Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot  
French, 1796–1875  

**Ville-d’Avray**  1865  
Oil on canvas  

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Charlotte R. Stillman, 51.10  

Known as “the very poet of landscape,” Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot sought to capture the subtle shifts of light in serene views. He painted this work in the vicinity of his parents' country house in Ville-d’Avray, south of Paris, positioning his easel amid the reeds by a pond. The realistic play of light on water provides a subtle pathway into the composition, while scattered field workers hint at the rhythms of rural life.
Gustave Courbet
French, 1819–1877

The Wave  ca. 1869
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Horace O. Havemeyer, 41.1256

While summering at Étretat in northwestern France, the Realist painter Gustave Courbet was drawn to nature in an unbridled state, capturing a wave breaking at high tide. The artist represented the foam and cresting waves by slathering thick white paint onto the canvas with a palette knife. He wrote to the poet Victor Hugo: "The sea! The sea! . . . in her fury which growls, she reminds me of the caged monster who can devour me."
Alfred Sisley
British, active France, 1839–1899

Flood at Moret 1879
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of A. Augustus Healy, 21.54

During the 1870s, the Seine and its tributaries flooded several times. Here, Alfred Sisley depicted the inundated banks of the Loing River on a crisp late autumn day. His landscape possesses the typical sketchy quality of Impressionism, indicating that the picture was painted on the spot, quickly, so as to capture a moment in time. The artist left portions of the primed canvas surface visible in the upper sky to indicate white wisps of clouds.
Claude Monet
French, 1840–1926

*Rising Tide at Pourville* 1882
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Horace O. Havemeyer, 41.1260

Claude Monet painted this abandoned customhouse in 1882 during a visit to the Normandy coast. He emphasized the cabin’s dramatic setting on the rugged coastline by cropping the right edge of the canvas and adopting an elevated viewpoint. The sweeping brushstrokes convey the raw forces of nature, from the roiling sea to the windblown vegetation on the cliff side, as well as the weathered surface of the brick cottage.
Walter Sickert  
British, born Germany, 1860–1924

*The Height of the Season*  1885
Oil on panel

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Ferdinand Gottschalk, 118.317

In 1885 Walter Sickert explored the meeting of sea and sky at Dieppe, a resort on the Normandy coast. He divided the seaside scene into horizontal bands of blue-green water and thickly painted, gray, low-hanging clouds. Sickert was inspired by the tonal seascapes of his teacher James McNeill Whistler, who also employed a high horizon and an improvisational touch for his views of the Thames.
Gustave Caillebotte  
French, 1848–1894

*Apple Tree in Bloom*  
1885

Oil on canvas


With his signature use of zooming perspective in this painting, Gustave Caillebotte lured the viewer into his suburban retreat outside of Paris. His careful depiction of the garden’s strict plan complements the more informal treatment of the apple blossoms, rendered with thick touches of paint. Strokes of bright orange hint at the roofs of the estate’s various buildings, here fragmented by the screen of the flowering tree branches.
In this work Paul Cézanne rendered the church tower and stucco houses of a Provençal village in a series of interlocking squares and rectangles. These flat geometric forms, painted in warm ochers and reds, counter the more haphazard organic shapes of the trees on the hillside, with their cool, contrasting greens and blues. Sketchy traces of a graphite underdrawing are visible in the areas of canvas left bare, especially at bottom right and at the tip of the bell tower, providing insight into the artist’s working process.
Eugène Louis Boudin
French, 1824–1898

The Beach at Trouville
ca. 1887–96
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Robert B. Woodward, 15.314

In this late seascape, Eugène Boudin depicted a couple of local workers making their way across the beach in a wood horse-drawn cart. Though the composition harks back to seventeenth-century Dutch marine paintings, the freshness and immediacy of Boudin’s paint handling is very modern. The artist’s commitment to working en plein air to capture the play of light on water and clouds in saturated and unmodulated patches of color had a profound influence on his younger friend Claude Monet, and demonstrates why Boudin is recognized as an important forerunner of the Impressionists.
Odilon Redon
French, 1840–1916

*Jacob Wrestling the Angel*
ca. 1905–10
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Alexander M. Bing, 60.31

As a Symbolist, Odilon Redon sought to express spiritual ideas and feelings in his art, as opposed to slavishly copying nature. Here, the artist depicted the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with an angel, recounted in Genesis (32: 24–29). After the two struggled throughout the night, the angel finally blessed Jacob after wrenching his opponent’s hip. The windowlike void at the center of the canvas, with opalescent layers of paint and daubs of impasto, accentuates the spiritual significance of daybreak in the story.
Gabriele Münter
German, 1877–1962

*Nightfall in Saint-Cloud* 1906
Oil on board


*Countryside near Paris* 1906
Oil on board


Gabriele Münter quickly built these studies of the Parisian countryside with overlapping wet-on-wet strokes of electric yellow, blue, orange, green, and pink. Although the images are highly abstracted, even illegible in places, short touches deftly suggest tree branches and foliage, long horizontal brushstrokes indicate swaths of sky and parkland, and diagonal strokes mark recessions in space. Münter’s freely worked oil sketches reflect her shift during this period from an earlier Impressionist-derived approach toward Expressionism, a movement that espoused communicating the artist’s inner life through art.
André Derain  
French, 1880–1954  

*Landscape in Provence*  
ca. 1908  
Oil on canvas  

Brooklyn Museum, Anonymous gift, 39.273

With his friend Henri Matisse, André Derain was a major proponent of Fauvism, a brief early twentieth-century avant-garde movement characterized by vivid colors and exuberant application of paint (often squeezed from the tube directly onto the canvas). This work also shows the influence of Paul Cézanne and Pablo Picasso in the artist’s restrained palette of dark greens, blacks, and ochers, his more schematic, geometrical design, and his compressed composition, which collapses foreground and background into a series of flat, intersecting patches of color.
Pierre-Auguste Renoir  
French, 1841–1919  

The Vineyards at Cagnes  
1908  
Oil on canvas  

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Colonel and Mrs. Edgar W. Garbisch, 51.219  

Pierre-Auguste Renoir depicted a young woman reading beneath an olive tree in this lush, summery painting of the olive groves near Cagnes, in the South of France. The work fuses modern and classical elements of French landscape painting. Renoir’s rapid, sketchlike technique is quintessentially Impressionist, as is his vivid palette of warm reds, cool blues, and lush greens and yellows. The use of the olive trees as a framing device, however, recalls the orderly compositional structure of seventeenth-century pastorals.
Raoul Dufy
French, 1877–1953

*The Regatta* ca. 1908–10
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William K. Jacobs, Jr., 64.91

*The Regatta* depicts a crowd of spectators watching a boat race at Sainte-Adresse, a popular seaside resort near Le Havre, in Raoul Dufy’s native Normandy. The artist reduced the figures, sailboats, and flags to geometric forms, building his composition through blocks of bright, flattened color. He was inspired by the Fauves, or Wild Beasts, who caused a scandal at the 1905 Salon d’Automne in Paris through their brash colors and non-naturalistic painting style.
Henri Matisse  
French, 1869–1954

**Crossroads at Malabry**  
ca. 1916  
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Laura L. Barnes, 67.24.16

In a conservative turn from the bold, vivid colors of his Fauvist period paintings and geometric structuring inspired by the Cubist movement, Henri Matisse focused here on the muted earth tones of a light-dappled forest in the Paris suburb of Châtenay-Malabry. Using a vertical format, he created spatial recession—a nod to Italian Renaissance single-point perspective—through a receding path punctuated by pools of light.

Matisse’s painting style was transformed during World War I, when Cubism was offending the conservative press. He responded by returning to a more traditional approach to landscape painting.
Yves Tanguy
American, born France, 1900–1955

_Dress of the Morning_ 1946
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of The Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation, 2002.30.25

In _Dress of the Morning_, Yves Tanguy framed desolate voids with interlocking forms that resemble body parts and spindly rods with rigorous precision. He painted this otherworldly landscape in the United States shortly after World War II. Tanguy’s disturbing dreamscape reflects an interest in the psychology of the subconscious that was typical of Surrealism. He stated that painting “surprises me as it unfolds, giving me total freedom . . . and for this reason I am unable to make a prior plan or a sketch.”
Pierre-Édouard Frère
French, 1819–1886

The Little Cook  1858
Oil on panel

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Robert B. Woodward, 15.328

Pierre-Édouard Frère adopted a low vantage point in this painting, encouraging viewers to share the young girl’s space as she sits beside the stove, waiting to stir the pot with a ladle more than half her size. Root vegetables and a large head of leafy green cabbage are scattered on the floor, and popular inexpensive prints are pinned to the wall. Common in nineteenth-century working-class households, the prints also allude to a more complicated world beyond the confines of the child’s humble kitchen, underscoring, by contrast, the innocent quality that was Frère’s stock-in-trade.
Jean-Léon Gérôme
French, 1824–1904

The Carpet Merchant of Cairo
1869
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Joseph Gluck, 74.208

Jean-Léon Gérôme painted this scene of a merchant hawking his wares on the streets of Cairo following a three-month-long trip to Egypt and North Africa in early 1868. The vendor calls out to passersby as he holds up the ornate carpet for their inspection—and ours. In a bravura performance of his celebrated meticulous brushwork, Gérôme lavished attention on the carpet’s rich colors, complex patterns, and plush folds.
Antoine Vollon
French, 1883–1900

Fish  1871–75
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of William A. Putnam and Walter H. Crittenden, 19.86

Using a loose, animated painting style, Antoine Vollon depicted a mound of freshly caught fish beside a bed of reeds and a wicker basket. His use of heavy impasto brushwork is most noticeable in the bright red scales around the eye of the fish at the far right. The artist’s quick and intuitive approach to painting is also evident in his signature, which he roughly scratched into the still-wet pigment at the bottom right.
Jehan-Georges Vibert
French, 1840–1902

An Embarrassment of Choices
(A Difficult Choice)
before 1873
Oil on panel

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Carll H. de Silver in memory of her husband, 13.39

Jehan-Georges Vibert, a successful painter and sometime writer of comedic plays, won popular acclaim in the 1870s and 1880s with paintings poking fun at clergymen’s excesses. The scarlet-robed cardinal in this image sniffs daintily at a bouquet of flowers, his face reflected in the mirror behind him. The ghostly outline in the mirror of another head turned away from us—which has only become visible over time—suggests that Vibert altered the original composition as he worked.
Pierre-Auguste Renoir
French, 1841–1919

Still Life with Blue Cup
c. 1900
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Laura L. Barnes, 67.24.19

Auguste Renoir’s modest still life depicts a blue china cup and saucer, two peaches, and several green figs arranged horizontally on a tablecloth. A slender strip of ocher floral wallpaper can be seen behind the table, and the creases and folds of the tablecloth are modeled with tones of gray and violet. Renoir often painted such still-life compositions in order to explore various color combinations—here, the contrasting cool blues of the china cup and warm, fiery oranges and yellows of the peaches.
Robert Delaunay
French, 1885–1941

In the Garden 1904
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Iris and Gerald B. Cantor, 86.28

Robert Delaunay here transformed an outdoor breakfast in the garden of his family home into an intimate still life bathed in morning light. A freshly laid table awaits a lady opening her parasol near the house. The garden, with its profusion of flowers and fruit trees, and the steep-roofed house are typical of the Berry region. Delaunay painted this work at age nineteen, when he was influenced by the landscapes of Claude Monet, whose paintings had been exhibited in Paris the year before.
Henri Matisse  
French, 1869–1954

*Flowers*  
1906  
Oil on canvas  

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Marion Gans Pomeroy, 61.243

With the irregularly applied patches of vivid color characteristic of the Fauves, or Wild Beasts, this composition suggests a tabletop and a wall (or perhaps a windowsill and frame) with a field of flat, thinly brushed areas, along with visible sections of unpainted canvas. In the center is a vase filled with wildflowers, articulated by short strokes and smudges of pigment. Some of the flowers float apart, enmeshed in the surrounding color fields. Empty space and solid objects are rendered alike, dematerialized in various painterly marks of unmodulated color.
Georges Lemmen
Belgian, 1865–1916

Still Life with Fan  ca. 1907–08
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Purchased with funds given by William K. Jacobs, Jr., 83.70.1

Georges Lemmen painted this still life of a bouquet of wildflowers in a blue-and-white vase set in front of an open fan during his “intimiste” period, when he concentrated on subjects drawn from his domestic milieu. The profusion of real and decorative blossoms—seen in the glass bowl next to the vase, along the tabletop, and in the patterns of both the tablecloth and the wallpaper—also reveals the artist’s interest in decorative arts, a realm in which he worked intensively during the 1890s.
József Rippl-Rónai
Hungarian, 1861–1927

Woman with Three Girls
ca. 1909
Oil on board

Brooklyn Museum, Designated Purchase Fund, 1994.68

József Rippl-Rónai’s “corn style” application of paint (so called by the artist because the paint daubs look kernel-like) juxtaposes bright, intense colors that compress the figures, furnishings, and decorative floral pattern into a single plane. Inspired by avant-garde techniques observed in Paris, where the artist lived from 1887 to 1900, Rippl-Rónai sought to create a modern Hungarian style. Here, the flowering foliage recalls the allover floral patterns of embroidered Hungarian folk textiles, and the tulips in the yellow vase are traditional symbols of Hungarian culture and identity.
Chaim Soutine
Russian, active in France, 1893–1943

*Still Life, Gladiolas*  ca. 1919
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Laura L. Barnes, 67.24.24

In *Still Life, Gladiolas*, Chaim Soutine brought together the expressive brushstrokes of the European Old Masters with the brilliant color and flattened compositions of his contemporaries in France, including Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse.

Soutine's passion for painting led him from a Lithuanian Jewish ghetto in modern Belarus to the art academies of Minsk and, ultimately, Paris. In the French capital, he turned his back on the prevailing avant-garde style of Cubism and embraced the expressive manner of Rembrandt van Rijn and Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, whose works were then on view in the Louvre.
Alexander Archipenko
American, born Ukraine, 1887–1964

The Ray  1920s
Bronze with green patina

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of The Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation, 2004.37.1a–b

Alexander Archipenko’s enigmatic sculpture evokes a vase, a ray of light, and a standing nude woman. The artist articulated the female body using simple forms: a horseshoe for a face, a triangle for a right arm, a semicircle for a left breast, and a vertical cleft to delineate legs. He ultimately transformed a living model into an inanimate object, creating two versions as Vase Woman and one as The Ray.
André Masson  
French, 1896–1987  

**Glasses and Architectures**  
1924  
Oil on canvas  

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of The Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation, 2004.37.3  

Two goblets arranged within an enigmatic architectural framework anchor this transitional work by the Surrealist painter André Masson. The geometric structuring of the composition draws from Analytic Cubism, whose practitioners, including Pablo Picasso, fragmented their images into abstract forms. The startling appearance of an androgynous torso passing beyond the right edge of the canvas suggests the rising prominence in Paris of the Surrealists, whose art sought to blur the boundary between dream and reality. Masson would join the group the year he painted *Glasses and Architectures*. 
Pierre Bonnard
French, 1867–1947

The Breakfast Room  ca. 1925
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Frank L. Babbott Fund, Carll H. de Silver Fund, and A. Augustus Healy Fund, 43.202

A keen observer of the mundane routines of domestic life, Pierre Bonnard simultaneously conveyed both intimacy and distance in the shared space of this cheerful breakfast room. While the vantage point implies a place for the viewer across from the seated woman, the austere jutting wedge of the white tablecloth and the placement of the basket of fruit set her apart. Moreover, with her head and shoulders bowed over her cup, the woman stirs her drink with meditative self-absorption. Bonnard further underscores the detachment of the figures with the turned back of the retreating child.
Fernand Léger
French, 1881–1955

Composition in Red and Blue
1930
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of The Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation, 2004.37.2

Fernand Léger’s experimental still life juxtaposes nonrepresentational and representational objects against a blue-gray field. Architectural elements, including the staircase and fragment of wall molding at the left, rest alongside abstract shapes, such as the peach rectangle and form evoking a lollipop or pinwheel, that float on a large red ground in the center. Léger was inspired by the burgeoning medium of cinema during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and began using techniques such as fragmentation, magnification, and montage in his paintings.
Georges Rouault
French, 1871–1958

Still Life with Clown  1932
Oil on paper laid down on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of William K. Jacobs, Jr., 1992.107.34

The painter and printmaker Georges Rouault’s training in a stained-glass workshop had a powerful impact on his vibrant painting style of the 1930s. Here, for example, his use of bold, flat patches of color separated by outlines of black paint smacks of stained glass and creates a decorative border around the main subject, a masked clown seated next to a vase of flowers. Rouault identified deeply with the clown, regarding the tragicomic character’s ability to overcome suffering with laughter as an allegory of the human condition: “I saw quite clearly that the clown was me, was us, nearly all of us.”
Jean-François Millet  
French, 1814–1875

*Shepherd Tending His Flock*  
early 1860s  
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of William H. Herriman, 21.31

The son of Norman farmers, François Millet dedicated his career to the depiction of the peasants of Barbizon, the farming community outside Paris where he lived. Here, Millet endowed the shepherd, described as a massive pyramidal shape looming above the horizon, with dignity and an imposing monumentality. With his dark head haloed against a bright break in the clouds, he stands tall among his flock like a Christ figure. While Millet did not support overtly religious interpretations of his work, his images do reflect a common contemporaneous belief in the inherent spirituality of poor peasants.
William Bouguereau
French, 1825–1905

*The Elder Sister*
reduction, ca. 1864
Oil on panel

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of William H. Herriman, 21.99

William Bouguereau here portrayed a dreamy young woman, dressed in garments that seem at once rustic and classical, holding her little brother. Although the title defines the figures as siblings, the pair’s tender, entwined pose, the woman’s serene expression, and the rosary beads the child holds clearly recall images of the Madonna and Child. Bouguereau’s works appealed to a bourgeois clientele—both French and American—that cherished Christian and domestic values, especially when presented with such untroubled sweetness and delicacy.
Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot  
French, 1796–1875  

Young Women of Sparta  
1868–70  
Oil on canvas  

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Horace O. Havemeyer, 42.195  

In this idyllic landscape, a woman in theatrical gypsy costume reclines on a jaguar skin with a mandolin on her lap. Her languid pose contrasts with the twirling triad of maidens in the background engaged in a dance or, perhaps, a physical contest, since Spartan women were renowned for their athleticism.  

For this voluptuous odalisque, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot chose a favorite model, Emma Dobigny, whose pale skin reflects the tonalities of the landscape. He wrote of his struggle to capture “these tissues of flesh that let one sense the blood beneath while they reflect the light of the sky.”
In this intimate image of an elderly woman holding a rosary and a taper, Jules Breton conveyed the religious devotion associated with Brittany and its people. The picture is one of his many paintings and studies of *pardons*, Brittany’s annual penitential rites in which peasants in traditional costumes assemble at the local church and then take part in a procession. Breton’s woman bows her head in prayer, her black-and-white costume sharply silhouetted against a monochromatic background. She is an evocative portrayal of religious devotion and tradition, unshaken and unchanged in the face of modernity.
Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot  
French, 1796–1875  

*The Young Woman of Albano*  
1872  
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Horace O. Havemeyer, 42.196

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot’s solitary female figure wears the traditional garb of the Italian town of Albano, located just south of Rome, where the artist had traveled and worked earlier in the century. Corot reveled in the richly textured garments of his sitter, a fifteen-year-old girl named Mademoiselle Darmelas, employing glittering touches of paint to articulate the details of her head scarf, vest, and necklace. Darmelas’s pensive gaze and the smoky tones of the background together lend the picture a melancholy air.
Berthe Morisot
French, 1841–1895

*Madame Boursier and Her Daughter*  
ca. 1873

Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Museum Collection Fund, 29.30

Much of Berthe Morisot’s work focused on modern life as it was experienced in spaces associated with women: the home, a garden, or a park or other area of polite bourgeois leisure. The subjects in this painting are the artist’s cousins, posed as though paying a social call in a nicely appointed room with striped wallpaper, an upright piano, and a vase of flowers. Quick, unblended strokes summarily define the forms, patterns, and textures of the pair’s fashionable clothing and elegant furnishings while simultaneously foregrounding the materiality of paint itself.
Édouard Manet
French, 1832–1883

Young Girl on a Bench  1880
Oil on canvas

Collection of The Rita and Alex Hillman Foundation, L2009.5.9

This portrait may be unfinished. Passages of primed canvas are visible throughout, particularly around the girl’s clasped hands, yet Édouard Manet fully realized her delicate facial features. Young Girl on a Bench is a masterpiece of performative painting, forcing the viewer to consider the picture’s materiality and the painter’s process through thick, gestural brushstrokes. Manet captured his model in the garden of the celebrated Algerian-born opera singer Emilie Ambre while he was summering in the spa resort village of Bellevue, outside Paris.
Henri Fantin-Latour
French, 1836–1904

*Madame Léon Maître*  1882
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of A. Augustus Healy and George A. Hearn, 06.69

Henri Fantin-Latour imbued his subject—the sister-in-law of his friend the composer Edmond Maître—with an air of melancholy. Madame Maître’s downward glance avoids direct engagement. Her elegant evening dress emphasizes her corseted waistline and low neckline. In this large-scale portrait painted in the studio, the raking light from above makes the sitter’s ivory skin glow. Fantin-Latour commented, “The soul is like music playing behind the veil of flesh.”
Jules Breton
French, 1827–1906

The End of the Working Day
1886–87
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Edward S. Harkness, 35.867

Jules Breton here depicted three young women crossing a potato field near Courrières on their way home, under a rosy twilight sky. This idealized and heroic portrayal of field workers reflects the impact of the democratic Revolution of 1848 on artists later in the century. In his autobiography Breton recalled that after the Revolution artists showed “a deeper interest in the life of the street and the field. The tastes and the feelings of the poor were taken into account, and art conferred honors upon them, formerly reserved for the gods and for the great.”
Auguste Rodin
French, 1840–1917

Balzac in a Monk's Habit
ca. 1893; cast 1971
Bronze

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation, 84.75.22

In 1891 the Parisian Society of Men of Letters commissioned Auguste Rodin to create a monument to the writer Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850). Rodin first explored representing the author in the suit he wore in daily public life but ultimately depicted him in the Dominican robe he wore when he worked at home at night, including a stack of books or manuscripts beside him.

Rodin believed that France produced uniquely regional physical types and traveled to Balzac’s native city of Tours to find a model, choosing a local driver named Estager.
Édouard Vuillard
French, 1868–1940

**Thadée Natanson** 1897
Oil on cardboard mounted on panel

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of William Kelly Simpson in honor of Nathan Todd Porter, Jr., 2005.23

Édouard Vuillard portrayed his patron, the influential editor and publisher Thadée Natanson, engaged in a favorite activity, reading. His downcast eyes and inclined head indicate a quiet, absorbed moment.

Vuillard was a leading member of the Nabis (Hebrew for “prophet”), an artistic brotherhood founded in 1891. The artist’s emphasis on his sitter’s meditative gaze and red-and-white patterned shirt illustrates the Nabis’ attention to spiritual feeling and surface decoration.
Augustus John
British, 1879–1961

Woman by a Riverbank
ca. 1910–12
Oil on panel

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Helen Babbott Sanders. 78.151.7

Augustus John painted his mistress Dorothy McNeill, known as “Dorelia,” with a small, doll-like head and diminutive features. Using heavy touches of unmixed pigments, he depicted Dorelia in a brightly colored costume consisting of a blue jacket, yellow head scarf and stockings, and a long, contour-hugging, striped dress. Both the artist and his model were known for their bohemian dress and lifestyle, often traveling in a caravan in emulation of the Roma people and culture they admired.
Giovanni Boldini
Italian, 1842–1931

*Portrait of a Lady*  1912
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Anonymous gift, 41.876

In this painting, the sought-after society portraitist Giovanni Boldini imbued the New York philanthropist Florence Blumenthal (born Florence Meyer) with a casual, sensual elegance. The artist’s careful drawing of her face contrasts with the deftly abbreviated touches of black, gray, and white that render her fashionable dress and the silver jacket she has just removed. The liveliness of the brushwork and the complementary curves of the chaise lounge and sitter make for a striking composition.
Marc Chagall
French, born Russia, 1887–1985

The Musician 1912–14
Oil on canvas


The Musician recalls Marc Chagall’s memories of growing up in a Russian Jewish household in the town of Vitebsk, in present-day Belarus, where he would listen to his uncle “Neuch” play the fiddle. Chagall painted the work during his first Parisian period (1910–14), when he absorbed the influences of Fauvism and Cubism, evident in the painting’s bright, nonrepresentational colors and spatial ambiguities.
Lajos Tihanyi
Hungarian, 1885–1938

The Critic  1916
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Right Reverend John Török, D.D., 29.1302

A self-taught artist who would settle in Paris in the mid-1920s, Lajos Tihanyi combined the fragmentation of Analytical Cubism and the psychological intensity of Expressionism in his portraits. This figure has been identified as a particular individual—Andor Halasi, a Hungarian literary critic whom Tihanyi knew well. Tihanyi emphasized the sitter’s pronounced bone structure with a subtle play of light and shadow indicating sharp protrusions and deep hollows. The angular wings of the starched collar and the knot of the tie further echo the sitter’s pointed features.
Henri Matisse
French, 1869–1954

*Woman in an Armchair*
ca. 1916–17
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of Laura L. Barnes, 67.24.15

In 1916 and 1917, Henri Matisse made some fifty paintings of an Italian model named Laurette, whom he consistently posed seated in an antique armchair with pink upholstery, and clad in a green gandoura, a Moroccan robe typically worn by men. *Woman in an Armchair* is a study in sinuous curves—from the long, dark hair to the black contours describing the fall of the robe to the wood frame of the chair. There is a wistful, melancholy quality in Laurette's expression that hints at the intimacy that may have fueled the relationship between artist and model.
Kees van Dongen  
French, born Netherlands, 1877–1968

**W. S. Davenport**  
ca. 1925

Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William Slocum Davenport, 32.117

Kees van Dongen made a splash in the 1920s chronicling Parisian high society. His winning strategy involved placing his sitters against a neutral backdrop and punctuating the composition with brilliant, even supernatural color. In this portrait of an American dentist residing in Paris, van Dongen added blue-green highlights to the face. A bright red brushstroke at the lapel signals Dr. Davenport’s recent knighthood in the Legion of Honor for facial reconstructive surgery during World War I.
Jean Hélion  
French, 1904–1987  

*Composition*  
1939  
Oil on Masonite  

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Lucile E. Selz, 1991.283.2  

Many of Jean Hélion’s New York abstract paintings from the second half of the 1930s evoke the human figure. *Composition* may depict a man standing with his legs apart. The blue arch may represent legs, and the yellow polyhedron a head.  

Hélion returned to Europe in 1940 to support the war effort in France and was interned in a Nazi POW camp. By 1942 he had escaped and returned to the United States, where he remained for four years before resettling in France.
Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Peña
French, 1807–1876

*Bathers by a Woodland Stream*
1859
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Gladstone in memory of Sylvia Israel, 85.228

Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Peña, born to Spanish parents in Bordeaux, was part of a group of French landscape painters who began to paint in the Forest of Fontainebleau near the village of Barbizon, about thirty miles south of Paris, in the 1830s. In this painting, Diaz’s characteristically rapid and loose handling of paint, evident in the daubed highlights on the sun-dappled leaves and tree trunks, enlivens the tranquil, centered composition. The three female bathers, who might represent nymphs, lend the painting a mythological air. Leafy, tree-filled scenes like this one—sometimes with figures, sometimes without—were the artist’s stock-in-trade.
Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux
French, 1827–1875

*Woman of African Descent*
1868
Plaster with patina; red stone base

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Benno Bordiga, by exchange and Mary Smith Dorward Fund, 1993.83a–b

*Woman of African Descent* is one of numerous studies for a figural group representing the four continents that Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux designed as the central element for the Observatory Fountain in Paris. Based on the sculptor’s observation of a live model, this expressive bust is an allegorical representation of Africa. The work includes specific allusions to slavery that did not appear in the fountain: the ropes that bind the torso (a substitute for the manacle that appears on the full-length figure’s ankle) and an inscription reading “Pourquoi naître esclave” (Why born a slave?).
Auguste Rodin
French, 1840–1917

The Age of Bronze
medium-size model, first reduction, 1876; cast 1967
Bronze

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of B. Gerald Cantor, 68.49

Auguste Rodin’s original life-size sculpture, almost twice as big as this version of The Age of Bronze, was so convincing that some accused the sculptor of casting the figure directly from a live model. False accusations of “cheating” by those offended by an artwork’s realism were common in the nineteenth century. To present-day eyes, however, the figure may appear somewhat idealized, though that was not the artist’s intent.
Edgar Degas
French, 1834–1917

*Nude Woman Drying Herself*  
ca. 1884–86  
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Carll H. de Silver Fund, 31.813

Edgar Degas’s painting of a nude woman drying herself with a towel is very likely unfinished. The artist used his brush to outline the main forms in the composition, including the female model, the circular tub from which she has emerged, and a sponge resting in the center. In other areas, he used paint thinned with turpentine in order to indicate texture and tone. Had he finished the canvas, Degas would have then overlaid the bright colors for which his paintings were known, bringing the final work to life.
Edgar Degas  
French, 1834–1917

*Dancer at Rest, Hands Behind Her Back, Right Leg Forward*  
modeled 1882–95; cast 1919–32  
Bronze

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Rodgers, 70.176.5

In this sculpture, Edgar Degas depicted a young dancer of the Paris Opéra Ballet with one foot placed far in front of the other, in ballet’s fourth position. Her hands are held behind her body, and her chin thrusts upward in a pose that seems both relaxed and haughty. Many of Degas’s paintings and pastels focus on the female body, and the three-dimensionality of sculpture offered the artist a means of exploring its forms and musculature, as well as its placement and movement in space. During his lifetime, Degas hardly ever exhibited his sculptures, which he viewed as studies rather than finished works.
Auguste Rodin
French, 1840–1917

She Who Was the Helmet
Maker's Once-Beautiful Wife
1885–87; cast 1969
Bronze

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation, 86.87.2

Throughout much of his career, Auguste Rodin faithfully represented the effect of age upon the body. In this sculpture of an old, naked woman sitting on a rock with her head lowered, the artist’s keen sense of observation is evident.

The figure’s sagging, wrinkled flesh challenged the era’s conventional standards of beauty in art. Indeed, even the contemporary sculptor Aristide Maillol was mystified by the master's choice of subject matter: “An old woman’s belly does not appeal to me: I like health and beauty.”
Aleksandr Yakovlev  
Russian 1887–1938  

*Model Washing Her Hair*  1929  
Tempera on linen

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Martin Birnbaum, 44.220

By the turn of the twentieth century, working women in Paris often bathed with water from a pitcher while crouching over a copper basin. Here, the Russian-trained painter and noted draftsman Aleksandr Yakovlev, who settled in Paris after the 1917 Russian Revolution, focused on the model’s muscular body. He accentuated the torsion of her brawny arms as she wrings water from her hair. Inspired by Edgar Degas’s paintings of bathers, Yakovlev rendered this private scene in earthy tonalities with broad brushstrokes.
Jacques Villon
French, 1875–1963

The Philosopher 1930
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Gerda Stein, 34.1000

Based on a life study of a seated male bather swathed in a towel and reading a newspaper, Jacques Villon’s simultaneously geometric and organic painting blends hard- and soft-edged intersecting planes with the contours of a powerful, muscular body and its enveloping white drapery. Although this work developed out of an initial interest in the human form, the artist gave it a title that evokes the metaphysical realm of the intellect or the incorporeal.
Fernand Léger
French, 1881–1955

Les Plongeurs Polychromes
1941–42
Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of The Beatrice and Samuel A. Seaver Foundation, 2004.30.11

This painting is part of Fernand Léger’s series of Divers, which was inspired by watching swimmers at a pool in Marseilles while awaiting passage to New York in 1940. As the artist recalled, “It was impossible to tell whose head, leg, and arm belonged to whom.” Indeed, Les Plongeurs Polychromes gives an impression of a tangled mass of figures in space—a topsyturvy tumble of bodies and birds with neither top nor bottom. Léger’s juxtaposition of bright colors enhances the sense of exuberant, athletic chaos.
Auguste Rodin  
French, 1840–1917

**Danaid**  
ca. 1909 
Marble

Brooklyn Museum, Ella C. Woodward Memorial Fund, 12.873

This sculpture depicts a dramatic moment from Greek mythology when one of the Danaids, the daughters of Danaos, collapses in despair. For the crime of murdering their husbands on their wedding night, the Danaids were punished with the endless task of filling a bottomless barrel with water. Here, Auguste Rodin expressed the Danaid’s emotional anguish through the physical contortions of her body as she lies huddled on the ground, having realized the futility of her actions.