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The Bequest of Mrs. L. L. Coburn
Author(s): Daniel Catton Rich
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THE BEQUEST OF MRS. L. L. COBURN

DURING the summer months those visiting the Institute have been privileged to enjoy two galleries of modern painting lent from the Coburn Collection. Held under the auspices of the Antiquarian Society, this was the first public view of the oils and water colors which Mrs. L. L. Coburn had been gathering for a number of years, and even her friends who had seen the pictures in her apartment at the Blackstone Hotel were surprised at the richness and quality of the group.[1] There are many ways to collect art; some collectors choose the extensive, some the intensive way. Mrs. Coburn's taste was for the latter method, and expressed itself in acquiring splendid examples of the French Impressionist School. Among the oils, none date much earlier than 1860, only three later than 1902 and between those years, there is hardly a painter in France of any importance who is not represented.

Though in frail health, Mrs. Coburn attended the opening of her exhibition on April 6, but soon afterward was confined to her hotel and passed away on June 1. Her will generously bequeaths to the Art Institute fifty-nine French paintings (of which some thirty-seven are oils), and fifty water colors. In addition the Ryerson Library receives a number of books, and the Institute shares a one-third interest with two other museums in the residue of the estate. Two maintenance funds are established, the first of $200,000 to provide for the upkeep of the collection which is to be known as the "Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial," and the second of $50,000 as an endowment for the water color group given in memory of the collector's mother, Olivia Shaler Swan.

Mrs. Coburn began by collecting American painting by such men as Hassam and Weir, and from her later acquisitions one gains the impression that it was the color and light reflected from France in their work which pleased her. Monet was the logical outcome, though the first Monet she bought, "The Church at Varengeville," in its sober greys and greens still recalls Corot. There followed typical examples from the Haystack, Poppy Field, Vétheuil, and Venetian suites. Two canvases by this most scientific of the Impressionists deserve special comment. "The Beach at Sainte-Adresse," was painted at the seaside resort near Le Hâvre where Monet's family owned a house, and where he spent a number of unhappy weeks in 1867. There is nothing, however, but the most positive serenity in its conception and painting; seldom did he later manage so just and subtle a union of color and strong design. Here Monet, still under the influence of Boudin and Jongkind (study for instance the sky and water effects) consciously added Manet's flat masses and sense of pattern. The result is a painting, curiously light and luminous, persuasively delicate and charming, yet without a trace of Monet's final chalkiness or decomposed form.

In a second work, painted fifteen years after at Étretat, the Impressionist formula is in full swing. But "The Cliff Walk" is one of the rarer Monets in which the intense lyricism of the scene so affected the painter that it automatically forced a cer-

[1] The paintings were published in a detailed, illustrated catalogue. Copies of this edition are still available and may be ordered from the Department of Publications and Reproductions. The catalogue notes contain full details of chronology, collections, and histories of individual works.

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CLAUDE MONET, "THE BEACH AT SAINTE-ADRESSE" (1867). THE COBURN COLLECTION.

tain unity into the picture. We need not look for the massed color, the patterns of light and dark, the steadying linear scheme of "Sainte-Adresse"; what we see is a certain happy fluidity, a sense of movement in all things, and a triumphant record of a bright, breezy day on the coast. In such a work Monet almost meets Renoir.

Renoir's attitude, however, was if anything sunnier, and certainly more sumptuous and rich in expression. Monet saw, thought, and painted; Renoir saw, felt, and hurried to set down on canvas the floating webs of sunlight that had caught in them all of the brilliant hues of the prism. The six paintings by him in the Coburn gift show Renoir at this period (1878-1885) as the arch-Impressionist. At the same time he loved the real appearance of things too deeply to lose their ultimate structure; a scaffolding of form remains to check the incessant flow back and forward of brilliant tone, to guide and relieve the eye of tedium. Unhappy with men as models (the portrait of Sisley, which may eventually take its place in the Gallery of Artists' Portraits along with André's deferential canvases of Renoir and Monet and Fantin-Latour's gallant Manet, feels a little like an exercise), Renoir is at his best in the "Lady Sewing" and at his most popular in "On the Terrace." In the exhibition, this latter has been the center of admiration, but Renoir the artist is better revealed in the tender spring landscape that spreads its greens and rose as a background, than in the somewhat fixed, stilted figures of the young girl and child. A bouquet of peonies —these flowers in his hands taking on an almost Courbet-like, shaggy strength,—a green and blue and white landscape, and a delicately tinted head of an Algerian girl (inspired by Delacroix) complete the list, all in all a great addition to the Renoir group already in the Institute.

Works by Manet and Degas were purchased relatively late in Mrs. Coburn's career. Of the earlier Manet, "The Lange Boy," with its studio tone, and curious retailoring of one of Velasquez's dwarfs to suit the needs of a Parisian gamin little need be said. The two later studies of women, the sketchy "Portrait of a Lady" and the more complete "Journal Illustré" are evidence of the artist's further experiment with the tangled lines and spots of color, which he derived from out-of-door vision and out-of-door painting. Especially the second spells "Manet, the Impressionist" as no other work in the Institute does. All the mastery of the early period is here; the suave laying on of paint, the elegance of draughtmanship with the brush (implied and never overstated) but the mood is changed. Manet the traditionalist has become Manet the experimentalist and perhaps before his early death, do the two completely blend only once in "The Bar at the Folies Bergère."

Can a museum ever acquire enough works by Degas? In some ways one doubts it and the four paintings by this master in the Coburn Collection are especially notable. The "Uncle and Niece" has been thoroughly discussed in another *Bulletin*;[2] it is enough to state again that among the early family portraits there is scarcely one to excell it in inimitable quality of style, and perhaps none more moving. Degas is here caught off his guard; his almost unwavering objectivity deserts him, but none of his penetration and skill. Its appeal has been very adequately characterized by Manson[3] and even in the midst of a gallery of Renoirs and Monets, in this storm center of blues, reds, greens and violets, it holds its own by right of sober and sensitive excellence.

The graphic side of Impressionism, the controlled but expressive line, joined to scintillant color—this was what Degas desired in paint but did not always achieve. The small things, the exquisite little theatre interiors or race tracks almost invariably have it, but not always his more ambitious works in oil. Tone sometimes struggled with color as in the arresting sketch "The Morning Ride"; at other

[2] XXIII (1929), 125-127.
[3] J. B. Manson, *The Life and Work of Edgar Degas*, Lond., 1927, 12.

EDGARD DEGAS, "THE MILLINERY SHOP" (C. 1882). THE MR. AND MRS. LEWIS LARNED COBURN MEMORIAL.

times line, itself, is a little lost in an overlay of pigment. "The Dancer on the Stage," the third of the Coburn Degases, is what one has come to expect from this genius of the *coulisses,* but in "The Millinery Shop" we have a work in oil to compare with the greatest of his laundresses and café singers. In fact it is not too much to insist that this large canvas is among the finest later works by him. The subject was repeated often, oftener perhaps in pastel than in paint, but here there is no hint of the crayon. And here the hats themselves have conquered. and the figures have been reduced

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go on, discussing the color with its harmony and subdued dissonance, the selection and arrangement of shapes, the movement back and into the picture space, but even this would miss something of Degas' magic. There would still be the expressive brush stroke—so soon to be laid aside for the more supple, accented stroke of pastel—and still something unsaid, that quality which more than one critic has confessed as remaining mysterious in this artist.

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Mrs. Charles H. Worcester. The "Two Lawyers," tiny as it is (5¼ x 5¾), is Daumier at his most concentrated; the swift rhythm of line plays over these inch and a half heads, and with a few dark and light accents builds an heroic composition.

The examples by Pissarro and Sisley belong with Monet, far more than with Daumier or Cézanne. The Sisley, "Landscape near Moret," is unusually exquisite in its harmony of tans, browns and yellows—a range which he later put by for often less happy color—while the Pissarro, though painted at the very end of his career, is a typical *pointilliste* work.

Of course it is easy to see the best of Pissarro in the early Cézanne, and especially in so typical a work as the panorama of "Auvers-sur-Oise" of 1873 included in the Coburn gift. Cézanne, the formal architect, is implied rather than expressed in this canvas; but it is a colorful, attractive prelude to the landscapes, such as the "L'Estaque" of the Ryerson Collection. If the artist had not gone on with his experiments in vision, as well as technique, he might have stopped here and become the purely Impressionist figure that D. C. MacColl, in his recent *Confessions of a Keeper,*[5] would like to make him out. But by the time that Cézanne had retired to Aix he had already progressed beyond the broken color and fused handling of his teacher. Though today the admitted founder and leader of Post-Impressionism, the genius of this painter is a little obscure. On the one hand there has been the long fought and highly successful attempt to make Cézanne into a classic artist, and the most reasoning and able studies have been published on this point, of which the best is undoubtedly Roger Fry's. But in all this work of careful analysis and dissection, Cézanne's commanding quality has not come entirely to light. The key, perhaps, lies in those remarkable conversations which the painter had with Gasquet, and recent attempts to discredit Gasquet cannot take away the main argument, which Cézanne put in his own words, that the artist's intense urge was to get at and to express the living poetry of the world, not merely to paint great compositions modeled in space and in strange, powerful color. He thus becomes by his own admission a kind of symbolist poet of an exceedingly high order and not the purist that much recent criticism would make him out.

Now he would not neglect any force, nor any means by which this "vision of things" might be made real. He dreamed of uniting form and color, atmosphere and surface, resemblance and idea into one great expression. Nowhere is this sort of spiritual research carried further than in certain still lifes. "Things," remarked Cézanne, "never cease to live. . . . Through their own inner radiance they finally impose themselves on our consciousness, as we speak by our glances and our words. . . . Chardin was the first to catch the atmosphere of things" . . . and Cézanne goes on to speak of this "bloom of emotion which envelops every object." Even Fry admits that in his "still life he achieved the expression of the most exalted feelings and the deepest intuitions of his nature . . ." and Sir Charles Holmes put the matter very clearly when he wrote: "With Cézanne, a mere crumpled table-cloth may thus take on the majesty of a mountain."

All this by way of prelude to one of the finest paintings in the Coburn Collection, a still life of tulips and fruit, which in its way ranks with Cézanne's highest achievements. There are paintings richer in texture, more dynamic in effect, but few that have as sustained a tranquillity. Everything seems perfectly placed, and perfectly felt; the motif of round and jagged lance-like forms is exploited with real mastery; the color (here very thin and very complex in its greens, orange, dull reds, and powder-blues) melts into drawing, and the drawing into color. Cézanne himself, who gave up such flowers because they faded too soon for him to probe their deeper reality, has said it all when he remarked, "Drawing and color

[5] N. Y. 1931, "Cézanne as Deity," 260-272.

are no longer distinct: in proportion as one paints, one draws . . . the more harmonious the color, the more precise the draughtsmanship . . ; when the color is at its richest, the form is at its fullest. . . . All the rest is poetry."

Cézanne's contemporaries, Gauguin and van Gogh, whose names so often roll out together, are represented each by a painting, the first with a Marquesan "Incantation" (1902), the second by a landscape done in Arles. Vincent wrote to his brother Theo concerning the picture: "In this last category is a canvas of thirty square, a corner of a garden with a weeping tree, grass, round clipped bushes of cedar and an oleander bush. The same corner of the garden, that is, which you have already had a study of in the last parcel. But as this one is bigger, there is a lemon sky over everything and also the colors have the richness and density of autumn, and also it is still heavier paint than the other, plain and thick." Lautrec's "Au Moulin de la Galette," which was one of the features of the Toulouse-Lautrec Exhibition at the Institute, is another remarkable acquisition. Every artist of importance has certain landmarks in his development, pictures which sum up what he has done and thought for a long time. "Au Moulin de la Galette" (1889) is such a picture, showing Lautrec the *designer* at the height of his power, just as "Au Moulin Rouge" (1892) displays him at his best as a *painter*. In the earlier work, the descriptive medium of line, which the young artist studied so assiduously in Degas and Forain, stains its way into

Two paintings by Derain, a woman's head, and a bouquet of flowers in the style of Manet, a fan by Manet himself, two slighter works by Monet, a late still life by Albert André, an excellent Redon still life, and an early Picasso complete the list. Of all these the Picasso, "On the Upper Deck" is clearly the work best calculated to support the claims of the twentieth century against the nineteenth. And yet this statement is hardly accurate, for in many ways it is the most conventional of Picassos and looks back to Lautrec and Degas and even to Manet for inspiration. The young Spaniard was only twenty when he painted it, and it is remarkably free from some of the disagreeable color qualities and straining for effect found at this time in his work. It is curiously Spanish with its blue of Valencian tiles, its darkly massed figures in the Goya manner, its subdued but persistent melancholy. On the surface resembling the social pictures of Steinlen, its mood has nothing to do with any description of character. The play of blues throughout is the symbol, though here less validly expressed than in Picasso's later work.

The water colors, French, American and English, must be reserved for later comment. Constantin Guys is found in some of his vivid little pen and brush drawings, witty, easy and full of spirit. Among the Americans there are excellent examples by Sargent, Hopper, Demuth and many others. These will increase the water color collection, and help to foster interest in this medium, which under the impetus of the Institute's International Exhibitions

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