

# Le Forum Arte

## “American Art ’Round Paris”

A Smithsonian American Art Museum Tour

May 2004

Journal by  
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### “AARP”

Far from being an indication of the average age of our fellow SAAM travelers, the above title embraces our extraordinary experience - *“American Art ’Round Paris.”*

Paris, the “City of Lights” and all kinds of other sensuous experiences, was never prettier, never more inviting. With perfect weather and great friends, we turned this particular fairy tale into an immersion of unforgettable art, champagne, food, architecture and horticulture. The interplay of art, camaraderie and all we sought to engage in played out in mental and poetic games in which everything seemed to be related, yet subject to illusion. Four days is probably all any mortal can endure in such magical surroundings.

In the eighteen years of Art Forum’s existence, this was our first international foray. Annie Cohen-Solal, author of *Painting American*, played a key role in planning and guiding our odyssey. We stayed at the magnificent Plaza Athénée on avenue Montaigne, very near the Pont d’Alma. Including SAAM staff, there were forty in our party; all serious about art and thrilled to be part of this extraordinary experience.

### Wednesday, May 12

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*Monet’s house at Giverny*

Judith and I arrived at Charles de Gaulle airport at 7:30a.m., on Wednesday, May 12. The combination of an extended delay on the tarmac at Dulles, slow movement through security and baggage claim in Charles de Gaulle and heavy commuter traffic in Paris caused us to miss our 8:45 a.m. bus from the Plaza Athénée to Giverny. It was probably never possible to make that fast a turn-around, but, not to be deterred, we “hailed” a taxi to catch up with our group.

The gardens at the Musée Claude Monet are without parallel, both those that surround the lily ponds and the more formal ones in front of Monet’s restored house with its pink, crushed brick façade. Monet was, as we all know, the leader of the French Impressionist School. He provided an enchanting home for his family from 1883 to 1926. Recently, a Museum of American Art has been added to the other attractions at Giverny. We had lunch at Terra Café and briefly took in their special exhibition: *Edward Hopper: The Parisian Years, 1906-1910.*



*The Moore's at Giverny*



On the way back to Paris, we stopped at Chateau de la Mormaire. This exquisite country home of Francois and Maryvonne Pinault, boasts extensive, outdoor sculpture and topiary gardens featuring significant works by Picasso, Henry Moore, David Smith, Richard Serra and many more. Superb!

Back at the Plaza Athénée, we had thirty minutes to shower, change, reclaim our passports and present ourselves at the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. The wife of the French Secretary of State (His Excellency Minister Michel Barnier) welcomed us and led a tour through two floors of this seat of French cultural diplomacy. It proved to be a treasure trove of art, including paintings from Vauchalet and Le Fauconnier, Gobelins tapestries and clocks from Paillard. Of special personal interest were two paintings by Theodore Gudin, father and teacher of Henriette, who painted our own prized seascape. Foreign Minister, Barnier was president of the French Olympic Committee in 1992, and along with Jean Claude Killy, led the unsuccessful quest to bring the Winter Games to France in 1994. Then, as if we hadn't already done enough, we boarded *Le Bretagne* for a dinner cruise on the River Seine. With the skyline of Paris as a backdrop and the Eiffel tower sparkling above us, we had an ideal vantage point for basking in the architecture and ambience of the *City of Lights*. It was good to be back.



*Eiffel Tower at night*



*Aboard Le Bretagne*

## Thursday, May 13 – A “Quint” fecta of Art!

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We started at the rue Vaugirard, the home of Andre and Claude Bernheim, where on one floor, there were works by Rauschenberg, Twombly, Marden, Dine, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Nevelson, Kline, Thibaud, Picasso and many others. The icing on the cake was a pair of Bösendorfer pianos!

Next, we went to the Musée du Louvre to see a special exhibition of the drawings of Jean-Auguste Ingres. Sabine de la Rochefoucauld, from the Louvre’s Department of Development, took us on a whirlwind tour which featured paintings by Ingres, Delacroix, and David - everyone’s favorite, the incomparable “Winged Victory”—and some newly-excavated parts of this unique institution. Breathless and excited as we were, we recovered at lunch at the Café Marly, overlooking I. M. Pei’s controversial glass pyramid and the museum’s otherwise classical exterior! I love them both!



*Musée du Louvre, the courtyard*

Now for the coup de grace! We were invited to the Left Bank home of Monsieur et Madame Jean-Pierre Marcie-Rivière. Our charming hosts shared with us two floors of the most incredible collection of modern and contemporary art and furniture, together with an extensive selection of “to-die-for” works by Bonnard and Vuillard. I was personally quite blown away!

The rue de l'Université home of Bernard and Clotilde Herbo-Bacri presented a different, but equally stimulating challenge. Their home is comprised of two floors crammed with contemporary art by Kieffer, Gorky, Schnabel, Warhol, Sherman, Giacometti, Richter and others, together with furniture by Palladino and Nikki de Saint Phalle. In addition, a few exquisite works by Clouet and Cranach were sprinkled amongst the “moderns”. Just when I think I'm beginning to adjust, I get a challenge like this. Across the street in a gallery window, Judith and I were attracted to a seascape by a contemporary French artist. Maybe it was just self defense!



*Le Petit Salon*

Finally, to complete an exceptional day of art, we spent the evening at the Musée d'Orsay with its permanent collection of masterpieces from 1800-1916. Originally built to accommodate trains needed to bring visitors to the 1900 Exposition Universelle, architect Gae Aulenti has transformed this wonderful railway station into one of the world's most popular museums. (Just wait until the world gets to see the majestic transformation of Washington's Patent Office Building in July 2006!) Curator Françoise Heilbrun led us through the current photography exhibition, *Landscapes and Nature*. Judith was in seventh heaven. In their beautiful private dining room, Petit Salon, we dined elegantly while once again overlooking the Seine.

## Friday, May 14 – Politics and Art.

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Most of the group started the morning at the beautiful Musée Maillol. They admired Aristide Maillol's drawings, engravings, paintings, sculptures and decorative objects, and visited with Dina Vierny, Maillol's former model and muse. I walked to 25 avenue Matignon to visit Claude Bebear, Chairman of the Advisory Board of AXA Group, the only French member of the Committee to Encourage Corporate Philanthropy.

I caught up with the group at Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre George Pompidou, France's collection of art from 1920 until the present. While this building is not every Frenchman's favorite architecture, there is just so much wonderful modern art to see inside. Our group magically materialized for lunch at the (new-to-us) restaurant Georges, with its sweeping and breathtaking views of the city of Paris. After yet another superb lunch, we ventured forth on our most exciting guided tour! Olivier, a "Conferencier," led us through the temporary exhibition, Joan Miró, 1917-1934. It is a wonderful exhibit, but we were completely captivated by Olivier's passion for, and knowledge of the subject. We then made a final stop at the Fondation Pierre Bergé Yves Saint-Laurent, where we split into two groups, taking turns seeing the iconic fashions in storage, and selected fashions and related works by Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, and Warhol.

That evening, we joined The Honorable Howard Leach, U.S. Ambassador to France, at the Paris American Club's gala dinner at the Cercle de l'Union Interalliée on rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Black tie and all, we met charming, interesting people with mixed feelings about Franco-American relations, including the author of a new book on "anti-Americanism." The keynote speaker was Doctor Bernard Kouchner who, I thought, took a pro-American position. Many see him as a future president of France.



*Betsy Broun, Dina Vierny and son*

## Saturday, May 15 – The most unusual is yet to come.

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In Garches, a short distance from Paris, we visited Denyse and Philippe Durand-Ruel, heir of 19<sup>th</sup> century dealer Paul Durand-Ruel who founded a market for French Impressionist painters in America. And what did we see? – an extraordinary country house (surrounded by a public golf course) with a master collection of modern, contemporary and impressionist works spread over four floors. It was amazing! The large, airy rooms absorbed the diversely eclectic art to create comfortable, homey spaces. The view from every window was of a charming garden with wonderful wisteria and chestnut trees in bloom.



*Le Cyclop*

Our next stop was in a wooded area in the heart of Milly-la-Forêt, where we came upon Le Cyclop, a monumental 1991 open-air sculpture by Jean Tinguely and Nikki de Saint Phalle (and about ten others). Standing over 22 meters high, weighing over 300 tons with a reinforced concrete foundation of the same weight, this impressive work defies all description! It has a glass face with running water, moving parts, an interior theatre and toilet, chimes, a boxcar on top, unusual noises, four oaks growing through a labyrinth of structural steel and effigies!

What's the symbolism? As I saw it, we had an orchestra (team) of artists using "rejected materials" to create a "tribute to nature" and the environment. This immense folly was started in 1969, took ten years to construct and another fifteen years to finally complete. If nothing else, it represents an amazing commitment on the part of the artists who took no funds from the state and are continuing to maintain the sculpture today.

We then enjoyed a sumptuous luncheon (with champagne, white and red wine) in a charming country inn and visited the workshops of French sculptors François-Xavier and Claude Lalanne in Ury, near the Fontainebleau Forest. Our hosts had produced yards of mostly bronze animals of all descriptions as well as intricately designed aluminum furniture. They are represented by one of our members, Gerry Peters. A beautiful drive back to Paris took us through the region of the Barbizon artist colony, where American artists congregated in the mid-1880s, gaining insight from French peers and forming alliances and partnerships that would become key to the development of American art.



*Sculpture in Fontainebleu*

Our final evening was spent at 6 rue de Tournon, residence of Laurent and Daisy Prevost-Marcilhacy. This was a typical Parisian early 18<sup>th</sup> century house between a courtyard and garden on the Left Bank. Actually, the plot dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Our hosts were charming and shared with us the history of their house, and their collection of rare Louis XIV interior decorations, beautiful tapestries and Chinese porcelains. We were treated to a candlelight, Tattinger Cuvee Prestige champagne dinner of:

*Saint-Honoré de thon et de daurade*  
*Navarin printanier de lotte aux*  
*petit legumes confits*

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*Fromage (et Baron de Brane 2000 – Margeaux)*  
*Couronne glacée aux fruits rouges*

Heaven! Particularly if you like fish! It was truly wonderful! Just to make things a bit more interesting, the electricity failed shortly after dinner started, so the candles took on added importance. (The champagne was already crucial!) Incidentally, our charming host had no trouble finding his wine cellar in the black-out but couldn't locate the fuse box!

## Sunday, May 16

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Having been spoiled by the luxurious service of the Plaza Athénée, Judith and I elected to walk a block and a half to a little corner shop overlooking the Seine for a breakfast sanity check. Fortified with *The Sunday Times* (printed in Brussels), we felt pretty smug and more than a little sorry to leave this beautiful city and its surroundings. Our expectations had been exceeded. We had immersed ourselves in art of all kinds, both American and European. We had been re-united with Paris and old friends and had made new ones. Bonus "take-aways"?...lights, horticulture, the majestic Seine, and a few extra pounds.

What's next? Eight hours on UAL #915; unpacking; a day and a half of serious work in NYC; haircut and re-packing for a whole new adventure in China and Cambodia!

**“If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.”**

- Ernest Hemingway