

ORDRUPGAARD

PRESS RELEASE

1 December 2025

Exhibition dates
6 February- 31 May 2026

Press meeting
5 February 11-13



ORDRUPGAARD
VILVORDEVEJ 110
2920 CHARLOTTENLUND
DANMARK
T. +45 3964 1183
ORDRUPGAARD.DK

CAFÉ SOCIETY

ART AND SOCIABILITY IN BELLE ÉPOQUE PARIS

6 FEBRUARY – 31 MAY 2026

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Contact

Ann-Sophie Lignell
Head of Communication
asolig@ordrupgaard.dk
M. +45 31 31 97 92

In this exhibition, artists such as Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and Édouard Vuillard tempt the audience to step into the Parisian cafés in the decades around 1900. They became venues for artists, musicians, and poets, who would meet there to discuss art and broaden their networks whilst coffee, beer, wine, and absinth added sparkle to their conversation. Scandinavian artists, among them Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Edvard Munch, and Anders Zorn, also flocked to the French establishments to seek new acquaintances and inspiration. They depicted modern life, a motif adopted by avant-garde artists to replace the historical and mythological motifs that had hitherto defined art for centuries.

The exhibition *Café Society. Art and Sociability in Belle Époque Paris* assembles a broad selection of paintings and works on paper that trace various aspects of café culture. Through works by artists such as Edgar Degas, Vincent van Gogh, and Édouard Manet, the exhibition seeks to convey how artists both observed and took part in the flourishing café culture during the time of the Third Republic. Works by such artists as Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso, who broke new artistic ground with cubism and abstraction, demonstrate the continued relevance of the cafés during the years preceding World War I. Ultimately, therefore, the exhibition attempts to uncover the emergence and development of the café culture in Paris as a central motif for the dawning modern visual art.

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ART, NETWORKING, AND MODERN LIFE

The artists who lived and worked in the French capital were attracted by special cafés, including the now famous *Café Guerbois* and *Café de la Nouvelle Athènes*. To all intents and purposes, they served as miniature universes offering networks, cheap meals, and a much-needed retreat.

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Artist colleagues, workers, *demi-mondes*, and bohemians were portrayed in the blinding glitter of intoxication but equally the morning after when loneliness and the darker side of the metropolitan city started to kick in. Women, too, gradually became a visible part of the café culture during the *belle époque*, reflecting contemporary views on gender and public places. The cafés and their colourful clientele became a fresh motif among the leading avant-garde artists.

A SCANDINAVIAN PERSPECTIVE

Paris was the central hub of an increasingly international art world and, as an extra dimension, Ordrupgaard presents the theme of *Scandinavians in Paris*. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many Scandinavian artists flocked to Paris where they formed their own networks and sought inspiration in the Parisian café culture. *Café de la Régence* became a haunt of the period's well-known artists, among them Christian and Oda Krohg, Edvard Munch, J. F. Willumsen, and Anders Zorn, who portrayed modern city life and its characters. The exhibition also outlines, for example, how Paris left distinctive footprints in Scandinavian art and on the café culture emerging in Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Kristiania (now Oslo).

THE CAFÉ AS A NEW VENUE

Although cafés have existed in Paris since the sixteenth century and inns can be traced back many centuries, the importance of the cafés made significant strides following the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) and the formation of the Paris Commune. A new Paris emerged in the mid-nineteenth century when Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann became responsible for transforming the infrastructure of the growing city. The streets were transformed into wide boulevards, old districts were either renovated or demolished, and the working class was gradually pushed further out from the city centre. Hence the cafés became central meeting places, a fine supplement to the private salons as democratic spaces for networking and exchanging ideas.

The exhibition is arranged in close collaboration with Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis, USA, and Joslyn Art Museum, Nebraska, USA. After showing first at Ordrupgaard, it will travel on to the two American museums.

Nineteenth-century French and Danish art constitutes the heart of the collection at Ordrupgaard, and Wilhelm Hansen, founder of the museum, worked tirelessly to ensure that art from this period reached the widest possible audience. With *Café Society. Art and Sociability in Belle Époque Paris*, the

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museum adds a new facet to the visual art of this period and the artistic environments that provided the inspiration.

CATALOGUE

To accompany the exhibition, a richly illustrated catalogue in both Danish and English is published by GILES. The catalogue is an interdisciplinary effort of historians and curators, featuring articles by international experts such as Dr. W. Scott Haine and Dr. Jeffrey H. Jackson, whose pioneering research into Parisian café culture is internationally acclaimed. Further, the catalogue contains articles by Taylor Acosta, curator & director of collections at the Joslyn Art Museum and Julie Pierotti, Martha R. Robinson curator at Dixon Gallery and Gardens as well as Dorthe Vangsgaard Nielsen, senior curator at Ordrupgaard. The publication examines how the café culture created new social and artistic spaces, zooming in on modernity, consumption, and gender.

The scenography for the exhibition is created by Anne Schnettler, and the following foundations have generously offered financial support:

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