A Fresh Vision

Landscape Painting in Belgium after Romanticism

The School of Tervuren in an International Context

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
September 2–December 7, 2025
Daley Family Gallery

A Fresh Vision: Landscape Painting in Belgium after Romanticism; The School of Tervuren in an International Context

An exceptional gift from Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust establishes the McMullen Museum as home to the leading collection of nineteenth-century Belgian landscape painting in North America. These paintings reflect one aspect of Charles Hack's wide-ranging passion for Belgian art. Over the past five decades, he has assembled the pre-eminent collection of Belgian painting, sculpture, and works on paper outside Europe. In recognition of his efforts to preserve and promote this artistic legacy, the Kingdom of Belgium named him Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Couronne in 2024.

The exhibition demonstrates how painters from the School of Tervuren, including Theodore Fourmois, Hippolyte Boulenger, Joseph-Théodore Coosemans, and Théodore T'Scharner, were influenced by the French Barbizon painters to blend Romantic sensibility with realist technique, capturing the nuances of light, weather, and terrain in a modern, expressive style. Painting outdoors—enabled by the recent invention of paint tubes, and motivated by Romantic poetry and new scientific concepts of nature—they brought a fresh immediacy to landscape painting.

Though loosely defined, the School of Tervuren represents a vital chapter in the international evolution of modern landscape. Like their contemporaries in Barbizon and Giverny in France, Skagen in Denmark, and the Hudson River Valley of New York, these artists believed in portraying nature as they saw and felt it, in the moment. This exhibition places Belgian landscape painting in dialogue with wider European and American movements, inviting visitors to experience the power of place—and of painting—as a quiet yet radical form of resistance and renewal. Comparisons with selected works by Barbizon artists such as Charles-François Daubigny, and artists associated with the Hudson River School, like Albert Bierstadt and John Frederick Kensett, introduce international parallels.

Organized by the McMullen Museum, *A Fresh Vision* has been curated by Jeffery Howe. Major support has been provided by Boston College and the Patrons of the McMullen Museum.

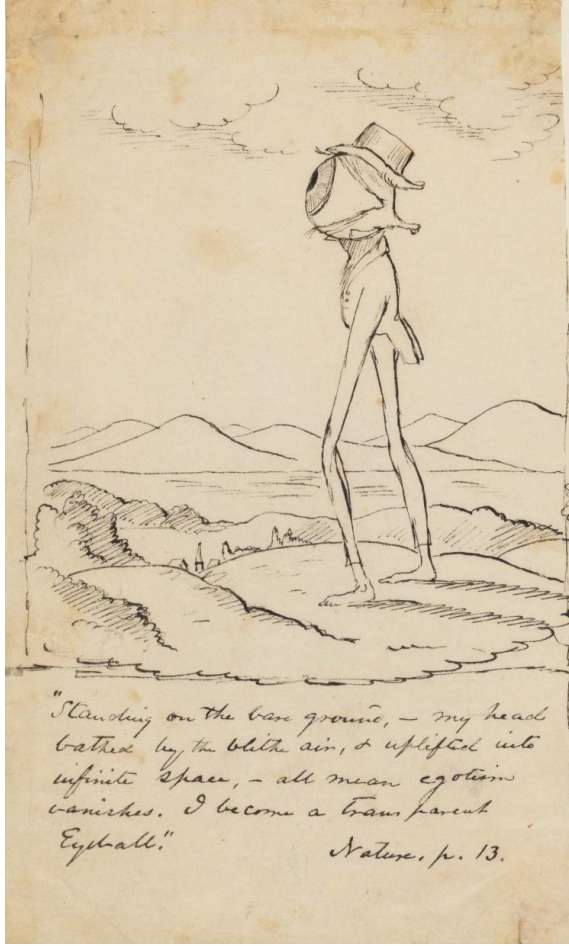
In Europe and America, landscape painting rose to new prominence in the nineteenth century as a vehicle for personal expression combined with an almost scientific fascination with recording natural phenomena. Science and poetry were combined in the process of making marks on the canvas and matching them to the visual phenomena being represented. Viewers then use imagination to comprehend what they see.

Of this dynamic process the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850) wrote that the audience must actively interpret "all the mighty world / Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create, / And what perceive."

The creation of a work of art involves observation, memory, and imagination as well as technical skill. The image of the artist as a seeker and even hunter of motifs that he could capture became popular, as seen on this headpiece of the Brussels journal *L'Artiste* in 1834.

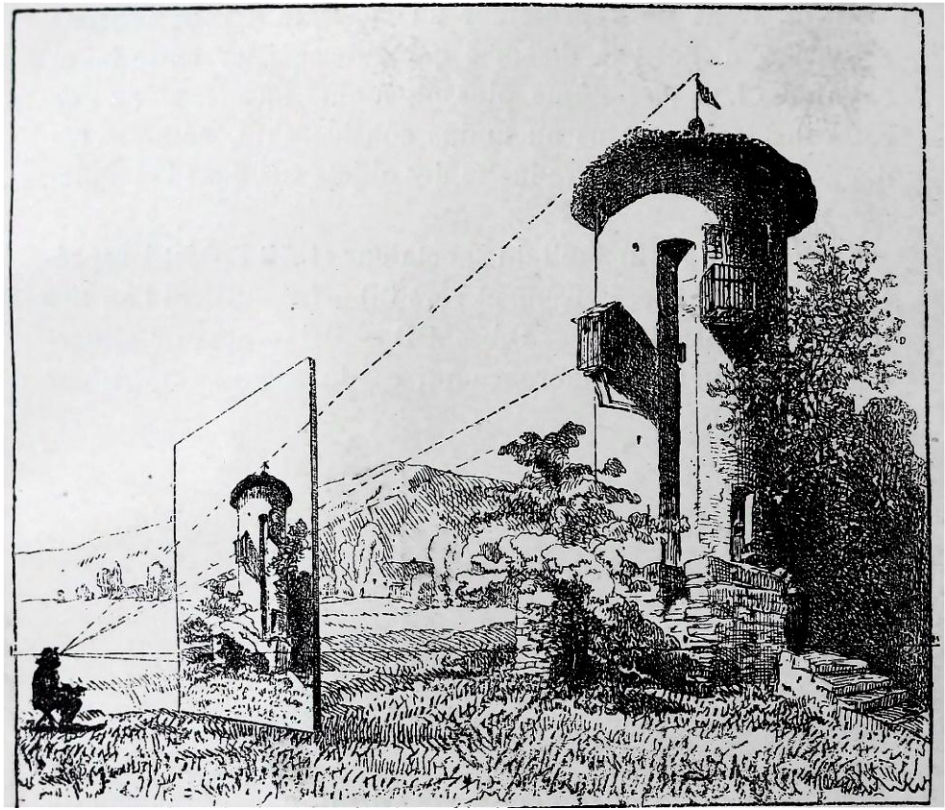
Vignette from *L'Artiste, Revue des Arts et de la Littérature* (Brussels) 1, no. 41 (June 8, 1834)

Ralph Waldo Emerson described in *Nature* (1836) how one could attain a sense of unity with the divine by allowing one's consciousness to be absorbed in the contemplation of nature. It is through such meditation that one becomes aware of the external forces larger than the self, and the transcendental realities. In this witty and proto-surrealist drawing, Christopher Pearse Cranch (1813–92) illustrated Emerson's most famous quote on dissolving one's ego in the face of the cosmos. Emerson described the sensation of "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God." The impossible image of a transparent eyeball captures the goal of total ego-less visuality in contemplation of nature.



Christopher Pearse Cranch, "Standing on the Bare Ground...I Become a Transparent Eyeball," 1837–39
Pen and brown ink on paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The importance of perspective for landscape artists is shown in this illustration from a manual published by Armand Cassagne (1823–1907), a Belgian artist who painted and taught in Barbizon, France, from 1857–68. To faithfully represent an image of nature, artists had to consider spatial relationships as well as light, color, and texture. One-point perspective, invented in the fifteenth century, was a mainstay of academic training in art, and, although increasingly challenged by avant-garde artists, was still effective.

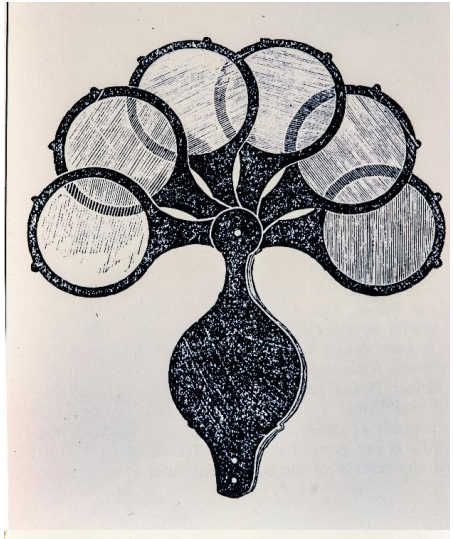


Armand Cassagne, *Traité Pratique de Perspective* ([1866] Paris, 1889), 18

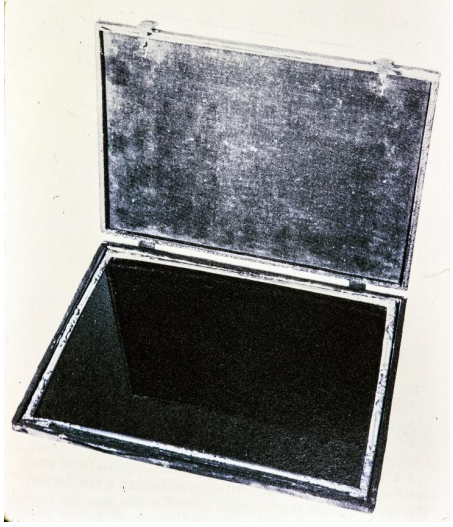
Classical academic doctrine insisted that nature had to be idealized to be beautiful. The French seventeenth-century artist Claude Lorrain was considered by many in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centures to be the epitome of this idealization and the "the picturesque." Artificial devices such as smoked glass mirrors and lenses of varying degrees of tinting were used by artists to achieve the warm, luminous tone of Claude's paintings.

The English Romantic artist John Constable was much admired in France and Belgium, but was often criticized for painting excessively naturalist landscapes. Even his most supportive patron, Sir George Beaumont, regretted that Constable painted grass that was too harshly green, too "real"; it would be much better, he said, if the artist painted the fields in a "mellow brown of an old violin." To refute this, Constable is said to have taken a violin outside and set it on the green grass, insisting on the need to capture the true colors of nature.

Constable's stubborn dedication to realism held him back in his career, although he is now regarded as one of the finest painters of the nineteenth century. Many later landscape artists, including those working in the style of the School of Tervuren, faced similar criticisms as they sought to expand the visual language of representation.



Claude Lorrain glass, 1856



Claude Lorrain mirror, 1850

William Trost Richards (1833 Philadelphia–Newport 1905)

Coastal View, n.d.

Pencil and gouache on paper
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
In Memory of Theodore R. Conant

Richards was an exemplar of the new direct approach to nature, traveling widely but always returning to his local sites in New England.

The artist's son Theodore described his father's intense concentration while trying to sketch breaking waves: "He stood for hours in the early days of Atlantic City or Cape May, with folded arms, studying the motion of the sea,—until people thought him insane. After days of gazing, he made pencil notes of the action of the water. He even stood for hours in a bathing suit among the waves, trying to analyse the motion."

As he stood near the breaking surf, Richards kept boards for his oil sketches and painting materials at the ready in a cigar box. To study waves, he also consulted photographs that he describes in several letters. By 1891 he even photographed waves with his own camera.

Cigar box with tubes of paint belonging to William Trost Richards

William Vareika Fine Arts, Newport

The invention of flexible metallic tubes for paints by the American artist John Goffe Rand in 1840 made it much easier for artists to sketch in oils outdoors. Patented by the London firm Winsor and Newton, paint tubes were enthusiastically adopted by artists who wanted to paint *en plein air*.

The French painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) asserted: “Without paint in tubes there would have been…nothing of what the journalists were later to call Impressionists.”

Barbizon School

Rejecting the centralizing tendencies of nineteenth-century urbanism, many European and American artists began turning their attention to local terrain as a statement of independence. Less constrained by academic principles, they felt greater freedom to be innovative by painting landscapes.

One of the key movements of French painting in the mid-nineteenth century was the Barbizon School, named for a village near the Forest of Fontainebleau south of Paris, where many of the artists worked *en plein air*. They shunned the idealized landscapes endorsed by the conservative French Academy. Building on a Romantic appreciation of the beauty and quiet drama of the landscape, Barbizon artists such as Jean-François Millet (1814–75), Charles-François Daubigny (1817–78), and Gustave Courbet (1819–77) sought refuge from the explosive growth of the modern city. Their increased naturalism and innovative pictorial styles inspired, around 1870, the next generation of impressionists.

Charles-François Daubigny (1817 Paris–Paris 1878)

Sunset on a River, n.d.

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College

Daubigny was one of the leading artists of the Barbizon School. After moving to Barbizon in 1843, he dedicated himself to capturing glimpses of the French countryside in every season. This twilight scene is created with unusually fluid brush strokes and subtle but rich color. He boldly depicts the setting sun directly, in a manner that would recur with Vincent van Gogh. The deep shade that obscures the woman and her cattle contrasts dramatically with the bright yellow streak that courses along the river, a reflection of the setting sun.

Daubigny famously created a painting studio on a boat, anticipating Claude Monet. Influenced by Camille Corot and Gustave Courbet in his painterly style, he inspired both Belgian artists and the development of impressionism in France.

Jules Dupré (1811 Nantes–L'Isle-Adam 1889)
Landscape with Woman in Red, c. 1880

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College

This bucolic scene of a small remote farmhouse depicts an age-old mode of life far from the increasing urbanization and industrialization of modern Paris. Dupré was a leading artist of the Barbizon School. Here Dupré captures the late afternoon light with broad brushstrokes and rich color; his loose brushwork signaled a rejection of the academic ideal of slick, polished surfaces that then still characterized official painting. Dupré was highly regarded in his lifetime; American collectors vied for his paintings; his fellow artist Camille Corot (1796–1875) called him "the Beethoven of landscape."

A hint of sunset glow in the distance is typical of his works. The bright, ragged clouds overhead are reflected in the reedy pond below, suggesting a unity of sky and earth. As with earlier Romantic artists, nature is a vehicle for expressing emotion. In the early 1830s Dupré had visited Britain where he admired the paintings of John Constable (1776–1837). The isolation of the single figure in red evokes the loneliness of rural life, especially for women of the era. A few cattle are the only other living creatures, and the shifting drama of light and the changing season evoke the inexorable passage of time.

Hudson River School

Emerging from the spirit of Romanticism, the Hudson River School was the first distinctly American art movement, flourishing between 1825 and 1870. Centered primarily in New York City, its artists were devoted landscape painters who turned their gaze to the natural splendor of their homeland.

They celebrated the majestic scenery of the Hudson River Valley and nearby regions such as the Catskill, Adirondack, and White Mountains—depicting these native landscapes with a deep reverence for their beauty and power. Inspired by European masters like Claude Lorrain (c. 1600–82) and John Constable (1776–1837), American painters including Thomas Cole (1801–48), Albert Bierstadt, and John Frederick Kensett infused their works with both meticulous detail and a profound sense of the sublime. For these artists, nature was more than subject—it was a source of moral and spiritual reflection, a symbol of the nation's promise, and a uniquely American muse.

John Frederick Kensett

(1816 Cheshire, CT–New York 1872)

A View of Niagara Falls, 1854

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Alexandria & Michael N. Altman P'22, '24, '26
in recognition of a life of service to Boston College by
William M. & Alison S. Vareika '74, P'09, '15, LP'16 on the
occasion of William's Fiftieth Boston College Reunion

American Romantic artists and writers found that the sublime vastness of nature offered a perfect analog to the spiritual experience of feeling one's ego join in a union with a higher power. This could find echoes in religion or nationalism, or any context where the individual ego melds with a larger entity. American artists such as Kensett and Albert Bierstadt celebrated the unique physiognomy and grandeur of Niagara Falls and the White Mountains in particular.

John Frederick Kensett

(1816 Cheshire, CT–New York 1872)

On the Beverly Coast, 1865

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

Kensett was a leading American luminist artist, influenced by nineteenth-century Transcendentalism. His precise and accurate style was shaped by his early training as an engraver. This almost abstract vision of the rocky shore of Beverly, Massachusetts, depicts the Atlantic Ocean and horizon cloaked in a luminous mist. The evanescent realm of light and color balances the harsh clarity of a rocky promontory with low trees at the right. The stilled sea and split rocks have an elegiac undertone of calm after a storm, perhaps a metaphor for the recent end of the Civil War and desire for peace. The golden light of the distant sea also suggests hope for freedom, transcending the burdens of earthly life.

Albert Bierstadt (1830 Solingen, Germany–New York 1902)

The Approaching Storm: White Mountain View with Hay Wagon and Figures, 1861

Oil on panel
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

Albert Bierstadt was fascinated with the epic scale of the American landscape. With his brothers Charles and Edward, he capitalized on the new invention of stereoscopic photography. They opened a photography shop in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1859 and in 1860 published a catalogue of photos of the American West and views of the White Mountains of New Hampshire taken from viewpoints chosen by Albert.

The White Mountains were a popular destination in the growing tourist trade, and Bierstadt painted there often, visiting at least seven times between 1852 and 1886. This painting is refreshingly naturalistic, in contrast with some of his earlier works that combined imaginary European castles with the New Hampshire landscape. The heavily loaded hay wagon is returning to the farm, the harvest now secure from being ruined by the rain. The soon-to-be-lost light dances across the canvas, illuminating the hay wagon, workers, and slices of the landscape. Is the approaching storm perhaps a metaphor for the onset of the Civil War? Stormy weather was a fundamental symbol in nineteenth-century literature and art, and Bierstadt was sophisticated in the use of imagery to mirror emotion.

The Hague School

Working in and around The Hague between 1860 and 1890, this group of Dutch painters sought to revive the naturalism that defined seventeenth-century Dutch art. Focusing on landscapes and scenes of rural life, they captured the quiet poetry of everyday surroundings with subdued tones and atmospheric effects. Their work shares much with that of the French Barbizon painters—such as Jean-François Millet, Jules Dupré, and Constant Troyon—as well as the artists of the Belgian Tervuren School, who similarly embraced nature as a source of truth and beauty.

Anthonij (Anton) Mauve

(1838 Zaandam–Arnhem 1888)

Snow Scene with Sheep, c. 1882–88

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College

Mauve was a prominent member of the Hague School. *Snow Scene with Sheep* is noteworthy for the delicacy of its tonal gradations and nuances of color. Nominally realist, it also represents a nostalgia for a way of life that was disappearing. A shepherd guides his small flock through the snow, persevering against the winter chill. The shepherd tending his flock has long been a metaphor for social and spiritual care.

Vincent van Gogh (1853–90), *Pink Peach Trees ("Souvenir de Mauve")*, March 30, 1888. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

Mauve influenced a number of painters, notably Vincent van Gogh, his cousin by marriage. In his youth Vincent kept a photograph of one of Mauve's drawings hanging in his room, and cherished his paintings. Van Gogh commented that "A picture by Mauve…says more, and says it more clearly, than nature herself." In late 1881 Mauve taught Van Gogh to paint in watercolor and helped him begin to explore the use of color in oil.

Tervuren: Varieties of Realism

In the mid-nineteenth century, a group of Belgian artists began painting the forests and fields around Tervuren, a small village just east of Brussels. Inspired by the French Barbizon painters—especially Jean-François Millet and Gustave Courbet—they turned their attention to quiet, everyday scenes of the countryside.

By 1863, some of these artists had formed an informal colony in Tervuren, gathering regularly at the village inn Au Renard (In den Vos). One of them, Hippolyte Boulenger, whose paintings hang nearby, first coined the term "School of Tervuren" when submitting his work to the 1866 Brussels Salon. Despite the name, the group had no formal structure, but shared a commitment to realism and a deep connection to the land they painted.

The Tervuren artists stood at the crossroads of Romanticism and realism. Their landscapes reflect both the beauty and the labor of modern rural life—fields under cultivation, forest paths, industrial scenes, and tranquil natural vistas. Their goal was simple but radical: to paint the world as they saw it.

To do so, they adopted new techniques: painting outdoors (*en plein air*), using looser brushwork, and exploring light and color in fresh ways. These experiments aligned with the rise of impressionism in Belgium, and helped each artist develop a personal, expressive style grounded in direct observation.

Many of the Tervuren artists also traveled to other scenic regions in Belgium and the Netherlands. Several of these sites are pictured in this exhibition and are marked on the adjacent map.


Zeeland
NETHERLANDS
Kempen
Heist
Ostend
Bruges
Antwerp
GERMANY
Brussels
Tervuren
Eijsden
BELGIUM
Nafraiture
Bastogne
Ardennes
FRANCE
LUXEM-
BOURG

Théodore Fourmois (1814 Presles–Ixelles 1871)

Paysage (Landscape), 1867

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Fourmois was a forerunner of the School of Tervuren, visiting there often in the 1840s and 1850s.

Echoing Flemish and Dutch seventeenth-century landscapes, this painting captures the peaceful beauty of the Belgian rural countryside. The clouds and broken tree recall both Baroque naturalism and the scientific studies of the Romantics. Shafts of light illuminate the farmhouse and fields.

Théodore Fourmois (1814 Presles–Ixelles 1871)

La Hulpe, 1865

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Fourmois was one of the first Belgian artists to break away from the traditional formulae of landscape imagery and add fresh, direct observations. His depiction of the landscape at La Hulpe is a bucolic scene of cows browsing in a pasture with a light-filled valley in the distance.

Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709), *A Farm in the Sunlight*, 1668. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

A substantial barn may be glimpsed behind two large shady trees, which highlight the artist's natural rendering of the chiaroscuro effect of contrasting sunlight and shade.

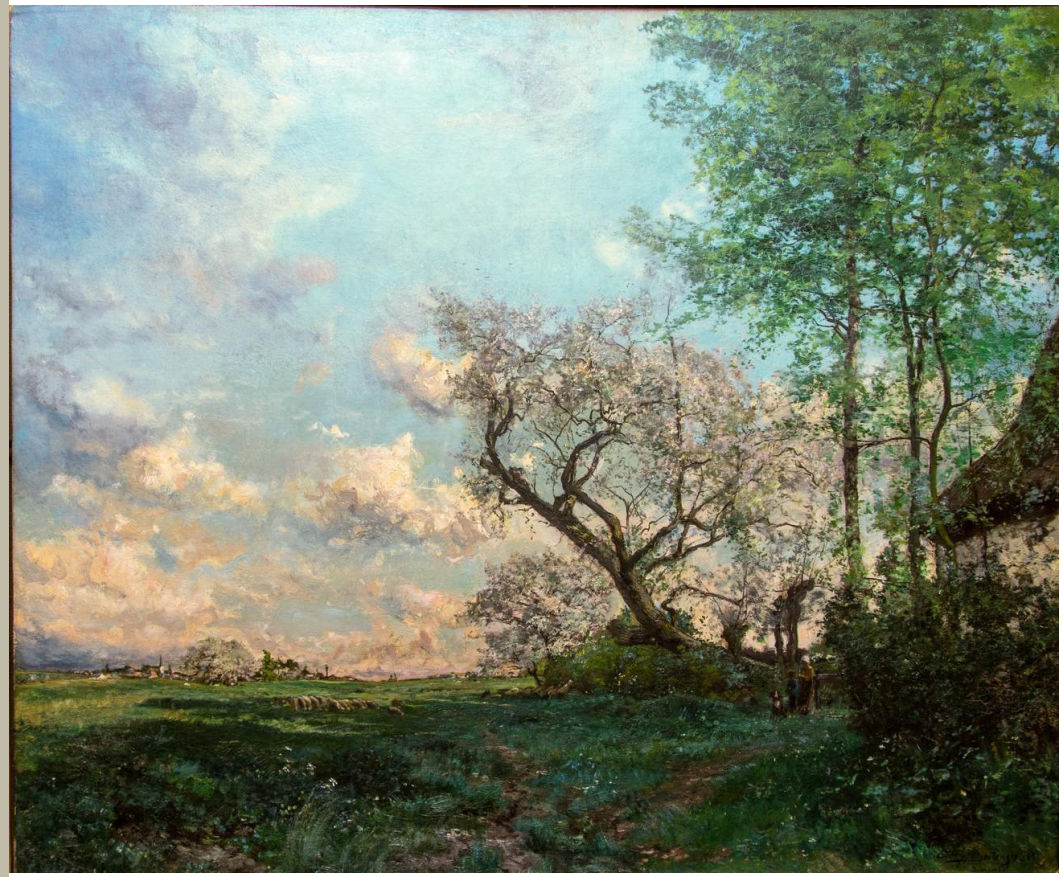
Hippolyte Boulenger (1837 Tournai–Brussels 1874)

Retour à la ferme (Back on the Farm), 1869

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

In 1864 Boulenger became the first painter to settle in the environs of Tervuren. He painted this picture a few years later at a happy and productive time of his life, the year he married. Bathed in the fresh light of spring, the landscape shows a farmhouse nestled behind trees and cut off at the right. A large flowering tree sprawls to the left to shade two small figures and a flock of sheep.

Boulenger was awarded a gold medal at the Salon of 1872. *L'Art Moderne* praised him for "the arrangement in the lines, lively, witty, unexpected, or in the tones, vibrant, skilfully nuanced, harmoniously arranged, sometimes opposed, sometimes confused with a boldness that is always happy.…Everywhere one feels the hand…quickly describing the line, directing it with a sureness that delights, drawing in particular the physiognomy of the various foliage with marvelous finesse."



Hippolyte Boulenger (1837 Tournai–Brussels 1874)

***Paysage (Landscape)*, n.d.**

Watercolor on paper
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

This radically simple watercolor sketch of the Belgian countryside, probably in the vicinity of Tervuren, uses masses of color and free-floating pencil marks to capture the rural landscape. Delicate washes of blue depict the sky above a red farmhouse in the distance. This quick sketch omits any details in its abstraction. In its simplicity, it gives a glimpse into the creative process of the artist.

Hippolyte Boulenger (1837 Tournai–Brussels 1874)

Inondation en Ardenne (Flood in the Ardennes), n.d.

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

The thick swirling brushstrokes of this high-water scene in the Ardennes, a rich study in grays, embodies the artist's exploration of nature and energetic technique. He downplays individual features of the landscape in favor of an almost abstract scene composed of the elements of earth, air, and water. The dark, turbulent sky appears to be as solid as the land below it, while the floodwater fills the frame with a calmer surface, mirroring the clouds and sunlight.

Hippolyte Boulenger (1837 Tournai–Brussels 1874)

Paysage avec meules de foin (Landscape with Haystacks), n.d.

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Here, the artist uses a disciplined brush technique of small, parallel strokes to capture the quiet peace of an agricultural scene. The hay is stacked in a long row at the end of the field, unlike the conical stacks depicted by the impressionist Claude Monet in his serial studies of haystacks. The lengthening shadows suggest that this is the end of the day. The scene is calm and restful, and no workers are in view, but the large harvest stands as a testament to the bounty of the land.

Alfred William Finch (1854 Brussels–Helsinki 1930)

Paysan écobuant son champ (Peasant Burning His Field), c. 1884

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

A farmer burning the brush from his field provided Finch an opportunity to explore effects of smoke against dark fields. He applies paint thickly, with the broad strokes of a palette knife.

Reviewers praised him for the "prodigious intensity and delicacy of the shimmering of the light and the discolorations of the tone. His eye scrutinizes nature in its most intimate perceptions, draws unexpected scales from a corner of a village, a wall, a roof of red tiles…he has been studying for years with admirable perseverance to appreciate the accuracy and acuity of his vision."

Finch was a founding member of the avant-garde exhibition society *Les XX* (The Twenty) in Brussels, which rebelled against the academic tradition. For his unwavering realism, Finch was rejected by the official Salon in 1884, giving rise to calls for a new "Salon des Refusés" in Belgium. He later adopted a luminous neo-impressionist style, experimented with pottery, and in 1897 moved to Finland to lead a ceramics studio.

Louis Dubois (1830 Brussels–Brussels 1880)

Sablonnière (Dunes), 1879

Oil on panel
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Louis Dubois was an energetic supporter of Gustave Courbet, who led the French realism movement. A founder of the Free Society of Fine Arts in Brussels and a collaborator on their journal, *L'Art Libre*, Dubois adopted Courbet's painterly approach as seen here in his vigorously rendered study of sand dunes on the Belgian coast. Dubois was also a rebel, declaring "I hate the academic traditions that continue to filter everywhere…: THE TIME HAS COME TO PAINT DIFFERENTLY."

Gustave Courbet, *The Stream of the Black Well (Les Puits Noir)*, 1872–77. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

The writer Camille Lemonnier celebrated how "Dubois…embodied the lively passion for materialities, the sensitivity of the eye, the so human joy of the shimmering and light"—qualities well demonstrated in this bold painting.

Joseph-Théodore Coosemans

(1828 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1904)

Étang de Robiano-Tervuren (Pond at the Castle of Robiano-Tervuren), 1863

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

After a career as the town secretary in Tervuren, Coosemans came late to painting, but quickly earned success. He received his first lessons from Théodore Fourmois, whose paintings hang nearby.

This twilight scene is one of Coosemans's earliest works, and represents an already accomplished example of tonal subtleties. As the shadows fall, a man sits on the edge of a pond fishing, accompanied by a woman. The air is calm, and the trees are mirrored in the glassy surface of the pond. At left, a sheep and a lamb add to the rustic harmony.

A retrospective review noted "his ardent love of nature, in patient and persevering toil, in a noble simplicity of manners which made him prefer to all distractions the rustic existence of Tervuren."

Joseph-Théodore Coosemans

(1828 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1904)

Paysage de campagne (Landscape in the Countryside), 1866

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

This dramatic landscape shows a more vigorous technique, suited to capturing a windy day. Two years after he painted this scene, Coosemans became a founding member of the Free Society of Fine Arts in Brussels, an independent avant-garde artist association dedicated to realism. By 1876 he was acknowledged as "the current leader of the School of Tervuren."

After his death, the Belgian art critic Octave Maus (1856–1919) credited him as "one of the architects of the revival of landscape painting in Belgium" and as responsible for "the first emancipation of landscape aesthetics, which until then had been enclosed in a code of outdated formulas."

Jean-Baptiste Degreef

(1852 Brussels–Auderghem 1894)

Sous bois (Undergrowth), c. 1880s

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

In 1870 Degreef discovered the ancient abbey of the Red Cloister in the Forest of Soignes on the outskirts of Brussels; he moved there in 1883. Reviewers marveled at his dedication to capturing his immediate environs, he "expresses, often in emotional pages, the melancholy and austerity of the winters, the brilliance of the radiant summers in the vicinity of Brussels."

In 1900 Degreef was praised for his love of nature, "which he reproduced with a sort of voluptuousness in the shimmering aspects, the limpid atmosphere, the clear and deep horizons. He dared to express the greenery of the woods splashed with the sun, the iridescent light of the heavens reflected by the mirror of the waters."

The bright colors in *Sous bois* display the influence of impressionism. The rhythmic curves of the solid tree trunks anchor the prismatic cloud of the leaves. Degreef was a member of *La Chrysalide* (1875–81), a progressive artistic association founded by Belgian painter and printmaker Félicien Rops.

Victor Uytterschaut

(1847 Brussels–Boulogne-sur-Mer 1917)

Étang en hiver (Pond in Winter),

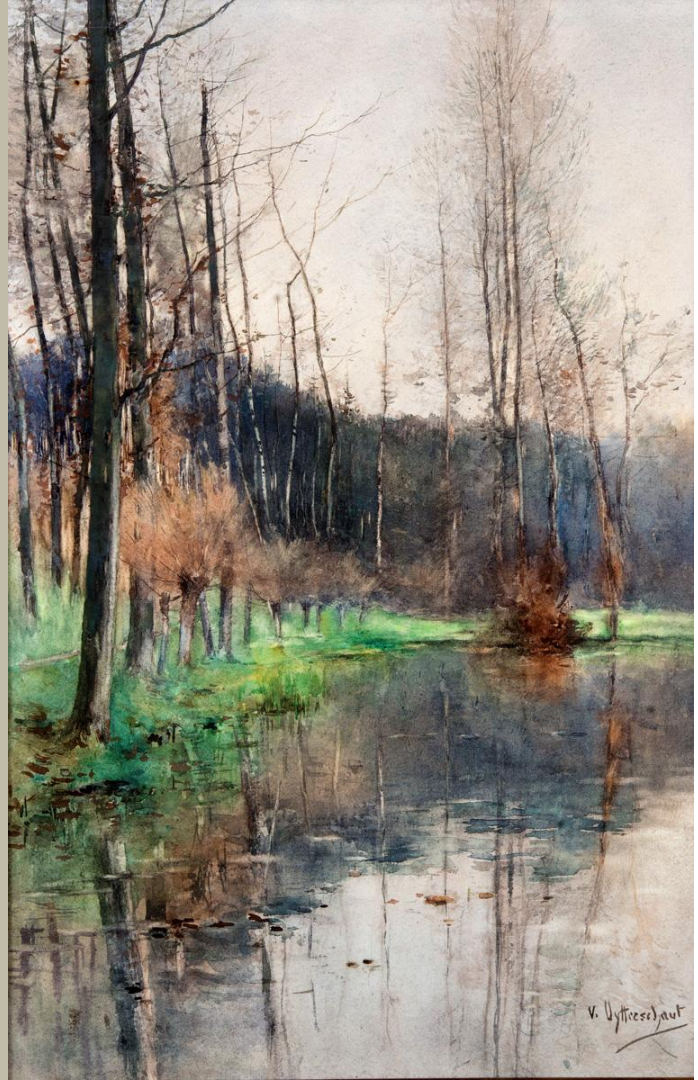
last quarter of the 19th century

Watercolor on Conté paper
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Uytterschaut's watercolors were praised by his colleague Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921) as "clever and sparkling," a description that applies perfectly to this winter landscape. A writer in *L'Art Moderne* described him as "an artist above all of peaceful harmony and serene expression. Contemplation of his landscapes soothes and delights." The poetry of this landscape is found in the sharp green of the arc of the ground cover, still verdant in the winter, with the bare slender trees and their reflection in the pond anchoring the composition like the lines of a musical staff.

Uytterschaut described watercolor as "in essence, a painting full of spontaneity, verve, enthusiasm and first draft. It allows the rapid fixation of fugitive and transient impressions that other pictorial processes do not have time to note in passing. Properly understood, it proceeds by instantaneity. Whether it aims at the deep side of things or at their superficial charm, it almost always synthesizes and summarizes by the use of the simplest means."

Uytterschaut studied technical drawing and landscape painting at the Academy in Brussels. He was a member of the realist artist association *La Chrysalide* and the Royal Society of Belgian Watercolorists.



William Degouve de Nuncques

(1867 Monthermé–Stavelot 1935)

Vue de Stavelot (L'été, Ardenne) (View of Stavelot [Summer, Ardennes]), 1925

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

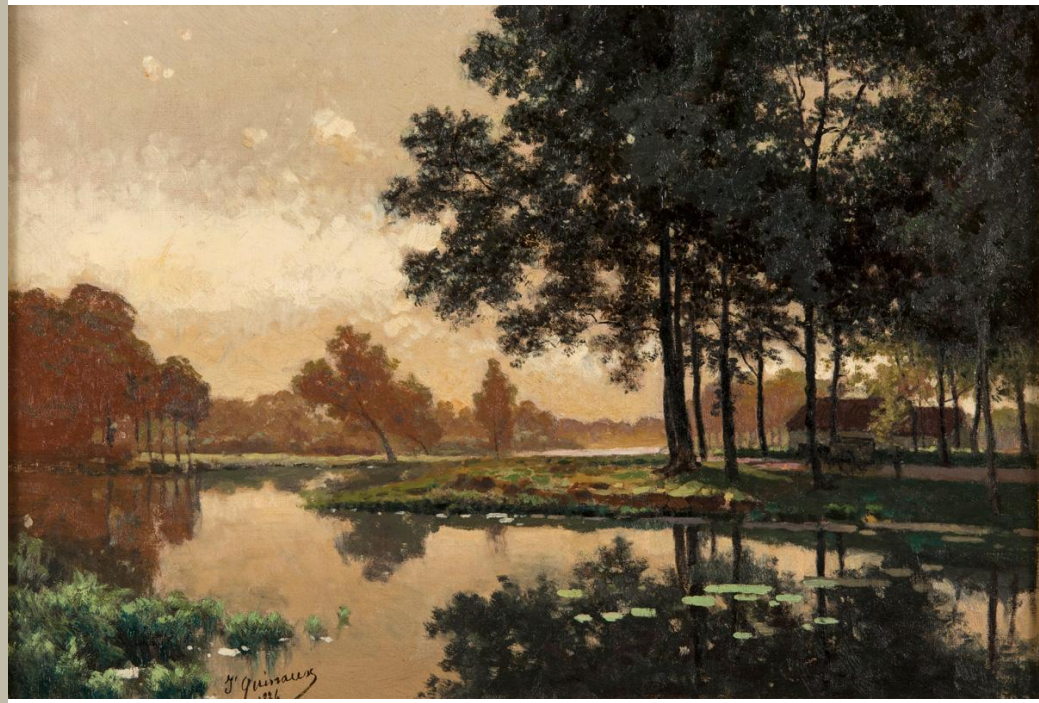
In 1919, Degouve returned to Belgium after the First World War, establishing himself in Stavelot, an ancient town in the Ardennes near Spa. This sun-drenched image shows a deep vista of the Ardennes viewed from a hilltop fringed with conifers. Here he revisits the light-filled scenes he painted before the war. Nature offers the promise of new life and continuity after the desolation of trench warfare. The fresh colors and peaceful landscape provide an image of hope.

Joseph Quinaux (1822 Namur–Schaerbeek 1895)
Rivière (River), 1886

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Quinaux taught at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels from 1876 until his death in 1895. His specialty was landscape, and among his pupils were Isidore Verheyden and Hippolyte Boulenger, whose paintings hang nearby.

Quinaux had spent much of the 1840s in the Forest of Fontainebleau where he came into contact with painters of the Barbizon School. Here he balances a smooth, luminous background and shady trees in the middle ground with bold touches of green for the waterlilies in the foreground. While these green strokes indicate lily pads floating on the pond, at the same time they sit flat on the surface of the canvas, creating tension between the two-dimensional canvas and the illusion of depth. He was a master of traditional perspective, and also aware of modernist challenges to the portrayal of space.



François Bossuet

(1798 Ypres–Saint-Josse-ten-Noode 1889)

Ostend. The Plain Viewed from the Top of the Dunes to the West, n.d.

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Here, Bossuet demonstrates his fluency in the art of perspective as well as mastery of the technique of oil painting. The low horizon and expanse of clouds evoke a traditional setting prevalent in Netherlandish painting of the seventeenth century (see example).

Jacob Isaacksz. van Ruisdael (1628/9–82), *View of Alkmaar*, c. 1675–80. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

In the early 1830s Bossuet worked as a civil servant, before being appointed professor of perspective at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels in 1835, a position he held for almost fifty years, after having published a two-volume book on the subject.

Jean Pierre François Lamorinière

(1828 Antwerp–Antwerp 1911)

***Plaine à l'infini (Plain to Infinity)*, 1895**

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Low horizon and uniform sky hanging over the nearly flat plain impart an abstract quality to this painting. The combination of atmospheric and traditional one-point perspective work beautifully here. The misty haze in the distance makes the plain appear to stretch infinitely into the distance, creating a perfect subject for contemplation.

Jean Pierre François Lamorinière

(1828 Antwerp–Antwerp 1911)

Paysage de Campine avec berger et moutons (Landscape in Kempen with Shepherd and Sheep), before 1895

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Born in Antwerp, Lamorinière studied at the city's Royal Academy of Fine Arts and then practiced open-air painting in the Campine (Kempen) and Ardennes regions. In 1853 he became one of the first Belgians to paint with the French artists in Barbizon. The solitary shepherd in the high fields, watching over his flock in the soft afternoon light, evokes a peaceful image of rural life in Belgium.

His alma mater in Antwerp appointed him professor in 1895, but he had to abandon the post when his vision failed a few years later. Lamorinière received many honors, including membership in the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Legion of Honor.

Frans Pieter Lodewijk van Kuyck

(1852 Antwerp–Antwerp 1915)

Marais au crépuscule (Marsh at Twilight), n.d.

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Van Kuyck's *Marsh* conveys his keen interest in light and color. Broad, visible brushstrokes reflect his focus on the process of making art. Painted in the open air, his direct observations of nature, like the shadow cast by the small boat, are richly detailed.

Van Kuyck was first taught by his father, Louis van Kuyck (1821–71), and then studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp under François Lamorinière (whose paintings are displayed nearby), an advocate of painting in the open air. He later became a teacher at the Academy, and served as deputy director there from 1895 until 1915. He was active in Antwerp politics and cultural affairs, and is credited with helping to establish Mother's Day in Belgium—the first in the world—with a pamphlet published in 1913.

In 1897 he became the president of a new artistic society with a social view, *L'Art dans la Vie Publique* (Art in Public Life). This group included Charles Mertens and Frans van Leemputten, who are also in this exhibition.

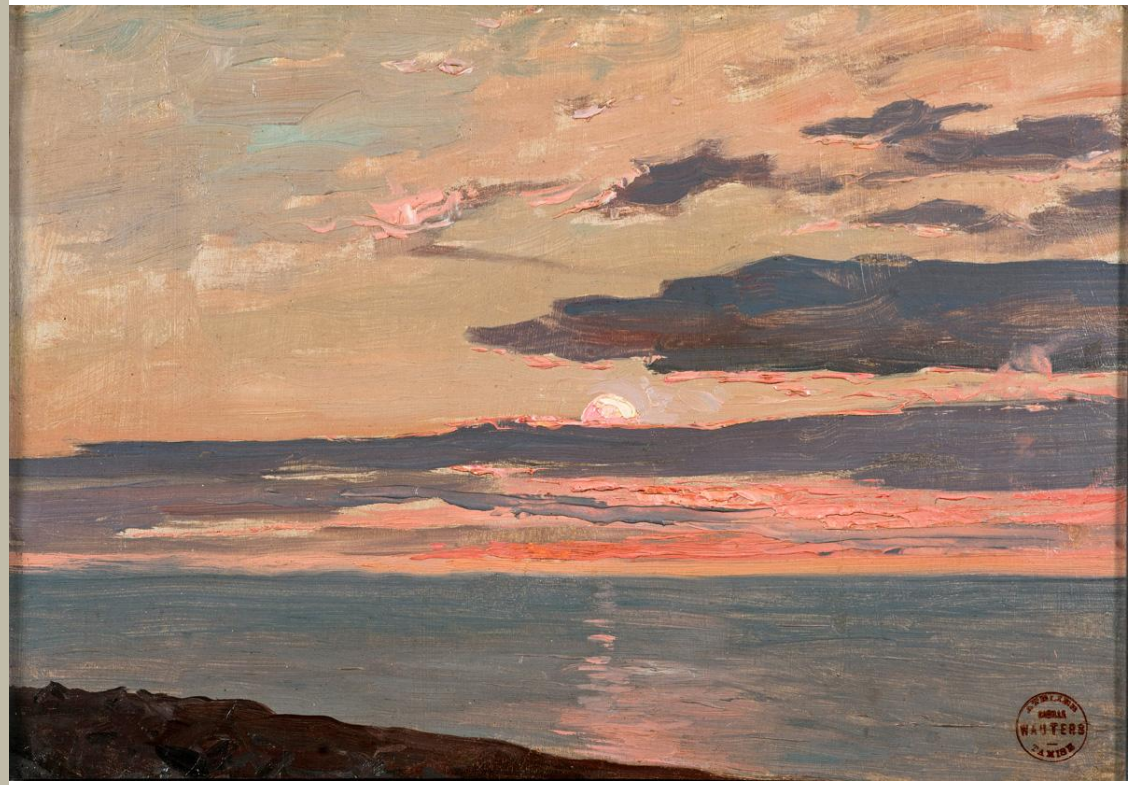
Camille Wauters (1856 Temse [Tamise]–Lokeren 1919)
Coucher de soleil (Sunset),

last quarter of the 19th century

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Wauters's *Sunset* is a fine example of Belgian landscape painters' focus on the effects of light engendered by local varieties of impressionism. It exemplifies his mastery of subtle color and has all the freshness of a quick sketch executed on the spot, but with a solid composition.

Wauters spent time at Barbizon and traveled extensively, from Scandinavia to Egypt. He was a founder of the exhibition society *Voorwaarts* (Forward) in Antwerp, an attempt to replace the official Salon.



Boats were a prominent motif in the art of the late nineteenth century, building on the symbolic use of ships as emblems of "the voyage of life" that emerged in the Romantic era. Shipping for industry and commerce was also a major focus of modernism. Belgian artists Vogels, Meyers, Degreef, and T'Scharner represent different aspects of this theme.

Isidore Meyers (1836 Buggenhout–Brussels 1917)

Au bord de l'eau (At the Water's Edge), last quarter of the 19th century

Oil on panel
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Meyers came under the influence of the French Barbizon painters during a stay in Paris in 1855. He adopted their practices of painting in the open air and of careful observation of nature and effects of light. Here he captures the coloristic subtleties of the sky and mirrored reflections in the water below. Two small figures stand on the shore, with a boat in dry dock behind them at right. A boat sails in at the left side of the canvas. Meyers's brushstrokes follow the contours of the land and ships, while the water's surface and distant trees are defined by parallel vertical strokes, creating an intricate surface texture.

Reviewers praised Meyers for "Conscientious notations of light refracted by the mist….It is of a penetrating poetry and of a delicate harmony."

In 1892, Meyers was made a Chevalier in the Order of Leopold by the King of Belgium, along with painters Victor Uytterschaut, Frans van Kuyck, and Frans van Leemputten, also in this exhibition.

Jean-Baptiste Degreef (1852 Brussels–Auderghem 1894)

Vue de l'Escaut (View of the Scheldt), n.d.

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

The monumental Gothic cathedral and bustling commercial docks of Antwerp are far in the distance, across the Scheldt River. Degreef has focused on a muddy dock with small boats. A couple sheltered by an umbrella strolls in the foreground at the right in this scene of realistic ordinariness. The muted atmosphere is subtle but richly colored, and the moisture-laden air is luminous.

Guillaume Vogels (1836 Brussels–1896 Ixelles)

Barque à Trouville (Ship at Trouville), late 1880s–early 1890s

Watercolor on paper
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

This exquisite watercolor depicts a small fishing boat in the harbor at Trouville in France. The blue-trimmed vessel lists to the side, as do other lightly sketched ships in the background—perhaps the aftermath of a coastal storm, or aground in low tide. Vogels's technique is bold and sketchy; he uses an opaque white to accent the ships. His focus was not so much to represent details of a site, but rather to capture the latent emotion of the scene.

From humble origins, Vogels began as a decorative painter, but under the influence of the French Barbizon School he focused on landscape painting. One of the founding members of the Brussels avant-garde group *Les XX* (The Twenty) in 1884, Vogels also joined its successor, *La Libre Esthétique* (The Free Aesthetic) in 1893. His energetic style led to severe criticism by the official establishment, which accused him of making his paintings "with a broom, like that of whitewashers and poster pasters."

By 1896, however, his vigorous style had been "officially consecrated" by the purchase of one of his landscapes by the Belgian government. Art critic and founder of *Les XX*, Octave Maus, declared that "What characterizes [Vogels's] art is the finesse and acuity of optical perception, wonderfully apt to grasp the infinite gradations of light."

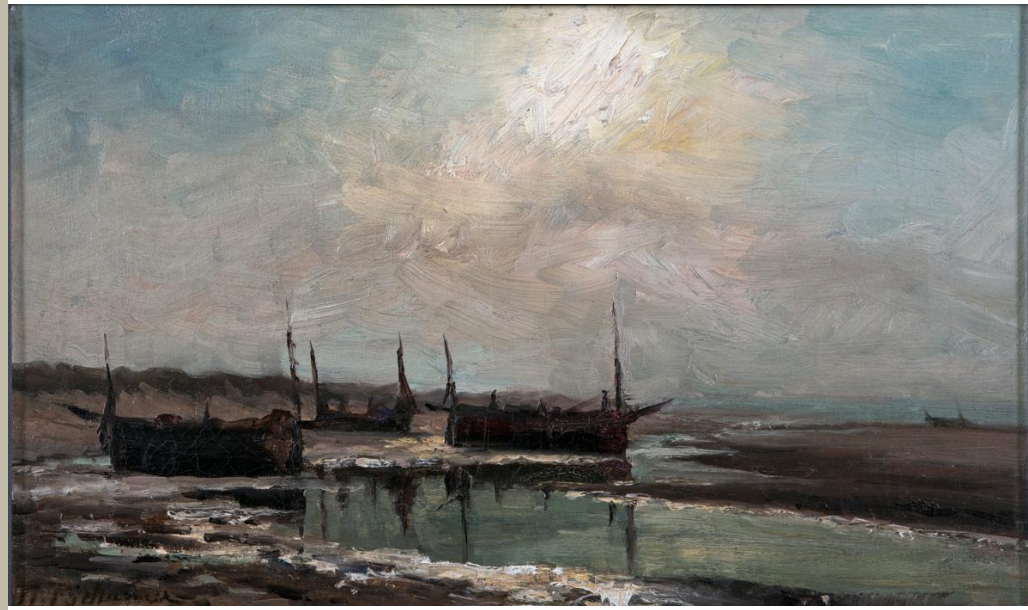
Théodore T'Scharner

(1826 Namur–Veurne [Furnes] 1906)

***Barques (Ships)*, last quarter of the 19th century**

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

The subtle tonalities of T'Scharner's style capture the luminosity of the sky and its reflections in the water below. Like fellow artist Félicien Rops (1833–98), T'Scharner was born in Namur where he received his first artistic training at the Academy. From 1850 to 1853 he traveled in California, producing drawings of scenes of the Gold Rush, and visited Brazil. He returned to Belgium in 1854, eventually settling in the coastal towns of Veurne and Koksijde. He often painted scenes of the North Sea like this one "whose melancholy was in accord with his meditative nature… [where] it was the infinity of spaces, the retreat of successive horizons, under moving skies, that exalted his soul."



Henri de Braekeleer (1840 Antwerp–Antwerp 1888)

L'Escaut près d'Anvers (The Scheldt near Antwerp), n.d.

Oil on paper mounted on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Henri de Braekeleer, *The Teniersplaats in Antwerp*, 1876. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen.

Although known today primarily for detailed interiors that feature city views through windows (see image), de Braekeleer also painted wonderful landscape scenes in the environs of Antwerp.

The juxtaposition here of a muddy riverbank with the distant silhouette of Antwerp's skyline of towers exemplifies his realism. Although derived from panoramic formats in Northern Baroque landscape paintings, the width of this small painting also must be indebted to the popularity of panoramic photographs in the nineteenth century.

De Braekeleer studied at the Antwerp Academy from the time he was fourteen. His uncle was the famous history painter Henri Leys (1815–69), and de Braekeleer learned much from him. De Braekeleer won a gold medal at the Brussels Salon in 1872, and a medal of honor at the World's Fair in Vienna in 1873.

Frans van Leemputten

(1850 Werchter–Antwerp 1914)

Impressions de l'Escaut (Impressions on the Scheldt), 1884

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

The Scheldt River near Antwerp was a recurring site in the works of many Belgian artists, including the realist Frans van Leemputten.

Fellow artist Constantin Meunier (1831–1905) had encouraged him to paint in the open air. Jules Dupré and Claude Monet also painted from boat studios to be closer to nature. In this painting, possibly a self-portrait, an engrossed artist seen from behind sketches on a pad that is barely visible to the viewer. With its large figure and partial view of the boat dominating the scene, the picture's cropping likely reflects the influence of recent innovations in photography.

Édouard Manet (1832–83), *Claude Monet Painting in His Boat Studio*, 1874. Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

Théodore T'Scharner

(1826 Namur–Veurne [Furnes] 1906)

Paysage avec étang (Landscape with Pond), last quarter of the 19th century

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

T'Scharner's primary interest here is the light effect of the sun bursting through the clouds, and its reflection in the surface of the pond below. Sketchy and spontaneous, it was probably painted outdoors.

In response to a query on impressionism, T'Scharner wrote that "Expressing what things have made us feel has always been the motive of painting....I sincerely believe that the Impressionists had the excellent result of illuminating the palette of many, of whom I readily call myself one of the converts."

T'Scharner found poetry in humble settings; he "happily expressed…the moving solitude of these regions of Silence: the sadness of the great marshes, the smile of the heather, the grave beauty of the ravined sandpits."

Théodore T'Scharner

(1826 Namur–Veurne [Furnes] 1906)

The Château d'Eysden, after 1870

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

In 1870, T'Scharner moved into the Château d'Eysden just over the Dutch border near Maastricht. The seventeenth-century castle was built on the site of a medieval one, and has considerable historic interest.

T'Scharner painted the castle and its grounds many times. Here, he focuses on the gatehouse in the foreground, silhouetting the château's towers against the evening sky with the glow of sunset lighting the clouds. A small figure in black adds a note of mystery to the scene. Above the house, branches of the trees blend and fade into the sky.

Théodore T'Scharner

(1826 Namur–Veurne [Furnes] 1906)

Canal avec moulin (Canal with Mill),

last quarter of the 19th century

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

T'Scharner was a member of the Free Society of Fine Arts (1868–76) in Brussels, which promoted artistic freedom and realist painting. He painted the villages and coast of Belgium in the style of early impressionism, with bright colors and painterly brushwork. This picturesque scene recalls the classic landscapes of the seventeenth century by Dutch and Flemish artists, especially as reworked by Romantics such as John Constable.

John Constable (1776–1837), *Dedham Lock and Mill*, 1820. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Louis-Joseph-Désiré Crépin

(1828 Fives [Lille]–Etterbeek 1887)

Le Marly, Edge of the Willebroeck Canal, 1877

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Louis Crépin painted at Tervuren with Joseph Coosemans, whose paintings hang nearby. He also was a founding member of the Free Society of Fine Arts in 1868. His painting *Le Marly* is an impressionistic depiction of an inn on the bank of the canal that runs from Brussels to the port of Antwerp. The Willebroeck Canal served commerce but also was popular for recreational excursions. This is a precious reminder of the natural environs in an area that is now largely developed with industrial plants and housing.

Bateau mouche between Brussels and Antwerp, docked at Marly.

Frans Binjé (1835 Liège–Schaerbeek 1900)

Paysage avec écluse (Landscape with Lock), n.d.

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Binjé was a self-taught artist who worked for the Belgian railway. Until his forties he painted only in his spare time. In 1874 he began working with artists of the School of Tervuren, and was especially influenced by Hippolyte Boulenger, also represented in this exhibition.

This landscape reveals the growing influence of the impressionists on him in its flowing and visible brushwork in the foreground (in contrast to the smoothly blended sky). Fellow Belgian painter Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921) praised Binjé's "delicacy of sentiment and bold colouring."

Louis-Joseph-Désiré Crépin

(1828 Fives [Lille]–Etterbeek 1887)

Canal à Bruxelles (Canal in Brussels), 1878

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Gilbert Radoux, photograph of the Senne in Brussels before it was covered, c. 1856.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the urban fabric of Brussels changed radically. The River Senne was covered and broad new boulevards cut through the city along the path of the old city walls. As in Paris during the same period, medieval areas of Brussels were demolished and modernized. While still important for commerce, canals were surpassed by railroads as the primary mode of transportation. Crépin's painting captures a moment in the city's history that will soon be lost.

Tervuren: Inspiration from Nature

Although Tervuren was the original nucleus for landscape painters in Belgium in this period, by the end of the century many artists were celebrating local sites throughout the country as a matter of national and regional pride. Léon Frederic favored rural vistas in the Ardennes, although he and Théodore T'Scharner also painted coastal scenes of the North Sea and the High Fens near Germany. Artists from Antwerp championed landscapes of the Scheldt River, and painters from Brussels found beauty in nearby parks and villages. The focus on local sites and the return to nature inspired the next generation to establish an important artists' colony in Laethem-Saint-Martin (Sint-Martens-Latem) near Ghent in the twentieth century.

Tervuren is only twelve miles east of Brussels in Flemish Brabant, separated by the Sonian Forest (Fôret de Soignes). The vast park at Tervuren is a remnant of the lost medieval castle of the dukes of Brabant, and is still a popular destination for Belgians (see nearby video). In 1897 it was a site for the Brussels International Exhibition, a world's fair that in part highlighted King Leopold II's personal property: the Congo Free State. The Royal Museum for Central Africa opened in the park in 1910 and has struggled to deal appropriately with the brutal legacy of its colonial past.

Théodore Verstraete (1850 Ghent–Antwerp 1907)
La viellée (The Vigil), 1888

Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

Like many of the artists in this exhibition, Verstraete studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, but he abandoned his academic training to paint directly from nature in the open air. Verstraete even built a mobile studio in order to paint landscapes on site. Reviewers described him as "a delicate artist, a gentle lover of nature," even "nervous" or "neurotic."

A founding member of dissident artist groups, *Les XX* (The Twenty) in Brussels and the *Cercle des XIII* (Circle of Thirteen) in Antwerp, he painted realist scenes of the rural poor. This darkly impressionistic landscape shows figures dressed in black trudging through the snow to keep vigil in a dying neighbor's house. The gentle snowflakes contrast with the stolid figures in their dark clothing.

His fellow artist Fernand Khnopff, writing in the *Studio* in 1897, suggested a spiritual dimension to these scenes of everyday life and the Belgian landscape: "Verstraete has treated landscape not from the colourist's point of view alone. He has grasped and recorded the spirit of the soil in its subtlest aspects and in his most characteristic manner, and with all possible delicacy and intensity of feeling revealed the close connection between Man and the Earth he inhabits."

Verstraete was awarded a gold medal at an 1897 exhibition in Munich, and at the 1900 exhibition in Paris.

Charles Mertens (1865 Antwerp–Calverley 1919)

Parc à huîtres en Zélande (Oyster Park in Zeeland), n.d.

Oil on cardboard
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

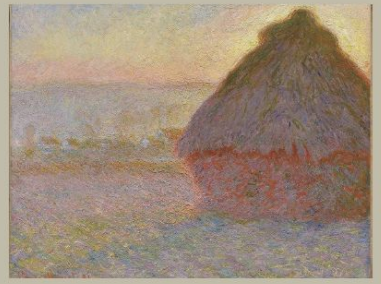
Trained in the Royal Academy in Antwerp, Mertens became an important representative of the Antwerp School around the turn of the century as a member of several artist groups: *Als Ik Kan* (The Best I Can), *Cercle des XIII* (Circle of Thirteen), and *Kunst van Heden* (Art of Today).

Here, in an overall gray-blue atmospheric tone, Mertens focuses on the cultivation of oysters in artificial beds along the coast of Zeeland in the Netherlands. Leasing of cultivating beds from the government began in 1870 to counteract a collapse of natural oyster stocks. This shift from wild-caught bivalves to the farmed variety flourished, but put many traditional fishermen out of work.

Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)

Haystack at Nafraiture, c. 1905

Oil on canvas on board
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust



Claude Monet, *Grainstack*, 1891.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Nafraiture is a small town in the southern Ardennes where Frederic spent many summers. He painted landscapes there, as well as studies of some of the rural citizens. This view of a conical grainstack in its field is his realist response to Claude Monet's famous series of *Grainstacks* (1890–91). Although Frederic's brushstrokes are broad and visible in the road and sky, his stack is more tightly defined and his color more natural and less prismatic than Monet's.

Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)

Dunes at Heist, 1905

Oil on canvas on board
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

This is a minimalist study of the sandy dunes on the Belgian coast, where the arc of the large dune at left is mirrored in the clouds coming in from the sea. Only sparse vegetation dots the landscape. These simple studies were praised in the weekly review published in Brussels, *L'Art Moderne*: "His last harvest was gathered on the coast, in the plains bathed in light unfurled to infinity under the moving skies, in the middle of the dunes of blond sand, on the edge of the shores bitten by the waves. He brings to these new studies the same penetration, the same concern for truth, the same probity as in his previous works, with more brilliance and force."

Léon Frederic (1856 Brussels–Schaerbeek 1940)
***Heist*,** 1905

Oil on canvas on board
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
Gift of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust

The sandy Belgian coast had long been popular with Belgian artists. In these two studies Frederic focuses on the undulating dunes near the resort town of Heist. Painted in the open air, he applies the paint freely and fluidly. Beyond the undulating dunes red-roofed houses can be seen as well as a typical church steeple on the Belgian coast.