

## **DISCUSS THE TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPRESSIONISM WITH REFERENCE TO A RANGE OF WORKS**

The birth of the Impressionist movement came about with the certain scientific discoveries such as the camera. It brought science and art together to produce a number of quality paintings. It inspired artists to express their true view of what became more experimental and to express their true view of what they thought art should be.

In the 1860s a great deal of interest was aroused by scientific developments the results of which were published in journals. One of the major discoveries for the Impressionists was the optical research on the constitution of colour and light. The development of the prism and the discovery that white light is made up of the whole spectrum of colours was crucial for the development of modern art. It implied that white light could be broken up into constituent colours. This encouraged the artists to try out different approaches and techniques and to express their true view of what art should be.

The camera also influenced the evolution of art. It made artists question the nature of representation and their intentions when recording from life. It also could produce an image without much effort. This dissuaded some artists from continuing painting and instead to pursue a career based on photography. It encouraged those who continued painting to be more creative and to use different colour techniques. One of the theories put forward by placing colours side by side so that they influenced each other. By placing red and yellow side by side, from a distance, the colours seem to merge together creating the colour orange. Chevreul was the man associated with these colour theories. Another of his discoveries was revolutionary art theories was that shadows were not necessarily black or brown, they could be blues, greens, purples or other hues.

Although these discoveries did influence art, and help start the movement of impressionism, not all artists painted using the same technical terms.

The Impressionist movement was an evolution of what Coubert started the artist who bridged Coubert and the development of impressionism was Eduard Manet. He was a French painter whose work inspired the impressionist style by his use of simple colour areas and his brush technique.

His studied in Paris and was taught by the academic French painter Thomas Couture. He also visited Germany, Italy and the Netherlands to study the paintings of old masters.

Manet enjoyed painting everyday subjects, such as old beggars, street urchins, café characters and Spanish bullfight scenes.

In 1863 one of Manet's famous paintings called *Le Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe* was shown at the Salon des Refuses. The painting portrayed a woodland picnic, and a female nude accompanied by two fully dressed young men staring at the observer in an indifferent manner. Not only did the subject matter offend the academics, but his style of painting was also considered shocking. He used and distorted the traditional academic technique of painting. His flat style and lack of modelling of shapes was seen as scandalous and an insult to the academics.

Despite the critical opinions of those old school academics Manet continued painting in this "impressionist style" producing a number of famous paintings.

In 1865 he exhibited his *Olympia*, this painting aroused a much more violent reaction in the academic circles because of its unorthodox realism. It was considered vulgar, immoral and an insult to good taste. It was based on a *Venus by Titian*, which Manet distorted to depict an image of a young girl receiving flowers and waiting for her next client. Her direct gaze implies that the observer might be her next client. Her expression is one of indifference; she is not bothered by her work. The few items like the bracelet, slippers and the flowers that Manet painted could be interpreted as sexual trappings. The black cat's yellow eyes probably symbolise erotic pleasure as well links with witchcraft. Young artists who were influenced by Manet's art loved this painting.

One of these artists was Claude Monet. He is known for his technique of applying bright unmixed colours in quick short strokes. He developed his technique from early guidance from two artists, Eugene Boudin and a Dutch artist called Johan Barthold Jongkind. The broad areas of bright colours and Japanese wood block prints also influenced Monet's work. Monet's formal art training began in 1859 when he went to the Academie Suisse, here they encouraged their students to draw from models rather from plaster casts of ancient Greek and Roman statues.

In 1874 Monet showed four pastels and five paintings in an exhibition. Among these works was one called *Impression: Sunrise*. It depicted what impressionism was all about, in fact it even gave the movement its name. A French art critic Louis Leroy called the painting impressionist in one of his reviews "impressionism I knew it, after all I am impressed, so it must have been an impression ..... what freedom." The painting is not really a pure impressionist painting, the brush strokes are more discreet although bright colours were used. They were applied in three washes. In the portrayal of the reflection of the sunlight on the water a typical impressionist style is used. The technique used in this painting was sketchy and even Monet classified it as unfinished, that is the reason why he named *Impression: Sunrise*.

Monet continued to paint throughout the years, his paintings became even more layered and complex, he generally started painting outdoors in the

gardens in Giverny from the house he had purchased. He never lacked buyers for his work and by the 1890's his sales were strong.

Monet met a great number of artists throughout his life but one that became especially famous using his techniques was Alfred Sisley. Although none of his student works survived his later work was truly fascinating. One of these paintings is Village on the Banks of the Seine. It was painted in 1872. This shows a tranquil and unelaborated scene. It is a scene of simplicity, which is a characteristic used in his earlier works. He concentrated on the use of subtle colour, light and atmosphere. The trees in the foreground are painted using a certain amount of conventionality. This shows contrast in the background and foreground as the background is painted in a more impressionistic style.

Impressionism brought about new freedom of colours; brighter and bolder colours. It introduced colour theories and cameras into the late nineteenth century artistic world. This opened doors for future artists allowing them to express and experiment through colours and discover that painting should not be a direct image of reality.