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FRENCH IMPRESSIONISM

FROM THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

6 JUN – 5 OCT 2025
LEARNING RESOURCE



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(cover)
Claude Monet
Meadow with Poplars c. 1875 (detail)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of David P. Kimball in memory
of his wife Clara Bertram Kimball (23.505)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Dance at Bougival 1883 (detail)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Picture Fund
(37.375)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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INTRODUCTION

This resource is an introduction to the NGV exhibition *French Impressionism from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. It follows the ten thematic sections of the exhibition to provide an overview of the history, context, and key characteristics of French Impressionism. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the content, including suggested questions, to the level and interests of their students.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Connect French Impressionism to a wider cultural, historical and social context
- Analyse and interpret themes, concepts and ideas in the work of French Impressionist artists and discuss how they are expressed
- Identify and describe sources of inspiration and the important influence of the natural world on the practice of the French Impressionist artists
- Discuss how the French Impressionists used materials, techniques, technologies and processes to realise their intentions in their artworks.

Claude Monet
Poppy field in a hollow near Giverny 1885 (detail)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection (25.106)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

French Impressionism is a major exhibition developed by the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston, in partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). The exhibition, drawn from MFA Boston's rich collection of French Impressionist masterworks, traces the development of **Impressionism** and **Post-Impressionism** in late nineteenth-century France, and represents the achievements of renowned **avant-garde** artists, who boldly rejected the prevailing artistic conventions of their time.

French Impressionism has been designed, in part, to evoke the grand nineteenth-century residences of affluent Bostonian collectors – where works such as those in the exhibition would have been displayed. The exhibition design also draws inspiration from the display settings favoured by the Impressionist artists themselves.

In the second last section, Innovative Printmaking, etchings are presented using design elements based on Pissarro's choices for part of the fifth Impressionist group exhibition in 1880. The final section, Monet in situ, is modelled after Monet's *Nymphéas* installation at the Musée de l'Orangerie.

Claude Monet
Meadow with poplars c. 1875 (detail)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of David P Kimball in memory of his
wife Clara Bertram Kimball (23.505)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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IMPRESSIONISM IN 1874

Impressionism started in France in the late nineteenth century. Its founding artists were described as **avant-garde**, referring to their experimental and unorthodox approach to creating art. The artists ventured out of their studios and painted outdoors and directly in front of their subjects, a practice known in French as painting **en plein air**. This practice was enabled by the 1841 innovation of metal tubes, which made paints much easier to store and transport.

The term **Impressionism** is linked to the artists' aim of capturing 'impressions' of the world around them as they saw it; recording changing natural light, movement, and other atmospheric effects in natural and urban landscapes. The Impressionist style became known for vivid colours and distinctive brushwork, with artists using rapid, broken, feathery strokes and dabs. The greatest painters of the movement included Claude Monet (1840–1926), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) and Alfred Sisley (1839–1899).

During the 1860s, the French Impressionists were often rejected from the French **Salon** exhibitions. Their work was seen to be 'sketchy', unfinished and not fitting in with the highly detailed 'finished' landscapes aligned with traditional art-world values. These earlier rejections spurred the artists to develop independent exhibitions, and they held their first in 1874. Impressionism is now recognised and appreciated as an important and influential art movement.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

Look closely at Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Woman with a parasol and small child on a sunlit hillside* c.1874–76.

- What do you notice about the colours in this painting?
- How has Renoir evoked temperature, light and the time of day?
Consider the palette and use of shadow.
- Describe the atmosphere Renoir has captured in this painting.
- How would you describe the brushstrokes used?
- A commercial innovation facilitated the direction of the Impressionists' work. Renoir said: 'Paints in tubes, being easy to carry, allowed us to work from nature, and nature alone. Without paints in tubes, there would have been no Cézanne, no Monet, no Sisley or Pissarro, nothing of what the journalists were later to call Impressionism.'¹ Which other innovations can you think of that have transformed art? What might life as an artist have been like before they were invented?



Pierre-Auguste Renoir
French 1841–1919
Woman with a parasol and small child on a sunlit hillside c. 1874–76 (detail)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of John T. Spaulding (48.593)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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BEFORE IMPRESSIONISM

In the nineteenth century the French art scene was tightly controlled by the Academy of Fine Arts (*Académie des beaux-arts*). The Academy provided education to the most talented art students, and taught drawing, painting, architecture and sculpture. The Academy's control extended to deciding who and what was exhibited in France at the Paris **Salon**, an artist's primary opportunity to show their work and receive recognition. Historical and academic subjects were considered superior to landscapes and still-life works. Those landscapes that were permitted were usually painted in artists' studios with realistic detail. The scenes were often imagined and idealised.

A group of painters who later came to be named the **Barbizon School**² paved the way for the Impressionists. They abandoned the traditional and academic styles imposed by the Academy, instead redefining landscape painting by working outdoors and recording scenes in nature.

The Barbizon School is named after a village in the forest of Fontainebleau in France. Just over 50 kilometres from Paris, Barbizon was a popular destination for artists for much of the nineteenth century. The region had abundant natural scenery, including rock formations, plains and old-growth trees. The natural surrounds became inspiring subject matter for artists painting and sketching en plein air, directly from and in nature.

Many of the future Impressionists admired the work of their predecessors, as their methods and artworks provided important guidance and inspiration to the younger painters. Artists of the Barbizon School included:

- Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875)
- Paul Huet (1803–1869)
- Narcisse Diaz de La Peña (1807–1876) – friend and mentor to leading Impressionist artist Pierre-Auguste Renoir
- Théodore Rousseau (1812–1867)
- Jean-François Millet (1814–1875) – his influence can be found in Monet's Impressionist work *Woodgatherers at the edge of the forest*.



Théodore Rousseau
Edge of the woods (Plain of Barbizon near Fontainebleau) c. 1850–60
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of Mrs. David P. Kimball (23.399)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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GUIDED QUESTIONS

Compare and contrast Théodore Rousseau's *Edge of the woods (Plain of Barbizon near Fontainebleau)* and Claude Monet's *Woodgatherers at the edge of the forest*.

- Analyse the content and composition of each of the artworks, and identify similarities between the work of Rousseau and Monet.
- Looking at each of the paintings, describe the differences between the painting techniques.
- Discuss the visual effects that have been created by each artist, the colours used, the light captured and the mood created. How are they similar? How are they different?

Claude Monet

Woodgatherers at the edge of the forest c. 1863
 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
 Henry H. and Zoe Oliver Sherman Fund
 (1974.325)
 Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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EUGÈNE BOUDIN: EXEMPLAR TO THE IMPRESSIONISTS

Eugène Louis Boudin (1824–1898) was one of the first French landscape painters to paint en plein air. Boudin is not considered an Impressionist artist, but a precursor to the Impressionist movement, and he was an influential figure for Monet.

Boudin worked on a steamboat as a young boy and later opened a shop that framed pictures. Through his shop, Boudin met Barbizon painters, who encouraged him to pursue a career in art. He started to paint full-time at the age of twenty-two.

In his early thirties, Boudin met the young Claude Monet, and the two became lifelong friends. He taught Monet how to paint with oil paint and encouraged him to paint landscapes en plein air. The two also shared a fascination with water. Monet observed that there was a lack of marine paintings at the Paris Salon and it was perhaps a niche that the older artist could fill. Boudin took Monet's advice and devoted his career to marine paintings. Interestingly, Boudin exhibited with Monet and his friends in the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, but ultimately preferred to submit works to the official Salon.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

Look carefully at Boudin's *Port of Le Havre*, c. 1886.

- Describe the different visual effects Boudin has depicted in this seascape including in the water, sky and background landscape. How has he used paint and colour to create these effects?



Eugène Louis Boudin
Port of Le Havre c. 1886
oil on canvas
39.7 x 54.3 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of Miss Elizabeth Howard Bartol
(RES.27.90)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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IN THE STUDIO

Although painting en plein air was a favoured approach of the Impressionists, many of the artists continued to maintain a studio practice, as we see in the still-life paintings in the exhibition. Painting outside in the natural world had its limitations: the artists were at the mercy of the weather and other uncontrollable elements. Still life presented the opportunity to apply the naturalistic, living effect of Impressionist methods to static objects, animating them with colour and texture.

Just as the Impressionists had limitless creativity when capturing watery surfaces, they also each brought their own unique style and innovation to still life:

- Cézanne was referred to by critics as the ‘master of still life’.³ He embraced this genre to investigate questions of form, structure and colour, as shown in *Fruit and a jug on a table*, c. 1890–94.
- Renoir used still life to experiment with painting techniques, using a range of brushstrokes to create texture and vibrant contrasts of colour to produce luminosity (*Mixed flowers in an earthenware pot*, c. 1869).
- For Berthe Morisot, still life was an opportunity for experimentation, where she could apply her characteristic quick brushwork to the canvas. Her work *White flowers in a bowl*, 1885, records her hurried brushwork, creating a sketch-like quality often remarked upon by critics of the time as being linked to her ‘feminine’ ability to record mere impressions of the world around her.



(above)
Berthe Morisot
White flowers in a bowl 1885
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Bequest
of John T. Spaulding (48.581)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
All Rights Reserved

(below)
Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Mixed flowers in an earthenware pot c. 1869
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of John T. Spaulding (48.592)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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GUIDED QUESTIONS

- Compare and contrast *White flowers in a bowl* with *Mixed flowers in an earthenware pot*. How do the different colour palettes impact the mood of the paintings?
- Describe any evidence you can find of the importance of form, colour and structure in Cézanne's *Fruit and a jug on a table*.

(left)

Gustave Caillebotte

Fruit displayed on a stand c. 1881–82

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Fanny P. Mason Fund in memory of

Alice Thevin (1979.196)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

All Rights Reserved

(right)

Paul Cézanne

Fruit and a jug on a table c. 1890–94

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Bequest of John T. Spaulding (48.524)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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WATERY SURFACES

Rippling water was a favoured subject of many of the French Impressionists. Whether it was in the form of a river, the ocean or a backyard pond, capturing something described by Alfred Sisley as 'so beautiful, so translucent, so changeable'⁴ was at the heart of the Impressionist movement. Charles François Daubigny even constructed a studio boat to float down the river so that he could paint on location. In his painting *Woman washing clothes at the edge of a river*, c. 1860–70, the viewer feels as if they are standing in or hovering directly above the moving water.

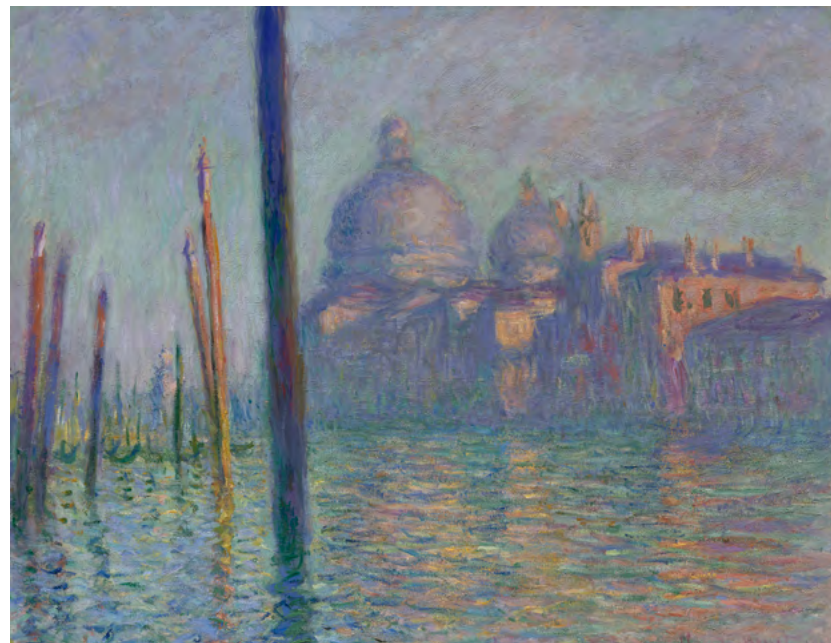
The Impressionists depicted the ever-changing nature of water in many ways, for example:

- In Sisley's painting *The Loing at Saint-Mammès*, 1882, the water is next to the land and reflects the trees, sky and other aspects of the world around it.
- To create *The pond*, c. 1877–79, Paul Cézanne used short, parallel brushstrokes to portray the water as a static band that sits flat and extends across the bottom half of the painting.
- Monet renders a pastel city dissolving into pink and blue dappled water in *Grand Canal, Venice*, 1908. In fact, Monet painted thirty-seven artworks inspired by the canals of Venice throughout his two-month stay in 1908.



(above)
Paul Cézanne
The pond c. 1877–79
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Tompkins Collection—Arthur Gordon
Tompkins Fund (48.244)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston. All Rights Reserved

(below)
Claude Monet
Grand Canal, Venice 1908
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of Alexander Cochrane (19.171)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston. All Rights Reserved





GUIDED QUESTIONS

- Describe how Monet uses colour and paint to capture the water and atmosphere in *Grand Canal, Venice*.
- Compare and contrast *Woman washing clothes at the edge of a river* with *The Loing at Saint-Mammès*. How are they similar and different?
- Imagine you are one of the figures in *The pond*. What are you thinking as you gaze out onto the water?



(above)

Charles François Daubigny

Woman washing clothes at the edge of a river c. 1860–70

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Gift of Louisa W. and Marian R. Case (20.1864)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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(below)

Alfred Sisley

The Loing at Saint-Mammès 1882

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Bequest of William A. Coolidge (1993.44)

Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

All Rights Reserved

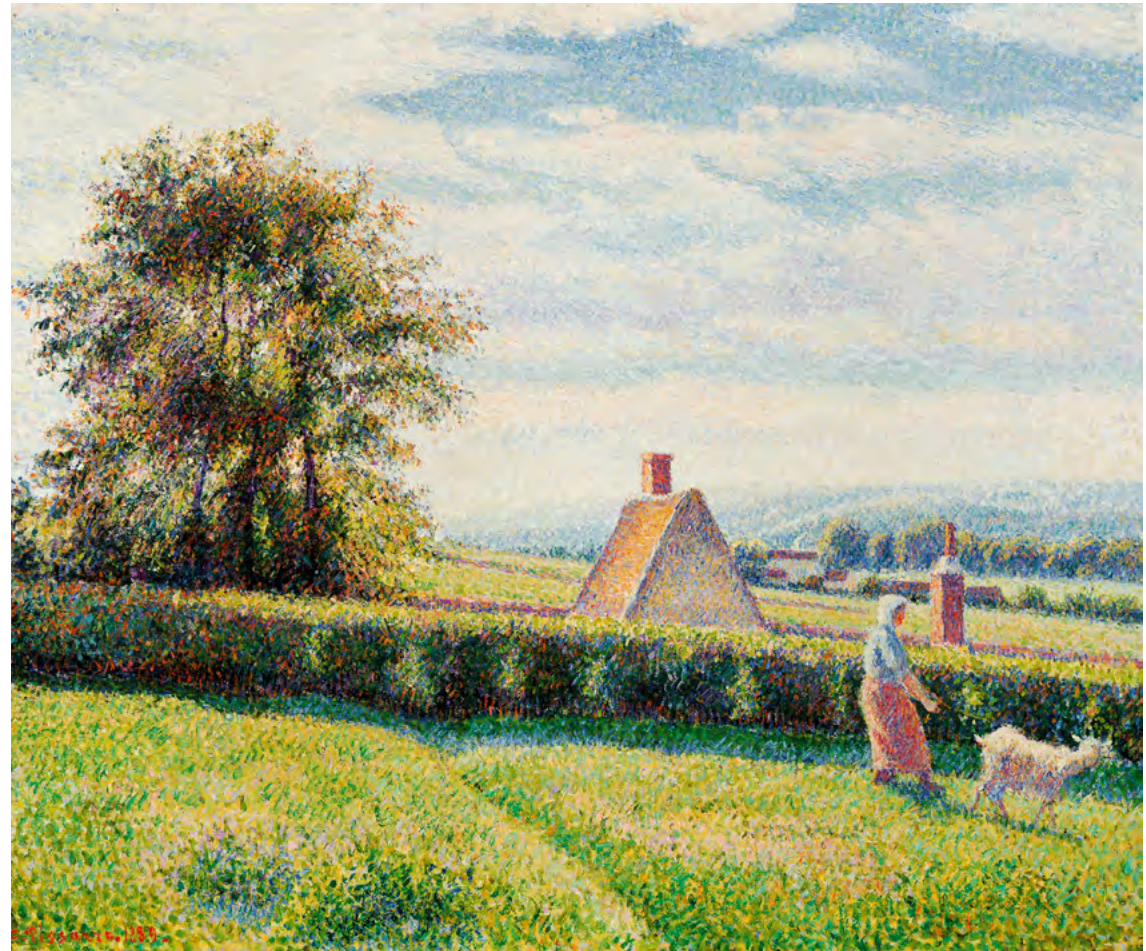
CAMILLE PISSARRO: MENTOR AND MENTEE

Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) was the oldest of the Impressionist group and among its most daring innovators. He shared non-hierarchical (equal) relationships with the other artists, learning from them and teaching them regardless of their age or status. For example:

- During the 1860s, Pissarro worked with the younger Renoir and Monet in Paris. They experimented with new techniques and constantly learnt from one another.
- In 1870, war broke out between France and Prussia (an area of eastern Europe which existed before Germany was unified as one country) and Pissarro took refuge in London. Monet had also moved to England during the war. Together, they studied the landscape paintings of British artists J. M. W. Turner and John Constable by visiting museums.
- Pissarro returned to France in 1871 and moved to Pontoise, outside Paris. Cézanne joined him and the two painted outdoor scenes together.

Pissarro played an important role as part of the Impressionist group. His style was slightly different from that of some of his Impressionist friends; the shapes and forms of objects in his works are distinct and tend not to dissolve into the overall painting (which can be observed in Monet's work). *Sunlight on the road, Pontoise*, 1874, is an example of this unique style.

Besides working with his fellow Impressionists, Pissarro also worked with and encouraged **Post-Impressionist** painters such as Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh during his career, acting as a mentor to the younger artists while also learning new ideas from them. Pissarro also experimented with **Neo-Impressionism** in the latter half of the 1880s, exploring Georges Seurat's **Pointillism**, a technique that involved applying small dots of pure colour onto the surface of the canvas to eventually create a unified composition. He later returned to his previous painting style.



Camille Pissarro
Spring pasture 1889
Deposited by the Trustees of the
White Fund, Lawrence, Massachusetts
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
All Rights Reserved



GUIDED QUESTIONS

- The forms of objects in Pissarro's works are distinct. Unlike works by other Impressionists such as Monet, objects are not blended with the rest of the painting. What evidence of distinct forms can you see in *Sunlight on the road, Pontoise*? Describe the colour and brushstrokes Pissarro has used to create these distinct forms.
- *Spring pasture*, 1889, shows Pissarro's experimentation with Pointillism. Compare this painting with *Sunlight on the road, Pontoise*. What are the differences in the brushwork of the two paintings? Which style do you prefer, and why?

Camille Pissarro

Sunlight on the road, Pontoise 1874
 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
 Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection (25.114)
 Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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URBAN REALISMS

Paris went through a major redevelopment during the latter half of the nineteenth century under the direction of urban planner Baron Haussmann. Entire neighbourhoods were demolished and tens of thousands of workers were hired to improve the city's water supply, sanitation, sewerage and rail system. The transformation of the city brought new people to live and work there, and with them, artists who were inspired to 'be of one's own time'⁶ and depict the diverse individuals they observed in modern urban life.

Some artists re-created people and places they had observed on the street using models in their studios, such as in Édouard Manet's *Street singer*, c. 1862. Others, including Edgar Degas (1834–1917), depicted the excitement and enjoyment of middle-class activities such as a day at the races (*At the races in the countryside*, 1869).

American artist Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) often painted family members and domestic scenes, including her niece in *Ellen Mary in a white coat*, c. 1896. Cassatt herself is believed to be the subject of a painting by her lifelong friend Degas, *Visit to a museum*, c. 1879–90. She is supposedly shown, possibly with her sister, looking both interested but also perhaps tired after a long day admiring works of art.



(above)
Edgar Degas
At the races in the countryside 1869
oil on canvas
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
1931 Purchase Fund (26.790)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
All Rights Reserved

(below)
Édouard Manet
Street singer c. 1862
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Bequest of Sarah Choate Sears in
memory of her husband, Joshua
Montgomery Sears (66.304)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
All Rights Reserved





GUIDED QUESTIONS

- Choose one of the paintings illustrated in this section that interests you. What is going on in this work? What is it about the subject matter, and the artist's depiction of the subject matter, that you find interesting?

(left)

Mary Stevenson Cassatt
Ellen Mary in a white coat c. 1896
 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
 Gift of Charles, Hope, and Binney Hare in
 honour of Ellen Mary Cassatt (1982.630)
 Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
 All Rights Reserved

(right)

Edgar Degas
Visit to a museum c. 1879–90
 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John McAndrew (69.49)
 Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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RENOIR AND EXPERIMENTATION

Pierre-Auguste Renoir's artistic style underwent many transformations throughout his career. He was constantly trying to improve his technique by learning, experimenting and accepting his mistakes.

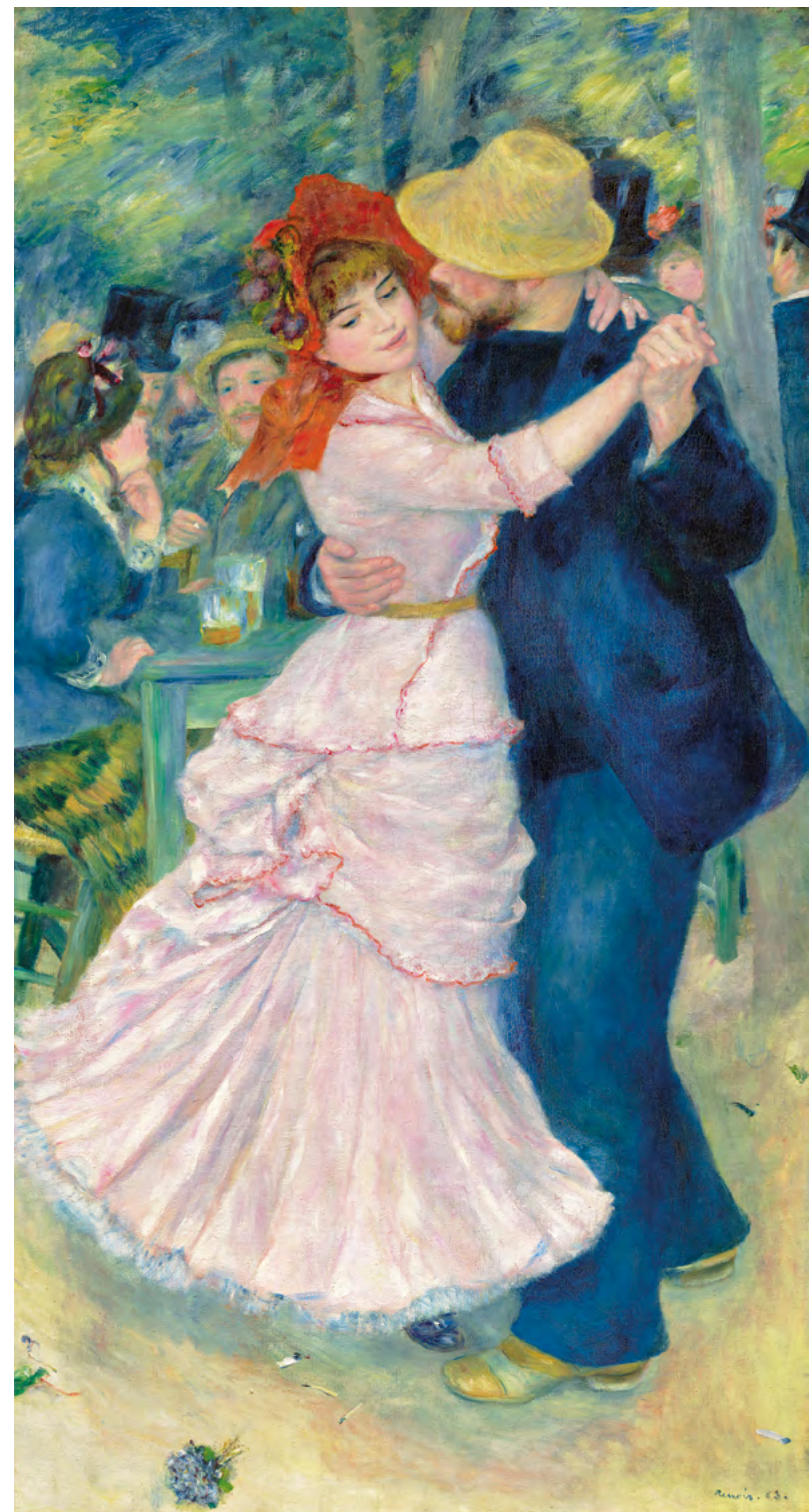
Born into a working-class family, Renoir had to leave school when he was thirteen to start an apprenticeship at a porcelain factory. At the factory, he made miniature copies of **Rococo-style** pictures on porcelain plates and showed talent. The apprenticeship gave Renoir early art training and helped him to earn enough money to pay for a formal art education.

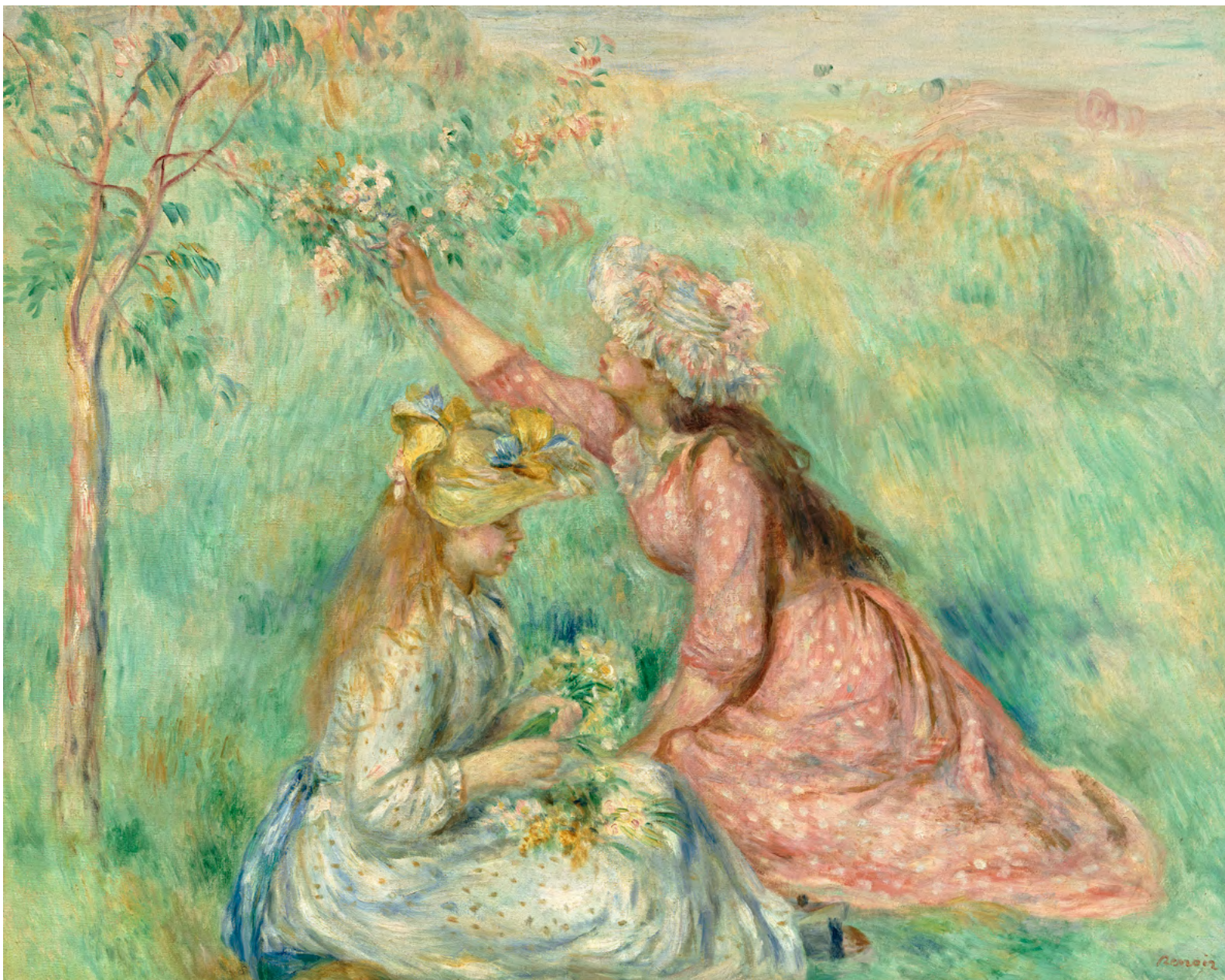
In 1861, Renoir studied in the Paris studio of Swiss artist Charles Gleyre; at the studio, he also befriended fellow students Claude Monet and Alfred Sisley. Renoir and his new friends shared similar visions and new ideas of art: they painted en plein air and experimented with the effects of light.

In the 1880s, Renoir experimented with pictorial effects different from those used by the other Impressionists. Inspired by Raphael and other Renaissance masters, he attempted more disciplined and formal techniques, with a focus on strong outline. The monumental *Dance at Bougival*, 1883, is one of his most celebrated works from this period, showing a combination of his Impressionist technique and classical influences.

Renoir's style changed again after 1890 as he returned to the thinly brushed colour of his earlier works. *Girls picking flowers in a meadow*, c. 1890, is an example of this change in his style. He continued to paint throughout the final years of his life, even after developing arthritis in 1892, which severely limited his mobility.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Dance at Bougival, 1883
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Picture Fund (37.375)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
All Rights Reserved





GUIDED QUESTIONS

Dance at Bougival and *Girls picking flowers in a meadow* are examples of how Renoir's style changed as he experimented with different techniques.

- Look at the two paintings closely, observing his use of colour, line and brushwork. What differences and similarities do you notice?
- What atmosphere or feeling do the colours and brushstrokes convey in each work?

Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Girls picking flowers in a meadow, c. 1890
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection (39.675)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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INNOVATIVE PRINTMAKING

For the French Impressionists, innovation and experimentation expanded beyond canvas and paint. They experimented with printmaking, pushing the medium in new and innovative directions.

Edgar Degas' craze for prints was infectious. He influenced artists around him, sharing technical advice and even printing some of their plates. In 1879, Degas, Cassatt, and Pissarro teamed up with the goal of publishing an illustrated journal of original etchings called *Le Jour et la nuit* (*Day and night*). The journal's title referenced the play of light and shadow captured in the works from the series. They never published the journal, but the idea inspired the artists to create some of the most remarkable prints of the late nineteenth century.

The artists approached printmaking as they did their paintings, unconcerned by tradition and willing to combine media in unconventional ways. They combined different printing techniques such as **lithography**, **drypoint**, **aquatint** and **soft-ground etching**, and worked their plates through multiple states. Each state shows the artist's process; they printed the plate then worked on it further and printed it again.

Cassatt created a set of prints for *Le Jour et la nuit* called *In the opera box no. 3*, 1879–80. She worked through seven states, superimposing layers of aquatint tone over soft ground to create a hazy atmosphere. Reflecting her interest in artificial light (a new phenomenon at the time), the work shows Cassatt's sister in a mirrored theatre box, backlit by the dazzling chandelier.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

- What do you notice about each state of Cassatt's prints? Describe the changes.
- How would you describe the atmosphere in Cassatt's final print, 7th of 7 states?
- What visual effects has the artist used to create this atmosphere?
For example, consider how tone is used.



(clockwise from top left)

Mary Stevenson Cassatt

In the opera box (no. 3) c. 1880
soft-ground etching, etching and aquatint
3rd of 7 states
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Gift of Henri M. Petiet, confirmed by his estate
(2001.688)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
All Rights Reserved

Mary Stevenson Cassatt

In the opera box (no. 3) c. 1880
soft-ground etching, etching and aquatint
5th of 7 states
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Gift of Henri M. Petiet, confirmed by his estate
(2001.691)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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Mary Stevenson Cassatt

In the opera box (no. 3) c. 1880
soft-ground etching, etching and aquatint
7th of 7 states
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Gift of Henri M. Petiet, confirmed by his estate
(2001.693)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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MONET IN SITU

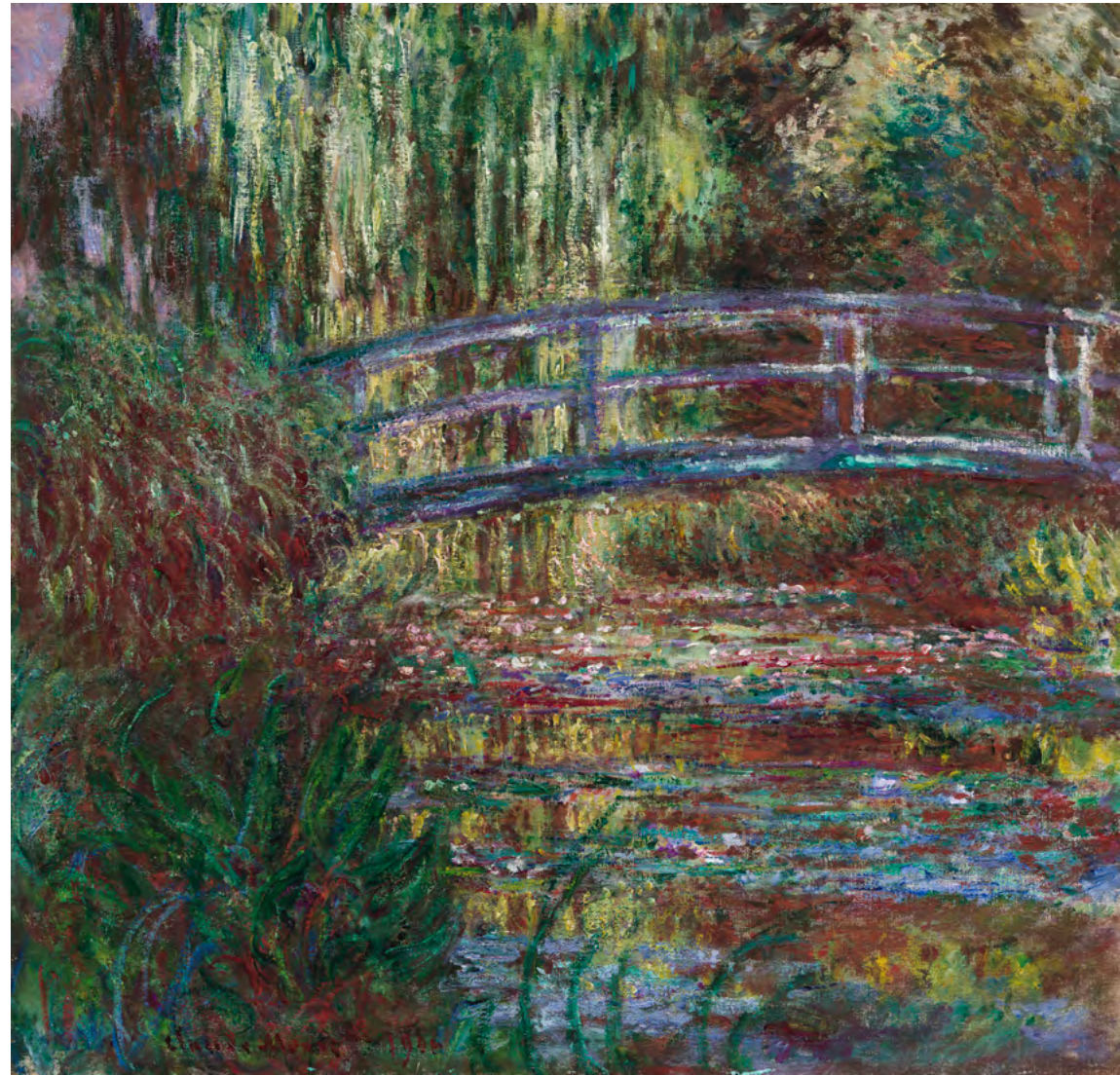
Claude Monet (1840–1926) started drawing at a young age. Even as a teenager, he was able to earn extra money with his **caricatures**. Monet was determined to be an artist despite his father's disapproval. As a teenager he befriended Eugène Boudin, who taught him how to paint and encouraged him to paint outdoors (refer to 3. *Boudin* for more). He served in the French army for two years and studied for a short time at art school, leaving early, as he did not like the traditional style of art that was taught.

Monet eventually joined Charles Gleyre's studio in 1862, where he befriended other artists such as Renoir and Sisley. He went to England in 1870 to flee the Franco-Prussian war and later to Argenteuil, near Paris, in 1871. Monet and his friends held the first independent Impressionist exhibition in 1874 after a series of rejections by the official Salon. One of his works exhibited, *Impression, sunrise*, 1873, is the origin of the Impressionist movement's name.

In 1883, Monet settled in the small town of Giverny. He often painted multiple canvases depicting the same scene at different times of day to capture the changing atmospheric conditions. For example, in his famous *Grainstack* series, he painted stacks of wheat from outside his Giverny farmhouse at different times of day, and during different seasons and weather conditions (*Grainstack (snow effect)*, 1891).

A garden pond also features in many of Monet's most famous works from this period, such as *The water lily pond*, 1900. Inspired by Japanese art, Monet extended his garden at his home and installed a waterlily pond complete with a bridge running across it. He spent the final years of his life – while suffering from deteriorating eyesight and lung cancer – on his largest project, a series of large panels of his pond, which he gifted to the people of France. These panels are now permanently on display at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris.

The last room of the exhibition displays works representing some of Monet's most cherished places: Argenteuil, the Normandy coast, the Mediterranean coast and Giverny, both its fields and the artist's own waterlily garden there. Everywhere he travelled, Monet found splendour in the ordinary, making everyday scenes appear dazzling and teaching the modern eye to see the world anew.



Claude Monet
The water lily pond 1900
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Given in memory of Governor Alvan T. Fuller
by the Fuller Foundation (61.959)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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GUIDED QUESTIONS

- Find two paintings of a similar scene or subject by Monet in the exhibition and compare the two paintings carefully. How did Monet use colour to capture light? What time of day do you think they were painted? How can you tell?
- Monet has used a variety of colours to show the water surface in *Antibes, afternoon effect*, 1888. Describe the colours as if you are talking to someone who has never seen the painting.
- Monet painted his garden at different times of the day under different light conditions. Find a window around your school or home and take two photographs of the view outside at different times of the day. Compare the two photographs. How do the colours of the same view change under different light conditions?

(left)

Claude Monet

Grainstack (snow effect) 1891
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Gift of Miss Aimée and Miss Rosamond
Lamb in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Horatio
Appleton Lamb (1970.253)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
All Rights Reserved

(right)

Claude Monet

Antibes, afternoon effect 1888
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Gift of Samuel Dacre Bush (27.1324)
Photography © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
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REFLECTION

Consider any ideas you had about Impressionism before viewing the exhibition, and how these may have changed. Complete the following sentence stems to prompt your reflection: I used to think ... Now I think ...

- What has this exhibition inspired you to investigate further? Are there any artists or artworks that you would like to research in more detail?
- How has this exhibition inspired you creatively? If you're interested in making some of your own Impressionist-inspired artwork, here are some great art ideas to get you started:
 - Expressive skies
 - Tissue collage
 - Everyday moments

Claude Monet
Water lilies 1905
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Gift of Edward Jackson Holmes (39.804)
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GLOSSARY

Aquatint

Aquatint is a printmaking technique used to create tone rather than lines. The process involves a metal plate that the artist applies a powdered resin or acid-resistant material to (attached by heating the plate). It is then immersed into an acid bath to erode the exposed metal. When inked and printed, this achieves patterning that is read as tone. The longer the plate spends in the acid bath, the darker the print.

Avant-garde

Avant-garde is originally a French word that means vanguard or advance guard (the troops moving at the head of an army). In art, this term describes radical, experimental or innovative approaches to art-making.

Barbizon School

An informal group of painters who worked in and around the French town of Barbizon to paint the forest of Fontainebleau near Paris from 1830 to 1870. Barbizon painters elevated landscapes from mere backgrounds to subjects in their own right.

Caricature

A caricature is a comic portrait where the person's most striking characteristics are exaggerated in order to satirise the subject.

Drypoint

Drypoint involves scratching an image into a printing plate with a needle-like tool, which throws up a small burr of metal beside the scratch. Ink is applied to the plate, then wiped off, leaving ink caught in the metal burr and scratches. Paper is placed against the plate and put through a printing press. The remaining ink is pressed from the plate, transferring the image onto the paper.

En plein air / plein air

A French term meaning 'in the open air'. It is used to describe the practice of working outdoors and finishing the entire painting in the open air, rather than in the studio.

Impressionism

Impressionist artists aimed to capture 'impressions' of the world around them as they saw it, recording changing natural light, movement, and other atmospheric effects in natural and urban landscapes. The Impressionist style became known for vivid colours and distinctive brushwork, with artists using rapid, broken, feathery strokes and dabs. The greatest painters of the movement included Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro and Alfred Sisley.

Lithography

Lithography is a printmaking technique that involves many steps and special equipment, chemicals and materials. First, an image is drawn with greasy crayons or pencils directly on a flat stone or metal plate. Next, chemicals are applied over the surface, then ink, then paper and then it is put through a printing press. This process transfers the image to the paper in a way that shows the details of the lines drawn by the artist.

Neo-Impressionism

Neo-Impressionism is the name given to the work of Georges Seurat, Paul Signac and their followers. The Neo-Impressionists moved away from the earlier style of the French Impressionists to favour a more ordered and 'scientific' method of painting. Inspired by optical theory, they painted with tiny dabs of pure colour rather than mixing colours together on the palette. The contrasting colours oscillate against each other and create the effect of shimmering light in the viewer's eye.

Pointillism

A technique of painting that uses small, distinct dots of colour to form an image. This technique was developed by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac in 1886, branching from Impressionism. See **Neo-Impressionism** for more information.

Post-Impressionism

Post-Impressionism describes the changes and development in Impressionism from about 1886 (after the last Impressionist group exhibition). This term is usually used to describe the style of four major artists: Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat and Vincent van Gogh, who each extended Impressionism in very different ways.

Renaissance

A French word which means 'rebirth', the Renaissance was a period from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries when art was revived in Italy under the influence of Classical art and culture. Italian painter Raphael (1483–1520) is seen as a great master from this movement.

Rococo style

The term Rococo originates from French word *rocaille*, which describe rock works based on forms of seashells and corals. Rococo style features elaborate curves and is intensely decorative. This style was developed in France in the early eighteenth century.

Salon

The Salon, or sometimes the Paris Salon, refers to the official exhibition of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (*Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*) and its successor the Academy of Fine Arts (*Académie des Beaux-Arts*), sponsored by the French government. The name of the Salon comes from the location of the exhibitions, the Salon Carré of the Louvre in Paris. The Salon was arguably the most important and influential art event in the Western world between the 1740s and 1890s.

Soft-ground

Soft-ground etching involves tracing an image with a pencil on a sheet of paper placed over a metal plate covered with a soft, sticky ground. The soft ground attaches to the paper as the pencil is drawn over it, exposing the metal surface of the plate below the pencil marks. The plate is dipped in acid, which eats away the exposed parts of the metal. These hold the ink that is transferred onto the paper in the printing press. The resulting print looks similar to a drawing made with pencil or pastel.

NOTES

- 1 Pierre-Auguste Renoir quoted in Jean Renoir, *Renoir: My Father*, trans. Randolph & Dorothy Weaver, New York Review Books, New York, 2001, p. 69.
- 2 Dita Amory, 'The Barbizon School: French painters of nature', 2007, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2000, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/bfpn/hd_bfpn.htm, accessed 22 March 2021.
- 3 Alfred Sisley, letter to Adolphe Tavernier, 1892, cited in Ann Dumas, 'Alfred Sisley: the true Impressionist', *Alfred Sisley: poète de l'impressionisme*, Musée des beaux-arts, Lyon, 2002, p. 329.
- 4 John McCoubrey, 'Cézanne's difference', in Eliza E. Rathbone & George T. M. Shackelford (eds), *Impressionist Still Life*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2001, p. 34.
- 5 'Il faut être de son temps!' (One must be of one's time!) is recorded as an expression of Honoré Daumier's, frequently quoted by Manet. Linda Nochlin, *Realism*, Penguin, London, 1971, p. 103.

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