

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 May 8, 2017

Media Contacts:
 Sarah Corley, 202.387.2151 x235
scorley@phillipscollection.org

Amanda Hunter, 202.387.2151 x243
ahunter@phillipscollection.org

Online Press Room:
www.phillipscollection.org/press

THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION PRESENTS *RENOIR AND FRIENDS*

Exhibition to Reveal New Insights into Renoir's Celebrated *Luncheon of the Boating Party*



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 69 1/8 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, Acquired 1923

WASHINGTON—Opening this fall on October 7, The Phillips Collection presents an exceptional exhibition inspired by the museum's celebrated *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1880–81) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Comprised of more than 40 carefully chosen works from private and public collections around the world, *Renoir and Friends: Luncheon of the Boating Party* explores the process by which the artist created his masterwork, while also recounting and illustrating stories of the diverse circle of friends who inspired it.

“As the Phillips draws closer to our centennial year, it is a very fitting time to shed new light on one of the gems of our permanent collection,” said **Phillips Director Dorothy Kosinski**. “I am delighted

that Renoir's masterwork will be displayed alongside numerous other works by the artist and his contemporaries, helping further contextualize this remarkable painting.”

Recognized today as one of the greatest achievements of the artist's career, the work is a marvel of *plein-air* painting on a grand scale. While no known preparatory studies exist for this masterwork, the years before Renoir completed *Luncheon of the Boating Party* were marked by encounters with riverside locations along the Seine west of Paris and with specific individuals who helped him realize his ambitious undertaking. No other large-scale painting by Renoir with the exception of the *Dance at the Moulin de la Galette* (1876) comprises as many figures as *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. While never intended as a group portrait, the 14 individuals depicted in the painting appear nonetheless highly individualized and based on specific people in Renoir's life.

“*Luncheon of the Boating Party* represents so much more than a diverse group of friends having a lovely time,” said **Phillips Chief Curator Emerita, and project director, Eliza Rathbone**. “Much has been written about Renoir and his work. Our project seeks to separate fact from fiction and to uncover as

much specific detail and evidence as possible in order to bring to life this group of journalists, critics, models, collectors, and world travelers. By looking closely at these individuals who inspired Renoir, we find ourselves in a fascinating backstory that sheds light not only on this great enterprise and its models but on the artist himself.”

A room in the exhibition dedicated to research on the masterwork will feature an in-gallery interactive that uses findings from x-radiographic and infrared images and paint cross-sections.

“Drawing upon a recent technical study on *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, I am excited to share new discoveries made about the painting,” said **Phillips Head of Conservation Elizabeth Steele.**

“Inspection of the surface in raking light compared to the same passages in x-radiographic and infrared images reveal numerous changes that the artist made while completing the painting, and scientific analysis of the paint layers further illuminates these revisions. Through richly illustrated text panels and a groundbreaking in-gallery interactive, visitors will for the first time be able to track Renoir’s development of the composition on their own.”



Renoir made a surprising rearrangement to the pair of men who stand at the end of the balcony. The revision the artist made becomes clear in the infrared image: Charles Ephrussi, who wears the top hat, initially looked out toward the front of the balcony with his head in three-quarter view. By turning him to face the man to his left, Renoir strengthens their relationship, making them look more involved in conversation than in the previous configuration.

Only on view at The Phillips Collection, this single-venue exhibition opens October 7, 2017, and closes January 7, 2018.

RENOIR’S MASTERWORK AT THE PHILLIPS

Founder Duncan Phillips first encountered Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s *Luncheon of the Boating Party* in 1911 while he was in Europe and the painting was owned by the artist’s dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. A few years later in a 1914 essay, Phillips was still taken by the masterpiece and wrote that it captured the essence of “life’s vivacity” and the pleasures of “men and women lunching up the river on a hot holiday, the fitful breeze flapping the awnings and the general discussion becoming of more importance than the dessert.”

While preparing to establish a museum of modern art and its sources, Phillips started an acquisition strategy that identified significant masterworks to serve as the collection’s foundation. Duncan Phillips’s journals reveal that Renoir’s painting was at the top of his wish list. By July 9, 1923, only 18 months after the museum opened and just over a decade since Phillips first saw the painting, the Phillips Memorial Gallery reached a deal to purchase the work for \$125,000. The very next day, Phillips shared his excitement: “The big Renoir deal has gone through with Durand-Ruel and the Phillips Memorial Gallery is to be the possessor of one of the greatest paintings in the world. The *Déjeuner des Canotiers* [*Luncheon of the Boating Party*] is the masterpiece by Renoir and finer than any Rubens—as fine as any Titian or Giorgione....Its fame is tremendous and people will travel thousands of miles to our house to see it. It will do more good arousing interest and support for our project than all the rest of our collection put together. Such a picture creates a sensation wherever it goes.”

Just as Phillips imagined it would be when he bought the painting in 1923, *Luncheon of the Boating Party* by Renoir remains the best known and most popular work of art at The Phillips Collection. The painting

captures an idyllic atmosphere as Renoir's friends share food, wine, and conversation on a balcony overlooking the Seine at the Maison Fournaise restaurant in Chatou. Parisians flocked to the Maison Fournaise to rent rowing skiffs, eat a good meal, or stay the night.

The painting also reflects the changing character of French society in the mid- to late 19th century. The restaurant welcomed customers of many classes, including businessmen, society women, artists, actresses, writers, critics, seamstresses, and shop girls. This diverse group embodied a new, modern Parisian society.

IMAGE GALLERY

High-resolution press images for *Renoir and Friends: Luncheon of the Boating Party* are available by request.

CATALOGUE

Renoir and Friends: Luncheon of the Boating Party will be accompanied by a full-color catalogue published by D Giles Limited. The publication, edited by Eliza Rathbone (Chief Curator Emerita, The Phillips Collection), will feature Rathbone's essay along with others by Elizabeth Steele (Head of Conservation, The Phillips Collection), Sara Tas (Curator of Exhibitions, Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam), Mary Morton (Curator and Head of the Department of French Painting, National Gallery of Art), Aileen Riberio (Professor Emerita, Courtauld Institute of Art, United Kingdom), and Sylvie Patry (Deputy Director for Collections and Exhibitions and Chief Curator, Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia).

SPONSORS

Renoir and Friends: Luncheon of the Boating Party is organized by The Phillips Collection.

With support from The Florence Gould Foundation, the MARPAT Foundation, the Robert Lehman Foundation, and Sotheby's.



ROBERT LEHMAN
FOUNDATION

Additional in-kind support provided by **FARROW & BALL**

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection, America's first museum of Modern art, is one of the world's most distinguished collections of Impressionist and Modern American and European art. Stressing the continuity between art of the past and present, it offers a strikingly original and experimental approach to Modern art by combining works of different nationalities and periods in displays that change frequently. The setting is similarly unconventional, featuring small rooms, a domestic scale, and a personal atmosphere. Artists represented in the collection include Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Vincent van Gogh, Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Claude Monet, Honoré Daumier, Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, Mark Rothko, Milton Avery, Jacob Lawrence, and Richard Diebenkorn, among others. The permanent collection has grown to include more than 1,000 photographs, many by American photographers Berenice Abbott, Esther Bubley, and Bruce Davidson, and works by contemporary artists such as Anselm Kiefer, Wolfgang Laib, Whitfield Lovell, and Leo Villareal. The Phillips Collection regularly organizes acclaimed special exhibitions, many of which travel internationally.

The Phillips also produces award-winning education programs for K–12 teachers and students, as well as for adults. The University of Maryland Center for Art and Knowledge at The Phillips Collection is the museum’s nexus for academic work, scholarly exchange, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Since 1941, the museum has hosted Sunday Concerts in its wood-paneled Music Room. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations.

###