

Forerunners of Impressionism

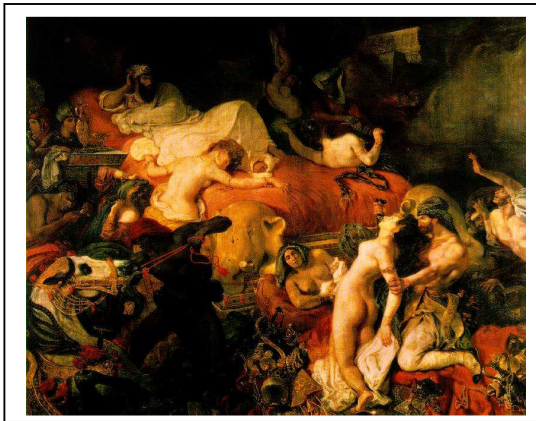
Impressionism is a major art movement that was primarily established in France during the late 19th century. It developed for many reasons though it essentially progressed to leave behind the formal and academic style of art. The rise of Impressionism with its radical new aims and techniques is only understood completely in view of the Academies and the artists who reacted against them.

In a new age young independent artists were forced to seek their own alternative style in training, drawing practice and painting methods. Delacroix, and Manet are such independent artists who influentially paved the way for key Impressionists such as Monet, Pissarro and Renoir.

Previous to these forerunners the French Academy taught its students of traditional conventions and classifications such as Drawing indoors with regard to light, form, contour, Chiaroscuro, and hatching to name but a few. Painting was not as important as drawing since they believed it came lower down on scale of spiritual elevation. The paintings that were created can be characterised by its highly refined finish, its use of historical subject matter, and its moralistic tone, which was highly regarded.

Eugene Delacroix

The French Academy concerned itself with structure and was self-perpetuating. It stood firmly against the new age and the artistic upheaval that was Impressionism. One extremely influential figure in the challenge of the academies was Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) who was regarded as an independent artist. Delacroix considered himself as a painter who was simply bringing new energy and vitality to a tired classical tradition. Delacroix however did not completely break with tradition because he continued to maintain the importance of the highly finished artwork. This can be seen true with close inspection towards his painting The Death of Sardanapalus (1827).



Their work consisted of smooth brush marks and unsaturated colours. The ground of the canvas they used was also of a dark nature as they used earthy brown coloured tones. In the earlier stage of The Death of Sardanapalus, Delacroix like many other academics sketched some of his ideas for poses of his figures later to be planned in more detail. These sketches came to embody the artist's first ideas

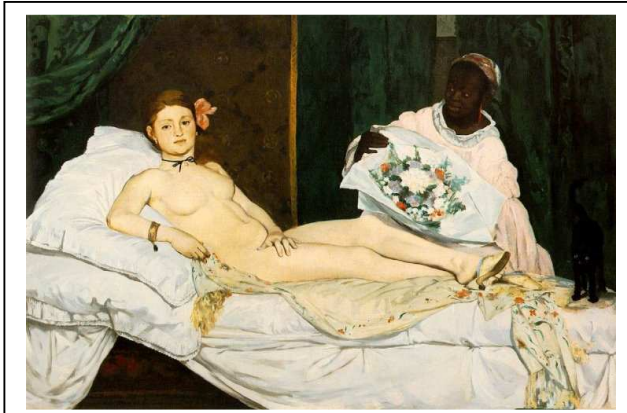
for the final painting. Ironically it can be seen that spontaneity and originality were the qualities that were sought after. Delacroix's expressive energy is apparent in many of his sketches. Subsequently the preparatory stages in painting like the Ebauche and the Esquisse was surprisingly promoting the idea of originality.

Unit Four - Contextual Study

Msgana Semere

Manet

Similar to Delacroix, Thomas Couture (1815-1879) is another independent artist who was still in practice of some Academic standards. His protégé however better known as Edouard Manet (1832-1883) is one of the first forerunners to have an immediate impact on Impressionism. Couture encouraged Manet to work rapidly and to keep the first vivid impression. Manet often suppressed detail and halftones to favour direct spontaneity. Manet also turned away from the old masters. Instead his subject matter for his paintings merged old themes with new modern subject matters. This is evident in his painting Olympia- (1863).



Manet is active with his brushwork often dragging colours in thick strokes. Manet also developed strong contours with forms like the lying woman, reducing her to a mass of light with hardly any tone. Manet's Olympia however is concentrated around photography, which developed from the 1840's explaining the contrast in darks and lights.

Manet embraced photography

as he studied it along with other artists like Degas in the 1860's. Through photography he found a new way of depicting simplified more direct impression of his subject matters.

Photography and the development of Impressionism

Photography was a great influence on art. It changed the artist's idea about light and its effects. Though it also can be blamed for the downfall of the academies and the moralistic tone they tried to maintain. People argued that photography lacked the subtle and delicate aspects of the painting. The objective truth came through and it held no personal illusionistic account of reality. In response to this, artists from the 1860's up to the 1880's were drawn together to bring about a new richer representation of reality through visual experience. Their method was based on reaching new lengths beyond what the camera can do. Thus Impressionism was born. Impressionist artists such as Monet and Pissarro stunned their contemporaries with their revolutionary treatment of colour and light.

Impressionism

The principal Impressionist style of painting is characterised by the subjective impression that is produced from a scene or object, the use of unmixed primary colours and irregular strokes to simulate actual reflected light. The studio restrained the standard Impressionist of painting a scene that captured nature with its energetic atmosphere and the natural light which defined the artist's perception of shape, form and most importantly colour. One fundamental principle of Impressionist technique is to observe and record and for the Impressionist who is trying to record the effects of nature and the moments of everyday life colour is of great significance.

Unit Four - Contextual Study

Msgana Semere

Colour

Colour is an independent constituent when creating artwork; it enables an artist to evoke emotions from the observer. Scientist Eugene Chevreul discovered and demonstrates colour can perform illusions and affects the observer psychologically. It was Chevreul's development of colour theory that allowed Impressionists to move in new directions.

Using basic principles of colour contrast and general colour effects Impressionists created complex paintings. Importantly it is the eye, which creates the actual colour as



the seven original colours mingle with every brush stroke. The basic colours Impressionists used were those of the spectrum as shown in this Colour wheel. Using Chevreul's theories of divisionism and optical combination of colours the Impressionist is able to preserve the atmosphere of an instantaneous moment in time. The artist creates this by the effect of light on the surface of the subject or object using complimentary colours. Artists resort to using colour side-by-side rather than mixed, realizing that the reproduction of nature's effects in two dimensions is unattainable. Instead of black and earthy colours Impressionists opted for the pure prismatic hues and white. Their use of complimentary colours

allowed them to create shadows without using black and in general a colour's complimentary was a response to the colour at hand e.g. Yellow and purple, blue and orange, red and green. In using chromatic colours they also used a light white-based ground, which was good for the use of the bright chromatic coloured brush marks that would be layered on it.

Brushmarks

In practice the Impressionist painter would use both flat and round –section brushes bought by them from their suppliers. Painters liked their brushes to be long handled and flexible, in order to produce extraordinary effects. The use of texture by Impressionist painters is a key factor in their technique. They would complement and emphasise colour. The use of the *tache* was not alien to the Impressionists as Zola conducted a study of Manet, and found that when recording his subjects he saw them ‘*par larges taches*’. It was Manet's treatment of the *tache* that influenced Impressionist painters and later on Post-Impressionists such as Cézanne. The *tache*, though it is a colour sensation has some weight, thickness and texture which all effect the viewer's conception of colour. The play of light across the surfaces of some Impressionist paintings can be used as a deliberate suggestion of natural light effects depicted.

Spontaneity?

Despite the fact that one fundamental Impressionist technique is to observe and record, almost all of the paintings were not completed ‘*en plein air*’. Impressionists were concerned with retaining the quality of the first immediate impression, even in works, which were not spontaneously painted at a single sitting. Their concern was thus as much with rendering the appearance of spontaneity, with finding a visual language, which embodied that idea of spontaneous painting. Impressionists created the illusion of immediacy, which did not keep with the infamous Impressionist practice of completing paintings at a single sitting. It was not that the painters could not complete a painting *au premier coup* but that time played against them when painting outdoors. The light and atmosphere is ever changing creating a challenge for

Unit Four - Contextual Study

Msgana Semere

the Impressionist. Monet was to have said one effect - *'lasted only seven minutes, or until the sunlight left a certain leaf, when he took out the next canvas and worked on that.'*

Claude Oscar Monet (1840-1926)

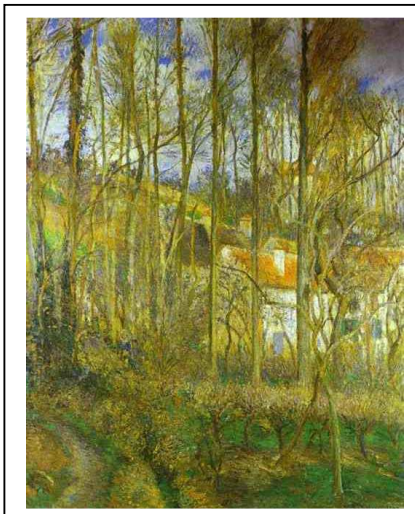
Monet is one of the most famous Impressionist artists and is world renowned for his artwork. Along with Camille Pissarro he amazed his contemporaries with his revolutionary use of light and colour. Monet's artwork alone stands for all the Impressionist ideals and principles. Studying his painting *Bathing at La Grenouillere*



(1869) one can see his lively brushwork and the use of the *tache*. Monet used Colourful neutral or greyish hues, mixing red and green for the boats. On closer inspection he uses vermilion almost purely and Prussian blue for the people on the right hand side. His brushmarks and the definitive *tache* can be seen to suggest forms though they are only formed from irregular shapes. When stood away from the painting the colours mix to create a whole unified

compositional design. The surface texture and brushmark is almost equal through out the work unifying the design. The thickness of the paint adds to this effect. Monet worked both wet into wet and wet into dry. His use of wet into wet made colours indistinct by slurring one colour on another. Monet used wet over dry towards the end of the painting in the top layers trying to define the pure colour. E.g. Pure white is used to show the dazzling sunlight reflecting off the water surface.

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903)



During Impressionism Pissarro, Monet and Renoir were close companions often adopting the same style. Pissarro however implemented the Neo-Impressionist style, which emerged in the 1880's. Though towards the 1880's Pissarro was open to new ideas of younger artists, Renoir remained uninspired resisting Neo-Impressionism. Pissarro began to use the pointillist technique though before in *The Cote des Boeufs at L'Hermitage* (1877) one can see he used the swift small comma brushstroke. This is one of Pissarro's most ambitious paintings of the 1870's. It has small touches of broken colour and its heavily textured surface is characteristic of the period in which it was painted. This oil painting

depicts a hillside close to Pissarro's home. Pissarro has used yellow greenish hues. The painting's texture shows the build up of layers. Firstly Pissarro used green for the foliage and then a yellowish brown on top portraying the effects of light.

Unit Four - Contextual Study

Msgana Semere

Post Impressionism: Moving On...

Impressionism began as a response to the academic arts, influences of independent artists and the new innovations of the mid 19th century. It took nearly a century but Impressionism had arrived and then developed into its own. However during the 1880's a new generation of artists emerged and began to question the techniques of the Impressionists. Pissarro was for the change but others like Renoir and Monet resented the new generation. By the mid 1880's the Impressionist group started to collapse taking its place the new artists, the Post-Impressionists.

Post-impressionism is the term coined (1910) by British art critic Roger Fry to describe the various styles of painting that thrived in France during the period from about 1880 to about 1910. Post-Impressionists including former impressionists Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) were unified in the belief that the development of impressionism had not yet ended. These artists were all searching for a more intense truth behind painting, as a result these artists experimented with new approaches and methods e.g. Pointillism, Georges Seurat (1859-1891).

Paul Cézanne (1839-1906)

Paul Cézanne the oldest of the new generation is one of the most important post-impressionist painters. He is popular for his compositional technique of the distribution of area, which is apparent in many of his landscape paintings. One can argue that this element of compositional design is the first direction into cubism. Cézanne divided the scene into different areas and by dividing the scene he made visible reality abstract. Cézanne also experimented with colour and used complimentary colours to intensify certain effects.

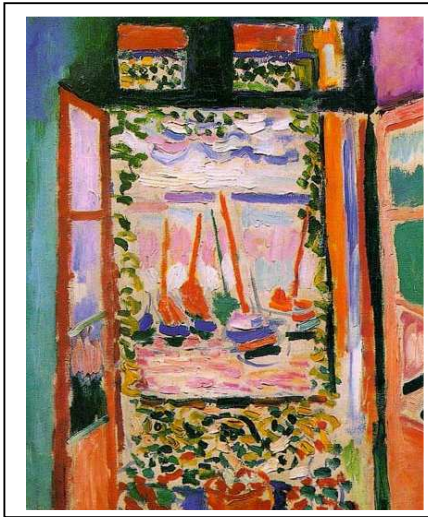


Fauvism

Fauvism is an art movement and style of painting which developed from Post-Impressionism in early twentieth century France. Fauvism was a release for the new emerging 20th century artists as they realised that it should be their own personal vision that is the subject of the artwork and not reality. It all began at the 1905 Salon d'Automne in Paris. A group of painters under the direction of Henri Matisse (1869 - 1954) exhibited their paintings. The paintings were brilliant in colour and used expressive brushwork on a flat composition. A hostile critic Louis Vauxcelles gave the name Fauves, French for "Wild Beasts," to this style of art because it was felt that they used intense colours in a fierce and wild manner. Unlike Post-Impressionist paintings the paintings exhibited were more primal and less naturalistic in style. Paul Gauguin's style and his use of colour were especially strong influences. Fauvist leader Matisse was inspired by Gauguin and this is evident in his use of flat compositions and Colour.

Henri Matisse (1869-1954)

Henri Matisse was the most important French painter of the 20th century. Influenced by Cézanne and Gauguin, he and Andre Derain (1880-1954) developed Fauvism. Before fauvism he had experimented with Pointillism but he found it to rigid and felt he could not release himself, so he began to paint in a much freer and more expressive style. Open Window-Collioure- (1905), is among the very first fauve works in which



he adopted the fauve style, emphasised by its vigorous brushstrokes and intense colour. In Open Window-Collioure Matisse had no formal style of mark making; this shows us that he is expressively painting. The brush marks are unique, each one adopting its own shape. Matisse often avoided detail, instead using bright vivid colours and strong lines to create a sense of movement. Matisse thought that colour was as important as a painting's subject. His choices of colours are not natural; consequently it further expresses his freedom of choice. The view is teeming with light creating vibrancy. Through the window one can see small boats on pink waves under a turquoise sky with more pink. The surrounding walls and glass doors are

painted in blue-green's, purple and orange-red.

Unit Four - Contextual Study

Msgana Semere

Cubism

One of the most influential and groundbreaking art movements of the twentieth century was Cubism pioneered by Pablo Picasso (1882-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963). Picasso and Braque initiated the movement when they took counsel in Post-Impressionist Paul Cézanne's advice. Artists should treat nature – “in terms of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone.”-1904. The Cubist style emphasized the flat, two-dimensional surface of the picture plane in turn rejecting the traditional techniques of perspective, modelling, chiaroscuro and contesting long-established theories of art as the imitation of nature. Cubism derived its name from comments that were made by Matisse and critic Louis Vauxcelles, who described Braque's 1908 work *House at L'Estaque* as composed of cubes. Both Picasso and Braque were greatly inspired by African art in particular sculptures, by Post-Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne and the Fauves. Cubist painters were free to present a new reality in paintings that depicted radically fragmented objects, whose several sides were seen simultaneously.

Unit Four - Contextual Study
Msgana Semere