

At the National Galleries of Scotland – Seurat painting on show for the first time

An oil painting by George Seurat (1859-91) has been loaned to the National Galleries of Scotland by the Courtauld Gallery.

The painting has never been shown in Scotland before and is called *Young Woman Powdering Herself*, painted between 1888 and 1890. It depicts the artist's mistress Madeleine Knobloch whose identity was kept concealed when the painting was first exhibited. Their relationship was clandestine, and remained so until after Seurat's death, even though they had a child together. The artist was only 31 when he died but he invented the scientific style of Neo-Impressionism called pointillism, where the paint is applied using small dots of colour.

This painting has been x-rayed and shows that there is a face in the frame on the wall in the original which is thought to be a self-portrait.

The Courtauld's substantial collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art is one of the most important in Europe, thanks to the generosity of the textile tycoon Samuel Courtauld, who acquired outstanding examples of the work of Claude Monet (1840-1926), Vincent van Gogh (1853-90), Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and others during the 1920s.

Speaking about this loan, Christopher Baker, Director of European and Scottish Art and Portraiture at the National Galleries of Scotland, said: "This exceptional and very

generous loan provides a fascinating complement to the major Post-Impressionist paintings in the collection of the National Galleries of Scotland. A deeply personal portrait, executed in Seurat's distinctive and shimmering technique, it gives a glimpse of the private bohemian world of 1880s Paris. It also demonstrates the skills of one of the most experimental artists of the age, who celebrated modern subjects and so carefully calibrated every aspect of his mesmeric works."

The National Galleries of Scotland also has an impressive Impressionist collection and *Young Woman Powdering Herself* will enhance the small group of Seurat works currently held in its collection. This includes two works related to the masterpiece with which the French artist made his name, *The Bathers, Asnières*, now in the collection of the National Gallery in London.

Young Woman Powdering Herself joins two studies for his large-scale *The Bathers, Asnières*: a drawing called *Seated Nude: Study for 'Une Baignade'* and a small preparatory oil study of the artwork, as well as a third entitled *La Luzerne, Saint-Denis*, 1884-5, a larger oil painting and an excellent example of the artist's move towards Neo-Impressionism.

The first owner of *Young Woman Powdering Herself* was the well-known critic and art dealer Félix Fénéon. There exists an interesting parallel with *La Luzerne*, which was owned by the English critic Roger Fry, one of Courtauld's chief advisors and the man who invented the term 'Post-Impressionism'.

The painting's arrival also coincides with the opening of the gallery's *Bridget Riley* exhibition. Riley was profoundly influenced by Seurat's work and it was her early encounters with the artist's paintings in the Courtauld collection in the late 1950s that inspired her journey towards abstraction.

The painting will be in Edinburgh until October 2020.



Young Woman Powdering Herself, c.1888-90 by George Seurat (1859-91). Oil on canvas, 95.5 x 79.5cm. Collection: The Courtauld Gallery, London, gift from Samuel Courtauld, 1932. Photo credit: The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London