



Discovering The Impressionists
Paul Durand-Ruel And The New Painting

By Stephen May



PHILADELPHIA, PENN. — Countless monographs and exhibitions have documented the enduring popularity of the Impressionists, but scant attention has been paid to the remarkable French art dealer who played a key role in kick-starting the growth and marketing of the movement. Astute, ambitious and loyal, Paul Durand-Ruel (1831–1922), embraced the new painting from the start in the 1870s, when it was publicly derided as a fringe movement whose pictures appeared unfinished.

The acceptance and subsequent popularity of the Impressionists was also due, of course, to the innovative style and subject matter of a group of gifted artists — Claude Monet, the leader, and Gustave Caillebotte, Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, among others. Nevertheless, Monet said of Durand-Ruel, “Without him, we wouldn’t have survived.”

“Dance in the Country,” 1883, by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, oil on canvas. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Previous Page: In 1883, Renoir painted three sizable views of couples dancing on the terrace of a country restaurant. “Dance at Bougival,” 1883, shows model and artist Suzanne Valadon likely dancing with the son of the owner of the restaurant.

Durand-Ruel's visionary role in putting the Impressionists on the map is the subject of a fascinating exhibition, "Discovering the Impressionists: Paul Durand-Ruel and the New Painting," on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through September 13. Aply curated by Joseph Rishel and Jennifer Thompson, the museum's senior and associate curators of European painting before 1900, respectively, the display of 85 works documents the manner in which the perspicacious art dealer believed in and tirelessly sustained the oeuvre of the Impressionists over nearly a half century, creating an active market for the movement in Europe and the United States and in essence creating the Modern art market. "He was," say the curators, "the single most powerful driving force making Impressionism a household name worldwide."

The 303-page exhibition catalog, edited by Sylvie Patry, is lavishly illustrated and contains perceptive essays by an

After finishing his first series of Haystacks, which were displayed at Durand-Ruel's gallery in 1891, Monet began a series of Poplar paintings. "Poplars on the Bank of the Epte River," 1891, is one of 24 Poplar paintings that marked a turning point in the artist's career.



impressive group of curators and Durand-Ruel descendants. It makes a good case for Durand-Ruel's lasting influence on American art dealers and will be *the* authoritative volume on the subject for years to come. Published by National Gallery Company Limited, London, it sells for \$65, hardcover.

Collecting for himself and his gallery, which expanded from Paris to include branches in London, Brussels and New York, Durand-Ruel acquired an astounding 12,000 paintings between 1891 and 1922. Included were 1,500 works by Renoir, 1,000 Monet, 800 by Pissarro, 400 each by Eugene Boudin, Mary Cassatt, Degas and Sisley and 200 by Edouard Manet.

In addition to establishing international gallery branches and assembling work of the Impressionists, the dealer's innovative strategies included offering monthly stipends in return for exclusive control over works and hosting single-artist exhibitions.



Of the roughly 1,500 paintings by Renoir acquired by Durand-Ruel, surely few offered as much charm as the timid 6-year-old in "Portrait of Mademoiselle Legrand," 1875.

"Apples and Pears in a Round Basket," 1872, by Camille Pissarro, oil on canvas. The Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation, on long-term loan to the Princeton University Art Museum.



Exploring key works that passed through Durand-Ruel's hands, the exhibition showcases such early purchases as Monet's views of London, a Degas of dancers and Manet's bold and dramatic view of the Civil War sea battle between the Union *Kearsarge* and the Confederate *Alabama* in Cherbourg Harbor. Significant canvases the dealer acquired from the crucial Second Impressionism exhibition of 1876 —which indelibly linked Durand-Ruel to the Impressionists — included Renoir's "Study, Torso, Effect of Sunlight" (ridiculed as depicting "putrefying flesh") and genre scenes by Morisot and Sisley.

One of the more than 1,000 works by Claude Monet purchased by Durand-Ruel was "The Artist's Garden in Argenteuil," with its colorful profusion of dahlias.



The finest painting of the American Civil War, "The Battle of the USS Kearsarge and the CSS Alabama," 1864, was created by Edouard Manet, who did not see the engagement but relied on sketches by observers to compose it right after the fight.



Many years after Durand-Ruel had his friend Renoir paint portraits of his children, in 1910 the dealer asked the artist to paint this likeness. “The face is handled extremely carefully,” say Paul-Louis Durand-Ruel and Flavie Durand-Ruel, “and reflects the friendship that existed between the two men after 40 years of unbroken and mutual loyalty.”

The significance of solo exhibitions, a novel concept that Durand-Ruel pioneered for Monet, is reflected in “La Pointe de la Heve, Sainte-Adresse” and “Train in the Snow.” Of Monet’s 15 famed paintings of poplars, six have been reassembled, inviting examination in depth of the artist’s serial approach to this subject.

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