

**GEORGES SEURAT'S LUMINOUS DRAWINGS ARE THE FOCUS
OF COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION AT MoMA**

More than 100 Drawings Reveal Seurat's Mastery of His Medium

Georges Seurat: The Drawings

October 28, 2007–January 7, 2008

The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art Gallery, sixth floor

NEW YORK, October 24, 2007—Georges Seurat (French, 1859–91), one of the most influential painters of the nineteenth century, was a prolific draftsman who, despite a brief career, created an extraordinary body of work on paper. *Georges Seurat: The Drawings* is the first exhibition in almost 25 years to focus exclusively on the artist's luminous drawings. These drawings played a crucial role in Seurat's career and are often seen as touchstones for the art of the twentieth century and forerunners of abstraction. This comprehensive exhibition surveys his entire oeuvre, with over 135 works, primarily the artist's conté crayon drawings, along with a small selection of oil sketches and paintings, and explores his materials and methods, his subject matter, and the relationship between his drawings and paintings. The exhibition, organized by Jodi Hauptman, Associate Curator, Department of Drawings, The Museum of Modern Art, is on view from October 28, 2007, through January 7, 2008.

This exhibition showcases one of Seurat's greatest achievements: the artist's exploration of the dramatic relationship between darkness and light. The placement of dark next to light so that each would amplify the other—an effect Seurat called "irradiation"—generated a soft halo or glow around his figures. To achieve such glowing luminosity and velvety blackness, Seurat tailored his application of conté crayon to a French handmade textured paper called Michallet, leaving parts of the paper untouched to indicate illumination while building up his medium to intensify shadows. Ms. Hauptman states, "Bathed in light that shimmers around them, nurses, street sweepers, elegant ladies, and a host of others emerge out of a mysterious, unreadable darkness."

Most of Seurat's drawings were created as independent works. These drawings will be featured in the exhibition, along with a selection made during his academic training and groups of studies created for his renowned monumental canvases, such as *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884–86) and *Bathing Place, Asnières* (1883–84). Also, four of the artist's sketchbooks, brought together here for the first time, have been digitized so that viewers may peruse them in their entirety.

Seurat, best known as the leader of the Neo-Impressionist movement and inventor of pointillism, a form of painting in which tiny dots of primary colors are used to generate secondary

colors, had a tragically short artistic career that ended with his death at age 31 in 1891. Despite the lack of Seurat's letters, diaries, archives, and photographs, it is known that drawing was of great importance for the artist, as seen from his extensive output—an extraordinary 500 works on paper (with about 230 dating from his mature period) have been catalogued.

Georges Seurat was born in 1859 into a Parisian bourgeois family. He began drawing as a boy, starting his formal training in a small neighborhood art school. When he was 18, he entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and made numerous drawings from antique sculpture and live models, and copied masterworks by such artists as Ingres, Raphael, and Poussin. During his required military service, completed in Brest, a town in northwestern France (1879–1880), Seurat began to turn away from his Beaux-Arts training. Without models and antique sculptures, Seurat sketched what was available, including his fellow recruits and his own hands. In addition, four sketchbooks (c. 1877–81) show that Seurat wandered through the city observing people and architectural details. In the unfolding of Seurat's career, these sketches function as a hinge between his academic training and his mature style: the attention to the everyday, the use of cross-hatching for rendering light on a surface, and a line that seems to have an agency of its own rather than functioning as descriptive contour.

Seurat's first publicly exhibited work was a drawing—*Aman-Jean* (c. 1882–83)—at the Salon of 1883. Though traditional in subject, this large-scale portrait of his friend and fellow artist reveals the formal innovations that Seurat had already developed and would continue to refine throughout his brief career: the massing of tones to shape and form, the use of the conté crayon to create velvety blackness and glowing luminosity, and an evocative softness and mood.

Seurat's choice of materials was critical to the look of his mature drawings. In preparation for this exhibition, drawings in the Museum's collection have been examined closely by MoMA conservator Karl Buchberg with the goal of understanding Seurat's materials and working techniques. The drawings were examined using low power magnification and other forms of analysis. A French handmade paper called Michallet, a set of black stick media known collectively as conté crayon, and fixative have been identified as Seurat's most important materials. Mr. Buchberg's research proves that the layering of conté crayon, the deployment of fixative to protect initial layers, and the judicious use of stumping (in which the medium, once applied, is manipulated with pointed rolls of paper, leather, or cork) are all key artistic techniques. Seurat exploited the texture of the Michallet paper by stroking the conté crayon across the sheet's ridges, thus devising his own kind of draftsmanship: he massed dark and light tones, abstracting figures, spaces, and structures; exploited unmarked paper to signify light; incorporated the paper's surface pattern into his compositions; layered pigment to create a range of densities, from a translucent scrim to impenetrable darkness; and offered accurate descriptions of subjects using the barest of means. The exhibition also addresses the relationship between Seurat's drawings and his paintings and the similar ways he approached these different mediums. Once again,

analysis by Mr. Buchberg and other MoMA conservators shows the parallels in Seurat's exploitation of his chosen support, whether it was paper, canvas, or wood panel. Moreover, lessons learned from working with *conté* on paper helped Seurat better understand chromatic relationships; in the exhibition visitors will see the links between the artist's tonal rendering and his particular use of color, as well as the way he uses drawing to refine the positions, modeling, and lighting of his figures. Mr. Buchberg's research is explored in depth in his essay in the exhibition's accompanying catalogue and on the exhibition's Web site, moma.org/seuratdrawings. Ms. Hauptman and Mr. Buchberg also discuss the findings in the MoMA Audio program.

Seurat was interested in subjects drawn from urban Paris and its surroundings: modish women and city workers, modern transport and horse-drawn carts, the industrializing suburbs, and the popular entertainment of the day. But in contrast with Seurat's renowned paintings of nineteenth century leisure, such as *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884–86) and *Bathing Place, Asnières* (1883–84), his drawings present empty places and lone figures. Seurat turned his back on the grand boulevards of Paris, presenting instead gritty and desolate views of Paris's edges: the fallow area just outside the city walls known as the Zone and the industrializing suburbs with their factories and simple housing. His rural landscapes, such as *The Edge of the Forest* (c. 1883) or *Haystacks* (c. 1882–83) are equally lonely. Subjects of portraits—including *Embroidery (The Artist's Mother)* (c. 1882–83)—are completely absorbed in solitary activities while his more anonymous figures are often presented with their backs to the viewer or with their faces partially obscured as seen in *The White Coat (Woman with Umbrella)* (c. 1883), *The Veil* (c. 1882–84), and *Seated Woman with a Parasol* (study for *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*) (c. 1884–85). In his drawings of urban types—including well-dressed women and city workers—Seurat reduced his figures' bodies to geometric forms and took them out of their contexts while still offering crucial details of their role in the urban panorama (see, for example, *Nurse* (c. 1882), *Woman in White and Black*, (c. 1882), and *Market Porter* [c. 1882–84]). In this way, he unites the modern and the classical, creating figures with the forms of ancient sculpture but the gestures and attributes of nineteenth-century Parisians.

Toward the end of his career Seurat focused on scenes of popular entertainment, showing the array of amusements—acrobats, clowns, circus performers, singers—available to city dwellers. These works include nine drawings devoted to the *café-concert*—cafés that featured singers and other performers for an audience drawn from the varied strata of Parisian society. Seven of the drawings are included in this exhibition and each one offers a slightly different view of a performer (or performers) on stage, from close-up to long views to vantage points deep in the crowded audience, as seen in *At the Concert Européen* (c. 1886–88).

SPONSORSHIP:

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PUBLICATION:

The accompanying publication will feature an introduction and essay by Jodi Hauptman, and essays presenting important new research on Seurat's artistic strategies, materials, and themes by: Karl Buchberg (MoMA conservator); Hubert Damisch (art historian, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris); Bridget Riley (artist); Richard Shiff (art historian, University of Texas); and Richard Thomson (art historian, University of Edinburgh). The book will also include a chronology, selected bibliography, and detailed checklist. The book is distributed to the trade through Distributed Art Publishers (D.A.P.) in the United States and Canada and through Thames & Hudson outside North America. It will be available in October 2007 at MoMA Stores and online at www.momastore.org. Hardcover: 8 x 10 in. (20.5 x 25.5 cm); 272 pages; 185 illustrations. Price: \$49.95.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

The Café-Concert in Art and Song: The Civilians in Performance will be held in the Titus 2 Theater at MoMA at 7:30 p.m. on December 11 and 12, 2007. Using Seurat's drawings of the café-concert as a springboard, the New York-based theater group The Civilians will present a selection of original songs, readings, and projected images of Parisian locales by artists such as Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Tickets (\$15; members \$12; students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$10) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, the Film desk, or online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern. See separate press release for more information

Two Brown Bag Lunch Lectures by Tricia Paik, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings, The Museum of Modern Art, will be held on October 29 and November 1, from 12:30-1:15 p.m. Tickets (\$5; members, students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$3) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, at the Film desk, or in the Cullman Building lobby. Tickets are also available online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern.

MoMA AUDIO:

Curator Jodi Hauptman and Conservator Karl Buchberg explore the importance of Seurat's drawings in terms of the artist's subject matter, materials, and methods. The audio program is available at the Museum free of charge, courtesy of Bloomberg, and as an enhanced podcast at www.moma.org/audio. Available in English only.

WEB SITE:

The exhibition is accompanied by a Web site, www.moma.org/seuratdrawings, which is divided into three sections: Sketchbooks, Conservation, and Subjects. The first section is devoted to the four extant Seurat sketchbooks, featuring ten spreads plus the cover of each sketchbook. The section dedicated to conservation features MoMA Conservator Karl Buchberg's research on

Seurat's methods and materials divided into three parts: materials, techniques, and wood panels and textured grounds. The final section is devoted to Seurat's subjects presented in four parts: Paris and its environs, Asnières, La Grande Jatte, and the Café-Concert. The site is designed by Behavior Design, New York.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, please register at www.moma.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.
Closed Tuesdays, except December 19, December 26, and January 2.

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free for children 16 and under. Free for members. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs)
Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

Film Admission: \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)

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Bus: On Fifth Avenue, take the M1, M2, M3, M4, or M5 to 53rd Street. On Sixth Avenue, take the M5, M6, or M7 to 53rd Street. Or take the M57 and M50 crosstown buses on 57th and 50th Streets.

The public may call 212/708-9400 for detailed Museum information.

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