

COUNTRY LIFE

MASTERPIECES FROM THE MELLON COLLECTION

FROM THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



Hyena (or Hyaena) with a Groom on Newmarket Heath,
 George Stubbs (1724-1806), around 1765-1767, oil on canvas, 101,9 127,3 cm
 © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA)

True to the mission of Fondation François Sommer, the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature explores the different aspects of the relationship that humans have with animals and natural spaces. In its own way, art conveys the changes in our ecosystem by translating and orientating the perception of successive generations of observers and creators.

The exhibition *Country Life – Masterpieces from the Mellon collection from the VMFA* revisits a moment in western civilisation associated with Industrial Revolution and the rise of the upper class, which tended to turn the countryside in a place of leisure. According to the model of Country life, which came out of British culture, the land and domesticated animals – horses in particular – saw their productive value associated with recreational value. The countryside became a place of leisure for an entire social class coming generally from cities and fostering nostalgia for an idealised form of rural life.

In England at the end of the 18th century, equestrian sports went through remarkable development (races, hunting parties). Paradoxically, this change coincided with the moment when burgeoning industry gradually imposed the supremacy of horsepower over its animal competition. An artistic genre that had a particular strong presence in the British school, sporting painting reflected this passion of the dominant social group. This class spread its cultural model throughout other western nations through the Anglophilia that marked the 19th century. On the other side of the Channel, French painters, impressionists in particular, portrayed another aspect of country life. They showed how the rural spaces near cities were filled with the middle class who enjoyed outdoor activities that were extolled for their benefits by hygienists' theories.

Continuing on with a family tradition, the multimillionaire and art lover Paul Mellon (1907-1999) fervently expanded his art collection. Symptomatically, the work that he collected shows his attachment to an increasingly extinct way of life. Of course, Mellon is connected to the British tradition of his mother, but his father's legacy drew him into the world of American industry and finance. Endowed with great wealth and devoted to a social life in the midst of the business world, he still chose a somewhat rural lifestyle. With his wife, Bunny, they sought to make for themselves a life as Gentlemen Farmers in the Virginia countryside. On their Oak Spring estate, Bunny tried her hand at gardening while Paul bred racehorses. Covering the walls of their cottage was their collection of paintings that illustrated this dream-like connection to nature and those at odds with industrial agriculture, which at the same time, was radically transforming the rural countryside.

In an exceptional exhibition, the master works that they collected and that have been loaned by Virginia Museum of Fine Arts are now on display at the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature. They can be viewed from an art history perspective, but they also show western culture's awakening to a new sensibility towards nature at the same time as the rise of industrial development and urbanisation.

PRactical INFORMATIONs

62, rue des Archives
 75003 Paris
 The museum is open every day
 except Mondays and holidays,
 from 11AM to 6PM, from 11AM
 to 9:30PM on Wednesdays
 Regular ticket: 8 euros
 Discount ticket: 6 euros

PRess SHOWING

Monday, September 3, 2018

CONtACT

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