
Potsdam, February 23, 2023

The Sun: Source of Light in Art
February 25, – June 11, 2023

On February 25, 2023, the exhibition *The Sun: Source of Light in Art* opens at the Museum Barberini. Conceived in collaboration with the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris, it is the first exhibition to explore the sun in art from antiquity to the present. The point of departure is Claude Monet's 1872 painting *Impression, Sunrise*, which gave the Impressionist movement its name over 150 years ago. The painting, which is now in the collection of the Musée Marmottan and is shown outside Paris only very rarely, will be on view in Potsdam for the first eight weeks of the exhibition.

The exhibition comprises 130 objects, with paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, prints, photographs, and videos by artists such as Sonia Delaunay, Otto Dix, Albrecht Dürer, Olafur Eliasson, Adam Elsheimer, Max Ernst, Caspar David Friedrich, Joan Miró, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch, Odilon Redon, Peter Paul Rubens, Katharina Sieverding, and William Turner. It includes loans from over sixty museums and private collections, among them the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, the Munchmuseet, Oslo, the Musée du Louvre, Paris, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and the Albertina, Vienna.

The first exhibition devoted to the sun in European art from antiquity to the present

As the source of warmth and light, a symbol of fertility, and a guarantor of life and growth, the sun is a universal theme. It played a central role in European art from earliest times, whether as the personification of divine powers, a protagonist in mythological narratives, an atmospheric element in landscape painting, or an intensifier of color in modern art. *The Sun: Source of Light in Art* is the first exhibition to explore representations of the sun in European art from antiquity to the present and showcase the ever-changing ways in which the sun has been perceived, studied, and interpreted for over 2,500 years.

Since the earliest documented cultures, the sun has been the focus of religious and mythological conceptions and was venerated as a symbol of inexhaustible power. The sun god Helios, and later Apollo, served as an allegory for rulers from Alexander the Great to Napoleon. The motif of the divine sun chariot and mythological stories such as the fall of Icarus or Phaethon inspired artists from centuries past to the present day. With Christianity, the identification of the sun with the Roman god *Sol invictus* (the unconquered sun) was

transmuted into the light symbolism of Christ. The solar star was no longer seen as an autonomous power, but as an element of the world created by God. Images of the Crucifixion show the sun as a witness in the heavens and integrate it into the event as a solar eclipse.

130 works by artists from Albrecht Dürer to Olafur Eliasson, Caspar David Friedrich, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch, and Peter Paul Rubens to Katharina Sieverding, William Turner and Félix Vallotton

The exhibition also explores the complex iconography of the sun in astronomy and esoteric thought and shows how artists, both past and present, have visualized the unity of the individual and the cosmos. In landscape painting, the sun gained importance from the early seventeenth century on and became a means of expressing atmosphere or mood. Around 1850, the sun emerged as the true subject matter of the Impressionists with their precise renderings of natural phenomena. After 1900, color began to be used more freely in painting and was employed with greater intensity in the depiction of landscape. From 1910 on, the visual experience of sunlight and scientific discoveries related to the perception of color played a role in the dissolution of the pictorial object, leading to abstract forms of representation.

“As a motif, the sun is found in all periods of European art and plays a role in the most diverse contexts – from religion to astrology to landscape painting. It’s all the more surprising that until now, the iconography of this important theme has not yet been explored. Our exhibition traces the constant fascination with the sun that artists since antiquity have expressed in their works,” explains Michael Philipp, Chief Curator of the Museum Barberini and curator of the exhibition.

The show brings together 130 works – including paintings, sculptures, bronzes, manuscripts, and prints – by artists such as Alice Boughton, Sonia Delaunay, Otto Dix, Albrecht Dürer, Olafur Eliasson, Adam Elsheimer, Max Ernst, Caspar David Friedrich, Hendrick Goltzius, Bernhard Heisig, Joan Miró, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch, Odilon Redon, Johann Rottenhammer, Peter Paul Rubens, Joachim von Sandrart, Katharina Sieverding, William Turner, Félix Vallotton, and Maarten de Vos. The collaboration with the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris was inspired by two paintings by Claude Monet: *Impression, Sunrise*, which gave its name to the Impressionist movement in 1874, and *The Port of Le Havre, Night Effect*. Monet painted both works in 1872 from a hotel room overlooking the port in his home city of Le Havre. He captured the view once by night, showing it as an energy-charged site of modernity, and again in the morning, awakening beneath a red sun. *Impression, Sunrise*, on loan from the Musée Marmottan and probably one of Monet’s most famous paintings, is shown only very rarely outside of Paris. For the Potsdam show, the Paris museum is

making an exception: the work will be presented in Potsdam for the first eight weeks of the exhibition.

The over sixty lenders to the show also include the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, the Munchmuseet, Oslo, the Musée du Louvre, Paris, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and the Albertina, Vienna.

“In 2024, the first joint exhibition of the Impressionists will be commemorated worldwide, for example with shows at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris and the National Gallery of Art in Washington as well as the international program *Destination Impressionisme*. We conceive of our *Sun* exhibition as the upbeat to the international anniversary year,” explains Ortrud Westheider, Director of the Museum Barberini. “The theme is traditionally very important for Potsdam, too, as a center of solar observation. The year 1874 saw the founding of the Astrophysical Observatory Potsdam, where researchers like Wilhelm Oswald Lohse studied sunspots. In 1922, the Einstein Tower designed by Erich Mendelsohn was completed on the Telegrafenberg and served as the site of experimental tests on Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity. To this day, the Einstein Tower is used for scientific research on the sun. Our program of events and our digital content explore the theme with talks, discussions, tours, and workshops.”

The Sun: Source of Light in Art is an exhibition of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam, and the Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris. In Paris, the show was entitled *Face au soleil. Un astre dans les arts* and was on view from September 21, 2022, to January 29, 2023. A symposium took place in 2021 in preparation for the exhibition. The extensive exhibition catalogue is published by Prestel Verlag and includes contributions by Nils Büttner, Matthias Krüger, Michael Philipp, Helene von Saldern, Ortrud Westheider, Hendrik Ziegler, and Michael F. Zimmermann.