



Press Release

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<http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/pressroom>

The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850–1900

February 11 – June 13, 2010

Exhibition evokes shadowed interiors and private introspections to examine a less familiar history of nineteenth-century art

Eugène Carrière, *Sleep*, 1897



The University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art presents *The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850–1900*, an exhibition that examines the private worlds of late nineteenth-century Europe through prints and other works meant for quiet contemplation. Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the exhibition reveals a sober world of individual collecting

and private study in which prints were kept aside in portfolios, bronze medals were stored away in cabinets, and statuettes were set on a table in the stillness of the library, to be viewed discreetly on chosen occasions.

On view at the Smart Museum from February 11 to June 13, 2010, *The Darker Side of Light* features over a hundred of these enigmatic, often startling prints, drawings, illustrated books, and small sculptures by artists such as Félix Bracquemond, James Ensor, Max Klinger, Käthe Kollwitz, James McNeill Whistler, Charles Meryon, and Anders Zorn, among others. The exhibition is organized in eight thematic sections—Possession, Nature, the City, Creatures, Reverie, Obsession, Abjection, and Violence and Death—that together offer another view of the art of a period most often associated with the light and landscapes of Impressionism.

The Darker Side of Light is curated by Peter Parshall, the Curator of Old Master Prints at the National Gallery and an alumnus of the University of Chicago. Parshall will deliver an introductory lecture on the exhibition during an opening reception at the Smart Museum on Thursday, February 11, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm.

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

For high-resolution images of works in the exhibition, please contact C.J. Lind at 773.702.0176 or visit <http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/pressroom>.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Paris reigned as the city of light and Impressionism captured the bustle of its lively streets and cafés. But there is another dimension to the period, one captured by less well known, sometimes enigmatic, and often melancholy imagery. This was the art of collectors who kept prints, drawings, and small sculptures under wraps, compiled in albums and portfolios or stored away in cabinets.

Unlike a framed painting hanging on the parlor wall, such works were never intended to be a part of the day-to-day. Rather, they were subject to more purposeful study on chosen occasions, much like taking a book down from the shelf for quiet enjoyment. The inherently discreet nature of this type of aesthetic experience encouraged the investigation of suggestive, sometimes disturbing themes, including complex states of mind and expressions of deep social tension: opium dreams, the obsessions of a lover, the abject despair of an impending suicide, meditations on violence, the fear of death. As *The Darker Side of Light* demonstrates, the desire for intimate aesthetic experience and the art made to satisfy it constitute an important chapter in the long history of collecting as a private endeavor.

In addition to examining the appeal of a print collector's cabinet, *The Darker Side of Light* explores the intellectual pursuits and techniques of artists in the late nineteenth century. Many of the works presented in the exhibition share the dark naturalism and rebelliousness of the writings of Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe, among other literary figures of the time. The revival of the etching medium during this period is also evident. According to Baudelaire, etching compelled an artist to express the most intimate degrees of self-revelation. This rich medium became a common arena for often opposing styles and schools of thought, and its exploratory latitudes drew the attention of Impressionists, academic painters, Realists, and Symbolists alike.



Anders Zorn, *An Irish Girl*, 1894



With works drawn primarily from the collection of the National Gallery of Art, *The Darker Side of Light* centers mainly on art from France and Germany, but also includes works by artists in Britain, Belgium, the United States, and Norway. Together with related public programs and lectures, the exhibition reveals a

private world filled with beautiful, often startling works and offers a far less familiar story of late nineteenth-century art.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Additional educational programs, including lectures, poetry readings, and tours will be announced in the near future.

Thursday, February 11, 5:30–8 pm

Opening Reception and Lecture

Discover the private world of nineteenth-century collectors and the allure of prints during an introductory lecture by Peter Parshall, Curator of Old Master Prints at the National Gallery. The lecture begins at 5:30 pm and will be followed by a reception and exhibition viewing.

Saturday, February 23, 1–4 pm

The Dark Mirror: Writing from the Interior Image

Join poet Eric Elshtain for a free adult writing workshop that examines how inner states are mirrored in nineteenth-century Romantic poetry and the works on view in *The Darker Side of Light*. Borrowing from the symbolic language of particular works in the exhibition, workshop participants will compose a rough draft of a poem that interprets their own interiorities.

Advanced registration is required, as space is limited. To register, the public may contact Kristy Peterson at 773.702.2351 or kristypeterson@uchicago.edu.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a 192-page, hardcover catalogue published by the National Gallery in association with Lund Humphries. The catalogue features 86 color illustrations and essays on late nineteenth-century art and collecting by Peter Parshall, National Gallery of Art; S. Hollis Clayson, Northwestern University; Christiane Hertel, Bryn Mawr College; and Nicholas Penny, National Gallery, London. The catalogue will be available for purchase in the Smart Museum Shop. To order call 773.702.0528 or email smart-books@uchicago.edu.

RELATED COURSE and EXHIBITION

The Darker Side of Light will be an integral part of the spring 2010 University of Chicago art history course *Public and Private in Nineteenth-Century Art*, taught by Smart Museum curator Anne Leonard. Focusing on artworks originating in France, the course will consider the designations of “public” and “private” along with other dichotomies

that have shaped the historiography of nineteenth-century art. At the culmination of the course, and in response to *The Darker Side of Light*, students will help to prepare a small, collection-based exhibition at the Smart Museum in the fall of 2010.

CREDITS

The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850–1900 is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. The exhibition is curated by Peter Parshall, Curator of Old Master Prints at the National Gallery. The Smart Museum's presentation is overseen by Anne Leonard, Smart Museum Curator and Mellon Program Coordinator.

The exhibition was previously on view at the Hammer Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles, from April 5 to June 28, 2009 and at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from October 1, 2009 to January 18, 2010.

ABOUT THE SMART MUSEUM OF ART

As the art museum of the University of Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art takes a distinctly interdisciplinary approach to the collection, display, and interpretation of art. Founded in 1974, the Smart Museum is home to acclaimed special exhibitions and a permanent collection that spans five thousand years of artistic creation. Working in close collaboration with scholars from the University of Chicago, the Smart has established itself as a leading academic art museum and an engine of adventurous thinking about the visual arts and their place in society.

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Hours

Tues, Wed, Fri	10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Thurs	10 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Sat and Sun	11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Galleries closed Mondays and holidays
Café and Museum Shop open daily

Admission is always free

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