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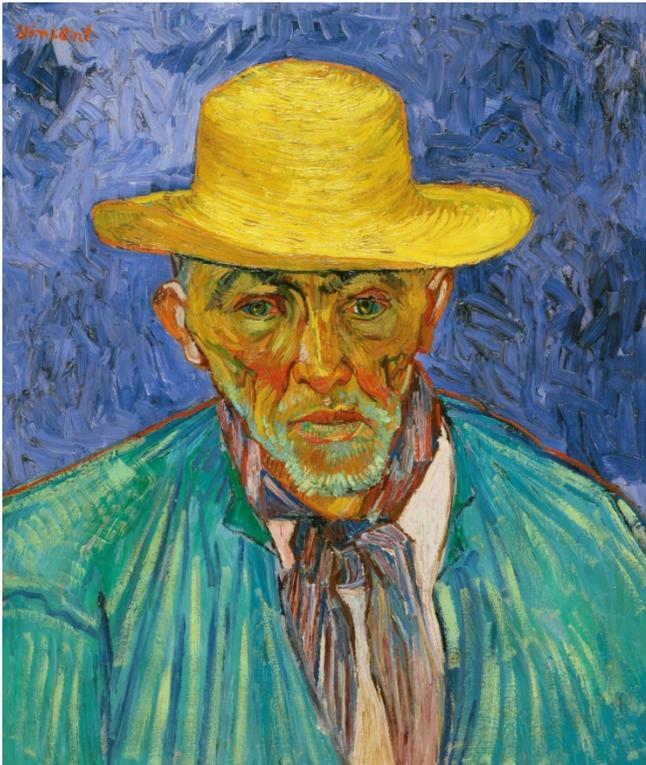
from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

1 EAST 70TH STREET • NEW YORK • NEW YORK 10021 • TELEPHONE (212) 288-0700 • FAX (212) 628-4417

MEDIA ALERT

VAN GOGH'S *PORTRAIT OF PEASANT (PATIENCE ESCALIER)* ON PUBLIC VIEW IN NYC FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FORTY YEARS



Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*, Arles, August 1888, oil on canvas, 25 3/8 x 21 1/2 inches, Norton Simon Art Foundation

This fall The Frick Collection will present Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*. The painting has not left its home institution, the Norton Simon Museum, in Pasadena, CA, in nearly forty years, making this a particularly rare and exciting viewing opportunity for East Coast audiences. This modern masterpiece will be shown in the Frick's Oval Room from October 30, 2012, through January 20, 2013, and will be accompanied by lectures and gallery talks. The special loan is part of an ongoing exchange program with the Norton Simon Museum that began in 2009 when a group of five works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries travelled to New York. Other loans have followed: the Frick's *Comtesse d'Haussonville* by Ingres was shown at the Norton Simon in the fall of

2009, and Memling's *Portrait of a Man* is currently on view there, remaining through the end of April.

The van Gogh presentation in New York is being coordinated by Frick Senior Curator Susan Galassi, who comments, “Our exchange program with the Norton Simon Museum has offered both institutions opportunities to see their works in different contexts. For the most part, we have featured artists not represented in our own holdings, as is the case with the selection of this remarkable van Gogh portrait. In this instance, the timing feels particularly fortunate, as we’ve spent the last year focusing on artists—Renoir and Picasso—active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and somewhat contemporary to museum founder Henry Clay Frick. These efforts have led us to consider, among other things, the influences upon these later artists by forebears such as Rembrandt, and placing a van Gogh among our holdings in the coming fall is sure to continue this exploration fruitfully.” Support for the exhibition is generously provided by Agnes Gund.

ARLES: A PERIOD OF INNOVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

Van Gogh’s *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)* was painted in Arles in the heart of Provence during the artist’s stay in the area in 1888–90, a period of innovation and intense productivity. Van Gogh (1853–1890) first alluded to his potential sitter in a letter to his brother Theo noting the resemblance of the old peasant to their father. Shortly thereafter he introduced his subject by name and enclosed a drawing made after the portrait: “You will shortly make the acquaintance of Mr. Patience Escalier—a sort of man with a hoe, an old Camargue oxherd, who’s now a gardener at a farmstead in the Crau.” His reference to a “man with a hoe” refers to the well-known painting of the same name by Jean-François Millet, an artist van Gogh greatly admired and with whom he shared a love of “rough” subjects, which he referred to as paintings *en sabots* (in clogs).

Van Gogh sympathized deeply with peasants and their subsistence-level lives. While living in Nuenen, Holland, van Gogh made some fifty bust-length portraits of farm laborers (“Heads of the People” as he referred to them) around the time he painted his first masterpiece, *The Potato Eaters* (1885). Rembrandt, Holbein, and Dürer provided inspiration for these rapidly-executed works in a dark palette. After leaving Holland, van Gogh spent two years in Paris and studied in the studio of Fernand Cormon. While in Paris he met Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Emile Bernard, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Gauguin, among other members of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist groups. His palette lightened and he adopted the Impressionists’ method of painting in broken brushstrokes. He also shared their enthusiasm for Japanese prints, with their bold juxtapositions of flat color. Yet his lack of success and the hardships of living in the capital prompted van Gogh to seek a simpler life in a warmer climate. In 1888, he left for Arles, where he hoped to establish an artists’ community. He immediately took in his new surroundings through light-filled paintings of flowering orchards and fields, bridges, and the nearby sea shore. Yet his primary

interest lay in figure painting, although his lack of funds and eccentric personality made it difficult for him to find willing models. Nevertheless, during his stay in Arles, he painted some of his greatest portraits—a gallery of townspeople of various ages and walks of life as well as self-portraits—and he broke new artistic ground in his experimental approach to color. Van Gogh carefully chronicled the radical steps he was making in letters to his brother, and to his friend Emile Bernard. Several lengthy passages refer directly to the Norton Simon's *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*, providing invaluable insight into his creative process.

A BOLD AND DIGNIFIED PORTRAIT

Depicted half-length and life-sized, the subject of the portrait faces the viewer directly in an iconic frontal pose, with eyes inwardly turned. His head and upper torso are pushed up to the picture plane in a bold rejection of traditional illusionistic space. Patience Escalier is dressed in good clothes: a green smock over a light pink shirt, with a gray scarf tied around his neck. The brilliant yellow of his round straw hat pulled down over his forehead shimmers against the ultramarine blue background, which is painted in rapid, broad strokes. A thin red outline separates the green of the jacket from the blue of the background, adding an additional vibration between the color areas. With a finer brush, van Gogh modeled the man's weather-beaten face and his beard in strokes of green, yellow, orange and red. Within the larger areas of primary and secondary colors that suggest the Provencal sky, sun, and lush vegetation at the peak of summer, the peasant's face is a hub of energy.

In speaking about the direction he was taking in his current work, Vincent wrote to Theo, "I find that what I learned in Paris *is fading*, and that I'm returning to my ideas that came to me in the country before I knew the Impressionists. And I wouldn't be very surprised if the Impressionists were soon to find fault with my way of doing things, which was fertilized more by the ideas of Delacroix than by theirs." Summing up his new approach, he continued, "Because instead of trying to render exactly what I have before my eyes, I use color more arbitrarily in order to express myself more forcefully." He arrived at his image of the old peasant, he said, by "imagining the terrific man I had to do, in the very furnace of harvest time, deep in the south. Hence the oranges, blazing like red-hot iron, hence the old gold tones, glowing in the darkness." The artist anticipated that his new work would not find favor with the public, saying "the good folk will see only caricature in this exaggeration."

In the Norton Simon's portrait of Patience Escalier, as well as in other portraits of his Arles period, van Gogh carried on his desire to render ordinary human beings within their place in a dignified, direct fashion, as he had in Nuenen. Working on his own, he departed from the Impressionists' concern with

optical reality to dig deeper into the spiritual or intangible aspects of the character of his subjects expressed through his arbitrary use of color. This painting represents a turn in the path of a great artist's career beyond realism to a more subjective mode of expression through abstract means. Patience Escalier comes to life in this bold modern portrait and he and the environment that formed him create a complementary whole.

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Hours: open six days a week: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11am to 5pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$18; senior citizens \$15; students \$10; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.
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Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Museum Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call 212. 288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Head of Media Relations & Marketing, or Alexis Light, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

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