

Impressionism anniversary marked in major St James's exhibition

Gallery with family connections stages a show 150 years on
from Paris exhibition where the art movement began



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20 May 2024



📷 Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *La Place du Havre, Effet de Pluie*, oil on canvas, 13 x 16in (33 x 41cm). It is among the works featured at the Stern Pissarro exhibition. Image courtesy Stern Pissarro Gallery

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Stern Pissarro's blockbuster summer exhibition marks the 150th anniversary of the *First Impressionist Exhibition* in Paris.

The St James's gallery is better placed than most to commemorate the movement's early days. It is run by David Stern and Lélia Pissarro, the great-granddaughter of Camille Pissarro, one of the artists present at the foundational exhibition.

His works, along with those of other major figures from the movement, will be included in *Celebrating 150 Years of Impressionism*, which runs from May 30-June 29.

"We have to do something to mark the occasion," Stern tells *ATG*. "There is not much else going on in the UK and we are the only commercial gallery as far as I know."



📷 Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), *La Cueillette des fruits*, oil on canvas, 18 x 22in (46 x 56cm), c.1905. The painting features at the Stern Pissarro exhibition. Image courtesy Stern Pissarro Gallery

Thin on the ground

Indeed, despite the cultural dominance of Impressionism, there are relatively few tributes to it this year.

In France, the Musée d'Orsay hosts *Paris 1874, Inventing Impressionism* (running until July before moving to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC), and in London the RA closed *Impressionists on Paper* in March. Otherwise, exhibitions are thin on the ground.

That's in contrast to other recent anniversaries, such as this year's centenary of Surrealism (celebrated, for example, at BRAFA, the Pompidou Centre and Waddington Custot) or last year the 50th year since Picasso's death (marked by the Guggenheim Bilbao, the MoMA and Ward Moretti among many others).

As a result, Stern feels the gallery is "doing a great thing for the London art scene", offering quality works from the movement's earliest days through the years of Post- Impressionism. For him, the primary goal of the show is to get visitors through the door and educate them.



📷 Armand Guillaumin (1841-1927), *La Seine à Paris*, oil on canvas, 18in x 2ft (45.5 x 61cm), c.1874. The painting features at the Stern Pissarro exhibition. Image courtesy Stern Pissarro Gallery

What is now known as the *First Impressionist Exhibition*, staged in April 1874, was at the time simply the first show held by the Société anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc, a group of artists whose work had been rejected by the official Paris Salon.

The 31 artists included Pissarro, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley and others, some more or less forgotten or no longer associated with the movement.

It marked a conscious break with the leading traditional style of the day, as the artists attempted to present a vision of the world as it really was.

From that show, the term 'Impressionist' was born, contained in a dismissive review by critic Louis Leroy and based on the title of Monet's painting *Impression, Sunrise*. Though the inaugural show was a round failure critically and commercially, the group persisted, and seven more Impressionist exhibitions followed. Its popularity endures.

"The romance of the Impressionists is very much alive with the public," Stern adds.

The gallery, which is also celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, specialises in Impressionist and post-Impressionist works as well as Modern and Contemporary pieces. However, like the first Impressionist exhibition itself, Stern suspects that the show in question may not be a money-spinner.

"The show isn't commercially driven. I have a budget and I don't expect a return," he says, although he would certainly not be opposed to one. "We want to educate. It's not about the hard sell."



📷 Alfred Sisley (1839-99), *Bords du Loing*, oil on canvas, 18 x 22in (46 x 55.5cm). The painting features at the Stern Pissarro exhibition. Image courtesy Stern Pissarro Gallery

While part of that budget has gone towards some serious advertising - including on the sides of London buses - Stern likes the idea that there will be some word-of-mouth support for the show once it opens and that people will come in interested to know more or even on a whim.

"Passing trade still plays an important part for us," he says. Positioned slightly north west of the main clutch of St James's shopfronts, the gallery often entices the curious as well as the devoted collector.



📷 This photograph taken in Auvers-sur-Oise in 1874 shows on the right Camille Pissarro, with, seated, Paul Cézanne. The others are, from the left: Martinès (photographer), then behind Cézanne: Alphonso (medical student and amateur painter), the eldest son of Camille Pissarro, Lucien Pissarro (in the middle) and Aguiar (from Cuba). Image courtesy Stern Pissarro Gallery

Long-term value

Taking a wider view of the market, Stern says that the “focus on the Contemporary has overshadowed the Impressionists recently, but whenever that market cools, there’s more focus on blue-chip Impressionists. They are like long-term bonds: they might not go up a lot but they won’t go down.”

Around 50 works feature in the show, two thirds of which are on offer at prices ranging from £10,000-10m (Pissarro drawings are at the bottom end of the scale while a stand-out Monet painting is at the top). The rest are loans from private collections and institutions such as the Ashmolean.

Among the works are landscapes by Pissarro, Monet, Sisley, portraits and landscapes by Renoir and port scenes by Boudin. Post- Impressionists are also represented including Henri Martin, Gustave Loiseau, Henri Lebasque, Claude-Émile Schuffenecker and Lucian Pissarro.

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