

Impressionism is the movement in painting that was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in France. It was the result of the reaction to the formalism and sentimentality that were characterized by academic art.

The impressionists prefer to paint outdoors. The most popular ones are landscape and streets scenes, as well as figures from everyday life. They are trying to achieve a spontaneous, undetailed picture of the world through careful representation of the effect of natural light on objects. Since the impressionists believe that light tends to diffuse the outlines of the objects and reflect the colours of surrounding objects into the shadows, they are more concerned with the light than with exact depiction of form. The colours they prefer are the primary colours (red, blue and yellow) and complimentary colours (green, orange and orange). By placing short brushstrokes of these colours side by side, they achieve the effects of naturalness and immediacy. When the primary colours are blend into together with the complimentary colours and viewed from a distance, the contrasting colours will bring out the vivid quality of each. Therefore, the painters will achieve a greater brilliance of colour and tones in their paintings. The most famous impressionists of all times include Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot and Alfred Sisley.

Claude Oscar Monet is a French impressionist painter who was famous for bringing the study of the transient effects of natural light to its most refined expression. He was born on November 14, 1840 in Paris, France. However, strangely, he spent most of his childhood in Le Havre. During his teen years, he studied drawing and also painted seascapes outside with the French painter Eugene Louis Boudin. By 1859, Monet had committed himself to a promising career as an artist and began to spend as much time in Paris as possible. During the 1860's he was associated with the preimpressionist painter Edouard Manet and with other French painters who later formed the impressionist school. They are Camille Pissarro, Pierre Auguste Renoir and Alfred Sisley. Around the same period, Monet painted simple landscapes and scenes of contemporary middle-class society and had some success at official exhibitions. As his styles developed, he began to violate one traditional artistic convention after another in the interest of direct artistic

expression. He experimented with outdoor sunlight and bright colours and he was close to cutting himself off from the possibility of a successful career as a conventional painter.

In 1874, Monet and his colleagues decided organize their exhibition. They called themselves independents but the press soon labeled them as “impressionists” because their works were sketchy and unfinished and one of Monet’s works had the title *Impression: Sunrise*. Monet’s compositions from this period were extremely loosely structured and the colours were applied in strong and distinct strokes. His technique suggested that the artist had captured a spontaneous impression of nature. During the 1870s and 1880s, Monet continued to refine this technique and he made numerous trips to scenic areas of France, especially the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, to study the most brilliant effects of light and colour.

In the mid 1880s, Monet had been regarded as the leader of the impressionist school and had achieved significant recognition and financial security. He was recognized as a master of meticulous observation, despite the boldness of his colour and the extreme simplicity of his compositions. In 1890 he was able to purchase some property in the village of Giverny and there he began to construct a water garden. The water garden consisted of a lily pond arched with a Japanese bridge and overhung with willows and clumps of bamboo. Beginning 1906, paintings of the pond and the water lilies kept him busy for his remaining life. He also worked his other “series” paintings, groups of paintings of the same subject – haystacks, poplars, Rouen Cathedral, the river Seine, etc. The great impressionist died on December 5, 1926 in Giverny.

This painting is called “The Artists Garden at Vetheuil” painted in 1880. This is a good example of how Monet uses the natural light and colours. The painting is full of primary and complimentary colours, blended together. The background is bright blue and the details are exempted. The grass is painted with short brushstrokes and the flowers stand out against the dark green background. Notice how the leaves and the flowers are blended to make the foreground more filled and rich. The empty and plain pavement in the center attracts the most attention all eyes go the little girl.

This painting is called “Antibes” painted in 1888. This is another excellent example of how Monet blended the colours together and usage of natural light. The tree is obvious the main focus of the painting. The leaves are dots of yellow, green and tints of red. Once again, he used primary and complimentary colours. The buildings in the distance are blurred and no details can be seen. The sky is a mixture of gray, blue and white. Little dots and brushstrokes create this beautiful scenery. The mountains are also a product of small brushstrokes.

Pierre Auguste Renoir is a French impressionist painter noted for his radiant and intimate paintings of female nude. Critics recognized him as one of the greatest and most independent painters of his period. He was also noted for the harmony of his lines, the brilliance of his colour and the charm of his variety of subjects. He enjoyed painting single human figure or family group portraits than landscapes.

Renoir was born in Limoges on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1841. As a child he worked in a porcelain factory in Paris. He painted many designs on china and at the age of 17, he copied the paintings on fans, lampshades and blinds. In 1862 to 1863, he studied painting formally at the academy of the Swiss painter Charles Gabriel Gleyre in Paris. His early works were influenced by Claude Monet for his treatment of light and Eugene Delacroix for his treatment of colour.

Renoir’s first exhibition was in Paris in 1864 but he didn’t get recognized until 1874, during the first exhibition of painters of the new impressionist school. One of the most famous works displayed there is *Le Bal au Moulin de la Galette* which is an open-air scene of a café. His mastery in figure painting and in representing light are evident. In 1883, Renoir had fully established his reputation with a solo exhibition held at the Durand – Ruel Gallery in Paris. In 1887, he completed a series of studies of a group of nude females known as the Bathers. These paintings reveal his extraordinary ability to depict the lustrous, pearly colour and texture of skin. Many of his later paintings had the same theme. During the last twenty years of his life, Renoir was crippled by arthritis which unabled him to move his hands freely. However, he continued to paint by using a

brush strapped to his arm. Renoir died at Cagnes – sur – Mer, a village in the south of France on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1919.

This painting is called “In the Meadow” painted in 1890. He used a variety of colours and a new vivacity in his brushwork. He paints thinly over light ground, creating a silken surface with the fine grass being blown by soft summer breeze. Throughout the painting, colours are blended together by small brushstrokes. For example, the leaves of the trees are a variation of greens and browns. The hat of the girl is composed of light purples, yellow and blues. In the background, very light shades of green, blue and yellow are used to make the foreground more apparent and stand out.

The last painting is called “The Loge” painted in 1874. This displays Renoir’s skills and talents for painting human figures. This picture is a hymn to the beauty of a woman. She is the center of attention. Her pale face is brought out against her dark clothing. Her hair and clothes are painted with tiny little spots and blended together so that no straight lines are seen. The flower on her hair is blurry but stands out once again against the dark brown background. The man behind her does not get full attention for his face and shirts aren’t nearly as white as the woman’s face. The woman’s eyes are staring right at you as if she has something to tell you. This is an excellent painting which reveals Renoir’s talents and love for impressionism.