

**Musée
Marmottan
Monet**
ACADÉMIE DES BEAUX-ARTS

MUSEUM BARBERINI

POTSDAM



The Sun

Source of Light in Art

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FOREWORD

The sun in art is a universal human theme: as the source of light and origin of life, it has been the focus of religious and mythological conceptions since the earliest documented cultures. In Central and South America as well as in Asia, Egypt, and large portions of Central Europe, the sun was considered a deity and was venerated as a symbol of inexhaustible power. In the wake of the Christianization of Europe, the sun's identification with the Roman god Sol was transmuted into the light symbolism of Christ. With the disappearance of the medieval gold background, fifteenth-century artists began integrating natural phenomena such as the sunrise or sunset into their religious images. Yet the representation of the sun in landscape painting remained the exception until well into the eighteenth century, though it occurred in the context of mythological themes such as the fall of Icarus or Phaëthon. Not until the early seventeenth century was the sun depicted more frequently as the expression of atmosphere or mood, and after 1850 it often constituted the actual, if indirect, subject matter for the Impressionists with their precise evocation of natural phenomena. From the late nineteenth century on, the intensification of color and its liberation from a purely descriptive function was based on the observations of Impressionism and knowledge gained from the prismatic study of sunlight.

The exhibition *The Sun: Source of Light in Art* explores the iconography of the sun in European art from antiquity to the present. The show was conceived in partnership with the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris, where it was presented from September 14, 2022, to January 29, 2023. This cooperative exhibition was inspired by two paintings: *Impression, Sunrise* (cat. 98), the centerpiece of the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris, and *The Port of Le Havre, Night Effect* from the Hasso Plattner Collection (fig. p. 44), which was acquired in 2016 when Hasso Plattner decided to reconstruct the Palais Barberini in Potsdam to serve as the future home of his Impressionist

collection. The pictures comprise a pair: Monet painted them in 1872 from a hotel room overlooking the port of his hometown city of Le Havre. He captured the view by night, showing it as an energy-charged site of modernity with its artificial gas illumination, and again at dawn, with the red fireball of the sun hovering over the awakening scenery. When the latter painting was shown at the first group exhibition of the Société anonyme in Paris in 1874, a critic made fun of the title *Impression*. The criticism stuck, and shortly thereafter the term "Impressionism" was born.

One of the greatest aspirations of the still-young Museum Barberini was to be able to show the painting in Potsdam. The present exhibition, mounted in honor of the 150th anniversary of Monet's famous painting, has now made it possible to fulfill this wish: *Impression, Sunrise* is the focal point of an exhibition devoted to the sun in art within the broader conceptual context of artistic and scientific ideas since antiquity. The show was curated by Marianne Mathieu in Paris and Michael Philipp, chief curator of the Museum Barberini, who expanded the exhibition in Potsdam to include numerous loans and edited the catalog as part of the publication series of the Museum Barberini. We are profoundly grateful to them. Together, we would also like to express our thanks to the lenders who generously supported our project.

In recent years, a number of scientific and historical exhibitions have been devoted to the sun, such as *The Sun: One Thousand Years of Scientific Imagery* at the Science Museum in London or the wide-ranging cultural-historical presentation *Shine on Me: The Sun and Us* at the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum in Dresden (both in 2018). *The Sun: Source of Light in Art*, however, is the first exhibition to address representations of the sun in art from antiquity to the present. The fourteenth symposium of the Museum Barberini on November 10, 2021, paved the way for the exhibition; we would like to thank the authors for their

insightful contributions. We are also grateful to Anne-Sophie Luyton and Helene von Saldern, who worked alongside the curators in the realization of the project. Thanks are also due to Jacqueline Hartwig for her editorial assistance with the catalog and to all who contributed to the success of this outstanding exhibition in Paris and Potsdam.

In 2024 the first Impressionist exhibition of 1874 will be commemorated with an anniversary exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, as well as the international program *Destination Impressionnisme*. This anniversary is also important for Potsdam as a center of solar observation: the year 1874 marks the founding of the Astrophysical Observatory Potsdam, where researchers like Wilhelm Oswald Lohse engaged in the study of sunspots (cat. 88). The tower of the Military Orphanage in Potsdam served as an observatory before the Einstein Tower on the Telegrafenberg, designed by Erich Mendelsohn, was completed in 1922. The Einstein Tower was the site of experimental tests on Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and to this day it still serves for the scientific study of the sun. Our hope is that in the dialogue of art and science, this universal human theme will delight many visitors in Potsdam as well as in Paris.

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Paris

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our gratitude for advice and support in the realization of the exhibition goes to

Marion Ackermann, Dresden
Sébastien Allard, Paris
Sylvain Amic, Rouen
Dario Armini, Berlin
Sylvain Bellenger, Naples
Sabine Beneke, Berlin
Stephan Berg, Bonn
Regina von Berlepsch, Potsdam
Gwenaél Beuchet, Issy-les-Moulineaux
Hartmut Beyer, Wolfenbüttel
Tulga Beyerle, Hamburg
Konrad Bitterli, Winterthur
Mikkel Bogh, Copenhagen
Till-Holger Borchert, Aachen
Peter van den Brinck, Aachen
Stephanie Buck, Dresden
Peter Burschel, Wolfenbüttel
Nils Büttner, Stuttgart
Laurence des Cars, Paris
Marko Daniel, Barcelona
Stefanie Dathe, Ulm
Carsten Denker, Potsdam
Frédérique Duyrat, Paris
Katrín Dyballa, Hamburg
Bernd Ebert, Munich
Olafur Eliasson, Berlin
Galerie Elstir, Paris
Jürgen Emmert, Würzburg
Kaywin Feldman, Washington, DC
Marialucia Giacco, Naples
Peter Gorschlüter, Essen
Vincent Guyot, Paris
Tone Hansen, Oslo
Mareike Hennig, Frankfurt am Main
Frank Hildebrandt, Hamburg
Paul Hofmann, Berlin
Jan de Hond, Amsterdam
Stephan Jost, Toronto
Nicola Kalinsky, Birmingham
Stephan Koja, Dresden
Dagmar Korbacher, Berlin
Dorothy Kosinski, Washington, DC
Stefanie Kreuzer, Bonn
Claudia Kryza-Gersch, Dresden
Christiane Lange, Stuttgart
Justus Lange, Kassel
Tomasz Łęcki, Poznań
Micha Leeflang, Utrecht
Séverine Lepape, Paris
Bernhard Maatz, Munich
Gudula Metze, Dresden
Christof Metzger, Vienna
Karine Meylan, Lausanne
Maryse Mocoœur, Compiègne
Alfons Niedhart, Zurich
Anna Nouet, Paris
Dorothea Nutt, Düsseldorf
Franz Ossing, Berlin
Ulrich Pohlmann, Munich
Gisbert Porstmann, Dresden
Carolin Quermann, Dresden
Immanuel Reisinger, Berlin
Jürgen Rendtel, Potsdam
Thomas Richter, Braunschweig
Ines Richter-Musso, Genoa
Christiane Righetti, Baden-Baden
Laura Ritter, Vienna
Esther Ruelfs, Hamburg
Christine Salvadé, Porrentruy
Henning Schaper, Baden-Baden
Julieta Scharf, Berlin
Dirk Schmitz, Cologne
Frits Scholten, Amsterdam
Holger Schuckelt, Dresden
Sebastian Schütze, Vienna
Jennifer Scott, London
Aurora Scotti, Genoa
Katharina Sieverding, Düsseldorf
Orson Sieverding, Düsseldorf
Guillermo Solana, Madrid
Matthias Steinmetz, Potsdam
Oliver Thiele, Schaffhausen
Jürgen Tietz, Soest
Marcus Trier, Cologne
Stephan Urbaschek, Berlin
H.E. Armando Varricchio, Berlin
Ulrike Villwock, Aachen
Marius Winzeler, Dresden
Kyllikki Zacharias, Berlin
Michael F. Zimmermann, Eichstätt

LENDERS

- Städtische Sammlung Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona
neugerriemenschneider, Berlin
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie,
Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und
Museum für Byzantinische Kunst
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz,
Abteilung Handschriften und Historische Drucke
Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin
The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
University of Birmingham
Kunstmuseum Bonn
Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum Braunschweig,
Kunstmuseum des Landes Niedersachsen
Römisch-Germanisches Museum der Stadt Köln, Cologne
Musée Antoine Vivenel, Compiègne
SMK, National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen
Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Rüstkammer, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Städtische Galerie Dresden—Kunstsammlung, Museen der Stadt
Dresden
Museum Folkwang, Essen
Freies Deutsches Hochstift / Frankfurter Goethe-Museum,
Frankfurt am Main
Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg
Musée Français de la Carte à Jouer, Issy-les-Moulineaux
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- Bibliothèque de l'Observatoire de Paris
Musée de Cluny—Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris
Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris
Société française de photographie, Paris
République et Canton du Jura, Collection jurassienne des
beaux-arts, Porrentruy
Leibniz-Institut für Astrophysik Potsdam (AIP)
National Museum, Poznań
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen
Stadtbibliothek Schaffhausen, Ministerialbibliothek
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen—Schleissheim,
Staatsgalerie Schleissheim
Kunstsammlung der Stadt Soest
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart
AGO Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Museum Ulm—Stiftung Sammlung Kurt Fried
Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht
LIECHTENSTEIN. The Princely Collections, Vaduz–Vienna
Albertina, Vienna
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC
Kunst Museum Winterthur
Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel
Kunstsammlungen der Diözese Würzburg—MAD,
Museum am Dom
- Collection Lucile Audouy
Collection Fanny Deleuze
Elisa Klapheck
Alfons Niedhart, Zurich
Private collection, courtesy american contemporary art GALLERY,
Munich
- and private collectors who wish to remain anonymous

