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Networks of Impressionism:
A Digital Research Platform Reveals the Networks Behind Impressionism

Marking the tenth anniversary of Museum Barberini, *Networks of Impressionism* turns the spotlight on the people and relationships behind Impressionism. Artists, collectors, art dealers, and intermediaries all played a role in shaping the movement and spreading it internationally. But how were they connected? What journeys did paintings take before finding their way into museums and private collections? And what personal, economic, and social circumstances shaped their creation and reception? The digital research platform *Networks of Impressionism* brings together information from archives, publications, and databases. It links artworks to their provenance histories, the individuals and institutions associated with them, and the historical sources that document their past. In doing so, it makes connections accessible that, until now, could often only be reconstructed by piecing together information from widely dispersed documents.

Made possible by the **Hasso Plattner Foundation** and led by **Museum Barberini,** the platform was developed in collaboration with Navigating.art, the Wildenstein Plattner Institute, and international partner museums. At its launch, the platform takes as its starting point the Hasso Plattner Collection at Museum Barberini, comprising 115 works of French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Over time, it is intended to expand in collaboration with museums and research institutions around the world. Six digital interpretation projects further translate the research findings into a range of formats, from an audio guide and a literary audio piece to a graphic novel and a media installation at the museum.

The platform begins with the provenance histories of works in the Hasso Plattner Collection. These trace the journeys paintings have taken across countries and generations, bringing to light the people who acquired, brokered, exhibited, or researched them. The platform maps the networks of relationships among artists, collectors, dealers, and institutions from the 1850s through the 1950s. It thereby offers insight into the personal, economic, and social circumstances in which Impressionist art was created, circulated, collected, and received. In addition to provenance information and exhibition and publication records, the platform provides access to digitized historical sources, including exhibition and auction catalogues. By linking information directly to its documentary sources, it allows users to trace the evidence, critically assess existing records, and pursue new lines of inquiry.

Particular attention is given to women collectors, intermediaries, and art dealers, whose contributions have often remained largely overlooked in art history. Dedicated profiles bring their roles within the networks of Impressionism into view, even when historical sources identify them only by their husbands' names. Labels, stamps, and handwritten annotations on the backs of paintings provide further clues for provenance research and can help uncover previously unknown stages in an artwork's history. An interactive timeline, maps, and network visualizations offer different ways to explore the data. They show when and where individuals were active, which works they owned, and how they were connected to other figures in the art world. By linking artworks with digitized archival materials and scholarly publications, users can investigate the provenance of individual paintings as well as broader developments in the art market and the history of international collecting.

The platform's scholarly foundation was established in collaboration with the **Wildenstein Plattner Institute,** which makes extensive archival holdings and publications relating to Impressionist artists, collectors, and dealers accessible to researchers. A substantial portion of these resources is available online. The Institute also manages and publishes research findings produced by catalogue raisonné committees in New York and Paris. Among the catalogues raisonnés published online are those devoted to Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Maurice de Vlaminck. The research associated with these projects also encompasses the provenance histories of the individual works.

The technical platform was developed by **Navigating.art.** Its system has been used since 2021 for digital catalogues raisonnés published by the Wildenstein Plattner Institute and other institutions. It is built on a relational database and a standardized data model that enables research data to be linked and used across institutional boundaries. Navigating.art follows the FAIR principles, which call for research data to be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable, as well as established standards in provenance research. The platform brings together data and sources from different institutions while preserving their origins and respective research contexts. Information can be compared across collections and institutions, sources can be traced with precision, and historical relationships can be investigated collaboratively. In this way, the platform provides a foundation for cooperation among museums, collections, and research institutions across institutional boundaries.

By digitally connecting these resources, the platform opens up new possibilities for relating the histories of individual paintings to broader developments in Impressionism. Provenance chains can be traced, historical movements in the art market compared, and connections among individuals, artworks, and institutions followed over extended

periods of time. At the same time, previously overlooked figures and relationships can be brought into focus. Transparent documentation of sources is essential to this process. It enables researchers to verify findings, critically assess information, and contribute new insights. Networks of Impressionism is therefore conceived not simply as a digital reference resource, but as a foundation for ongoing scholarly exchange among researchers, museums, and collections around the world. The planned integration of international partner museums will gradually expand the body of knowledge available through the platform. Comparing holdings across collections will make it possible to investigate broader historical developments and raise new questions about the history, circulation, and reception of Impressionism.

networksofimpressionism.org

Ortrud Westheider, Director of Museum Barberini: “The Hasso Plattner Collection is a central point of departure for our scholarly work. With Networks of Impressionism, we are making the knowledge generated through this research accessible not only to scholars, but also inviting art enthusiasts to discover the history of Impressionism from new perspectives. Our goal is to continue developing the platform in collaboration with international collections and research institutions. In this way, we hope to create an international platform for the collaborative study of Impressionism – one that makes knowledge transparently accessible and fosters new forms of cooperation.”

Linda Hacka, Research Associate for Provenance Research at Museum Barberini: “Provenance and art market research relies on sources that are often scattered across archives, libraries, and collections. Evaluating these materials is time-consuming, particularly when reconstructing complex ownership histories or tracing relationships among dealers, collectors, and institutions. Networks of Impressionism connects this information and provides transparent access to the underlying sources. This makes it easier to trace the often more than 150-year histories of individual paintings and place them within broader historical contexts.”

Six digital projects translate the research behind Networks of Impressionism into a variety of interpretive formats. Bringing together art, literature, photography, sound, and interactive technologies, they offer new ways to explore the people, places, and stories behind the paintings. From a graphic novel to an immersive installation at Museum Barberini, each project offers a distinct way of experiencing the networks of Impressionism.

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