



# PISSARRO'S PEOPLE

June 12–October 2, 2011



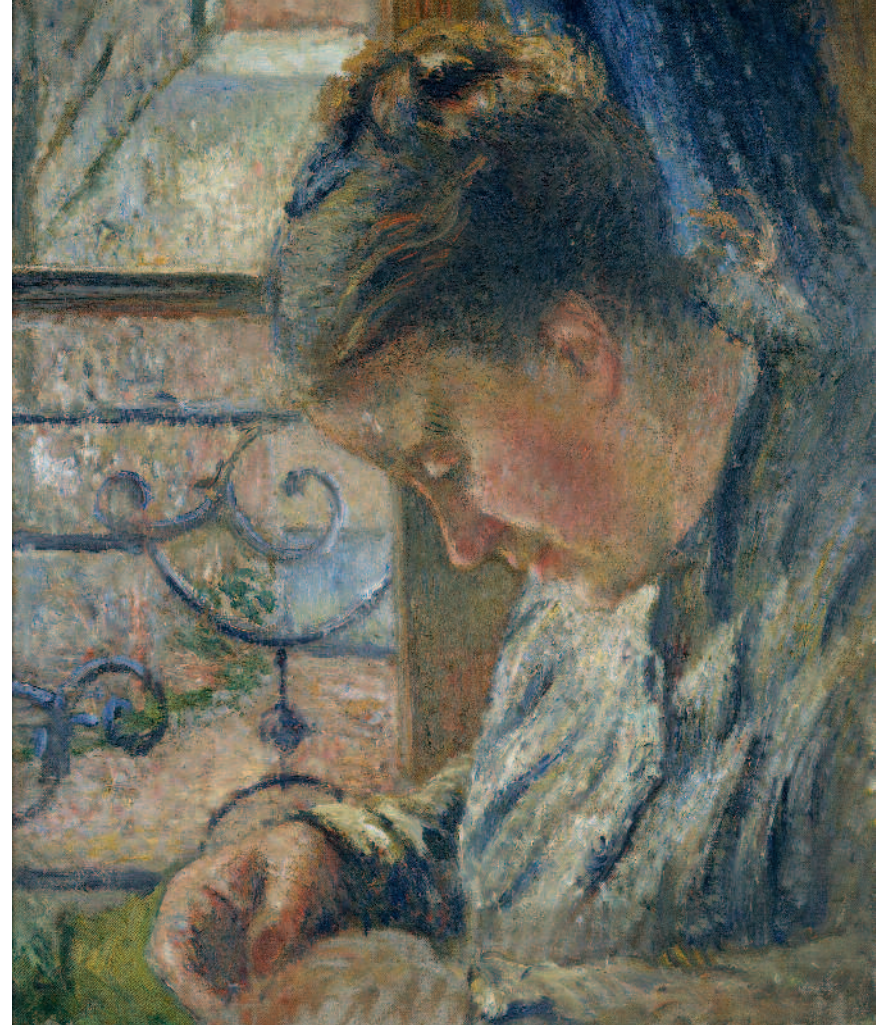
Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), called the “dean of Impressionism,” is best known as a landscape painter. But Pissarro also had a lifelong interest in the human figure, and his drawings, paintings, and prints feature human subjects from many walks of life.

He portrayed his friends and family, depicted domestic servants and farm workers, and made genre scenes set in the fields and marketplaces of rural France. Pissarro's social vision as expressed in his art was tied to his radical political beliefs. As a committed anarchist, he imagined a future society of small communities bound by shared work and social integration. *Pissarro's People* explores the painter's humanism in all its aspects by bringing together his figural works made over the full course of his career.

Born on the Caribbean island of Saint Thomas, then a Danish colony, Pissarro came from an extended Sephardic Jewish family. He was secular in his daily life, yet his Jewish background formed an important part of his identity. Although Pissarro spent nearly his entire adulthood in France, he retained his Danish nationality until his death.

Shortly after his move to France in 1855, Pissarro embarked on a love affair with Julie Vellay, a French woman who had worked in his mother's household. Camille and Julie eventually married and had eight children together. Pissarro was a quintessential family man, but he was hardly conventional. He encouraged his children to read, to draw, and to question the values of the period. Pissarro represented this lively family dynamic, as well as his many friendships, in portraits and genre scenes. He also included the family's maids, some of whom were relatives of the Pissarrs, in these pictures. He portrayed domestic service as healthy, comfortable work, rather than drudgery.

Pissarro was intensely interested in the nature of work and the dignity of labor. In the mid-1870s, he began a series of paintings dedicated to the rural worker. Representing male and female figures at work and at rest, the paintings were not only studies in character, but also statements of Pissarro's anarchist beliefs. To the artist, the ideal way of life was found in the country, rather than the city. Pissarro's rustic characters work, lounge, and chat idly, suggesting that rural life was fulfilling, pleasant, and simple.



Pissarro expressed his political beliefs most explicitly in an album of drawings he made for his nieces, Esther and Alice Isaacson. Entitled *Turpitudes sociales*, the album's twenty-eight drawings illustrate the artist's perceived horrors of modern capitalism. His parade of images showing starvation, poverty, and exploitation closes with a scene of violent insurrection by the urban working class.

The uprising shown at the end of the *Turpitudes sociales* could represent the “final” revolution that many anarchists believed would inevitably occur, toppling government and heralding an era of equality. Between the later 1880s and 1901, Pissarro completed a series of paintings that envisioned what this anarchist utopia would look like. Invariably, these scenes are set in the countryside and depict communal, rural labor. The landscape appears limitless, and the work is carried out by groups of laborers dedicated to their collective purpose.



In the mid-1880s, Pissarro extended his repertoire to include scenes of small-town markets. For Pissarro and other anarchists, the ideal market was agricultural: producers sold their fresh, locally grown food at a fair price directly to consumers. Pissarro's many images of marketplaces offer a panorama of sights, odors, and sounds and are jammed with people. He painted relatively few market scenes in oil, his most expensive medium. Gouaches, drawings, and prints were much more affordable and found a wider and more diverse clientele.

Though Pissarro's last years were marked by critical acclaim and increased wealth, he suffered personal hardship. His health was poor and anti-Semitism swept France in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair. During these years, he painted his final self-portraits. While only one of these late self-portraits bears any direct reference to Pissarro's profession, in all of them he seems to reflect on his lifetime of experiences and artistic achievements—on a life lived in complete dedication to his art and his ideals.



*Pissarro's People* was organized by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. It is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the archival support of and extraordinary loans from the Pissarro Archives of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, England.

Page 1: Detail of *The Marketplace*, 1882. Gouache on paper (Private collection, Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); Page 2: *Madame Pissarro Sewing beside a Window*, c. 1877. Oil on canvas (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Pissarro Family Gift, 1951); Page 3: *Two Studies of a Girl*, c. 1895, Black chalk and pastel on pink paper (Amgueddfa Cymru—National Museum Wales); Detail of *Apple-Picking*, 1886. Oil on canvas (Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, Japan); PAGE 4: Detail of *Self-Portrait*, c. 1898. Oil on canvas (Dallas Museum of Art. The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection)



## Related Events

### Member Event: Clark Society Exhibitions Preview and Reception

Thursday, June 9 at 6:00 pm

Members of the Clark Society are invited to a cocktail reception and curator-led previews of the summer exhibitions, *Pissarro's People*, *El Anatsui*, and *Spaces: Photographs by Candida Höfer and Thomas Struth*.

This event is free, but reservations are required. For reservations, please call 413 458 0524.

### Summer Opening Party

Saturday, June 11, 6:00 pm

The Clark's annual summer gala takes a new twist this year! Celebrate the openings of three summer shows with a party that samples both the classic and the contemporary. Enjoy *Pissarro's People* in a French country market and *Spaces: Photographs by Candida Höfer and Thomas Struth* and *El Anatsui* in a city-chic gallery setting.

Tickets are \$100 (\$85 members) and may be purchased online or by calling 413 458 0524.

### Curators' Conversation

Sunday, June 12, 3:00 pm

Join us for a free conversation between Richard R. Brettell, Margaret McDermott Distinguished Chair of Arts & Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas and guest curator of the *Pissarro's People* exhibition, and Richard Rand, Robert and Martha Berman Lipp Senior Curator and Curator of Paintings and Sculpture.

### Members Lecture: *Pissarro's People* in Prints

Tuesday, June 14 at 4:00 pm

Join Barbara Stern Shapiro, Curator Emerita at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for a close look at Pissarro's graphic work in the intimate space of the Clark's Manton Study Center for Prints, Drawings, and Photographs.

This event is free; reservations are required. Limited to 15 guests; for reservations, call 413 458 0585 by June 10.

### Members Gallery Talks

Thursday, June 16 at 9:30 am

Thursday, July 28 at 9:30 am

Join Richard R. Brettell, Margaret McDermott Distinguished Chair of Arts & Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas, and guest curator of *Pissarro's People*, for a special members-only tour of the exhibition.

This event is free, but reservations are required. To register for this event, please call 413 458 0585.

### Family Day

Sunday, June 26, 11:00 am

Celebrate *Pissarro's People* with an afternoon of free events for the whole family! The Clark transforms into a farmer's paradise with barnyard friends, festive activities like stilt walking and horseshoes, art projects, entertainment—and more. Family Day activities begin at 11:00 am.

This event is generously supported by funding from the officers and employees of Allen & Company, Inc.

### Landscape Painting Class

Mondays, July 11 through August 8, 1:30 pm

This five-week painting class will take inspiration from *Pissarro's People*. Participants will work outside on the Clark grounds, taking in different vistas each week. This class is best suited for adults and teenagers ages 16 and up.

Five-week class: \$150 non-members (\$125 members). Drop-ins are welcome: \$30/members (\$40/session non-members). To register, please call 413 458 0524.

### *Pissarro's People*: The Making of an Exhibition

Sunday, July 17, 3:00 pm

In this special free lecture, Richard R. Brettell will explore the themes of the exhibition.

### Toil of the Soil Film Series

In conjunction with *Pissarro's People*, the free Toil of the Soil: Films of Peasant and Yeoman film series looks at the politics of labor. Films are screened on Mondays at 2:00 pm.

*Jean de Florette*—August 1

*Farrebique*—August 8

*Pelle the Conqueror*—August 15

*The Tree of Wooden Clogs*—August 22

*Days of Heaven*—August 29

# THE CLARK

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