that the brilliant Parisian art dealer Ambroise Vollard would have the audacity to give this strange genius his first one-man show, an exposure that marked the begining of the deification of Cézanne by a younger generation of artists who felt liberated by the master's courage in creating the most private, yet monumental of pictorial universes.

Cézanne's intense introspection, however, was never deflected by the growing public recognition of his work, which was even included in the survey of French art shown at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle. In the 1890s and until his death in 1906, his art, like his life, became more hermetic, probing further into earlier themes of landscape, still life, and the nude which he had slowly defined for himself in the 1870s and 1880s. He would often, for instance, restudy the Montagne Ste.-Victoire, as Monet, in the 1890s, would re-examine the same motif—grainstacks, poplars, a cathedral facade—and he would return again and again to the theme of nude bathers with which he had struggled throughout the 1880s. In the last decade of his career, it was this theme that corresponded to his most exalted ambitions and he worked simultaneously upon it in two major canvases, one of which, begun in 1898 and still under way the year before his death, was to be the largest painting of his entire career (**fig. 393**). In a Proustian recall of life and art, this final triumph resonates deeply, its crammed abundance of female nudes at the water's edge evoking the more overtly awkward and erotically charged bathers of the 1880s (see fig. 387), and its ascendant vaults of trees even restating the pairs of chestnut trees that lined the approach to his family estate at Aix. And just as the grandly pyramidal symmetries perpetuate here the authority of old-master compositions, so, too, do certain elusive passages—a pointed finger above a swimmer, the rapt concentration of the central group upon some illegible object or activity—remind one of a distant pictorial heritage in which dramatic events might unfold. Yet these public and private memories are finally absorbed by an overwhelming amplitude of visual order. Here, the arcing trees, like the nave of a Gothic cathedral, carry so broad and so forceful an upward thrust that their energies not only continue above the frame but carry with them the bathers' bodies, which must twist, merge, and strain to conform to these dominant rhythms. Yet the underlying tumult of Cézanne's earlier art at last seems resolved, for figures and landscape, light and substance are fused in an indissoluble whole, whose almost translucent, shimmering surfaces of softly fractured planes resurrect the goals of Impressionism without sacrificing the master's ongoing pursuit of a graver, denser structure of major and minor forms.

Such a transcendent visual order could even conquer, in Cézanne's late work, the forces of death, as symbolized by the paintings and watercolors of the skulls which he scrutinized in the studio he built outside Aix after the death of his mother in 1897 and the consequent sale of the family estate. Whether he chose to focus upon the bald presence of one, two, or three skulls, the results, as in a painting of 1898–1900 (**fig. 394**), produce a surprising synthesis of opposites: a disturbing image which might have had the gruesome impact of, say, Vereshchagin's allegorical pyramid of skulls (see fig. 337), and a search for a visual coherence so intense that these traditional associations are almost suppressed. Though this simple trio of skulls may well have had a personal significance for the master in what were to be the last years of his life, this allusion to death, like the allusions to sexuality in the nudes or, more obliquely, as has been suggested, in the apples, is finally subordinated to the dictates of perception and of art. Here, the spherical protrusions and hollows of these grisly human relics are swallowed up in a dense, but luminous agitation of flickering surfaces that merge with their neutral setting as if they were only a trio of bowls or rounded fruit that the artist had used for abstract ends. This, indeed, was the interpretation of Cézanne's work that would mythologize him as the first modern painter and that would liberate many twentieth-century artists to fracture further his apples, nudes, or mountains, or to distill them into Platonic ideals of form. Yet, if Cézanne, like all great artists, could nurture future generations, he was nonetheless an artist of his own century, sharing with many of his contemporaries a belief that painting should record faithfully his own perception of the seen world, while attempting to wed these truths to the weighty traditions of the old masters.

Fig. 394 **Paul Cézanne**, *Three Skulls*, 1898–1900. Oil on canvas, 14⅝ × 17⅞". Private collection.

## Georges Seurat and Neo-Impressionism

Such ambitions, of course, might apply to many nineteenth-century painters, from Constable and Turner to Millet and

Manet, but the impulse to return to tradition was particularly urgent in the 1880s, when so many artists felt that Impressionism, while offering an exhilarating freshness of visual truth, finally obliterated more than it restored, denying, so it seemed, the values of a more timeless, calculated order that could encompass far more than the instantaneous experience recorded with the blinking of an eye. Of those artists who wished to graft Impressionism onto the tree of old-master tradition, none was so systematic and so immediately successful as the short-lived Georges Seurat (1859–91), who, dying before his thirty-second birthday, neverthless left a decade's work whose monumental achievement can rival even Cézanne's.

Precocious from the beginning, Seurat was his own master by 1880. In 1878–79, he had studied at the École des Beaux-Arts with an Ingres disciple, Henri Lehmann, who trained him in classicizing figural traditions; but then, in 1879–80, during a year of military service, he quickly turned to the world around him, making drawings of maritime life in Brest, the Breton coastal city where he was stationed. Like many other Parisian artists, he painted scenes of both city and country, and his first small painted sketches and drawings of 1880–83 oscillate beween these polarities. In *Farm Women at Work* (fig. 395), an oil sketch of c. 1882, his unique stamp can already be felt. The subject itself belongs broadly to those images of agricultural labor that became so common after 1848; but more specifically, it is Millet's *Gleaners* (see fig. 223) that provides a point of departure. Although this working-class subject, like the stonebreakers Seurat painted at the same time, may still evoke the social issues so conspicuous in paintings of the 1850s, the emphasis here is upon an almost diagrammatic reduction of Millet's broadly rhymed peasants, their backs even more firmly arched toward the earth. More like robots than people, Seurat's farm women are at one with their landscape, which is similarly schematized into broad horizontal striations of sunlit grass and shadowy furrows.

Such strict, mechanized patterns and movements announce Seurat's mature pictorial ambitions. Moreover, the calculated regularity of the brushstroke, which resembles what has been described as "chopped straw," becomes an ally in his equally methodical exploration of scientific ways to capture in pigment on canvas the blaze of natural light and color which the Impressionists had sought intuitively through rapidly applied, irregular dabs of high-keyed hues. In his effort to find a rational basis for achieving such goals, he had read, for instance, Ogden Rood's *Modern*

Fig. 395 **Georges Seurat**, *Farm Women at Work*, c. 1882. Oil on canvas, 15⅛ × 18¼". Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

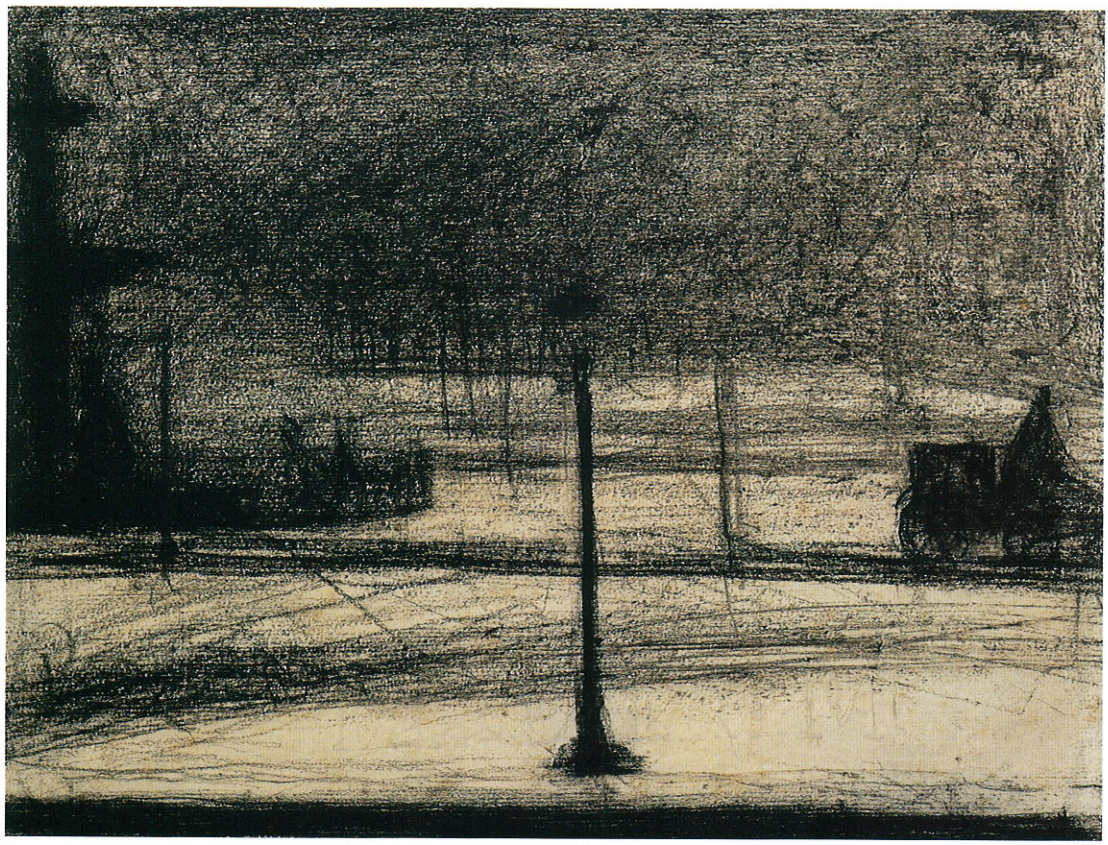

Fig. 396 **Georges Seurat**, *Place de la Concorde, Winter*, c. 1882–83. Conté crayon and chalk, 9⅛ × 12⁹⁄₁₆″. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

*Chromatics* in a French translation of 1881, as well as treatises by the Frenchmen Charles Blanc and Eugène Chevreul, which also treated the question of how light could be broken down into component colors and how our sensations of color were heightened by the simultaneous presence of a complementary hue (orange, for example, intensifying the effect of blue). From such texts, he began to evolve his own system of disciplining Impressionist techniques into more predictable results, determining, for instance, how a local color should contain certain proportions of other colors (such as the orange and yellow of sunlight, or the reflections of adjacent colors). These meticulously measured recipes could theoretically be calculated in advance and would presumably produce more intense optical vibrations by using ever more regularized and minuscule brushstrokes.

In his black-and-white drawings, too, this fascination with the phenomena of light and this search for a stabilizing structure are no less apparent. In what at first seems the most casual drawing of the *Place de la Concorde* (fig. 396), probably executed in the winter of 1882–83, the strong sunlight he hoped to replicate with pigments is replaced by the gloomy effects of twilight on a snowy day, with results that parallel Whistler's refined perceptions of the veiled atmosphere of London at dusk. Yet, despite what seem the irregular scratchings of a velvety conté crayon that convey the murky darkness enshrouding the fountain at the left or the scribble-like marks left by carriages on the snow, an ordered, rhythmic beat begins to dominate. The lampposts, in tandem with the horizontal strata of this vast Parisian traffic hub, measure out a network of rigorous parallels and perpendiculars that surprisingly create a strange melancholy, as the lone carriage moves out of our view and leaves these grandly ordered spaces empty and abandoned in the snow and gas-lit haze. Already in so modest a drawing, Seurat's urban poetry, often ignored in favor of his conspicuous adaptation of quasi-scientific methods, can be savored.

His aspirations, however, were rapidly scaled to the masterpieces of Western painting and to the walls of the Salon, which in 1883 accepted two of his small portrait drawings and which he hoped would accept, the following year, a huge painting (some ten feet wide) that he was preparing with a large battery of drawings and small oil sketches, *A Bathing Place (Asnières)* (fig. 397). In many ways, these preparations were for Seurat a rapid course in Impressionism, for he chose an outdoor theme, the banks of the Seine in a Paris suburb, and made on-the-spot studies which recorded the immediacy of the movement of figures, boats, water. But these individual studies, which for an Impressionist might have been the pictorial ends, were for Seurat only the means to grander goals. With infinite calculation,


Fig. 397 **Georges Seurat**, *A Bathing Place (Asnières)*, exh. Salon des Indépendants 1884. Oil on canvas, 6′ 7″ × 9′ 11½″. National Gallery, London.

he synthesized these observed fragments of experience into a composite whole that appears, in every last detail, the final, inevitable distillation of countless possibilities. In this, he reaffirmed the meticulous, intellectualized working methods of such masters of the French classicizing tradition as Poussin, David, and Ingres, deities whose noble structural order Seurat so often invoked in contemporary terms.

This pedigree, however, was not obvious enough to the 1884 Salon jury, which rejected Seurat's canvas, whose museumworthy ambitions, like those of Renoir's *Bathers* (see fig. 389), clearly called for a large public audience. The timing was nevertheless fortunate; for in the same year, in response to the Salon's conservative taste, a large group of rejected artists formed a Société des Artistes Indépendants, which, following the Impressionist group, would sponsor regular exhibitions, uncensored by a jury and therefore open to greater innovation. Althogh it was poorly displayed (it was hung in the bar), *A Bathing Place (Asnières)* could at least be included at the first Salon des Indépendants, which opened on May 15, 1884 and which included works by four hundred and one artists whose names, with the fewest of exceptions (Seurat, Signac, Redon), were soon forgotten.

In one way, everything about this painting was topical and contemporary; for it represents a specific site on the Seine in the growingly industrial suburb of Asnières, where Raffaëlli had also found themes from working-class life (see fig. 363). The background, with its view of a railway bridge and the factories at Clichy (whose smoke is visibly polluting the air), could hardly be more specific; and the seeming casualness of the men and boys who relax in or by the river, while sailboats, a sculler, and a small ferryboat go by, contributes to the effect of a random cross-section of a sweltering summer day, where physical exertion is minimized to near inertia. Yet the disposition of not only the figures, but every last smokestack, sail, or tree, is so willfully controlled and interrelated that this slice of working-class leisure is miraculously transformed into a remote idyll. One of Seurat's contemporaries, in fact, called the work "a fake Puvis," recognizing the rapport with Puvis de Chavannes's images of elemental harmony and serenity in some archaic, classical world (see fig. 257), and the point was apt in many ways. Seurat, like any artist of the 1880s, was aware of Puvis's ubiquitous mural decorations in France, and he seemed to re-create these dreams of terrestrial paradise in contemporary terms, finding inspiration as well in Puvis's

lucid compositional order which would align figures and landscape in the simplest relationships of parallels and perpendiculars, of profile and frontal views. These basic geometries, which also evoke the archaizing clarity of that quattrocento master Piero della Francesca, whose work had become known through copies at the École des Beaux-Arts, were explored and refined by Seurat in what finally becomes an enclosed system of clockwork intricacy. The incisively contoured arcs of the backs, for instance, carry one's eye, as in a theme and variations, from foreground to background and from water to shore; the absolutely vertical configuration of the white sailboat at the right is then varied by the form of the adjacent tree, which obligingly tilts inward to bring us back to center stage; the seemingly irregular contours of the discarded clothing in the foreground rhyme with the neighboring contours of the supine man who tidily fills the triangular corner at the lower left (mirrored in turn by the triangulation of his watchful dog); and so on, in a myriad of permutations and combinations. Despite these calculations of related planar and modeled shapes, the painting surprisingly conveys a luminous amplitude of outdoor sunlight and atmosphere, in which the heat, the languor, the glare of a summer day are as instantly present as in many Impressionist canvases. Yet Seurat's efforts to systematize the techniques of Impressionism are already evident in the brushwork of the greenery, the sky, the water. The grass of the riverbank, with its mixtures of yellow, orange, green, blue, and white hues, is as neatly shredded as the contents of a lawn mower; and the surfaces of the water, which catch reflections of everything from the blocky, utilitarian geometries of the factories to the furled French tricolor in the ferryboat, are applied with so regularized a white, blue, and green horizontal stipple that they look more like a product of the textile industry rather than the hand-stitching of an Impressionist weave of paint.

In many ways, Seurat's goals paralleled Cézanne's in the 1880s; for both artists were trying to perpetuate the gains of Impressionism while reviving pre-Impressionist goals of carving out images of depth where figures could be arranged in an interlocking order. And in the case of both artists, the rejection of inherited perspective systems meant the creation of new private systems to conjure up illusions of depth while maintaining the Impressionist inheritance of


Fig. 398 **Thomas P. Anshutz**, *Ironworkers: Noontime*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 17 × 24″.
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California.

an insistent surface pattern in which visible brushstrokes play a material role. As in Cézanne's landscapes and bathers of the 1880s (see figs. 384 and 387), near and far are simultaneously evoked and contradicted. Here, for instance, the figures diminish swiftly in size along the receding riverbank, and the colors of the factory complex seem softened in the hazy distance; yet the flat white silhouettes of distant sailboats and houses connect visually with foreground shapes and light values, and the horizon is so high that the major forms below it become flattened patterns. Indeed, these figures, many of whom echo the postures and sleek surfaces of the ideal nudes propagated by Ingres and his disciples, seem modeled as shallow reliefs. Their obverse sides, even when suggested by, for example, the halo of white light around the central seated figure, are finally denied the rounded volume created by traditional modeling and perspective systems. Yet for all the parallels one can draw between Seurat's and Cézanne's efforts in the 1880s to reconstruct, upon Impressionist foundations, a monumental art, their visual and psychological temperaments separate them irrevocably. Already in his first major painting, Seurat, too, created a uniquely personal universe of form, an intricate, but finally serene harmony that seems the product of a master chess player who has thought out every move. But here, as always, Seurat's quasi-scientific faith that art can be created through rational systems of color, geometry, even emotion—a faith so unlike Cézanne's lonely dependence on the truths of his own sensations before nature—is tempered by a strange poetry, an uncanny, even melancholic stillness and silence that totally transcend the prosaic modern subject.

It is worth noting that even on less lofty levels of achievement, there were comparable attempts in the 1880s to transform essentially working-class themes into figural groupings of almost systematic rigor. So it is in what has become a famous American painting, *Ironworkers: Noontime*, by Thomas P. Anshutz (1851–1912; fig. 398), a student of Eakins (see figs. 350 and fig. 365). Like *A Bathing Place*, it offers an industrial scene with factories and anonymous figures who are seen washing up for their noontime lunch break. Yet far from being only a document of working-class life, the painting proposes an almost abstract compositional order. Anshutz, like his master, was a scrupulous student of anatomy, and in 1880, when he was in Wheeling, West Virginia, he made many studies of workers from an iron foundry. However, in the painting,

Fig. 399 **Georges Seurat**, *A Sunday on the Grande-Jatte—1884*, 1884–86. Oil on canvas, 6′ 9″ × 10′. Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois.

## SEURAT AND POINTILLISM: THE DOT AS MARXIST MATRIX

*Can a method of applying paint in itself be political? This is an issue that was debated in Georges Seurat's time and has been since. It is well known that Camille Pissarro was an active member of anarchist movements in France in the period and that Seurat hovered on their periphery. The debates first launched about Courbet's realism in the 1840s and 1850s resurfaced in this period. Seurat was developing a practice far removed from the polish of academicism, the crudeness of Realism, and the elegant if broken brushwork of Impressionism. At the same time, he was depicting subjects of seeming inconsequence on a grand scale. Do these features amount to a radical political agenda?*

*Seurat's contemporary, Paul Signac (1863–1935), alluded to this agenda in the publication* La Révolte *in June 1891, shortly after Seurat's death:*

> ...[artists] by the synthetic representation of the pleasures of decadence (*bals, chahuts*, circuses) in the manner of Seurat (who felt so acutely the degeneracy of our age of transition) ... will bring their testimony to the great social trial that is underway between the workers and capital.[73]

*Stephen Eisenman has built upon this conception of Seurat's practice. The technique of Pointillism divorces the painter from his work just as factory work divorces the laborer from the fruits of his creation:*

> Indeed, for Seurat and the Neo-impressionists, as for few other artists of the time, the division between the physical creation and intellectual cognition of the artwork was nearly absolute. Painted in discrete dots of color, applied according to a preconceived system, Neoimpressionist pictures are a kind of exaggeration or parody of the very type of industrial and alienated labor then expanding in France, in which workers see no relationship between their individual work-gesture and the final product. To what, then, can be attributed the sense of alienation and isolation perceived by contemporary and subsequent critics of the *Grand Jatte* [see fig. 399]? Precisely this: that it was a picture which sought to discover and employ a rationalized, esthetic formula for the representation of idleness, quietness, and pleasure. Short of a revolution in daily life and labor, these two halves could not make a whole; the result was parody.[74]

*Finally, the contemporary art historian T.J. Clark has well summed up the radical, incendiary power of the dot:*

> What the dot seemed to promise, at least for a while, was a truly naive visualization of the singular and uniform as the same thing. The dot exploded the opposition. And this was wonderful. It planted a bomb in the middle of the bourgeois idea of freedom – and order, and individuality, and Art-ness, and taste and "touch," intuition, variety, expressiveness. All the aesthetic categories of the nineteenth century, including most of the modernist ones, disappeared down the black hole of Seurat's technique.[75]

*For Clark, Seurat's pointillist technique, which the artist saw as a new, pseudo-scientific artistic principle, in the end was nothing of the kind, but a purifying, almost mechanical, approach to making art that presaged aspects of twentieth-century modernism and abstraction.*

completed in 1881, these individual poses are locked together in a tautly rectilinear network of profile and frontal postures that are starkly consonant with the bare, hard-edged geometries of the factory buildings which dominate the funneling space. Unlike Seurat, Anshutz, following Eakins, espouses traditional systems of modeling and perspective; yet even within these Renaissance conventions, so thoroughly annihilated by the Impressionist generation in France, the impulse toward a new kind of constructive order, at one with the functional, modular forms of the industrial age, can be felt.

The most awesome construction that would mirror in art this growing sense of belt-line, machine-made regularity is also Seurat's most famous painting, which Parisians first saw in May 1886, at the eighth and last Impressionist exhibition, under the title *A Sunday on the Grande-Jatte—1884* (fig. 399), the date referring to the year Seurat began work on this canvas, whose imposing dimensions—about seven by ten feet—almost exactly duplicate those of *A Bathing Place*. In fact, the painting, executed in two long campaigns between 1884 and 1886, may well be thought of as a successor, even a pendant, to the earlier masterpiece, reflecting similar paintings that contrast upper- and lower-class leisure shown at earlier salons. The title specifies another time of leisure, Sunday, and another place on the Seine, a sliver of an island whose tip is visible at the upper right of *A Bathing Place*. As if we had moved along the river from this industrial suburb to another social layer of Paris, this second masterpiece shows us not workers and factories, but a cross-section of elegant Parisians who, like tailors' dummies in the city's booming new department stores, display their Sunday best. Manet and Monet, among others, had already been inspired by contemporary fashion illustrations when painting figures in chic modern clothing, and Seurat followed their lead, insisting here on the artificially stiff and protuberant silhouettes popularized by the corsets and bustles of the 1880s. Yet Seurat's recognition of the time-bound modes of nineteenth-century costume is countered by a figural order of such timeless abstraction and immobility that many of the preclassical antiquities of

the Louvre—from the archaic Greek Hera of Samos to the statues and reliefs of Egypt and Mesopotamia—appear magically reincarnated in the unlikely environment of a Paris Sunday of 1884. For some viewers, then as now, what was most prominent in the *Grande-Jatte* was exactly this imperturbable, archaizing order. For others, among them Seurat's friend the critic Félix Fénéon (see page 421), what was no less important was the full-scale demonstration of new, quasi-scientific theories of painting, which explored what Seurat called Divisionism, by which colors would be divided, or broken down, into their separate component parts, as well as the technique of Pointillism, that is, the application of pigment in atomic dots, or points, of paint, almost microscopic units from which the vast whole would be constructed.

It was, in fact, Seurat's unique genius to be able to synthesize both the most distant dreams of a hierarchic, yet harmonious society, with a no less acute sense of a modern scientific world of industry and progress, as a result of which the *Grande-Jatte* reverberates in countless directions, past and present. If on the one hand, it looks back to the nineteenth century's countless utopian images of the Golden Age, a land of milk and honey, it also summarizes countless Realist efforts, from Ford Madox Brown's *Work* (see fig. 249) to Manet's *Concert in the Tuileries* (see fig. 271), to present a cross-section of modern society, right down, in Seurat's case as in Brown's, to the dogs in the foreground which, mongrel and pug, symbolize different social classes. Similarly, the monkey on the leash may be associated with a traditional symbol of licentiousness, a reference perhaps to the demi-monde origins of its now ramrod-backed mistress who, accompanied by her top-hatted cigar-smoking gentleman friend, dominates this upper stratum of middle-class society like a royal spectator on a day of official pageantry.

These sociological details, the heritage of the Realist and Impressionist generations, are nevertheless metamorphosed into a new image of humanity, society, and nature, which now has science and the machine as its presiding muses. Flattened into frontal and profile silhouettes against the steep ascent of the land, the water, and the distant riverbank, these park visitors look like an army of robots manufactured from geometric, modular parts which, like the arcs of the bustles, the umbrellas, and the sailboat, almost seem interchangeable. Caillebotte, in his *Paris Street: Rainy Weather* (see fig. 358), captured these rhythms of an industrial society, but even his Parisians, though regimented, are made of flesh and blood. In Seurat's inorganic world, even the grass looks like Astroturf, as if the dappled greenery recorded so exuberantly by the Impressionists had been synthesized by modern chemistry and machinery to provide a landscape environment suitable for these toylike automatons. The trees, too, contribute to this strange, dollhouse scale and imagery, their thin, leafless trunks creating a weightless, decorative screen of vertical accents that belie the monumental gravity implied by the foreground figures. Within this mechanized republic, every citizen, from the pipe-smoking, bare-armed boatsman in the lower left corner to the parents who fondle their white-clad infant in the right distance, is subject to the tyranny of Seurat's laws, which increasingly polarize options—parallel or perpendicular, straight or curved, standing or seated, single or paired. Far more intricately and rigorously ordered than *A Bathing Place*, which, in comparative terms, still conveys the openness and freedom of nature, this new universe ticks like a Swiss watch, an immaculate image of modular precision consonant with the decade's faith in technological progress. Like a machine, Seurat himself, being able to determine in advance the exact chromatic components of all portions of the canvas, could work almost mindlessly into the night, by artificial light, thereby rejecting totally the Impressionist principle of the artist's immediate, instinctive response to the perceived world.

Seurat's faith in the rational methods of the Industrial Age makes the *Grande-Jatte* a kind of Eiffel Tower of painting, and it is telling that when that monument was erected on the occasion of the 1889 Exposition Universelle, Seurat rushed to make a small picture of it, even before its completion (while defenders of traditional beauty bewailed it as a monstrous eyesore that defiled their city). As such, the *Grande-Jatte*'s vision of a mechanized utopia could inspire many twentieth-century dreams of Brave New Worlds, most conspicuously those by Léger. Yet Seurat's more covert mystery can also wreak its irrational spell here in the stillness and hush that are so at odds with Sunday crowds, or in the patterns of long, dark shadows on the grass (Fénéon described the scene as occurring at 4:00 P.M.), which, together with the single running figure (the little girl who races toward the stove at the right, probably to buy a hot crepe or waffle), already propose the dreamlike spaces and frozen motion that would later excite the imagination of de Chirico and the Surrealists.

Like all great art, the *Grande-Jatte* looks far into the past and into the future; but in the context of its own time, its public debut in 1886, at what was to be the last Impressionist group show, gave it virtually the character of a manifesto which both repudiated and revised the premises of that movement and for which a new word, "Neo-Impressionism," as coined by Fénéon that year, seemed mandatory. Seurat's position vis-à-vis Impressionism in the *Grande-Jatte* is so complex as synthesis and rejection that it is probably more easily observed in the less ambitious landscapes and seascapes that he painted on the English Channel during the same years, 1884–86. In a view of the dramatic bluff called Le Bec du Hoc at Grandcamp, painted in the summer of 1885 (**fig. 400**), he offers almost a modernized, corrected version of the Normandy coast scenes that Monet had also been painting in the 1880s, such as

Fig. 400 **Georges Seurat**, *Le Bec du Hoc, Grandcamp*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 25¾ × 32″. Tate Britain, London.

Fig. 401 **Claude Monet**, *The Cliff Walk*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 25¾ × 32″. Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois.

*The Cliff Walk* of 1882 (fig. 401), which locates us on a comparable promontory near Dieppe. Typical of the 1880s' growing sensibility to silhouetted patterns, both paintings pit the craggy irregularity of a high headland against a flattened ground plane of water and sky divided by an almost unbroken horizon line, a format in good part inspired by such Japanese woodcuts as Hokusai's views of surging waves. Yet Seurat imposes upon this Romantic motif of jutting rock and breathtaking expanse of sea the tidiest order of the whole and the parts. Monet's choppy, erratic brushwork is replaced by a facture that would mimic the inhuman perfection of a sewing machine; and an abstract

border of colored dots, like the one Seurat would later add to the *Grande-Jatte*, puts into actual practice the theoretical preaching about intensifying painted colors by placing them next to contrasting colors. Even the birds here fly in a military formation that almost prophesies an air-force display, a far cry from Monet's gently windswept, uncontoured clouds. In short, the older master's immediate, almost sensuous capture of the pleasures of this breezy Channel site is replaced by the Neo-Impressionist's translation of nature into an artistic discipline that might be equatable with the impersonal application of a scientific theory, were it not for the many marks of personal genius. For here, as in the *Grande-Jatte*, Seurat juggles and fuses a scale both monumental and diminutive, and projects a horizontally tiered space that at once evokes immense depth and a jigsaw-puzzle tautness of flat patterning. Moreover, the master's strange poetry can again be savored in this image of such rapt immobility that even the flight of birds and the bobbing movement of the tiny sailboats seem fixed forever in a fairy-tale world.

In no major figure painting by Seurat is the mood more haunting than in the one titled *Une Parade de Cirque*, in English usage generally simplified to *La Parade*, a French word that refers to the outdoor come-on meant to attract customers to the indoor circus performance (fig. 402). First shown to Parisians in 1888 at the fourth Salon des Indépendants, it was mainly executed in the autumn and winter of 1887–88, when Seurat turned away from the summery, sun-drenched landscapes of Paris suburbs and Normandy coastlines in favor of the kind of wintry, urban scene illumined by the light of gas jets which Seurat had earlier recorded in drawings (see fig. 396) and which would also fascinate Whistler, whose lecture on the painting of artificial light Mallarmé would publish in a French translation in 1888. As usual, the stimulus was real, not imaginary, a particular circus identifiable as the Cirque Corvi. But also as usual, a mundane Parisian fact—here, a pedestrian's glimpse of popular entertainment on the boulevards—is transformed by Seurat into a scene of such ritualistic solemnity that we might also expect an Egyptian tribunal, with the most terrifying of proclamations, to appear after this brassy fanfare being played by a trombonist in a magician's costume on the center platform and four accompanying musicians behind the railing. Even more than in the *Grande-Jatte*, the figures of the performers have an iconic rigidity, and their implied solid geometries bear

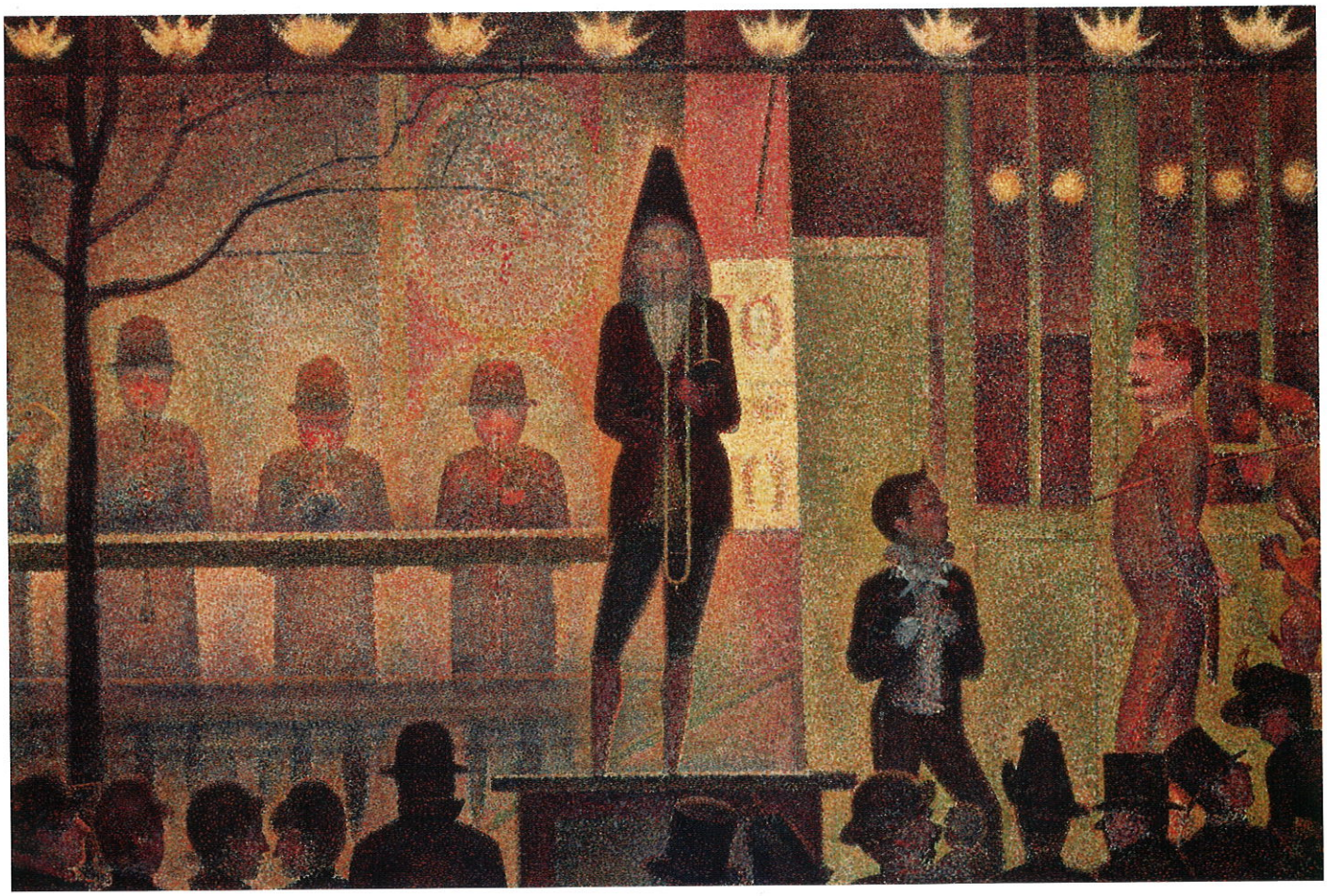

Fig. 402 **Georges Seurat**, *La Parade*, exh. Salon des Indépendants 1888. Oil on canvas, 39¾ × 59⅛″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

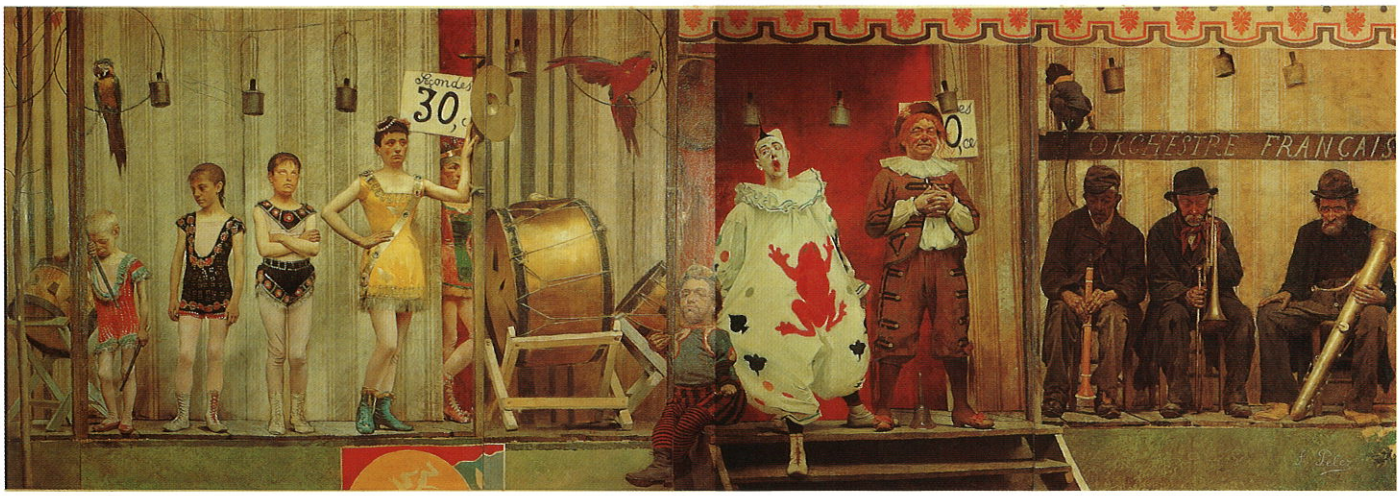


Fig. 403 **Fernand Pelez**, *Grimaces and Misery*, Salon of 1888. Oil on canvas, 7′ 4″ × 21′. Ville de Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.

out Cézanne's remark about cylinders, spheres, and cones far better than does any work by Cézanne himself. Yet the modeling in the yellowish haze of the gaslights is now so filmy that the figures' profile and frontal postures almost dissolve into the tight, two-dimensional network of curved and rectangular patterns that define the props of the background, from the canvas curtain with its probably gaudy, but almost invisible, circus paintings within oval frames, and the zeros that refer to the second digit of the price of tickets (30 and 40 centimes), over to the cagelike window at the right which separates the cashier from the ticket buyers with whom we stand and watch. Locked into place by a preordained geometric system that follows the proportional principles of the Golden Section (an academic theory that here imposes an approximately 3:5 ratio on both the horizontal and vertical divisions of the painting), this razor-sharp backdrop is at once lucid and ambiguous, the exact sequence of planes constantly eliding and shifting places in the foggy, granular light.

But if the painting can look as remote as Egypt and as abstract as Euclid, its appearance is also rooted in the popular imagery of Seurat's day, an imagery fully appropriate to the subject. At the bottom and right-hand edges, the silhouetted heads of the prospective audience provide a casual, agitated movement at odds with the stark immobility of the players. Approaching the art of the caricaturist, Seurat seizes the salient features of hats, physiognomy, posture to define the vivacious diversity of the crowd, which includes the strange exception of a solitary figure in a bowler hat viewed from behind, a projection perhaps of the artist himself as witness to this spectacle. It is known that Seurat, like Courbet, Manet, and the Impressionists, often borrowed ideas from the posters or popular illustrations of his time, which frequently represented people in flattened, cartoon-like ways. Moreover, the Divisionist technique used here, in which even the most palpable of forms dissolve in an infinity of regularized dots of color, coincides closely with the look of some of the new techniques of cheap color reproduction explored by printers in the 1880s. In this, Seurat's hand-made images would become ever more consonant with the machine-made color illustrations that were rolling off the printing presses and would, as such, prophesy such later aesthetic adaptations of commercial printing techniques as Lichtenstein's Pop Art use of benday dots in the 1960s.

Seurat's firm roots in the art and experience of the 1880s can be further borne out if we turn to an exactly contemporary painting of the same circus subject, *Grimaces and Misery* (fig. 403), a work by Fernand Pelez (1843–1913) accepted at the Salon of 1888, which opened its doors on May 1, two days before the closing of the Salon des Indépendants, where *La Parade* was to be seen. Working within the conventions of the meticulously descriptive Realist technique he had learned from such academic masters as Cabanel, Pelez also places us before a Paris circus come-on, with young acrobats, clown, barker, and musicians lined up as in a shooting gallery. The bittersweet contrast of a scene of rousing fun with the transparent poverty and dreariness of these performers' lives offered a segment of the urban misery which Pelez, following Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), made into a pictorial specialty at the Salons of the 1880s. The coincidences between this work and Seurat's are legion, from the leafless tree at the left and the posted prices of tickets to the carefully contrived network of parallels and perpendiculars that define this shallow, friezelike space (which in both cases is sharply cropped at the bottom and the sides, suggesting the continuing horizontal spectacle that greets the city stroller); yet they are undoubtedly the result of a common source in popular imagery rather than an instance of plagiarism. As such, they permit us all the more easily to measure not only the visual genius of Seurat, which here miraculously fuses