

**Mary Cassatt** (1844 – 1926) was an American painter and printmaker. She lived much of her adult life in France, where she first befriended Edgar Degas and later exhibited among the Impressionists. Cassatt often created images of the social and private lives of women -- with particular emphasis on the intimate bonds between mothers and children. She was described by Gustave Geffroy in 1894 as one of "*les trois grandes dames*" of Impressionism, alongside Marie Bracquemond and Berthe Morisot.

### **History of 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Master Prints**

Starting in 1860, and coming into full force by 1890, there was a revival in printmaking in both London and Paris, an artform that had fallen out of favor since the glory days of Rembrandt. By 1890, the print revival was sweeping Paris and London by storm, supported by the newly widespread popularity of poster art and the invention of new lithographic inks, which made drawing on stones produce works of vivid color -- something the Impressionists required in the re-established medium. As for B&W prints, so many new techniques were being advanced that prints became a kind of nuanced and refined multiple 'ink drawing,' if you will. Furthermore, art dealers, notably Ambrose Vollard (publisher of *The Album of Painter-Engravers*) and Durand Ruel, began pressing their stables to create works in print media like etching and lithography that were more affordable to entry-level collectors. Ruel went so far as to underwrite print-only exhibitions at his famed gallery. Finally, enough cannot be said about the influence of the art patron Dr. Paul Gachet, M.D. -- who, being an amateur etcher himself, practically forced each artist who visited him to try their hands at printmaking! Gachet is ever famous for having cared for van Gogh in the last months of his life, and for van Gogh's famous painting of Gachet.\*

\**Portrait of Dr. Gachet* is one of the most revered paintings by the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh. It depicts Dr. Paul Gachet who took care of Van Gogh during the final months of his life. There are two authenticated versions of the portrait, both painted in June 1890 at Auvers-sur-Oise, Gachet's country hometown. One is in a private collection and the other, at the Orsay Museum in Paris. Both show Gachet sitting at a table and leaning his head on his right arm, but they are easily differentiated in color and style. In 1990, the first version fetched a record price of \$82.5 million (\$75 million, plus a 10 percent buyer's commission) when sold at auction in New York. When accounting for inflation, this is still the *highest price* paid for art at a public auction!

Here is a summary of the major shows dealing with the 1890 print revival in Paris:

*General Exhibition of Lithography, École de Beaux Arts, Paris, 1891, a thousand prints on view*

*Centenary Exhibition of Lithography, Champs de Mars, Paris, 1895\*\**

\*\*Lithography was invented in 1796 by German author and actor Alois Senefelder, as a thrifty method of publishing theatrical works. Thus, 1895 would be the centenary of the medium