Professor Holly Clayson examines American expat Mary Cassatt’s first intaglio prints (1879-1882) set in Cassatt’s Paris apartment. Clayson’s analysis takes root in the often-overlooked fact that lighting (éclairage) was a key attribute of the nineteenth-century City of Light (la ville lumière). Clayson maintains that the new lights, their visual properties, and the era’s debates about them provided circumstances that stimulated aesthetically innovative art gingerly balanced vis-à-vis the lights themselves between rejection and embrace, between disavowal and enthusiasm. The lecture will focus on the relationship between Mary Cassatt’s elegant oil lamp, prominent in each of the prints, and the new electric arc lights out in the street.

Professor Clayson is an historian of modern art who specializes in 19th-century Europe, especially France, and transatlantic exchanges between France and the U.S. Her publications include: The Darker Side of Light (co-author; 2009), Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life Under Siege (1870-71) (2002), Understanding Paintings: Themes in Art Explored and Explained (co-editor; 2000), and Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era (1991). She curated the exhibition Electric Paris at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA. Her related book studies the visual cultures of the City of Light in the era of Thomas Edison. It will be published by the University of Chicago Press.

The MIT Global France Seminar (formerly MIT Research Seminar in French and Francophone Studies) aims to bring together MIT faculty, instructors, and graduate students from across disciplines interested in the study of French and francophone cultures around the world.

Upcoming: 11/18 - photographer Lalage Snow, 5:30 in 2-105. Details to be announced.

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