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# Souvenirs and Fêtes Champêtres: William Allan Coats's Collection of 19th-Century French Paintings

Frances Fowle

In 1889 Andrew Carnegie warned that 'the man who dies leaving behind him millions of available wealth, which was his to administer during life, will pass away "unwept, unhonored and unsung"'.<sup>1</sup> The industrialist William Allan Coats (1853–1926) died in 1926 leaving an estate of nearly four million pounds, the equivalent of just over £181 million today (Fig.1). A member of the Coats cotton dynasty, at the time of his death he was one of the wealthiest men in Britain. He came from a family of devout Baptists who were driven by a strong work ethic and spent a large part of their fortunes on building schools and libraries and on improving conditions for those less fortunate than themselves. By contrast, in William's case there is little remaining evidence of his philanthropy, but we do know that he spent his money on more self-indulgent pursuits such as sailing and art. When he died in 1926, almost as Carnegie had prophesied, his passing was acknowledged by only a short notice in the local newspaper. By contrast, his father Thomas's coffin was followed by an entourage of 10,000 mourners, including 8,000 children; and even though it was pouring with rain the funeral cortege took half an hour to pass through the gates of Paisley cemetery.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless William deserves to be remembered for his magnificent art collection, now widely dispersed. He was fortunate to be born into one of the most successful and wealthy families in Britain at the end of the

rough date for photo?



1. William Allan Coats.  
Private Collection

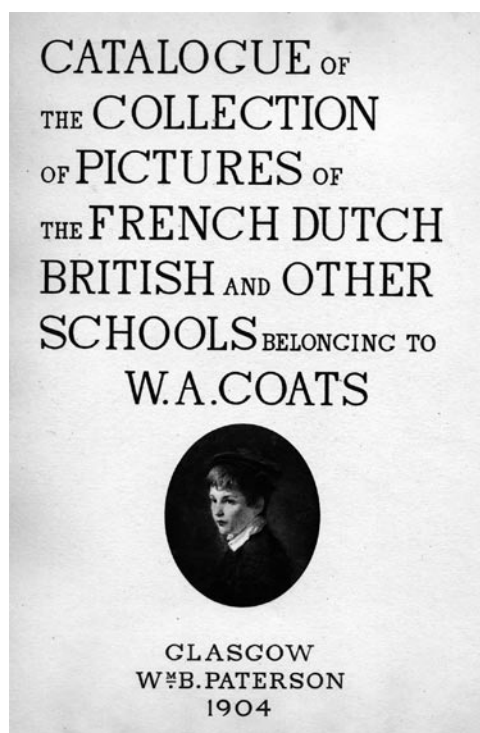


century, so that, as we shall see, he had not only the wherewithal but also the leisure time to indulge his passion for collecting. Although it is on Coats's collection of modern European art that this paper focuses, it was for his 'fine collection of old masters' that he was chiefly known.<sup>3</sup> He was the owner of Johannes Vermeer's *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* the only religious painting and one of the very few early works by Vermeer (Fig.2). This painting was gifted to the National Gallery of Scotland in 1927, by Coats's sons Thomas and Jack, a year after their father's death. He also owned the portrait of the family of *Jan Breughel the Elder* by Peter Paul Rubens, painted c.1612 (Courtauld Institute Gallery, London) and had a fine collection of 18th-century portraits, including George Romney's *Portrait of Emma Lady Hamilton* (National Maritime Museum, London) and pictures by Raeburn, Gainsborough, Hoppner, Reynolds

2. Johannes Vermeer,  
*Christ in the House of Mary  
and Martha*, c.1654–5, oil  
on canvas.

National Gallery of  
Scotland, Edinburgh

and Lawrence. His collection of Dutch old masters included still lifes by Kalf and van Beyeren, works by Hals, Koninck, Teniers and Terborch and five works attributed to – but certainly not all by – Rembrandt. He also formed an important collection of 19th-century art. He owned several works by Bonington, Constable and Géricault and two works by or attributed to Whistler. But, like most Scottish collectors of the period he was interested primarily in the artists of the Barbizon and Hague Schools.



3. Frontispiece of the 1904 catalogue.

*Author's collection*

We are fortunate that in 1904 Coats published an illustrated catalogue of works in his collection (Fig.3).<sup>4</sup> He also preserved a surprising number of receipts, almost all relating to purchases of modern French pictures during the 1890s.<sup>5</sup> We can tell from these that he acquired a number of works by artists such as Narcisse Diaz dela Peña and Charles Jacque that are not included in the 1904 catalogue. We can also tell that his main dealer during this period was Thomas Lawrie & Son at 85 St Vincent Street, Glasgow. From the late 1890s he became a regular client of the dealer Alex Reid, and there are records of his purchases in the Reid Gallery stockbooks, now stored in the Tate archive, dating from 1899 to 1911. After this period he bought mainly from W.B. Paterson, the brother of Glasgow Boy James Paterson. In 1927, the year after Coats's death, the entire collection of 341 works was exhibited by Paterson at the Galleries of the Royal Society of British Artists in Suffolk Street, London.<sup>6</sup> In addition,

there are inventories of the collection taken around this period which give us an idea of where Coats actually hung his pictures. Like many wealthy Scots of his generation, Coats died intestate and most of the collection was eventually sold at Christie's in June 1927 or at a later sale in April 1935.<sup>7</sup>

Even a cursory glance at the Coats catalogues reveals that there were certain artists for whom he had an obsession. His collection included 31 works by the Marseilles artist Adolphe Monticelli, the same number of works by the Hague School artist Johannes Bosboom and about 20 pictures by Camille Corot. From about 1907 onwards he began collecting contemporary Scottish art and by 1926 owned no fewer than 45 works by Joseph Crawhall and 28 drawings and watercolours by James Paterson.

I wish to focus in this paper on Coats's collection of 19th-century French art, much of which was formed by 1901, the year of the second Glasgow International Exhibition. My aim is to assess how typical Coats was as a collector and to examine the extent to which he was influenced in his choice of pictures not only by dealers but also by prevailing taste and contemporary criticism. However, before exploring in more detail Coats's collection of modern French art, I want to discuss briefly his background, in order to give a sense, first, of the source and extent of his wealth and, second, of his character and upbringing.

### The Coats Family

Born in 1853, William Allan Coats was one of eleven children and the fourth of six sons of Thomas Coats of Ferguslie (1809–83). His grandfather, James Coats (1774–1857), was from a simple weaver's family but was well educated, as well as being physically strong. (At the age of 22, he walked all the way home from London to Paisley.) He prospered as a weaver, making a living from the Paisley shawl industry and from the production of Canton Crape. Canton Crape requires yarn with a particular twist and in 1826 James Coats built a small cotton spinning mill at Ferguslie, in Paisley, where he began producing his own thread.<sup>8</sup>

In 1830 James's oldest sons, James (1803–45) and Peter (1808–90), took over the running of the company and Thomas joined them two years later. At that date the mill was just 63 feet in length.<sup>9</sup> By 1850 it had expanded to 385 feet and was powered by a huge 400 horse-power steam engine. By the end of the century it was 760 feet long. The turning point

came in 1839 when a fourth brother, Andrew, moved to the United States and established a flourishing export business. The firm of J. & P. Coats expanded rapidly, aided not only by steam power, but also by the invention of the first domestic sewing machines in the 1840s, and by the Coats's decision to manufacture high quality six-cord cotton thread. They were not the only company to manufacture six-cord cotton, but they captured the market thanks to their sheer efficiency and scrupulous honesty. By the mid 1850s J. & P. Coats was a household name. Celebrities of the period such as William Thackeray and even Napoleon III visited Paisley and were given guided tours of the Ferguslie mills. In the early 1860s the American Civil War disrupted the flow of business, but James Coats, Peter's oldest son, moved to New York and helped Andrew to set up the first Coats mills at Pawtucket, Rhode Island.<sup>10</sup> By 1886 the business had expanded to Montreal and St Petersburg in Russia. Ten years later the firm took over its three British rivals, including the Paisley firm of Clark & Co., with the result that J. & P. Coats became the biggest thread-making firm in the world.<sup>11</sup>

One of the secrets of the Coatses' success was their strong work ethic and strict moral principles. They were a family of Baptists, regular churchgoers and very disciplined in their approach to life. William's father, Thomas, was a man of strong religious principles and his uncle, Peter, was a Director of such worthy bodies as the Paisley society for the reclamation of fallen women. Thomas Coats donated a large amount of money towards improving living conditions and establishing schools for his employees. He was the first chairman of the Paisley School Board, which was set up in 1873, and he funded the Paisley Observatory and the Fountain Gardens. After his death in 1883 the family commissioned Hippolyte Blanc to design the large Baptist church that now dominates Paisley, in memory of their father.<sup>12</sup> William's older brother James, who took over as Director of the family company after his father's death, regularly gave money towards the upkeep of the local schools, as well as the hospital and the Observatory. He donated free schoolbags to Paisley schoolchildren and gave books for the blind to the Paisley library; and each year he sent Christmas gifts to all the lighthouse keepers in Scotland. Their uncle, Peter Coats, was also extremely philanthropic and in 1870 he founded Paisley public library and museum and paid for its extension in 1882.<sup>13</sup>

This was William Allan Coats's background and it was expected from the outset

that he would join the family company and work for his living. As a young man he was interested in mining as well as textiles and he worked for an entire year in the coal pits before joining J. & P. Coats. In 1885 he was involved in the formation of the Cardiff Steam Collieries and he invested a large amount of money in the firm.<sup>14</sup> However, his main interest was in the family business and he was one of the original directors when J. & P. Coats floated on the stockmarket in 1890. In 1891 he was appointed as one of four directors of the American Business Committee and he remained on the board until 1900.<sup>15</sup>

Despite his strong work ethic and business commitments William had comparatively more leisure time than his father and uncles, especially after 1900. He listed his hobbies as sailing and 'cultivating his artistic tastes' and he was happiest when he was either buying pictures or sailing on the Clyde. His obituary describes him as 'an enthusiastic yachtsman' and in later life he owned a steam yacht, *The Queen of Scots*, and a ketch, *The Druid*, which he acquired in 1914.<sup>16</sup> William inherited his love of sailing from his older brothers James, Thomas and George, all of whom raced on the Clyde. James owned six yachts and their younger brother Andrew sailed to the Arctic in 1898 in his steam-yacht *Blen-cathra*. In 1902 James and Andrew financed William Bruce's Antarctic expedition, as a result of which an area of Antarctica was given the name 'Coats Land'. Later in 1908 William's nephew Thomas Glen-Coats won a gold medal for sailing at the Olympic Games.<sup>17</sup>

#### **W.A. Coats's modern art collection**

William Coats began collecting around 1890, the year that J. & P. Coats floated on the stockmarket, making the Coats brothers phenomenally wealthy. Two years earlier, he had married Agnes Muir, the daughter of Sir John and Lady Muir of Deanston House, Perthshire. Their first child, Thomas, was born in October 1889 and John (known as Jack) was born in 1892. During their brief marriage William and Agnes lived at Westfield House in Ayr before moving to Skelmorlie Castle, just north of Largs, which Coats acquired in 1890. Tragically Agnes died only four years later at the age of 27, while the couple were staying at Cannes. William never remarried and seems to have been an extremely private individual, finding solace in building up his art collection.

Coats's first recorded purchases date from April 1890, when his main dealer was

Thomas Lawrie & Son at 85 St Vincent Street, Glasgow.<sup>18</sup> Between 23 April and 12 November 1890 he acquired a large number of works of art with which to furnish his new home. These included several pieces of French furniture, as well as stained glass panels, a suit of armour, a set of swords and a Renaissance Bronze horse. As far as pictures were concerned, his tastes were primarily for modern French painting and he was almost certainly influenced by the recent

firm based in Glasgow, and a regular client of Thomas Lawrie, who was William Coats's favourite dealer for most of the 1890s.<sup>20</sup>

Lawrie was an obvious choice of dealer, since not only was he the most established Glasgow dealer specialising in modern European painting, he also sold furniture and other works of art and – perhaps most importantly – he was conveniently situated just down the road from J. & P. Coats's head office at 155 St Vincent Street. At this date there were still relatively few galleries in Glasgow that specialised in modern French art. Craibe Angus at 159 Queen Street sold Barbizon pictures, but was best known as the main source for the Dutch Hague School. There was also the French Gallery, run by E. & E. Silva White, which had been established at 104 West George Street since 1885, and just up the road at no. 227 was Alex Reid's La Société des Beaux-Arts, which had recently opened in October 1889.<sup>21</sup>

Between June and November 1890 Coats spent nearly £14,000 at Thomas Lawrie & Son. His purchases included several French paintings and one Hague School painting by Jozef Israëls. The French pictures included works by Corot, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, Jules Dupré, Monticelli, Charles-François Daubigny, Troyon and Diaz. Of these the most expensive were two late landscapes by Corot, *Evening* (Private Collection) and *The Swamp by the Large Tree with a Goatherd* (Private Collection) (Fig. 4), which he acquired for £2,100 and £2,700 respectively.<sup>22</sup> By the early 1890s Corot's work was well known in Scotland. He was widely represented at both International Exhibitions and in 1888 the critic R.A.M. Stevenson and the art dealer David Croal Thomson contributed articles on Corot to the *Scottish Art Review*. Stevenson commented on his atmospheric 'effets' and praised his ability to achieve in his paintings what he regarded as the ultimate aim of the artist, 'a general ensemble of feeling' and a 'harmonious voice'.<sup>23</sup> In keeping with a late 19th-century Whistlerian aesthetic, it was the poetic, suggestive associations of Corot's late 'souvenirs' that most appealed to Scottish collectors and when Coats first began collecting in the early 1890s it was these works that he most admired.

In 1892 he bought two further works by Corot, *Clocher de St Nicolas* and *Le Bucheron* (both untraced), again for high prices (£1,800 and £1,500). This time he went to E. & E. Silva White, the Glasgow branch of London's French Gallery, at 104 West George Street. If, earlier that year, he had wandered farther up the street to Alex Reid's gallery



4. Camille Corot, *The Swamp by the Large Tree with a Goatherd*, 1850–5, oil on canvas.  
Private Collection

International Exhibitions, which had showcased the work of these artists and the Dutch Hague School. The critic W.E. Henley had published two memorial catalogues of the French and Dutch pictures at the International Exhibitions which were held in Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1886 and 1888 respectively. In the late 1880s essays on Corot, Millet, Rousseau and other artists of the Barbizon School appeared in contemporary journals such as the *Art Journal*, the *Magazine of Art* and the *Scottish Art Review*.<sup>19</sup>

Coats's taste for French art was almost certainly influenced by critical appreciation of the Barbizon School, but his immediate social circle also included a number of collectors who were interested in modern French painting. Most significantly, Coats was close in age and related by marriage to Thomas Glen Arthur (1857–1907), whose family also came from Paisley. In September 1888 Arthur married Elizabeth Winthrop Coats, a daughter of William's first cousin, Sir James Coats of Auchendrane. By this date Arthur had a significant collection of Hague School paintings, which he lent to both International Exhibitions, and of French paintings by Corot, Constant Troyon, Diaz, Théodore Rousseau, Monticelli and others, which he lent to the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888. He was director of Arthur & Co., a wholesale drapery



at no. 227, he would have been able to see works by Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley and Camille Pissarro. Furthermore, he would almost certainly have known that Thomas Glen Arthur had bought Degas's *At the Milliner's* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) from Reid that February for £800 and that Arthur's business partner, Arthur Kay, had bought the even more controversial *Au Café*, now known as *L'Absinthe* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

However, it seems that Coats was far too conservative to even consider acquiring a work by an artist as problematic as Degas. Instead he turned to Jean-François Millet, buying *The Shepherdess* from Thomas Lawrie for £1,500 (Fig. 5).<sup>24</sup> The market for Millet's work developed in Britain soon after the publication in 1881 of Alfred Sensier's biography of the artist and of Henley's edition of *Millet's Woodcuts and Etchings*, published in the same year. It was almost certainly Lawrie who encouraged Coats to buy Millet, since he was the main source of Millet's work, which he acquired through Boussod & Valadon in Paris. It was Lawrie, for example, who sold the Glasgow manufacturer James Donald one of Millet's masterpieces *Going to Work* (Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow) which was exhibited at the Glasgow Institute in 1883.

Perhaps more to Coats's taste was Millet's *Return From the Fields*, c.1846-7 (Cleveland Museum of Art), then known as *The Last Load*, which he bought from Lawrie for £1,400 in April 1893. The painting depicts a peasant woman, her clothes in disarray, exposing her right breast. It had previously been in the collection of the Glasgow industrialist John McGavin (1816-81), a strict teetotaler (indeed, for 20 years a member of the Scottish Temperance League) who never married. In 1881, the year of his death, McGavin lent the painting to the annual exhibition of the Royal Glasgow Institute. One commentator remarked that the peasant woman had more the 'form and gesture ... of a wood nymph' than of a woman who has toiled all day in the fields,<sup>25</sup> but she won the approval of the critics who described the painting as 'a charming idyll, poetically suggestive ... of the possibilities of beauty and happiness in the lot of honest labour'.<sup>26</sup> Once again it possessed that poetic suggestiveness which was the hallmark of a good painting and which, when combined with a suitable working theme, made it almost irresistible to a collector like William Coats.

Coats bought from other Glasgow dealers besides Lawrie and Silva White. By 1892 he was a regular client of the Van Baerle brothers' gallery at 203 Hope Street. Van Baerles were the agents for the London-based Belgian dealers Hollender & Cremetti. In 1892 they sold Coats Diaz's *On the Alert* (untraced) and Charles Jacque's *La Bergerie* (untraced), as well as works by Maurice Levis and Paul Veron. They were also an important source of prints, which Coats began to collect in earnest after the death of his wife in 1894.

In 1896 the two companies of Coats and Clark merged and William Coats came into even more money. He acquired a new property, Dalskairth House in Dumfriesshire, where he moved permanently in later life. In the same year he made his first recorded visit to one of Glasgow's leading dealers, Craibe Angus at 159 Queen Street, from whom he bought *The Harvest Fête* by Monticelli (untraced) for £1,050. Monticelli's work first came into Scotland through the dealer Daniel Cottier, for whom Angus was the Glasgow agent. By the mid-1880s Cottier via Angus had sold his work to collectors such as Arthur and R.T. Hamilton Bruce. In 1886, the year of Monticelli's death, eight works by this artist were shown at the Edinburgh International Exhibition. They were praised by Henley who wrote of Monticelli's work: 'there is audible in these volleys of paint, these orchestral explosions of colour, a

5. Jean-François Millet, *The Shepherdess*, 1849. The Burrell Collection, Glasgow

strain of human poetry, a note of mystery and romance, some hint of an appeal to the mind.<sup>27</sup> Again it was the poetic quality of Monticelli's work that the critics so admired.

In 1888 an important Monticelli retrospective was held in London at Dowdeswell's gallery. The exhibition raised awareness of Monticelli's work as well as pushing up the prices. A major lender to the exhibition was the dealer Alex Reid who had found a regular source of Monticelli's pictures through the artist's cousin Fernand Delas and his agent in Marseilles.<sup>28</sup> Only three years later, in 1891, the Impressionist artist Camille Pissarro was to describe Reid as 'the man who sold Monticellis at such high prices in Glasgow'.<sup>29</sup> But it was not only Reid who benefited, for Monticelli's work was stocked by a number of Glasgow dealers.



6. Adolphe Monticelli, *The New Vintage*, 1849, oil on canvas.

*The Burrell Collection, Glasgow*

Coats began buying Monticelli's work in 1890 and bought steadily for the next decade. In 1890 he purchased two unknown works from Thomas Lawrie for £900 each and in 1897 he paid £1,600 for three works, including *Autumn in the Fields* (Burrell Collection, Glasgow) and *The New Vintage*, which he acquired from W.B. Paterson (Fig.6). His most expensive purchases were *The Destruction of Pompeii* (Paisley Museum and Art Gallery) and *The Star of Bethlehem* (Rizzoli Collection, Milan), both acquired through Alex Reid for £1,200 and £1,000 guineas respectively.<sup>30</sup>

By 1903 he had acquired no fewer than 21 paintings by Monticelli from Glasgow dealers such as Lawrie, Angus, Reid and Paterson.<sup>31</sup> At this date his collection also included 13 Corots, three Boudins, four works by Charles Jacque, four by Rousseau, five by Troyon, three each by Millet, Daubigny and Decamps, one Diaz and two paintings by Jules Dupré. The inventories of Coats's collection give an idea of how he prioritised his works. Most of

his modern French paintings hung at Skelmorlie and later graced the walls of his town house at 30 Buckingham Terrace, Edinburgh. The drawing-room at Buckingham Terrace was decorated with seven Monticellis, the most important of which was *The Destruction of Pompeii*, which he eventually bequeathed to Paisley Art Gallery. It was surrounded by his most important old masters, including the early Vermeer, as well as works by Géricault and Millet's *The Last Load*. (He later added nine watercolours by James Paterson and 11 gouaches by Joseph Crawhall.)

The dining room featured nine paintings by Monticelli, including *Autumn in the Fields* and four untraced works, *The Bathers*, *A Supper Party*, *A Wine Party* and *Girl Playing a Tambourine*. This room also contained the Rubens family group and a few portraits by Raeburn, Lawrence, Gainsborough and Romney, but mainly Barbizon and Hague School paintings by Jacob Maris, Israëls, Corot, Jacque, Dupré, Troyon and the Millet *Shepherdess*. A room at the back of Coats's house in Buckingham Terrace was reserved for further paintings by Corot and Monticelli and a handful of pictures by Diaz, Millet, Rousseau, Troyon and Henri Fantin-Latour. This room included seven works by Corot, including the *Circle of Nymphs*, *Morning of c.1857* (Private Collection) and eight by Monticelli, including *The New Vintage* and two large oils, *Christ Descending from the Temple* (untraced) and *A Hawking Party* (untraced).

Coats's favourite artists were clearly Corot and Monticelli. Neither was what one would today describe as an Impressionist artist, but to a 19th-century *amateur* they displayed all the characteristics of the modern school. In those days, the word 'impressionist' was applied to virtually any artist who painted broadly or sketchily, in contrast to the detail and descriptive qualities of Pre-Raphaelite art. In 1887, for example, Monticelli was described by the art critic for *The Scotsman* as 'one of the earliest exponents' of 'the impressionist style, pure and simple'.<sup>32</sup> In 1891 the Watson Gordon Professor of Fine Art at the University of Edinburgh, Gerard Baldwin Brown, described Corot as 'a typical impressionist' because of the 'suggestive' quality of his painting: 'Corot is comparatively careless as to what his patches and tints represent,' he wrote. 'It suffices if they so far suggest nature as to touch the right chord of poetic association in the spectator.'<sup>33</sup> Crucially, according to Baldwin Brown, the successful 'impressionist' painting was 'not only generalised and imaginative, but also in the highest degree decoratively pleasing to the eye'.

Looked at in this context, Coats's admiration for artists such as Corot and Monticelli qualifies him as an early collector of 'impressionist' art, even though he failed to take an interest in more mainstream Impressionism. His tastes were almost certainly guided by contemporary criticism. Leading critics of the period such as Henley and Stevenson were early champions of modern European painting, especially Corot, but were wary of French Impressionism. In 1893 Stevenson advised the aspiring art collector not to disturb the harmony of his collection by introducing pictures by what he termed the 'later' impressionists, in other words by Monet and his contemporaries:

I would not disparage the later impressionist work but I feel that the real lover of pictures preserves them from dangerous encounters. He will not toss them, as it were, into a pit to fight it out like dogs and cats ... he jealously guards his pictures from improper companions and riotous debauches of untrammelled colour.

In 1901 Coats was one of the major lenders to the Glasgow International Exhibition which was held in Kelvingrove Park. His brothers Thomas and George, and cousins James and Archibald also lent pictures, and Thomas was on the Oil Paintings committee. Despite the fact that Manet had been dead for nearly 20 years, the exhibition included very few examples of what Stevenson might have defined as 'later' Impressionist art. There were two works by Manet – the *Portrait of Victorine Meurent* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) lent by Sir William Burrell and the small pastel *Un Café, Place du Theatre Français* (Burrell Collection, Glasgow), lent by Arthur Kay – and Monet's early *Seascape: Storm* (Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown), owned by Andrew Bain; but none was an example of what one might term 'high' Impressionism.

Only four other Impressionist paintings were included in the exhibition. These were Pissarro's *Crystal Palace Viewed From Fox Hill, Upper Norwood* (Art Institute of Chicago), lent by C.J. Galloway, a collector from Cheshire (and a client of Reid's), and three works by Monet, Sisley and Renoir, all lent by the French dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. Otherwise the majority of foreign loans to the 1901 International Exhibition were Barbizon or Hague School paintings. The two most widely represented French painters were Corot and Monticelli, Coats's favourite artists. No fewer than 21 works by Corot were on view, prompting one critic to comment: 'Alas and alack for the acres of Corot that exist in and around Glasgow, or, at least, alas and alack

for their owners!' To him, it seemed inevitable that the price for his work would soon fall.<sup>34</sup>

William Coats lent 14 works in total, all to the Foreign Oil Paintings section in Gallery 20, and all French, apart from one seascape by Johan Barthold Jongkind which he had bought the previous year from Alex Reid. Coats had also recently bought three works by Eugène Boudin from Reid, but decided not to lend them. On the other hand, his loans did include four works by his favourite artist, Monticelli, boosting the total number of Monticellis in the exhibition to 11. He also lent two works by Corot and two by Millet, whose work had been so enthusiastically promoted by Thomas Lawrie. Thereafter he lent one each by the Barbizon artists Rousseau, Daubigny, Troyon and Decamps. To put this in context, apart from Corot and Monticelli the exhibition included roughly seven or eight examples of work by Millet, Daubigny, Rousseau and Diaz and of the 'animaliers' Jacque and Troyon. Apart from the Hague School artists, who were well represented, these artists were a fair reflection of the Scottish taste for modern European art at the turn of the century and by 1904 they were all represented in Coats's collection.

In conclusion it can be said that Coats's taste was typical of this period in Scotland. He was certainly not an adventurous collector, and even though close friends such as Arthur were persuaded to buy the work of Degas as early as 1892, Coats was too cautious to venture into unknown territory. On the other hand he knew what he liked and he collected obsessively those artists who struck a chord with him: Corot and Monticelli in the early years and later Crawhall and Bosboom. Yet, despite his intrepid forebears, he lacked the adventurous spirit and never travelled outside Glasgow for his pictures. Perhaps for this reason the quality of works in his collection is extremely variable and dependent on the integrity and knowledge of local dealers: there are several fakes or wrongly attributed works in the collection, which suggests that connoisseurship was not his strong point. He was a typical, rather than an innovative collector, but at least he kept pace with contemporary taste. And it has to be said that his tastes were well in advance of art establishments such as the National Gallery of Scotland, which failed to acquire a single example of 19th-century French art until 1908. Significantly it was Coats's dealer W.B. Paterson who sold the gallery their first modern French painting, a small landscape by none other than Adolphe Monticelli.



## NOTES

- 1 Andrew Carnegie, 'The Gospel of Wealth' (1889) in Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays*, New York 1901, p.19.
- 2 *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, 20 October 1883, quoted in Paul Stokes, 'Rich Man, Richer Man? The 'missing' wealth of a Victorian manufacturing millionaire: The case of Thomas Coats (1809–1883)', MPhil dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2004, p.1, n.3.
- 3 Obituary, *The Scotsman*, 1 September 1926, p.8.
- 4 *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures of the French, Dutch, British and Other Schools belonging to W.A. Coats*, Wm B. Paterson, Glasgow 1904.
- 5 These and other documents, including inventories, relating to the Coats collection are still in private hands.
- 6 *Catalogue of Pictures and Drawings being the entire collection of the late W.A. Coats, Esq.*, exhibited at the Galleries of the Royal Society of British Artists, Suffolk Street, London, Wm. B. Paterson, London, January 1927.
- 7 *Catalogue of Ancient and Modern Pictures and Drawings of the British Continental Schools, the property of W.A. Coats Esq. ...*, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 10 June 1927; *Catalogue of Fine Modern Pictures & Drawings and some Important Pictures by Old Masters, the property of the late Major J.A. Coats ... also the property of Thomas H. Coats Esq. of Leverholme, Nitshill, Renfrewshire and formerly from the collection of the late W.A. Coats Esq.*, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 12 April 1935.
- 8 The main sources of information on the Coats family are Andrew Coats, *From the Cottage to the Castle*, written at Pitcullen House, Perth, December 1890 and privately printed; and *Six Cord Thread, The Story of Coats and Clark's Paisley Threadmills*, produced by Paisley Project Team, Paisley 1995. See also Stokes (n.2).
- 9 *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, 7 Jan. 1880, quoted in Stokes (n.2), p.9.
- 10 'The Late Sir James Coats', *The Scotsman*, 21 January 1913, p.6.
- 11 Dong-Woon Kim, 'J. & P. Coats as a multinational before 1914', *Business and Economic History*, Vol.26, no.2, Winter 1997, p.535. James meanwhile settled in America and married Sarah Auchincloss, daughter of John Auchincloss, whose family had emigrated to the States from Paisley in 1803. James Coats returned to Scotland in 1901 and was knighted in 1905.
- 12 *Six Cord Thread* (n.8), pp.109–12.
- 13 Peter Coats's art collection included a large number of genre paintings with anecdotal titles such as 'A Tedious Task', 'Trudging Along' or 'Getting Impatient'. In many ways the most interesting and surprisingly modern picture that the Coats bequeathed to Paisley Museum was not a French painting at all, but a Scottish painting strongly influenced by French art. This was William Kennedy's *Spring* which was presented to the gallery by Peter Coats's eldest son James in 1888.
- 14 R.H. Walters, *The Economic and Business History of the South Wales Steam Coal Industry 1840–1914*, Manchester 1977, p.107.
- 15 The first board of twelve directors included eight members of the Coats family. The first chairman was Archibald Coats, Peter's second son, under whom the business expanded rapidly.
- 16 *The Scotsman*, 1 September 1926, p.8.
- 17 This was perhaps not quite as impressive as it sounds, as only two boats were entered for the 12-metre class. Coats and the crew of *Hera* were racing against a crew from Merseyside. It hardly seemed worth their while travelling down to Cowes, where the main events were held, so they tossed a coin and Coats won. The event was therefore held on the River Clyde for the first and only time in history.
- 18 For information on Thomas Lawrie & Son see F. Fowle, *Impressionism and Scotland*, exh. cat., National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh 2008, p.139.
- 19 Henley called this group of artists the French 'Romantics' and it was only in 1890 that they were dubbed the 'Barbizon School' by the Scots-born dealer David Croal Thomson.
- 20 On Arthur, see Fowle 2008 (n.18), p.125.
- 21 W.B. Paterson's business was not established until September 1892.
- 22 The receipts for these paintings are in the Coats family papers, which are still in private hands. In June Coats bought a Corot, *Evening*, for £2,100. In July he bought Decamps *The Knife Grinder* for £200 and *Nursing Baby* by Jozef Israëls for £840. Two months later he acquired six more paintings, including two works by Monticelli for £1,800, a painting by Dupré for £1,400, Daubigny, *Moonlight* for £1,600, Troyon, *Sheep* for £1,150 and a Diaz landscape for £1,935, including commission.
- 23 R.A.M. Stevenson, 'Corot as an example of style in painting', *Scottish Art Review*, 1889, pp.50–1.
- 24 In April he also bought Diaz's *La Mare Sous Bois* for £550 from Silva White and, from Thomas Lawrie, Troyon's *Goats Nibbling Hollyhocks* (£2,650), which he paid for in installments.
- 25 'Glasgow Fine Art Institute Exhibition – Second Notice' in *The Scotsman*, 7 February 1881, p.3.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 W.E. Henley, *Memorial Catalogue of the French and Dutch Loan Collection, Edinburgh International Exhibition 1886*, Edinburgh 1888, p.61.
- 28 Frances Fowle, 'Vincent's Scottish Twin: The Glasgow Art Dealer Alexander Reid', *Van Gogh Museum Journal*, 2000, p.95.
- 29 Letter dated 19 October 1891 from Camille Pissarro to his son Lucien, Eragny, 26 December 1891 in *Camille Pissarro, Lettres à son fils Lucien*, Editions Albin Michel, Paris 1950, p.273.
- 30 These were acquired in 1900 and 1903 respectively.
- 31 Information from Coats family papers.
- 32 'Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts, Exhibition', *The Scotsman*, 28 January 1887, p.4.
- 33 G. Baldwin Brown, Letters to the Editor, 'What is Impressionism', *The Scotsman* 24 December 1891, p.3.
- 34 Megilp in *The Bailie*, 4 December 1901, p.7.