

Visitor information

Forever Young The Langmatt's Most Significant Paintings

4. June to 10. December 2023

Forever Young presents masterpieces of Impressionist painting in the historic villa: before the museum closes for renovation from 2024 to 2025, *Forever Young* will show around **50 paintings of French Impressionism**, one more time. Other important groups of works by Corot and Boudin, Venetian vedute and selected donations by contemporary artists complete the exhibition. The **picture gallery** presents not only paintings, but also historical furniture, carpets and valuable vases. It conveys a vivid picture of how Sidney and Jenny Brown lived amidst their extraordinary collection.



Gallery with French Impressionist paintings, 1934, Langmatt Museum Archive

The exhibition title picks up on the mega-hit of the same name by the Berlin group **Alphaville** in 1984: a catchy tune that evokes eternal youth and gave rise to numerous cover versions. The Impressionists of Langmatt, however, do not have to conjure up their youth: their immortality and eternal youth consists in their contribution to the historical **pioneering achievement of Impressionism**, namely, to have paved the way for the Modernism of the 20th century. The discovery of light and movement in nature and the associated first tendencies towards abstraction led to a fundamental change in the concept of art and have had a noticeable impact right up to the present day.

The collection of **Sidney and Jenny Brown** contains all the famous names of Impressionism such as Cézanne, Degas, Gauguin, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley. Today, it is one of the most important private collections of French Impressionism in Europe. The Browns amassed most of their collection **between 1908 and 1919**. At that time, French Impressionism was still contemporary art, controversial in professional circles and met with fierce rejection by the public. Therefore, profit considerations or social prestige could not have played a role. **The Browns collected with their heart** and followed their personal preferences. Without their knowing it or wanting to, they wrote **European art history** before other Impressionist collections were established in Switzerland, for example in Winterthur or Zurich. It was by no means the case that the Browns could pay for their paintings out of petty cash, despite the immense success of the BBC (now ABB): to be able to acquire Impressionists, they sold almost their entire collection of works from the Munich Secession and agreed to pay for some new acquisitions in instalments.

The works in the Impressionist collection are described in detail in the Langmatt collection catalogue. Furthermore, the included catalogue of works contains detailed information on the circumstances of acquisition, the purchase prices and the provenance. Since the beginning of 2022, the Langmatt, with the help of external experts from Lange & Schmutz, has been working on the provenance of 13 Impressionist paintings acquired between 1933 and 1941, the year of Sidney Brown's death. The Federal Office of Culture is supporting the research with a generous financial contribution.

Since the Impressionists preferred to work in series, it is relatively easy to make comparisons with works from the same group. This way, it becomes evident that around half of the 50 paintings need not fear comparison with works in the world's most important museums. To put it casually, they play in the **Champions League**. To pick out just four of them: the painting *Trees and Rocks in the Park of the Château Noir* (circa 1904) by **Paul Cézanne** is probably of the greatest art-historical significance within the collection. In this late work, the striking abstraction of nature and the focus on the colours ochre, green and blue already herald the Cubism that was developed only a few years later by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. With the painting *Peaches, Carafe and Figure* (circa 1900) by **Paul Cézanne**, acquired in 1908, the Browns wrote Swiss art history: it was the first painting by Cézanne to come to Switzerland, and this again as contemporary art, when even Cézanne was still the subject of heated debate among experts.

Camille Pissarro painted the view of Boulevard Montmartre from his hotel room window fourteen times, in different weather, at different times of day, and in the change from winter to spring. The great Baden version *Boulevard Montmartre, Spring* (1897) is an almost archetypal impressionist painting, in which the artist shows the nature of permanent change and the disappearance of things behind color and brushstroke. And finally, *The Braid* (circa 1886–87) by **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** should not go unmentioned. When Renoir painted this portrait of Suzanne Valadon, one of the few Impressionist women artists, he was in an artistic and economic crisis. He no longer saw a future in Impressionism and turned to the art of French Classicism, especially that of Ingres. *The Braid* is a striking example of how the Impressionists were able to paint in a naturalistic manner, but did not want to, because for them external nature was only the occasion for capturing light and movement. Some time later, Renoir returned to Impressionism, as can be seen in other paintings in the collection.

Forever Young also features two important precursors of Impressionism: **Camille Corot** and **Eugène Boudin**. In the Dining Room, selected works by Corot enter into dialogue with those by Edgar Degas, in the Green Salon, pictures by Boudin from various creative phases with a painting by Odilon Redon. Among Boudin's works is *Laundresses on the Banks of the Touques* (1895), which the Browns acquired as contemporary art on their honeymoon in 1896. They were enthusiastic about the banal **everyday life** of laundresses and recognised in this motif a sign of social change, while in the background the smokestacks of **industry** smoke, the motor of technological progress. This can certainly be read symbolically: The BBC (now ABB), founded in 1891 by Charles Brown and Walter Boveri and joined by Sidney Brown in the same year, was instrumental in launching European electrical technology.

The Venetian Room presents a selection of 13 **Venetian vedute** painted in the mid-18th century. The Browns acquired them in Turin in the 1920s. The authorship is still unclear, but this could soon change due to the lively research activity during the last few years. Due to its outstanding art-historical significance, experts refer to it as the «**Master of the Langmatt Foundation**». In the 1920s, the Browns temporarily turned away from Impressionism and became interested in **18th century** art. This is also reflected in the architectural changes: Venetian Room, Dining Room and 18ième Room were frenchified, i.e. remodelled in the style of 18th century France.

Since the collection is historically complete, Langmatt's collection concept does not envisage any further acquisitions. Fortunately, however, the collection continues to receive **donations**, on the one hand from private individuals, on the other hand from contemporary artists who have exhibited at the Langmatt. *Forever Young* takes the opportunity to present selected donations by Margot Bergman, Joëlle Flumet, Katrin Freisager, Mireille Gros, Michael Günzburger, Renée Levi, Léopold Rabus and Sandra Senn. In keeping with the tradition of the Browns and their commitment to contemporary art of the time, *Forever Young* thus sets an example for **contemporary art**.

These works are mainly exhibited on the upper floor. Among them is the installation *Wir kommen* (We are coming, 2006) by **Michael Günzburger**: mysterious little creatures enter one of the exhibition rooms through openings in the radiator panelling. The video work *Kleines, heimisches Theater* (Small, local theater, 2015) by **Joëlle Flumet** addresses various facets of the Langmatt as a museum, such as the museum team's care of the historic rooms. In the meantime, some of the details are already history. *Babra 1* (2019) by **Renée Levi** was created as a large-format painting for the Langmatt Park. The artist handed over the authorship to nature, which gradually decomposed the work. In 2022–23, *Babra 1* was laid horizontally on the lawn at the back of the park. Now, in a third and final phase of life, *Babra 1* can be seen as an «archaeological relic» in a display case in the library. **Sandra Senn** donated no less than 17 of her 34 text installations *Ich stell die Wiese in die Vase* (I put the meadow in the vase, 2020), which take up and condense the atmosphere of Langmatt with philosophical poetry. Her works can be discovered in the following rooms: ground floor: Library, Dining Room, Venetian Room, Green Salon, 18ième Room. 1st floor: exhibition rooms 1 and 2, corridor, Winterthurer Room. Park: Gardener's House, greenhouse, fruit tree meadow, near garage, Veranda Café (see also orientation plan 2023). Sandra Senn recently donated two of her paintings created in 2020 to Langmatt, which have the interior of the Green Salon as their theme.

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