

Impressionism in painting



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Impressionism



Impressionism

- **Impressionism** is a 19th-century art movement characterized by relatively small, thin, yet visible brush strokes, open composition, emphasis on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities (often accentuating the effects of the passage of time), ordinary subject matter, inclusion of *movement* as a crucial element of human perception and experience, and unusual visual angles. Impressionism originated with a group of Paris-based artists whose independent exhibitions brought them to prominence during the 1870s and 1880s.
- The Impressionists faced harsh opposition from the conventional art community in France. The name of the style derives from the title of a Claude Monet work, *Impression, soleil levant* (Impression, Sunrise), which provoked the critic Louis Leroy to coin the term in a satirical review published in the Parisian newspaper Le Charivari.
- The development of Impressionism in the visual arts was soon followed by analogous styles in other media that became known as impressionist music and impressionist literature

Impressionism

Overview

- J. M. W. Turner's atmospheric work was influential on the birth of Impressionism, here *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839)
- Radicals in their time, early Impressionists violated the rules of academic painting. They constructed their pictures from freely brushed colours that took precedence over lines and contours, following the example of painters such as Eugène Delacroix and J. M. W. Turner. They also painted realistic scenes of modern life, and often painted outdoors. Previously, still lifes and portraits as well as landscapes were usually painted in a studio. The Impressionists found that they could capture the momentary and transient effects of sunlight by painting outdoors or en plein air. They portrayed overall visual effects instead of details, and used short "broken" brush strokes of mixed and pure unmixed colour—not blended smoothly or shaded, as was customary—to achieve an effect of intense colour vibration.
- Impressionism emerged in France at the same time that a number of other painters, including the Italian artists known as the Macchiaioli, and Winslow Homer in the United States, were also exploring *plein-air* painting. The Impressionists, however, developed new techniques specific to the style. Encompassing what its adherents argued was a different way of seeing, it is an art of immediacy and movement, of candid poses and compositions, of the play of light expressed in a bright and varied use of colour.
- The public, at first hostile, gradually came to believe that the Impressionists had captured a fresh and original vision, even if the art critics and art establishment disapproved of the new style.

Overview



Beginnings

- In the middle of the 19th century—a time of change, as Emperor [Napoleon III](#) rebuilt Paris and waged war—the [Académie des Beaux-Arts](#) dominated French art. The Académie was the preserver of traditional French painting standards of content and style. Historical subjects, religious themes, and portraits were valued; landscape and still life were not. The Académie preferred carefully finished images that looked realistic when examined closely. Paintings in this style were made up of precise brush strokes carefully blended to hide the artist's hand in the work. Colour was restrained and often toned down further by the application of a golden varnish.
- The Académie had an annual, juried art show, the [Salon de Paris](#), and artists whose work was displayed in the show won prizes, garnered commissions, and enhanced their prestige. The standards of the juries represented the values of the Académie, represented by the works of such artists as [Jean-Léon Gérôme](#) and [Alexandre Cabanel](#).
- In the early 1860s, four young painters—[Claude Monet](#), [Pierre-Auguste Renoir](#), [Alfred Sisley](#), and [Frédéric Bazille](#)—met while studying under the academic artist [Charles Gleyre](#). They discovered that they shared an interest in painting landscape and contemporary life rather than historical or mythological scenes. Following a practice that had become increasingly popular by mid-century, they often ventured into the countryside together to paint in the open air, but not for the purpose of making sketches to be developed into carefully finished works in the studio, as was the usual custom. By painting in sunlight directly from nature, and making bold use of the vivid synthetic pigments that had become available since the beginning of the century, they began to develop a lighter and brighter manner of painting that extended further the [Realism](#) of [Gustave Courbet](#) and the [Barbizon school](#). A favourite meeting place for the artists was the [Café Guerbois](#) on Avenue de Clichy in Paris, where the discussions were often led by [Édouard Manet](#), whom the younger artists greatly admired. They were soon joined by [Camille Pissarro](#), [Paul Cézanne](#), and [Armand Guillaumin](#).



Beginnings

- Artists' petitions requesting a new Salon des Refusés in 1867, and again in 1872, were denied. In December 1873, Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Cézanne, Berthe Morisot, Edgar Degas and several other artists founded the *Société Anonyme Coopérative des Artistes Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs* ("Cooperative and Anonymous Association of Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers") to exhibit their artworks independently. Members of the association were expected to forswear participation in the Salon. The organizers invited a number of other progressive artists to join them in their inaugural exhibition, including the older Eugène Boudin, whose example had first persuaded Monet to adopt *plein air* painting years before. Another painter who greatly influenced Monet and his friends, Johan Jongkind, declined to participate, as did Edouard Manet. In total, thirty artists participated in their first exhibition, held in April 1874 at the studio of the photographer Nadar.
- Claude Monet, Haystacks, (sunset), 1890–1891, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
- The critical response was mixed. Monet and Cézanne received the harshest attacks. Critic and humorist Louis Leroy wrote a scathing review in the newspaper *Le Charivari* in which, making wordplay with the title of Claude Monet's Impression, Sunrise (*Impression, soleil levant*), he gave the artists the name by which they became known. Derisively titling his article The Exhibition of the Impressionists, Leroy declared that Monet's painting was at most, a sketch, and could hardly be termed a finished work.
- He wrote, in the form of a dialog between viewers,
- *Impression—I was certain of it. I was just telling myself that, since I was impressed, there had to be some impression in it ... and what freedom, what ease of workmanship! Wallpaper in its embryonic state is more finished than that seascape*

Beginnings



Impressionist techniques

- Mary Cassatt, *Lydia Leaning on Her Arms* (in a theatre box), 1879
- French painters who prepared the way for Impressionism include the Romantic colourist Eugène Delacroix, the leader of the realists Gustave Courbet, and painters of the Barbizon school such as Théodore Rousseau. The Impressionists learned much from the work of Johan Barthold Jongkind, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and Eugène Boudin, who painted from nature in a direct and spontaneous style that prefigured Impressionism, and who befriended and advised the younger artists.
- A number of identifiable techniques and working habits contributed to the innovative style of the Impressionists. Although these methods had been used by previous artists—and are often conspicuous in the work of artists such as Frans Hals, Diego Velázquez, Peter Paul Rubens, John Constable, and J. M. W. Turner—the Impressionists were the first to use them all together, and with such consistency. These techniques include:
- Short, thick strokes of paint quickly capture the essence of the subject, rather than its details. The paint is often applied impasto.
- Colours are applied side-by-side with as little mixing as possible, a technique that exploits the principle of simultaneous contrast to make the colour appear more vivid to the viewer.
- Grays and dark tones are produced by mixing complementary colours. Pure impressionism avoids the use of black paint.
- Wet paint is placed into wet paint without waiting for successive applications to dry, producing softer edges and intermingling of colour.
- Impressionist paintings do not exploit the transparency of thin paint films (glazes), which earlier artists manipulated carefully to produce effects. The impressionist painting surface is typically opaque.
- The paint is applied to a white or light-coloured ground. Previously, painters often used dark grey or strongly coloured grounds.
- The play of natural light is emphasized. Close attention is paid to the reflection of colours from object to object. Painters often worked in the evening to produce effets de soir—the shadowy effects of evening or twilight.
- In paintings made en plein air (outdoors), shadows are boldly painted with the blue of the sky as it is reflected onto surfaces, giving a sense of freshness previously not represented in painting. (Blue shadows on snow inspired the technique.)

Impressionist techniques



Impressionist techniques

- New technology played a role in the development of the style. Impressionists took advantage of the mid-century introduction of premixed paints in tin tubes (resembling modern toothpaste tubes), which allowed artists to work more spontaneously, both outdoors and indoors. Previously, painters made their own paints individually, by grinding and mixing dry pigment powders with linseed oil, which were then stored in animal bladders.
- Many vivid synthetic pigments became commercially available to artists for the first time during the 19th century. These included cobalt blue, viridian, cadmium yellow, and synthetic ultramarine blue, all of which were in use by the 1840s, before Impressionism. The Impressionists' manner of painting made bold use of these pigments, and of even newer colours such as cerulean blue,^[4] which became commercially available to artists in the 1860s.
- The Impressionists' progress toward a brighter style of painting was gradual. During the 1860s, Monet and Renoir sometimes painted on canvases prepared with the traditional red-brown or grey ground. By the 1870s, Monet, Renoir, and Pissarro usually chose to paint on grounds of a lighter grey or beige colour, which functioned as a middle tone in the finished painting. By the 1880s, some of the Impressionists had come to prefer white or slightly off-white grounds, and no longer allowed the ground colour a significant role in the finished painting.

Impressionist techniques



Content and composition

- Prior to the Impressionists, other painters, notably such 17th-century Dutch painters as Jan Steen, had emphasized common subjects, but their methods of composition were traditional. They arranged their compositions so that the main subject commanded the viewer's attention. The Impressionists relaxed the boundary between subject and background so that the effect of an Impressionist painting often resembles a snapshot, a part of a larger reality captured as if by chance.^[26] Photography was gaining popularity, and as cameras became more portable, photographs became more candid. Photography inspired Impressionists to represent momentary action, not only in the fleeting lights of a landscape, but in the day-to-day lives of people.
- The development of Impressionism can be considered partly as a reaction by artists to the challenge presented by photography, which seemed to devalue the artist's skill in reproducing reality. Both portrait and landscape paintings were deemed somewhat deficient and lacking in truth as photography "produced lifelike images much more efficiently and reliably".^[27]
- In spite of this, photography actually inspired artists to pursue other means of creative expression, and rather than compete with photography to emulate reality, artists focused "on the one thing they could inevitably do better than the photograph—by further developing into an art form its very subjectivity in the conception of the image, the very subjectivity that photography eliminated".^[29] The Impressionists sought to express their perceptions of nature, rather than create exact representations. This allowed artists to depict subjectively what they saw with their "tacit imperatives of taste and conscience".^[30] Photography encouraged painters to exploit aspects of the painting medium, like colour, which photography then lacked: "The Impressionists were the first to consciously offer a subjective alternative to the photograph"

Content and composition





From whose work is the name of the style of impressionism?

- Claude Monet



- Edouard Manet



- Kazimir Malevich



What color is not used in pure impressionism?

● Red



● Black



● Green



In which year did Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Cezanne, Berta Morizot, Edgar Degas and several other artists establish the Sociological Anonymous Cooperative of Artists?

● 1885



● 1869



● 1873

