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RENOIR'S *ON THE SHORE OF THE SEINE* RETURNS TO THE BMA IN SPECIAL EXHIBITION CELEBRATING COLLECTOR SAIDIE MAY

*More than 60 years after its theft from the BMA, Renoir painting is reunited with
other artworks bequeathed to Museum by visionary Baltimore collector*

Museum research confirms landscape was painted on a table linen

BALTIMORE (UPDATED March 27, 2014)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) is pleased to announce that Pierre-Auguste Renoir's painting *On the Shore of the Seine* (c. 1879) has returned to public view in a special exhibition presented March 30 – July 20, 2014. ***The Renoir Returns*** reunites the diminutive painting that was stolen 63 years ago with more than 20 artworks from the extraordinary collection of Saidie May. This visionary Baltimore collector purchased the Renoir in 1925, and gave the BMA masterworks by Juan Gris, Paul Klee, Joan Miró, and others that will be featured in the exhibition along with archival documents. The exhibition is generously supported by PNC Foundation. Additional support is provided by Fireman's Fund Insurance Company.

"We are thrilled to welcome this charming painting back to the Museum, to re-introduce it to the people of Baltimore, and to reunite it with the many masterpieces from Saidie May's collection," said BMA Director Doreen Bolger. "As we celebrate the BMA's 100th anniversary this year, we are particularly excited to honor May's legacy as one of the BMA's most generous donors."

Highlights of the two-gallery exhibition organized by Senior Curator of European Painting & Sculpture Katy Rothkopf include masterworks such as Piet Mondrian's *Composition V* (1927), Paul Klee's *Traveling Circus* (1937), Joan Miró's *Portrait No. 1* (1938), and André Masson's *There Is No Finished World* (1942), which demonstrate May's role as an early champion of pivotal 20th-century artists. Also on view is an oil sketch by Georges Seurat that May purchased from the same gallery on the same day as the Renoir painting, and a self-portrait by Edgar Degas that was acquired by the BMA with funds received from the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company and Saidie May's bequest following the claim of the Renoir's theft. Examples of May's own artwork and that of her companion and fellow artist Alfred Jensen are presented as well.

New research conducted by the BMA's conservation and textile departments confirms part of Saidie May's story about Renoir painting the landscape on a linen napkin at a restaurant on the Seine for his mistress. Since Renoir was not married at the time, there is no conclusive information about the identity of his mistress, but the surface of the painting is in fact a linen damask with an elaborate geometric weave. It was unusual for painters to use this type of fabric as a background, but very common for table linens of that period. It turns out to have been a good choice, as linen increases in strength when wet and is smoother than wool and cotton. The painting returned to the museum in very good condition and only required a light cleaning before its display.

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RENOIR'S ON THE SHORE OF THE SEINE

On the Shore of the Seine is a 5 ½ -by-9 inch oil on linen painting created by Renoir c. 1879 with the bright colors and expressive brushwork that exemplify the artist's high Impressionist style and technique during that period. The small painting was purchased by Saidie May and her second husband Herbert May from the Parisian art gallery Bernheim-Jeune in November 1925. The couple installed the work in their New York apartment. Following the couple's divorce, May retained the painting and later gave it to the BMA on long-term loan in 1937. May died in spring 1951, bequeathing her collection to the BMA. The painting was stolen from an exhibition in the galleries in November 1951, while her estate was still in probate. It resurfaced at an auction house in Alexandria, Virginia in 2012, which reported it was found at a flea market in West Virginia. In January 2014, a federal judge granted ownership of the Renoir painting back to the Museum. Details about the theft and where the painting was for more than 60 years remain a mystery.

SAIDIE ADLER MAY

Saidie Adler May (1879-1951) is considered one of the BMA's most generous donors. She was deeply immersed in art both as a collector and practitioner for much of her adult life and built a remarkable collection of nearly 900 objects ranging from the Italian Renaissance through Abstract Expressionism. Aware that fellow Baltimore collectors Claribel and Etta Cone predominantly collected works by early 20th-century French artists, May focused much of her attention on the younger generation of Surrealist and other European and American avant-garde artists. The complementary nature of the two eminent Baltimore collections ensured the BMA's distinguished place among national presenters of 20th-century art. After her sister Blanche died in 1941, May donated funds for the creation of a Members' Room for Modern Art dedicated to her sister's memory and selected artworks from her collection to be displayed there. May was also a strong advocate for art education and donated funds for the Saidie A. May Young People's Art Center that opened at the Museum in 1950. Encompassing galleries, classrooms, art studios, and an auditorium, the center made the BMA one of the first museums in the country to have such a large space dedicated to children's education. This commitment will continue when the museum opens its new center for learning and creativity in 2015, providing innovative spaces for visitors of all ages to explore and experience the arts.

ABOUT THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) is home to an internationally renowned collection of 19th-century, modern, and contemporary art. Founded in 1914 with a single painting, the BMA today has 90,000 works of art—including the largest holding of works by Henri Matisse in the world. The Museum is currently undergoing an unprecedented \$28 million renovation to provide visitors with a more welcoming environment and more imaginative and inspiring encounters with art. The BMA is remaining open throughout the multi-year project so that visitors can enjoy its outstanding selection of European and American painting and sculpture from the 17th through 20th centuries and the newly reinstalled Contemporary Wing with 14 galleries showcasing the art of our time. Two beautifully landscaped gardens display an array of 20th-century sculpture that is an oasis in the city. The museum's 100th anniversary will be celebrated in November 2014 with the reopening of the grand historic entrance designed by John Russell Pope and a beautiful new presentation of the museum's distinguished collection of American art. Subsequent reopenings include expanded galleries for the African and Asian art collections and a new learning and creativity center that will open in 2015. Since 2006, the BMA has eliminated general admission fees so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.