

Watershed Event

Everson revs cultural engine with "Turner to Cezanne" show

The French art critic Louis Leroy was not won over by the brash new style. Why, he'd seen more accomplished work in wallpaper designs. These pictures, he wrote dismissively, were mere "impressions." Leroy's term, coined in 1874, stuck, and before too long, took hold of the public imagination — and never let go.

Impressionism certainly seized Syracuse's imagination during the 12-week run of the Everson's exhibition, "Turner to Cezanne: Masterpieces from the Davies Collection, National Museum Wales." The show featured 53 works by artists from pre-Impressionists Turner and Corot through Impressionist masters like Monet, Renoir and Cezanne, to post-Impressionists Bonnard and Van Gogh.

At its closing on Sunday, "Turner to Cezanne" had received more than the hoped-for 60,000 visits — a new record — exceeding the goal of \$450,000 in ticket sales. After New Year's Day was added to the show's run, a long line snaked out into the frigid air. The first attendance record fell Nov. 27, with 1,500 visits. New records followed, with 2,200 Jan. 2 and another 1,773 on closing day. Steven Kern, the Everson's director, called it "proof positive of the role this art museum can play in this community."

Indeed, "Turner to Cezanne" is a watershed in Syracuse's cultural life. The event became a multimedia celebration of culture, with Wednesday Civic Morning Musicals designed around the show's themes. The museum staged an original 30-minute play, "Woman in the Blue Dress," written by Syracuse Stage's Lauren Unbekant, bringing to life the subject of Renoir's arresting, life-size painting in the show, "La Parisienne."

The exhibition that drew major contributions from area businesses also inspired other cultural events, including concerts by the Syracuse



Mike Greenlar / The Post Standard

PATRONS VIEW Renoir's *La Parisienne* at the Everson Art Museum exhibit "Turner to Cezanne."

Symphony Orchestra featuring works by Debussy, Ravel, Mussorgsky and Faure. Syracuse Opera offered Puccini's "La Boheme" and a visit from mezzo-soprano Julie Nesrallah and baritone Chad Sloan, who sang period pieces while standing in front of exhibition paintings. The Onondaga Historical Association offered local artifacts of the Impressionist era, while the county library mounted an exhibit of *en plein-air* work by artists still practicing the "open air" creativity of the Impressionists.

More than 2,000 schoolchildren saw the show. Upstate Medical University sent 50 residents to gain insights into "visual literacy" and "meaning in imagery," in the words of Drs. Stephen Knohl and Michael Iannuzzi.

For some, the biggest thrill was to be in the presence of iconic artworks like "La Parisienne" or Monet's "Water Lilies." "To know that what you are seeing is not a copy is incredible," said Jane Elmer, who drove her 13-year-old son Kyle through the snow on the show's final day.

For others, the inspiration was even more personal. "It has inspired me to paint again," one visitor wrote in the "comment" book. An elated Kern reacted: "To know that you've personally touched people's lives — that's the best thing going."

The successful, community-wide collaboration of "Turner to Cezanne," years in the making, bodes well for the future of the Everson as a cultural engine for Central New York.