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For Immediate Release

## MILLET DRAWINGS FROM THE FRICK'S COLLECTION ON VIEW

*A Devotion to Work: Barbizon Drawings by Jean-François Millet supplements  
The Road to Impressionism: Barbizon Landscapes from the Walters Art Museum*

PITTSBURGH, PA , January 30, 2009—Drawings by the nineteenth-century master French painter Jean-François Millet (1814–1875) will be on view at The Frick Art Museum concurrently with *The Road to Impressionism: Barbizon Landscapes from the Walters Art Museum*. Both exhibitions will be on view from February 7 through May 24, 2009.

Between 1897 and 1908 Henry Clay Frick quietly assembled one of the most significant collections of works on paper by Jean-François Millet in the country. Left to his daughter, Helen Clay Frick at his death, these works owned by the Frick Art & Historical Center form a collection second in America only to that at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Many of Millet's most sought after drawings are pastels, and because of the fragility of the medium and the inherent sensitivity of works on paper to light exposure—these works spend about 75% of their time in storage. This is the first time the collection has been displayed in its entirety since 2000.

The eleven works owned by the Frick provide a compact survey of many of Millet's most enduring themes and pictorial techniques. The earliest drawing, *The Cowherd*, dates to around 1848, the year in which Millet first exhibited a peasant subject at the Salon. The latest work is dated c. 1868—and shows the artist more interested in the depiction of landscape, texture, and

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color than the figure. From about 1865 on, Millet made many highly finished, masterful pastels for private collectors and connoisseurs. He re-worked earlier themes, and yet seemed to experience a sense of freedom with the technically tricky medium, which allowed him to explore compositions and landscapes in ways that his monumental paintings couldn't.

The drawings in the exhibition, titled *A Devotion to Work: Barbizon Drawings by Jean-François Millet*, will be organized chronologically, allowing for works from the 1840s and 1850s to provide an introduction to Millet's interest in rural life, his humanist impulse towards dignifying the work of agricultural laborers, and his scenes of domestic interiors—indebted to Dutch genre painting, and his own daily experience raising nine children in a village cottage. Later works—from the 1860s—show his technical skill, his fine sense of touch, and an interest in spontaneous, evocative color, reminiscent of the young Impressionists, as he made intimate, poetic works for collectors like Emile Gavet, who at one point owned ninety-five of the artist's pastels.

Jean François Millet was born in 1814 into a farming family near Cherbourg. He trained with a local portrait painter and then went to Paris in 1837 to study at the École des Beaux-Arts under Delaroche. The academic focus on drawing skills, especially in relation to the human figure, had a strong effect throughout Millet's career. His early work focused on conventional portraits and fashionable eighteenth century pastoral scenes. However, in 1848 he chose to exhibit *The Winnower*, a painting depicting peasant life, at the Paris Salon. It was the first of many rural scenes based on memories of his own childhood. In 1849 he moved to the village of Barbizon in the forest of Fontainebleau, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Millet's early paintings of country life were idealized—pulled from his childhood memories. However, as he continued to live with his family in Barbizon, he came face to face with the real drama of rural life at the time. Mid-nineteenth-century France lagged behind other countries in industry, and agricultural production remained backward and focused on subsistence. This lack of resources engendered conflict among absentee landlords, village farmers and the landless poor concerning traditional rights of village communities, including pasture on commons, gleaning, haying, and wood gathering—all subjects of Millet's drawings and paintings. While Millet

claimed that he was no socialist, his work poignantly addresses the issues and rights of the rural poor.

The drawings in the Frick's collection beautifully document the development of Millet's artistic voice. The earliest drawing, *The Cowherd*, shows his struggle to develop a personal style. The close landscape and high horizon create a shallow stage for the figure, much like the work of Romantic painters early in the nineteenth century. This contrasts with his later work where the landscape becomes an important character in the story.

At the end of the 1850s, harsh criticism of his paintings of peasant subjects made Millet focus more on drawings of domestic scenes, which his dealer, Alfred Sensier, found easier to sell. *The Departure*, c. 1858-62, and *The Knitting Lesson*, 1857-58, portray the sweetness of domestic life, without any dark overtone of social justice. The thematic focal point of *The Knitting Lesson* is a simple human gesture—the protective embrace of a mother as she directs her daughter's hands in the action of knitting. *The Departure* shows a young woman leaving her home, holding her active baby who reaches greedily for the contents of her basket. The drawing includes more anecdotal detail with the cottage and kitchen garden surrounding the figures than is usual in Millet's drawings. The laundry drying in the background and the woman weaving in the shadow of the cottage interior give us additional information about their lives. Millet used his wife, Catherine, and his nine children as models for these domestic scenes.

Never far from Millet's heart, the iconic peasant scenes for which he is known continued to inspire his drawings. *The Gleaner Returning Home with Her Grain*, c. 1857-1862, and *The Sower*, 1865, present peasant workers whose features are unspecific, placed monumentally within the landscape. Millet's drawing of the gleaner was done for his friend and dealer Alfred Sensier who repeatedly tried to convince Millet to soften his imagery. The drawing of the peasant girl standing upright but relaxed while balancing a sheaf of wheat on her head, contrasts starkly with his famous monumental Salon painting *The Gleaners*, 1857, which presents three figures bent over in their backbreaking search for grain that remained on the ground after the harvest.

Millet's 1850 painting, *The Sower*, was described by critics as “confrontational” and “savage,” but by the 1860s, when the Frick's *Sower* drawing was done, dealers and collectors were requesting the subject. In the painting, the lone figure strides forcefully across the picture plane, with the steep hills of Millet's childhood terrain pushing him forward, tossing grain from a pouch slung over his shoulder—crowding into the viewer's space. In the drawing executed fifteen years later, the sower is integrated into the landscape, showing the texture of the plowed earth, the movement of the clouds in the sky, and farming activities in the distance, in a landscape that is recognizably Barbizon—the flat plain of Chailly with the ruins of its old telegraph tower in the distance. By the twentieth century, the image became a symbol of the benefits of hard work. It was used as a logo for the Provident Trust Company, the forerunner of Provident National, which merged with Pittsburgh National Bank in 1983 to become PNC Bank Corporation.

While Millet made many preparatory drawings for his paintings, most of the drawings in this collection were created as finished works. Millet was meticulous in his choice of medium and paper. He was a master in working with conté crayon—a mixture of charcoal and wax still used by art students today—and achieved a rich range of textures with only one color. Once again in response to Sensier's request for more saleable work, he began to add color to his drawings with watercolor and pastel.

*Resting in the Shade*, c. 1860 used watercolor with black conté crayon in a combination of loose strokes that animate the grass and trees. The shepherdess sitting on the bank seems to merge with the landscape. Shepherds guarding their flocks are a continual theme throughout Millet's oeuvre. Landless peasants did not have the right to pasture their animals on village commons and were forced to graze their animals along roadways or in out-of-the-way places. They were heavily fined if their animals entered the richer grazing areas. In *Flight of Crows*, c.1866, a landless countrywoman pastures her cows as a flock of crows rises in the distance. A row of leafless Lombardy poplars separates her—like bars—from the richer pasture beyond. In this work the landscape and glowing sky speak most profoundly, while the figures of the woman and her cows only provide a sense of scale.

*Le Puy Du Dôme*, c. 1866–68, was done as a commission for Emile Gavet. Millet did this drawing on a visit to Auvergne, a mountainous region in central France. At 4,800 feet, Le Puy Du Dôme is the highest peak of the range of extinct volcanoes. In Millet's drawing, the ominous peak is wreathed in blue-gray clouds while the grassy areas in the foreground are rendered in lush shades of green and aqua. The shepherdess minding her goats in the foreground emphasizes the remoteness of this place. In the pastels of his later years, Millet continued to use color in an increasingly masterful way, assuring his reputation through time as a master of drawing.

Henry Clay Frick's appreciation for Millet and the Barbizon school began when he still lived in Pittsburgh. Frick acquired most of his collection of Millet drawings from M. Knoedler & Co., an art dealer with galleries in New York, Paris and Pittsburgh. Many of the drawings graced the walls of Clayton, even after the family began spending more and more time in New York and Boston. Millet was among a group of French painters who were actively promoted to American collectors, as can be seen in the accompanying exhibition *The Road to Impressionism: Barbizon Paintings from the Walters Art Museum*, which features many paintings purchased by Baltimore collector William T. Walters. His Millet canvas, *The Goose Girl*, 1863, is featured in the exhibition. The Barbizon artists were considered innovators whose work focused on actual observation of nature as opposed to the academic tradition of depicting an idealized view of the natural world.

A suggested contribution of \$5 will be requested to view both exhibitions. Frick members are admitted for free.

## **THE FRICK ART MUSEUM**

The Frick Art Museum at the Frick Art & Historical Center contains collections of fine and decorative arts assembled by Helen Clay Frick, daughter of Henry Clay Frick. In addition to exhibiting its permanent collection, which has strengths in Italian Renaissance and French eighteenth-century painting, the Museum has an active program of temporary exhibitions.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The Frick Art & Historical Center is located at 7227 Reynolds Street in Pittsburgh's Point Breeze neighborhood. Free parking is available in the Frick's off-street lot or along adjacent streets. The Frick is open 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Tuesday–Sunday and closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to the Car and Carriage Museum, Greenhouse, and Playhouse is free.

Docent-led tours of *The Road to Impressionism* and *A Devotion to Work: Barbizon Drawings by Jean-François Millet* are available with museum admission on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 2:00 p.m. Groups of five or more and those interested in scheduling a tour of the permanent collection are requested to schedule a private tour at an alternate time. The cost for group tours of the exhibition and permanent collection is \$7 per person, and reservations must be made one to two weeks in advance. Call 412-371-0600, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00p.m., Monday—Sunday.

**For additional information or images, please contact Greg Langel, Media and Marketing Manager, at 412-371-0600 ext. 524 or [GLangel@TheFrickPittsburgh.org](mailto:GLangel@TheFrickPittsburgh.org).**

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*The Frick Art & Historical Center, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, is an historic site and cultural center with a mission to serve the public through preservation, presentation, and interpretation of the fine and decorative arts and historically significant artifacts for all residents of and visitors to Western Pennsylvania.*