EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

TURNER TO CÉZANNE:
MASTERPIECES FROM THE DAVIES COLLECTION, NATIONAL MUSEUM WALES

The following exhibition highlights have been prepared to complement *Turner to Cézanne: Masterpieces from the Davies Collection, National Museum Wales*, an exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts and National Museum Wales and supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Eugène Boudin (1824–1898), *Venice, the Molo,* 1895. Oil on canvas, 14⅛ x 22¾ in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Gwendoline Davies in 1912

Often described as a pre-Impressionist, Eugène Boudin was well into his sixties by the time of his first visit to Venice in 1892. It is likely that this work, which shows the mouth of the Grand Canal and the Molo, the large stone quay at the entrance to St. Mark's Square, was painted outdoors, as Boudin had been painting in this way since 1853. While in Venice, Boudin noted that the city was wrapped in a "grey, dull mist," an atmospheric detail captured very effectively here. Venice was a special place for the Davies sisters; they visited numerous times and, between 1912 and 1913, purchased six oils depicting the city.

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), ***Provençal Landscape,*** **ca. 1887. Oil on canvas, 31⅞ x 25⅝ in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Gwendoline Davies, 1918**

Following his father's death in 1886, Paul Cézanne was financially secure enough to devote his energies fulltime to painting. *Provençal Landscape* was probably painted on the grounds of the Jas de Bouffan, the estate outside Aix-en-Provence, France, where he spent much of his time. This is a deceptively simple work. In fact, every aspect of the canvas has been carefully worked through. While the thin, multi-directional brushwork provides dynamism, it also emphasizes the flatness of the canvas—to the extent that the foreground almost has the quality of textile. Spatial effects make the lighter areas within the center band of the canvas appear to float while the darker areas recede. The terracotta-green-blue triad is typical of Cézanne's work during this period; while the immediate appearance is one of distinct bands representing earth, trees, and sky, the repetition of blue, from the top down through the trees, provides an overall visual coherence.

Camille Corot (1796–1875), *The Pond,* 1860s. Oil on canvas, 15½ x 26½ in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Gwendoline Davies, 1908

By the time Corot painted *The Pond,* he had settled into what would be the most commercially successful phase of his career. During this period, he produced lyrical landscapes that fuse classical composition with the contemporary naturalism of the Barbizon school, a strong influence on the development of Impressionism. Corot's ability to give the impression of having painted directly from nature is one of the strengths of his later technique. This is particularly evident in the atmospheric suggestion and white wintry light that pervade his canvases but never appear bleak. As in the other works by Corot in this exhibition, tonal uniformity is avoided through tiny flashes of color—here, in the touches of red and yellow added by the head coverings of the two figures.

Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), *A Third Class Carriage,* ca. 1865. Oil on board, 10⅜ x 13¼ in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Gwendoline Davies, 1919

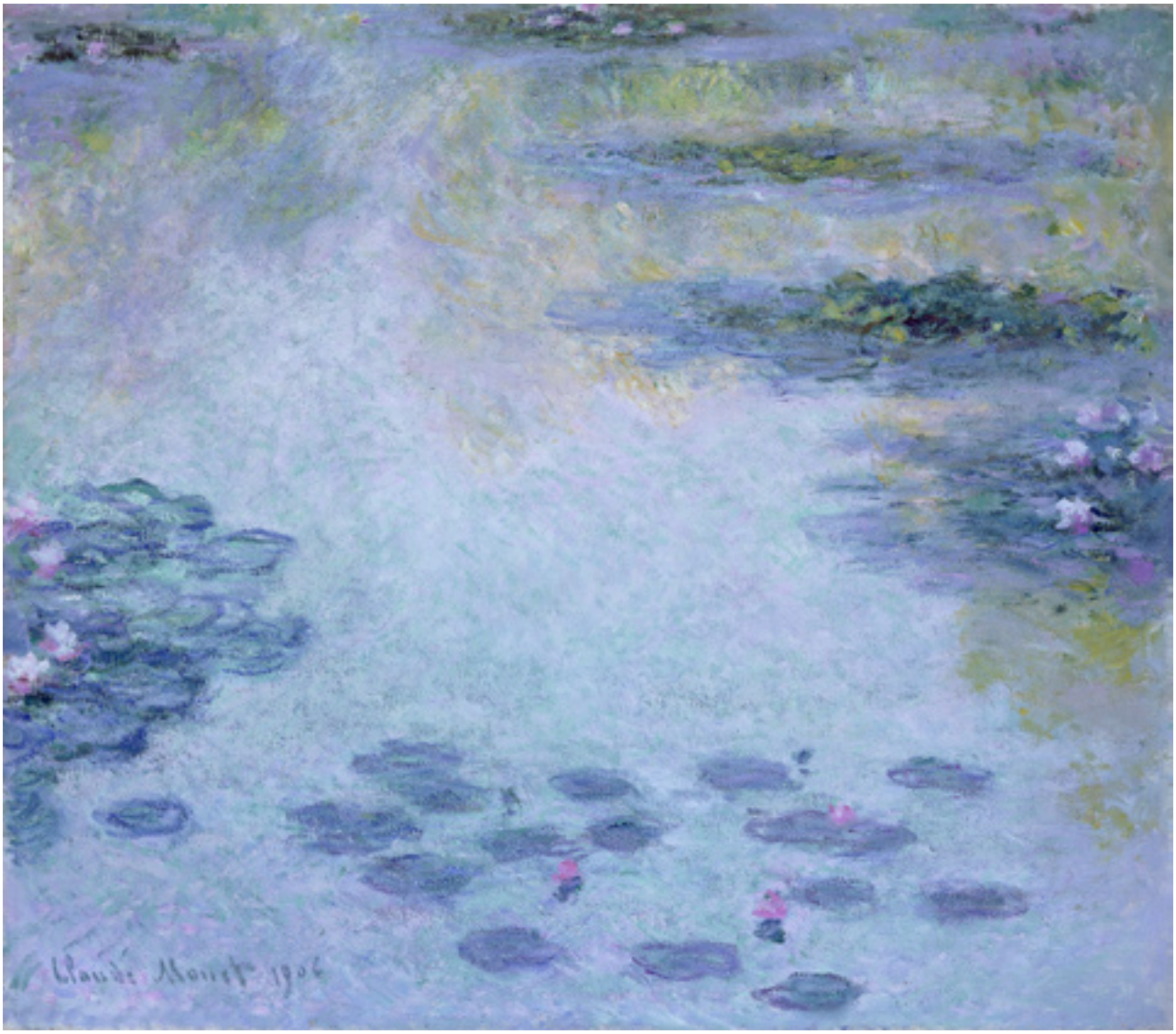
Public transport was an ideal subject for Honoré Daumier because it exposed him to the broad range of social types he liked to illustrate. This scene shows five figures, the most prominent being a red-haired female in a striking blue dress. Daumier used black bitumen (a naturally occurring tar-like substance) to create patches of inky density. This can be seen particularly in the figure on the left who has been blacked out entirely. While other versions Daumier made of *A Third Class Carriage* have a graphic, almost caricature-like quality to them, this is very much a study in paint surface and technique. It is also made up of discrete depictions of individuals rather than a homogenous group.

Edouard Manet (1832–1883), *Effect of Snow at Petit-Montrouge,* 1870. Oil on canvas, 24¼ x 19⅞ in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Gwendoline Davies, 1912

Edouard Manet was one of the earliest nineteenth-century French artists to depict the scenes of modern life that would become a mainstay of Impressionist subject matter. Painted during the siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian war, in which Manet had enlisted as a guardsman, this work is a particularly bleak scene showing a snow-covered wasteland near the church of Saint Pierre de Montrouge on the outskirts of the city. The painting's apparent spontaneity—there is no underdrawing on the fine-woven linen canvas, and the hastily applied brushstrokes suggest forms rather than describe them—has led some to believe that this may be Manet's first "Impressionist" scene. While the paint was still wet, Manet inscribed the painting "A mon ami H. Charlet," most likely a dedication to a fellow guardsman. It was purchased by Gwendoline Davies in 1912, the year in which the sisters began to acquire Impressionist art. It was a bold and unusual choice and, as it transpired, an extremely farsighted one.

Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), *The Seated Shepherdess*, 1840–50. Oil on board, 7⅜ x 9⅝ in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Margaret Davies, 1912

Jean-François Millet grew up in Normandy and as a youth worked on his family's farm before moving to Paris in the 1830s to study art. Beginning in the late 1940s, he became increasingly disenchanted with urban life and industrialization, and in 1849, he moved to the village of Barbizon, about thirty miles outside of Paris on the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau. There, Millet and artists such as Camille Corot painted directly from nature. The depiction of peasant life in nineteenth-century France underwent a shift in the 1840s, with the idealized countryside gradually being replaced by images showing the rigors of rural life and its inhabitants. Although in later works Millet illustrates the exhaustion and backbreaking labor of peasant life, in earlier works such as this, he portrays more of a bucolic reverie. While the small scale, attractive color, and relaxed nature of this painting would have appealed to the picture-buying public, Millet also hints at the grind of rural life: the figure's skin is sunburned, and her hands are large and prominent, a sign of one inured to manual labor.



Claude Monet (1840–1926), *Waterlilies*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 32⅛ x 36½ in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Gwendoline Davies, 1913

In 1888, Claude Monet began to paint works of art in series—among them, haystacks, Rouen Cathedral, and Venice. By far the largest and most intense of these series are his studies of light and water on the lily pond at his home in Giverny, France, where he and his family moved in 1883. While early versions of the lily pond show a more traditional landscape view of the bridge and surrounding garden, later works concentrate on the water's surface, often blurring the lines between representation and abstraction. Monet engineered his lily pond with great precision, employing a gardener whose sole purpose was to maintain it. He set up his canvases on the bridge before dawn, which enabled him to take advantage of the early morning light. This is one of three versions purchased by Gwendoline Davies from the series.

Matthew Smith (1879–1959), ***Apples on a Wicker Chair,*** 1915. Oil on canvas, 16½ x 20 in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Margaret Davies, 1961

Matthew Smith was born in England but studied in Paris and spent much of his life in France. His early use of color owes much to Matisse and the Fauves. *Apples on a Wicker Chair* dates from the period when Smith had returned to London and was living on Fitzroy Street, the hub of progressive art in England at the time. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, Smith was not allied to a specific artistic group. This still life reflects the ideals of modernism and can be seen more as an exercise in color and form than a direct attempt to depict the subject at hand. Smith painted this subject numerous times with strikingly different results, from naturalistic to semi-abstract.

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), ***The Rainbow,*** **ca. 1835. Watercolor and gouache with blotting out on wove paper, 9 3/8 x 11 7/8 in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Gwendoline Davies, 1919**

The dynamism and luminosity of this work is typical of many of Turner's later colored sketches. He employs numerous techniques to create depth and tonal gradations, demonstrating how skilled he had become in the medium of watercolor. Images of rainbows appear throughout Turner's work, as do depictions of churches. Here, the rainbow meets the land almost in the center, silhouetting the spire of the church against the golden edge. The rainbow was commonly used in European art as a Christian symbol, and Turner would have been aware of its symbolism. Like his contemporary John Constable, Turner was fascinated by the effects of weather, and his sketchbooks and countless studies of different landscapes reflect an interest in atmospheric nuance. The skies in many of his works depict accurately observed meteorological conditions, though the weather is also used to add drama to a scene.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), ***Nocturne: Blue and Gold, St. Mark's Venice,*** 1880. Oil on canvas, 17½ x 23½ in. National Museum of Wales; Purchased by Gwendoline Davies, 1912

Whistler's many pastels and etchings of Venice depict it as a living, working contemporary city. The present work is one of only three known existing oils he made there. Painted from the vantage point of the Café Florian on the south side of St. Mark's Square, the huge basilica— described by Mark Twain in 1880 as like a "vast, warty bug taking a meditative walk"—looms over the piazza. Only the essentials of the Byzantine architecture are represented, silhouetted against the deep blue of the night sky. The flecks of white represent the newly installed gas lamps in the square. This was the first of six paintings of Venice acquired by the Davies sisters.