THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS SUBJECTIVITY AND EVOCATIVE ATMOSPHERE IN NEO-IMPRESSIONISM AND THE DREAM OF REALITIES: PAINTING, POETRY, MUSIC

New exhibition takes a fresh look at Neo-Impressionism, focuses on exchange of ideas between painters, poets, and musicians.

Camille Pissarro, *Peasant Women Planting Poles in the Ground*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 21 1/4 x 18 1/8 in. On loan from a Private Collection, Museums Sheffield, UK.

Washington, D.C.—This fall, The Phillips Collection examines the Neo-Impressionist movement through a new lens with its special exhibition, *Neo-Impressionism and the Dream of Realities: Painting, Poetry, Music*. Presenting 15 artists and more than 70 works, the exhibition demonstrates that the Neo-Impressionists, a group generally identified by its pointillist technique and emphasis on the representation of reality, were in fact inspired through interactions with their literary Symbolist contemporaries to create suggestive compositions that celebrate atmosphere and notions of nature. *Neo-Impressionism* will be on view at the Phillips from September 27, 2014, through January 11, 2015.

The lush exhibition focuses on the Neo-Impressionist movement in Brussels and Paris around 1890. During this time, the exchange of ideas and interactions between painters, poets, and musicians were particularly fruitful and compelled the Neo-Impressionists to create works of evocative beauty.

“Neo-Impressionist painters were close friends with Symbolist writers and discussed passionately how to express ideas in poetry and painting,” says exhibition curator Cornelia Homburg. “Their paintings and works on paper increasingly transformed reality to express a concept or an idea rather than meticulously represent the motif in front of them.”

Homburg partnered with the Phillips on this exhibition to investigate how the Neo-Impressionists responded to and incorporated Symbolist concepts with an emphasis on subjectivity, inner dream worlds, and the synergy of senses.

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NEO-IMPRESSIONISM IN PARIS AND BRUSSELS

Paris and Brussels were important artistic centers for the Neo-Impressionists in the late 19th century. In addition to the rich cultural landscape of Paris with its exhibition venues, avant-garde theaters, and popular entertainment, Brussels played a very important role. Here the avant-garde group Les XX (the Twenty) invited the most innovative artists of the moment to show at their annual exhibitions. Its activities, nurtured by a lively exchange between painters, writers, and composers both from France and Belgium, greatly influenced the course of modern art in Europe.

PAINTING, POETRY, AND MUSIC

The Neo-Impressionists’ circle extended into other artistic spheres, including poetry, music, and theater. Like many of their contemporaries, the painters were fascinated by the expressive power of music and used it as inspiration for their work, sometimes even thinking of their paintings in terms of musical movements, as Paul Signac did in his *Adagio* (*Setting Sun. Sardine Fishing. Adagio. Opus 221* from the series *The Sea, The Boats, Concarneau*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York). There is also evidence of collaboration as Neo-Impressionists were invited by contemporary composers to create cover artwork for their musical compositions inspired by Symbolist poetry.

The painters also frequented popular theaters, circus, and music halls, experiences that informed their work. Sketching during stage performances and concerts, and depicting popular dances and sideshows, the artists tried to capture the atmosphere and experience of these places, engaging senses like sound and smell in addition to sight.

“Though their subject matter is always rooted in reality, Neo-Impressionists were interested in addressing an inner world—illustrating mood, feeling, and emotion,” says Homburg. “Looking beyond the real, these works seem to brim with suggestiveness, transporting us to an idealized reality.”
NEO-IMPRESSIONISM AT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

Neo-Impressionism and the Dream of Realities brings together renowned artists, such as Georges Seurat, Paul Signac, and Camille Pissarro, as well as their lesser known contemporaries, including Alfred Finch. In addition to works from the Phillips’s permanent collection, including Georges Seurat’s Sidewalk Show, the exhibition also offers an opportunity for visitors to become acquainted with famous works of art that have rarely or never before been exhibited in the United States.

“The innovative concept of the exhibition corresponds to the Phillips’s tradition of bold exploration of thought-provoking ideas and visual conversations,” says Phillips director Dorothy Kosinski. “Neo-Impressionism sheds new light on a well-known movement, inspiring audiences to look beyond the brushstrokes of each composition—to see as artists see.”

CATALOGUE

Beautifully illustrated with 130 color images, the exhibition catalogue is published by Yale University Press in collaboration with The Phillips Collection. The catalogue includes essays by exhibition curator Cornelia Homburg and Paul Smith (Warwick University), as well as Laura D. Corey (Ph.D. candidate, New York University), Simon Kelly (Saint Louis Art Museum), Noelle C. Paulson (independent scholar), and Christopher Riopelle (National Gallery, London). The catalogue will be available for purchase for $60 at The Phillips Collection and online at shop.phillipscollection.org.

IMAGE GALLERY

High-resolution press images are available by request or by accessing the museum’s online Dropbox:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/09fxbidh0a905ud/AABY9MmbgKsoYDTSBkAY3eya?dl=0

SPONSORS

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EXHIBITION-RELATED EVENTS

Thursday, Sept. 25 (6:30 p.m.): Curator’s Perspective. Neo-Impressionism and the Dream of Realities curator Cornelia Homburg explores the creative exchange between Neo-Impressionist painters and Symbolist writers and composers around 1890.


Sunday, Oct. 5 (4 p.m.): The Phillips Camerata opens the Sunday Concert season with a program celebrating the special exhibition, presenting works by Fauré and Franck, stylistically contrasted by the String Quartet of Germaine Taillefaire, the sole female composer of Les Six.

Thursday, Oct. 23 (6:30 p.m.): Guided Gallery Meditation. Yoga therapist and instructor Elizabeth Kanter debuts a series of contemplative in-gallery experiences to encourage slow looking, mindful art viewing, and personal connections to Phillips artworks and a work from the special exhibition.

Thursday, Nov. 6 (5–8:30 p.m.): Phillips after 5, Brussels/Paris Remix. Get inspired by the Neo-Impressionist exchange of ideas between Paris and Brussels. Experience the sights, sounds, and flavors of two exciting European capitals through gallery talks, cartoons, and gourmet tidbits including creations by Chef Spike Mendelsohn.

Friday, Nov. 14 (12 p.m.): Gallery Talk. Curator Cornelia Homburg discusses works of art from the special exhibition.
Sunday, Nov. 16 (2 p.m.): Neo-Impressionists and Symbolists: Allies and Rivals. Curator Cornelia Homburg gives an introduction to the artistic friendships and competitions of late-19th-century Europe. A conversation among leading scholars and curators follows.

Thursday, Nov. 20 (6:30 p.m.): Dance and the Dream of Realities. CityDance School and Conservatory Artistic Director Lorraine Spiegler presents an evening of dance featuring pieces by Jason Ignacio, drawing upon themes from the special exhibition.

Thursday, Dec. 4 (5–8:30 p.m.): Phillips after 5, Dreams of Reality. Explore the concept of dreams with Neo-Impressionism and the Dream of Realities gallery talks and art activities.

Thursday, Jan. 8 (6:30 p.m.): Curator’s Perspective. Neo-Impressionism and the Dream of Realities curator Cornelia Homburg discusses the suggestive moods and evocative landscapes of Neo-Impressionism.

For a complete schedule of events, visit www.phillipscollection.org/events

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection 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 Phillips Collection, America’s first museum of modern art, has an active collecting program and regularly organizes acclaimed special exhibitions, many of which travel internationally. The Intersections series features projects by contemporary artists, responding to art and spaces in the museum. The Phillips also produces award-winning education programs for K–12 teachers and students, as well as for adults. The museum’s Center for the Study of Modern Art explores new ways of thinking about art and the nature of creativity, through artist visits and lectures, and provides a forum for scholars through courses, postdoctoral fellowships, and internships. 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.

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