



from **Degas**
to **Warhol**

Masterpieces
from

Johannesburg Art Gallery



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Exhibition Project

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Regina Cordium
1860
Oil and gold leaf on canvas
20.8 x 25 cm

The Johannesburg Art Gallery in Italy

Text by Antoinette Murdoch

The Foundation Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) is the largest art collection created by Sir Hugh Percy Lane (born 6 November 1875, Cork, Ireland – died 7 May 1915, at sea off the Cork coast), a renowned art collector, dealer and connoisseur of Old Master paintings. JAG's Foundation Collection is the second modern art collection put together by Lane, after he had collected works for the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, now known as the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, which opened in 1908. Thereafter Lane fashioned his third collection, the Michaelis Collection in Cape Town in 1914, consisting of 17th century Dutch and Flemish paintings.

Lane was one of the most important curators of his time because he was the first to curate displays showing the development of modern British art and the earliest to collect French Impressionist paintings for British public collections. He was knighted for his services to Irish art in 1909 and is renowned for his contested *Lane Bequest* of 39 French Impressionist paintings to the National Gallery in London.

Joseph Mallord William Turner
Hammerstein Below Andernach
1917
Watercolour
31.5 x 19 cm



Lane's JAG collection, and the building which would house it, designed by prominent British colonial-era architect Edwin Lutyens, was officially opened in November 1915. While Lane was responsible for curating and acquiring the collection, this was only made possible through the offices, passionate commitment (and access to funds!) of the formidable Lady Florence Phillips, wife of the Randlord Lionel Phillips. Prior to taking its place in its custom-designed home at JAG in 1915, the collection was housed in temporary premises at the South African School of Mines in Eloff Street, Johannesburg.

While the Lutyens building was not the first gallery or museum in SA, or the first to exhibit work by living artists, it was unique at the time in bringing together contemporary European art in a custom-designed setting, in a colonial urban centre.

Lane had first met Lady Phillips in 1909, and they worked together on the designing and acquiring of both the collection and its building. Sadly he would not live to see it officially opened, since he drowned with hundreds of others on board the RMS Lusitania, notoriously sunk off the Cork coast in May 1915, during the course of the First World War, after the Germans torpedoed it.

John Everett Millais

Cuckoo!

1880

Oil On Canvas

99 x 127.7 cm

JAG's foundation collection primarily includes works in different media by famous British and French 19th century artists, as well as by some lesser-known European artists. Famous names in the collection include Monet, Courbet, van Gogh, Picasso, Sir John Everett Millais, Henry Moore, Sir David Wilkie, Augustus John, and Alfred Sisley, amongst many others. Its origins in Lane's curation on behalf of Lady Phillips and the Randlords saw the acquisition of important work such as the bust of Eve Fairfax by Auguste Rodin, the acquisition of a number of works by Camille Pissarro from his son, as well as bequests and acquisitions of a significant collection of Pre-Raphaelite work, including Rossetti's famous *Regina Cordium* of 1860, acquired by JAG in 1912. This work features in the ViDi selection, along with other notable work from the Pre-Raphaelite paintings in the collection by Holman Hunt and J.E. Millais.

The extended collection also features many works by canonical black South African artists, long under-exhibited in their own country due to its apartheid past, and who feature in this selected exhibition of work from JAG.

The JAG collection has long been well respected throughout the world. Its outgoing loans attest to the fact that most of its works are internationally significant and travel the world on an ongoing basis. One of JAG's regular exhibiting partners is ViDi, so we were very excited when we were contacted by them to invite us to show a selection of works from the JAG collection.





Albert Joseph Moore
A Wardrobe (Venus At The Bath)
1867
Oil Painting
48.1 x 99.7 cm

Jean Baptiste Camille Corot
Landscape
Oil On Panel
17.2 x 14.3 cm



Louis Eugène Boudin
Le Port De Trouville
1893
Oil Painting
63.7 x 45.1 cm



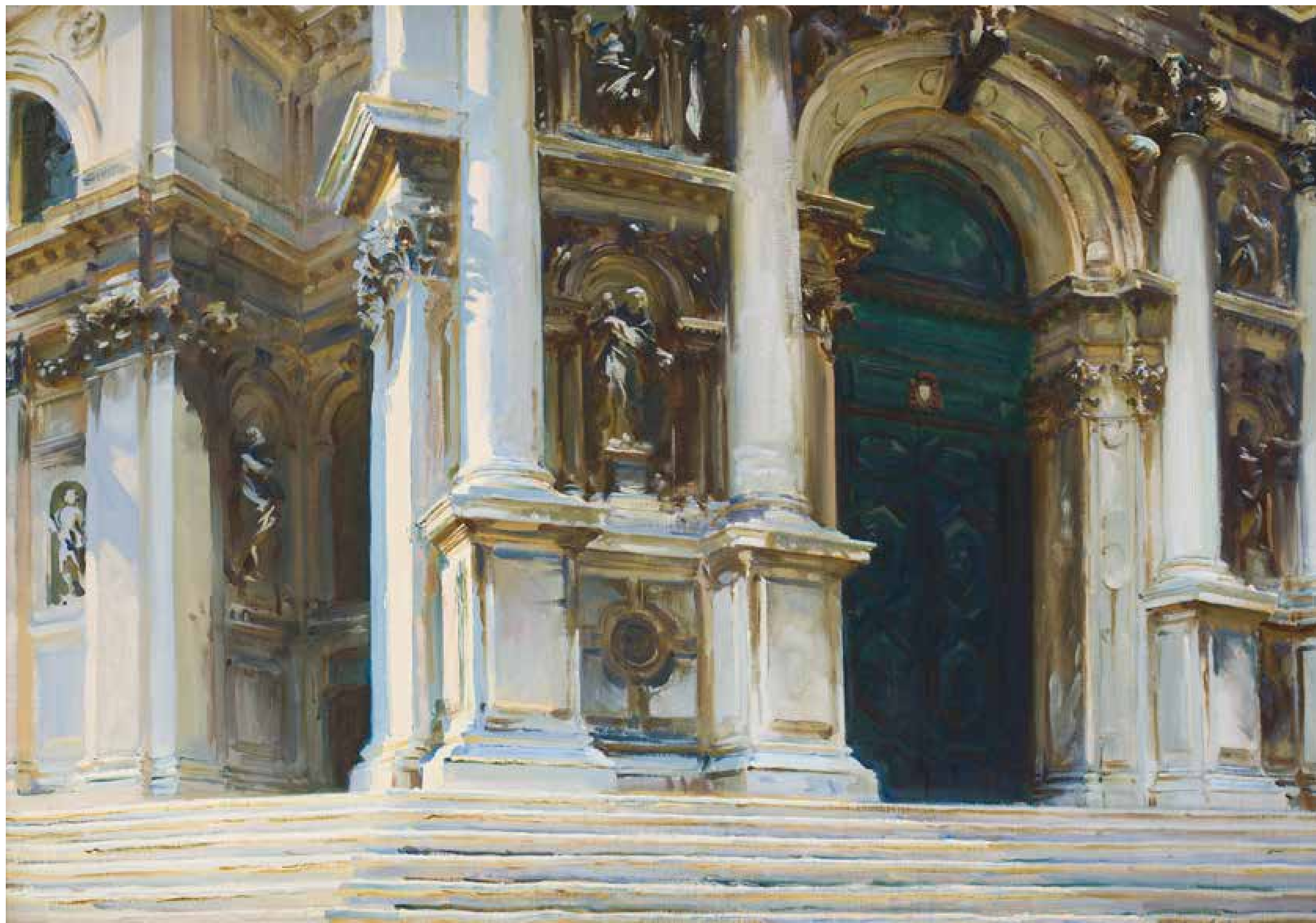
This opportunity reinforces the fact that the JAG collection is sought after internationally and that it is considered to be historically significant in representing work in particular from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. JAG is of course honoured to be able to contribute to the international art historical archive in this way.

On a personal note, having been chief curator at the gallery for many years allows me to insert a more anecdotal testament to the gallery's significance in our society. As a white, Afrikaans speaking child growing up in South Africa in the 1970's I was privileged enough to enjoy entrance to institutions such as museums and galleries, which, under the apartheid regime, was largely denied to the black population.

Despite the privilege, it was romance of another kind that led me to JAG. The first time that I visited the gallery was by invitation of a potential boyfriend. We made the journey to the Johannesburg Art Gallery in an old turquoise Volkswagen Beetle, when I was just 17.

Claude Monet
Les Printemps
1875
Oil Painting
58 x 78.5 cm





John Singer Sargent
Santa Maria Della Salute, Venice
1909
Oil Painting
101 X 71 Cm



Pissarro Lucien
Matin, Soleil, Riec
 1910
 Oil Painting
 44.3 x 53.7 cm

That day I was completely seduced - not by the potential boyfriend but by the old lady: the Johannesburg Art Gallery. I fell in love! The building in itself was majestic, voluminous and beautifully designed to let light and shade do its work in displaying its magnificent collection. I had the opportunity to see work by some of the artists that I had been studying at school, in this alleged colonial outpost, the centre of Johannesburg, in South Africa! Years later, sadly, the after-effects of apartheid spatial design continue to do their work – the wonderful gallery in the midst of the city is underexplored by most of its inhabitants, and underappreciated even by many of its art denizens.

For my own experience, I was completely taken by abstract artists Kenneth Noland, Helen Frankenthaler, the collection of Minimalist work, Dan Flavin and others. I also vividly recall paintings and sculptures by their South African counterparts such as Hans Potgieter. The breadth of the JAG collection was demonstrated by the presence of these historically significant works as well as contemporary South African works such as *Melancholia* by Penny Siopis (1986), a baroque, heavily layered allegorical oil painting.

Subsequent to my first brief visit, I returned often to JAG, taking in the full experience of the world-class collection. My subsequent studies in Art History meant that I had the opportunity to think and write about many of the works in the collection – in particular the Modern works, which were on permanent display in the gallery for many years.

Even so, it was only when I became Chief Curator of the gallery in 2009, and was reunited with my lovely old lady, that I began to discover the full extent of the treasure trove of art contained in the institution. There are traditional African works, a cutting edge contemporary space, an extensive archive of historical works, work on paper, a collection of work in Applied Arts, and so much else. The archive of the collection is justly renowned as one of the most extensive and organised in the country – an indispensable resource supporting the work in the collection itself.



Gustav Courbet
La Falaise d'Etretat
1869
Oil On Canvas
74.5 x 62 cm

The work selected for exhibition in Pavia gives a good sense of both the breadth and the significance of the JAG collection.

A nineteenth century oil by Courbet, *La Falaise d'Etretat* from 1869, offers a representative seascape by the widely respected French painter. A curiosity and splendidly collectible piece is the 1882 charcoal drawing by Van Gogh selected for exhibition in Pavia, *Head of an Orphan Man in Top Hat*, drawn from the artist's earlier career when the portrayal of marginal working-class life was a field of interest for him.

Vincent Van Gogh
Portrait Of An Old Man
1882
Chalk, Charcoal, Body Colour?
27.5 x 42.5 cm



Henry Matisse
Femme And Fleurs
1923
Lithograph
20.2 X 29.2 Cm



Edgar Hilaire Degas

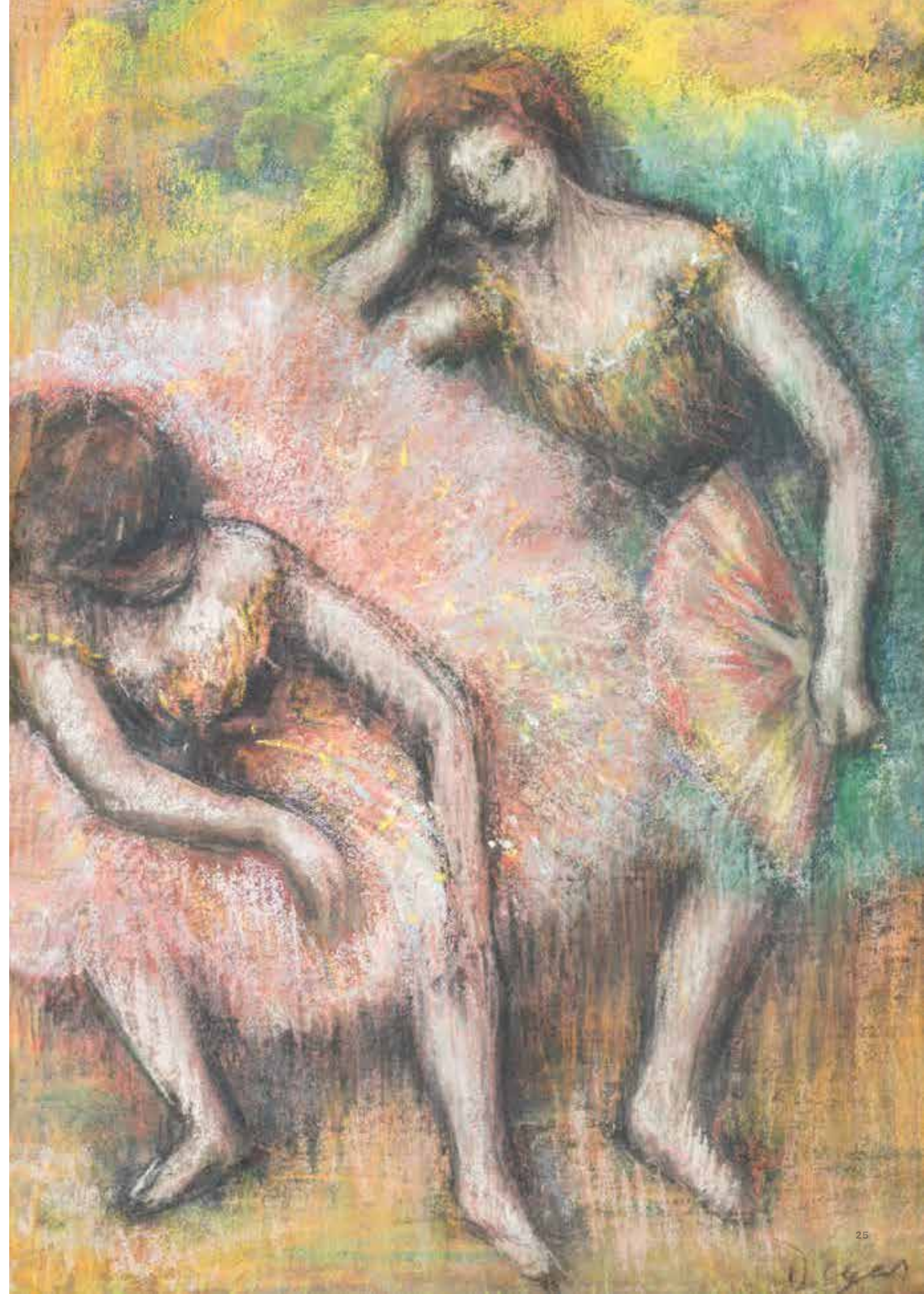
Deux Danseuses

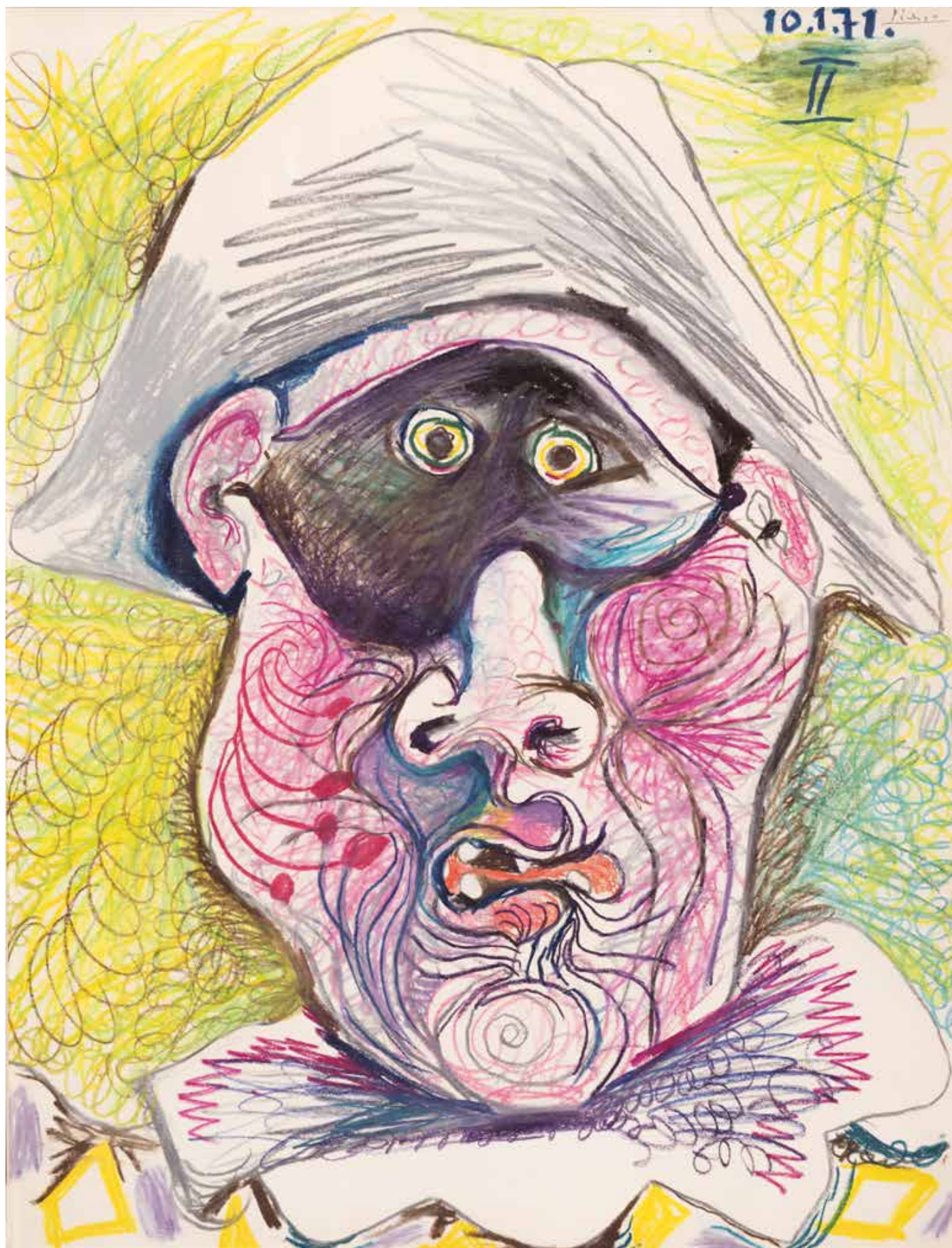
1898

Pastel On Paper

32.7 x 48 cm

Other works by French artists in the collection and being shown in Pavia, such as the *Femme et Fleurs* (1923) of Matisse and the *Deux Danseuses* (1898) of Degas, indicate the focus of the Foundation Collection, and Lane himself of course, on the French art of the period – leading to his contested bequest of French Impressionist work to the National Gallery in London.





Pablo Picasso
Tête d'arlequin II
 1971
 Crayon And Pastel On Paper
 49 x 64 cm

Of special interest in the ViDi selection is a group of works by Picasso. One of these, the *Tête d'arlequin II* (1971) caused a stir on first being exhibited at JAG after its acquisition in 1974. The work was castigated by a disgruntled public as 'hideous', 'outrageous' and 'ugly', despite its reputation as one of his finest later works. The crayon and pastel work was prominently featured in the 'Picasso and Africa' travelling exhibition of 2006, co-sponsored by the relevant state departments of South Africa and France.

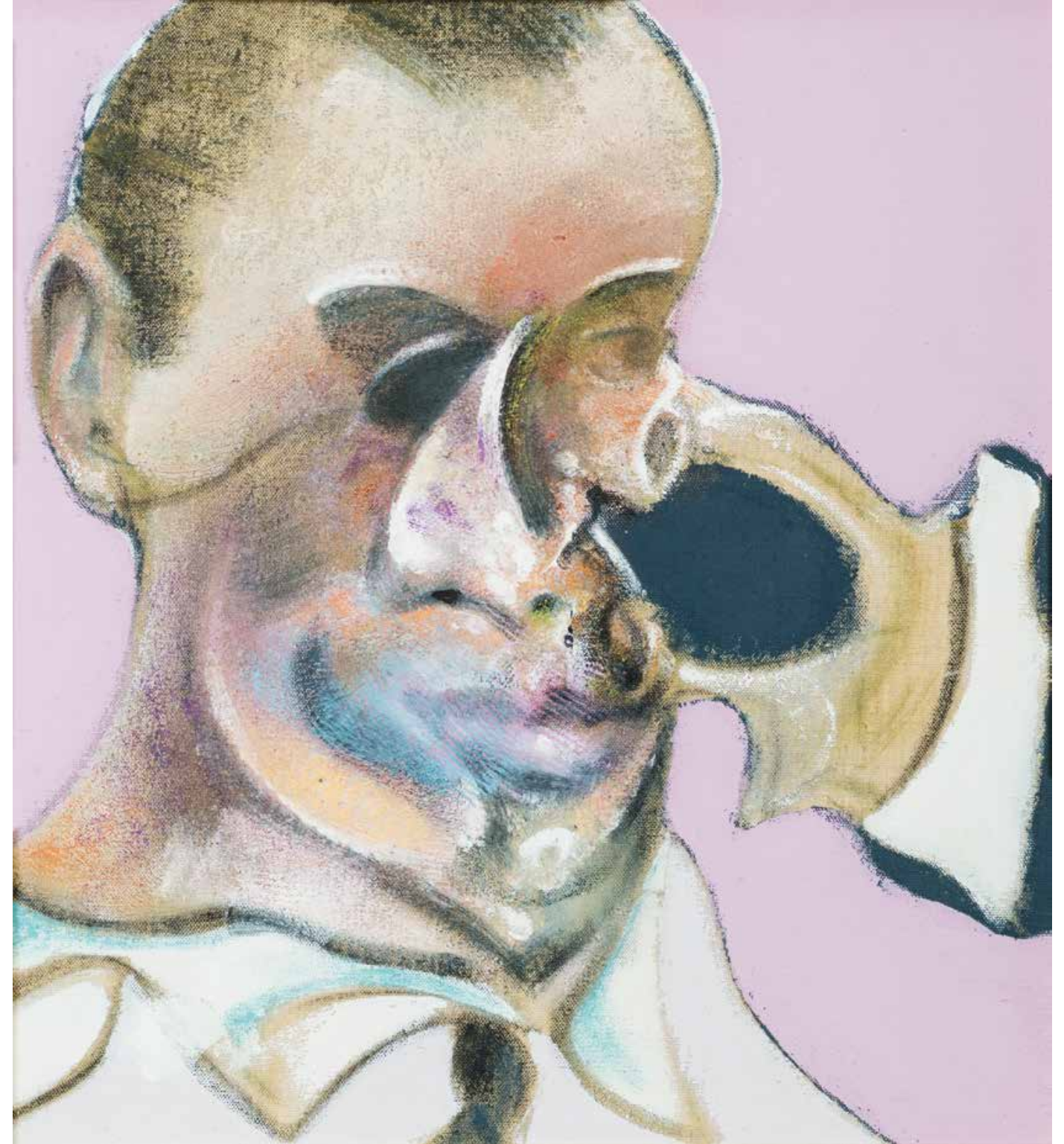
The rest of the ViDi selection demonstrates the curatorial breadth and acquisitional acuity of the JAG curators over the years. From its core Hugh Lane collection of British and French painting from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the wider JAG collection includes work by JMW Turner, Edvard Munch, Cezanne, Gauguin, Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein.

The ViDi selection also, and crucially, includes work from the very fine inventory of South African twentieth century painting in the JAG holdings. A group of fine exemplars of Irma Stern oil paintings will hang alongside little-seen work by George Pemba and Selby Mvusi. Included too is a work by the historically important painter and educator Maggie Laubser.

Albert Leon Gleizes
Portrait Of A Woman
1910
Oil On Canvas
100.2 x 73.5 cm



Francis Bacon
Study Of Portrait Of A Man
1969
Oil On Canvas
28 X 33 Cm





Roy Lichtenstein
Crak!
 1964
 Lithograph In Colours
 47.3 x 68.2 cm

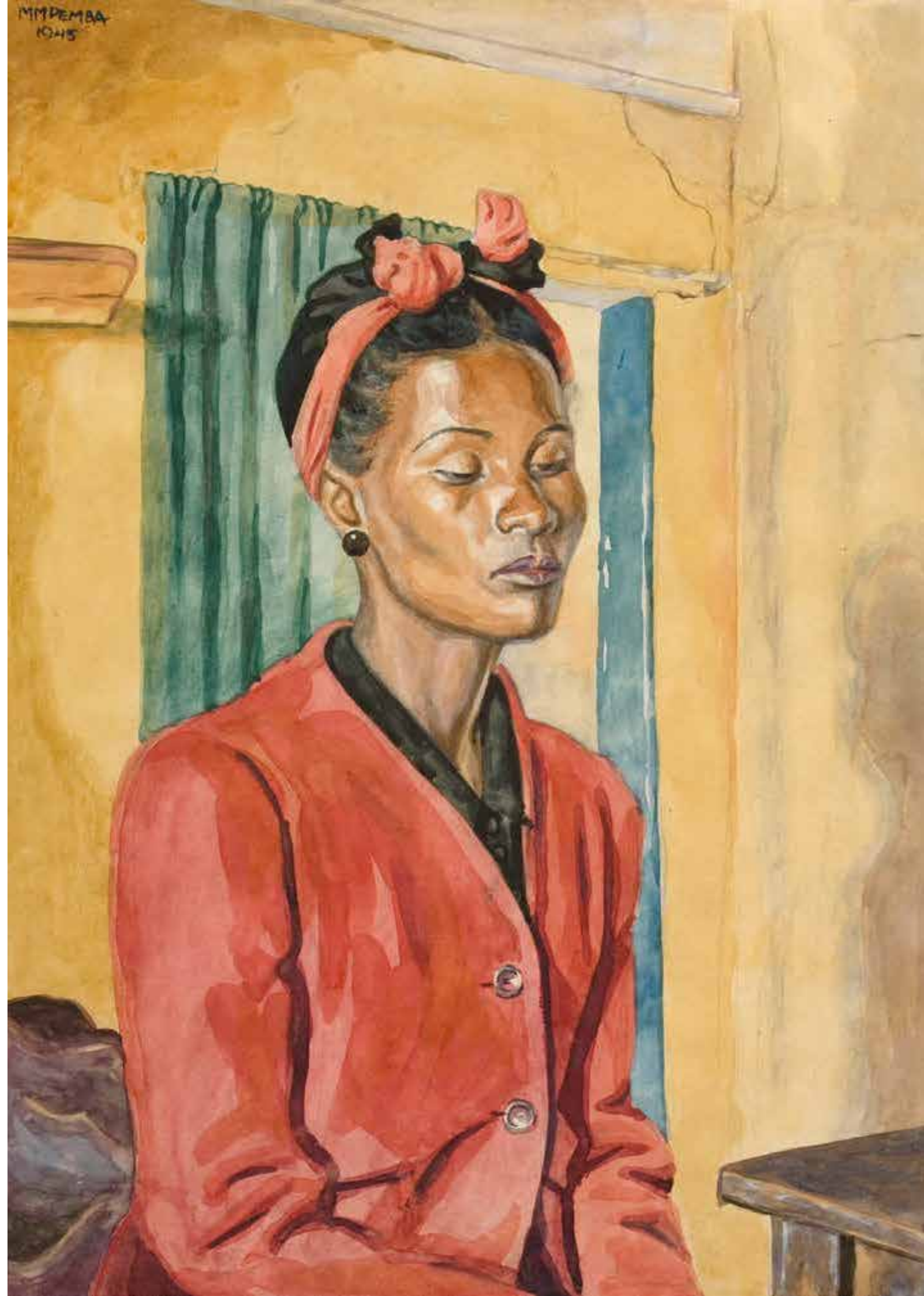


Andy Warhol
Joseph Beuys (Triptych – X 3 Works)
 Screenprint
 Each Print: 74.3 x 110 cm

George Pemba
I'm Sorry Madam
1945
Watercolour On Paper
35.4 X 25.4 Cm

This broad range of paintings in the gallery's holdings testifies to the vibrancy of the museum which houses them. The vicissitudes of post-apartheid demographics have meant that the Gallery's core audience – the educated and middle class art lover – has moved away from the inner-city area where the stately centenarian of the Lutyens building was first erected. The locale of the gallery, in Joubert Park, was once the epicentre of Johannesburg's high frontier society, where the mining magnates ate, shopped and strolled. Over the course of the 20th century, JAG established itself as an integral landmark, part of old Joburg's identity.

Now the old city has changed fundamentally, and the teeming inner city centred on Joubert Park is home to a very different community, of working class commuters and school children from the surrounding apartment blocks. People still stroll through the park, and wander into the museum to rest in its cool and soothing interior – and to look at the art. JAG remains a landmark, though with quite a different function to its original one. The Gallery is now the custodian of its wonderful collection for all of the city's people, not just the well-heeled and highly educated. Those who are exposed to the work that JAG houses, shown here in a representative sample in Pavia, are always enduringly touched by some of the finest art in the world, from many different points in history. Jag continues to make its city proud.





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