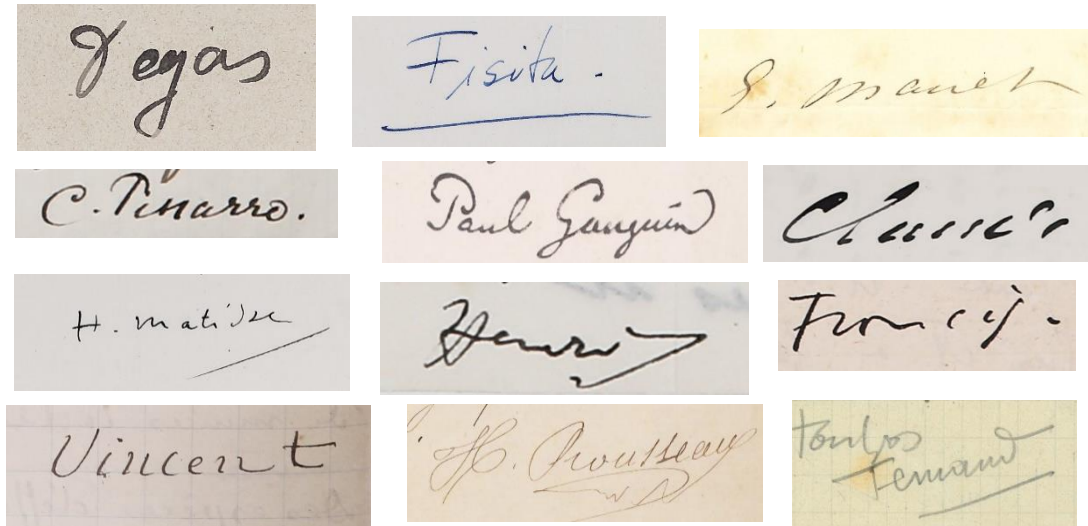


ARTISTS' LETTERS

FROM THE COLLECTION OF ANNE-MARIE SPRINGER

30 May to 25 September 2022

Curator: Clara Marcellán



The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza is presenting the first selection to be seen in Spain of letters and postcards by artists such as Delacroix, Manet, Degas, Monet, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse, Juan Gris, Frida Kahlo and Lucian Freud from the collection of Anne-Marie Springer. They are shown in dialogue with works by these and other artists from the permanent collection in an original exhibition that brings visitors close to the writers of the letters and their works from an intimate viewpoint.

The selection of letters and postcards reflects the original one that provided the basis for this collection, namely love letters. However, these writings also include the expression of other ideas, sometimes illustrated with sketches by their artist-authors, such as anxieties, the defence of their art, celebration of success, details of progress made in the creation of a work, references to historical events and a range of emotions that offer us a different and first-hand perspective on the lives and personalities of these painters. Particular mention should be made of the letters written in wartime by Egon Schiele, Fernand Léger, Gala and Max Pechstein and to the happiness, consolation and healing which the authors found in the contemplation and practice of art and convey in their correspondence.

More information and images: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.
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Egon Schiele, Letter to Edith Schiele, June 1915. The Anne-Marie Springer

From the most everyday subjects to the profoundest aesthetic and professional speculations, these letters introduce us into the lives of key figures in the history of art of the last two centuries and re-echo in works from the museum's collection, giving rise to an enriching overlap of ideas, words, calligraphy and painting that encourages a new way of looking at the paintings:

"You ask me where happiness is in this world: after many experiences, I have convinced myself that it lies only in self-contentment. [...] I have had a pair of breeches made: that is the biggest event of the week."

Eugène Delacroix to Joséphine de Forêt, 16 August 1855

"Your painting, the view of a church in Rouen in grey weather, is very good. It is still a bit dull. The greens are not luminous enough." **Camille Pissarro to Paul Gauguin, May 1885**



Paul Gauguin, *Street in Rouen*, 1884. Madrid. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. **Camille Pissarro**, Letter to Paul Gauguin, May 1885. The Anne-Marie Springer Collection.

"Oh, the beautiful sun down here in high summer; it beats down on your head and I have no doubt at all that it drives you crazy. Now being that way already, all I do is enjoy it." **Vincent van Gogh to Émile Bernard, around**

21 August 1888

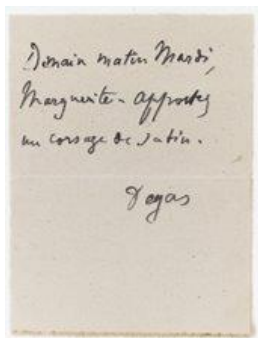


"Once the capital is in my pocket, I will go back to Oceania [...]. No need to make any comments on this. Nothing will stop me from leaving, and it will be forever: what a stupid existence the European life is." **Paul Gauguin to William Molard, September 1894**

"Tomorrow morning Tuesday, Marguerite. Bring a satin bodice." **Edgar Degas to Marguerite S., 9 July 1894**



Edgar Degas, *At the Milliner's*, 1882. Madrid. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. **Edgar Degas**, Letter to Marguerite S., July 9th, 1894. The Anne-Marie Springer Collection.



"The Thames was all gold. My God, it was beautiful, so I set to work frantically following the sun and its shimmer on the water." **Claude Monet to Alice Hoschedé, 3 February 1901**

"Yesterday, Sunday morning, I worked in the casbah, but the morning was not a happy one. I have a little ink bottle in my pocket; it opened and stained my waistcoat badly. It was the Old England one, fortunately. Then the man I put in a painting without telling him said he didn't want to pose anymore, which [...] and will prevent me from continuing. It's a pity, the painting is very good, [...]" **Henri Matisse to Amélie Matisse, October-November 1912**

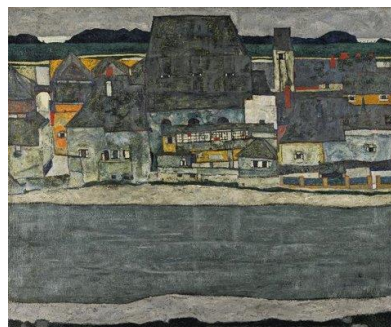
“It is very beautiful, Argonne in the snow. Where I am well out of harm’s way. The brass flies by over my head [...] My fireplace has to work. I don’t want to be asphyxiated tonight. It’s because of my fireplace that my letter is shortened. My eyes are stinging terribly and I can’t see any more. When you get long letters, you can tell yourself that your big boy’s fireplace is working well.” Fernand Léger to Jeanne Lohy, 24 January 1915

“I have been posted to the 75th Regiment, to the ‘surveillance service’”. I will be by the fence as often as I can, in the place where we held hands last time. It’s a shame you are not here now!” Egon Schiele to Edith Schiele, 23 June 1915

“Don’t wander around in the forests anywhere, you might happen to get killed or taken prisoner. Promise me that.” Gala to Paul Éluard, 27 November de 1916

The Anne-Marie Springer Collection

“Personally, I have always been fascinated by handwritten letters, by their variety, by the beauty of the handwriting and the expressiveness of the script, which often perfectly illustrates the message it conveys. They are unique, multifaceted objects that tell us a lot about the human soul.”



Egon Schiele, Letter to Edith Schiele, June 1915. The Anne-Marie Springer Collection. **Egon Schiele**, *Houses on the River (The Old Town)*, 1914. Madrid. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Anne-Marie Springer started to collect love letters in 1994 after the birth of her daughter and in the present day has more than 2,000 examples in her collection. The oldest dates to the 15th century and the most recent to the 1970s. Over time her initial interest in amorous correspondence broadened to include a range of themes such as history, literature, performances, music and the arts in general. The first letter that attracted her attention was written by

the young Napoleon Bonaparte to his wife Josephine. In recent years Anne-Marie Springer’s focus has been on letters by painters, which are notable for the coherence they reveal with regard to their art and thinking and the interesting parallels to be perceived between their pictorial style and their handwriting, for example in the case of Schiele.

Love letters

“Do not be sad – paint and live. I love you with all my heart” (Frida Kahlo to Diego Rivera, 31 January 1948)

On 10 August 1822 Théodore Géricault wrote to Madame Trouillard *“The deprivation is painful to me [...] I finally place your return among the sweetest desires I could form [...] so sweet are your caresses to me.”*



Théodore Géricault, *The Kiss*, c.a. 1816-1817. Madrid. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. **Théodore Géricault**, Letter to Madame Trouillard. August 10th, 1822. The Anne-Marie Springer Collection.

This is the oldest letter in the group selected for this exhibition, shown alongside *The Kiss* (ca. 1816-17), a gouache on paper by the artist.



Gala (Elena Ivanovna Diakonova),
Letter to Paul Éluard, November 27th,
1916. The Anne-Marie Springer
Collection.

Completing this first group of letters, all centred on love, are: a letter from Henri Rousseau to his lover Joséphine Nourry of June 1899, accompanied by a postcard which the artist wrote to his daughter Julia in 1906; a postcard sent by Egon Schiele to Edith Harms from his military posting on 22 June 1915, a week after they were married, with instructions as to how they would meet, written in a condensed handwriting that evokes his artistic style, exemplified by *Houses on the River*. *The old Town* (1914); and a letter from Gala to Paul Éluard dated 27 November 1916 in which she discusses books, her fears following his enlistment in the army and a dress she is making, of which she includes a sketch and fabric samples. Finally, this section includes various letters from Frida Kahlo to Diego

Rivera that cover a range of themes including her health problems, the development of their careers as artists and details of their stormy relationship.

Healing art

“Do you not think I have become young again? It’s not the waters: it’s Rubens who has performed this miracle”
(Delacroix to Charles Soulier, August 1850)

In many of the letters artists express emotions and ideas and recount experiences relating to the healing power of art. In August 1850 Delacroix wrote to his friend Charles Soulier from the spa town of Bad Ems, telling him about the curative effect of looking at Rubens’ works in Belgium, which he considered better than the thermal springs. In Fernand Léger’s letter of 24 January 1915, rather than telling his lover Jeann Lohy about the atmosphere of war surrounding him he describes the forest of Argonne where he has been mobilised, praising its beauty and including a sketch of his “villa”, the underground gallery where he was sheltering. The sketch is executed in a style similar to that of *The Disc* (1918), one of the earliest oils he painted after the war.

From the ruins of Berlin, in 1944 Max Pechstein wrote to the young historian Wilhelm Soldan who was active in the art protection unit, sharing with him his desire to get back to painting and to find the materials he needed for his work. This follows a description of the bombings that have destroyed his studio, a context that contrasts with the idyllic locations which had previously inspired the artist, to be seen in *Summer in Nidden* (1921) shown alongside the letter.

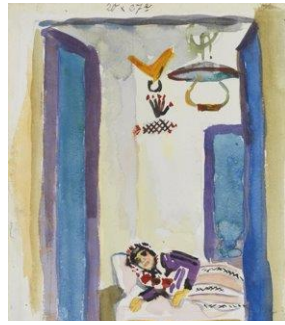


Fernand Léger, *The Disc*, 1918. Madrid.
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.
Fernand Léger, Letter to Jeanne Lohy.
January 24th, 1915. The Anne-Marie
Springer Collection.

The artist's craft



Henri Matisse, Letter to Amélie Matisse, November 1st, 1912. The Anne-Marie Springer Collection.



August Macke, *Woman on a Divan*, 1914. Madrid. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

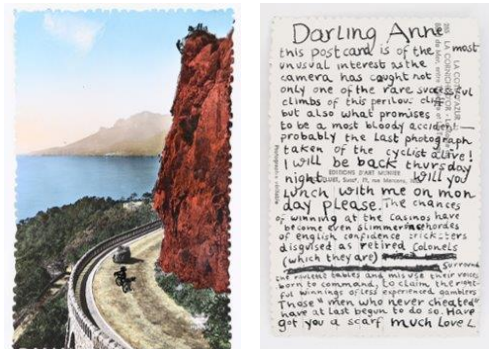
“Yesterday I worked on the Moorish one, which is finished, I think. There is some good stuff. She had a blue dress, but I did it in green. I’ll see this morning whether I touch it up or not.” (Henri Matisse to Amélie Matisse, 1912)

The letters from Matisse to his wife Amélie written during his trips to Morocco in 1912 and 1913 are full of sketches with which the artist aimed to transport her to Tangier. Matisse’s subjects range from domestic issues and health matters to his

commitments to his gallerist and anecdotes about his life in Morocco. The letter is shown here alongside the watercolour *Woman on a Divan* (1914) by August Macke, one of the artists who followed Matisse’s footsteps, inspired by his motifs and palette.

In his letter to Josette, Juan Gris describes his work for Diaghilev’s ballets, a project that took him to Monaco in the winter of 1923-24, as well as details of his life there: *“[...] when I’m not drawing, I’m at rehearsals or at the theatre. Diaghilev is charming and so is Lariónov, but in a rough way. In the evenings [...] we go to the Café de Paris dance hall to see the shimmy dance. It’s really very fine.”*

The idyllic landscape of the Côte d’Azur on the postcard which Lucian Freud sent his friend and model Anne Fleming is transformed into the location of a tragic accident in the artist’s drawings, which he commented on ironically: *“Probably the last photograph taken of the cyclist alive!”*. He signs off with *“Have got you a scarf”*.

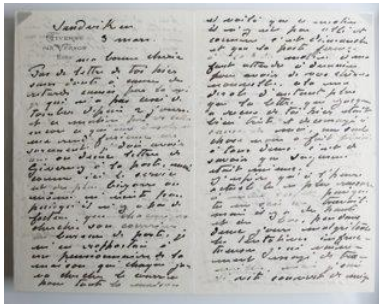


Lucian Freud, Postcard to Anne Fleming, 1953. The Anne-Marie Springer Collection.

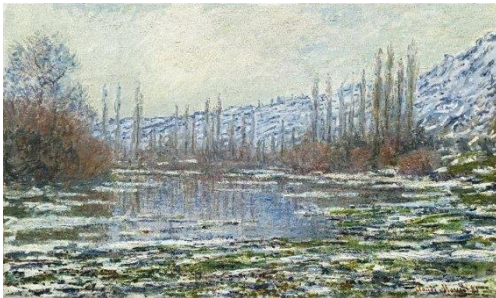
A brief intimate history of Impressionism

“I have tried in vain to work, but I am so quickly covered with snow, me, my palette and my canvas, that it is impossible” (Claude Monet to Alice Hoschedé, March 1895)

The Impressionist artists’ correspondence with their partners, friends, critics and fellow painters is one of the most complete sections in the exhibition and allows for a brief survey of this artistic movement. Letters include one from Édouard Manet to Claude Monet of late 1879 following the death of the latter’s first wife Camille. It includes words of affection and the offer of help with selling his paintings; and one by the playwright and critic Octave Mirabeau, also to Monet, suggesting various excursions to places that had inspired him and reminding him of his passion for the snow as an encouragement for him to keep working.



In 1895 Monet wrote to his second wife Alice from Norway, recounting the problems he was experiencing. He also wrote to her from London, describing his walks round the city and the social gatherings he attended in the company of John Singer Sargent. During his working trips Camille Pissarro also frequently wrote to his wife Julie, sharing with her his interest in their children and his small successes such as the sale of a painting. These are intimate letters which the painter asks her to destroy before he signs off: *"I beg you to tear up my letters. I don't want chance or carelessness to allow a stranger to read them."*



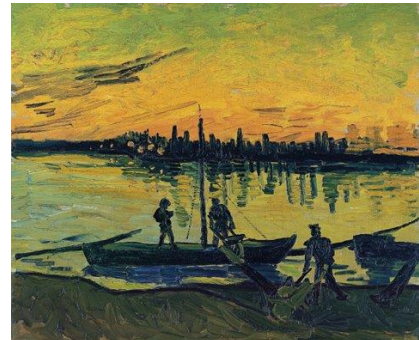
Claude Monet, Letter to Alice Hoschedé, March 3rd, 1895. The Anne-Marie Springer Collection. **Claude Monet**, *The Thaw at Vétheuil*, 1880. Madrid. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

In a long letter to Gauguin of 1885, Pissarro summarises the latest news about Monet, Degas, Guillaumin, the annual Salon and the group's growing interaction with the wider public. For his part, writing from Pont-Aven in 1894 Gauguin informed his friend William Molard of his forthcoming second trip to Tahiti. From there, in 1899, Gauguin responded to a review of his work by André Fontainas that had been published in the *Mercure de France*.

On 21 August 1888 Vincent van Gogh wrote to Émile Bernard, sharing with him his fascination with the light of the South of France and describing the scene of stevedores by the river that he was currently painting.

These are some of the examples of the 34 letters included in the exhibition, which is presented in several spaces in the museum: the first floor exhibition gallery (free entry) and Rooms 19, 29, 31, 37, 39 and 42 of the permanent collection. Also on display is a print by Gauguin of a portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé and Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera's marriage certificate, both also from the Anne-Marie Springer collection.

To enhance the visit to the exhibition, a selection of these letters has been recorded in audio format with the collaboration of the Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático. The readings, by teachers and students from this school, can be listened to in Spanish and English via the Ivoox platform and a QR code displayed in the gallery.



Vincent van Gogh, Letter to Émile Bernard, August, 1888. The Anne-Marie Springer Collection. **Vincent van Gogh**, *The Stevedores in Arles*, 1888. Madrid. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

Title: *Artists' letters from the Anne-Marie Springer Collection*

Organiser: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

Venue and dates: Madrid, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 30 May to 25 September 2022. First floor exhibition gallery and Rooms 19, 29, 31, 37, 39 and 42 of the permanent collection.

Works: 34 letters, a document, a print and 19 paintings

Curator: Clara Marcellán, curator of Modern Painting at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza

Catalogue: with texts by Anne-Marie Springer and Clara Marcellán

VISITOR INFORMATION

Address: Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014, Madrid

Opening times: Mondays from 12 noon to 4 pm; Tuesdays to Sundays, 10 am to 7 pm

Free entry to the first floor exhibition gallery

Ticket prices: Combined entry: Permanent collection and temporary exhibitions

-Standard: 13 Euros

-Reduced price: 9 Euros for visitors aged over 65, pensioners and students with proof of status

-Groups (7 and more): 11 Euros

-Free entry: visitors aged under 18, officially unemployed Spanish citizens, disabled visitors, Large Families, currently employed teachers and holders of the European Youth Card

More information: www.museothyssen.org

PRESS INFORMATION: [Artists' letters from the Anne-Marie Springer Collection](#)