



HSBC Presents: Beyond the Frame, Episode 5 – *Ellen Mary in a white coat*, Mary Stevenson Cassatt (1896)

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BOOT:

I don't give a scuff, really. I thought about putting my foot down and demanding some sympathy strokes, but it's a magnificent work of art and how could you take the attention from that face?

HOST:

HSBC proudly presents "Beyond The Frame", a look behind the bigger picture of some of the world's most important Impressionist Art. In this season, we're looking at the rebellion of the impressionists. It was all old dreamy brushwork, but rife with bravery, breaking stereotypes and smashing perceptions. Across this series, we go back 150 years to discover some of the surprising stories behind six iconic impressionist artworks. One classic impressionist painting in every episode.

Don't take my word for it, you'll hear from the paintings themselves. If you like what you hear and you'll be on the frame experience, see these renowned artworks for yourself in the National Gallery of Victoria's Exhibition French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, proudly supported by HSBC. It's open now until October 3. For tickets visit NGV.Melbourne.

These boots were made for walking, and that's just what they did, by walking into an Artistic Rebellion and staying there for over 125 years.

It's baby steps, though, for *Ellen Mary in a white coat*. Mary Cassatt's painting signified a revolution of composition and interpretation. One wonders if that was Mary Cassatt's intention, or was this adorable painting of her niece, the 1800's version of a screensaver? You be the judge. Cassatt studied art in the United States and then asked herself, what does the heiress to a Pennsylvania fortune do with her talents? Move to France and buy a chateau, of course. The friending Edgar Degas, one of the founders of the Impressionist movement. She became an official member of the rebellious group and one of the three great ladies of Impressionism with Marie Bracquemond and Bert Morisot.

Notably, she was the only American in the Impressionist circle. So, it was a crucial link between American Nouveau riche and French Art. Known for her unique depictions of domestic and urban life, the market responded well to her inventive composition. And with this in mind, *Ellen Mary* is a work of its time, ensconced in a white coat, the two year old child is stoic and aware being painted is a big deal. She's leaning forward in her chair in anticipation. We are so grateful to be joined in the studio today by one of the boots from the painting. Right boot of "*Ellen Mary in a White Coat*" by Mary Cassatt. Welcome to Beyond the Frame.

BOOT: Barely in the frame. You mean?

HOST: Yeah, you're not really in the painting, not even painted.

BOOT:

Sketched. That's what they call me. I don't want to blow my own shoe horn, but that's just part of the style, I'm supposed to be a dress shoe, but I'm actually an outdoor shoe. Artists generally prefer the more expensive option so really, I've got no business, being sketched. I'm happy to be here in Australia, on tour, apart from some Blundstone envy. Aren't they nice boot? That said, gets feet grow quickly. So can't complain about 125 years of

perfect feet, but on the other foot, that's 125 years of the same stinky socks. I guess, that's the price you pay for immortality.

HOST:

And Cassatt was considered one of the three great female French Impressionist artists. What was it actually like working with her?

BOOT:

My memory meeting her is sketchy, but I once heard someone describe her work as good as men's. A cringe-worthy reminder of the few women who managed to make it into the boys club. That was the salary and exhibition system in the day. It was difficult. I wouldn't have liked to work in her shoes. Impression is very much about the moment and in Cassatt's case, the moment was often things in everyday life of women and children in various domestic and urban settings, both indoors and in the open air. She wasn't as free perhaps as the men, again, a sign of the times.

Back to the artwork, back to me, as you can see, I clearly wasn't as important as the bonnet, because that was the important part. She didn't even finish, merely sketching both me and the other boot. Well, she would have considered the work finished, because I was foreign to the face of the child. Really getting a sense of who this kid was. But what many don't know, is that, this is also a reimagining of a 17th century Spanish style, infantile painting. Those incredible paintings of the little princesses, infantiles in Spanish, with a Bejeweled wigs and ornate costumes that Velasquez painted. She was very influenced by Velasquez. He also didn't paint.

HOST:

Oh, okay. Touchy subject. So do you think that Cassatt would be pleased with where she hangs in the exhibition?

BOOT:

Hanging alongside paintings by Edgar Degas and Édouard Manet, two great painters of the late 19th century. Both well known for the radical approach, depending more than life. I think she'd have enjoyed being displayed in their company, artistically speaking. She was certainly an important part of the movement.

HOST: How do you feel about the painting?

BOOT:

I don't give a scuff really. I thought about putting my foot down and demanding some sympathy strokes, but it's a magnificent work of art and how could you take the attention from that face?

HOST:

Yeah. Shame, he can't get up, be the spit and polish to shine at the exhibition, but I must commend you on your knowledge of Cassatt, you sound like a real fan.

BOOT:

Even though I'm barely there, I'm being run by her niece. Although I bet you didn't question that the boot, doesn't exist on first glance you get to meet. She really understood how people look, but don't see, you don't need much convincing to assume something exists. Just that enjoyed great success as both a member of and advocate for the French impressionists. Leading a female charge in this predominantly male movement, her paintings were held in such esteem, that she was about to bequeath her niece, Ellen Mary, the chateau, that she was painted in and the painting too.

HOST:

Well boot from Ellen Mary in a White Coat by Mary Cassatt. Thank you for taking a stroll with us in Beyond The Frame.

BOOT: It was such a pleasure meeting you.

HOST:

That's all the time we have for Beyond The Frame, brought to you by HSBC, proud partner of the National Gallery of Victoria and French Impressionism from the museum of Fine Arts, Boston. We hope that after hearing this podcast, you've got a greater understanding of these masterpieces. On the next episode of Beyond The Frame, we take you to Dance at Bougival.

FEMALE DANCER:

Obviously what happens in a Renoir, stays in a Renoir.

Bougival the place to be. We were free, society wasn't watching. They were all there. We danced, drank, laughed, and loved. No wonder this rebelliousness made an impression on him.

HOST:

Extend the Beyond The Frame experience, by seeing this piece and more for yourself at the National Gallery of Victoria's French Impressionism Exhibition, brought to you by HSBC, a proud partner of the NGV. It's open now until October 3. For tickets, visit ngv.melbourne. Make sure to follow, like and rate these podcasts. There's plenty more Beyond The Frame to come.

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