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Monet's Haystacks Reconsidered

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ON May 4, 1891, an exhibition of 22 recent paintings by Claude Monet opened at the Galerie Durand-Ruel in Paris. In one small room, 15 paintings of the same subject were hung together. The "Series of Grainstacks (1890–91)," as they were called in the catalogue,¹ was conceived at a decisive moment not only in Monet's own career but also in the history of French painting. Monet, at the age of 51, clearly was the dean of French painters. By the time his exhibition of Haystacks opened, he had already outlived two of his greatest younger colleagues: Vincent van Gogh committed suicide in the previous summer and Georges Seurat died in March, while working on his last masterpiece, *The Circus*. The two other major masters of the younger generation were not in Paris: Paul Gauguin had fled France for Tahiti and was not to reappear in the world's artistic capital until 1893, and Paul Cézanne was living in what amounted to life-long aesthetic exile in Provence. The remaining younger artists, with the exception of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, were working under the spell of one or the other of these four Post-Impressionists; the original Impressionist movement definitely had lost its avant-garde vitality.

Monet himself essentially had abandoned the Impressionists before the group's last exhibition, held in the spring of 1886, and refused to participate in that event.

PLATE 1 Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926),
Haystack, Thaw, Sunset, 1891. The Art Institute of Chicago
(see figure 12).

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At the time, he was struggling toward an aesthetic independence that was to culminate in the great exhibition he shared with sculptor Auguste Rodin at the Galerie Georges Petit in connection with the International Exposition of 1889. After 1886, his Impressionist colleagues had scattered. Camille Pissarro remained in Eragny, where he adopted the Divisionist style of Seurat; Alfred Sisley worked in the quaint river town of Moret-sur-Loing, evolving a style that harked back to early Impressionism; Auguste Renoir became involved in classically inspired figure painting; and Edgar Degas turned into a sort of urban recluse, working increasingly inwardly as his eye problems worsened. In some ways, Monet was the only one who looked confidently forward; with the exhibition of his Haystacks at Durand-Ruel in 1891, he secured his preeminent position.

The Haystacks series proved to be a critical and financial success that far exceeded the dreams of its painter or his dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. The critics, led by Gustave Geffroy, Monet's young friend and author of the lyrical introduction to the catalogue, were almost unanimous in their applause. Pissarro, often impatient with what he considered the venal, bourgeois values of his colleague, called the Haystacks "the work of a very great artist."² Yet, more extraordinary was their popularity with buyers. Before the end of the summer, many of the available paintings from the series had been sold and Monet had finished several others for his dealers. In the history of modern art, it is hard to point to other paintings as revolutionary that have been accepted so easily by critics and collectors alike as were the Haystacks.

The reasons for this have never been fully established, perhaps because the Haystacks, like most of Monet's later series of Poplars, Cathedrals, Water Lilies, and various travel views, have been dispersed in collections throughout the world and never have been reunited. In Monet exhibitions of significance held in Chicago, New York/St. Louis, and Paris,³ only a small number of Haystacks were brought together to suggest the majesty of the original ensemble. The superb group of eight Haystacks in the current exhibition "A Day in the Country: Impressionism and the French Landscape" is the largest to be assembled since 1891.⁴ Until recently, only three versions of the Haystacks could be seen at one time in a public collection—that of The Art Institute of Chicago. Thus, Monet's original intention to create a series of 15 specific paintings that achieved a larger harmony than was possible in a smaller number existed more in the minds of scholars and critics than it did in any actual location.

Fortunately, The Art Institute of Chicago recently had the opportunity to purchase two additional paintings from the Haystack series to add to its distinguished

group of three—*Haystacks, Setting Sun* (pl. 3, fig. 13), *Two Haystacks* (pl. 4), and *Haystack, Winter, Giverny* (pl. 5, fig. 9). The decision to acquire both these canvases—*Haystack* (pl. 2, fig. 11) and *Haystack, Thaw, Sunset* (pl. 1, fig. 12)—was complicated by the fact that the museum already possessed 32 paintings by Monet. However, our recognition of the importance of the idea of series for Monet and of the seminal nature of the Haystack images provided the necessary impetus for the purchase. With five Haystacks in its collection, the Art Institute has become the place where one can begin to understand Monet's intentions in doing the series.

When hung together on a single wall, the five paintings from the series "breathe contentedly," as Pissarro said of the original grouping in 1891.⁵ Interestingly, there is no particular sequence in which the paintings look best; virtually any combination of the five on a single wall is powerful. One can interpret the series by hanging the five canvases in different ways, using as the determinant compositional balance, chromatic relationships, seasonal or diurnal time, or even something as un-historical as their various current frames. One is tempted to think that Monet himself wanted maximum flexibility of arrangement in the series so that no particular interconnections would be paramount. Yet, such temptation must be avoided until a full analysis of all the paintings in the 1891 exhibition is completed.

In fact, it is due to the way that this exhibition caught the imagination of one Chicago collector that the Art Institute today has five Haystack images. Bertha Honoré Palmer (1849–1918) saw the 1891 exhibition and, perhaps as a result of that experience, became the most important 19th-century collector of Impressionist landscape painting outside France as well as the first collector to grasp the importance of Monet's series paintings. Twenty-eight of the Art Institute's great collection of Impressionist paintings—including three of the museum's five Haystacks (pls. 1–2, 4)—once were owned by Mrs. Palmer. It is the purpose of this article to examine carefully the exhibition of Haystacks in 1891, deducing from it Monet's intentions; to reveal more about the series by showing how his most important and perceptive American patron responded to it; and to discuss the ways in which her perception of the series continues to influence our view of it today.

Unfortunately, it is difficult, indeed impossible, to identify with certainty all the Haystack paintings in the 1891 exhibition. Monet himself chose the 15 compositions from a larger number of Haystacks, 30 of which survive today.⁶ Of the fifteen pictures selected, eight had been purchased from the painter by Durand-Ruel, two were in private collections, and the remaining five evidently were part of Monet's own stock, although they

were not identified as such. This meager information, together with the records kept by the Galerie Durand-Ruel, makes it possible to identify at least ten of the paintings with some certainty. However, some of Monet's titles were general enough that they could apply equally to two or three pictures, and the early records of several of the Haystacks are sufficiently vague as to make precise identification difficult. Modern conservators, in their attempts to give added life to these fragile paintings, have relined and restretched many of them, removing in the process marks or labels that might have helped to identify missing members of the original group of 15.

Due to these problems, no systematic reconstruction of the original exhibition has been attempted. Daniel Wildenstein identified twelve canvases conclusively and one other with reservations.⁷ From the evidence provided by Wildenstein, it is possible to propose the following identification of the 15 paintings in the original exhibition. The title in each case is Monet's original, and the Wildenstein (W.) number following it allows the reader to connect the painting to a catalogued and illustrated work. The paintings are arranged in the order in which they appeared in the 1891 exhibition catalogue and are listed with their original numbers. Each work is illustrated here by a figure whose number corresponds to that of the 1891 catalogue but whose title in most cases has been assigned to it after 1891 and therefore often differs from that listed in the catalogue. The spaces between certain works have been inserted to suggest several "subgroups" that will be discussed below.

1. *Haystacks (End of Summer)*
W. 1269, Private Collection, Chicago
2. *Haystacks (End of Summer)*
W. 1266, Musée d'Orsay, Galerie du Jeu de Paume, Paris
3. *Haystacks (Last Rays of the Sun)*
W. 1272; Private Collection
4. *Haystack (Sun in the Mist)*
W. 1286, Private Collection, USA
5. *Haystack (Sunset)*
W. 1289, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
6. *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Gray Weather)*, either
(?) W. 1274, Shelburne Museum, Vermont, or
(?) W. 1279, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
7. *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Sun)*
(?) W. 1277, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh
8. *Haystack (Snow Effect)*
W. 1280, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
9. *Haystack (Snow Effect, Cloudy Weather)*
W. 1281, The Art Institute of Chicago

10. *Haystack (Sunset, Winter)*
W. 1282, Private Collection
11. *Haystack (Winter)*
(?) W. 1283, The Art Institute of Chicago
12. *Haystack (End of the Day)*
(?) W. 1284, The Art Institute of Chicago
13. *Haystacks (Sunset, Snow Effect)*
W. 1278, The Art Institute of Chicago
14. *Haystack (Winter Evening, Misty Weather)*
(?) W. 1217, Private Collection
15. *Haystack (Snow Effect, Sun)*
W. 1287, Private Collection, France

Modern students of Monet's oeuvre have been interested principally in four aspects of the Haystack series: the order in which they were made, the way in which they were painted, their meaning, and the critical response to the Durand-Ruel exhibition.⁸ From their investigations, we have learned the following: that Monet did not paint the Haystacks exclusively out-of-doors; that he worked on each of them for protracted periods, allowing the paint to dry between one session and another; that he was not unmindful of the various meanings associated with the haystack and, therefore, that he was not painting only effects of light and color; and that the paintings were interpreted in a rich and varied manner by contemporary critics, who were as concerned with their content as with their formal innovations.

One subject that has been largely neglected is what might be called the "function" of the paintings in the Haystack series. Were they intended by the artist as easel pictures to be sold individually, or did he create them as a unified decorative ensemble to be kept together? All of the evidence suggests that Monet was ambivalent about this point. Obviously, he was more interested in their essential decorative unity than he had been when painting various views of related motifs earlier in his career. It is clear, for example, that his two similarly composed views of boathouses at Etretat, both today in The Art Institute of Chicago (figs. 16, 17), were meant to be separate easel pictures, one of which deals with stormy waters and the other with calm waters. The fact that each is of a different size and that no other versions of the composition survive is proof that they were not intended as a pair. Monet came closer to such a series in his paintings of the Creuse Valley, which were exhibited together in 1889. Yet, these works vary in their compositions (of which there are at least four types) and were not isolated in the exhibit, but rather were placed in a large gallery with many iconographically unrelated paintings by Monet, as well as with sculptures by Rodin.⁹

PLATE 3 Monet, *Haystacks, Setting Sun*, 1891. The Art Institute of Chicago (see figure 13).

PLATE 2 Monet, *Haystack*, 1891. The Art Institute of Chicago (see figure 11).





However, Monet did engage in a protracted period of experimentation with decorative and iconological interrelations among separate pictures before he launched the idea of a series as such. Four versions of *The Poppy Field* of 1890, one of which is in the Art Institute, and a group of four similarly sized pictures of a *Field of Rye and Poppies* were begun in the summer of 1890 and seem to have been made as a mini-series.¹⁰ Indeed, Monet already had painted at least four and probably five pictures of haystacks in the autumn and winter of 1888–89 and probably conceived of the series of poppy and rye fields as part of a larger agricultural narrative. Indeed, the haystack—a form of agricultural architecture—transcends seasonal time because it lasts throughout the winter. Therefore, Monet could study the subject between late summer and late spring, a stretch of time that was considerably longer than the period in which poppies bloom or rye ripens.

In his 1891 exhibition, Monet included seven pictures that were made at an earlier point than the Haystacks and constitute an early exploration of the concept of series. He included a strange pair of paintings, both signed and dated 1886 and entitled *Study of a Figure Out-of-Doors*, apparently to prove that his analysis of a single subject at different points of time had begun several years previously. The painter also exhibited four of the poppy-and-rye-field pictures mentioned above, which presumably preceded the Haystacks not only in execution but also in the agricultural cycle. The selection was rounded out by an extraordinary painting from the collection of Monet's friend, the Socialist politician Georges Clemenceau. The painter may have included *Study of Rocks, Creuse* not only because of its high quality and its relationship to the Creuse series, but also because its ownership, announced in the catalogue, indicated the painter's connections with the great leader.¹¹

Top

FIGURE 1 Monet, *Haystacks, End of Summer, Evening*, originally *Haystacks (End of Summer)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 60 × 100 cm. Chicago, Private Collection. Photo: D. Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné* 3 (Paris, 1979), no. 1269.

Bottom

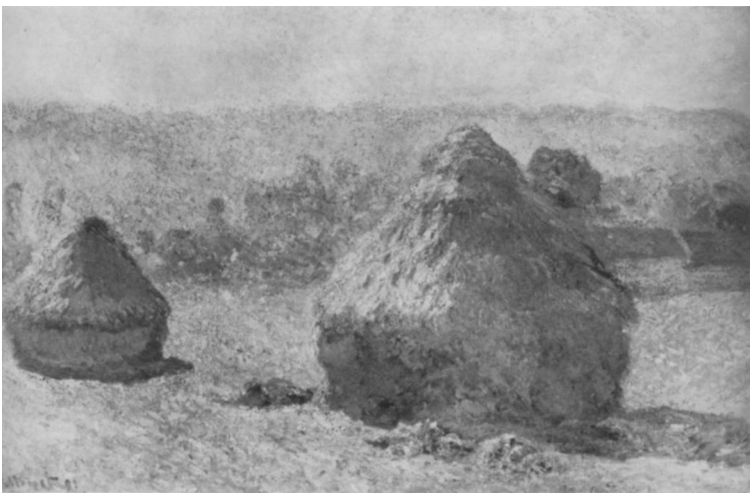
FIGURE 2 Monet, *Haystacks*, originally *Haystacks (End of Summer)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 60 × 100 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, Galerie du Jeu de Paume. Photo: Documentation photographique de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux.



Thus, Monet's acceptance of the decorative unity of the series clearly was only partial. Pissarro sensed this unwittingly when he first judged the series as mass-produced easel pictures made for consumption and then recognized their collective power as a larger unity. In order to understand fully the ambivalent status of the pictures as "parts of a whole," one must know how they were selected and exhibited as well as how and to whom they were sold.

Monet selected the paintings himself and sent a list of titles to Durand-Ruel in a letter of April 26. About the installation of the gallery of *Haystacks*, we know practically nothing. Unfortunately, no photographs of the original installation survive (Durand-Ruel did not begin to photograph his exhibitions routinely until well after 1891). Monet did indicate in a letter of April 13 to the dealer that he wanted two of the frames in the exhibition to be white, but gave no clues about any of the remaining ten frames ordered in that letter or about which two pictures were destined to receive the white frames.¹²

The *Haystacks* probably were hung in a single row around the gallery because there would not have been any need to double-hang such a small number of pictures. If this is true, the order of the paintings in the catalogue might reflect the sequence of the paintings on the walls. Because of his direct involvement with the catalogue, it can be interpreted as an expression of the artist's intentions. As suggested above, the pictures in





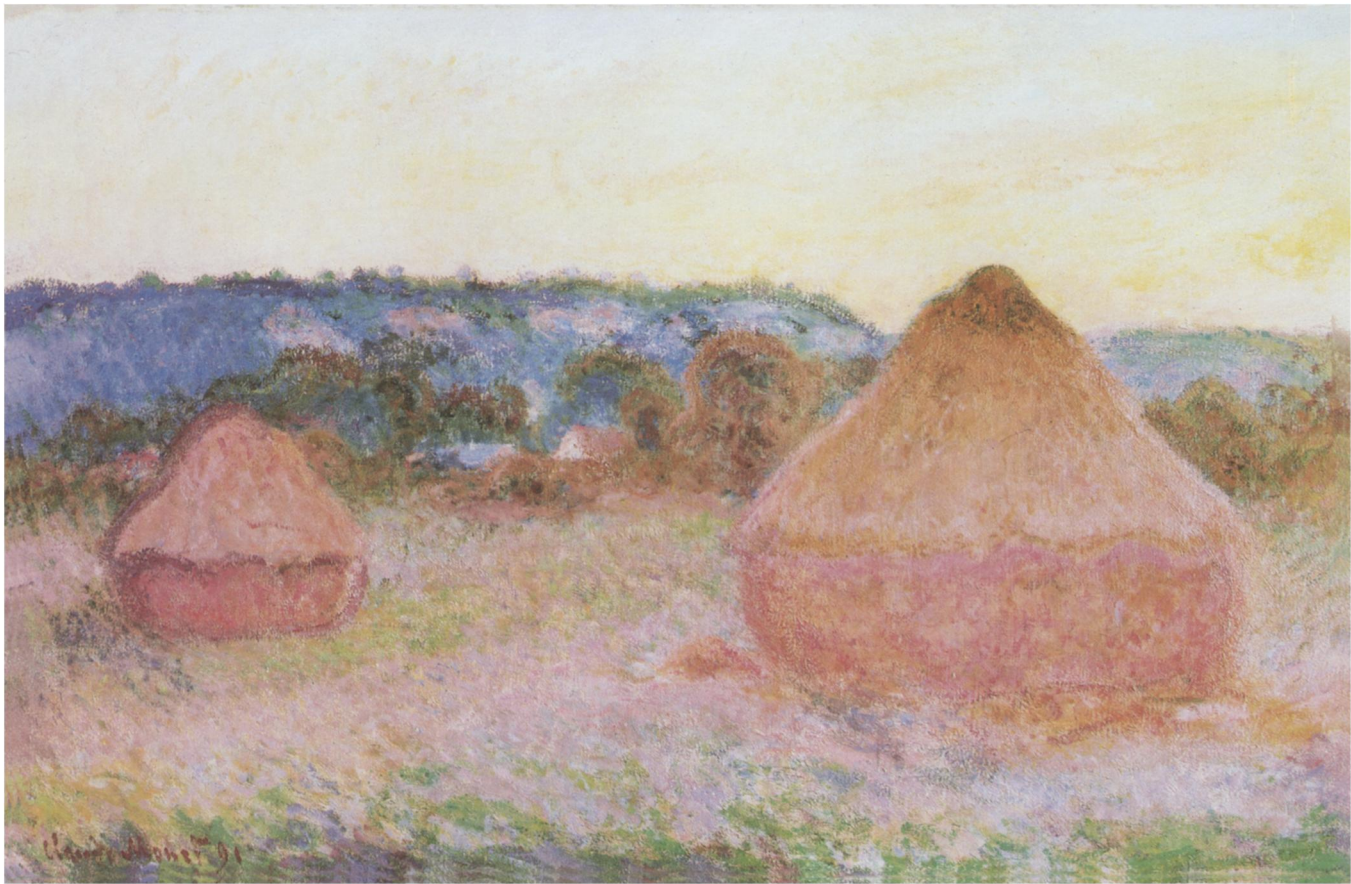
this list can be related to each other in subgroups of various types and dimensions. Analysis of these subgroups is revealing. The first is a pair of identically sized and titled paintings representing haystacks late in the summer, just after the harvest (figs. 1–2). Aside from the minor compositional distinctions between the paintings, there is a basic difference between the time of day represented; one is an evening landscape while the other represents morning.¹³ Pairings of landscapes depicting the four classically defined times of day (morning, midday, sunset, and evening) were not uncommon in the 19th century; the four times of day had been suggested as proper subjects for painters in virtually every French treatise on landscape painting produced during the 19th century.

The next group in the catalogue consists of three paintings that would have formed a balanced compositional unit if hung together. In the first, *Haystacks (Last Rays of the Sun)* (fig. 3), a dominant haystack at the far left of the composition casts a powerful shadow across the field. In the second, *Haystack (Sun in the Mist)* (fig. 4), a central haystack emerges from an evanescent, misty landscape. The third, *Haystack (Sunset)* (fig. 5), is dominated by a haystack placed at the far right edge of the composition. Together, these three paintings assume a powerful compositional unity. Despite their lack of any apparent temporal sequence, it is likely that they were intended to represent what Geffroy called in his cata-

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 FIGURE 3 Monet, *Haystacks (Last Rays of the Sun)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 73 × 92 cm. Private Collection. Photo: D. Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné 3* (Paris, 1979), no. 1272.

Left
 FIGURE 4 Monet, *Haystack (Sun in the Mist)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 65 × 100 cm. USA, Private Collection. Photo: D. Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné 3* (Paris, 1979), no. 1286.

Right
 FIGURE 5 Monet, *Haystack at Sunset Near Giverny*, originally *Haystack (Sunset)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 75 × 94 cm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Julia Cheney Edwards Collection, bequest of Robert J. Edwards in memory of his mother (25.112). Photo: Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



logue essay “the sumptuousness and melancholy of autumn,”¹⁴ and that they were intended to follow the first pair of late summer pictures in seasonal sequence.

The titles of the third group, *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Gray Weather)* (figs. 6a-b) and *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Sun)* (fig. 7), reveal clearly the nature of their pairing. In these two works, Monet was not setting up oppositions of time—either seasonal or diurnal—but rather of light. While it is not possible to identify these paintings conclusively today,¹⁵ the pair advanced the series into the next season—winter.

That winter was the period during which most of the *Haystacks* of 1890–91 were begun is evident from the exhibition catalogue. Of the fifteen paintings in the series, only five (the first pair and the trio) represent seasons other than winter; a sixth picture, number twelve in the catalogue, lacked a winter title, but was most probably a winter picture. Monet was fascinated by the endurance of the haystack through the most difficult and

frigid weather. His series must be read as an apotheosis to the triumph of the haystack over time as well as weather. This would have been demonstrated most dramatically in the group of five paintings that followed the winter pair discussed above and that certainly formed the core of the series.

These five pictures (figs. 8–12), of which only the first three can be identified securely, are identical in their size and composition, and in the season they depict. In them, Monet explored changes in time with a relentless clarity. In each, a single haystack, its bottom right edge placed directly along the canvas’s vertical center, occupies a position to the left of center. Working from this compositional constant, Monet shifted his vantage point around the haystack so that, in every case, the background is slightly different. It was perhaps this movement around a fixed, circular motif that inspired the ecstatic astronomical metaphors in Geffroy’s catalogue essay. For the critic, Monet “evoked without cessation,

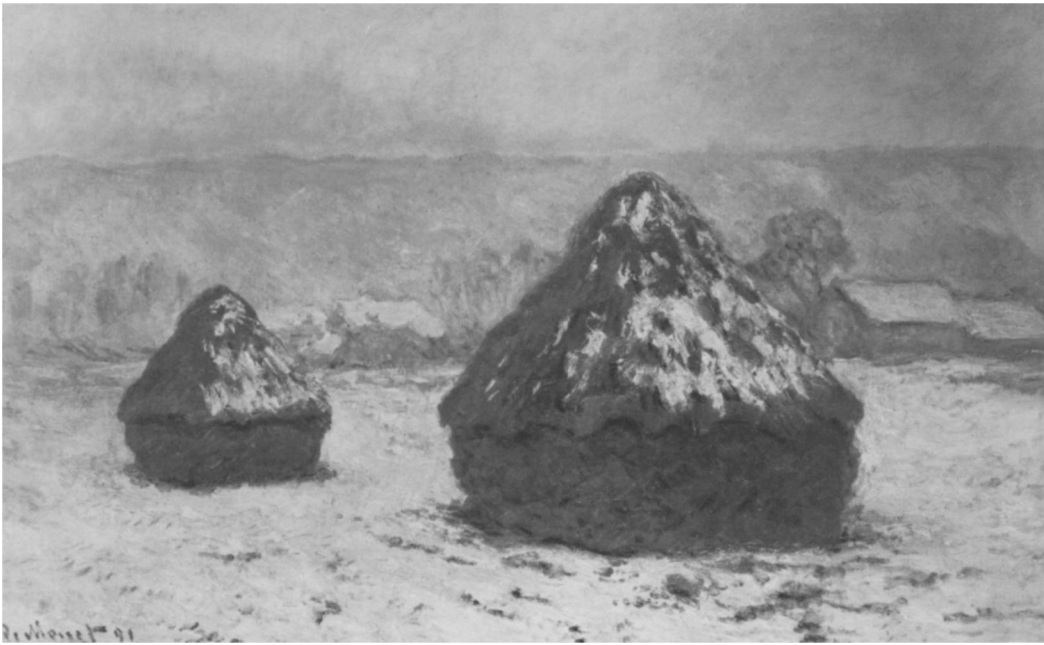
Monet's Haystacks Reconsidered

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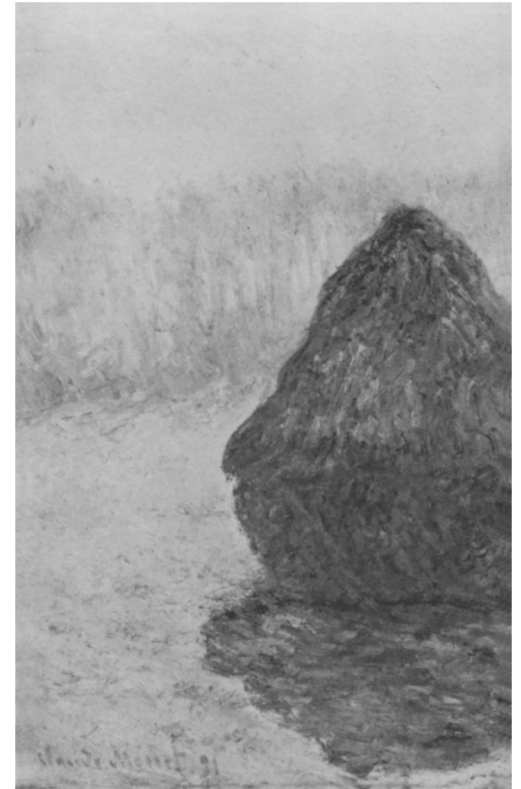
PLATE 4 Monet, *Two Haystacks*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 64.8 × 99.8 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis L. Coburn Memorial Collection (1933.444).

PLATE 5 Monet, *Haystack, Winter, Giverny*, 1891. The Art Institute of Chicago (see figure 9).





Left
 FIGURE 6a Monet, *Haystacks in Snow*, originally *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Gray Weather)* (?), 1891. Oil on canvas; 60 × 100 cm. Shelburne Museum, Vermont.



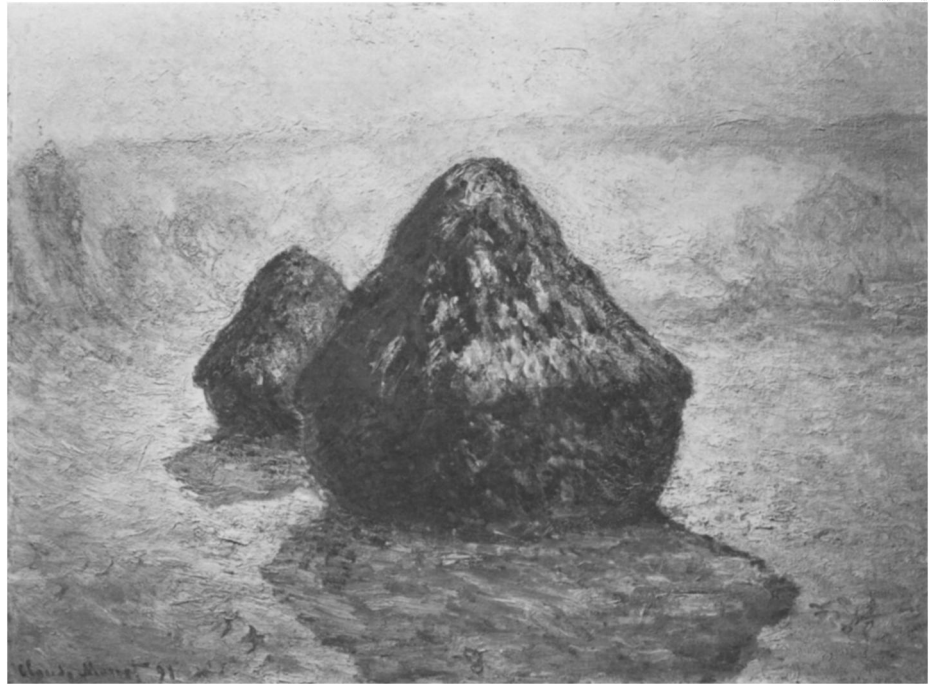
Center
 FIGURE 6b Monet, *Haystacks in Snow*, originally *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Gray Weather)* (?), 1891. Oil on canvas; 65.4 × 92.1 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection (29.100.109).

Right
 FIGURE 7 Monet, *Haystacks, Snow Effect*, originally *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Sun)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 65 × 92 cm. Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland.

in each of his canvases, the curve of the horizon, the roundness of the globe, the course of the earth through space.” He went on to call the Haystacks “a synthetic summary of the meteors and the elements.”¹⁶ Never again in Monet’s career was a single object to play so crucial a role in anchoring a world in flux.

This great subseries was followed in the catalogue by three paintings, one of which, *Haystacks (Sunset, Snow Effect)* (fig. 13), seems to have been isolated from any group. Now in the Art Institute, the canvas was executed with a directness and rapidity not evident in very many other paintings in the series. The visual drama created in the Chicago canvas by the intense orange against the icy blues of a winter evening contrast markedly with the final pair of Monet’s exhibition, *Haystack (Winter Evening, Misty Weather)* (fig. 14) and *Haystack (Snow Effect, Sun)* (fig. 15), in which the artist apparently created yet another type of pairing—misty and clear weather during the same season.

Although this reconstruction of the exhibition is only tentative, it suggests a high degree of conscious manip-



ulation of subgroupings by the artist as well as a comprehensive seasonal narrative that binds the 15 works together. The series began on a late summer evening and ended in the clear light of a winter day. The haystacks survived time and weather, each variable of which Monet manipulated through specific pairings that give a structural rigor to the series. At its center, the group of five single Haystacks were given a compositional rather than a temporal order, and, in each of them, the haystack dominates the winter.

Given this sophisticated internal narrative, with its obvious analogies to symphonic movements or to sequential segments (chapters, stanzas, or verses) of a text, one might well wonder who, if anyone, understood Monet's aims. Fortunately, an understanding of the public's response is made possible by studying the first owners of the Haystacks. As noted above, the series was an enormous commercial success. Many of the 15 canvases sold within the first month of the exhibition. All but one or two of the entire group of thirty were sold within a year; of these, twenty went to America and ten

remained in France. Of the pictures sold to Americans, two each went to A. A. Pope of Cleveland, J. H. Wittmore of Naugatuck, Mr. and Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer of New York, and nine to Mrs. Palmer (she purchased eight Haystacks directly from the artist or his dealers and a ninth from Charles Fairchilds, Boston).¹⁷ Thus, several American collectors, of which Mrs. Palmer was the most significant, clearly understood that the paintings meant more in combination than individually.

During her lifetime, Mrs. Palmer was called "the queen of Chicago"; Anders Zorn's famous portrait of her (fig. 18) makes her regal status perfectly clear. Married to the great hotel and retail magnate Potter Palmer, she bore him two sons, built a famous "castle," presided over the largest private collection of works of art in Chicago, and was named president of the Board of Lady Managers for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. By 1890, she had become preeminent in Chicago, and was also well known in New York, Newport, London, and Paris. Hers was a rich, intense life, full of politics, intrigue, and sheer power; if there was a woman



PLATE 6 Monet, *Haystacks, End of Summer, Evening*, 1891. Chicago, Private Collection (see figure 1).

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Top left

FIGURE 8 Monet, *Haystack in Winter*, originally *Haystack (Snow Effect)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 65.4 × 92.3 cm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Aimee and Rosamond Lamb. Photo: Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Bottom left

FIGURE 9 Monet, *Haystack, Winter, Giverny*, originally *Haystack (Snow Effect, Cloudy Weather)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 66 × 93 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection (1933.1155).

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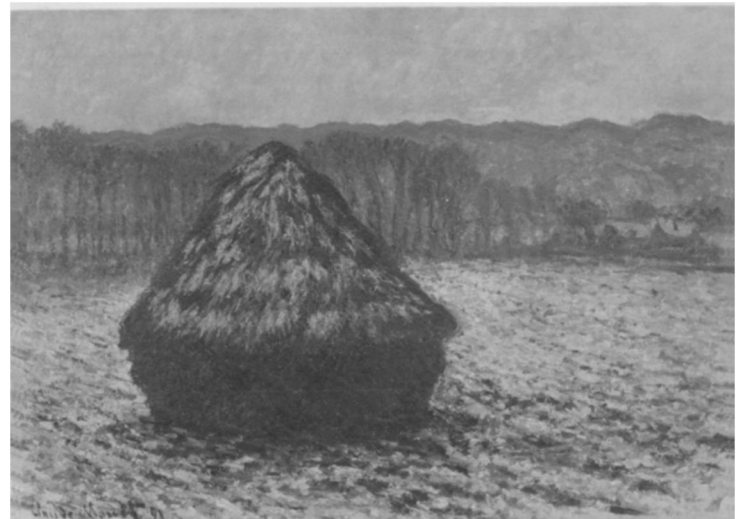
FIGURE 10 Monet, *Haystack (Sunset, Winter)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 65 × 92 cm. Private Collection. Photo: Courtesy Durand-Ruel, Paris.

Middle right

FIGURE 11 Monet, *Haystack*, originally *Haystack (Winter) (?)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 65.6 × 92 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Martin A. Ryerson Collection, Potter Palmer Collection, bequest of Jerome Friedman, Major Acquisitions Fund, and Searle Family Trust (1983.29).

Bottom right

FIGURE 12 Monet, *Haystack, Thaw, Sunset*, originally *Haystack (End of the Day) (?)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 64.9 × 92.3 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel C. Searle (1983.166).



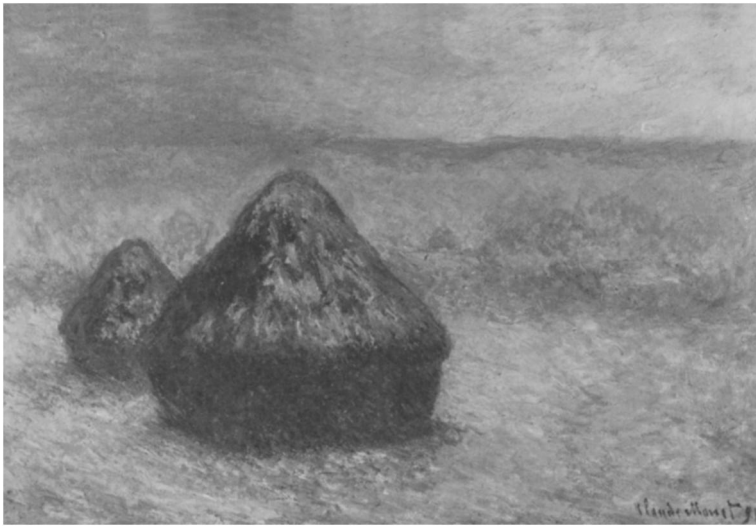


FIGURE 13 Monet, *Haystacks, Setting Sun*, originally *Haystacks (Sunset, Snow Effect)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 65.3 × 100.4 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Potter Palmer Collection (1922.431).

who dominated the generation of American robber barons, it was Mrs. Palmer.

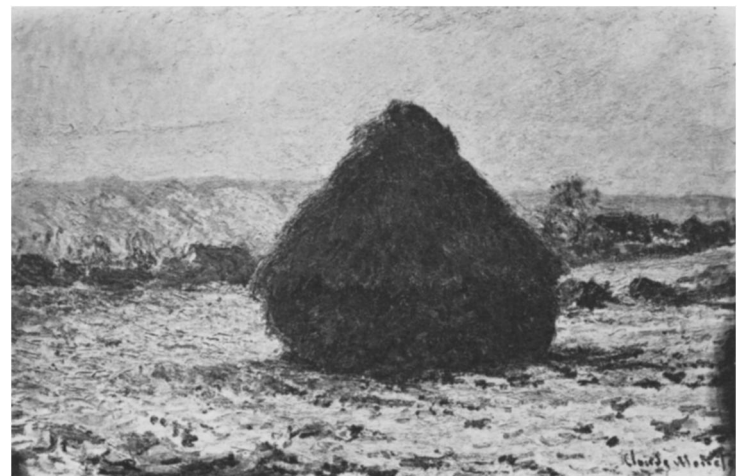
Given her accomplishments as a collector, it may come as a surprise that, for her, collecting was a vital but minor activity, despite the staggering quantity of sculpture, furniture, paintings, rugs, glass, and objets d'art that were continually on display in her residences. Amidst this profusion of goods were superb paintings by Monet, Degas, Renoir, Manet, Corot, Sisley, and Delacroix; with these works as a backdrop, she entertained everyone from queens to students and dowagers to diplomats. We know that Mrs. Palmer started buying in the second half of the 1880s as part of her plan to furnish and decorate her home on Lake Shore Drive, finished in 1883 and remodeled throughout the 1880s and early 1890s. Her early purchases were contemporary American paintings, the most remarkable of which were by Eastman Johnson and William Merritt Chase. About 1889/90, her interests changed dramatically and she began to acquire with a determination unparalleled in that period works by French 19th-century painters. At first, she selected examples by Barbizon School artists and by Eugène Delacroix; this taste, typical of the time, soon was supplanted by one for the Impressionists and their contemporaries. Her two favorite painters were Claude

Top

FIGURE 14 Monet, *Haystack (Winter Evening, Misty Weather)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 65 × 92 cm. Private Collection. Photo: Courtesy Durand-Ruel, Paris.

Bottom

FIGURE 15 Monet, *Haystack (Snow Effect, Sun)*, 1891. Oil on canvas; 65 × 92 cm. France, Private Collection. Photo: Courtesy Durand-Ruel, Paris.



Monet and Jules Cazin. She owned as many as 90 works by Monet, the majority of which were painted during the 1890s, when she was most active as a collector. Without doubt, she was the first private collector to recognize the significance of Monet's serial paintings. In fact, her collection of these works to this day ranks as the most important assembled by a private collector or an institution. In addition to her nine Haystacks, she owned four of the Poplars, three of the Rouen Cathedral, and three of the series devoted to morning on the Seine.

Perhaps because of the very opulence of her collection, her motivations for buying works of art largely have been misunderstood in books and articles on the life of this larger-than-life lady.¹⁸ Mrs. Palmer was as much a dealer as she was a collector. She made many of her purchases, it seems, to upgrade her collection. In some, she apparently was motivated to maintain balance and consistency. In other cases, it appears that she was manipulating the market for her own gain. She bought and sold pictures at a profit, often after short periods, very much as she and her husband bought and sold real estate.¹⁹ In this way, she probably did as much as any single dealer or collector not only to create the rising prices for Impressionist works but to benefit from that very inflation!

Mrs. Palmer's acquisition of Haystacks is fascinating to analyze in light of these larger issues. Of the nine pictures she bought, three were sold within three years of their acquisition.²⁰ That she retained ownership of six indicates her desire to prune the collection and improve the character of the ensemble. Unfortunately, we know next to nothing about the way in which Mrs. Palmer hung her prized works by Monet and nothing at all about her installation of her Haystacks. The most famous photographs of her picture gallery (fig. 19) were taken before the collection expanded to include works by the Impressionists; many of the photographs that do include works by Monet were taken after her death and represent more the taste of her daughter-in-law than of Mrs. Palmer herself. It is likely that Mrs. Palmer's gallery was in a state of constant flux after 1890, that pictures were put up, taken down, and rearranged as her purchasing continued. That each step in this process was not documented photographically is hardly surprising when one considers that she purchased as many as 15 paintings per month in the most active years of her collecting, 1891 to 1894. Interestingly, she rarely loaned the Haystacks to exhibitions.²¹

Of the nine Haystacks Mrs. Palmer owned, only three (figs. 1, 12, 13) are known for certain to have been in the 1891 exhibition. However, others from her collection, such as figs. 6b and 11, probably were included, as well. In any event, she chose her Haystacks not merely from



Top
FIGURE 16 Monet, *Boats in Winter Quarters: Etretat*, 1885. Oil on canvas; 65.5 × 81.3 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection (1947.95).

Bottom
FIGURE 17 Monet, *Boats in Winter Quarters*, 1885. Oil on canvas; 73.5 × 93 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Potter Palmer Collection (1922.428).

the exhibition, which gave her impetus and provided her with the opportunity to buy, but also from the group of canvases retained by Monet and his other Parisian dealer, Boussod et Valladon. Her taste tended toward summer and autumn scenes rather than the stark winter pictures favored by Monet himself (two of the three she sold were winter scenes). Other than this preference, one cannot make of Mrs. Palmer's Haystacks many intelligible combinations or subsets like those Monet apparently created so carefully himself for the 1891 exhibition. Rather, her paintings could have been combined in many ways, each with its own peculiar emotional, compositional, and temporal patterns, on the walls of her many homes, apartments, and hotels throughout the world.

Monet seems to have conceived his ambitious Haystack series with great finesse. That his own intentions were largely, perhaps completely, unnoticed in 1891 is not surprising, given the newness of the series concept in 1891 and the shortness of the exhibition period (less than two weeks). His narrative sequence of Haystacks, his pairs and trios, and his cosmic groupings and isolations failed to find an audience, despite the several American collectors who realized that the Haystacks were better understood in groups. Even Mrs. Palmer, whose sizable, indeed environmental, collection of Haystacks gave some expression to the artist's notions, evidently did not fully understand the subtle substructure that Monet strove to create in his exhibition. Yet, while Chicago's greatest and most adventurous collector of

FIGURE 19 Photograph of the Picture Gallery, Residence of Mr. and Mrs. Potter Palmer, Chicago, c. 1890.



FIGURE 18 Anders Zorn (Swedish, 1850–1920), *Mrs. Potter Palmer*, 1893. Oil on canvas; 258 × 141.2 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Potter Palmer Collection (1922.450).



modern art in the 19th century had a simpler view of the Haystacks, her collection brought the concept of series to America. If Monet, as Geffroy put it, saw the “poetry of the universe in the restricted space of a field,”²² Mrs. Palmer carried that universal poetry into the world. That her aims were unabashedly capitalist should neither surprise nor repel us. After all, Monet's garden became larger and more extraordinary as Mrs. Palmer made more and more money from—and for—the artist.

NOTES

1. Paris, Galerie Durand-Ruel, *Exposition d'oeuvres récentes de Claude Monet*, pref. by Gustave Geffroy, 1891. The exact translation from the French is “Grainstacks,” but the series has come to be known as the Haystacks; see Robert Herbert, “Method and Meaning in Monet,” *Art in America* 67 (Sept. 1979), p. 106.

2. Camille Pissarro, *Camille Pissarro: Lettres à son fils Lucien*, ed. John Rewald and Lucien Pissarro (Paris, 1980), p. 237.

3. The Art Institute of Chicago, *Paintings by Monet*, exh. cat., 1975; New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and The St. Louis Art Museum, *Monet's Years at Giverny: Beyond*

Impressionism, exh. cat., 1978; Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, *Hommage à Claude Monet (1840–1926)*, exh. cat., 1980, and Centre Culturel du Marais, *Claude Monet au Temps de Giverny*, exh. cat., 1983.

4. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, *A Day in the Country: Impressionism and the French Landscape*, exh. cat. by Richard R. Brettell, Scott Schaefer, et al., 1984.

5. Pissarro (note 2).

6. Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné* 3 (Lausanne, 1979), nos. 1914–17, 1266–90 (all subsequent catalogue numbers are listed in the following notes with the prefix “W.”). During the month preceding the exhibition, Monet seems to have changed his mind about what paintings to include, indicating first that he was going to exhibit 12 for which he ordered frames and then that he had decided to increase the number to 15 (*ibid.*, letters 1104 and 1106, p. 261).

7. They are: W. 1217?, 1266, 1269, 1272, 1274, 1277–78, 1280–82, 1286–87, 1289. Number six in the exhibition catalogue, which Monet entitled *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Gray Weather)*, was identified by Wildenstein as a work now called *Haystacks, Snow Effect* (W. 1274) in the Shelburne Museum, Vermont. However, this painting is one of four Haystacks purchased from Monet by Durand-Ruel in July 1891 (W. 1270, 1274, 1278, 1288). We know from Monet's letters that at least two of these were being finished in June, one month after the exhibition (Wildenstein [note 6], letter 1116, p. 262). Another problematic assignment made by Wildenstein is number seven in the exhibition, *Haystacks (Snow Effect, Sun)*. He identified it as a painting now entitled *Haystacks, Effect of Hoar Frost* in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. Yet, this work was purchased from the artist by his other dealer, Boussod et Valladon, in July 1891 with its present title. A change in just two months in title from “Snow Effect, Sun” to “Hoar Frost” is enough to throw into question at least the identification of this picture with number seven in the exhibition. Another candidate for either numbers six or seven in the exhibition is *Haystacks, Winter Effect* (W. 1279), now in the Metropolitan Museum (see note 20).

8. The order: Grace Seiberling, *Monet's Series* (New York, 1981), pp. 92–97; execution: Herbert (note 1), pp. 106–07, John House, *Monet* (Oxford, rev. ed., 1981), pp. 20, 22 and nos. 37–39, and Seiberling, *ibid.*; meaning: Herbert, *ibid.*; critical response: Steven Z. Levine, *Monet and his Critics* (New York, 1976), pp. 117–50; Seiberling, *ibid.*, pp. 103–110.

9. Roger Terry Dunn, *The Monet-Rodin Exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit in 1889 . . .* (Ann Arbor, 1979), pp. 81–82.

10. Four versions of *The Poppy Field*: W. 1251–54; four versions of a *Field of Rye and Poppies*: W. 1256–59; 1888–89 *Haystacks*: W. 1213–17.

11. Pair of *Studies of a Figure Out-of-Doors*: W. 1076–77; *Study of Rocks, Creuse* (W. 1228); Wildenstein maintained that the canvas was given to Clemenceau only in 1899, in spite of the fact that he is listed as the owner in the 1891 catalogue (note 1).

12. Wildenstein (note 6), April 26: letter 1105, p. 261; April 13: letter 1104, p. 261.

13. Interestingly, Wildenstein identified the evening landscape as number one of the 1891 exhibition, thereby suggesting that the series began at the end of the day rather than at the beginning.

14. Galerie Durand-Ruel (note 1), p. 6.

15. When they are considered as a pair, one is tempted to identify them as W. 1274 and W. 1279, in the Shelburne and Metropolitan museums respectively, and to disqualify W. 1277 from the pairing on compositional grounds. Yet, W. 1274 is smaller than either of the two candidates, making any easy pairing of it difficult.

16. Galerie Durand-Ruel (note 1), p. 10.

17. The nine pictures she bought were: W. 1269–71, 1273, 1274, 1278–79, 1283, 1290.

18. See Aline Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York, 1958), pp. 3–24; Ishbel Ross, *Silhouette in Diamonds: The Life of Mrs. Potter Palmer* (New York, 1960).

19. She tended to buy works of art on her own, independently of her husband, and she kept separate accountings of her transactions.

20. The three she sold: *Haystacks, Snow Effect* (fig. 6a; W. 1274), which she purchased from Durand-Ruel sometime after July 1891 and then resold to him in 1892 (he eventually sold it to Mrs. Havemeyer); *Haystacks, Winter Effect* (fig. 6b; W. 1279), which she bought from Durand-Ruel and sold to Mrs. Havemeyer; and *Haystack* (W. 1290), which she sold to Durand-Ruel in 1894. In another case, *Two Haystacks* (pl. 4; W. 1270), evidence suggests that Mrs. Palmer bought the picture, now in the Art Institute, from Durand-Ruel in 1891, sold it through the dealer to William van Horne in Montreal, and then bought it back the next year.

21. The works from the Palmer Collection shown in the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago did not include any Haystacks; see Chicago, World's Columbian Exposition, *Art and Artists of All Nations* (New York, 1895), and Rossiter Johnson, ed., *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago 3, Exhibits* (New York, 1898). None of the Palmers' many temporary loans to the Art Institute ever included more than one or two paintings from the series.

22. Galerie Durand-Ruel (note 1), p. 3.