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Vancouver Art Gallery Presents First Major Exhibition of Drawings to Travel from Paris's Renowned Musée d'Orsay

The Modern Woman: Drawings by Degas, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec and Other Masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay, Paris

VANCOUVER, BC - In the first exhibition of drawings ever to travel from the distinguished collection of the **Musée d'Orsay, Paris**, the Vancouver Art Gallery brings together nearly 100 artworks by celebrated 19th century French artists, including Bonnard, Degas, Gauguin, Manet, Morisot, Pissarro, Redon, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Seurat and many more. On view from **June 5 to September 6, 2010**, **The Modern Woman** explores how artists at this watershed moment in art history radically departed from tradition to capture a sense of the "modern" in their work. With a focus on the female subject, the exhibition presents drawings that reflect the dramatic evolution of artistic practice, as well as the increasing independence of women in French society during this era.



Edouard Manet
Portrait of Nina Villard (Madame Callias), 1873-74
gouache heightened with leadpoint on wood
Paris, Musée d'Orsay (kept at the Graphic Arts Department of the Louvre)
Rosenthal donation, 1920
Photo: © RMN (Musée d'Orsay) / Michèle Bellot

"It's been an extraordinary opportunity for the Vancouver Art Gallery to work closely with the Musée d'Orsay and delve into the finest collection of nineteenth-century French art to co-organize this stunning exhibition," said Vancouver Art Gallery director Kathleen Bartels. "With *The Modern Woman*, the Gallery continues its commitment to working with outstanding international museums and collections to bring the world's best art to British Columbia."

The Modern Woman will only be presented in Vancouver, providing a unique opportunity for North American audiences to experience rarely seen drawings, many of which have never travelled beyond Paris. The exhibition is curated by Isabelle Julia, conservateur général du patrimoine, arts graphiques at the Musée d'Orsay, with the cooperation of exhibition commissioners Guy Cogeval, président of the Musée d'Orsay, and Thomas Padon, assistant director/director of international partnerships at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Through an exquisite selection of works from the Musée d'Orsay's unrivalled collection, *The Modern Woman* offers a spectacular overview of late-19th century French drawing—a fascinating and tumultuous period of social, economic and political transformation—and a tangible connection to the creative impulses of the most prominent artists working at the time.

In the mid 1800s, French artists started to turn away from the formal portraits, landscapes and historical scenes that had dominated French art for centuries, and began to take inspiration from everyday experience. Presenting drawings that capture the spirit of Paris's dynamic urban life, *The Modern Woman* includes startlingly direct portraits, intimate domestic scenes and cityscapes that demonstrate the artists' deep connection to their subjects. Women are central in the drawings and are pictured in a variety of contexts—sitting for portraits, strolling the city streets, frequenting cafés or glimpsed in the privacy of their boudoir seemingly unaware of the artist's presence.

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“What came together when selecting these drawings with Isabelle Julia was how intimately and vividly the artists captured the complexity of the Belle Époque and the women who inhabited it,” said Thomas Padon, one of the exhibition’s three commissioners.

Remarkable portraits by artists such as Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet show young girls and women, often anonymous sitters, depicted with an increased complexity and level of independence. Pierre Bonnard, Henri Fantin-Latour, Georges Seurat and others portray women alone, in the privacy of their home, reading or knitting with quiet intensity. Other artists, such as Maurice Denis, Berthe Morisot and Auguste Rodin show innovation by depicting nude or partly nude woman in domestic interiors. Yet other artists, including Edgar Degas and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, capture, with brilliant insight, the patrons and performers at the cafés and theatres, which became such a popular fixture in Parisian society at this time. Finally, a group of artists, including Paul Gauguin, Jean-Francois Millet, Camille Pissarro and Eugene Boudin seek inspiration outside the city, depicting women ranging from Breton peasants to elaborately dressed tourists at fashionable new seaside resorts.

During this era of radical change, innovations in technique rivalled those of subject matter. Artists during this period established drawing as a fully realized artistic practice, rather than a method of preparation for other pursuits, such as sculpture or painting. This development coincided with new drawing materials, including synthetic charcoal, coloured pencils and pastels, which allowed artists to create highly atmospheric compositions mirroring the psychological state of their subjects. The drawings in the exhibition provide a comprehensive look at the various techniques favoured by artists of the period. A highlight of the exhibition is a spectacular group of pastels—works that are only rarely exhibited because of their fragility.

“The revival of pastel in the mid-19th century inspired a number of artists to experiment with the medium, creating chromatically radiant drawings,” noted Padon. “Degas, Manet and Redon in particular used pastel with visceral intensity to capture fleeting moments in the lives of the women they depicted.”

The Modern Woman: Drawings by Degas, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec and Other Masterpieces from the Musée d’Orsay, Paris is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Musée d’Orsay, and is accompanied by a 120-page fully illustrated publication with a major essay by exhibition curator Isabelle Julia. The exhibition is the latest in a series of historical exhibitions the Vancouver Art Gallery has organized in conjunction with some of the world’s greatest art museums. Over the past four years the Gallery has presented, *Monet to Dalí: Modern Masters from the Cleveland Museum of Art*, presenting works from one of the finest museum collections of modernist European art in North America, *TruthBeauty: Pictorialism and the Photograph as Art, 1845-1945* from George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film, the world’s oldest and most extensive photography museum, *Vermeer, Rembrandt and the Golden Age of Dutch Art: Masterpieces from the Rijksmuseum*, drawn from the finest collection of Dutch art in the world, and *Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man*, generously loaned from the Royal Collection by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

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Exhibition organized with:



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