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| **Your article** |
| Impressionism (Painting) |
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| Jeremy Spencer  J. Matthew Huculak  Impressionism is an artistic movement that flourished in France between 1860 and 1890. The term has been widely adopted around the world to describe artistic production that follows the principles and methodologies of the “Impressionists.” Opposing Realism, a technique that valued accurate renderings of a scene (“to copy nature”), Impressionists sought to “observe nature” and to capture its transitory states of light and feeling. |
| Impressionism is an artistic movement that flourished in France between 1860 and 1890. The term has been widely adopted around the world to describe artistic production that follows the principles and methodologies of the “Impressionists.” Opposing Realism, a technique that valued accurate renderings of a scene ( “to copy nature”), Impressionists sought to “observe nature” and to capture its transitory states of light and feeling (Moore). Impressionists produced paintings of natural landscapes as well as the spectacle of modern life to express an essence of modernity. They took advantage of technological innovations like collapsible paint tubes and synthetic colors, which allowed them to work quickly en plein air and use bright palettes. Modernity also brought in new products to Paris. The opening of trade routes between Japan and Europe exposed French artists to different compositional techniques through Japanese woodblock printing, specifically the *ukiyo-e* print. Monet claimed that Japanese artists “taught us [impressionists] to compose differently.” The original movement fractured in the mid-1880s and the core artists no longer painted or exhibited together. Originally criticised for artistic incompetence that did not reflect prevailing norms in the artistic academy, Impressionist paintings are among the most reproduced and sought after popular works of modern art.  The paintings that Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir produced in the summer of 1869 at La Grenouillère, a fashionable bathing and boating site located on the island of Croissy on the Seine, signalled the emergence of Impressionism. Monet and Renoir developed a set of techniques appropriate to the representation of a scene or motif under different and changing conditions of light and weather. The preoccupation with an impression or an effect and the apparently naive technical devices to accomplish it: sketch-like brushwork, lack of conventional drawing, modelling, composition and the juxtaposition of bright color distinguish the Impressionist project.  *File: renoir\_La\_Grenouillere.jpg*  Figure 1 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, la Grenouillère, 1869  Artists who participated in the formation of the movement include Gustave Caillebotte, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Alfred Sisley. These artists exhibited independently of the official Salon in eight group exhibitions held in Paris between 1874 and 1886. They adopted the label “Impressionist” to describe their project after it was applied derisively to the techniques and devices they used to represent landscapes and scenes of Georges-Eugene Haussmann’s Paris and its suburbs, especially pictures of bourgeois leisure.  The artists most associated with Impressionism composed an informal circle, known as “the Batignolles group,” who met at the Café Guerbois in Paris under the unofficial intellectual leadership of Edouard Manet (1832 – 1883). By 1871-72, an Impressionist style characterised the work of different artists that identified them as a coherent group, a process helped by the interest shown by the dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, who bought and exhibited their works. In December 1873 they formed an independent exhibiting society, the *Société anonyme des artistes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc.,* and organised privately their first group exhibition outside of the official Salon where artists usually went to market and sell their works.  The first exhibition opened in April 15th 1874 at 35 Boulevard des Capucines in Paris in the former studio of the photographer Nadar [Gaspard-Félix Tournachon]. Thirty artists participated, exhibiting over two hundred stylistically diverse artworks, the exhibition was relatively small by contemporary standards and was the first of eight similar exhibitions held between 1874 and 1886. The core members included Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Sisley, Degas, Morisot, and Caillebotte. Devoted to success at the Salon, Manet refused to join the *Société* and never exhibited with them; Degas accused him of deserting his fellow “realists.”  The conservative art critic Louis Leroy (1812–85) mockingly described the sketchy technique Monet employed in a lazily unfinished painting of Le Havre, *Impression: Sunrise* (1873) in a satirical article “Exhibition of the Impressionists” published in *Le Charivari.* The name “Impressionist” became popular and was adopted by the Impressionists for their third exhibition, lessening its pejorative intent. Degas, however, was unhappy with the designation for future exhibitions, preferring “independent” or “realist” denoting the representation of the modern over historical, mythical, or biblical themes.  *File: monet\_impression.jpg*  Figure 2 Claude Monet, Impression, soleil levant, 1872  “Impressionist” was not the only name applied to the artists who exhibited in 1874. Another politicised label, “Intransigent,” carried different radical and democratic connotations to the attitude of uninhibited individualism of “Impressionist.” The reviews of the first show were not uniformly negative; Emile d’Hervilly writing in *Le Rappel* compared “fresh” and “gripping” works to “the nauseating banalities of the academic routine.” Edmond Duranty saw in their “sketches” an obvious originality and “genuine discovery.”  Jules-Antoine Castagnary’s review of the first Impressionist group exhibition expressed lasting themes in Impressionism’s interpretation, namely, individuality and technique: “They are impressionists in the sense that they render not a landscape but the sensation produced by a landscape” (Castagnary). Monet, the most prominent Impressionist in modernist accounts, concentrated on the analysis of the effects of changing light and chose subjects that offered the possibility of achieving this: poplar trees, haystacks, the façade of Rouen Cathedral, his garden with ponds of water-lilies at Giverny. His painting was later interpreted as a concern with sensation and the expressive possibilities and limitations of a painted surface. For twentieth century modernist critics, the Impressionist attempt to “limn nature with utmost fidelity” realised the expressive autonomy of the physical medium (Greenberg). Impressionism was interpreted as materialist and objective, detached and scientific, preoccupied equally with the essence of painting and visual experience.  Writing in 1937 in *Marxist Quarterly*, challenged formalist interpretations of Impressionism to emphasis the rootedness of Impressionist subject matter in the spectacle of bourgeois leisure, dance halls, cafés, and theatre, individuality, and domestic interiors (Schapiro). T. J. Clark (2003) described Georges Seurat’s monumental *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-1886) as an attempt “to find form for the appearance of class in capitalist society.” The paintings made at La Grenouillère, which may have been sketches for large works, Monet’s *Bathing at la Grenouillère* (National Gallery, London) and Renoir’s *La Grenouillère* (National Museum, Stockholm), are scenes of bourgeois leisure in places easily reached from Paris from the Gare Saint-Lazare. Understood as unfinished and professionally incompetent, they are meaningful as records of society’s “incessant transformations” (Clark).  Impressionism entered a period of crisis of representation or loss of confidence in the mid-1880s for which aesthetic reasons are often given but was symptomatic of changing conditions of artistic production generally. The original group became increasingly fractured and stylistically less certain; fewer of them participated in the Impressionist exhibitions. Monet, however, did not abandon Impressionism but did return to exhibiting at the Salon, writing critically of the “daubers” now exhibited as Impressionists. He broke Impressionism’s strong ties with Paris and its suburbs, travelling widely across France to paint in different locations. By the 1900s, the early controversies surrounding Impressionism had subsided to become critical indifference and the once avant-garde artists most active in its development were recognised and largely accepted names within the French art establishment. Impressionism in the United Kingdom J. Matthew Huculak  In 1863, the American-born James McNeill Whistler moved to London from France, where he had worked with many of the artists associated with French Impressionism, including Monet; when the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870, many French artists, including Monet, sought refuge in England and painted there. Whistler taught his techniques to budding artists, including the young Walter Sickert.  *File: whistler.jpg*  Figure 3 Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge, c. 1872-1875  In 1886, The New English Art Club was founded by artists influenced by French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism as an alternative to the Royal Academy. Sickert, who had travelled to Paris to work with Edgar Degas, joined the club in 1888; a year later, he and Wilson Steer curated the “London Impressionists’ Exhibition” held at the Groupil Gallery in December 1889. In the introduction to the catalogue for the exhibition, Sickert writes, “Essentially and firstly [impressionism] is not realism. It has no wish to record anything merely because it exists. It is not occupied in a struggle to make intensely real and solid the sordid or superficial details of the subjects it selects. It accepts, as the aim of the picture, what Edgar Allan Poe asserts to be the sole legitimate province of the poem, beauty” (MacColl). American Impressionism Carmenita Higginbotham    American Impressionism was an art movement that flourished in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It explored the aesthetic effects of light and atmosphere as it sought to create a modern American art that incorporated contemporary aesthetic techniques drawn from European precedents. Stylistically, American Impressionism was inspired by the rapid brushwork and high key palette of French Impressionist painting, particularly the work of Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Through plein-air or out of doors landscapes and scenes of domestic interiors, American impressionist painters including William Merritt Chase, Childe Hassam, Julian Alden Weir, Theodore Robinson, Thomas Dewing, and John Twachtman balanced articulating the ethereal quality of the sensory experience with a commitment to realist representation. Impressionism in the United States developed from the training of American artists in European countries after the American Civil War (1861-1865), and the exhibition of French Impressionist painting in cities such as New York in the 1880s and 1890s. Its artists sought a contemporary visual style that conveyed experiential shifts triggered by social, cultural and technological diversification and growth at the turn of the century.  *File: Chase.jpg*  Figure 4 William Merritt Chase, In the Studio, 1882.  *File: weir.jpg*  Figure 5 Julian Alden Weir, The Red Bridge, c. 1895.  The American Impressionists drew from the example of Monet, Renoir, Edgar Degas, and Mary Cassatt to explore the ephemeral nature of perception in modern life. American Impressionist artists adopted a quick or flickering painting technique and bright pigments to articulate how one perceived an object at a specific moment. They also looked to the design principles of nineteenth-century Japanese print work for their unique use of perspective and compositional arrangement. The decorative patterns in Chase’s *In the Studio* (1882); the delicate stain of colors in Dewing’s *Venetian Brocade* (1904); and the tonal harmonies in Twachtman’s *Winter Harmony* (1890-1900) highlight atmospheric qualities and surface effects as much as the subjects of their paintings. Integrating figure and setting, American Impressionist artists celebrated a harmony of art and life.  At the end of the nineteenth century, American Impressionism was popular among wealthy art patrons and private collectors who considered its genteel subject matter and European references to be appropriate expressions of an affluent class status. Paintings that featured light-infused landscapes of the rural countryside, panoramic urban scenes, and elegant interior spaces offered a romanticised vision of modernity in the 1890s and 1900s. Public interest in American Impressionism waned by the late 1910s, but its impact was broadly felt in art colonies and art schools throughout the United States. Many of the movement’s participants, including Chase and Weir, became instructors at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, one of the country’s premiere art institutions of the time. Impressionism in Australia Anita Callaway  Although Australian colonial artists were aware of French Impressionism in the mid-1880s, their understanding of the term derived from reading European sources and seeing poor black-and-white reproductions, rather than from experiencing the actual paintings themselves. As Impressionism was to them more an idea than a method, they abandoned their studios to paint contemporary subjects out-of-doors—capturing not only the Australian landscape and way of life but also the clarity of Australian light—without reference to the specific color techniques of French Impressionism. This apparent rejection of traditional art practice happened to coincide with the rise in nationalist sentiment associated with the 1888 centenary of European settlement in Australia. The concepts of naturalism and nationalism were therefore conflated and Australian impressionist painting became synonymous with Australian national identity. The term Australian Impressionism is usually reserved for a particular group of artists associated with the National Gallery of Victoria School, who gathered to paint *en plein air* in semi-rural districts close to Melbourne. The group is widely known as The Heidelberg School, a name coined in 1889 by the critic Sidney Dickinson (1851-1919) after the location of a second camp on Melbourne’s fringe that was temporary home to Arthur Streeton (1867-1943) and frequented by Tom Roberts (1856-1931) and Charles Conder (1868-1909).  The first of this group’s informal weekend camps was set up at Box Hill in late 1885 by Roberts, Fred McCubbin (1855-1917) and Louis Abrahams (1852-1903), where they and their fellow artists painted closely-focused intimate glimpses of the surrounding bush.  *File: roberts.jpg*  Figure 6 Tom Roberts, A Summer Morning Tiff 1886  (Reproduction rights held by the Art Gallery of Ballarat  Email:artgal@ballarat.vic.gov.au)  The landscapes painted from 1888 at the later Heidelberg camp were more expansive and characteristically colored bright blue and gold (considered Australia’s national colors until green and gold were so proclaimed in 1984).  *File: streeton.jpg*  Figure 7 Arthur Streeton, Golden Summer, Eaglemont 1889.  National Gallery of Australia  (<http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=61325)>  The key members of the so-called Heidelberg ‘school’ are usually given as Roberts, McCubbin, Streeton and Conder; however, in a group retrospective exhibition held at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2007, other usually overlooked artists were represented by the inclusion of a fifth and female addition: Jane Sutherland (1853-1928).  The fact that these artists identified themselves as impressionists can be seen in their *9 x 5 Impressionist Exhibition* of 1889; a deliberately provocative exhibition of spontaneous sketches executed on small wooden cigar-box lids (hence the name ‘9 x 5’). Presumably the brainchild of Roberts (who promoted the event through his society contacts) and Conder (who designed the catalogue’s symbolist cover), the exhibition included over 180 exhibits that supposedly confirmed the accompanying statement that “An Effect is only momentary”. James Smith (critic for the *Argus*) dismissed both this interpretation of impressionism, and the individual works themselves, in words very similar to those used by Ruskin in his 1877 criticism of Whistler. Indeed, the 9 x 5 exhibition, with its emphasis on aesthetic display and color harmonies, owed more to Whistler than to Monet and Renoir.  Following the growing recognition of impressionism as more than a French-based specialty but instead a world-wide modernist movement, the term Australian Impressionism now includes *plein-airists* who worked in Sydney where Julian Ashton (1851-1942) and Alfred Daplyn (1844-1926) had taught Conder in 1887, and where Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton relocated in the 1890s. It also includes artists such as Walter Withers (1854-1914) and Emanuel Phillips Fox (1865-1915), who were still painting near Melbourne with the same fresh palette and loose brushwork long after the original Heidelberg foursome had gone their separate ways. Despite images such as Conder’s *Holiday at Mentone*—which by any measure is an exemplar of fashionable urban modernity—impressionism to Australian eyes remains inextricably linked with nostalgic bush landscapes and national identity.  *File: conder.jpg*  Figure 8 Charles Conder, Holiday at Mentone 1888  Art Gallery of South Australia  (http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Collection/detail.jsp?ecatKey=1645) Impressionism in Thailand Eksuda Singhalampong  Impressionism in Thailand was a modern movement pioneered by Chit Buabus and Fua Haripitak, young artists from *Poh Chang School* (The School of Arts and Crafts), the institution which dominated the Thai art scene from the post-war period up until at least 1958. Sometimes, the movement is loosely termed as “Thai Impressionism.” This style was not entirely different from French Impressionism, Thai Impressionists shared the swift, broken and bold brushstrokes, the use of bright and varied colors as well as the attempt to depict or everyday subjects with their French counterparts. However, unlike in the French context, the term “impressionism” in Thailand was read in a literal way. As Silpa Bhirasri [Corrado Feroci], the founder of Silpakorn art university, wrote, “...the word ‘*Impressionism*’ should not be understood as merely copying the Western Impressionist School...*impressionism* means to express sincerely what we see and, accordingly, what we feel without any intellectual speculation.”  Unlike French Impressionism, then, Thai Impressionism was not regarded as a revolt against the academy. On the contrary, Thai Impressionist works were welcomed by Thai art academies and became a kind of ‘institutional art’ in their own right.  According to Silpa Bhirasri, Impressionism, along with Realism, were two movements that most Thai artists passed through when beginning of their career. Impressionism was introduced to Thailand by Thai artists who had seen Impressionist paintings abroad and then adopted the style when they returned home. Khun Pathiphakphimlikhit, a tutor at The School of Arts and Crafts, played a crucial role by encouraging young Thai artists to adopt an impressionistic style. It is believed that he was the first Thai Impressionist, however, all of his works were either lost or destroyed. The earliest example of impressionistic work was Fua Haripitak’s portrait of Silpa Bhirasri (1935). Haripitak, along with Chit Buabus, was one of Khun Pathiphakphimlikhit’s most prominent pupils and later became notable Impressionist artist. When Haripitak and Buabus were art students at the School of Arts and Crafts in 1929, they would paint landscapes near Bangkapi (a district in Bangkok) utilising the same *en plein air* practice as the French Impressionists.  Thai Impressionist artists focused on depictions of landscapes, cityscapes, still lives and nude figures. Impressionism was so celebrated that most of the awards in the National Exhibition of Art were given to the Impressionist paintings, including Misieum Yipintsoi (1949, 1950 and 1951), Sawasdi Tantisuk (1953), Chamras Kietkong and Fua Haripitak (1950). Thai Impressionism was succeeded by Cubism, which was adopted by Thai artists during the 1940s but was not popular until the mid-1950s. |
| Further reading:  (Frascina, Garb and Blake)  (Rewald)  (Lewis)  (Burns)  (Gerdts)  (Weinberg, Bolger and Curry)  (Krairiksh and Thongchua)  (Kunavichayanont)  (Lisuwan)  (Mukdamanee)  (Astbury)  (Clark and Whitelaw)  (Hammond and Peers)  (Lane)  (Smith)  (Spate) |