

Wednesday 8/3/2000
Realism and Impressionism

Realism:

In art and literature, realism is an attempt to describe human behaviour and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life. Attempts at realism have been made periodically throughout history in all the arts; the term is, however, generally restricted to a movement that began in the mid-19th century, in reaction to the highly subjective approach of Romanticism. Realism is concerned directly with what is absorbed by the senses.

In art, although a clearly defined realist school has never evolved, a realist approach has been manifested in different ways at various times. The term realist, used to describe a work of art, has often simply meant that “ugly” objects or figures are represented, as opposed to those considered “beautiful”. Frequently used to describe scenes of humble life, the term implies a criticism of social conditions.

Realists: Gustave Courbet, Honore Daumier, Jean-Francois Millet, William Sidney Mount, Thomas Eakins.

Impressionism:

It is the movement in painting that developed in late 19th-century France in reaction against the formalism and sentimentality that characterized the academic art of that time. The Impressionist movement is often considered to mark the beginning of the modern period in art.

Impressionism in painting arose out of dissatisfaction with the classical and sentimental subjects and dry, precise techniques of paintings that were approved by the Academie des Beaux-Arts in Paris and created in studio settings. They traditionally set the standards of French art and sponsored the official Paris Salon exhibitions, which reflected and popularized them. Rejecting these standards, the Impressionists preferred to paint outdoors, choosing landscapes and street scenes, as well as figures from everyday life. Their primary object was to achieve a spontaneous, undetailed rendering of the world through careful representation of the effect of natural light on objects.

The Impressionists were concerned with the depiction of reality not through the exact rendering of form and to reflect in shadows the colours of surrounding objects. In academic painting, form was defined and shape modelled by graduated tones; shadows were indicated with black and brown. The Impressionists, by contrast, eliminated minor details and suggested rather than defined form. They preferred the primary colours – red, yellow and blue – and complimentary colours – green, purple and orange. They achieved effects of naturalness and immediacy by placing short brushstrokes of these colours side by side, juxtaposing primary colours so that they would appear to blend when viewed from a distance. Juxtaposing a primary colour (red) with its complementary colour (green) brought out the vivid quality of each. The Impressionists achieved greater

brilliance and luminosity in their paintings than that ordinarily produced by blending pigments before applying them to the canvas.

Impressionism had far-reaching effects. Painters who began as Impressionists developed other techniques, which started new movements in art.

Impressionists: Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sidney, Jan Vermeer, Diego Velazquez, Fransisco de Goya, John Constable J.M.W. Turner, Camille Corot, Eugene Louis Boudin, Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, Emile Zola, Charles Baudlaire, J.A.M. Whistler, Mary Cassatt, Childe Hassam, Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, Walter Sickert, Giovanni Segantini, Georges Seurat, Paul Signac, Paul Cezanne, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh

Here are two paintings of realism and impressionism (from left to right)