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[Georges Seurat](#)
French, 1859-1891

A Sunday on La Grande Jatte — 1884, 1884/86

Oil on canvas

81 3/4 x 121 1/4 in. (207.5 x 308.1 cm)

Inscribed at lower right: Seurat

Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection, 1926.224

de Hauke 162

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[Gallery 240](#)

In his best-known and largest painting, Georges Seurat depicted people relaxing in a suburban park on an island in the Seine River called La Grande Jatte. The artist worked on the painting in several campaigns, beginning in 1884 with a layer of small horizontal brushstrokes of complementary colors. He later added small dots, also in complementary colors, that appear as solid and luminous forms when seen from a distance.

Seurat's use of this highly systematic and "scientific" technique, subsequently called Pointillism, distinguished his art from the more intuitive approach to painting used by the Impressionists. Although Seurat embraced the subject matter of modern life preferred by artists such as Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, he went beyond their concern for capturing the accidental and instantaneous qualities of light in nature. Seurat sought to evoke permanence by recalling the art of the past, especially Egyptian and Greek sculpture and even Italian Renaissance frescoes. As he explained to the French poet Gustave Kahn, "The Panathenaeans of Phidias formed a procession. I want to make modern people, in their essential traits, move about as they do on those friezes, and place them on canvases organized by harmonies of color." Some contemporary critics, however, found his figures to be less a nod to earlier art history than a commentary on the posturing and artificiality of modern Parisian society.

Seurat made the final changes to *La Grande Jatte* in 1889. He restretched the canvas in order to add a painted border of red, orange, and blue dots that provides a visual transition between the interior of the painting and his specially designed white frame.

— Permanent collection label

[Exhibition, Publication and Ownership Histories](#)

Exhibition History

Paris, Maison Dorée, 1, rue Laffitte, VIIIème Exposition de peinture, May 15–June 15, 1886, cat. 175.

Paris, Rue des Tuileries, IIème Exposition de la Société des Artistes Indépendants, August 21–September 21, 1886, cat. 353.

Brussels, Musée de l'Art Modern, IVe exposition annuelle de XX, February, 1887, cat. 1.

Paris, Pavillon de la Ville de Paris, VIIIème Exposition de la Société des Artistes Indépendants, March 19–April 27, 1892, cat. 1082.

Paris, 23 Boulevard des Italiens, Exposition de La Revue Blanche, Georges Seurat: Oeuvres peintes et dessinées, March 19–April 5, 1900, cat. 17.

Paris, Grandes Serres de la Ville de Paris (serre "B" de la Champs de la Reine, Aval-Alma), 21me Exposition de la Société des Artistes Indépendants. Exposition Rétrospective Georges Seurat (1859-1891), 1905, cat. 18.

Paris, Galeries Bernheim-Jeune et Cie, Georges Seurat (1859-1891), December 14, 1908–January 9, 1909, cat. 58.

Paris, Galeries Bernheim-Jeune, Exposition Georges Seurat, January 15–31, 1920, cat. 23.

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The Art Institute of Chicago, A Century of Progress Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture, June 1–November 1, 1933, cat. 370.

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The Art Institute of Chicago, Seurat: Paintings and Drawings, January 16–March 7, 1958, cat. 101, traveled to New York, The Museum of Modern Art, Seurat: Paintings and Drawings, March 24–May 11, 1958.

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Emile Verhaeren, "Georges Seurat," *La Société nouvelle* (April 30, 1891), pp. 430-38.

Téodor de Wyzewa, "Georges Seurat," *L'Art dans les Deux Mondes* 22 (April 18, 1891), pp. 263-64.

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Ownership History

By descent to Mme. Seurat, the artist's mother (died 1899), Paris, 1891; by descent to Emile Seurat, the artist's brother; sold for 800 francs to Casimir Brû, Paris, 1900; given by him to his daughter, Lucie, Paris, 1900; Lucie Brû Cousturier and Edmond Cousturier, Paris; sold for \$20,000 possibly through Charles Vildrac, Paris to Frederic Clay and Helen Birch Bartlett, Chicago, 1924; given to the Art Institute, 1926.

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