Breton Painting Gifted to Joslyn

Joslyn Art Museum is delighted to announce a new addition to its European collection—Jules Breton’s *The Departure for the Fields* (1857), a gift from the Landen family in memory of Mary and Mickey Landen.

While many nineteenth-century artists turned their attention to the preindustrial landscape and its cultivators, none became so intimately identified with its record as Jules Breton (French, 1827–1906). His representations of gleaners, harvesters, and shepherds offered a vision of the French countryside that embodied many late nineteenth-century ideals: the dignity of working close to the land, the beauty of the landscape, and the social harmony of agrarian communities. *The Departure for the Fields*, painted in 1857 near the small village of Courrières, emphasizes childhood innocence and a reverence for nature. The painting depicts a mother with her children walking across a field under the morning light. They are engaged in playful activity: the mother holds out a poppy to the youngest child, who sits in a cart pulled by a sister and followed by two brothers. The composition is open and spacious, with fields receding gently toward the distant bell tower of the village.

*The Departure for the Fields* was featured in the exhibition *Jules Breton and the French Rural Tradition*, organized by Joslyn in 1982, and has been on display in the Museum’s galleries for the last several years, on loan from the collection of Mary and Mickey Landen. From a young age, Mary was passionate about art. She became a Joslyn docent and a member of the Joslyn Women’s Association (now Joslyn Art Museum Association), including two years as its president. As her commitment to volunteer service expanded, the Museum remained high on her impressive list of civic endeavors. Mary served on Joslyn’s board of trustees for nearly thirty years spanning four decades. In 1979, the board elected her president—the first woman to ever hold that position. Mary was instrumental and insightful in formulating strategies in the areas of exhibitions, collections, education, fundraising, and audience engagement for the Museum.

A great admirer of Jules Breton’s work, Mary cherished this painting dedicated to family life. Jim Landen, one of Mary and Mickey’s five children, noted, “The gift of this painting is especially meaningful for our family. Our parents would be so pleased to have this painting added to the important Breton collection at Joslyn and displayed for the Omaha community to enjoy.”

*The Departure for the Fields* enriches the Museum’s presentation of Jules Breton’s work, joining three paintings, *The Weeders* (1860), *The Vintage at Château Lagrange* (1864), and *Two Women Picking Grapes* (1862), already in the permanent collection.