

Three Girls in the Snow by George Hendrik Breitner acquired by the Musée d'Orsay

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At TEFAF Maastricht 2025, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris acquired George Hendrik Breitner's painting *Three Girls in the Snow* (1892-1894) from Kunstgalerij Albricht. The Société des Amis des musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie (SAMO) has donated the work to the museum as a tribute to Sylvain Amic, former president of the Musée d'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie, who passed away on 31 August 2025. This acquisition strengthens the Musée d'Orsay's position as a significant platform for European modernities and substantially expands its representation of Dutch avant-garde art.

The painting depicts three working-class girls walking arm in arm through the snow in an Amsterdam street. The foremost girl looks towards the viewer with curiosity, whilst the one at the back appears less pleased by the unwanted attention. The unusual vantage point – the women seen from above against a dirty white background suggesting urban snow – and the absence of other details lend the work the immediacy of a snapshot. This composition would not have been possible without Breitner's pioneering use of photography as a source of inspiration.

Bob Albricht, owner of Kunstgalerij Albricht:

"The sale of this masterpiece by George Hendrik Breitner to the Musée d'Orsay during TEFAF Maastricht is a personal milestone for me. It's my favourite museum in the French capital, and this acquisition fits perfectly with its mission to fully represent European modernities. It once again demonstrates that TEFAF is the world's leading art fair, where international dealers are given a platform to present museum-quality artworks from all eras and genres to a broad base of collectors and connoisseurs."

Pioneer of Street Photography

Breitner (1857-1923) was not only a painter but also a talented photographer and a pioneer of street photography in the Netherlands. Around 1890, he began photographing urban life in a radically new way. Whilst most photographers of his time captured the city itself, preferably without passers-by, Breitner actively sought confrontation with everyday life. He worked at close range, released the shutter as pedestrians entered the frame, and disregarded conventional rules of composition and technique.

This innovative approach produced unusual vantage points and compositions featuring truncated bodies, oblique framing, and motion blur. Breitner's more than 2,000 exposures provided an inexhaustible source of inspiration for his paintings and anticipated the modern art of the twentieth century.

Amsterdam as Working Ground

In 1886, Breitner moved to Amsterdam, which was rapidly transforming from a provincial town into an international industrial and commercial center at the end of the nineteenth century. The city's new vitality attracted a young generation of artists. Breitner explored every corner of the city, seeking beauty in everyday life. In an interview, he said: "It is not only the beauty of the city that moves me, but also the dynamism, the vitality. Everything here is in motion, construction is everywhere, and the cultural climate flourishes. I want to capture this vitality in my paintings."

He painted modern urban life with broad, rough brushstrokes, minimal detail, and a predominantly brown palette. Through his large cityscapes, he became the history painter of his own time, as he had declared in 1882: "I myself will paint man in the street and in his home, the streets and houses he has built, life above all. I shall try to become the painter of the people, or rather I already am because I wish to be."

Strengthening the Dutch Avant-Garde Collection

The Musée d'Orsay already holds two works by Breitner, both acquired in the 1980s: *Clair de Lune* (1887-1889) and *Deux chevaux tirant des pieux à Amsterdam* (1897-1898). *Three Girls in the Snow* is an important addition to this collection. The work exemplifies Breitner's innovative use of photography, his interest in everyday urban life, and his role as a precursor to modern art.

Outside the Netherlands, Breitner is sparsely represented in major international museum collections. With this acquisition, the Musée d'Orsay underscores its ambition to present all facets of European modernities comprehensively, alongside its collection of works by Van Gogh and Mondrian's *Meules de foin III*, acquired in 2018.

About George Hendrik Breitner (1857-1923)

George Hendrik Breitner was born in Rotterdam in 1857. He studied at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, where he worked with artists such as the Maris brothers, Anton Mauve, and Hendrik Willem Mesdag. In 1882-1883, he had close contact with Vincent van Gogh, with whom he regularly walked the streets "to look for figures and interesting cases".

In 1886, he moved to Amsterdam, where he remained for the rest of his life, except for a brief interruption between 1903 and 1906. Amsterdam became his working base, and the city and its inhabitants his principal subject. Through his monumental works and distinctive compositions, he pointed the way for modern art in the twentieth century. He died on 5 June 1923 at his easel, palette and brush in hand.

Image Material

High-resolution images are available for publication. For image material and further information, please contact:

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