

History of Art
Post Impressionism

Post Impressionism was an artistic move to follow Impressionism, desperate to break free of Impressionistic style yet maintain its contemporary popularity. Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Seurat all developed their own technique and style which were, in themselves, to follow a whole new fashion of art, such as Fauvism and Cubism. Each of the artist's individual techniques struck the end of Impressionism and the beginning of a completely fresh type of art.

Cézanne's (1839 – 1906) art lies in the roots of nature, he is often referred to as the father of modern art; despite remaining faithful to Impressionistic art of open scope painting and fleeting affects of light and shade, he gave birth to a whole new, different and controversial approach in which artists were to follow. He strove to develop an ideal synthesis of naturalistic representation, personal expression and abstract pictorial order. We can see Cézanne's influence in the cubist work of Picasso and Matisse; Matisse admired colour whereas Picasso developed Cézanne's planar compositional structure into the cubist style. In Cézanne's paintings he defines the vibrations of colour.

In "La Cote Du Galet" (1879/82) at Pontoise we see influences of Impressionism through the mark making of strokes and slabs of colour and the diagonal brush strokes emphasising the composition. Cézanne has flattened the composition but with understandable perspective, the flat fields and diagonal stripes are in perspective to a degree. The use of colour of the painting is extraordinary, he has used a limited palette consisting of no reds, no bright yellows, the painting is an essay in green against a composition of landscape.

We see Cézanne's use of image flattening and the Japanese print influence in "The Basket of Apples" (1890/94), the black line around the apple and black outline links with the structure of the painting, he flattens the 3 dimensional potential. In "Curtain, Jug and Fruit Dish" (1893/94) the rich and luxurious colour is shown through the vibrant oranges and viridian green, Cézanne is renowned for his excellent use of a limited palette and in this painting we can see his overwhelming talent. "The Bathers" is more than 8ft across, it is Cézanne's most stylised and architectural work of art, the bathers lean inwards echoing the Gothic arch produced by the trees.

The most prominent feature of Cézanne's influence was the transition of art; he is known as the father of modern art because he introduced the importance of process which is the main characteristic of modern art. Cézanne recognised the importance of the process over the subject matter.

During his last years many younger artists travelled to Aix to observe him at work and to receive any words of wisdom he might offer. Both his style and his theory remained mysterious and cryptic; he seemed to some a naïve primitive, while to others he was a sophisticated master of technical procedure.

Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) was a Dutch Post Impressionist, he produced a series of water colours which depict ragged edges of the urban life. All of Van Gogh's pieces seem to be endowed with a physical and spiritual quality; "The Potato Eaters" (1885) one of his earliest pieces of work, is dark and somber, sometimes crude, among his other early pieces this provides evidence of Van Gogh's intense desire to express the misery and poverty of humanity as he saw it among the miners in Belgium.

"Starry Night" (1889) attempts to make modern, religious art with the inclusion of Protestant sun, stars and trees, the church and cottages are Dutch which

origins in his father who was a Dutch Protestant pastor. He was a religious man and saw his paintings as a way of communicating, as revealed in the expressive colour of "Vincent's Chair" (1888).

Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) came from France; his lush colour, flat two-dimensional forms and subject matter helped form the basis of modern art. For a long period of time he worked alongside Van Gogh who infected him with his greed for yellow which is evident in "The Yellow Christ", in this Gauguin relates himself to Jesus as a betrayed man by his disciple. In 1891 Gauguin went to live in Tahiti where his paintings were rich in colour. He went to Tahiti in search of paradise but what he found was comparably different, however this did not stop him painting exotic pictures with which he was accused by critics of being artificially exotic when he showed his 66 revolutionary paintings at a Paris exhibition in 1893, he only went back to France for two years in 1893-1895.

In Gauguin's "Vision After The Sermon" he combines stylised images of Breton figures in shallow pictorial space with a 'vision' in the top right corner. He is representing Breton women coming back from church and witnessing a sermon, possibly one that had just been mentioned in the church service. We know it is only a vision as the women's eyes are closed. Madeleine, who was his current love is depicted in this painting as one of the Breton women, we can see her lips which are painted in some of her portraits. Gauguin also includes himself in this painting, he is the Priest (same nose), this shows the conflict of the desires of an angel with the desires of a man. The dark diagonal tree based on Japanese prints and the powerful red background add to the drama of the painting.

Gauguin's self portrait (1893) directly inspired the Fauvist movement, the flatness of hand, the flat area of red and blue, here he celebrates the power of colour. We can see an intense Japanese influence in "Night café at Arles", the French peasants look Asian and it looks linear with flatter areas of colour.

"The Spirit of The Dead Keeps Watch" (1892) shows his Tahitian wife Taha Amana and the dead watching is their deceased child. Gauguin is taking religious beliefs of Tahiti and putting them into a painting, the painting has an emotional spiritual quality, making the painting more personal to Gauguin and therefore giving us an insight into his emotions.

Georges-Pierre Seurat (1859-1891) produced seven main works of art until his untimely death at the age of 31. Seurat is recognised for his use of Divisionism, colour theory, pointillism and classical theory. Divisionism is secondary colours put into prints; pointillism is the application of paint into 'dots' of colour. Seurat attended the École des Beaux Arts where he relished on his ability to draw; Ingres, a great classical painter from the early 1800's was a great influence on Seurat and also of Degas. All of Seurat's paintings were all wonderfully planned and draughted, their meticulously planned composition were no different to classical 17th century and 18th century paintings.

The study of "The Young Man" (1883-1884) is dominated by the technique *conté*, which is compressed graphite with clay. He uses heavily textured piece of paper to create texture normally done by paint; he does not draw lines but merely and successfully represents them through different tones of the surface area.

In "The Bathers" (1884) Seurat uses tonal manipulation for a particular effect. The paint treatment of the Impressionist is evident in this painting; there is nothing spontaneous, flickering of fragmented about this piece of art, all objects and subjects have hard and precise edges. Seurat plays around with repeated compositional shapes seen in the hats of the bathers. He also relishes on a controlled

palette and a balanced use of colour. This painting is a synthesis on what is actually there, a play on reality. Seurat incorporates a systematic application of scientific colour theories, he has covered the canvas in dots of pure colour that are intended to gain in vibrancy by partially mixing in the viewer's eyes.

"La Grande Jatté" (1884) is a social narration and here the small, regular, divided dots of colour constitute the pointillist technique derived from the Impressionist touches, but here we only see them in embryo. The picture depicts social aspects on contemporary life, again Seurat plays with the repetition of compositional shape with the curve of the dogs tail and the curve of the woman's umbrella. We see this again in the painting "La Chahut" where the lines all go upwards, this is due to the psychological sensation by positive lines which create feelings of happiness.

Conclusively, Seurat, Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin played a major role in the influence of the art to precede them. Seurat's ideas were very influential, even persuading the great master of the movement of the Impressionist movement, Pissarro to adopt them for a while. His colour techniques would inspire a new generation of artists, the Fauves including Matisse and Picasso. The influence of Seurat can be seen in some of Van Gogh's work where he adopts small brushstrokes and brilliant, pure colour; Van Gogh represents the archetype of expressionism, the idea of spontaneity in painting. Similar to Van Gogh, Munch expresses his emotional turmoil through his paintings. Gauguin's bold experiments in colouring led directly to the 20th century Fauvist style in modern art. His strong modelling influenced Munch too and the later expressionist school. Cézanne was known as 'the father of modern art'; the intensity of his colour, coupled with the apparent rigor of his compositional organisation, signalled to most that, despite the artist's own frequent despair, he had synthesized the basic expressive and representational elements of painting in a highly original manner.