



BMA Opens *Deconstructing Nature: Environmental Transformation in the Lucas Collection* in August

The exhibition features more than 50 artworks by European artists from the 19th century, reflecting society's changing views and connections to the environment

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BALTIMORE, MD (August 6, 2025)—On August 27, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will open *Deconstructing Nature: Environmental Transformation in the Lucas Collection*. The exhibition explores how artists working in 19th-century Europe and French-occupied northern Africa reflected and participated in society's changing views and relationships to the environment. Featuring more than 50 exceptional works on paper drawn from the BMA's George A. Lucas Collection, the exhibition foregrounds the intricate and poignant ways that artists rendered different environments—from resplendent forests and fields to the natural elements at the core of urban centers—and invites engagement with humanity's impulses to both extract from and protect the environment. The exhibition will be on view through January 11, 2026.

Deconstructing Nature is organized thematically, focusing on five specific environments and the ways artists explored them in their work:

- **The Forest:** Views of forests were particularly valued as settings for artistic creativity and leisure in the 19th century. Many of the works in this section depict the Forest of Fontainebleau, which became a symbol of France's national identity due to its rich historical, cultural, and natural significance and led to calls for its preservation and protection by artist-activists. Among the featured artworks are *The Large Trunk of a Beech Tree* (1862) by **Eugène-Stanislas-Alexandre Bléry**; *Fontainebleau* (1888) by **Karl Bodmer**; and *Landscape: Winter - Edge of the Forest* (1850) by **Charles Émile Jacque**.
- **The Field:** Depictions of wheat fields loomed large in 19th-century France, as a core crop for French citizens as well as a significant economic driver. Wheat fields allowed artists to illustrate romantic views of rural life and the countryside as well as realistic representations of the hardships of farmers and laborers. This section includes *Woman Resting on Her Pitchfork* (1855 - 1860) by **Jean-François Millet** and *The Winnower from Cancale* (1872) by **François-Nicolas Auguste Feyen-Perrin**.
- **The Desert:** Nineteenth-century images of the Sahara as an empty and barren landscape by European artists contributed to efforts to justify French imperialism and the colonization of Algeria. This section features a range of artworks reflecting views of the desert and Algerians that continue to shape Western attitudes toward the region to this day. Among the works are

Arabs of Oran (1833; published 1865) by **Eugène Delacroix**; *A Koubba in Tlemcen, Algeria* (c. 1870-1879) by **Gabrielle-Marie Niel**; and *The Morning Prayer in the Desert* (1879) by **Paul Edme Le Rat**.

- **The City:** Artists' renderings of the 19th-century urban landscape often reveal how controlling nature made modern city life possible. Of particular interest in this section are representations of the Seine River in Paris and the River Thames in London. These depictions illustrate the connections between natural resources, commerce, and daily life. Among the artworks are *Black Lion Wharf* (1859) by **James McNeill Whistler**; *Laundresses* (1888) by **Alexandre Lunois**; and *Crossing the Bridge* (c. 1885) by **Albert Besnard**.
- **The Studio:** Many of the artists in this section either brought plants into their studios or brought their tools outside to sketch and make prints. Making art in and with nature suited artists working in a variety of styles, from detailed studies of specific plants to broader landscapes. These works often reflect artists' deep connections to the environment and resonate with early expressions of ecological consciousness. Featured artworks include *By the Pond* (c. 1896) by **Mary Cassatt** and *The Hydraulic Machine* (1862) by **Charles-François Daubigny**.

Deconstructing Nature explores the range of artistic engagement with the natural world and highlights the critical role that art plays in shaping perceptions of the world through history and into the present day," said Asma Naeem, the BMA's Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. "At a moment when we might be newly considering the importance of art within our society, this exhibition captures the ways in which it helps us see ourselves and our contexts more clearly and creates space for important conversations. We look forward to engaging our audiences with the extraordinary George A. Lucas Collection and themes of this exhibition."

The George A. Lucas Collection at the BMA

Born and raised in Baltimore, art collector George A. Lucas (1824–1909) moved to Paris, France, in 1857, where he became immersed in the artistic life of the city and developed close relationships with many artists. Across the five decades he lived in France, Lucas amassed an extraordinary art collection numbering nearly 20,000 objects. Comprising mostly prints and drawings, the Lucas Collection is regarded by scholars as one of the most comprehensive holdings of works on paper by 19th-century artists working in France. Lucas never returned to the United States but intended his collection to remain in Baltimore and serve as an educational resource. After his death, the collection was transported to Baltimore and placed in the care of the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). The Baltimore Museum of Art, which had the works on view for many years, formally purchased it with the Walters Art Museum from MICA in 1996, with financial support from the State of Maryland and numerous community members.

Deconstructing Nature is co-curated by Joanna Karlgaard, BMA Assistant Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, and Robin Owen Joyce, BMA Assistant Curator of Academic Engagement.

This exhibition is supported by the Nancy Dorman and Stanley Mazaroff Fund of the Baltimore Community Foundation and the Henry Luce Foundation.

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Turn Again to the Earth

Turn Again to the Earth is a series of major initiatives that model commitments to environmental sustainability and foster discourse on climate change and the role of the museum during the BMA's 110th anniversary. Unfolding throughout 2025, the interrelated efforts include a series of 10 exhibitions as well as public programs that capture the relationships between art and the environment across time and geography; the creation of a sustainability plan for the museum; and a citywide eco-challenge that invites Baltimore and regional partners to engage in environment-related conversations and enact their own plans for a more sustainable future. The title for this initiative is inspired by the writing of environmental activist Rachel Carson, who spent most of her life and career in Maryland.

This initiative is generously supported by the Cohen Opportunity Fund, Baltimore Gas and Electric, Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, the Eileen Harris Norton Foundation, and CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield.

Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 97,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world's largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation's finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

Visitor Information

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with extended hours on Thursdays until 9 p.m. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year's Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.