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Van Gogh along the Seine

Van Gogh travelled from Antwerp to Paris in 1886.

He moved in with his brother Theo. Their apartment was on the edge of Montmartre, a vibrant artists' neighbourhood.

In the spring of 1887, Van Gogh set off from the city virtually every day. With his painter's equipment on his back, he walked to Clichy, Asnières and Courbevoie, suburbs along the Seine. He also liked to work on La Grande Jatte, an island in the river. In these green surroundings, he found the peace and space to paint.

Asnières became a popular leisure destination following the construction of a railway bridge. Day-trippers from Paris visited the suburb on Sundays to swim, walk and picnic. From beneath the shade of the trees they watched sailing and rowing competitions.

At the same time, the area was rapidly transforming in the mid-19th century. Industry was on the rise and rural suburbs were increasingly swallowed up by the explosive growth of the city. Nature was interspersed with iron bridges, factories and commercial activity on the water.

Van Gogh was not the only painter attracted to the contrasts offered by these surroundings. Georges Seurat, Paul Signac, Émile Bernard and Charles Angrand too could regularly be found on the banks of the Seine in the 1880s.

The artists knew each other and occasionally worked together, but did not form a group.

The area offered new, contemporary subjects.

These prompted the artists to experiment with modern painting styles. Some painted with closely spaced dots in unmixed colours (Pointillism), while others used flat colour planes and strong outlines.

The time they spent around Asnières triggered a radical innovation in the work of all five painters.

Van Gogh's art became more modern.

He experimented by the Seine with the colourful rendering of light in loose brushstrokes. These paintings were a prelude to the more intensely coloured works he would create a year later in the South of France.

The Outskirts of Paris

Almost every day from early May to the end of July 1887, Vincent van Gogh walked with his painter's gear to Asnières, northwest of Paris. Following the example of the Impressionists, he went in search of modern subjects outside the city.

Van Gogh left Paris via the city gate, walked past the city walls and continued across a sprawling no man's land. He captured this transitional zone in several watercolours and paintings. An hour's walk brought him to the suburbs on the banks of the Seine: tranquil Asnières, its affluent neighbour Courbevoie and industrial Clichy on the other side. The green island of La Grande Jatte lay in the middle of the river.

Georges Seurat came to paint here in 1881, the first of the five artists to do so. The contrast between industry and nature, work and leisure, inspired their quest for contemporary subjects and painting techniques.



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

On the Outskirts of Paris, 1886

oil on canvas

Private collection, in loving memory of Frank and Marie Wangeman

This is the first painting that Van Gogh made just outside Paris in the autumn of 1886. He had arrived in the French capital earlier that year. Here he depicted the wasteland between the city walls and the surrounding suburbs.

You can see Paris in the distance.

The lamppost is lost in the landscape. Van Gogh painted with free, broad strokes, but not yet with the fresh colours he would employ the following year.



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Road to Gennevilliers, 1883

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, acquired in 1968



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Wheatfield with Partridge, 1887

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Gate in the Paris Ramparts, 1887

pencil, pen and ink, watercolour, on paper

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)

Road Running Beside the Paris Ramparts, 1887

pencil, watercolour, chalk, brush and (oil) paint, pen and ink,
on paper

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh
Foundation)

Van Gogh made four watercolour drawings around the ramparts of Paris. Workers used the overgrown city walls for recreation during the daytime, but by night they were the haunt of criminals. This made them an interesting subject for writers and painters. Van Gogh clearly made this drawing on a hot summer's day. Some of the little figures carry a parasol, while the wall on the right provides shade for a midday nap.

Banks and Bridges

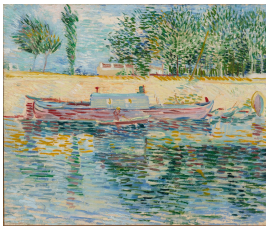
The bridges spanning the Seine were a favourite subject for the five painters.

Heavy iron structures with masonry piers and wooden pedestrian bridges carried traffic to the other side.

In some places there were small islands in the river, which meant that several bridges were needed to ensure good access. The green riverbanks too provided plenty of inspiration for experiments with composition and colour.

Van Gogh chose different viewing angles: a high horizon in one case, a sharp diagonal in the arrangement of planes in another. Paul Signac concentrated on colour effects.

He depicted the same riverbank twice – on a sunny day with bright colours and on an overcast day with a muted palette. Signac worked with Seurat to develop the new stippling technique (Pointillism) that Seurat had pioneered.



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Bank of the Seine with Boats, 1887

oil on canvas

Private collection

Van Gogh painted this riverbank from a low angle: the roofs of the houses only just stick out above it.

A large red boat is moored against the quayside.

The little figure in the rowing boat in front of it barely stands out. Van Gogh was fascinated by the reflection in the water.

He used elongated touches in bright colours to depict the effects of the light.

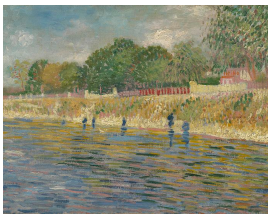


Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

The Bridge at Courbevoie, 1887

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

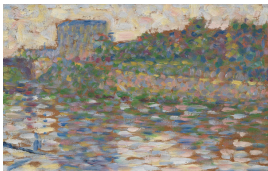


Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Bank of the Seine, 1887

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

The Seine at Courbevoie, 1883-1884

oil on panel

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (purchased with support from the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the Rembrandt Association, with additional support from the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds)

Seurat liked to make small studies on wooden panels.

You will see a lot of them in this exhibition.

He used the panels to collect ideas for larger compositions.

In this little painting of a river, he experimented with the stippling technique. The water and the bank are built up from loose brushstrokes in different colours.

You can just about spot someone rowing in the bottom left.



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Man Painting a Boat, c. 1883

oil on panel

The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)

Please have a look at the paintings on the wall behind you, from right to left.

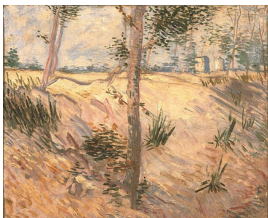


Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Banks of the Seine with the Pont de Clichy, 1887

oil on canvas

Private collection



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Bank with Trees, 1887

oil on canvas

P. & N. de Boer Foundation, Amsterdam

Van Gogh chose different viewpoints for his paintings in Asnières. In this bold close-up, he left out the Seine and focussed on the riverbank. You can see two distinctive buildings upper right in the distance.

The same ones are also visible in the small painting alongside. They emerge there just above the grassy waterfront. Compositions like this in close-up or with a sharp diagonal made for dynamic paintings.



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Quai de Clichy, (Opus no. 157), 1887

oil on canvas

The Baltimore Museum of Art, gift of Frederick H. Gottlieb

Signac got to know Seurat, four years his senior, when they organized an exhibition together in 1884.

They were both interested in scientific theories of colour.

Although Seurat was the founder of Pointillism, Signac became an especially important advocate of this distinctive painting technique. He applied it in two paintings of the quayside at Clichy (see also the adjacent painting).

In each one, he depicted a different part of the quay and in different weather conditions.



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Quai de Clichy, Grey Weather, 1887

oil on canvas

Private collection

Please follow the wall until the text “On the Water”, the start of the next chapter. Then cross to the opposite wall, and view from left to right.

On the water

The Seine is the main artery of Paris.

The river meanders right through the city, past its suburbs and on to the sea. The multicoloured surface of the water was a challenge to paint.

The artists experimented intensively with the effects created by light reflections. Charles Angrand filled two canvases this way, with water and sky merging almost seamlessly.

This artist is the least known of the five.

Angrand was a close friend of Seurat, which no doubt explains why he began to paint using the Pointillist technique.

All sorts of things happened on the water. Asnières was known as the 'holy city of boating'. People rowed, sailed and fished, while some worked in floating laundries.

There were boathouses and outdoor swimming pools along the riverside. Anyone who preferred not to walk too far could cross the Seine by ferry. These were all appealing subjects that the painters liked to capture on their canvases.



Charles Angrand (1854 - 1926)

The Seine at Saint-Ouen, Morning, 1886

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (purchased with support from the VriendenLoterij)

Angrand devoted three-quarters of the canvas to the clear blue waters of the Seine at Saint-Ouen, near Asnières. He headed out to the Paris suburbs to paint between 1885 and 1889. Van Gogh saw one of Angrand's works hanging in a shop window in the city. He suggested that they exchange paintings, but Angrand turned the offer down.



Charles Angrand (1854 - 1926)

The Seine at Dawn, 1889

oil on canvas

Association des Amis du Petit Palais, Geneva

A few years after *The Seine at Saint-Ouen* (left), Angrand painted another river view in which the water takes up most of the canvas. This time he used the stippling technique. Angrand had become a good friend of Seurat by then and had mastered the art of Pointillism. It enabled him to capture delicate effects of light on the water even more effectively. The artist spent months working on this painting, in which he depicted 'the typical haze of sunrise' over the river.



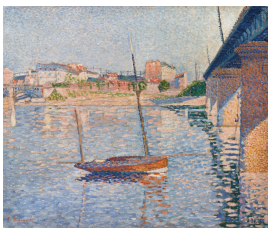
Émile Bernard (1868 - 1941)

Fisherman and Boat, 1885 - 1886

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Émile Bernard had just turned 18 when he painted this man fishing. He and his family had moved from Paris to Asnières two years earlier. The new location was so inspiring to Bernard that he quickly decided he wanted to become a painter. In this work, he went a step further than Angrand (alongside). The viewing angle is directed downwards so we see only water, no horizon. A dynamic choice.



Paul Signac (1863 - 1935)

Clipper (Opus no. 155), 1887

oil on canvas

Hasso Plattner Collection



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

The “Ponton de la Félicité” at Asnières (Opus no. 143), 1886

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (purchased with support from the VriendenLoterij, the Rembrandt Association, with additional support from its Themafonds Impressionisme/Claude Monet Fonds, Het Liesbeth van Dorp Fonds and Themafonds 19de-eeuwse Schilderkunst, the Mondriaan Fund, and the members of The Yellow House)

Signac got to know Van Gogh at a paint shop that they both liked to visit. Although they did not go out painting together, they did sometimes meet on the Seine.

Signac later recalled: ‘We used to paint on the bank of the river; we ate at the *guinguette* [a little restaurant] and walked back to Paris. Van Gogh wore a blue zinc worker’s smock and had painted dots of colour on the sleeves.’



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Sailing Boat on the Seine at Asnières, 1887

pencil and chalk on paper

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

This large drawing is probably a study for a painting that Van Gogh never made or which has been lost.

We can tell this from the precise colour notes that he wrote in pencil on the paper. The quayside below the trees is marked ‘jaune’ (yellow), the water ‘vert bleu ’ (green-blue), the shadow of the boat ‘violet’ and the mast ‘orange’. In the background, we see the same gasometers as in Signac’s painting ‘Clipper’ (left).

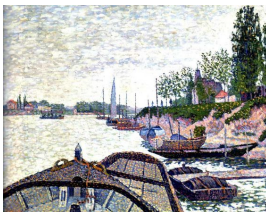


Paul Signac (1863 - 1935)

Regatta on the Seine, c. 1885 - 1886

conté crayon on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Paul Signac (1863 - 1935)

Bow of the Tub (Opus no. 176), 1888

oil on canvas

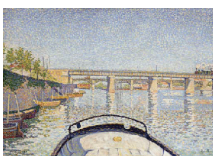
private collection

Signac experimented with different perspectives and painted not only from the riverside but also from a boat.

In the lower part of this painting we see the vessel's bow.

The artist placed dots of unmixed colours here next to each other. He opted for freer brushwork in the sky, where the colours are more mixed. Signac also did a painting of the bridges at Asnières from the boat (see illustration).

He turned around for this, so that the stern is now visible.



Not on view:

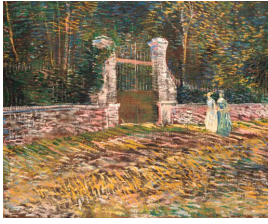
Paul Signac, Stern of the Tub (Opus no. 175), 1888.

Private collection

Van Gogh's Triptychs

Van Gogh's most ambitious project during this period comprised three triptychs: a total of nine paintings. He used style, colour and subject matter to depict the diverse character of the area. His Grande Jatte triptych is sketchy, the one devoted to Clichy is all fresh greens, while the Asnières triptych, with its bridges, boats and restaurants, is full of life. Van Gogh painted each triptych on a long piece of canvas measuring over 1.5 metres. He divided it up into three areas using red paint. In some cases, the red lines are still visible. When he was done, he cut the strip up into individual paintings. The canvases are now spread all over the world. Seven of them have been reunited here.

La Grande Jatte triptych



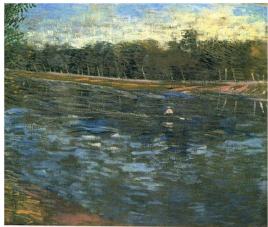
Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Gate on the Île de la Grande Jatte, 1887

oil on canvas

Bequest of Ignace Hellenberg, Paris, to the State of Israel, in memory of his parents Sigmund and Betty Hellenberg.

On permanent loan to The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, from the Administrator General of the State of Israel



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Seine with a Rowboat, 1887

oil on canvas

Private collection

The Grande Jatte triptych looks a little dark today, probably because the ground layer of the canvas has discoloured.

It must once have been an open and fresh ensemble.

Van Gogh used long, loose strokes to apply bright colours to the canvas. Together, the three paintings depict the island of La Grande Jatte. The similar use of colour and brushwork lend this triptych a powerful stylistic unity.



Not on view:

Vincent van Gogh, Lane on the Île de la Grande Jatte, 1887.

Private collection

Clichy triptych



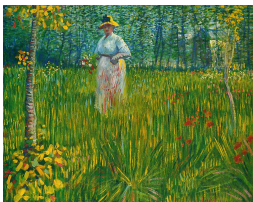
Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Fishing in Spring, the Pont de Clichy (Asnières), 1887

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Charles Deering

McCormick, Brooks McCormick, and the Estate of Roger McCormick



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

A Woman Walking in a Garden, 1887

oil on canvas

private collection

The three works that make up the Clichy triptych chiefly contain a great deal of lush greenery.

Although Van Gogh was working near to an industrial environment here, he preferred to paint the banks and small islands around the Clichy bridge. The central work shows a woman in the grass. She is worked out with considerable attention to detail: Van Gogh generally stuck to small figures in landscapes. The red edges he used to split his canvas into three are still readily visible.



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

River Bank in Springtime, 1887

oil on canvas

Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene McDermott
in memory of Arthur Berger

Asnières triptych



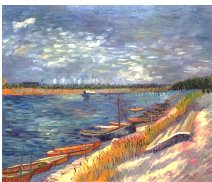
Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Bridges Across the Seine at Asnières, 1887

oil on canvas

Emil Bührle Collection, on long-term loan at Kunsthaus
Zürich

The Asnières triptych brought Van Gogh closer than ever to Impressionism. Like the Impressionists, he experimented with different points of view and chose lively, appealing subjects. In this series, he combined a tranquil image of boats moored on the river with a complex composition of bridges and a riverside restaurant, which he painted from a low angle. The steam from the passing train adds a sense of movement. Van Gogh painted all three works in bright colours and with a free touch.



Not on view:

Vincent van Gogh, View of the Seine with Rowboats, 1887.

Private collection



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Restaurant de la Sirène, Asnières, 1887

oil on canvas

The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, bequeathed
by Dr Erich Alport, 1972



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

The Laundry Boat on the Seine at Asnières, 1887

oil on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

Van Gogh made this colourful study of a laundry boat run by a couple called Lebreton. Floating laundries like these were found all along the riverside, often close to a bridge. They used large amounts of bleach, making them significant polluters of the Seine. Van Gogh depicted the 40-metre long boat on a small scale. Two years previously, Signac had painted precisely the same laundry boat (left) on a large canvas.



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Quai de Saint-Ouen, 1885

oil on canvas

private collection

Please go through the glass doors and take the elevator or the stairs to the next floor.

Exploring the Towns

The suburbs around Paris developed enormously in the second half of the 19th century.

The French capital transformed into a modern metropolis.

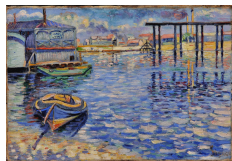
Old houses in narrow streets gave way to apartments on wide boulevards. This obliged people from the lower social classes in particular to move out to the more affordable suburbs. Paul Signac and his family moved to Asnières in 1880 when he was 16, followed by Émile Bernard a few years later. Both took their first significant steps as artists there. Signac, for instance, painted the railway junction at nearby Bois-Colombes three times in different seasons.

Bernard captured the gardens of Asnières in bloom using vivid colours. The café-restaurants in Asnières, including Restaurant de la Sirène and Restaurant Rispal, were painted by Van Gogh.



Emile Bernard & Vincent van Gogh in Courbevoie,
c. 1886-1887. Private collection

Please take a look at the old postcards hanging on this wall.



Paul Signac, Asnières Study (Laundry Boat), 1882, Uehara Museum of Art, Shimoda



Paul Signac, Quai de Saint-Ouen,
1885, private collection



Asnières—Port d'Asnières, c. 1900



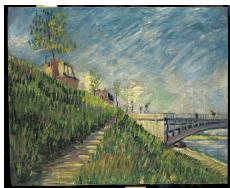
**Asnières—Quai d'Asnières, Seen from Pont de Clichy, c. 1900
(postmarked 1904)**



Paul Signac, Quai de Clichy, Gray Weather, 1887, private collection



Clichy—Grues de l'usine à Gaz, c. 1900



Vincent van Gogh, Banks of the Seine with the Pont de Clichy, 1887, private collection



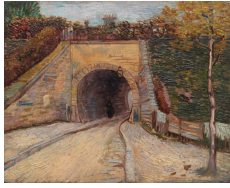
Vincent van Gogh, The Restaurant de la Sirène at Asnières, 1887, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Asnières—Pont de Clichy, c. 1905



Asnières—Quai d'Asnières, c. 1905



Vincent van Gogh, Roadway with Underpass (Le viaduc), Asnières, 1887, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Thannhauser Collection



Asnières—Quai d'Asnières, c. 1905



Emile Bernard, Quai de Clichy on the Seine, 1887 Musée d'Orsay, Paris, on loan to the Musée départemental du Prieuré, Saint-Germain-en-Laye



Vincent van Gogh, River Bank in Springtime, 1887, Dallas Museum of Art



Clichy - Port de l'usine à gaz, c. 1900



Asnières—Pont de Clichy, c. 1905

*Please continue with the art on the long straight wall.
View from left to right.*



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Restaurant Rispal at Asnières, 1887

oil on canvas

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, gift of Henry W. and Marion H. Bloch

This is the largest painting that Van Gogh made during his excursions to the suburbs to the northwest of Paris. Restaurant Rispal was located on the riverside in Asnières. The artist gave the building a prominent position, surrounded by greenery and trees in blossom. He painted a few of the housefronts red to create a complementary colour contrast. The figures on the street give the work an animated character.



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

The Restaurant de la Sirène at Asnières, 1887

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, bequest of Joseph Reinach, 1921



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Restaurant de la Sirène at Asnières, 1887

pencil and chalk on paper

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Van Gogh made this sketch-like drawing of Restaurant de la Sirène in Asnières to get to grips with the subject.

Working in smoothly applied stripes of chalk, he gave details like the grass and trees a dark green colour.

The drawing was done with his back to the river Seine.

Van Gogh liked the subject and painted the restaurant twice.



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

Exterior of a Restaurant in Asnières, 1887

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

The Festival at Asnières, 1884

oil on canvas

Private collection

The suburbs along the Seine offered plenty of subjects to paint. Interestingly, the five artists chose specific motifs. They were not keen on typically middle-class activities such as the balls and parties that the Impressionists often depicted. So it was very unusual for Signac to paint these colourful marquees. There is barely any trace of the partygoers themselves. We find a similarly deserted atmosphere in the paintings by Bernard and Signac hanging here on the right.



Émile Bernard (1868 – 1941)

Garden in Bloom at Asnières, 1889

oil on canvas

Collection of Andrew S. Teufel

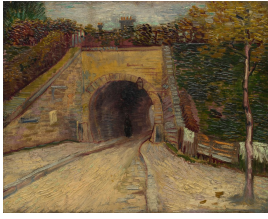


Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Rue de la Station, Asnières, 1884

oil on canvas

Private collection



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

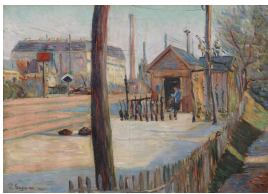
Roadway with Underpass (Le viaduc), Asnières, 1887

oil on cardboard

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Thannhauser Collection, gift of Justin K. Thannhauser, 1978

Van Gogh met Bernard, who was 13 years his junior, in Paris. They swiftly formed a close friendship that would last the rest of their lives. The two artists often painted together in the autumn of 1887, working in the studio in the garden of Bernard's parents in Asnières. The autumnal tones of this atmospheric painting of a railway viaduct suggest that Van Gogh produced it during one of those visits.

Turn around and look at the three paintings on the connected walls. From left to right



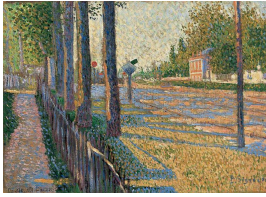
Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Railway Junction near Bois-Colombes, 1885-1886

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Signac painted the railway at Bois-Colombes, a municipality adjacent to Asnières, three times. Trains were a modern phenomenon in the 19th century and the railway junction offered Signac a challenging contemporary subject. He also opted for a dynamic composition with a tree that bisects the picture plane. The artist set up his easel behind a fence, from where he had a view of the stationmaster's house and a pointsman.



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

The Junction at Bois-Colombes (Opus no. 130), 1886

oil on canvas

Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds Museums and Galleries



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Snow, Bois-Colombes, 1886

oil on canvas

Private collection

Signac painted this railway junction in the snow near Bois-Colombes. He employed loose brushstrokes to express the fresh snow and bright winter light.

The artist painted the junction again in the summer from virtually the same spot (right). That brightly coloured painting was the first work in which he experimented with Pointillism. Take a moment to compare the brushstrokes and shadows in the two paintings.

Please go to the wall with the two elongated works.





Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

**Sketch of the Five Windows, Design for the
Decoration of the Reception Room of the Town Hall
of Asnières, 1900**

oil on canvas

Private collection



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

**Sketch of the Central Panel, Design for the
Decoration of the Reception Room of the Town Hall
of Asnières, 1900**

oil on canvas

Private collection

Signac had not painted in Asnières for over ten years when he decided to take part in a competition.

His entry consisted of sketches for murals in the reception room of the town hall. It gave him the opportunity to revisit a place of which he cherished many fond memories.

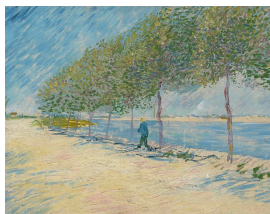
His sketches show Asnières on the left and Clichy on the right, with the Seine at their centre. All the typical features of the area are present: smoking factory chimneys, trains steaming by, bridges, green riverbanks, shimmering water, rowing and sailing boats, cranes and gasometers.

Please follow the walls to the next chapter of this exhibition.

Leisure

Leisure became increasingly common in the 19th century. People were now free on Sundays to get away from the dirty, crowded city. The construction of a railway line made Asnières readily accessible from 1837, allowing it to cater to day-trippers. You could walk along the riverside or picnic in the greenery. The island of La Grande Jatte was a popular destination. Parisians flocked there on Sundays.

Seurat captured the island and its visitors in an ambitious painting measuring 2 x 3 metres. Well-to-do bourgeois ladies clutch their parasols as sailing and rowing boats bob on the water in the background. The work would become the most famous example of Pointillism. Seurat based his approach on scientific colour theories. He placed dots of unmixed, contrasting colours next to one another on the canvas. Viewed from a distance, these blend optically to form a coherent whole. Seurat painted several preparatory studies on the island on small wooden panels before embarking on his large painting. They show him experimenting with light, colour and composition.



Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890)

By the Seine, 1887

oil on canvas

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Van Gogh sketched this man strolling along the Seine with a lot of verve. He set down the row of lime trees in small strokes of green, pink and yellow.

The spontaneous painting was completed in situ.

Parts of the canvas were left unpainted, including the edge of the riverbank and along the horizon.

He might have intended to finish it off at home.

But in the end he left it as it was.



Émile Bernard (1868 – 1941)

Figures on the Riverbank, 1888

reed pen and brush and ink and watercolour on paper
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Bernard was not a particular champion of Pointillism. All the same, this drawing shows his interest in Seurat's painting *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*. Here too, Bernard depicted day-trippers on the island. The simple, static forms he used to draw the figures also recall the ones in Seurat's painting. Bernard sent these drawings to Van Gogh in 1888. Vincent was in Arles in the south of France at the time, and this way he could keep up with his friend's work.



Émile Bernard (1868 – 1941)

Idyll at Asnières (Idylle à Asnières), 1888

brush and ink and watercolour on paper
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Émile Bernard (1868 – 1941)

Boats on the Seine at Asnières, c. 1886

pen and ink on paper
Kunsthalle Bremen—Der Kunstverein in Bremen



Émile Bernard (1868 - 1941)

The Regatta, c. 1886

pencil, pen, and brush and ink on paper

Private collection

This location might strike you as familiar.

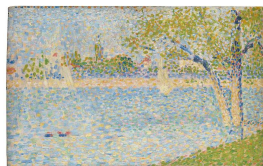
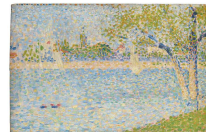
It is the same quay as the one in the photograph of Bernard and Van Gogh shown at the beginning of this floor. Bernard made several sketches there (adjacent). He was probably planning a large painting of the spot.

The drawing shown here is worked out in fine scribbles and patches of black and shows people in their Sunday clothes.

The river is full of rowing and sailing boats.



Cross the room diagonally and follow the walls from right to left



Georges Seurat (1859 - 1891)

The Seine Seen from La Grande Jatte, 1888

oil on panel

The National Gallery, London, presented by Heinz Berggruen, 1995

Seurat painted this small panel on the island of La Grande Jatte in July 1888. It was a preparatory study for the painting hanging here on the left. He worked out the composition in brightly coloured dots. Seurat spent a warm summer month working alongside Angrand and gave him this little painting as a token of their friendship.



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

The Seine at La Grande Jatte, 1888

oil on canvas

Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels



Charles Angrand (1854 – 1926)

The Seine at Courbevoie: La Grande Jatte, 1888

oil on canvas

Private collection

Angrand and Seurat spent July 1888 on the island of La Grande Jatte, where they worked side by side on paintings with the same subject and almost identical compositions. The two artists made the crossing to the island almost every day, on foot and via a small ferry. Angrand used larger dots than Seurat. Compare how the two painters conveyed the light reflecting on the water.



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

The Seine at Courbevoie, 1885

oil on canvas

Private collection

Seurat painted this canvas in his favourite spot, the island of La Grande Jatte. It was not a preliminary study but a finished painting, which he also exhibited. He applied the paint to the canvas in uniform streaks. The figure of the fashionable woman and the giant tree lend the canvas a monumental character.



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

oil sketch for “La Grande Jatte”, 1884

oil on panel

The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Mary and Leigh Block

This is one of the many preliminary studies that Seurat made for his painting A Sunday on La Grande Jatte – 1884. He did not yet use the stippling technique in this instance, but a looser, coarser touch instead. Seurat experimented with the placement of different figures in the composition. He also paid close attention to the shadows cast by the trees on the grass. Each of these studies shows how step by step Seurat edged closer to his final design.



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Landscape and Figures (The Pink Skirt), 1884

oil on panel

Private collection

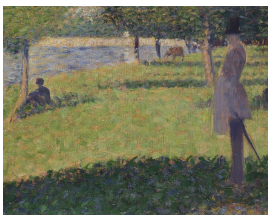


Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Seated Women (Study for La Grande-Jatte), 1884-1885

oil on panel

Private collection



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Study for "La Grande Jatte", 1884 – 1885

oil on panel

The National Gallery, London, presented by Heinz Berggruen, 1995



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Trees (Study for La Grande Jatte), 1884

black conté crayon on white laid paper, laid down on cream board

The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Regenstein Collection

Seurat produced over forty studies in preparation for his masterpiece, not only paintings but drawings too. He used these three drawings to explore how to represent trees in the composition. Working in black chalk, he meticulously examined the fall of light on the trunks, the density of the leaves and the shadows on the grass.



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Strolling Man next to a Tree on a Bank (Study for La Grande Jatte), 1884-1885

black chalk on paper

Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Tree Trunks (Study for La Grande Jatte), 1884

black conté crayon on ivory laid paper

The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Regenstein Collection

Go to the next gallery room and start with the text Industry. Follow the wall from left to right.

Industry

The carefree atmosphere of Asnières contrasted sharply with Clichy on the opposite bank of the Seine.

This area was heavily industrialized but otherwise sparsely populated. The landscape was dominated by seven gigantic gasometers. Signac made drawings of them and a powerful, stippled painting.

After a hard day's labour, workers rested on the riverbank. They swam and washed in the water.

Seurat painted them with the railway bridge and factory chimneys prominently in the background.

Large cranes were spread along the waterfront to unload the coal transported along the Seine. Bernard painted these dark structures several times. He opted for an entirely different painting technique to the others, working with large planes of flat colour and solid outlines. The five progressive artists were searching for a new way of painting, just as the Impressionists had. Working by the Seine acted as a catalyst. Their innovations would continue to inspire artists for generations to come.



Vincent van Gogh (1853 - 1890)

Factories at Clichy, 1887

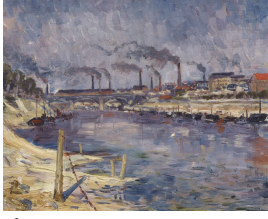
oil on canvas

Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri

funds given by Mrs. Mark C. Steinberg by exchange

Van Gogh painted this panorama of factories with smoking chimneys against a blue sky. It was unusual for the artist, who generally preferred more rural subjects.

The lower half of the canvas consists of empty grassland, which he built up with elongated brush strokes in all sorts of colours. If you look closely, you can see two figures walking in front of the factories.



Émile Bernard (1868 – 1941)

View of Saint-Ouen, 1885

oil on canvas

Private collection

This painting by Bernard is a modern river landscape. He focused his gaze on the industrial smokestacks of Saint-Ouen, downstream from Asnières. Like the Impressionists, his brushwork is dynamic and versatile. He alternated between short and long strokes and allowed colours to flow together or, on the contrary, to contrast strongly with one another. He paid a great deal of attention to the reflection of the buildings in the water. Those of the chimneys were scratched into the wet paint with the back of his paintbrush.



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Asnières Study (The Ferryman's Boat), 1882

oil on panel

Private collection



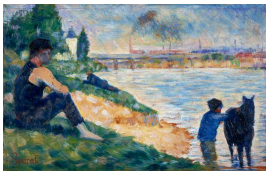
Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Clothes on the Grass, 1883

oil on panel

Tate, London, presented by Alex Reid and Lefevre 1926

In 1883, Seurat began to prepare his first large painting, *Bathers at Asnières*. This is one of his 14 painted preparatory studies. Working from the north bank of the Seine, Seurat looked towards the bridges of Asnières and the factories of Clichy on the other side. A pile of clothes has been left on the bank by a swimmer, probably a factory worker resting by the river after a long day.



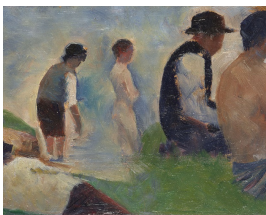
Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Study for “Une Baignade”, c. 1883

oil on panel

National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

presented by Sir Alexander Maitland in memory of his wife Rosalind 1960



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Study for “Bathers at Asnières”, 1883 - 1884

oil on panel

The National Gallery, London, presented by Heinz Berggruen, 1995



Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891)

Final Study for “Bathers at Asnières”, 1883

oil on panel

The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of the Adele R. Levy Fund, Inc.

This study is the one that most closely resembles the large painting Seurat eventually made of his bathers.

He chose a subject typical of the suburbs: workers resting on the river banks. Judging by the bowler hats, these were fairly well-off employees. The railway bridge and the smoking factory chimneys feature prominently in the background. Seurat’s painting style here, with its short brushstrokes in bright colours, formed the basis for the stippling we find in his later paintings.



Not on view:

Georges Seurat, Bathers at Asnières, 1884

The National Gallery, London



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Gasometers at Clichy, 1886

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Felton Bequest, 1948

Signac positioned himself in the middle of Clichy’s seven big gasometers to paint this sun-drenched canvas.

He wanted to create a distinctively contemporary painting with a new brushstroke and chose a modern subject to achieve it. These immense steel structures were designed in the mid-1870s in Gustave Eiffel’s office.



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)
Passage du Puits-Bertin (Clichy), 1887
 conté crayon on paper
 Private collection



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)
Gasometers, Clichy, 1885
 conté crayon on paper
 Private collection



Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)
Passage du Puits-Bertin (Clichy), 1887
 black ink on paper
 Musée du Louvre, Paris, fonds du musée d'Orsay

Signac did not only work with dots in his paintings: here he applied the technique to a drawing of the Clichy gasworks. He created light and shade effects by placing his dots closer or further apart. The aim was to demonstrate that the stippled style was suitable for reproduction and so he published this drawing in a magazine.

Cross to the other side of the gallery room and continue with this painting. From right to left.





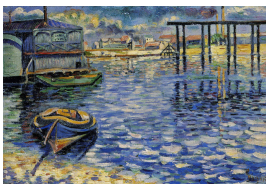
Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Coal Crane, Clichy, 1884

oil on canvas

Lent by Glasgow Life (Glasgow Museums) on behalf of
Glasgow City Council, Presented by
the Trustees of the Hamilton Bequest, 1946

To paint this work, Signac crossed the Seine from his home in Asnières to Clichy. Large cranes along the quayside unloaded barges carrying coal. The fuel was transported along the Seine to supply the gasworks. Signac painted the reflections of the boats and the jetty in the water using a myriad of colourful short brushstrokes. The sky is rendered with elongated touches.

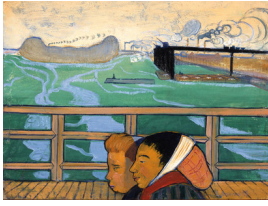


Paul Signac (1863 – 1935)

Asnières Study (Laundry Boat), 1882

oil on canvas

Uehara Museum of Art, Shimoda



Émile Bernard (1868 – 1941)

Two Women on the Asnières Footbridge, 1887

oil on canvas

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Brest métropole

Bernard opted for a different style of painting to Seurat. In this work, he showed how far he could go in simplifying his subject to flat planes of colour and firm outlines. He painted these two working-class women close up and from the side. Their bodies fall outside the frame of the picture, creating a modern composition. The women are walking across the wooden pedestrian bridge at Asnières. In the distance, we see the smoke from the factory chimneys in Clichy.



Émile Bernard (1868 – 1941)

Quai de Clichy on the Seine, 1887

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, on loan to the Musée départemental du Prieuré, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, bequest of Pierre Farcy, 1989

This is probably the first painting Bernard made using a radically different technique. He constructed his canvas from monochrome planes of colour. The two working-class women in the foreground have been simplified into flat shapes with strongly accentuated outlines. Bernard reduces the unloading dock of the gasworks to a pattern of lines. By choosing a subject that Signac also painted frequently, he was able to emphasize the diametric opposition of his new style to that of Pointillism.

You have reached the end of this exhibition.