a preparatory study. That it was done out of doors is attested by the presence of grains of sand embedded in the paint layers. Here, the seascape is stripped to its essentials, the separation between water and sky barely delineated by a strip of red at centre, whose identity – distant cliffs, another beach, or a jetty – remains unclear. The palette is primarily restricted to reds, blues and yellows, with the panel's white priming showing through in small areas all across the picture surface to suggest the cloudy radiance typical of this stretch of coast. The brushwork is fairly uniform, the strokes consistently horizontally elongated, giving the scene a sense of expansiveness that belies its diminutive scale. Although the view verges on abstraction, Seurat has not entirely abandoned his fidelity to the observed landscape. Beach at Gravelines hovers on the fine line where description gives way to pictorial invention.

Although it may seem incongruous to describe the Gravelines paintings as the 'mature' work of an artist who died aged thirty-one, both the finished canvases and the small panels bear witness to how rapidly and how radically his style had evolved over the course of a tragically short career and how close to abstraction his work had come, transforming prosaic landscapes into symphonies of luminous colour and atmosphere. Perhaps the last word on these paintings should be given to the poet and critic Emile Verhaeren, one of Seurat's most eloquent champions: 'It is air and light, even and tranquil, fixed in frames'.

Beach at Gravelines
VINCENT VAN GOGH
1853–1890
This drawing of a tile factory seen beyond ploughed fields was made from the road leading to the town of Tarascon, around half a mile outside Arles. Making drawings reduced the financial strain on Van Gogh’s brother Theo, who supported him. In a letter from the spring of 1888 the artist wrote, ‘if there comes a month or a fortnight where you feel pressed, let me know, from then on I’ll make drawings, and that will cost us less’.

Here, using reed pens of various thicknesses, Van Gogh has rendered the scene with the diversity of mark-making found in his paintings. Long deliberate lines are used to describe the furrows of the field; quick successive strokes where the pen barely leaves the page suggest stubble; and fine lines denote the factory roof. Van Gogh’s careful attention to the factory extends to the fence that horizontally divides the composition, where each individual plank of wood has been meticulously demarcated. Meanwhile, elements in the foreground have been cursorily described and the upper third of the drawing remains relatively untouched. Beneath the graphite, which Van Gogh used first to situate the buildings and the cart and rider before applying the brown ink, is a visible grid that covers the entire sheet. Some of the lines are ruled, while others are hand drawn, but all were drawn with a hard pencil that left indentations on the sheet. This may be evidence of Van Gogh’s use of a perspective frame, a portable wooden frame crossed by wires in a grid formation that could be pinned to posts, aiding with the accurate representation of a scene. Having recently moved to Arles from Paris, Van Gogh was excited about working outdoors. Despite the picturesque surroundings, however, he chose to focus on the modern subject of a factory.
Vincent van Gogh’s Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear is one of the most celebrated works in the Courtauld collection. Instantly recognisable as a portrait of the painter at the height of his artistic powers and depths of his emotional struggles, it has become an icon of the modern artist in popular culture. Van Gogh painted this work in mid January 1889, a week or so after returning to his rented lodgings in Arles following a two-week stay in hospital. He was recovering from a severe wound, self-inflicted on 23 December 1888 following a mental breakdown and a dispute with Paul Gauguin. Gauguin had come to Arles two months earlier to live and work with Van Gogh in his ‘Yellow House’, establishing what Van Gogh hoped would become the ‘Studio of the South’. The two men’s very different temperaments and artistic approaches, however, made for an uncomfortable cohabitation, with the domineering Gauguin urging Van Gogh to move away from direct observation from nature and towards a more stylised and symbolic way of painting. Following the clash and Van Gogh’s attack, Gauguin left Arles on 24 December and never saw him again.

A letter addressed to Vincent’s brother Theo on 17 January 1889 seeks to offer reassurance: despite his recent breakdown and ongoing money troubles, Vincent reports that ‘I retain all good hope. But I feel weak and a little anxious and fearful. Which will pass, I hope, as I regain my strength.’ He informs Theo that he has already completed four canvases since leaving the hospital, including a portrait of his doctor (Portrait of Dr Félix Rey, State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow), a still life (Still life with a Plate of Onions, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo) and two self-portraits (fig. 92 and the present work, which he promises to send to Theo). The list of expenses that accompany the letter act almost as an echo of the self-portrait itself: alongside charges related to his violent self-mutilation (covering the laundering of the bloodstained linen in Van Gogh’s bedroom, the hospital stay and the nurses dressing his wound) are payments for a hat (probably the fur cap he sports in this painting to secure his heavy bandage in place), brushes and painting material.

Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear is a powerful statement on the part of a wounded artist that he has started working again. It also reaffirms his commitment to direct observation. Van Gogh represents himself in the
small studio he set up on the ground floor of the Yellow House. In addition to his new cap, he wears a heavy coat to ward off the winter chill; fastened only at the top, it is probably a traditional Provençal shepherd’s cape. Behind him stands an easel and a barely begun canvas, counterbalanced on the other side by a Japanese woodcut pinned to the wall. Van Gogh owned hundreds of such Japanese prints: not only did they give him great visual pleasure but they were also an important artistic source of inspiration. Van Gogh had left Paris for the south of France seeking the bright colours and idyllic rural scenes found in Japanese woodcuts. The frayed edges and pinholes at the four corners of the print, formerly in The Courtauld Gallery’s collection and visible in an old photograph (fig. 93), attest to its use in Van Gogh’s studio.

Van Gogh’s representation of the print in his self-portrait, however, departs significantly from the original in the scale and placement of its different elements, rendered freehand. Thin lines of blue paint were
many months later, when Signac visited). The most compelling piece of evidence is a drawing that Van Gogh’s attending doctor, Félix Rey, made in 1930 at the request of Irving Stone, an American author working on a novel on Vincent’s life (fig. 94). That book, *Lust for Life*, was later turned into a Hollywood film featuring a striking Kirk Douglas as Van Gogh. On his doctor’s notepad, Rey outlined a before-and-after sketch of Van Gogh’s ear, showing that only a small part of the lobe remained after the razor cut. A moving inscription accompanies the sketch: ‘I am happy to provide you with the information you requested concerning my unfortunate friend Van Gogh. I dare to hope that you will not fail to glorify as it deserves to be the genius of this remarkable painter.’ Murphy further convincingly argues that Van Gogh’s survival owes much to the intervention of Rey, who was trained in new treatment techniques and had an awareness of antiseptic surgery. In his portrait, Van Gogh has carefully differentiated the yellow oil-soaked silk dressing used to stem the flow of blood and prevent infection from the white bandage used to keep it in place.

Van Gogh painted three dozen self-portraits in the space of four years and approached this theme in a myriad of ways: as homage to his illustrious Dutch predecessor Rembrandt; for psychological introspection; as a cheap way of securing an indefatigable model; to fashion his own identity and present himself to the outside world; and as a conduit for stylistic experimentation. *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* combines all of these aspects and its use of paint is incredibly bold and varied, especially when one considers the circumstances of its creation. It allowed Van Gogh to start work again following the most traumatic moment of his life and the loss of his dream of an artists’ community in the south. It enabled him not only to ground himself in his surroundings and reclaim his likeness (including the painful reminder of his act) but crucially to reassert his stylistic identity.

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**Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear**

*added over the broader planes of colour to describe finer features. The rest of the composition of Self Portrait was first outlined using a charcoal underdrawing on the thin priming before being painted quickly over it. Surfaces are rendered with a myriad of colours applied in thick strokes. Van Gogh’s flesh is a particular tour de force, with his cheek modelled in oranges, browns, purples and pinks.

The story of Van Gogh’s ear has, almost from the beginning, been the subject of lore and long pervaded popular culture. The facts, however, remain unclear. Recent research by the art historian Bernadette Murphy has enabled us to unpick many myths, including the nature of Van Gogh’s wound. Until now, most accounts have trusted the painter Paul Signac who visited Van Gogh in March 1889 and later asserted that he cut off only a portion of the lobe of his left ear. New evidence, including newspaper accounts and first-hand written testimony, suggests that in fact the painter cut off his entire ear; this very severe wound would have led to substantial loss of blood and justified his extended hospital stay, as well as numerous follow up visits (Van Gogh was still wearing his bandage notes 1 Tilborgh, Bakker, Homburg, Kōdera and Uhlenbeck eds 2018. 2 See Cooper 1957. The print was acquired by Cooper in Paris from Paul Gachet whose father was the doctor who supported and treated Van Gogh during his stay at Auvers-sur-Oise. The print was stolen in 1981 and remains untraced. The generous gift in 2005 of a copy of the stolen print means that The Courtauld Gallery now has another version. 3 Murphy 2016, pp. 148–49.*
VINCENT VAN GOGH

PEACH TREES IN BLOSSOM 1889

Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

The blossoms on the peach trees of La Crau, the wide plain outside Arles to the north east, indicate that this canvas was painted in the early spring, probably in late March 1889. Van Gogh had only been out of hospital for a few months, following his dispute with Paul Gauguin and his mental breakdown in December 1888. During his stay in Arles, Gauguin had encouraged Van Gogh to work not from life but from the imagination; Peach Trees in Blossom rejects this approach and embodies Van Gogh’s renewed commitment to working from nature. The textures of the pebble-strewn road, rickety wooden fence, flowing grasses and soft peach blossoms are rendered with an extraordinary variety of brush marks, recording both the natural and man-made forms that harmoniously co-exist within the landscape. In a letter to Paul Signac, Van Gogh described the Crau landscape as ‘a poor green countryside with little cottages, blue line of the Alpilles, white and blue sky. The foreground, enclosures with reed hedges where little peach trees are in blossom – everything there is small, the gardens, the fields, the gardens, the trees, even those mountains, as in certain Japanese landscapes, that’s why this subject attracted me.’ The idea that the south of France might bear a resemblance to the landscapes of Japan was a motivating factor for Van Gogh’s move to Arles from Paris the previous year. The peach blossoms in the foreground and the snow-capped peak that punctuates the vivid blue horizon, reminiscent of the silhouette of Mount Fuji, echo the Japanese prints that were circulating on the Paris market and avidly collected by Van Gogh. The delicate touches of paint used to describe the blossoms recall the brushwork in the Impressionist paintings Van Gogh saw in the French capital, while the subject-matter of an agricultural landscape below a wide expanse of sky reminded him of the seventeenth-century landscape paintings he was so familiar with from his native land.

In a letter to his brother Theo of 13 July 1888, he writes, ‘I’ve already told you more than once how much the Camargue and the Crau – apart from a difference in colour and the clearness of the atmosphere – make me think of the old Holland of Ruisdael’s day.’ In turn, Van Gogh’s painting had its own evocative effect on Samuel Courtauld, who, in April 1935, wrote to his friend Lady Aberconway: ‘the journey through Kent was lovely: the bright green grass, & blossoming fruit trees, & the newly washed sky, & water glistening everywhere reminded me of the Van Gogh Landscape at Portman Square’.
This work was painted in September 1889, a few months after Van Gogh voluntarily entered a mental asylum outside St Rémy-de-Provence, near Arles, where he stayed until May 1890. It is one of three almost identical versions of the same composition representing a landscape around the hospital. Cypress trees fascinated Van Gogh throughout his year there. Not only did he admire their beautiful lines and proportions, describing them to his brother Theo as like ‘Egyptian obelisks’, but for him the trees’ elegant silhouettes became a symbol of Provence.

Van Gogh painted a first canvas in late June 1889 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and was so delighted by its success that he drew a sketch of it in reed pen for Theo in a letter dated 2 July. Deeming it one of his finest landscapes, he decided to make two further versions, both executed in the studio – the present work, which is identical in scale, and a smaller example, meant as a gift for his mother and sister (now private collection). The present version exhibits the same rich textural variation as the first canvas, including the application of thick fresh paint over areas that had not yet dried, but it has been less intensively reworked or modified overall. In creating a second version of a known composition, Van Gogh was able to distil his initial ideas while making minor adjustments and refinements, resulting in a confident design with greater emphasis on the surface elaboration of individual elements. The rolling clouds that dominate a third of the composition and the foliage that flickers in the wind are rendered more schematically here than in Van Gogh’s initial composition, which was likely painted out of doors, as suggested by the presence of a wheat husk found embedded in the paint.

Purchased for the Tate Gallery through the Courtauld Fund in October 1923, A Wheatfield, with Cypresses was the first work by Van Gogh to enter a British public collection. Three further works by the artist were acquired by the Fund in the following years – Van Gogh’s Chair, Sunflowers (see fig. 25) and Long Grass with Butterflies (all National Gallery, London).
Henri Rousseau worked as a low-ranking clerk for the Paris Octroi, or municipal tax commission, collecting taxes on goods brought into the city – hence his nickname ‘Le Douanier’ (the customs officer). He began painting in his early forties and was entirely self-taught as an artist. The naïveté of his paintings, generally considered within the context of the avant-garde and embraced by Gauguin and Picasso, belies his admiration for academic art as practised by such establishment figures as Jean-Léon Gérôme, whose advice he claimed to have sought when he was starting out.

Rousseau frequently painted the outskirts of Paris, a strange landscape where the boundaries of city and countryside blurred uneasily, which he knew well from his working life, but *The Toll Gate* is the sole painting in his oeuvre to refer directly to his profession. However, comparison with contemporary photographs demonstrates that the toll gate depicted cannot be identified with any actual locale and is almost certainly a hybrid of real and imagined elements. The surrounding landscape, with the buildings almost overwhelmed by lush foliage, has less in common with the actual environs of Paris than it does with Rousseau’s fantastical and wholly imaginary paintings of jungles, themselves inspired by his visits to the Jardin des Plantes (Paris’s botanical garden). If the composition exposes some of Rousseau’s deficiencies as a painter, at least by academic standards – the tree trunks are rendered as smooth cylindrical tubes, the customs officials as stiff paper dolls, and linear perspective is virtually non-existent – it also reveals his considerable gifts as a colourist, with a wide range of greens handled with great subtlety. The tightly organised, insistently two-dimensional picture-plane, which would have appeared absurd to an academically trained artist, held great appeal for avant-garde artists who increasingly rejected naturalism. The overall effect is of a prosaic subject rendered magical and dreamlike.

Samuel Courtauld seems to have appreciated this painting but not enough to expand his holdings of the artist. To a dealer offering him further paintings by Rousseau in 1927, he wrote ‘I have a small one of very fine quality and this is all I want by this artist’.  

HENRI ROUSSEAU (LE DOUANIER) 1844–1910

**THE TOLL GATE** c. 1890

Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 32.7 cm

The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

PROVENANCE

Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from Alfred Flechtheim, Berlin, 1926, price unknown; Courtauld Bequest, 1948
HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC
1864–1901
HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

JANE AVRIL IN THE ENTRANCE TO THE MOULIN ROUGE c. 1892
Oil on millboard with pastel, laid on panel, 102 x 55.1 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Jane Avril was the stage name of Jeanne Beaudon (1868–1943), a Parisian dancer who overcame an abusive childhood and a spell in the hospital of La Salpêtrière being treated for Sydenham’s chorea (a nervous disorder causing its victims to make involuntary dancelike movements) to become an acclaimed performer at the Moulin Rouge in the 1890s. It was there that she encountered Toulouse-Lautrec, who first achieved widespread notoriety with his 1891 design for a poster advertising the Moulin Rouge and its star dancer, Louise Weber, known as ‘La Goulue’ (the Glutton). An enduring friendship developed between artist and dancer which is attested not only by her frequent presence in his oeuvre but also by the psychological acuity with which he studied her.

This enigmatic portrait reveals a starkly different side of the performer who was nicknamed ‘La Mélinite’ (a form of explosive) for the flamboyance and unconventionality of her dancing (see, for example, one of her most famous posters, fig. 95), and whom the poet Arthur Symons memorably described as ‘[having] about her an air of depraved virginity’. Here, Jane Avril appears alone in the entrance to the Moulin Rouge, a man’s coat and hat hanging on the wall to her left and the illuminated windows of a carriage in the dark street outside just visible at upper right. Whether she is arriving for a performance or about to leave is, perhaps deliberately, left unclear. Modestly dressed in a fur-collared coat, she appears wrapped up in her own thoughts, her eyes downcast; only her slightly frivolous-looking lime-green hat and yellow handbag relieve the scene’s otherwise cool and subdued palette and hint at the gaudy and occasionally outrageous stage costumes with which most of her admirers would have associated her. Although only in her early twenties when Toulouse-Lautrec painted her (fig. 96), her face resembles that of a much older woman, gaunt and drawn, its pallor accentuated by the yellow artificial light. The hieratic quality of her long face and lean figure is reinforced by the portrait’s unusually narrow vertical format, nearly twice as tall as it is wide. The composition has been built up from multiple layers of long, slashing vertical strokes of oil and pastel which appear to sink into the support. This unorthodox combination of media, in concert with the use of millboard rather than canvas, the bare patches of the support showing through in many areas, and the lack of varnish (the last a common characteristic of many of Toulouse-Lautrec’s paintings) elide provenance

Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from The Independent Gallery, London, December 1929, for £10,400; Courtauld Gift, 1932

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Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
Jane Avril at the Jardin de Paris, 1893
Lithograph, 91.5 x 114 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
the distinction between painting and drawing; indeed, Toulouse-Lautrec’s friend and biographer François Gauzi described many of his painted portraits as ‘drawings highlighted with colour’.1

Toulouse-Lautrec’s act of capturing Avril in the indeterminate space of the nightclub’s vestibule – caught between the public and the private, gathering her thoughts between the everyday hubbub of the street and the glitter of the stage – may, intriguingly, have been echoed in the painting’s original place of display. It has recently been suggested that the portrait may have first hung in the entrance to the Moulin Rouge, opposite a nearly contemporary portrait of La Goulue entering the club arm in arm with her sister and her lover (fig. 97), bringing to the fore the contrast between the brazenly provocative, extroverted La Goulue and the inscrutable reserve of Avril, who was best known for performing solo rather than as part of a quadrille and noted for the ‘morbid, vague, ambiguous grace’ of her dancing.2 The differences between the two performers were then a matter of regular discussion in the press and Toulouse-Lautrec, who had apparently been given free rein by the Moulin Rouge’s management to display his work there, might have borne this in mind in choosing to pair the paintings in this setting.
This portrait’s emphasis on Avril as a private individual rather than a public performer offers persuasive evidence of the close relationship between artist and sitter. She appears in more works (fifteen extant, plus a lost sketch) than any other single performer in Toulouse-Lautrec’s oeuvre and in a range of guises well beyond that of a dancer. Notably, the majority of these depictions are paintings rather than prints: most of his portrayals of other entertainers were lithographs, perhaps because he understood that lithographs would reach a much broader audience than would paintings. He may also have considered the speediness and ephemeral nature of the print medium more suited to promoting celebrity.

The slower and more meditative process of painting seems to have been better suited to capturing the different facets of Avril’s distinct personality, whether dancing alone, striding along an anonymous street, as part of a group of fellow bohemians, or lingering in a nightclub entrance, and Toulouse-Lautrec’s unorthodox paint handling and eschewal of glossy surfaces likewise invites a deeper gaze than does the flatness and brilliant colour of a lithograph. Considering them as a group, as the critic Arsène Alexandre did in his seminal essay article ‘Celle qui danse’ (She who dances), this portrait and its fellows present a sustained, psychologically penetrating study of a complex and introspective woman as much as, or more than, a dazzling stage presence.

Although it depicts an essentially private moment, Jane Avril in the Entrance to the Moulin Rouge was one of Toulouse-Lautrec’s most exhibited and well-travelled works during his lifetime, and, on the evidence of letters, he hoped to sell it soon after its completion. It was shown twice in London, where Avril had performed a few years earlier, in 1898, although there is no evidence that any critics particularly admired it; indeed, its first showing at the Goupil Gallery in May was notably unsuccessful. It did, however, attract the notice of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, who was then organising the first exhibition of the International Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers, and he included it in the show. It would remain in French collections for the better part of the next three decades, before eventually returning permanently to London when Samuel Courtauld purchased it in 1929.

NOTES
5. Arsène Alexandre, Celle qui danse, L’Art français, 30 July 1893.

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In 1896, Toulouse-Lautrec created a suite of ten lithographs called ‘Elles’, devoted to the daily lives of prostitutes and kept women. Inspired in part by Japanese woodblock print albums such as Kitagawa Utamaro’s ‘The Twelve Hours in the Yoshiwara’ (c. 1795) and in part by his intermittent residence in the brothels of Montmartre in the mid 1890s, the series is now considered one of his greatest achievements as a lithographer. Although published by Gustave Pellet, who specialised in erotica, ‘Elles’ was remarkable for the stress it laid on the mundane details of its subjects’ existence as well as for the sense of sympathy, even complicity, between artist and subjects. That ‘Elles’ proved to be a commercial failure for Pellet may reflect its thwarting of expectations of the titillating, voyeuristic approach commonly associated with such scenes.

Courtauld’s enthusiasm for Toulouse-Lautrec’s prints is borne out by the fact that they are represented in greater strength in his collection than those of any other artist-printmaker apart from Manet. Woman in Bed – Waking is one of two plates from ‘Elles’ that he owned. Printed in olive-green ink, it was drawn directly on the stone with Toulouse-Lautrec’s characteristic flowing line, its deceptive resemblance to a chalk drawing highlighting another important source of inspiration, the sensuous red chalk drawings of boudoir subjects popular in eighteenth-century France. The woman’s relatively luxurious surroundings suggest that she is a rich man’s mistress rather than a prostitute. All but buried in the bedclothes, her face half obscured by her hair – the true focus of the image is her lassitude. The direction of her gaze makes it clear that she is aware of being observed, but the languid nonchalance of her expression and pose suggests that she is little bothered by this.

In Bed can be dated to the same period as ‘Elles’ in terms of its draughtsmanship and subject matter. However, it is not preparatory
for any of the prints, and no printed version of the work exists. The fact that it was executed on a large sheet of high-quality paper and signed suggests that, in spite of the looseness of its execution, Toulouse-Lautrec considered it an independent work. The model lies in bed, with only her head and crossed, stockinged feet emerging from the rumpled bedclothes. The confident economy and rapidity of the lines – most apparent in the rendering of the legs and feet, whose forms the artist seems to seek as he works – makes it likely that the artist worked directly from the model; this likelihood is reinforced by the unusually low viewpoint, probably a result of Toulouse-Lautrec's small stature. Despite the speed with which he worked, the care Toulouse-Lautrec took with the drawing is evident in the use of two subtly different media – soft black chalk for the majority of the composition, combined with a hard graphite pencil for the more detailed treatment of the model's face and hair. Although the lower part of her face is obscured by her bunched clothing, her features display a vivid individuality. It has been suggested that the model was a woman he knew well and who is thought to appear in several of the 'Elles' prints, a prostitute named Pauline Baron, known as Mademoiselle Popo, and the angle of her gaze, under sagging eyelids, and the faint smile playing over her tired face suggest a calm and relaxed familiarity between artist and model.
HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

IN A PRIVATE DINING ROOM (AT THE RAT MORT) c. 1899

Oil on canvas, 55.1 x 46 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Never exhibited during Toulouse-Lautrec’s lifetime, this painting has been known by several different titles, all of which locate it in the louche underbelly of Paris’s fin-de-siècle nightlife: the ‘Rat Mort’ (Dead Rat) was a notorious café-restaurant on the southern fringes of Montmartre which the artist is known to have frequented in his final years, and the private dining rooms (cabinets particuliers) on offer at such places were often used for amorous liaisons. The woman at the centre of the composition, with her heavily made-up face set aglow by sickly absinthe-green artificial light and her laughing mouth a vivid crimson slash, has traditionally been identified as Lucy Jourdain, a well-known cocotte, or high-class prostitute. Her elaborate costume is typical of those worn at masked balls; Toulouse-Lautrec establishes a startling formal rhyme between her gauzy pear-shaped hood and the bowl of fruit looming at an unsettling tilt in the foreground. The identity of the man beside her, his face brutally cropped by the edge of the canvas, has long been debated. Once described as Jourdain’s lover, Baron de W., who was said to have commissioned the painting (this is unlikely, given that the first owner was one of Toulouse-Lautrec’s cousins), it has recently been suggested that he is the Australian painter Charles Conder. In any case, the man’s faceless anonymity frustrates any attempt to decipher a narrative in the relationship between the two figures. The presence of the viewer (or artist) is implied by the placement of one of the champagne flutes. The flowing brushwork, with colour laid on in bold streaks, is enhanced by the use of paint greatly thinned with diluent. Together with the palette dominated by bold reds and greens and the blurry, hallucinatory effect of the lamplight, the scene exudes the overripe sensuality and seedy glamour of Montmartre’s nightlife.

PROVENANCE
Purchased by Samuel or Elizabeth Courtauld from The Independent Gallery, London, March 1928, for £2,700; Courtauld Bequest, 1948
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

The Jockey 1899

Lithograph, first state, printed in black ink, 51.6 x 36.3 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

One of the last lithographs Toulouse-Lautrec made, The Jockey was the first plate in a projected series of lithographs on equestrian subjects entitled Les Courses commissioned by the Parisian publisher Pierrefort. It drew upon the artist’s long-standing fascination with horses, which had dominated his early work and in which he had been encouraged by his informal training from 1878 to 1882 with the sporting artist René Princeteau. Seemingly fused into single beings, two jockeys and their racehorses gallop along the racetrack – identified, thanks to the windmill visible in the distance at right, as that of Longchamp in the Bois de Boulogne to the west of Paris – in a display of remarkable dynamism. The sophisticated tonal effects, which mimic the qualities of graphite, chalk and charcoal, showcase Toulouse-Lautrec’s inventive approach to the technique of lithography, which occupied a place in his oeuvre equal to painting. The influence of Japanese prints is apparent in the composition’s strong diagonal thrust, the boldly silhouetted shapes, and the expressive distortion of the horses and jockeys. A more recent source for this startling image of horses racing flat out is likely the photographer Eadweard Muybridge’s studies of animal locomotion of the 1870s. The high viewpoint and the abrupt cropping of the horse in the foreground give the impression that it and its rider are actually suspended in space.

Toulouse-Lautrec’s rapidly deteriorating health prevented him from completing the series and he only managed to make four lithographs for it before his death in 1901. The Jockey was printed in two states by the studio of Henri Stern. Only ten black-and-white impressions of the first state were printed; 112 impressions of the second state were printed in colour. This exceptionally rare impression of the first state was the most expensive print by Toulouse-Lautrec to enter Courtauld’s collection.
This mask of the Japanese actress and performer Hisa Ohta (1868–1945), known as Hanako, is one of a series of over 50 heads, busts and masks Auguste Rodin made of her between 1907 and 1911. Rodin first met Hanako after seeing her perform on stage during the Exposition Coloniale in Marseille in 1906. Thanks to the American avant-garde dancer Loïe Fuller, who was Hanako’s agent and a friend of Rodin’s, he next saw her in a kabuki-style play in Paris later that year. The final scene of the play involved her enacting Japanese ritual suicide, or hara-kiri. He was so moved by her facial expressions that he invited her to pose for him. She became a frequent and regular presence in the studio over the next two years. Hanako would later recall how during modelling sessions she was made to hold attitudes of pain or terror for fifteen minutes at a time. Nearly all of the portraits in the series show a face with deeply furrowed brows and heavily reworked eyes (fig. 98). This mask, however, does not have any of that exaggerated tension. Hanako later explained that Rodin modelled it during moments of rest in between poses. She referred to the work as ‘tête de femme méditative’.

The Hanako series, like many of Rodin’s experimental late works, was made in a variety of materials, from terracotta to plaster slip, and does not seem to have been intended for sale. Yet Rodin must have been pleased with this mask (known as ‘type E’) since it appears to have been the only one in the series to go on the market very soon after it was conceived. A bronze version of it was purchased in 1910 by the French state for its museum of contemporary artists, the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris (it was transferred to the Musée Rodin around 1918). In 1911, Rodin commissioned a photograph of the bronze that emphasised its rugged and apparently weathered surface, giving it the appearance of a recently unearthed antique sculpture. He also took the unusual step of casting it in coloured pâte de verre (glass paste), which gave it an unsettling and death-like dimension. Upon Rodin’s death, his estate sent Hanako a bronze of this mask, respecting a promise he had made to her (now in the Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Japan).
INTERIOR WITH A SCREEN c. 1909–10

Oil (peinture à l’essence) on paper, laid on cardboard and panel, 35.8 x 23.8 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

A member of the avant-garde artistic brotherhood of the Nabis during the 1890s, Vuillard established a reputation as a painter of domestic interiors characterised by warm but muted colour, complex interweavings of fields of pattern, and a sense of cloistered intimacy. After 1900, however, his work lightened considerably in terms of both palette and mood. This informal scene, which captures a model in a studio reaching for her clothes just after she has finished posing, is one of a handful of works on this theme made around 1910. Despite its small scale, the image conveys a sense of height and airiness, with the gentle, even light from the tall windows suffusing the scene.

The theme of an artist’s model caught off-guard, between poses, had become popular in Salon painting in the 1880s, but Vuillard defuses the erotic charge normally associated with such scenes by his abbreviated treatment of the figure. The model – particularly her torso and left leg – is almost rendered in negative, scarcely modelled by a few brief strokes of blue-grey and white evoking the fall of light on flesh. The colour is muted, with the richest and most heavily painted areas reserved for the folding screen, which sets off the model’s body, and the glimpse of blue sky visible through the window. Large areas of the coarse, buff-coloured paper support are left exposed to serve as a mid-tone and the paint is very matt, with an almost chalky finish in some areas such as the patch of wall below the window, closer to the quality of gouache than oil. Vuillard appears to have used peinture à l’essence, or oil paint drained of its oil, a technique pioneered by Degas (see cat. 11); he may have been influenced in his choice by his experience as a painter of large-scale decorative works in the similarly flat, matt medium of distemper (glue-based paint). The overall effect is one of domestic tranquillity and of the figure being at one with her surroundings.
Although Bonnard maintained a studio in Paris his entire life, he spent large amounts of time out of the city. The view in this painting was probably taken from the studio in his home in Vernonnet, a village northwest of Paris located only a few miles from Giverny, where his friend Claude Monet lived. Bonnard had visited the area several times, initially renting a small half-timbered house he called ‘ma roulotte’ (my little caravan) before purchasing it in 1912. While there, Bonnard liked to focus on the relationship between the house and the garden, which became an important motif in his work, playing on the contrast between the architecture, the lush vegetation and the human figure. In this work a stooped figure can be seen to the left, on the balcony, which is distinctively painted blue, while another is visible by a table at the end of the central path through the garden. The painting appears to have been executed in late spring, as the trees that interrupt our view of the distant horizon have already grown leaves but retain their blossom. Dashes of yellow in the grass may indicate the daffodils or tulips that herald the spring.

During the early stages of his career, Bonnard was associated with the Nabis, a group of Post-Impressionist painters known for their flat planes of colour, simplified forms and symbolic representations. In contrast, this painting shows him moving away from this aesthetic and towards a renewed engagement with the lighter palette and tenets of Impressionism. Bonnard’s personal relationship with the aging masters Monet and Renoir, whom he visited frequently, seems to have heightened this interest, exemplified in this tranquil scene, with its focus on nature and the play of light on different surfaces.
In 1906, Modigliani left his native Italy to further his artistic career in Paris. Initially, he lived and worked in the avant-garde centre of Montmartre where he met Pablo Picasso and other leading modern painters and sculptors. In 1909, he moved across the city to Montparnasse, where another neighbourhood of progressive artists had been established, many of them fellow émigrés, such as Marc Chagall and Chaïm Soutine. By the time Modigliani painted *Female Nude*, probably in the second half of 1916, he had moved back to Montmartre and was well known throughout the Parisian avant-garde for his extreme bohemian lifestyle and his distinctive, highly stylised painted portraits and sculpted heads.

Although Modigliani had drawn and painted nudes previously, the present canvas was one of the first in a series of female nudes depicted seated or reclining that he worked on as a concerted campaign of activity between 1916 and 1917 (see, for example, fig. 99). Modigliani was encouraged in this endeavour by his new dealer Léopold Zborowski. Indeed, most of the nudes were painted in Zborowski’s Montparnasse apartment at 3 rue Joseph Bara. The dealer provided his new artist with professional models who were paid five francs per sitting whilst Modigliani received a daily stipend of fifteen francs.1 As with most of his other nudes, the identity of the woman who posed for *Female Nude* is not recorded. She bears some resemblance to a model called Marguerite who appears clothed in two other paintings by Modigliani but his stylised treatment of his subjects makes it difficult to suggest identifications with any degree of certainty.2

Like Paul Gauguin, whose work he admired, Modigliani fused stylistic elements taken from cultures outside Europe with conventional Western artistic tropes. In *Female Nude*, Modigliani’s elongated depiction of the model’s head and simplified linear treatment of her face draw, in a generalised way, on his knowledge of African and Oceanic sculpture. However, his arrangement of the model’s tilted head and carefully presented form clearly adopts the conventional, classicising imagery of...
a nude in repose familiar from the walls of the Paris Salon during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this way, Modigliani’s nudes both challenge and recast the European figurative tradition. Female Nude is also striking for its assertive and unconventional technique comprising decisively painted contours and boldly applied passages of colour. Recent technical research has highlighted the full range of painting techniques that Modigliani used for this canvas. He painted an upper layer of blue-grey ground and proceeded to work from dark to light as he rendered the figure. Modigliani leaves this ground visible to accent certain features, such as the model’s eyebrows, eyes and mouth. The X-radiograph of the canvas reveals very clearly the distinctive scallop-shaped marks he used for the flesh of her body, created by pressing the loaded brush on to the canvas so that it splayed (fig. 100). By contrast, Modigliani treats the darker flesh tones of the woman’s face with a more refined, smoother finish. This is set off by his summary delineation of her hair, which he scratches into the black paint with the handle of his brush. Finally, he signed the painting in the upper left corner just before outlining the perimeter of the canvas in the same black paint to create a frame of sorts.

By the academic painting standards of the period, which favoured smooth surface finishes and subtle flesh tones, Modigliani’s brushwork and colouring look aggressively rough and uncouth. However, taken on its own terms as a modern picture, it is remarkable that Modigliani’s assertive and seemingly raw painting style is still able to convey, in Female Nude, a sense of the harmony and tranquillity that is often associated with the classical Salon nude. Nevertheless, for contemporary viewers his nudes were provocative. Modigliani’s highly charged rendering of female bodies broke through the painted veils that maintained decency in the academic classical nude and instead presented images of women whose nudity was highly sensual or frankly sexual. His prominent depiction of his models’ pubic hair – as in this canvas – was especially shocking at the time when this was a significant taboo in conventional painting.

In December 1917, Zborowski organised Modigliani’s first and only lifetime solo exhibition at Berthe Weill’s gallery in Paris at 50 rue Taitbout. It included a group of his recent nudes, one of which was displayed in the window. Weill later recalled that on the opening day the window display drew a crowd and that soon the local police commissioner ordered that the canvas be removed along with the other nudes on display, which were deemed indecent especially on account of Modigliani’s flagrant depiction of pubic hair. Although the truth of this story may have been exaggerated, it has become the stuff of bohemian legend and has helped to promote this group of nudes as radical modern paintings. Although not commercially successful at the time, Modigliani’s nudes have long been considered some of the most significant, and latterly highly prized, works of the artist’s short career.

Samuel Courtauld bought Female Nude directly from Zborowski nearly a decade after Modigliani’s early death. It was one of the only major paintings Courtauld acquired by an artist belonging to the Parisian avant-garde after 1900; the other notable example is Picasso’s early masterpiece, Child with a Dove (see fig. 9). With its bold use of contouring lines and simplified forms, Modigliani’s Female Nude likely represented for Courtauld an extension of the aesthetics of earlier paintings in his collection, notably Gauguin’s Tahitian nudes (cat. nos. 48 and 49).

NOTES
1 For a recent detailed account of Modigliani’s nudes and the circumstances of their production, see Ireson 2017.
2 I am grateful to Nancy Ireson for drawing my attention to this possible identification.
3 Burnstock, Duvernois and Stringari 2018.
4 There is no record for this work among the Samuel Courtauld papers held by The Courtauld Gallery; however, a letter from Courtauld’s secretary confirms that it was purchased from Zborowski and a 1928 invoice for adjustments to the painting’s frame placed it in Courtauld’s collection by that date.
This drawing is a study for a painting that Matisse executed in his studio in Issy-les-Moulineaux, south-west of Paris, in the summer of 1919 (fig. 101). The model is the nineteen-year-old Antoinette Arnoux, who worked closely with the artist for two years, first in Nice and later travelling with him to Issy. During this time, Matisse created a substantial body of work featuring Arnoux, who played a prominent role in the artist’s evolving draughtsmanship. Two further drawings (both in private collections) related to the finished canvas show the model in the same cane chair; in one, Arnoux appears nude, and in the other garbed in the same clothes but viewed from a greater distance and with greater emphasis on the nearby table. In the present drawing, Matisse situates the model close to the picture plane and focuses on her striking costume, a nod on the artist’s part to the Middle East or North Africa. After having visited Morocco in 1912–13, Matisse developed a fascination with the exotic that he would later develop, with his next model, into an odalisque fantasy. Here, Arnoux sports a loosely tied headscarf, a flowing skirt or perhaps harem pants, a sleeveless vest and a long-sleeve, transparent shirt that skims her bare breasts and remains open at the front. The edge of a table, complete with a small cup and saucer, works to anchor the figure in space. Using precise lines and disciplined hatching, Matisse has created a drawing of adeptly balanced contrasts. Framed by the straight lines of the chair, Arnoux’s frontal pose and her frank, somewhat challenging expression are combined with the young woman’s soft contours and the sinuous lines of her revealing clothes to form a drawing of unnerving sensuality.
Drawing the human figure from life remained fundamental to Matisse’s practice throughout his career. Though he had a grounding in rigorous academic training, including studying in the class of the popular Salon painter William-Adolphe Bouguereau, his life drawings are far from traditional. In this sheet, a young woman wearing a simple, collared shirt sits with her arms crossed in a relaxed manner against her body in a composition that elegantly elevates the ordinary. Her pose is neither confrontational nor guarded. Sitting close to the picture plane, she looks directly out at the viewer but without making direct eye contact, appearing lost in her own world. The striped wall that frames her torso and the table she leans on evoke a domestic interior while lending a certain rigid formality to the picture. This sense of order is echoed by Matisse’s mark-making: instead of extensively working up the drawing to the high level of finish encouraged by Salon artists, Matisse synthesised forms to precise and deliberate outlines. He used black chalk to create a drawing of rich tonal range. A stump, a cigar-shaped roll of paper or leather, has been used to smudge the chalk. This softens the drawing while subtly rendering the fall of light on the model’s skin, particularly her delicately modelled face with her asymmetrical nose, high cheekbones and slightly pursed lips. Matisse’s eye for keenly observed details lends his sitter a real sense of presence, restrained dignity and gravitas.

PROVENANCE
Purchased by Samuel Courtauld from The Independent Gallery, London, April 1928, for £80; Courtauld Gift, 1935.
In the 1920s, Matisse’s favourite model was Henriette Darricarrère, seen here casually posed and leaning against a striped wall. A trained ballet dancer, Darricarrère was working as an extra in the film studios of Nice when she first met Matisse. He was immediately drawn to the elegant way she carried herself and her athletic physique, which he thought caught the light like a sculpture. For the seven years she worked as his model, Darricarrère became close both to the artist’s wife, who grew particularly fond of the young woman, and to Matisse, who taught her to paint and considered her as his partner in the creative process. Their collaboration only drew to a close when Darricarrère left to get married.

Here, Matisse depicts her almost nude, with her arms and shoulders clothed in a gauzy, open blouse with embroidered floral detailing at the shoulders and hem. Like her clothing, her long, dark hair is partially undone. Darricarrère’s relaxed posture and her passive gaze reflect a comfort with both her own body and her surroundings, allowing the viewer a glimpse not only of a private interior but of her intimate relationship with the artist.

Matisse drew this work, which exhibits his characteristic use of pattern and tonal range, with a greasy crayon on a specially prepared stone in order to produce a lithograph. This printing technique most closely reproduces the directness of drawing but allows the artist to create multiples, in this case an edition of 50. It is part of a wider group of lithographs in which Matisse depicted Darricarrère as his idea of a Moroccan beauty, playing into his fascination with the exotic. Matisse visited Morocco in 1912–13, and the country left a lasting impression on his subsequent work.
Picasso's confident command of line is exemplified in this seemingly effortless study of a seated female nude. A youthful woman sits prostrate, her left arm anchoring her to the ground and taking her weight while her right casually rests on her raised knee. Her gentle gaze is focused on something outside the composition. She is represented with a delicate lyricism that is typical of Picasso's most linear drawings. Consciously avoiding the variable thickness of line that a quill pen offers, Picasso has used an even pressure with a relaxed hand to produce fine, regular lines that hardly fluctuate in either width or tone. His assured command of the pen and the model's relaxed pose lend a calmness to the drawing, while the arrangement of the model's limbs into a square form creates a self-contained composition of great order and rhythm. The woman's reclining pose is one typical of the positions required of a model for traditional academic training, and also echoes the classical sculpture the artist would have seen when he travelled to Rome in 1917. This three-month trip, which Picasso undertook to work on theatre designs for the ballet Parade, spurred his interest in classicising imagery. Though he readily draws upon such motifs, his treatment is far from conventional. Rather than extensively describing the figure, Picasso deliberately omits elements, most notably her right thigh and the outline of her abdomen, encouraging the viewer's imagination to complete these areas on his behalf. Despite the series of broken lines, minimally suggested contours and the ambiguity of where the background stops and the figure begins, Picasso's fluent draughtsmanship produced a figure of great solidity and monumentality.
The six Courtauld siblings – four boys and two girls – were born between 1870 and 1883. Their father Sydney Courtauld was a wealthy man. He was a nephew of the founder of the Courtauld textile firm, sitting on the company’s Board until his death in 1899, and he was the third-largest shareholder. The family became exponentially wealthier after the company began to produce rayon in the early years of the twentieth century (see my essay in this volume). The eldest brother, Sir William Julien Courtauld (1870–1940), a businessman and philanthropist, continued his parents’ tradition of funding public buildings in Essex, where the family had lived since the early nineteenth century, but on a much larger scale. He paid for a group of important public buildings and civic facilities in Braintree, including the Town Hall, the hospital, a recreation ground and a fountain. His obituary remembered him as ‘the most generous benefactor the town has had’. He also supported the construction of the County Hall in Chelmsford. The architect chosen for all these buildings was Emmanuel Vincent Harris, a successful designer of civic buildings in a modern Beaux-Arts manner. In Braintree, Harris worked with William Courtauld’s younger brother John (see below), who had at the time had an architectural practice in Essex. Appointed to the honourable title of High Sheriff of Essex for the year 1921, William Courtauld was made 1st Baronet in 1939, in thanks for his services to the county. Although the title was hereditary, he had no children, so it was not passed on.

Next in line was Sydney Renée Courtauld (1873–1962). From 1892 to 1894 she studied at Newnham College, Cambridge (although she did not obtain a degree). She became a noted suffragist campaigner. In 1906 (the year of the General Election) she joined the Society for Women’s Suffrage and was Secretary of the North and East Essex branch of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies in 1913. Through her connections to Newnham (a hub of feminist ideas) she joined the Women’s University Settlement, which sent university-educated women to serve as social workers in the poorest areas of London. It was probably through a family connection that she came to be associated with an association to help women enter into agriculture, giving an interest-free loan of £4,000 to the Women’s Farm and Garden Association (WFGA) in 1919, and becoming a member of it in 1934. In the 1930s she also donated money to the
National Trust to purchase a piece of land in Herfordshire to be made available to deprived urban families. 19

Renée Courtauld also acted in concert with her siblings. For example, with her sister and brother-in-law she invested in a sailing ship to serve as a training vessel for women’s education and animal welfare. A few years after the death of her husband Samuel, she wrote a short memoir sharing her early memories of him. This very personal text is reproduced in this volume (p. 337). 20

The next sibling was Samuel Courtauld (1876–1947), the subject of Renée Courtauld’s first major recorded act of philanthropy (dated from these years). It was in response to a request from the National Trust to purchase a piece of land in Hertfordshire to be established in her name enabled the museum to acquire Tintoretto’s Soldiers in Battle painted for the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista in Venice in 1559. 21

Unlike his brothers, Stephen Lewis Courtauld (1889–1967) did not enter business, politics or the professions. He studied natural science at Cambridge and would later become an accomplished botanist. His two other passions were sailing and climbing. Sailing and horse-racing were the driving force of Stephen Courtauld to develop as a botanist, as he would regularly collect plant and flower cuttings which he sent to Kew Gardens and also cultivated in his own gardens. Climbing, he summed up the love of British watercolours (discussed below). To those who knew him in his own gardens. Climbing, it seems, opened the door to a love of British watercolours (discussed below). To those who knew him well, he was a kind and generous person who loved books and was steeped in learning. 22

His obituary in the Alpine Journal describes him as the first-class mountaineer with a heart full of compassion and gold. 23

From 1913 he served in the Artists’ Rifles, the Worcestershire Regiment and the Machine Gun Corps, and, like his brother John, 24

was awarded the Military Cross in 1918: “from 1914 to 1918 I was concerned with such hills only as Mont Kemmel and Aubers Ridge on the Western Front, but at length, in 1919, we could start again”. The ‘we’ was his regular climbing partner, E.G. Oliver, and in that year the pair made a pioneering ascent of Mont Blanc. 25

His account of it abounds in descriptions of the sights and sounds of the mountain, showing a sensitivity attuned to the aesthetic experience of nature: “for our delibration that year the little glacier had continued the most fantastic icefall I ever saw, underneath the lip of its snowy upper bowl a huge blue caved had been hollowed out, and from this plunged the vertical frozen curtain down to the middle reach”. 26

In the same year he acquired a watercolour by Joseph Mallord William Turner showing a view of Mont Blanc from above Courmayeur (see p. 242). From his description of it in a later memoir, the contemporary sensations, gets one of the immediate of the scene for him: ‘in centre is the gap between Mont Chetif on left and Mont Saix on right. Beyond is the Frébera Glacier and behind it the Petit Peter Ridge rises into the sunlight. In right foreground is Courmayeur and below to the left the Dora Flows between wooded banks’. 27

He owned about fourteen Turner watercolours, several of which were bequeathed by his wife (see p. 340). From his description of it in a later memoir, the contemporary sensations, gets one of the immediate. 28

His obituary in the Alpine Journal describes him as the first-class mountaineer with a heart full of compassion and gold. 29

In 1919 also Stephen Courtauld met his future wife, Virginia Penrith (1889–1951), known as ‘Ginie’, also in Courmayeur. Ginie Penrith was born in Romania to a Hungarian mother and an Italian father, and had spent her youth in London. In 1912 she married a fellow Italian, Marcello Cozzi, at the age of 24, who was the son of a prolific Genoese merchant and one of the oldest aristocratic families of Genoa. When she met Stephen Courtauld she was still married and she and her husband were holidaying in the Alps. Ginie Penrith obtained a divorce in 1913, in the state of Genoa. Stephen Courtauld, also in France, in the presence of the British Consul three months later. 30

She was an unconventional figure in English society. mollie Butley; Stephen Courtauld was never close to the couple, recalled that ‘we, the younger generation, were all rather frightened of Ginie, because, she was very beautiful … and extremely opinionated, and worldly, and we all thought she knew everything, and we were sort of, rather frightened’. 31

Perhaps Ginie’s most conspicuous eccentricities were the snake tattoo on her ankle and the constant companionship of a pet lama called Mab Jongs, which Stephen Courtauld had bought for her from the pet store at Harrods as a wedding present. Her real passion was ice-skating. 32

Stephen Courtauld built the London Ice Club for her as a birthday present in 1927 (it closed in 1939) and Ginie was on the organising committee when the Club’s ice carnival raised funds for the National Council of Girls’ Clubs in 1931. 33

In these years the couple lived at 47 Grosvenor Square in Mayfair. Stephen Courtauld commissioned Emmanuel Vincent Harris (the architect of Braintree’s public buildings) to build him a squareshaped and remodel part of the house. It was, however, most likely through Ginie’s connections that the couple employed an Italian society decorator called Pietro Malacrida to redesign the interiors. Malacrida also created a suite of boudoir rooms for Samuel Courtauld’s wife, Elizabeth, on the top floor of their home in Portman Square nearby. 34

Comparing the two interiors, it is clear that Ginie and Stephen Courtauld fully embraced the theatricality of the Malacrida touch whereas Elizabeth’s decoration remained more restrained. 35

In 1925 the couple’s luxurious new motor yacht, the Vespera (designed by Stephen Courtauld and his brother-in-law Captain Dowman), was launched in Scotland, and naturally they turned to Malacrida for the interiors. 36

Stephen Courtauld’s first major recorded act of philanthropy dates from these years. It was in response to a request from the director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Sydney Cockerell, in 1926 to purchase two years later to be displayed immediately underneath. 37

Adoration of the Shepherds established in her name enabled the museum to acquire Tintoretto’s painting.” For example, with her sister and brother-in-law she invested in a sailing ship to serve as a training vessel for women’s education and animal welfare. A few years after the death of her husband Samuel, she wrote a short memoir sharing her early memories of him. This very personal text is reproduced in this volume (p. 337).
giving £37,000 and Renée Courtauld £26,000). The Fitzwilliam’s fund a new £100,000 extension.35 After visits to Samuel and John S.L.C. or of his family’.36 As this was only half of the required amount, Cockerell wanted to approach additional family members of the most conspicuous and audacious commissions of the period. They appointed a firm of young architects, Paget & Sedy (a relative of one of the partners had been in Cambridge with Stephen), and for most of the interiors they went back to Malacrida, who also reinstated some of the more extravagant rooms from Grosvenor Square. Paul Paget would later remark, ‘it was a remarkable commission even for those days. The thing which sticks in my mind was that there were to be 14 bedrooms and 14 bathrooms.’37 They also engaged the services of the Swedish architect Rolf Engström to design a modernist entrance hall with a pierced concrete dome and commissioned several young British sculptors to decorate the building, as well as specialist craftsmen for the furniture and fittings. Country Life published a fully illustrated series of articles on Eltham in 1937, its critic Christopher Hussey giving polite praise to the ‘wise concentration on contemporary design in the new building’.38 The house was fitted with the most up-to-date services, including underfloor heating, synchronised clocks in the guest rooms, a loudspeaker system and a centralised vacuum cleaner. Eltham’s sumptuous interiors were also the setting for Stephen Courtauld’s collections of Old Master paintings and decorative arts, as well as works by young British sculptors such as Charles Sergeant Jagger and Alfrd Hardiman. Italian Renaissance paintings and mosaics were displayed in the Italian Drawing Room, while a small group of landscape paintings (by Turner and others) were shown in the Dining Room. They were in customised frames that harmonised with the decoration and were theatrically lit from the cornice, with further indirect lighting coming from a silvered ceiling. The library was reserved for the display of British watercolours, chief among them the collection of Turner’s (fig. 144 and see p. 339–40). The display was conceived to protect the works from excessive light, and its design, according to Hussey, was entirely due to Eltham’s owner.39 This is not surprising given Stephen Courtauld’s scholarly approach to other areas of his collection (the malacchia, for instance) and the fact that he was already sensitive to the issue of light damage practices in museums.40 Early as the 1930s, when he was purchasing watercolours from Agnew’s, he brought some of them Agnew’s special system of built-in blinds.41 The library’s watercolours hung on mahogany panelled walls, which were hidden behind built-in shutters, which Hussey guessed that in exchange for repairing its Great Hall – significant historically and architecturally and the only part of the palace that was not a ruin. The extent of the work on the set was left to the imagination. It was quite different and it is probably not necessary to go so far back in time. More logical would be to connect it with recent museum practices such as those undertaken by the Fitzwilliam, where Cockerell was, in those years, specifically preoccupied with the display of works on paper and which Stephen would have known well, as a benefactor and Syndic.42 The Courtaulds remained at Eltham during most of the Second World War, retreating to the basement when bombs hit. When they left in 1944, they donated Eltham and its grounds to the nation. Stephen Courtauld asked R.A. Butler, his nephew by marriage, a frequent guest and, more significantly, the Education Minister at the time, to oversee its transfer to a suitable public use. It served as the Army School of Education for many years. The final phase of Stephen Courtauld’s life started in 1955, when he and Ginie moved to Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), bringing with them their substantial collections of art, books and botanical specimens. The architectural and cultural legacy established in Zimbabwe was on a scale unmatched by anything he had done before. He was the lead force behind the creation of the Rhodes National Gallery (now National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare) and its first Chairman from 1952 to 1962, donating money and many of his own works of art to it. His ambition was clear: ‘in all countries of the world art galleries have their place in the cultural life of the country, and it is the firm belief of the Trustees that a National Art Gallery is essential to the progress of the people of this land.’43 In keeping with the family’s ethos, his impulse to support the arts in Zimbabwe was connected to a wider civic purpose, which, in the turbulent decades before independence, were, they both felt, at a premium. The Courtaulds were among the few liberal establishment figures in the country and, as such, were the key patrons of the Capricorn Africa Society, an association that promoted understanding between the races.44 At their home near Mutare, which they named ‘La Rochelle’ (in reference to the Courtaulds’ Huguenot ancestry), Ginie Courtauld established a ‘Homescraft Club’, where she taught local women needlework, embroidery, cooking and domestic science and where they sold their arts and crafts.45 In addition to the National Gallery, Stephen Courtauld funded the Courtauld Theatre and Queen’s Hall in Mutare (1954 and 1961), the auditorium of the Zimbabwe College of Music in Harare (1961), the Kubuwana Farm School in Nyanga (1964), the Rhodes Club in Mutare – the first multiracial club in the country (1961) – and many other buildings. When Ginie Courtauld left the country in 1970, she bequeathed ‘La Rochelle’ to the National Trust of Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesian National Trust), according to her late husband’s wishes, with the stipulation that it was to be freely open to all, regardless of race. Stephen Courtauld’s obituary in The Times paid tribute to both Courtaulds for their shared ideals of equality: ‘his wife contributed fire and imagination to a joint partnership of well-doing, all of which was conceived in and dedicated to the multi-racial ideals they held in common, and whose later frustration brought them deep sadness.’

NOTES
2. Stephen Courtauld usually referred to his shares as ‘the white’ and ‘the coloured’, and his white share was in a sense unmarred by anything he had done before. He was the lead force behind the creation of the Rhodes National Gallery (now National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare) and its first Chairman from 1952 to 1962, donating money and many of his own works of art to it. His ambition was clear: ‘in all countries of the world art galleries have their place in the cultural life of the country, and it is the firm belief of the Trustees that a National Art Gallery is essential to the progress of the people of this land.’ In keeping with the family’s ethos, his impulse to support the arts in Zimbabwe was connected to a wider civic purpose, which, in the turbulent decades before independence, were, they both felt, at a premium. The Courtaulds were among the few liberal establishment figures in the country and, as such, were the key patrons of the Capricorn Africa Society, an association that promoted understanding between the races. At their home near Mutare, which they named ‘La Rochelle’ (in reference to the Courtaulds’ Huguenot ancestry), Ginie Courtauld established a ‘Homescraft Club’, where she taught local women needlework, embroidery, cooking and domestic science and where they sold their arts and crafts. In addition to the National Gallery, Stephen Courtauld funded the Courtauld Theatre and Queen’s Hall in Mutare (1954 and 1961), the auditorium of the Zimbabwe College of Music in Harare (1961), the Kubuwana Farm School in Nyanga (1964), the Rhodes Club in Mutare – the first multiracial club in the country (1961) – and many other buildings. When Ginie Courtauld left the country in 1970, she bequeathed ‘La Rochelle’ to the National Trust of Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesian National Trust), according to her late husband’s wishes, with the stipulation that it was to be freely open to all, regardless of race. Stephen Courtauld’s obituary in The Times paid tribute to both Courtaulds for their shared ideals of equality: ‘his wife contributed fire and imagination to a joint partnership of well-doing, all of which was conceived in and dedicated to the multi-racial ideals they held in common, and whose later frustration brought them deep sadness.’
After this description in S.L. Courtauld, ‘The First Ascent of the Innominata’, article is illustrated with some of Dowman’s photographs. Stephanie Courtauld evokes his ‘proud yet gentle and humane spirit’.

In 1915 and 1919, Stephen Courtauld was not alone in turning to watercolours from a love of mountains: a more intimate connection with his campaign of acquiring oriental watercolours from a love of mountains: a more intimate connection with his camp of acquiring oriental watercolours; the description is from the Eltham Palace Inventory, December 1939. Courtauld’s niece Margaret Bernard (née Monkhouse for making these and other notes on unpublished research notes, Eltham Palace.


33 For photographs of Elizabeth’s boudoir in Portman Square, see Marchese Malacrida, ‘Modern Opera House Archives, London.

32 Pietro Malacrida, who came from an old Lombardy family, was born in Andernach in the Rhine Valley, and did very well; and he then began to expand and to grow up. But I don’t think they came much into Sam’s way then. The boys, who had to be chosen and learnt by heart and repeated. A strong sense of public duty was inherent in the family; to the end of their lives, our parents walked off to evening committees and so on, and the older children when at home naturally fell into these sort of interests.

33. For example, a couple were purchased with money from Robert W. Lloyd. See Sloan 1998, especially p. 202. In November 1939 Stephen Courtauld provided the money thus far should not provide the means for our home to be the subject of an article in Vogue in July 1927, quoted in Panayotova ed. 2008, p. 195. He withdrew his financial support in November, 1951. But I don’t think they came much into Sam’s way then. The boys, who had to be chosen and learnt by heart and repeated. A strong sense of public duty was inherent in the family; to the end of their lives, our parents walked off to evening committees and so on, and the older children when at home naturally fell into these sort of interests.

I don’t remember how soon he liked dancing. We all played hockey vigorously; Sam captained our team of Courtalds against the world in the Christmas holidays and made us all train and abstain from Christmas fare.

27 He was a dark-room for photography. Following our mother, we all had sketchbooks out on holidays. Sam sketched with a good deal of freedom, his thoughts not always being practical. It was rather a hobby.

25 Stephen Courtauld was not alone in turning to watercolours from a love of mountains: a more intimate connection with his campaign of acquiring oriental watercolours. Of course it was a small thing to be seen mixed with etchings and some modern English pictures our father bought, and line-engravings of Old Masters. I don’t think these last two had much influence on his objects of art, but I think that he was interested in these old things in the National Gallery – but I expect they helped to give him a seeing eye.

30 In 1906, she was mentioned in the gossip magazine Times Diary as a regular patron of the exclusive Rhodesia’, to the end of their lives, our parents walked off to evening committees and so on, and the older children when at home naturally fell into these sort of interests.

49 See http://ntoz.org/?s=courtauld.

31 In 1964, Stephen Courtauld, from an annual report of 1954, especially p. 254. He withdrew his financial support in November, 1951. But I don’t think they came much into Sam’s way then. The boys, who had to be chosen and learnt by heart and repeated. A strong sense of public duty was inherent in the family; to the end of their lives, our parents walked off to evening committees and so on, and the older children when at home naturally fell into these sort of interests.


Stephen Courtauld continued to expand and to grow up. But I don’t think they came much into Sam’s way then. The boys, who had to be chosen and learnt by heart and repeated. A strong sense of public duty was inherent in the family; to the end of their lives, our parents walked off to evening committees and so on, and the older children when at home naturally fell into these sort of interests.

His independent taste was his own; and I remember my surprise when at home. In 1952, when he moved to Zimbabwe.

2008, p. 202. In November 1939 Stephen Courtauld provided the money thus far should not provide the means for our home to be the subject of an article in Vogue in July 1927, quoted in Panayotova ed. 2008, p. 195. He withdrew his financial support in November, 1951. But I don’t think they came much into Sam’s way then. The boys, who had to be chosen and learnt by heart and repeated. A strong sense of public duty was inherent in the family; to the end of their lives, our parents walked off to evening committees and so on, and the older children when at home naturally fell into these sort of interests.

We had then a mid-Victorian upbringing with a strong Puritan influence. We had glorious holidays among the beauties of the Scotch seas; and later were encouraged to travel. There was musical interest too. Our father learnt the violin for love, and he married, and there were practices, musical parties, and concerts. I think Sam was the only one who took up an instrument after school days, and for a while learnt the clarinet (serious music!). Though the children’s lives were a good deal regimented outwardly, their inner lives were left free and not interfered with. There was this distinct religious background in the home, unobtrusive but felt as important to the parents, though there were few observations beyond the Unitarian service at High Garrett Chapel, to which we were not compelled to go, and, when we were Sunday reading in the evening with our parents, when hymns had to be chosen and learnt by heart and repeated. A strong sense of public duty was inherent in the family; to the end of their lives, our parents walked off to evening committees and so on, and the elder children when at home naturally fell into these sort of interests.

But I don’t think they came much into Sam’s way then. The boys, of course, were mostly away at school. But I don’t think they came much into Sam’s way then. The boys, of course, were mostly away at school.

Life at Bocking Place When We Were Young

S Y D N E Y R E N E E C O U R T A U D L

A Memoir by Samuel Courtauld's sister from a manuscript in The Courtauld Gallery archives
Widely considered the greatest British artist of all time, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) is also regarded as a titan of the golden age of British watercolour. He worked in watercolour at every stage of his long and prolific career, and his engagement with the medium can fairly be said to reflect the overall trajectory of his artistic development. His watercolours evolved from the careful drawings of his youth, strongly informed by the older tradition of ‘stained drawings’ (that is, drawings whose clearly drawn outlines were coloured in by delicate washes in a relatively restricted range of hues), to large, vibrantly coloured and meticulously detailed landscapes that could hold their own when exhibited alongside oil paintings and which were widely reproduced in engravings, to the boldly experimental sketches of his later years which largely abandoned the recording of topographical detail in favour of capturing subtle nuances of light, weather and atmosphere.

Although he was prevented from travelling to the Continent earlier in his career by the Napoleonic Wars – he made his first trip abroad during the short-lived Peace of Amiens in 1802 – Turner became an inveterate European traveller after 1815. His regular trips to Italy, Germany, France and Switzerland, which he continued to undertake even at an advanced age, served as a vital source of inspiration for watercolours ranging from rapid plein-air sketches to ambitious works finished in the studio.

The Courtauld Gallery is fortunate today to hold one of the most important public collections of Turner's watercolours in the United Kingdom. Of the 30 works, more than a third – thirteen sheets in total – once belonged to Sir Stephen Courtauld, and were presented to the Gallery in his memory by his niece Jeanne in 1974 (ten of these are included in this exhibition). Taken as a group, these watercolours can be said to encapsulate the entire arc of Turner’s career, ranging as they do from early works such as Chepstow Castle, made when Turner was only eighteen and recently returned from his first tour of Wales, to two dramatic late sketches of billowing storm clouds over the Kentish coast at Margate, where the artist spent a significant part of his later years. However, watercolours of mountain scenery assume particular pride of place in the collection, a choice almost certainly guided by Sir Stephen’s passion for mountaineering. Purchased primarily from the leading London dealer Agnew’s between 1915–19 and 1927–39, the mountain watercolours include several depicting Mont Blanc, which he had climbed in 1919, as well as views of the celebrated waterfalls at Reichenbach and Schaffhausen in Switzerland. That Sir Stephen cherished his collection of Turners is made clear by their carefully conceived display in his study at Eltham Palace (fig. 104).
We would like to extend first and foremost our profound gratitude to The Courtauld Institute of Art, and especially to Ernst Vagnon van Claerhoven, Head of The Courtauld Gallery, and to his colleagues Barnaby Wright, Karen Serres, Katy Gattozzi and George Meug, without whom this project would not have been possible. They have been essential and attentive partners in its success.

Sincere thanks are due to the lenders, heads of museums, of public and private institutions, whose generous support has guaranteed the success of this exhibition: The Samuel Courtauld Trust and its chairman, Andrew Adcock; The National Gallery, London, and its director, Gabriele Finaldi; the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, and their director, John Leighton; and The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and its director, Luke Syson, as well as the private lenders who wish to remain anonymous. It is a pleasure to express our gratitude to The Hon. Christopher McLean for his insights and recollections.

We would also like to thank all those who have offered their support, in a number of ways: Sébastien Chauffier, Vincent Dosí, Rosamund Garrett, Sylvette Gaudichon, Alexandra Gerson, Antoine Manzacc, Spiro Patsy, Anne Robins, Dimitri Salmond, Rachel Sloan, Henri Peter Schwerfleur. And most especially Daniella Luxembourg.

The Courtauld Gallery has benefited from the invaluable help and professionalism of Graeme Barracough, Louisa Dare, Emily Dodgson, Kate Edmundson, Jack Ellis, Lea Tisserot, Gerlind Lorch, Tanja Mihlard, Anne Pérez and Matthew Thompson. For their work on the production of this catalogue, we extend our deepest gratitude to Paul Holberton, Laura Parker and Karin Kyburz.

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