

For immediate release: January 9, 2012

International Exhibition at the Indianapolis Museum of Art Explores Impact of Photography on Post-Impressionist Painters

More than 200 photographs, many on view for the first time, reveal how artists experimented with the handheld Kodak camera at the turn of the century

INDIANAPOLIS, IN, January 9, 2012 — An exhibition exploring the influence of the handheld Kodak camera on artists of the Post-Impressionist era will open at the Indianapolis Museum of Art on June 8, 2012. *Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard* examines how the photographs of seven European artists relate to the paintings and prints for which they are best known. These artists did not consider photographs their official work and never exhibited them during their lifetimes. Featuring more than 200 photographs and 60 paintings, drawings and prints, the exhibition includes work by the painters Pierre Bonnard, George Breitner, Maurice Denis, Henri Evenepoel, Félix Vallotton, and Edouard Vuillard as well as French printmaker Henri Rivière. *Snapshot* will be on view in the Allen Whitehill Clowes Gallery June 8, 2012, through September 2, 2012.

The invention in 1888 of the first handheld, easy-to-use camera expanded the practice beyond the professional photographer to the amateur, who could now abandon the tripods and long exposure times that characterized earlier photography. Painters were not immune to the allure of the Kodak, which made the “*l’instantané photographique*”, or spontaneous snapshot, possible. The artists who eagerly took up this new device turned their cameras to a wide variety of subjects, from informal images of family, friends and vacations to views of modern urban life to more posed portraits and nude figural studies.

“These rarely seen photographs can be analyzed for their intriguing links to the artists’ work in other media or simply savored for their revealing glimpses of turn-of-the-century European life,” said Ellen W. Lee, The Wood-Pulliam Senior Curator at the IMA.

Working with the first handheld cameras, photographers in the late 19th-century had literally a different outlook from today’s picture makers. Viewfinders for the early cameras were on top of the apparatus, forcing the photographer to hold the camera at waist-level perspective. Several models of the early cameras are featured in the exhibition.

The artists experimented freely with the camera, achieving effects that they often transferred to paintings and prints. On some occasions they used their snapshots as preparatory studies, but usually the relationship between their photography and painting is more subtle, drawing upon the novel perspectives and radical foreshortening, the contrasts of light and shadow, dramatic cropping, and powerful silhouettes captured in their photographs.

Examples found in the exhibition include:

- Bonnard snapped two series of nude photographs of his mistress, which he used as inspiration for two book illustration projects.
- Breitner’s nearly 3,000 negatives and prints of the streets of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Paris, and London convey both the bustle and isolation of modern life.
- Evenepoel photographed his family life and studio, often choosing unusual points of view. He created powerful silhouettes of his family crossing Paris’s Place de la Concorde.

- Granted exclusive access to the Eiffel Tower during its construction in 1889, Rivière produced photographs with a striking sense of modernity.
- Vuillard's vast archive of surviving photos reveal only a few images that served as studies for specific paintings but many snapshots that capture the spatial complexity and sense of intimacy that characterize his paintings.

About the Artists

Pierre Bonnard (1876–1947), Maurice Denis (1870–1943), Félix Vallotton (1865–1925), and Edouard Vuillard (1868–1940) were prominent members of the Nabis, a progressive Parisian group who took their name from the Hebrew word for prophet and championed paintings with a strong surface pattern and a distinct sense of mood. Henri Rivière (1864–1951), printmaker and designer for the popular Shadow Theater in Paris, was a leader of the era's printmaking revival, infusing the bold style of Japanese woodcuts into his images of contemporary France.

The exhibition introduces George Hendrik Breitner (1857–1923) and Henri Evenepoel (1872–1899) to U.S. audiences. Born in Rotterdam, Breitner painted primarily in Amsterdam, depicting the city and the lives of the working class. Evenepoel was born in Nice to Belgian parents but lived in Paris during the 1890s until his untimely death at age 27. A student of Gustave Moreau and close friend of Henri Matisse, Evenepoel left behind 875 photographs and some 1,000 drawings and paintings of his studio and family life.

Exhibition Organization and Venues

Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard is co-organized by the Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., and the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. The exhibition stems from research conducted by curator Elizabeth W. Easton who discovered a rich collection of photographs through the Vuillard family archive in the 1980s. She then collaborated with Indianapolis Museum of Art Senior Curator Ellen Lee, Phillips Chief Curator Eliza Rathbone, Van Gogh Museum Head of Exhibitions Edwin Becker, and the founding curator of the photography department at the Musée d'Orsay, Françoise Heilbrun. The exhibition was realized with curatorial collaboration and exceptional loans from the Musée d'Orsay.

Before coming to the IMA, *Snapshot* was on view at the Van Gogh Museum October 14, 2011, to January 8, 2012, and will be seen at The Phillips Collection February 4 to May 6, 2012.

Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated 248-page catalogue *Snapshot: Painters and Photography, Bonnard to Vuillard*, published by Yale University Press in association with the Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Phillips Collection and the Van Gogh Museum. Essays about the development of the camera and amateur photography are complemented by articles on each artist. Edited by curator Elizabeth Easton with contributions from IMA Senior Curator Ellen W. Lee and Phillips Chief Curator Eliza Rathbone, the catalogue also includes essays by leading scholars from the George Eastman House, Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, Princeton University, Netwerk (a contemporary art center in Belgium), Fondation Félix Vallotton, and the Rijksmuseum. Described as "revelatory" by the art critic of the *Financial Times* (November 29, 2011), the book was declared "an essential contribution to photography's history."

About the Indianapolis Museum of Art

Encompassing 152 acres of gardens and grounds, the Indianapolis Museum of Art is among the 10 oldest and 10 largest encyclopedic art museums in the United States and features significant collections of African, American, Asian, European and contemporary art, as well as a newly established collection of design arts. The IMA offers visitors an expansive view of arts and culture through its collection of more than 54,000 works of art that span 5,000 years of history from

across the world's continents. The collections include paintings, sculpture, furniture and design objects, prints, drawings and photographs, as well as textiles and costumes.

Additionally, art, design, and nature are featured at 100 Acres: The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park and Oldfields–Lilly House & Gardens, an historic Country Place Era estate and National Historic Landmark on the IMA grounds. Beyond the Indianapolis campus, in May 2011 the IMA opened to the public the recently acquired landmark Miller House and Garden in Columbus, Indiana. One of the country's most highly regarded examples of mid-century Modernist residences, the Miller House was designed by Eero Saarinen, with interiors by Alexander Girard, and landscape design by Dan Kiley.

Recognizing the IMA's positive impact on its community, the Museum was named a recipient of the 2009 National Medal for Museum and Library Services – the nation's highest honor for museums and libraries. The IMA's commitment to free general admission, programming for schools and teachers, environmental leadership and online initiatives were among cited community contributions in the Museum's selection for the award.

Located at 4000 Michigan Road, the IMA and Lilly House are open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. The IMA is closed Mondays and Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's days. For more information, call 317-923-1331 or visit www.imamuseum.org.

###

Media Contacts:

Katie Zarich / Candace Gwaltney
IMA
317-920-2650 / 317-923-1331 x 239
kzarich / cgwaltney@imamuseum.org

Ilana B. Simon / Molly Kurzius
Resnicow Schroeder Associates
720-746-9552 / 212-671-5163
isimon / mkurzius@resnicowschroeder.com