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HSBC Presents: Beyond the Frame, Episode 1 – *Grainstack (snow effect)* Claude Monet, 1891

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HOST: Monet was as business savvy as he was talented, you could call him a Ken Done of his time.

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 French Impressionists. It wasn't all dreamy brushwork, but a movement that was 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 painting per episode. Warning, this isn't your usual art history series.

If you like what you hear in your Beyond 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. Open now until October three. For tickets visit ngv.melbourne.

He was pioneering working from home before COVID made it a thing. With eight kids one wonders if he would have preferred an office job. He was the most prolific of the impressionists. Figuring out that if he painted the same thing, but made it slightly different each time, he could ride the hay wagon, all the way to the bank. Not motivated by money, but by the art itself. The form, the subject, the object and beyond.

Toward the end of the 1800s Monet got into repetition in a big way. He painted a series of 15 grain stacks. Enormous stacks of hay, wheat, barley or anything else that was growing within walking distance of Monet's house. An act of creative freedom that turned Monet into a prolific artist.

Successful? One grain stack recently sold at Sotheby's for over 100 million dollars, equivalent to about two and a half million at the time. Not bad for watching the grass grow.

Usually, you'd expect we'd speak to a gallery representative, a curator, a professor in art. You'd expect. But on Beyond the Frame, we are moving past that into the artwork itself to give you a better impression of the work of these famed French artists.

We're lucky enough to be joined by one of the most famous subjects painted repeatedly by Monet with oil paint, one of the Monet grain stacks. The one covered in snow. Grain stack Snow Effect, welcome to Beyond The Frame.

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Actually, my Australian nom de plume is haystack. Haystacks in Australia and grain stacks in America. I heard one of your packers called me Graino.

HOST: Oh they were just being friendly. It's another way to say "Hello friend". So do you often experience much miscommunication on your travels?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): We're usually based at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It's nice to see Melbourne for the first time myself but to answer your question, I'm not the first celebrity to be misunderstood. For centuries people thought the Mona Lisa was happy.

HOST: It is hard to say. How would you define your status in the art world then? Didn't some perhaps think you were an art experiment gone wrong?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): I was an art experiment gone right. Creatively, artistically, and well, business wasn't bad as they say in Australia. The grain stack series is the first time an artist had repeatedly painted the same image.

Like Andy Warhol's portraits, or wait maybe he took that from Monet. For the first time people were paying to see the seasons change, and they paid. It was the show me the Monet moment.

HOST: So, how do the other haystacks feel about being the cream of the impressionist crop?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Some might say this series was the most banal thing that had ever been done in art. But I disagree. It was about time someone paid closer attention to us. And this is precisely what Monet did. In fact, whenever he painted, he went beyond the subject to capture the feeling around it. I guess that's why you picked me to go Beyond the Frame.

It's more about the way he paints much more about weather, life, time. These are impressions of the moment. Like a film really. A story of time.

Also with those eight kids, plenty of time to get out of the house and work. Even if it was just outside. Really getting out of the studio and into nature had never been done like this before and that was a great achievement. The fact that it began a movement, well, makes up for the fact that the term Impressionism was originally a slur coined by critics. They so rarely understand the rebels, do they?

I was lucky I had snow. The others are like, "why did he paint me when I was having such a bad-hay-day" or "that's the blazing sun, it's not dandruff." But we're all here for each other.

HOST: Good to know. Do all 15 of you ever get together?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Well there's six of us in Chicago, two in Boston and once we all had a reunion but that was the 90s and we're in different places in our lives now. But you never know, if Friends can do it, maybe we can too. Would be great, wouldn't it?

(Sneezing)

HOST: Bless you, do you have a cold?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): No, allergies.

HOST: Hay fever?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Ha ha so droll. Cats actually.

I do have to deal with quite a bit though. An assistant would go with Monet on his visits to the field, as he moved from canvas to canvas, schlepping his wheelbarrow with all the paints and easels and who knows what else that guy's carrying. That was the problem with Monet, he was always trying to be a multitasker. Did you know that he painted 2500 paintings during his seven decades of painting?

HOST: Wow.

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): While that doesn't make me feel special, knowing that this series was the one that started his run as a big time painter, it's satisfying to have played a role in it.

HOST: Yeah of course. I mean all of you grain stacks have had a massive impact on Monet's career and the way that it went. Just look at one of your colleagues recently sold for 110 million dollars.

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Oh, yes. 'Grainstack Sunset'. Inspired an instafilter. Sunset is very turn of the 18th century.

HOST: Whereas, you are raw, no tricks, honest. You pioneered snow?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Yes. White is not the absence of colour, white is every colour. I am the rainbow of haystacks. And being every colour ever is a burden. Not just any haystack can do it. So technically, I would be top of the pile.

HOST: So, when you last changed hands, how much did you sell for?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): I come from a pedigree of donations.

HOST: Oh okay you were a gift to the gallery?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Yes I'm a priceless people-painting. I'm here for everyone. Definitely enjoyed the travel. Staying in the best museums, the crowds, the flyers, the glory.

HOST: Yeah, of course.

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Not bad for a 125-year-old snowy haystack from Normandy. I mean look what the 15 of us created. We're so beautiful that audiences developed Stendhal Syndrome when they saw us.

HOST: Sorry Stendhal?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Oh pardon. That's when someone is so stunned by the beauty of the work that you physically fall to your knees, it can cause changes in heartbeats, even fainting and hallucinations. So we're not just beautiful, we're breath taking.

To paint a beauty such as myself, the Impressionists rebelled by bringing their practice of art out of the studio, and then the post impressionists had the unmitigated gall and temerity to say we were stifling them.

HOST: Who said that?

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Van Gogh, Edvard Munch. It's only because of us that post-Impressionists were able to then make the subject symbolic and emotive especially with colour. Maybe that's why the Haystack in Canberra is so comfortable hanging next to Jackson Pollock's Blue Poles. Painted 61 years later. I heard he was a bit of rebel too.

HOST: Well snowy grain stack, it's been a pleasure. Thanks for joining us on Beyond the Frame.

GRAINSTACK (SNOW EFFECT): Merci.

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're off to the races with Edgar Degas' Day at Longchamp.

Because I'm a horse. Oh I'm just horsing around as you can see in the painting perhaps the artist's making a statement to the salon, the art establishment of it's time.

If you like what you heard here then extend the beyond the frame experience by seeing this piece and more for yourself at the National Gallery of Victoria exhibition *French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston* proudly supported by HSBC its open now until October three. For tickets visit ngv.Melbourne.