

Norton Simon Museum For Immediate Release

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August 2021

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Manet's *Philosophers* from the Art Institute of Chicago

November 19, 2021–February 28, 2022

Pasadena, CA—The Norton Simon Museum announces a special installation of Édouard Manet's three *Philosopher* paintings: *Beggar with Oysters (Philosopher)* and *Beggar with a Duffle Coat (Philosopher)*, both dated 1865/67 and on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago, and the *Ragpicker*, from c. 1865-1870, one of the highlights of the Norton Simon collections. Shown together for the first time in fifty-five years, these richly resonant works reveal Manet at his most provocative, harnessing the authority of an established style to convey dignity on a class of people overlooked by French society.

About Manet's *Philosophers*

In 1865, Édouard Manet (1832–1883) traveled to Spain to “see all those beautiful things and seek the counsel of maestro Velázquez,” as he wrote to a friend, later declaring “the philosophers of Velázquez” to be “astounding pieces” that were “alone worth the journey.” Indeed, Diego Velázquez's *Aesop* and *Menippus*, both c. 1638, depict the ancient Greek storyteller and satirist as contemporary Spanish beggars, each man rendered in shabby clothes but with enough self-possession to confidently meet the viewer's gaze. These paintings provided a model for the young Manet, who sought to relate art historical tradition to contemporary life.

Shortly before and after his trip to Spain, Manet painted three of his own “philosophers,” *Beggar with Oysters (Philosopher)*, *Beggar with a Duffle Coat (Philosopher)*, and the *Ragpicker*, which, along with an earlier painting of an absinthe drinker, were loosely grouped as a series when he sold them to his dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, in 1872. The works depict disheveled, down-and-out male figures, all of whom would have been legible urban types to viewers of the mid-19th century. Portraying the men at nearly life size against an indecipherable dark background, Manet borrowed Velázquez's format and updated it to offer a modern equivalent.

The association between poverty and philosophy was already a well-established theme in the art and literature of Velázquez's day, but it had renewed relevance in 19th-century Paris. Beggars and ragpickers had become increasingly romanticized between the 1840s and 1860s as urban development seemed to threaten their existence altogether. Ragpickers sifted through the detritus of daily life—primarily rags, which they sold to paper manufacturers—as well as kitchen scraps, soap and other cast-offs that were left out for trash collectors. Sorting garbage might sound like work for the truly destitute, but these scavengers were regulated, semiprofessional recyclers of city waste, and they were seen as a discrete social type, one that was free from the restrictions and inhibitions of a traditional bourgeois lifestyle.

Recent scholarship has suggested that Manet, who suffered from his own sense of alienation and rejection from established art circles, may have identified with his embattled subjects. Both artist and “philosopher-ragpicker” could be seen as bohemians who operated on the margins and earned a living by making use of the stuff of everyday life.

About the Installation

This installation is the result of a masterpiece exchange program between the Art Institute of Chicago and the Norton Simon Museum, and marks the first time Manet's three philosophers have been shown together since the artist's major retrospective at the Art Institute in 1966-7. This will also be the first time *Beggar with Oysters (Philosopher)* and *Beggar with a Duffle Coat (Philosopher)* are on view in California. The Chicago paintings will be installed together with *The Ragpicker* in the Museum's permanent collection galleries, near the two other Manet works from the Norton Simon collections: an unfinished portrait of the artist's wife, *Madame Manet (1874–76)*, and the highly accomplished *Still Life with Fish and Shrimp (1864)*. The installation is organized by Chief Curator Emily Talbot, and is on view in the Museum's 19th-century art wing from November 19, 2021 through February 28, 2022. A series of related programs will be offered.

About the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an astonishing collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, and a stellar collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern and Contemporary Art from Europe and the United States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupies an important place in the Museum's collections. The Museum houses more than 12,000 objects, roughly 1,000 of which are on view in the galleries and gardens. Two temporary exhibition spaces feature rotating installations of artworks not on permanent display.

Location: The Norton Simon Museum is located at 411 W. Colorado Blvd. at Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif., at the intersection of the Foothill (210) and Ventura (134) freeways. For general Museum information, please call (626) 449-6840 or visit nortonsimon.org. **Temporary Hours:** The Museum is open Thursday through Monday, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed on Tuesday and Wednesday. **Admission:** General admission is \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free but limited, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** Pasadena Transit stops directly in front of the Museum. Please visit <http://pasadenatransit.net> for schedules. The MTA bus line #180/181 stops in front of the Museum. The Memorial Park Station on the MTA Gold Line, the closest Metro Rail station to the Museum, is located at 125 E. Holly St. at Arroyo Parkway. Please visit www.metro.net for schedules. **Covid-19 Protocols and Guidelines:** For up-to-date information on our Covid-19-related protocols, please visit nortonsimon.org/visit.