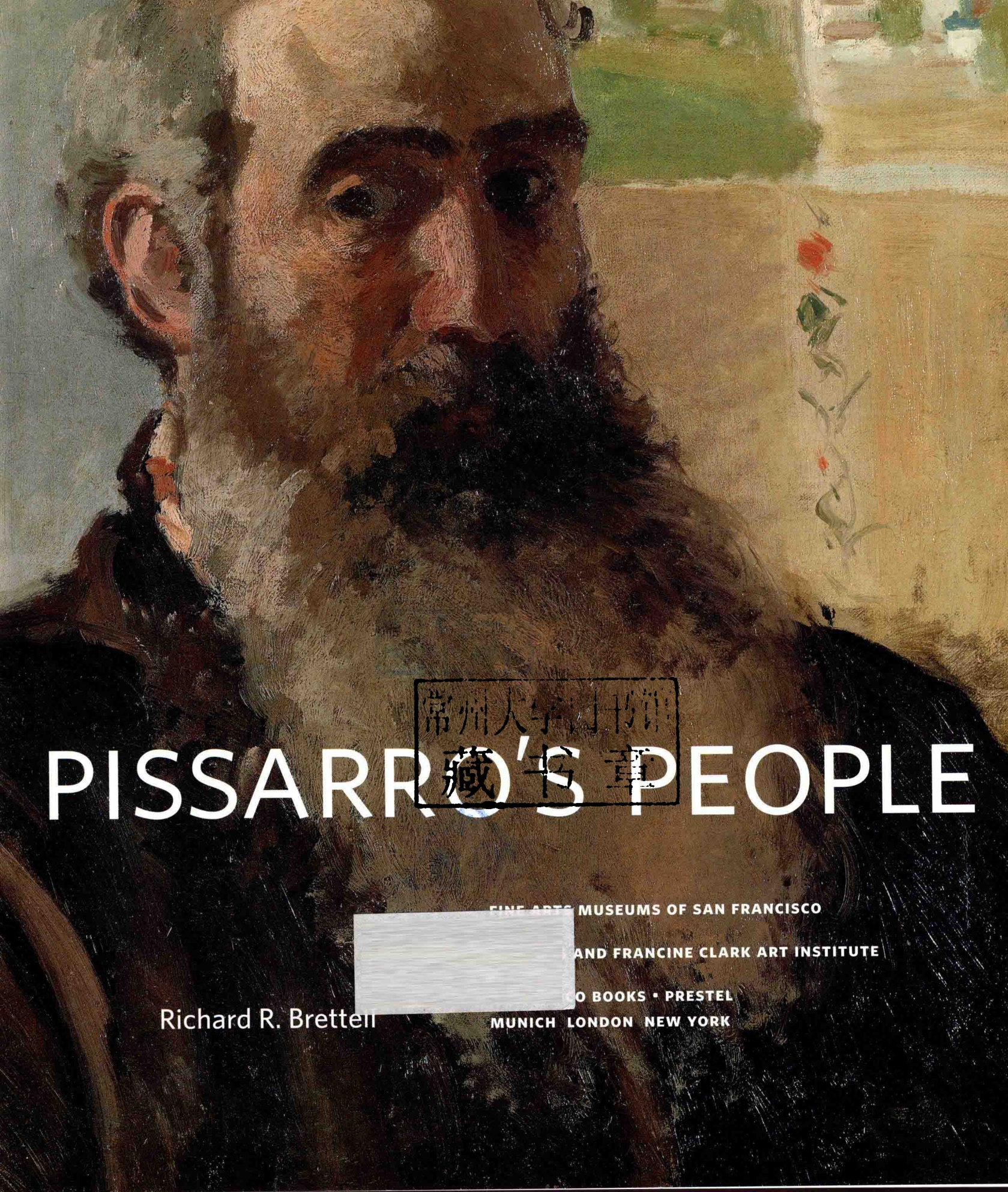




PISSARRO'S PEOPLE

Richard R. Brettell



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PISSARRO'S PEOPLE

FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO

AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE

CO BOOKS • PRESTEL

MUNICH LONDON NEW YORK

Richard R. Brettell

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June 12–October 2, 2011

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Pages 2–3: *Peasant Woman Lying in the Grass, Pontoise*, 1882
(detail of fig. 136)

Page 4: Pissarro, ca. 1895

Page 5: *Self-Portrait*, 1873 (detail of fig. 2)

Endsheets, front to back (hardcover edition only):

From left: Alfred Isaacson, Julie Pissarro, Camille Pissarro, and their children Jeanne, Georges, Félix, Ludovic-Rodolphe, and Lucien, ca. 1884

Pissarro in the apartment at 28, place Dauphine, Paris, ca. 1895

Pissarro and his son Félix, Paris, 1893

Pissarro's studio at Éragny, ca. 1901

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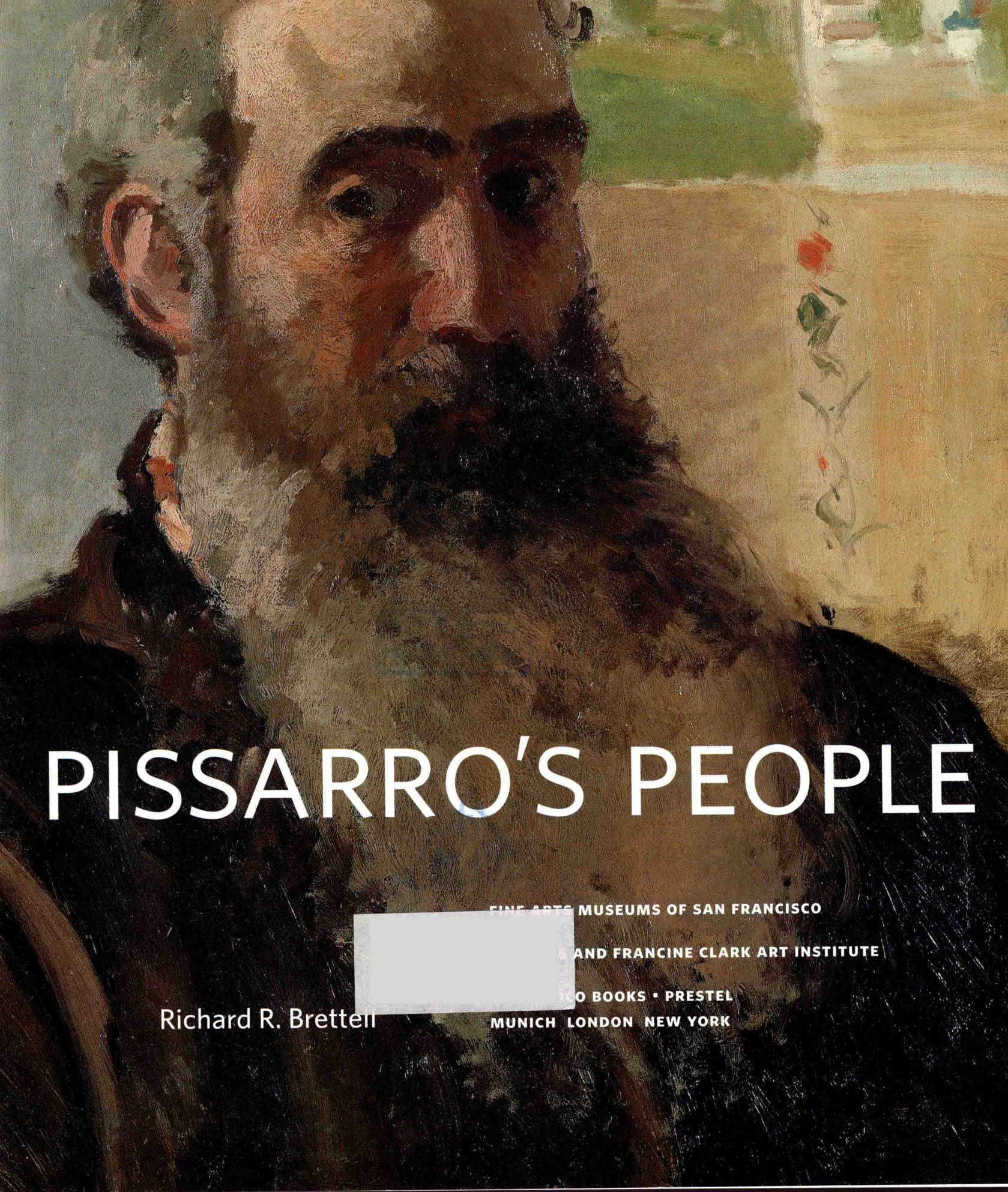
A faint, light blue sketch of a person's head and shoulders is visible in the background. The sketch is centered and occupies the upper half of the page. It shows the outline of the head, neck, and shoulders, with some internal lines suggesting facial features and clothing. The overall style is minimalist and artistic.

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DIRECTORS' FOREWORD

We are proud to introduce this perceptive investigation of the social philosophy and political ethics of the Impressionist painter Camille Pissarro. It has long been a commonplace to mention in passing both Pissarro's political radicalism and his commitment to the human figure, which is certainly unique among the Impressionist landscape painters. However, this exhibition and catalogue, conceived by the distinguished scholar Richard R. Brettell, represents the first in-depth examination of the family circumstances, life experiences, and personal motivations that promoted and sustained Pissarro's lifelong interest in the human form as reflective of the human condition.

Ranging from his earliest years in the Caribbean and Venezuela until his death in Paris in 1903, Pissarro's extensive output of figural works included more than two hundred paintings and some two thousand drawings and prints. Of crucial importance in this regard, Pissarro was a lifelong reader of social, political, and economic theory. The artist's knowledge of social philosophy ran deeper than that of any other significant painter of the nineteenth century. He was profoundly influenced by the writings of the French protoanarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and he counted among his friends the radical theorists Jean Grave and Élisée Reclus as well as the greatest anarchist writer of the period, the Russian émigré prince Peter Kropotkin. It is clear that Pissarro's careful study of social and economic philosophy colored his many depictions of rural and domestic workers.

No less important for the evolution of Pissarro's figurative works was his identity as a member of a diasporic Sephardic Jewish family—a network of individuals living and working in Uruguay and Venezuela, Bordeaux and Paris,

¹
Pissarro and his wife, Julie (montage of
two photographs), ca. 1873

and even London and the United States. Dr. Brettell's long-standing friendships with Pissarro's descendants have aided in no small measure the veracity of his reconstruction of the artist's community of family and friends. For in addition to touching portraits of his nuclear family, Pissarro painted many tributes to the artists, merchants, neighbors, servants, and others who populated his world.

Building on existing scholarship, this project identifies key relationships and significant texts among the vast sociopolitical literature absorbed by Pissarro, taking advantage of newly discovered and largely unpublished letters located in private archives. Dr. Brettell's sophisticated analysis of Pissarro's social and historical context, intellectual milieu, and artworks offers, for perhaps the first time, a fully three-dimensional portrait of the artist. Without a doubt, Pissarro's commitment to family, friends, and novel ideas both ordered his life and permeated his art.

Pissarro's People is a joint project of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, and many members of our respective staffs have been vital to the development of the exhibition. At the Clark, where the exhibition premiered, we especially wish to thank Sarah Hammond, Kathleen Morris, Richard Rand, Mattie Kelley, Paul M. Richardson, Curtis Scott, and Teresa O'Toole. At the Fine Arts Museums, Krista Brugnara, Therese Chen, Lynn Federle Orr, and James Ganz made important contributions. We recognize with particular thanks Karen Levine, director of publications at the Fine Arts Museums, who shepherded this volume through all of its stages with efficient professionalism and deceptive ease. This ambitious catalogue could not have been realized without the assistance of associate editor Danica Hodge and managing editor Leslie Dutcher, the careful copyediting of Jennifer Boynton, the wise counsel of Ed Marquand and his team at Marquand Books, and the enthusiastic partnership of Mary DelMonico and her colleagues at Prestel.

We extend warm appreciation to the many collectors, museums, galleries, and auction houses that furnished images for reproduction, and especially to Sandrine Pissarro for her magnificent selection of family photographs from the Archives L&S Pissarro in Paris. For their advice and information on the selection of artworks, Dr. Brettell is particularly indebted to Joachim Pissarro, Claire Durand-Ruel Snollaerts, and Barbara Stern Shapiro, who were continuously peppered with e-mails and phone calls in the final two years of this exhibition's long gestation period. He is also indebted to Marie-Christine Maufus at the Wildenstein Institute in Paris for help with photographs. Perhaps the greatest thanks for *Pissarro's People* goes to George Shackelford of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, who took Dr. Brettell's cumbersome draft titles and created a two-word masterpiece.

Every exhibition is indebted to the generous private collectors and museums that must part with their treasures for the duration of the tour. We would be remiss if we did not single out for special thanks the Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford. Its loan of twenty artworks makes it an essential partner in this exhibition, giving international recognition to its Pissarro collection and archive, which represent the single largest institutional holding of works by this artist. To each of our other lenders we extend our utmost gratitude. In addition, the support of the National Endowment for the Arts has become absolutely essential for such international exhibitions; we deeply appreciate the NEA's commitment to the nation's cultural programs. The San Francisco presentation of *Pissarro's People* is made possible by the generous support of Jeannik Méquet Littlefield, who has come on board as our grand patron. Education programs presented in conjunction with this exhibition are generously underwritten by Denise Littlefield Sobel. The catalogue is published with the assistance of the Fine Arts Museums' Andrew W. Mellon Endowment for Publications.

We cannot conclude without expressing profound thanks to our friend and colleague Rick Brettell. An art historian of amazing breadth, Rick continues to engage general audiences and scholars alike with his intellectual integrity, easy accessibility, and sharp wit. In the pages of this catalogue, he shares insights of the most detailed and nuanced sophistication as if in conversation with dear friends. We remain in his debt for his tireless efforts to bring this exhibition and publication to fruition—and for bringing Pissarro's people to light.

John E. Buchanan, Jr.
Director of Museums
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Michael Conforti
Director
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute

FOREWORD

Camille Pissarro painted the first of his four major self-portraits (fig. 2) in 1873 in L'Hermitage, a hamlet outside Pontoise, just north of Paris. Given to the French state in 1930 by his youngest son, Paul-Émile, it entered the canonical collection of the Jeu de Paume in 1947 and was transferred to the Musée d'Orsay when that museum opened in 1986. As Joachim Pissarro has demonstrated, it was in the act of defining himself for others that Pissarro reflected upon himself as a man. What can we learn about Pissarro from this self-image? He presents us with a calm, self-possessed, yet modest man, age forty-three, already nearly bald and with untrimmed hair. His eyes and bushy eyebrows are almost black, and he has a prominent, aquiline nose; his mouth is all but completely covered by his mustache and great gray beard. He wears what appears to be a dark gray-brown overcoat, and a scarf peeks out above its collar. Pissarro does not include his hands or artist tools and, were it not for the two small landscape sketches pinned to the wallpapered wall behind him, we would have no clue about his occupation. The sketches have never been convincingly identified from the scores of watercolors, gouaches, and oils that survive to form Pissarro's oeuvre before 1874, but they are both landscapes of villages, and the white-washed buildings with red and blue tile roofs nestle among fields and trees that are decidedly French.

We don't learn whether the subject was married or single, where he came from, or where he lived. We only suspect that he was an artist and that he might be Jewish, although nothing about the painting encourages us to reach these conclusions. It is modest and utterly secular—a man alone in a simple, light-filled room. He appears to be seated near a window that illuminates the proper right side of his face, yet we see no chair. There is a darkened section to the painter's

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Self-Portrait, 1873

Oil on canvas

22 × 18⁵/₁₆ in. (56 × 46.5 cm)

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, gift of Paul-Émile

Pissarro, 1930, RF 2837 (PDR 283)