

FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM HANDBOOKS

FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTS

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INTRODUCTION

‘I do not wish to foresee what the future
will hold for the artists of rue Peletier; will
they one day be considered great masters?’

Fortunately for his posthumous reputation, the critic Arthur Baignères answered his own question in the affirmative. Although he was by no means an unqualified admirer of the Impressionists, his judgement of the painters whose works he reviewed at their second group exhibition in April 1876 – albeit tempered by a certain cynicism – accurately forecast the esteem in which their works would come to be held.

Some of the exhibiting painters became acknowledged masters little more than a decade after Baignères’s review. By 1889, Monet was being hailed as one of the greatest painters of all time, and – like Renoir – was offered (but refused) the Légion d’Honneur a year or so later. By the end of the 1890s, the slightest scrap of a drawing by Degas was selling for ‘fabulous’ sums, while Monet’s annual income from the sale of paintings not infrequently exceeded an impressive 200,000 francs; as he later told the writer Wynford Dewhurst, the tide of his fortunes had turned after the sale of the collection of Victor Chocquet in 1899, when dealers began to make the pilgrimage to Giverny to buy up even those canvases he had rejected: ‘Today [c. 1904] I cannot paint enough, and can probably make fifteen thousand pounds a year; twenty years ago I was starving.’ Public recognition of a different sort came in the same decade, when works by Impressionist painters began to enter museums in France and abroad. Alfred Sisley’s *September Morning* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Agen), painted around 1887, was acquired the following year by the Ministry of Fine Arts, and in 1892 Renoir received an official commission to paint *Young Girls at a Piano* for the Luxembourg Museum, the state museum for modern art. The most important development in this respect took place in 1894, however, when the French state accepted – not without opposition – paintings by Renoir, Degas, Cézanne, Monet, Pissarro, Morisot and Sisley, which had been bequeathed to the nation by the Impressionist painter, Gustave Caillebotte; thanks to his gesture, the majority of these painters, at least, were able to see their still-controversial works displayed in a national institution in their own lifetime.

In the course of the twentieth century the private passions of individuals gradually made their way into the public arena through the gift, bequest or sale of their collections of Impressionist works to museums and galleries in Europe, the United States and the Far East. From these, they have been reconstituted into virtual galleries and exhibitions, which can be ‘visited’ through the Internet by global audiences on a scale that contemporary critics would have found unimaginable (and, in Baignères’s case, no doubt abhorred). As a result,

the Impressionist painters have, in little over a century, attained a level of popularity that in some cases borders on cult status, while the energetic marketing of their imagery has bred a familiarity which, it has been argued, makes it more difficult than ever to appreciate fully the radicalism of this ‘new painting’.

The scope of this handbook is at once defined and enriched by the holdings of a single collection, created in less than a century by gift, bequest and occasional purchase, and which, to a great extent, reflects the tastes and ambitions of the individuals who have helped to form it. The specific strengths of the collection arise in part from the personal preferences of those collectors who have given or bequeathed works, but also from the cumulative acquisition of chronologically or thematically related works. Notable in this last respect are pairs of paintings that show Pissarro’s extraordinary skill as a painter of snow (nos. 43, 45), Monet’s as a painter of sea (nos. 9, 10), and two contrasting views of Brittany by Renoir and Monet, both painted in 1886, the year which saw the last group exhibition of the Impressionists’ work (nos. 10, 17). The Museum owes its exceptional holdings of Degas drawings – reflected in their preponderance in this handbook – to one individual, Andrew Gow, whose bequest in 1978, rich, notably, in the artist’s early works, transformed the collection. Happily, this core has been enhanced in recent years by a magnificent group of wax sculptures, given by the late Paul Mellon, KBE, and his wife in honour of Michael Jaffé, one of the Museum’s most distinguished directors, and by the acquisition in 2000 of a rare and exceptionally beautiful early landscape, painted during Degas’s first visit to Italy in 1856 (no. 24).

WHO WERE THE IMPRESSIONISTS?

Defining an Impressionist painter is fraught with difficulties. The paintings and drawings included in this handbook were produced by only a few of the artists who exhibited at one, or more, of the eight group exhibitions between 1874 and 1886, which were subsequently – if almost always controversially – termed *Impressionist*. This deceptively straightforward rationale allows for the inclusion not only of those artists who quickly became identified by the writer and critic Théodore Duret as the ‘primordial’ Impressionists – Pissarro, Monet, Sisley and Renoir – but also of lesser-known painters such as Adolphe-Félix Cals (no. 1), who, although arguably more closely related to the realist painters of the Hague School, in fact showed more consistently at the group exhibitions than many of its perceived leaders.

As is now well known, the group of thirty artists who formed themselves into a body to exhibit 165 works in the former premises of the photographer Nadar in the boulevard des Capucines in 1874, initially settled on the wordy, if inoffensive, catch-all title of ‘The Anonymous and Cooperative Society of Artists, Painters, Sculptors and Engravers, etc.’ (neatly abbreviated by Cézanne to the Coop. Society). Many of the original group – Monet, Cézanne, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley – had been fellow-students in the 1860s, and trained either in the Atelier Suisse (see no. 52) or in the studio of another Swiss painter, Charles Gleyre. Renoir later

remembered that they came together mainly in response to their ‘mutual poverty’, although a core group of acquaintances also shared specific artistic objectives, defined by the writer Jules Castagnary in a review of their first exhibition as the desire to paint, ‘not the landscape but the sensation produced by the landscape’.

At their first exhibition in 1874, the exhibitors were communally branded the ‘Impressionists’ by the critic Louis Leroy, in an instantly infectious neologism coined in satirical response to Monet’s painting, ‘Le Havre, *Impression: sunrise*’ (Musée Marmottan, Paris), so called, the artist claimed, because he couldn’t hope to pass it off as a view of the port it nominally represented. The lack of finish and banality of the subjects that critics perceived in this and other paintings justified the worst fears of those who for some years had been voicing concerns about the direction of the modern school of French landscape painting. Only a decade earlier, for example, the critic Léon Lagrange, while praising the achievement of contemporary painters in liberating nature from the artificial constructs of the ‘historical landscape’ (*paysage historique*), recognized that the very simplicity of the naturalist approach was likely to bring about an exaggerated emphasis on novelty of technical expression, and an undue preoccupation with the material fabric of their art.

Given these prognostications, and the frequency of the term *impression* in contemporary artistic and critical vocabulary, it is not surprising that Leroy’s appellation quickly gained currency. The Impressionist painters themselves, on the other hand, did not adopt the term until their third group exhibition in 1877, when it appeared in an associated promotional document, *Impressioniste. Journal d’Art*. Thereafter, the term *impressioniste*, when not entirely rejected in the case of exhibitors such as Albert Lebourg, Henri Rouart and Jean-François Raffaëlli, was constantly qualified to sift out the ‘real’ Impressionists from the ‘half’ Impressionists, the ‘old’ Impressionists from the ‘new’ Impressionists and – partially related to the last – the ‘romantic’ from the ‘scientific’ Impressionists, the latter referring to neo-Impressionist painters such as Seurat, Signac and Guillaumin, who showed at the final group exhibition in 1886. The highly literate Degas – whose unilateral decision to expand the group’s membership in 1879 created considerable friction among the original participants – made particularly strenuous efforts to evolve a more appropriately inclusive term to describe their multifarious styles and objectives, and proposed that they adopt the title ‘Impressionist, Realist and Independent’ painters for their exhibition that year. In the event, however, only the last term was adopted, and many critics perceived the change simply as ‘old wine in new bottles’. The artists themselves reacted more violently. Renoir and Sisley refused to show at the exhibition that year, and, with Monet, defected to the Salon in 1880, in protest not only against the change in the group’s title but also at Degas’s new recruits, whose interests they considered to be remote from their own. In an interview that year, Monet declared that he was, and would always remain, an Impressionist, complaining that the ‘little church’ he and his colleagues had founded only a few years earlier had been desecrated by these newcomers. For his part, Renoir refused ‘at his age’ to exhibit as an ‘Independent Artist’, chary of the

political motivation of the ‘anarchist’ Pissarro; besides, as he told his dealer Durand-Ruel, it was likely to have a deleterious effect on sales, as ‘people do not like it to stink of politics’ (in fact, Renoir, like Monet, was keen to pursue alternative marketing strategies through one-man exhibitions in Parisian dealers’ galleries). By the last exhibition in 1886, which was dominated by the neo-Impressionist works of Pissarro, Signac, Guillaumin and Seurat (see no. 60), the posters and catalogues announced only the names of the artists, and the term ‘independent’ was dropped, so as to avoid confusion with a separate group that had been established under the same name two years earlier. Despite these endeavours, critics of the final exhibition clung more tenaciously than ever to the term *impressioniste*, most accepting, though not always restating, the lack of unity of purpose it had come to imply; the few who continued to examine their highly diverse objectives more analytically came to conclude that its philosophy was essentially that of ‘a school of abstraction’. For those painters who were able to take a more distanced view, Impressionism became, simply, synonymous with the *avant-garde*. As such, its badge was to be worn with pride: as Gauguin wrote to his friend Émile Bernard, ‘I am an Impressionist artist, that is to say, a rebel.’

COURTSHIP, CONTROVERSY AND COLLABORATION: COLLECTING IMPRESSIONISTS FOR CAMBRIDGE

In his essay, ‘La Nouvelle peinture’ (The new painting) of 1876, Edmond Duranty anticipated the difficulty that the recently formed group of painters – whom he at no point calls the ‘Impressionists’ – would experience in gaining public and critical acceptance. He reconciled himself in part to the incomprehension of his compatriots by his conviction that they would be likely to receive a more favourable reception abroad: ‘No one is a prophet in his own country’, he wrote, ‘that is why our painters are far more appreciated in England and Belgium, lands of independent spirit, where no one is offended at the sight of people breaking the rules, and where they neither have, nor create, academic canons. In these countries, the present efforts of our friends to break the barrier that imprisons art . . . seem straightforward and worthy of praise.’

This generous view of English liberal-mindedness was sadly exaggerated. During the key years of Impressionism, and, indeed, for most of the remainder of the nineteenth century, only a very small group of collectors of Impressionist paintings emerged, and the reception of Impressionist painting in Britain was sufficiently low-key for D. S. MacColl, critic of the *Saturday Review*, to complain in 1901 that ‘Monet is more familiar in American backwood towns than here.’

American collectors certainly led the way in the acquisition of Impressionist works at the turn of the century, provoking dire warnings from some proselytizing critics that England would end up paying dearly in the future for its neglect of modern French art. One of these, the writer and critic Frank Rutter, took it upon himself to remedy the situation,

launching a vigorous campaign in 1905 to have a work by an artist of the 'luminiferous movement' accepted by the National Gallery. His efforts – later recounted in some detail (and not a little vainglory) in his book *Art in My Time* – were hampered not only by a distinct lack of enthusiasm on the part of the National Gallery, but also by its constitutional inability to accept works by living painters, which at the time excluded Monet, Renoir and Degas, although Pissarro and Sisley were, as Rutter put it, 'safely dead'. In the event, with funds raised privately through special exhibitions and lectures, a late view of the entrance into Trouville harbour by Boudin – whom Rutter considered as a polite precursor of the Impressionists – was presented to the gallery by a group of subscribers in 1906, through the recently formed National Art Collections Fund. In 1913 a further group of Impressionist paintings was lent to the gallery by the Irishman, Hugh Lane, who had been collecting enthusiastically from 1905, when a large – but on the whole unsuccessful – exhibition of their works was held at the Grafton Galleries in London. Even then, however, less than a third of his paintings were exhibited until 1917, two years after Lane's tragic death on the *Lusitania*, when the full collection was put on display in the new Foreign Galleries at the Tate, in a tactical shift of policy designed in part to counter the threat of their return to Ireland under the terms of Lane's disputed will. The following year proved crucial both for the national collections, and, in the longer term, for the presence of post-Impressionist works in Cambridge. Thanks to the intervention of the economist, John Maynard Keynes, the Treasury authorized the National Gallery's director, Sir Charles Holmes, to spend up to £20,000 on paintings at Degas's studio sale in Paris in 1918, one of which was a flower piece by the Impressionist-turned-Symbolist, Gauguin.

For Cambridge, the active role Keynes played in events was of lasting importance, more in his capacity as private collector than as government advisor. For it was at this sale that he acquired, after the National Gallery declined to buy it, a remarkable still life of apples by Cézanne (no. 55). Keynes's appreciation of Cézanne's work at this date was certainly advanced, and undoubtedly cultivated by his friendship with Roger Fry, who became the artist's main champion in England from around 1910. He eventually added a further seven or eight works by Cézanne to his collection and developed a particular appreciation of what Fry termed the artist's 'spunky handling' (see nos. 53, 54). These paintings, along with Seurat's study for the *Grande Jatte* (no. 60), were bequeathed with the rest of his collection to King's College, Cambridge, after his death in 1946.

The decade following the Degas sale proved a turning point for the acquisition of Impressionist painting in Britain, and it was during these years, too, that the foundations of the Fitzwilliam's collection were laid. In 1924 the most remarkable collection of Impressionist works in England – with important groups of works by Cézanne and Monet – belonged to two Welsh sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret Davies, who eventually bequeathed them to the National Gallery of Wales in Cardiff. However, their collection was soon overshadowed by that of the textile manufacturer Samuel Courtauld, who collected intensively between 1922 and 1929, and in 1932 gave to the nation his house in Portman Square, along with a very

significant part of his collection of French paintings. Courtauld's particular significance lay in his commitment to the public domain, demonstrated not only by the gift of his own collection, but also by his creation in 1923 of a fund of £50,000 to enable the Tate to acquire modern foreign art, with potential purchases limited to a list of specified French artists. In a less direct way, the Fitzwilliam has also come to count itself among the beneficiaries of Courtauld's collecting instincts, through the acquisition, in 1986, of a key work of Renoir's Impressionist years, *Place Clichy* (no. 16), one of the comparatively small number of Courtauld's paintings to remain in his possession until his death. It eventually passed to his grand-daughter, who sold it to the Museum at an extraordinarily advantageous *prix d'ami*.

During these same years, two individuals, Frank Hindley Smith and Captain Stanley William Sykes, began to form collections, which, by gift and eventual bequest would transform the Fitzwilliam's holdings of French paintings and drawings. Neither had Courtauld's means at their disposal, but they were nevertheless able to acquire works by Renoir, Degas, Sisley, Pissarro and Monet that are today considered to be among these artists' finest works.

A retired textile manufacturer from Lancashire, Hindley Smith appears to have had no specific connections with Cambridge, although he did have a number of links with Courtauld. In 1926, with Courtauld, Maynard Keynes and Lee Myers he became one of the backers of the London Artists' Association – a charitable organization with cooperative aspirations not dissimilar to those of the original Impressionists – and like him, too, took advice in building up his collection from the collector and dealer Percy Moore Turner, whom he eventually made an executor of his will. Turner, who had owned a gallery in Paris, moved to England after the outbreak of the war in 1914 and opened the Independent Gallery in London. He was one of many dealers eagerly buying works by Degas at the sale of his studio in wartime Paris, one of which – *At the Café* (no. 33) – Hindley Smith acquired in 1925. Little is known of Smith's life, although the Bloomsbury painter Duncan Grant, who visited him after he moved to Sussex towards the end of his life, described him as 'A rich man according to our standards . . . without any pretension, simple and charming'; Roger Fry, he wrote, had 'discovered' him, probably around 1920, 'already deep in Proust, well-read, with an acquaintance of painting which he was eager to cultivate'.

Smith's bequest in 1939 of eighteen paintings, nine watercolours and two bronze sculptures to the Fitzwilliam was widely welcomed, not least by one of the Museum's Syndics, Andrew Gow (see below, p. 9). The 'plums' of the bequest, he wrote, were the paintings by Degas and Renoir (nos. 33 and 15); however, as he perceptively observed, the real significance of the bequest lay in establishing a framework for future donations:

Most of us had been praying for something of this sort for thirty years, but the late Director of the Museum (Sir Sydney Cockerell, Director 1908–1937) who had a talent for begging, couldn't be got to take any interest in modern painting and the prospects were growing dimmer; we shall now have quite a respectable show, and, what is

perhaps more important, a nest-egg. The nest-egg principle is vital to museums like the Fitzw. If you have something of the sort, the private collector says, 'here is a good museum, very weak in so and so; I shall bequeath my collection to it . . .'. If you have nothing, he says, 'Those fools don't know what is worth having'.

Captain Sykes's links with Cambridge, on the other hand, were well established. A graduate in Medieval and Modern Languages, he was admitted to the Inner Temple in 1907 and called to the Bar, but never practised. He joined the army at the outbreak of World War One, served with distinction in the Intelligence Corps, and was duly awarded both the Military Cross and the OBE. Sykes began to collect actively in the 1920s, acquiring Seurat's magical *croqueton* of the rue Saint-Vincent, Montmartre (no. 59) in 1926, and Sisley's painting of the flood at Port-Marly on the Seine three years later, both from the gallery, Reid and Lefèvre, a gallery he came to relish for its 'languid calm'. When he was first introduced to Carl Winter (director, 1946–66), Sykes was careful to discourage him from holding out expectations of future gifts; despite this, he presented a number of outstanding paintings to the Museum over the following two decades. It could be that this change of heart came about as the result of his deepening relationship with the Museum, although it is equally likely that the experience of another war, during which he lost twelve of his paintings when the London warehouse in which they were stored was bombed in 1944, may have caused him to feel that a museum would be a more secure environment in which to house his collection.

Sykes offered the first of these gifts – Rue Saint-Vincent (no. 59) – in 1948, to commemorate the centenary of the opening of the Museum to the public. Until then, the Museum represented 'scientific' Impressionism by only two watercolours by Seurat's fellow neo-Impressionist, Paul Signac, bequeathed by Hindley Smith some years earlier (nos. 62 and 63). Duncan MacDonald of Reid and Lefèvre wrote immediately to the director, Carl Winter, to congratulate him on the acquisition, reminding him that the Louvre had only recently acquired three panels of similar dimensions for a not inconsiderable sum, 'although none of them were better in quality'. Sykes followed this gesture with the gift of Sisley's painting of the Seine in flood (no. 13), one of a group of works widely considered as being among the finest of his high Impressionist years, and with a painting from Renoir's 'sour' period, *The Return from the Fields* (no. 17). On his death in 1966, Sykes bequeathed a further six French paintings, among which were Degas's dynamic sketch of David and Goliath (no. 27), Pissarro's snow scene at Montfoucault (no. 43), one of the series paintings of poplars which Monet had exhibited at an important one-man, one-subject exhibition in 1892 (no. 11), and a double-sided watercolour by Cézanne, which he had 'fallen to' in 1949 (nos. 57, 58).

Between the 1940s and the 1960s the campaign to boost the Museum's collection of French art, which had been initiated by Louis C. G. Clarke (director, 1937–46), was vigorously pursued by Winter. Almost immediately on taking up his directorship in 1946, Winter set about acquiring for the Museum works by two key Impressionist painters who were as yet

unrepresented in its collections: Pissarro and Monet, each bought with financial support from the National Art Collections Fund. Pissarro's painting of a woman washing dishes (no. 44) – a genre of large-scale figure painting which he began to practise at the beginning of the 1880s – seems to have entered the Museum's collection without a ruffle. The acquisition of Monet's painting *Springtime* (no. 8) five years later, however, was more fiercely contested. Winter clearly considered its acquisition important enough to consult widely before committing the Museum. In February, Sykes and Gow – the two collectors of French painting on the Museum Syndicate – were dispatched to inspect the painting in London. Gow's views are unrecorded, but Sykes told Winter that he thought it, 'Just the right size for the gallery, and it should not shock anyone, even the more timid Syndics. I never like a picture all over trees with no view through for myself but for your purposes you could not do much better at the price.'

Winter went on to seek external advice from the leading British expert in the field, Douglas Cooper, who at the time was engaged in writing the catalogue of Samuel Courtauld's collection of Impressionist and post-Impressionist paintings, and in the preparation of an associated exhibition in Paris. A brilliant and highly regarded independent scholar with an infamously lacerative tongue and a well-founded reputation for belligerence, Cooper was also regularly consulted by the Tate Gallery and other museums over potential acquisitions. Winter could only have expected a reply which would – at best – be frank. However, if he had planned it as a tactical move to gain Cooper's support, he would have been sorely disappointed: Cooper opposed the acquisition in unequivocal terms, describing it as, 'charming but dull . . . You are getting what I (following viticultural terminology) would call "an Impressionist type picture" painted after the days of Impressionism'. Cooper's views were presumably in the minority, for the painting – now among the best-loved in the collection – was acquired in spite of his objections. He might, however, have felt partially vindicated: half a century later, although the Museum has subsequently acquired three exceptionally beautiful paintings by Monet of the 1880s and 1890s (nos. 9, 10, 11), it still lacks the painting from the 'great years' of Impressionism which Cooper would have had it buy.

Around the same time that the Museum embarked – more or less controversially – on these major acquisitions, it also acquired an ally who took an unusually active personal rôle in helping to expand its collection of nineteenth-century French paintings, and Impressionism in particular. The Very Revd Eric Milner White, Fellow Chaplain of King's College and Dean of York, took to buying paintings relatively late in life with the specific intention of filling gaps in the Museum's collections. To this end, he had first proposed buying a painting by Nicolas Poussin, but was quickly steered by Winter towards the nineteenth century. The pleasure which he derived from picture-hunting on a limited budget is evident from his correspondence, and his enthusiasm eventually led him beyond the London gallery circuit to seek out the potential acquisition of works in private hands on the Continent. In the space of eight years he bought for the museum paintings by Pissarro, Gauguin, Signac (nos. 45, 50 and 61) and Courbet, using modest fees he earned through his membership of literary panels to cover the costs of

reframing. Milner White clearly enjoyed the experience of collaborating with the Museum in this way, and in 1952 wrote to Carl Winter to express his gratitude: 'I have learned much, & enjoyed much, since an ignorant ambition sought to fill the gap of a Poussin. First, merely to draw a cheque for four figures! Next, what a Museum like "ours" really wants. More than either, to look for quality far more than for name or the minor types of a good master . . . Such lessons, such help, add both to my delight & to your possession, which is exactly the best that can be!'

Impressionist paintings continued to enter the collection throughout the 1960s, thanks to the bequests of Milner White and Captain Sykes, and, in 1964, as part of the larger bequest of the francophile A. J. Hugh-Smith, director of Hambro's bank and member of the 'illustrious court' of Edith Wharton (see nos. 14, 18–20 and 42). At the end of the following decade, however, both the character and the extent of the Museum's collection of Impressionist paintings and drawings were transformed by the bequest of Andrew Gow. Gow arrived in Cambridge in 1925 to take up a fellowship and lectureship in Classics at Trinity College, and quickly established links with the Museum through its director, Louis Clarke. He served as a Museum Syndic for over thirty years, and also, between 1947 and 1953, as a Trustee of the National Gallery. Gow's dominating passion for the work of Degas seems to have been fired in around 1938: 'I am increasingly excited by him,' he wrote to Louis Clarke, 'and if I saw one which took me by storm might easily be tempted into an extravagance.' Temptation soon arrived, and the following year he bought his first drawing – a black chalk drawing of a woman washing (or drying?) her neck (no. 37) – for £45, and later the same year, with not a little financial anguish, acquired Degas's sensitive study of a dancer adjusting her tights (no. 35) for over double that sum. After the Second World War, when Gow felt able to be more extravagant in his acquisitive ambitions, he found that prices for pastels and large-scale oils were beyond his reach, but was nonetheless able to acquire two paintings, which, if modest in scale, provide fascinating insights into Degas's preoccupations in the early part of his career (nos. 21 and 22). That Gow derived enormous aesthetic pleasure from his collection is beyond doubt, but he also maintained a scholarly curiosity in his acquisitions, seeking out provenances and the opinions of both museum personnel and scholars working in the field. In the case of Degas, he entered into a regular correspondence with Paul-André Lemoisne, curator and author of the seminal four-volume catalogue of Degas's works. Their relationship was both cordial and mutually beneficial, Gow acting as an intermediary with private collectors and London dealers, Lemoisne offering opinions on Gow's recent acquisition and gaps in his collection. By the end of the 1940s, Gow had, Lemoisne conceded, put together a '*très bel ensemble*' of works by Degas, lacking only a portrait later than that of his sister, Thérèse (no. 23), which Gow, alas, was never able to acquire. Interestingly, Lemoisne was more reserved about Gow's later acquisitions – the magnificent nude with left arm raised (no. 40) and the study on tracing paper of a dancer fanning out her skirts (no. 39), both of which had been bought at the Degas sale by the art critic Félix Fénéon. Although they

added another dimension to his collection of Degas drawings, and thus made the group more representative, they were also, Lemoisne wrote, characteristic of Degas's late drawings, in exhibiting 'more strength than charm'.

Despite the extraordinary sums fetched by Impressionist paintings in the last years of the twentieth century, the Museum has continued to add to its collection. To do so, it has relied on a number of charities and trusts, as well as on the enlightened acceptance-in-lieu system, by means of which it was able to acquire in 1982 a marvellous Degas pastel of dancers (no. 38), and in 1998 two extraordinary seascapes by Monet (nos. 9 and 10). The support of the National Art Collections Fund, the Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Fund and occasionally, too, the generous response of individuals to public appeals, have proved vital in enabling the acquisition of important paintings by Pissarro, Monet and Renoir; while a few private collectors have given works to the collections, in a spirit of altruism which is all the more remarkable in this most sought-after area of the art market (nos. 51 and 64).

Ultimately, Gow's legacy was to have perpetuated the framework for giving that he considered so key to the vitality of the Museum and its collections, and to have established a fund for the acquisition of paintings which bears his name. In 2000, thanks to it, and to the support of the National Art Collections Fund, the Museum was able to acquire a luminous early landscape by Degas (no. 24), which breathes a serenity and assuredness that disguises his intense artistic searching in this early phase of his career: while in no sense an 'extravagance', Gow would surely have approved.

