

Impressionist and Post Impressionist Artists

Claude Monet

Born: November 14, 1840, Paris

Died: December 5, 1926, Giverny



Monet was a French painter, initiator, leader, and dedicated to the Impressionist style. He is regarded as the classic Impressionist in terms of his devotion to the movement.

His youth was spent in Le Havre, where he first excelled as a caricaturist artist (comic like) but then converted to landscape painting under the influence of his early mentor Boudin, from whom he derived his firm predilection for painting out doors. In 1859 he studied in Paris at the Atelier Suisse and formed a friendship with Pissarro. After two years' military service in Algiers, he returned to Le Havre and met Jongkind, to whom he said he owed 'the definitive education of my eye'. In 1862, he entered the studio of Gleyre in Paris where he met Renoir, Sisley, and Bazille, who later formed an Impressionist group. Monet's devotion to painting out doors is illustrated by the famous story concerning one of his most ambitious early works, *Women in the Garden*.

The picture is about 2.5 meters high and to enable him to paint all of it outside he had a trench dug in the garden so that the canvas could be raised or lowered by pulleys to the height he required. Courbet visited him when he was working on it and said Monet would not paint even the leaves in the background unless the lighting conditions were exactly right!

During the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) he took refuge in England with Pissarro where he studied the work of Constable and Turner. Monet even had time to paint the Thames and London parks, as well as meet the dealer Durand-Ruel, who was to become one of the great champions of the Impressionists. From 1871 to 1878 Monet lived at Argenteuil, a village on the Seine near Paris, and here were painted some of the most joyous and famous works of the Impressionist movement, not only by Monet, but by his visitors Manet, Renoir and Sisley. In 1878 he moved to Vétheuil and in 1883 he settled at Giverny, also on the Seine, but about 40 miles from Paris. After having experienced extreme poverty, Monet began to prosper. By 1890 he was successful enough to buy the house at Giverny he had previously rented and in 1892 he married the woman he had an affair with from 1876, which begun three years before the death of his first wife. From 1890 he concentrated on series of pictures in which he painted the same subject at different times of the day in different lights, with *Haystacks* or *Grainstacks* and *Rouen Cathedral* among the best known. He continued to travel, visiting London and Venice several times on his way, and even got to stay in Norway as a guest of Queen Christiana. However, he paid most attention to the water garden he created at Giverny, which provided the theme for the series of paintings on *Water Lilies* that began in 1899. In 1914 he had a special studio built in the grounds of his house so he could work on the huge canvases which showed just how much it began to dominate his work.

In his final years he had trouble with his eyesight, but he painted until the end. He was enormously prolific and many major galleries have examples of his work.

Edouard Manet

Born: January 29, 1832

Died: 1883, Paris



Edouard Manet is considered to be the father of impressionism. With the birth of lithograph photography, no longer was painting a necessary element in record reality. A new movement in art began to surface beginning with the work of Manet. Utilizing the elements of light and without the confines of exact perspective, the impressionist movement created works with vivid brushstrokes and images of everyday subject matters and unique landscapes. Although considered to be the originator of this art category, Manet refused, even till the

day of his death, to label his work as impressionistic.

Manet was the son of a high government official. As a young man, his father was trying to push him into studying law but in order to avoid this he decided to become a sailor. After this, he apprenticed himself to the academic French painter Thomas Couture. Also during this time, he visited the countries of Germany, Italy, and Holland to study the paintings of the old masters. His own influences centred greatly on the Dutch painter Frans Hals and the Spanish artists Diego Velázquez and Francisco Goya. When he began his own work, he chose simple everyday subjects such as old beggars, street urchins, and Spanish bullfight scenes and used bold direct brush strokes which was the opposite style to use at this time.

Manet's life as a painter seemed a cross between innovative creation and academic controversy. In his work, *Olympia*, many complained of the realism to his nude, portraying his character with a real expression on her face instead of the angelic look of classic nudes. As well as this, the subject of this work was a well known Parisian socialite which just made matters worse and played right into the hands of his critics. But Manet was not one to worry about public opinion. His comment about *Olympia* was, "I paint what I see." He was also helped by the French novelist Emile Zola, who lent written support of Manet's art in the newspaper *Figaro*. It was from this support that the two were to become lifelong friends.

Perhaps Manet's gift was not only in the great pieces of work he produced, but also on his influence on other painters of his time. He seemed to take on the role of mentor and gave inspiration to many younger painters of his day including such future masters as Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Cézanne. And as any true teacher, they in turn influenced his later works.

Manet left a prolific number of paintings numbering 420 oil paintings along with numerous watercolours and pastel studies. His work became very sought after late in his life and he was able to enjoy, if only for a short while the acclaim he deserved before he died in Paris in 1883.

Georges Seurat

Born: December 2, 1859, Paris

Died: 1891



During his short life, Georges-Pierre Seurat was an innovator in an age of innovators in the field of art. This French painter was a leader in a movement called neo-impressionist in the late 19th century. Unlike the broad brushstrokes of the impressionist, Seurat developed a technique called pointillism or divisionism. In this method, he used small dots or strokes of contrasting colour to create the subtle changes contained within the painting. Seurat was an art scientist in that he spent much of his life, searching for how different colours and linear effects would change the look or texture of a canvas. He was painstaking in his work, the technique he chose taking much longer to produce a work of art. Even so in his life, he produced over 500 paintings or drawings.

Seurat studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1878 and 1879. While there, the young man was strongly influenced by works of Rembrandt and Francisco de Goya.

Seurat kept himself to himself. After he was an established artist, he produced one large canvas a year for a total of seven monumental paintings. Along with this he produced 60 smaller paintings. He was very regimented, spending his winters in Paris and his summers on France's northern coast. In 1891, his life was cut short suddenly at the age of 31 in Paris, but even in this short time, his impact on the world of art will never be forgotten.

Paul Cézanne

Born: January 19, 1839, Aix-en-Provence (Southern France)

Died: October 22, 1906



The French painter Paul Cézanne, who exhibited little in his lifetime and pursued his interests increasingly in artistic isolation, is regarded today as one of the great forerunners of modern painting, both for the way that he evolved of putting down on canvas exactly what his eye saw in nature and for the qualities of pictorial form that he achieved through a unique treatment of space, mass, and color.

Cézanne was modern compared to stereotypical impressionists, but he went beyond their interests in the individual brushstroke and the fall of light onto objects, to create, in his words, “something more solid and durable, like the art of the museums.”

Cézanne was sent to school in Aix, where he had a close friendship with the novelist Emile Zola. He also studied law there from 1859 to 1861, but at the same time he continued attending drawing classes. Against the will of his father, he made up his mind that he wanted to paint and in 1861 joined Zola in Paris. His father's reluctant consent at that time brought him financial support and, later, a large inheritance on which he could live without difficulty. In Paris he met Camille Pissarro and came to know others of the impressionist group. Cézanne, however, remained an outsider to their circle; from 1864 to 1869 he submitted his work to the official SALON and saw it consistently rejected. His paintings of 1865-70 form what is usually called his early “romantic” period. Extremely personal in character, it deals with bizarre subjects of violence and fantasy in harsh, somber colors and extremely heavy paintwork.

Thereafter, as Cézanne rejected that kind of approach and worked his way out of the obsessions underlying it, his art is easily divided into three phases. In the early 1870s, due to his association with Pissarro, with whom he painted outside Paris at Auvers, he incorporated the principles of color and lighting of Impressionism and loosened up his brushwork. However, he still managed to retain his own sense of mass and the interaction of planes, as in *House of the Hanged Man*.

In the late 1870s Cézanne entered the phase known as “constructive,” expressed through the grouping of parallel, hatched brushstrokes in formations that build up a sense of mass in themselves. He continued in this style until the early 1890s, when, he produced a series of paintings titled *Card Players*.

Finally, living as alone in Aix rather than alternating between the south and Paris, Cézanne moved into his late phase. Now he concentrated on a few basic subjects consisting of still lifes of studio objects built around such recurring elements as apples, statuary, and tablecloths, as well as studies of bathers, based upon the male model and drawing upon a combination of memory, earlier studies, and sources in the art of the past; and successive views of the Mont Sainte-Victoire, a nearby landmark, painted from his studio looking across the intervening valley. The landscapes of the final years, much affected by Cézanne's modern day practice in watercolor, have a more transparent and unfinished look, while the last figure paintings once more had a somber and spiritual mood. By the time of his death, Cézanne's art had begun to be shown and seen across Europe, and it became a fundamental influence on the Fauves, the cubists, and technically all art being produced in the early 20th century.

Vincent Van Gogh

Born: 1853, Holland

Died: July 20, 1890



How can a man who only sold one painting in his entire lifetime, and that only for 400 francs (about £65) just 4 months before his death, become thought of as one of the world's greatest painters. It was not until after his death by suicide at age 37, that the troubled soul was set free with his art for the world. Van Gogh's paintings today are among the most sought after and expensive paintings in the world. He was a genius, but would never receive the acclaim or popularity he deserved while he was alive. But to be fair, perhaps his greatness was based on his sadness, not in spite of it. Had he been great in his time, he perhaps would not have created the masterpieces later placing him to the level of the most powerful art expressionist ever.

Van Gogh was the eldest of eight children. Even as a child, Van Gogh showed troubling signs that didn't change as he got older, often walking around in a daze deep in thought. As a young man, he took on many jobs but succeeded in none. He began studying the art of the masters. At one point he even became an art dealer. However, like all his other attempts, even this was to be short lived. If a patron tried to purchase a poorly painted picture, Van Gogh would argue and justify why the painting was a piece of junk. Of course, he sold little and soon was out of business. Later he tried, again unsuccessfully, to become at different periods of his life a minister and a teacher.

His occupational life was a complete disaster, not much better than his personal one. Van Gogh never seemed to learn the social skills of dealing with women. He fell in love easily and was heartbroken just as easily. One of his greatest lost loves was that for his first cousin Kee. It was really his failure that also fuelled his genius. Throughout his life, Van Gogh was supported financially by his younger brother Theo who seemed to show his brother never ending love and support.

Although Van Gogh was never successful in his lifetime, he did meet and work with several of the great masters of impressionism including Pissarro, Gauguin, and Signac. Van Gogh suffered from severe occurrences of depression and had repeated mental breakdowns in his life. Probably the most significant sign of his sad mental state was his infamous cutting off a large portion of one of his ears following a heated argument with fellow artist Gauguin. He then wrapped the ear in a newspaper and sent it to a prostitute he had supported.

No matter how disturbed Van Gogh was during his life, the greatness of his art cannot be ignored. The detail and complex use of colour and texture in his work has given the world some of its most passionate creations of beauty and feeling. He had the ability to convey the outside world as he saw it.

Vincent Van Gogh took his life with a gunshot to his chest. Although considered one of the world's most successful artists, tragically he died due to his constant failure through life.

Paul Gauguin

Born: June 7, 1848, Paris

Died:



Paul Gauguin was a French postimpressionist painter, whose lush color, flat two-dimensional forms, and subject matter helped form the basis of modern art. Gauguin is considered one of the leading painters of the Postimpressionist period.

Paul Gauguin was born into a liberal middle -class family. After an adventurous early life, including a four-year stay in Peru with his family and a period as a French merchant marine, he became a successful Parisian stockbroker, settling down with his wife, Mette Sofie Gad and five children. In 1874, after meeting the artist Camille Pissarro and viewing the first impressionist exhibition, he became a collector and amateur painter. He

socialised with the impressionists in 1876, 1880 -1882, and 1886. In 1883 he gave up his secure existence to devote himself to painting, and as a consequence, his wife and children, were left with no choice but to return to her family in Denmark.

From 1886 to 1891 Gauguin lived mainly in rural Brittany (except for a trip to Panama and Martinique from 1887 to 1888), where he was the centre of a small group of experimental painters known as the school of Pont-Aven.

Under the influence of the painter Émile Bernard, Gauguin turned away from impressionism and adapted a less naturalistic style, which he called synthetism. He found his inspiration in the art of indigenous peoples, in medieval stained glass, and in Japanese prints; he was introduced to Japanese prints by the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh when they spent two months together in Arles, in the south of France, in 1888. Gauguin's new style was characterized by the use of large flat areas of nonnaturalistic color, as in *Yellow Christ* (1889, Albright -Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York).

In 1891, ruined and in debt, Gauguin sailed for the South Seas to escape European civilization and "everything that is artificial and conventional." Except for one visit to France from 1893 to 1895, he remained in the Tropics for the rest of his life, first in Tahiti and later in the Marquesas Islands.

The essential characteristics of his style changed little in the South Seas; he retained the qualities of expressive color, denial of perspective, and thick, flat forms. Under the influence of the tropical setting and Polynesian culture, however, Gauguin's paintings became more powerful, while the subject matter became more distinctive, the scale larger, and the compositions more simplified. His subjects ranged from scenes of ordinary life, such as *Tahitian Women on the Beach* (1891, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), to brooding scenes of superstitious dread, such as *Spirit of the Deadwatching* (1892, Albright -Knox Art Gallery).

His masterpiece was the monumental allegory *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), which he painted shortly before his failed suicide attempt. A modest stipend from a Parisian art dealer sustained him until his death at Atuana in Marquesas on May 9, 1903.

Paul Signac

Born:

Died:



Paul Signac was the theoretician of the Neo-Impressionist group and the only one of the group to create an important body of graphic work based on those principles. The work we are including in our show is not particularly dependent upon his theories, which advocated moving away from Seurat's scientific precision towards a freer, more spontaneous use of color. *The Oxford Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Art* notes that Signac spent a great deal of time on the Mediterranean and French Atlantic coasts. His work had a great influence on Matisse.