



Today's Masterpiece: Berthe Morisot, *Girl Reading (Portrait of Julie Manet at Gorey)*, 1886. Pastel on paper. Bemberg Foundation.



Welcome back to **Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA**. I'm your host, **Michael Brown**, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in the first Friday of each month at 10:00 a.m. to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and special guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

Today's masterpiece is by Berthe Morisot, a leading founder of the Impressionist movement. The subject of her pastel is her seven-year old daughter, the irrepressible and resilient Julie Manet.

Morisot – the only woman to participate in the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874 – came from a family descended from the great Rococo painter Fragonard. Berthe's parents supported her aptitude for drawing and painting, eventually engaging Camille Corot – among the most famous artists in France, at the time – as her teacher. Even before that, Morisot and her sister Edma frequented the Louvre copying Old Master paintings, often with family friends including Claude Monet and the Manet brothers, Edouard – who went on to great fame as a modernist painter, and Eugène, who Berthe would marry in 1874. By this point, Morisot was experimenting with both oil paint and pastel. She and her American friend, Mary Cassatt, both honed the delicate pastel medium with advice from Edgar Degas, a mentor to both.

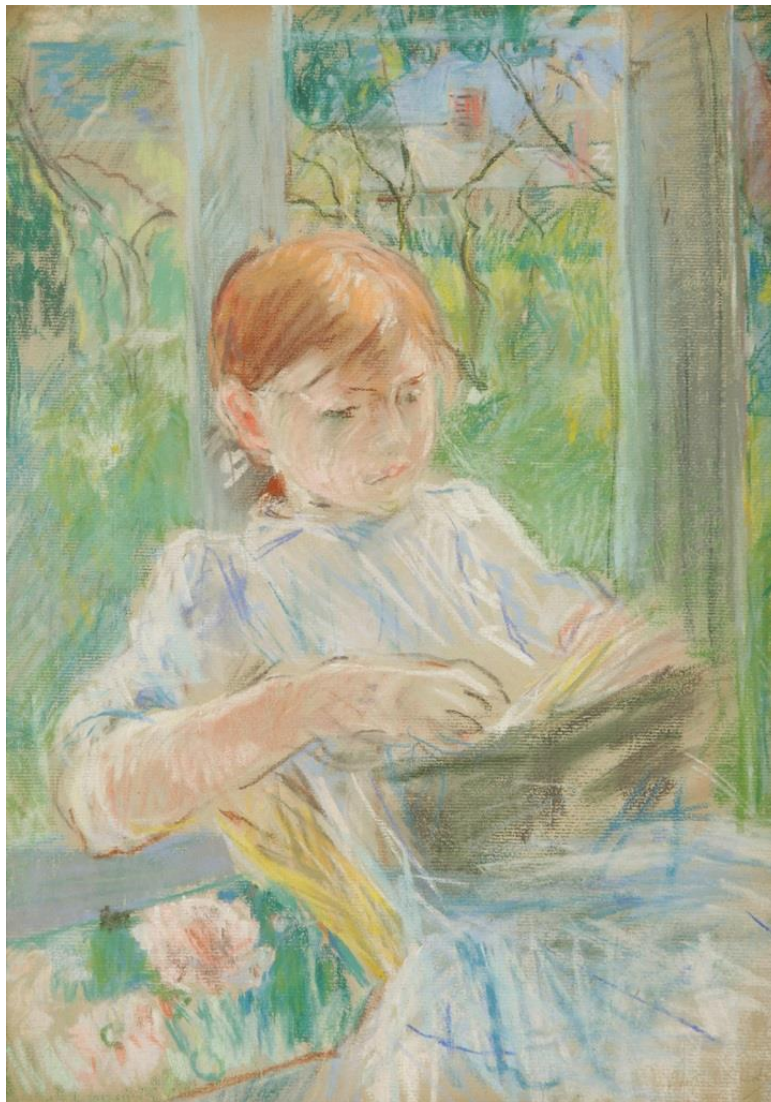
After Morisot's sister Yves died in 1893, Berthe took in her two orphaned nieces, Paule and Jeannie, who were a few years older than Julie. Tragically, Morisot herself died during an influenza outbreak in 1895, leaving the trio parentless. The cousins became inseparable, with the Degas and Renoir families serving jointly as Julie's adoptive parents. Jeannie and Julie celebrated their respective weddings in a dual ceremony in May 1900.

In this sensitive portrayal of her young daughter reading in the family's sun-room or veranda, overlooking the gardens of their country house, Morisot returns to a theme she had practiced in numerous introspective depictions of her sisters reading as young adults. Morisot's spontaneous brushwork is as daring and expressive as her sun-dappled palette.

Julie herself took drawing lessons and, like her mother, spent hours at the Louvre making studies of Renaissance paintings. She also oversaw an extensive art collection, inherited mainly from both Julie's and her husband's parents, including works by El Greco, Goya, Corot, and Daumier. For much of the 1890s, Julie kept diaries, recording her anguish over the loss of her parents and her determination to advocate for her mother's and uncle's artistic legacy. On the first anniversary of her mother's death, she assisted Degas and Renoir in the mounting of a retrospective exhibition of Morisot's work by writing the labels for all 400 works in the show. Years later, Julie was able to

acquire her uncle Edouard Manet's famed *Woman with Fans* of 1873, which briefly belonged to Morisot, who dreamt of seeing it installed in the Louvre. Julie fulfilled her mother's dream when she presented the work to the State in 1930 – it now hangs in the Musée d'Orsay.

This has been **Doc Brown** with Masterpiece Minute, thanks for listening here on Virtual SDMA!



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