



If you had lived in Paris a hundred years ago, you might not have visited the first Impressionist exhibition. During the month it was on view, its attendance was only a fraction of that of the official Salon, and the Salon was *the* thing to see. Among those who did go, few seem to have responded with interest or understanding: the general reaction was amusement and indignation, with the paintings branded as ugly, absurd, shapeless, fearful, stupid.

Beginning in December, you will have an opportunity to see an exhibition celebrating the "modern art" that so unsettled Parisians a century ago. The nucleus of *Impressionism: A Centenary Exhibition* is made up of forty-two masterpieces from the famous collection of the Galerie du Jeu de Paume in Paris, from the Metropolitan (which possesses one of the most important groups of Impressionist pictures in the world), and from public and private collections in Europe and America. Included is not only Monet's pale but dramatic seascape, probably the "Impression" that gave the group its name (lent by the Musée Marmottan in Paris), but also such paintings as Degas's magnificent *The Cotton Market*, New Orleans (from the Musée des Beaux Arts in Pau), Cézanne's powerful *House of the Hanged Man* (from the Galerie du Jeu de Paume), and Renoir's light-filled view of *La Grenouillère* (from the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm), which will hang beside the Metropolitan's version by Monet, painted at the same time.

This superb exhibition is truly an international undertaking: it is another milestone in the joint projects of the National Museums of France and the Metropolitan. Organized in major part by the French, with the Metropolitan's cooperation and the active participation of its staff, the show has been three years in preparation, and is currently on view in Paris, where – unlike its predecessor a century ago – it is attracting record crowds.

For its presentation in New York, this exhibition will be expanded to include eight supplementary galleries, containing works that help to put the Impressionists' innovations in context and indicate the scope of their accomplishments. Today we are so familiar with their

pictures, so used to radical and even shocking novelty in art, that it is hard for us to understand the discomfort their contemporaries felt when confronted with paintings such as these. So the first galleries will be devoted to major currents in French painting from the 1840s to the 1870s – from the anecdotal, ponderous, meticulously executed Salon pieces to works that reveal a growing interest in color and spontaneity. Included in this section, for instance, are two paintings by Manet that form a dramatic example of the old-guard traditionalism of the Salon judges: one painting, obviously indebted to the finesse of Velázquez, was accepted for the Salon; the other – bolder, brighter, more summary – was rejected. Also represented will be the nineteenth century's new artistic medium, photography, with photographs of the 1850s and 60s that reveal subjects and approaches similar to those of contemporary artists. Other galleries will contain later paintings by the Impressionists and post-Impressionists; preparatory sketches and X-rays that show their working methods; Salon pictures that indicate how Impressionist innovations affected even staunchly conservative artists; and, finally, an impressive selection of pictures by American Impressionists, whose caliber and achievements are often underrated. *Impressionism: A Centenary Exhibition* was made possible by important grants from both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the New York State Council on the Arts, for whose enthusiastic and generous support we are deeply grateful.

In a brilliant essay in this *Bulletin*, the distinguished art historian John Rewald discusses the development and evolution of the Impressionists' brushwork, how they influenced one another, and how they experimented – often successfully, sometimes not. His text and the details he has chosen – half from pictures in the exhibition – define one of the most important contributions of that group of painters who not only changed the course of art but even changed our way of seeing.

Thomas Hoving
Director

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin

Volume XXXII, Number 3

No. 3, 1973/1974

Published quarterly. Copyright © 1974 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Avenue and 82 Street, New York, N.Y. 10028. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. Subscriptions \$10.00 a year. Single copies \$2.50. Sent free to Museum members. Four weeks' notice required for change of address. Back issues available on microfilm from University Microfilms, 313 N. First Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Volumes I-XXXVIII (1905-1942) available as a clothbound reprint set or as individual yearly volumes from Arno Press, 330 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017, or from the Museum, Box 255, Gracie Station, New York, N.Y. 10028. Editor of the *Bulletin*: Katharine H. B. Stoddert; Associate Editor: Joan K. Holt. Art Director: Stuart Silver. Design: David Barnett.

The Impressionist Brush

John Rewald

“When an artist undertakes his work,” Heinrich Wölfflin observed, “certain optical conditions present themselves to him by which he is bound. Not everything is possible at all times. Vision has its own history and the revelation of those optical categories should be considered as the primordial task of art history.”

Throughout the nineteenth century there were two “traditions”: one, the generally accepted one, a high-priced and widely acclaimed commodity; and another, a more adventurous one, generally contested at birth and forced underground. Among the many things the adventurous – i.e., the true – tradition stands for is a brush stroke that speaks a language of its own, that expresses a concept, that frequently has a spontaneous quality, a sweeping assurance that transcribes the most volatile perceptions onto canvas. As used by such masters as Rubens and Rembrandt, this brush stroke never “sticks” to the support but manages – even though it applies opaque pigment to solid ground – to capture the vibrations of light, the pulse of life. What characterized the nineteenth-century accepted tradition, on the other hand, was torpid brushwork bent on erasing itself, so to speak, in a strenuous effort to hide the intervention of the painter’s tool for the sake of a smoothness and

finish which, according to Cézanne, “*fait l’admiration des imbéciles*” (earns the admiration of imbeciles).

Almost anyone can be taught to paint. But knowing how to apply pigment to canvas does not automatically carry with it an ability to produce art, any more than a knack for winning at Scrabble guarantees the capacity to write poetry. Though the painter’s technology is fairly easily acquired, the same brush that can create a masterpiece can produce a daub. Great achievements occur only when an artist has something original to say and uses his technical knowledge to fashion a personal expression. His brush stroke is not an end in itself but part and parcel of the creative process.

It is undeniable that Meissonier was devilishly clever at depicting horses (small), as was Rosa Bonheur (large), that Bouguereau was unequaled at assembling rosy children (cute) and chaste or wanton maidens (titillating), and that Gérôme excelled in Egyptian scenes (historical) with a profusion of archaeological details and sundry stuffed animals.¹ These skillful compositions, painted by wielders of uninspired brushes, were expensive objects of fashion, far removed from that true tradition, the one celebrated by Baudelaire when he chanted the beacons of mankind: Rubens, Leonardo, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Puget, Watteau, Goya, and Delacroix.

The optical conditions by which the Impressionists were bound were not those practiced by the darlings of the official Salon – the Meissoniers, Cabanels, Gérômes, Bouguereaus – but those which had been established by a few selected predecessors, in whose footsteps they decided to follow. It seems permissible then to elaborate on Wölfflin’s statement by stating that during the middle of the last century certain optical conditions presented themselves to the artist *between which he had to choose*.

By that time, the age-old struggle between color and line had reached a dead end. Under the banner of Ingres’s dictatorial leadership, line reigned supreme. All official art instruction was dominated by men infused with the ideas of Ingres, who opposed color as if it were a vice. At best, color was considered a complement to line, an inferior though unavoidable adjunct to it.

Perhaps no one has better formulated these concepts, steeped in what was considered the classical heritage, than William Blake when he wrote: “The great and golden rule of art, as well as

of life, is this: that the more distinct, sharp and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art, and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling."

It is against the background of such narrow doctrines that the originators of a modern approach emerged and slowly formulated the ideas that inevitably led to Impressionism.

Even though he was decried as a "colorist," Delacroix had not been able to reach an expression where color would be completely independent of line. Yet, within the confines of prevailing pictorial customs, he achieved wonders by infusing historical, mythological, or Oriental subjects with a splendor behind which quivered the sensibility and sensuousness of a visionary enamored of all the hues of the rainbow. However, the adored "Orientalists" of those days were Fromentin and, especially, Gérôme, authors of countless compositions in African settings, artists interested in the narrative and picturesque, not the pictorial potentials of their subjects. If Delacroix, by contrast, discovered the luminous complexion of the African continent, it was because he arrived in the East with an eye not only attuned to but eager for its multicolored radiance. But even Delacroix had to look for color under foreign skies or in history; he avoided contemporary subjects unless he could turn them into allegories. Indeed, the aspects of ordinary life were still considered too banal to be worthy of the artist's brush.

Courbet, on the other hand, involved with the social significance of his work, could not jeopardize the ideological message of his paintings by indulging in vibrant tonalities. And he had to sacrifice color for yet another reason: the garb worn by his preferred subjects – workers or peasants of Ornans – was a far cry from the lustrous garments of odalisques, the exotic raiment of black slaves, or the blood that spills from a warrior's sword, sights that excited the imagination of Delacroix. Millet and Corot, who turned to nature as an escape from the literary connotations of subject matter, also used color sparingly and did not manage, either, to shake off completely the current precepts of composition, of the relationship between figure and background, of scale, perspective, and so on. Nor did they use brushwork that showed radical departures from the norm.

And yet, from Delacroix to Corot there appeared – sometimes surreptitiously – all kinds of pictorial innovations that unnerved a public unwilling to change its visual habits.

Indications of unrest, and even of mutinous initiatives, were not lacking. In 1867, both Courbet and Manet, tired of fighting a hostile and self-perpetuating jury, had defiantly organized their own one-man shows, something still unknown then. There had also been various Salons des Refusés, where rejected works had been exhibited, with the covert intent of demonstrating how justified the jury had been in excluding them. Thus, the exhibition assembled in 1874 by the group who would become known as the Impressionists was no real novelty. Nor should it have been so surprising that a new generation of painters had arrived on the scene who preferred Delacroix to Bouguereau, Courbet to Gérôme, who loved nature, admired Corot, and considered color a divine gift. But the critics tried to dispose of them with their cheapest weapon: ridicule. What the jury's inequities had been unable to achieve, a mocking press hoped to accomplish: to dispose once and for all of this irreverent bunch. Though their work did not carry any serious threat and at worst merely showed a brazen disrespect for society's concepts of artistic law and order, these people had to be eliminated so that the established traditions could continue unchallenged.

The fact that the Impressionists were able to break this stranglehold testifies to their strength and their will to persevere. The miracle is not only that this goal was finally achieved, but that it was done by the most unlikely band of iconoclasts: a haughty dandy like Manet; an easygoing street urchin like Renoir; a soft-hearted revolutionary like Pissarro; a self-doubting dreamer like Cézanne; an exquisite young woman of highly proper background like Berthe Morisot; and an aristocrat of impeccable breeding but occasionally arrogant and nasty disposition like Degas. Among them was only one rude, outspoken, defiant, and domineering egotist, Claude Monet. Yet, despite different ideas and different approaches, different attitudes and different contributions, together they ran a self-promoting and apparently inexhaustible academicism to the ground.

Had fate limited the life spans of the individual Impressionists as it had rationed those of Alexander the Great or Raphael, Mozart or Byron, Watteau or Géricault, Impressionism as a movement might not have come into being. But even if such a circumstance had come to pass and these painters had not lived to organize their historic exhibition of 1874, the unorthodox tendencies that appeared very early in their works

– not least their brush strokes, applied as vehicles both of perceptions and emotions – would have inspired others to explore similar avenues of color and light. One of the surest signs of the “inevitability” of Impressionism is that this movement was not the feat of a single person, nor was it buttressed by the performance of a central figure, as Romanticism by Delacroix or Realism by Courbet, but that it embodied the aspirations of a group. That group, gathered more or less by accident and lacking real homogeneity, comprised artists of the same generation inspired by vaguely parallel tendencies, though what most clearly bound together a Degas and a Pissarro was their mutual contempt for officialdom rather than a common artistic outlook or attitude.²

Except for Bazille, who was killed during the war of 1870, none of the Impressionists died young. But it is tempting, nevertheless, to speculate on what they would have left behind had they disappeared before the 1874 exhibition. Some of their star-crossed contemporaries, such as van Gogh, Seurat, and Lautrec, conceived masterpieces and imposed their indelible mark on the evolution of art during the very few years that they were given. Most of the Impressionists would have bequeathed to us paintings of considerable stature – not just of “promise” – though, for most of them, the early works offer few clues to their mature style. Had they died at the age of about thirty-five, their names, while significant, would not carry anything like the weight they carry today.³ In some cases the brush stroke alone changed so much that, to the uninitiated, an early and a late canvas by Degas, or Renoir, or Pissarro, for example, may seem to have been painted by different artists.

Be this as it may, there can be no doubt that even in Manet's early works (Figures 2 and 4) we would have recognized the inheritor of a superb, painterly tradition, a man with a fluidity of the brush and an innate sense for color equal to those of the Spanish and Dutch masters he so admired. Only toward the end of his life did Manet apply a brush that was truly liberated from museum souvenirs (Figures 19 and 20), and for that he was indebted to the Impressionists, to Monet above all. If Monet would not have been hailed as the forerunner of Abstract Expressionism, an accolade he has been granted on the strength of his final canvases (Figure 32), he would nevertheless have gained admiration as a highly individual, unusually challenging, and powerful young artist (Figure 6), one – incidentally – whose daring and forcefulness were matched in the middle 1860s by Cézanne (Figure 9) and the

somewhat older Pissarro (Figure 8). We would have been deprived of Cézanne's subsequent work, from the patient accumulation of layers of pigment (Figure 16) to the deliberate later style that became so meaningful to the next generations (Figure 29). The young Degas, on the other hand, while still far from the amazing freedom of his last oils and pastels (Figure 30), would have deserved special notice for the masterful draughtsmanship and the very personal color accents with which he transformed Ingres's meticulous technique into a modern vernacular (Figure 1). At the same time his sense for composition shows how adventurous and unconventional he could be (Figure 3). André Chénier (another genius whose life was cut brutally short) had proclaimed: “*Sur des pensées nouveaux faisons des vers antiques!*” (On new thoughts let us write antique verse). Degas, with an uncanny gift for observation, managed to rely on time-honored modes of execution while informing them with the most modern thoughts.

Only the young Renoir and Sisley may not have announced any particular gifts, except that of sensitivity. They might have survived merely as pleasant enough talents, somewhat on the level of that shown by their unfortunate comrade, Bazille. During his early years, Renoir was torn between the heritage of Delacroix and Courbet; Sisley only slowly disengaged himself from the Barbizon school. Renoir, possibly because of his belated start, evolved a truly astonishing dexterity of brush that provided his delicate vision with a beautifully orchestrated proficiency. But Sisley did not keep in step with the others. Despite the marvelous perceptivity and the authentic lyricism of which he gave many proofs in the 1870s (Figures 10 and 18) when his handling of the brush showed the same assurance and deftness as that of Monet, his later work slackened and lost its exquisite freshness, its delectable sense of color. Not being as robust as Monet, not as constantly delighted with what he saw as Renoir, Sisley may have been worn out by the ravaging struggle for survival of which – unlike the others – he never saw the end.

But Sisley's fate illustrates another, singular fact. There was something like an “Impressionist moment,” when young eyes and fresh minds undertook together an assault of false traditions, like revolutionaries who, shoulder to shoulder, storm the barricades. They helped each other, learned from each other, shared their experiences in a truly unique and admirable fashion. Would we be able to distinguish who gave and who received more if some of the painters had not



1 DEGAS – THE BELLELLI FAMILY, 1858-1862

Oil on canvas, 78¾ x 99½ inches

Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume

Among the Impressionists – a designation of which he did not approve – only Degas readily proclaimed his admiration for Ingres. But where Ingres had been cold, precise, and hostile to imagination, Degas showed himself delicate and almost tender (qualities which, however, he did his best to conceal). Above all, he was an independent and inventive artist, who knew how to liven up the austerity of a portrait of a family in mourning, redundant with black, through vivid accents that betray the colorist behind the impeccable draughtsman. (The black itself, incidentally, is modified by the introduction of colors, an ingenious device already used by Velázquez.)

Very early in his career, Degas struck a perfect equilibrium between the technical rigors he derived from his self-chosen master, an eclectic eye that let nothing essential escape, and a wholly intellectual delight in turning the unconventional into something apparently quite commonplace. With a brush steeped in tradition, and with a disciplined line, Degas thus created – seemingly without effort – a new idiom of realism.



2 MANET – MADEMOISELLE VICTORINE IN THE COSTUME OF AN ESPADA, 1862
Oil on canvas, 65 x 50¼ inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer,
The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.53

“Influence,” Arthur Koestler wrote, “doesn’t mean imitation; influence means feeding and digesting.” Manet never tried to disguise his indebtedness to such masters as Velázquez and Hals, but what he learned from them above all was how to gain the authority and mastery of brush he needed to follow the intuitions of his eye. Far from trying to copy, to shock, or even to surprise, he merely wished to perfect the artistic qualities with which he was so richly endowed. His vision, though trained in the past, was no slave to traditions. While many of his subjects were still tied to a conventional picturesqueness, he was much too perceptive not to dispense with ready-made formulas. The subject for him was nothing but a vehicle for his painterly instincts, and his work always shows a unique, quite sensuous predilection for color and touch.

Manet’s superb craftsmanship here appears, among others, in the blue note nestled against black, a precious sapphire encased in somber velvet. And his brush – spontaneous, fluent, oblivious of any difficulties – models forms, places highlights and shadows, establishes contrasts or smoothly fuses nuances without ever imprisoning shapes in rigid outlines. He draws with his brush, as the masters he admired had done.



3 DEGAS – A WOMAN WITH CHRYSANTHEMUMS,
1858-1865

Oil on canvas, 29 x 36½ inches

Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer,
The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.128

The great wonder of Degas's beginnings is his perfect command of his media, his ability to strike different moods and to adopt different brush strokes in accordance with them. Yet he does not idly experiment. Rather, he seems to explore, with tremendous dedication, varied avenues so that with almost every new picture emerges a new Degas.

Having discarded his early, historical subjects, he turned to portraiture as a means of coming to terms with the world in which he lived. And since he had already studied a group in mourning (Figure 1), it appears natural that he should have searched for an opportunity to associate color – a rich, fairly luxuriant, yet perfectly controlled color – with a modern likeness.

A drawing of the sitter, dated 1858, was used in this composition on which the artist seems to have worked till 1865. But the main theme is a still life of flowers – a subject that never seemed to interest Degas particularly – here turned into a strange and innovative portrait, in which the attraction of the blossoms by far outshines that of the sitter. As to the off-center arrangement, it nonchalantly appropriates Oriental concepts and exhibits a mastery of balance that hovers on the edge of the impossible.

While the figure is treated with a certain dryness (compared with the lush brushwork of Manet), the flowers are painted with such delicacy and trueness that they approach the romantic bouquets of Delacroix. Fantin-Latour was to devote almost a lifetime to such realistic still lifes, whereas Degas seems merely to have measured here his aptitude at combining a daring composition with various textures, but especially with color and line. Once he had shown that he could solve these problems he could proceed in other, equally unconventional directions.





4 MANET – THE BALCONY, 1869

Oil on canvas, 67 x 49 inches

Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume, Caillebotte Bequest, 1894

Manet was not possessed by that avid curiosity that drove Degas, nor was he very imaginative. Most of his subjects and compositions relied on museum experiences. Yet his visual instinct always dominated such borrowings and his pictures, such as this one, inspired by Goya, turned into feasts of perception and sheer painterly bravado. The figures are still conventionally set against a dark background, the color range is limited, yet the green of the balcony, repeated in the shutters and even in the ribbon around the neck of the young woman (Berthe Morisot), is the accomplishment of a magical eye. It was an eye acknowledging no other problems than those a brush could tackle. What mattered was the nuance of tone within a shadow, the transparency of a sleeve, form modeled with a few sweeping strokes, depth established by the red diagonal of a fan. And despite the deftness with which all this is painted, there prevails an attitude of coolness and restraint; the artist is not carried away by his task but remains a craftsman of supreme detachment. If, in his preoccupations, Manet was nothing but a painter, he represented the highest degree of perfection that the nineteenth century reached.







5 PISSARRO – THE HERMITAGE AT PONTOISE,
about 1867

Oil on canvas, 59½ x 78¾ inches

Justin K. Thannhauser Collection. Courtesy of the Thannhauser Foundation and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Pissarro's early work is still strongly beholden to Corot, whom he considered his master, and to Courbet as well; with Daubigny they were the guiding landscape painters of the mid-nineteenth century.

It demanded courage to undertake such a large work as this, though it was in the tradition of the Salon where immense canvases were more likely to attract attention (in those years Renoir and Monet also tackled huge compositions). While it is unlikely that Pissarro executed this landscape from nature, following the example of his predecessors – who preferred to work in the studio from sketches made on the spot – he did achieve a tightly knit and superbly coherent picture.

Despite the size of the painting, Pissarro did not resort here to the palette knife so frequently used by Courbet for covering large surfaces with smoothly blended tonalities. His brush is still somewhat clumsy, his colors are still earthy, but in the subtlety of color relations there is an echo of Corot's words: "Beauty in art is the truth bathed in the impression that we have received from nature."



OVERLEAF

6 MONET – WOMEN IN THE GARDEN, 1866-1867

Oil on canvas, 100½ x 80¾ inches

Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume

7 RENOIR – PONT DES ARTS, PARIS, about 1867

Oil on canvas, 24½ x 40¾ inches

The Norton Simon Foundation, Los Angeles



6 MONET – WOMEN IN THE GARDEN, 1866-1867

Oil on canvas, 100½ x 80¾ inches

Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume

Monet's *Women in the Garden* represents not only a major effort for a beginner of twenty-five, but also a challenge and even a "program" since, despite its considerable size, the work was to be painted entirely from nature. With this in mind, the artist had a trench dug in his garden into which the canvas could be lowered when he wished to devote himself to the upper part. This arrangement greatly amused Courbet whenever he visited his young friend to examine the work in progress.

But there were certain handicaps that even Monet's ambitions and ingenuity could not solve: he had only *one* model, Camille, who posed for each figure in turn

(this meant that he never could study the group of women as a whole), and the very size of the canvas prevented him from working on it other than piecemeal, being unable to cover the entire surface under the dictate of his observations and while the sun spun around the lovely scene. As a result the atmosphere hardly flickers, there is little movement, and the brush stroke appears solid rather than animated by the feast of light which was, after all, the true pretext for this daring undertaking. Yet the sometimes astonishingly luminous colors and the way the bright figures detach themselves from the dark background without forming an overly sharp contrast, show the tremendous vigor that Monet later endeavored to replace by ever more delicate creations.



7 RENOIR – PONT DES ARTS, PARIS, about 1867
Oil on canvas, 24½ x 40¼ inches
The Norton Simon Foundation, Los Angeles

Not unlike a bee, young Renoir flew from painter to painter, gathering honey for his own hive. Less determined than his hardier friends to detach himself from the past, he was saved from doubts and doctrinary attitudes by the sheer pleasure he felt in manipulating a brush.

Courbet was the dominant influence to which Renoir submitted, yet in this view of Paris, painted when he was twenty-six, there also appears a link to Monet's friend Boudin, master of colorful crinolines on sun-drenched beaches.

While experience was soon to provide Renoir with a great agility of brush, he shows himself here – perhaps

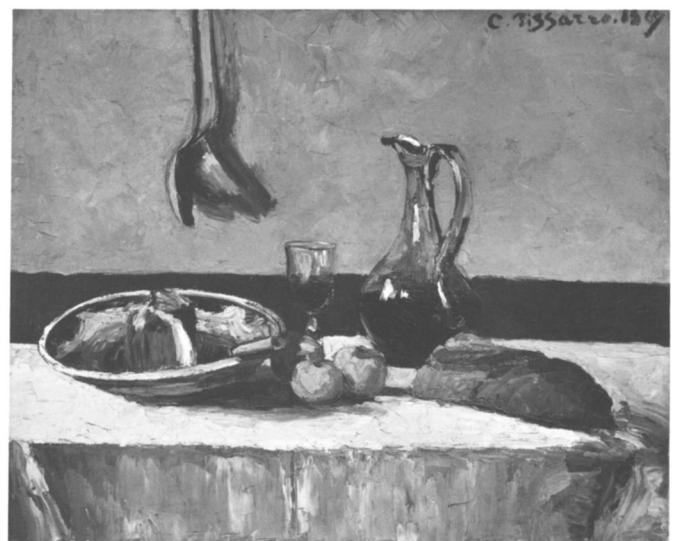
intentionally – riveted to a more traditional execution and to an almost conventional palette, though there are signs of a personal chromatism: the brilliant accents of red and blue, manifestations of the artist's youthful exuberance.



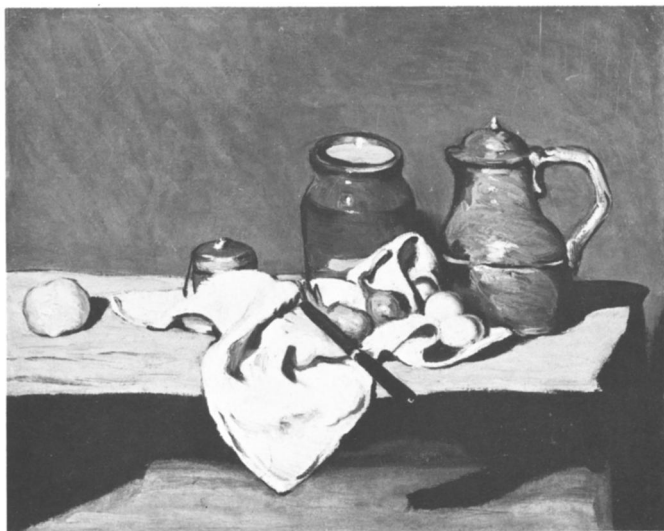
This is possibly one of the boldest still lifes ever painted up to the day Pissarro signed and dated it in 1867. Whereas Manet, in his still lifes, remained more or less consciously within the folds of the great French tradition (particularly of Chardin), and whereas Courbet – to whom the colors and the execution owe a great deal – was relatively timorous in his still lifes, Pissarro here seems to have ventured suddenly into a style of incredible forcefulness and originality.

Only very few of Pissarro's works were painted with such broad brush strokes and the use of a palette knife; and only a few show such an earthy and yet glowing coloration, such striking accents, such deft modeling. Yet despite the successful handling, Pissarro did not pursue further a road that might have led him away from the intimate contact with nature toward which – under the guidance of Corot – he had been so persistently inclined.

The only artist who applied a similar technique and color scheme to still lifes was Cézanne. A painting of such stark realism, inner strength, monumental simplification, and sureness as this cannot have failed to impress Cézanne and to lead him on to a series of equally bold compositions.



8 PISSARRO – STILL LIFE, 1867
Oil on canvas, 32 x 39½ inches
The Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Edmund Drummond Libbey, 1949



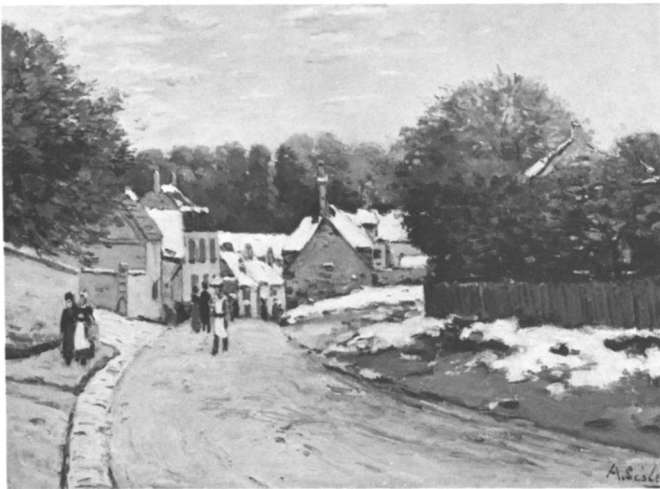
In firmness of drawing, sobriety of colors, and power of verticals and horizontals, this still life is stylistically close to the one Pissarro did in 1867 (Figure 8) and which may actually have been painted under Cézanne's eyes. The young artist was then still prone to a certain turbulence in his execution, yet here he exhibits a control of his sweeping brush, an instinctive though perfectly restrained force that shows the dynamic potential of his temperament, a disposition he would soon have to repudiate in order to study nature with the patience and humility preached by Pissarro. In this still life, however, by contrast to later works, the distribution of light and shade is so radical, the black shadows are so audacious – without ever producing “holes” in the composition – the forms are so perfectly reduced to essential shapes, conceived and rendered with utmost clarity, that Cézanne, had he never produced anything else, could still be ranked with Zurbarán and Goya.

9 CEZANNE – STILL LIFE, 1867-1869
Oil on canvas, 24¾ x 31½ inches
Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume



10 SISLEY – EARLY SNOW AT LOUVECIENNES, about 1870
Oil on canvas, 21 ¼ x 28 ¾ inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of John T. Spaulding, 48.600

The few early works of Sisley that are known (he may not have executed many during his leisurely beginnings) show him leaning unabashedly on Corot and the other members of the Barbizon school. He apparently hesitated to follow Monet and the others too closely because by disposition he was more timid and had to find his way without hurry. But his extremely sensitive eye eventually helped him achieve that intimate feeling for nature that was to distinguish his work. His brush became more free, his color brighter, and with an assurance for which he may previously have envied Monet, he began to paint landscapes such as this in which subdued colors softly fuse and in which delicate accents underline rather than disrupt the general harmony. It is the felicitous combination of poetic perception and unconstrained execution that led Sisley to the unostentatious mastery that was his.



OVERLEAF

11 RENOIR – LA GRENOUILLERE, 1869
Oil on canvas, 26 x 31 ⅞ inches
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

12 MONET – LA GRENOUILLERE, 1869
Oil on canvas, 29 ⅜ x 39 ¼ inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer,
The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.112



11 RENOIR – LA GRENOUILLERE, 1869

Oil on canvas, 26 x 31 7/8 inches
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

During the summer of 1869 – a year of dire poverty for both of them – Monet and Renoir frequently worked together at La Grenouillère, a popular boating and bathing place near Bougival. But while they treated the same subjects, their approaches were quite dissimilar, Renoir's brushwork being much gentler and his gaze more intent on delicate shades.

Landscapes with water played an important role in the evolution of the Impressionists, offering as they did opportunities for observing reverberations and reflections. Thus the painters could develop their knowledge of the fact that so-called local color is a pure convention and that everything represents to the eye a range of colors derived from its own hue, from its surroundings, and from atmospheric conditions. Moreover, the study of water provided pretexts for the representation of formless masses enlivened only by the richness of nuances, in other words surfaces whose textures invited vivid brush strokes.

What official artists would have considered "sketchiness" – the execution of an entire canvas without definitive contours, the use of brush strokes as a graphic means, the manner of composing planes completely through large or small particles of pigment in different shades – all this now became for Monet and Renoir not merely a practical method of realizing their intentions, it became a necessity if they wished to retain the vibrations of light and water, the impression of life. Their technique was the logical result of work out of doors and of their efforts to see in the subjects they se-

lected not entertaining, anecdotal aspects, not a multitude of details (of which they were perfectly aware), but the atmosphere and holiday mood that struck them as typical of this motif.

12 MONET – LA GRENOUILLERE, 1869

Oil on canvas, 29 3/8 x 39 1/4 inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.112

When Monet addressed himself to simpler subjects than in *Women in the Garden* (Figure 6) and to works of more modest dimensions, he could proceed with greater ease. This in turn seems to have increased his assurance at transcribing his perceptions with a kind of violent urgency. It took daring, of which Monet was to give so many proofs throughout his life, to represent the surface of comparatively peaceful water by stark streaks of blue-green, white, yellow, and especially black! (In the early works of the various Impressionists, black played a much greater role than is usually acknowledged; although they did avoid it during the seventies, many of them reverted to its use in later years.)

What Monet's brutal strokes achieved was less an illusionistic effect of water than an equivalent of its ripples, deliberately exaggerated to convey both a restless surface and the light upon it.

"In matters of art," Baudelaire had written, while speaking of Wagner, "I admit to not hating excesses; it has never seemed to me that moderation is the sign of a vigorous artistic nature."

And vigorous Monet's nature was.







13 DEGAS – THE DANCING CLASS, about 1871

Oil on panel, 7³/₄ x 10⁵/₈ inches

Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer,
The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.184

It seems to have been Degas's purpose not so much to discover new approaches to nature or to surpass the old masters as to equal them. Unconcerned with the endeavors of his friends, who were engaged in a rivalry with the sun, he felt no need for the outdoors and may even have enjoyed proving that color and light could be observed in the drab foyer of the Paris Opera. Nor did he require huge surfaces. But he knew how to use his brush to describe freely (without stooping to that dull precision prized at the Salon) though with an amazing acuity of perception the play of shadows on a face, the attitude of a relaxed body, the glint of a pearl in a girl's ear, the gracefulness of a black ribbon, the nuance of a pink bow, and the triumphant clarion of a yellow copybook. All this seen and rendered *largely* since size here is a matter of concept rather than of the surface available (this detail is actually bigger than the corresponding section of the picture). Yet while the brushwork is vivid, a sense of the intimate and the precious miraculously has been preserved.

It could well be that since Watteau no French artist had been so consummate in the execution of small paintings, and so delicate. None had been at the same time so supremely matter-of-fact.

We do not know whether Degas painted this scene *in situ*. In all likelihood it was done in his studio. This detachment from direct observation may even explain – at least in the case of Degas – the sharpness of the eye trained to remember, and the unfailing command of the brush, taught to rely on what *had been*. Instead of attempting to catch the fleeting instant before him, unwilling to be a slave to nature, Degas remained nevertheless attached to the unique moment, but a moment recreated through the selectivity and precision of his recollection.

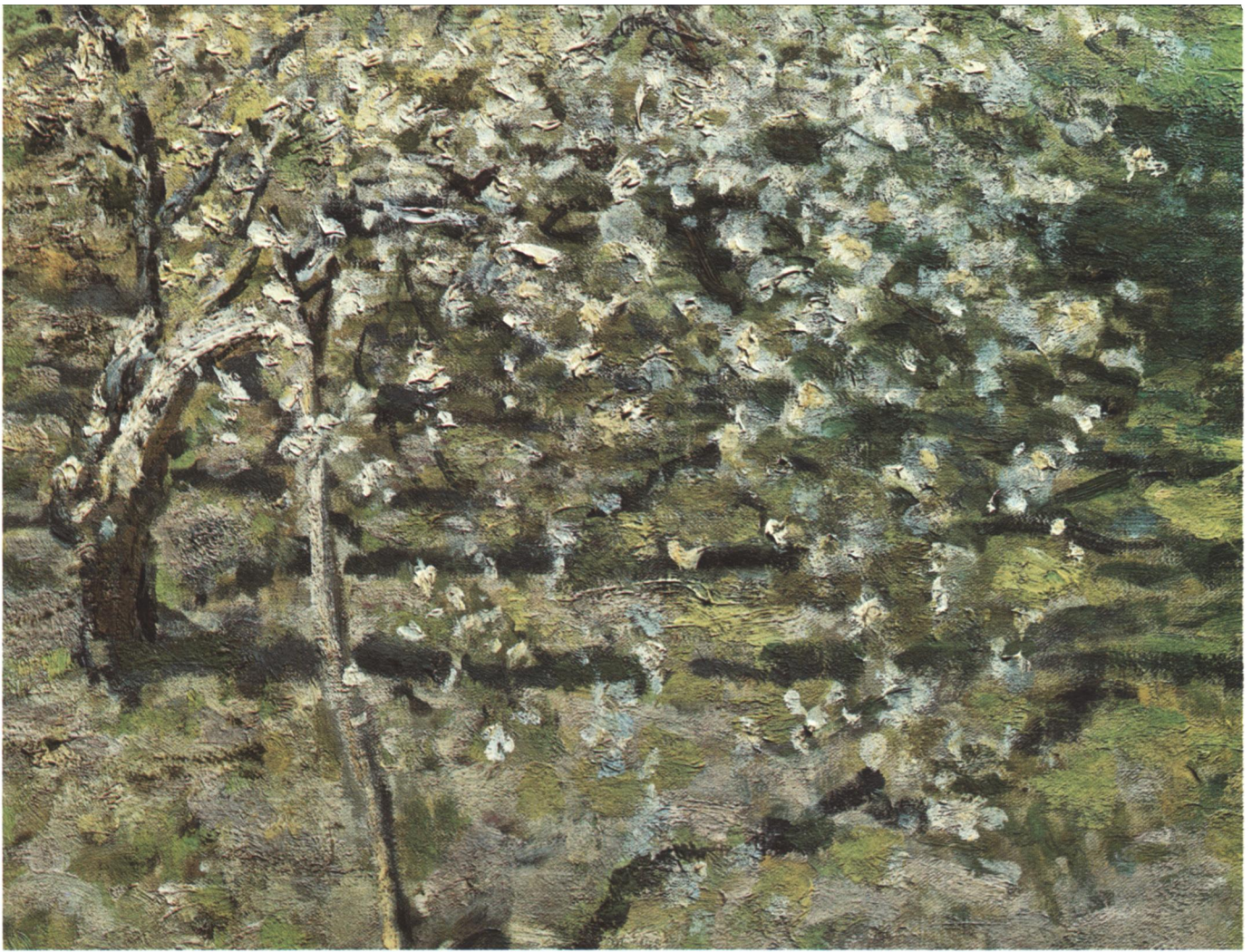


14 PISSARRO – ORCHARD IN BLOOM, LOUVECIENNES, 1872
 Oil on canvas, 17¾ x 21 5⁄8 inches
 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Ailsa Mellon
 Bruce Collection

Unlike Monet and Renoir (Figures 11, 12), Pissarro and Monet apparently never worked side by side, yet such was the emerging Impressionist technique of spontaneous execution that the blooming trees both painted in different places and at different times (Pissarro's canvas is dated 1872 and Monet's 1873) look as though they were done by the same hand and on the same day. In the early seventies their colors and their touch had become lighter, translating with a hitherto unknown immediacy the everchanging spectacle of nature.

While perfecting their rapid brushwork, the Impressionists also frequently selected subjects of inherent instability, such as water, snow, fragile blossoms, clouds, sailboats, crowds (Figure 17). As a result of this new attitude, literal details, though implicitly present, were turned into spots of color and merged into the general harmony. Indeed, the Impressionist canvases had to be seen from a certain distance at which the vibrating brush strokes blended, just as the painters themselves observed their motifs from a somewhat removed vantage point.

The close resemblance between the landscapes of the various Impressionists shortly began to worry their friend Théodore Duret who, in 1873, advised Pissarro: "You have . . . an intimate and profound feeling for nature and a power of brush, with the result that a beautiful picture by you is something absolutely definitive. . . . Don't think of Monet or of Sisley . . . , go on your own, your path of rural nature. You'll be going along a new road, as far and as high as any master."



When Duret, in 1873, spoke somewhat derisively of Monet's "fanciful eye," Pissarro immediately protested: "Aren't you afraid that you are mistaken about Monet's talent, which in my opinion is very serious and very pure? . . . It is a highly conscious art, based upon observation and derived from a completely new feeling; it is poetry through the harmony of true colors."

Pissarro was in an excellent position to judge the degree to which Monet's work was *conscious*, yet this applied more to his general attitude toward nature, to his incessant search for appropriate means of expressing his perceptions, than to the way in which he wielded his brush. Indeed, he seems to have proceeded with such directness and instantaneity, with such almost trance-like swiftness that the cohesion of his picture is nothing short of a miracle.

Painting away with dabs, strokes, splashes, swirls, or what have you, Monet nevertheless managed to put every color spot securely in the right place (there are no traces of *pentimenti* in works such as this). And he did it the hard way, breaking with the time-honored custom of *first* brushing in the expanses of blue sky or green fields, on *top* of which the white blossoms – being obviously in front of them – were subsequently established. Instead there are, in this incredible mosaic created by a febrile brush, white spots for the petals next to blue ones for the sky and green ones for the ground, all put down simultaneously and intermingled so that nothing should be arrested and that the light should flicker across the snowy branches.



15 MONET – APPLE TREES IN BLOOM, ARGENTEUIL, 1873
Oil on canvas, 24½ x 39⅝ inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mary Livingston Willard, 26.186.1



16 CÉZANNE – THE HOUSE OF THE HANGED MAN, AUVERS, 1873-1874
 Oil on canvas, 21 5/8 x 26 inches
 Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume, Camondo Bequest, 1908

This landscape has become the symbol of Cézanne's Impressionist phase, when, egged on by Pissarro, he began to work directly from nature. Upon his friend's advice he dropped dark colors from his palette and completely changed his brushwork. However, unable to adopt the rapid, "sure-fire" execution of Monet and Pissarro (Figures 14, 15), Cézanne proceeded very deliberately and slowly. The thick, nearly enamel-like layers of pigment that cover this canvas attest, on the one hand, the "richness of sensations" of the artist discovering endless nuances out of doors and, on the other, the difficulties he experienced in retaining his observations, difficulties that prompted him to return to this work again and again in order to add further touches. In a few places these were applied with a palette knife.

So as to isolate individual forms, Cézanne here had recourse to an extraordinary solution: instead of tracing contours, he treated them as boundaries of pigment with impastos built up on either side of them, sometimes almost in relief. When the artist was asked in later years why he had abandoned the fiery execution of his early years (Figure 9) in favor of the technique of small, separate strokes which characterizes his work of Auvers, he explained: "I cannot convey my perceptions immediately; so I put color on again, and keep putting it on as best I can. But when I begin, I always try to paint sweepingly, like Manet, by giving form with the brush."

Thus, through a process quite opposed to that of his Impressionist friends, Cézanne faithfully recreated certain aspects of nature and managed to provide that sense of space which was always one of his major aims. As Odilon Redon had written a few years before: "Aerial perspective is simply the result of a rigorously exact tone and well observed values."



OVERLEAF

17 MONET – BOULEVARD DES CAPUCINES, PARIS, 1873
 Oil on canvas, 31 1/4 x 23 1/4 inches
 Nelson Gallery – Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Gift of the Kenneth A. and Helen F. Spencer Foundation

18 SISLEY – THE FLOOD AT PORT-MARLY, 1876
 Oil on canvas, 23 5/8 x 32 inches
 Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume, Camondo Bequest, 1908



17 MONET – BOULEVARD DES CAPUCINES, PARIS, 1873
Oil on canvas, 31¼ x 23¼ inches
Nelson Gallery – Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Gift of the
Kenneth A. and Helen F. Spencer Foundation

Once the painter's brush was liberated from its *descriptive* role and free to devote itself to suggestions, a whole new language could be created, that of Impressionism. This language was particularly well adapted to out-of-door scenes, though it did not confine itself to landscapes, either of the countryside or of cities.

When Monet exhibited in 1874 at Nadar's this view of a Paris boulevard (or a very similar, horizontal version), public and press were outraged. The painting was "wittily" attacked by Louis Leroy, the journalist who coined the word "Impressionism," when he published the following dialogue with another visitor to the show:

"Be so good as to tell me what those innumerable black tongue-lickings in the lower part of the picture represent!"

"Why, those are people walking along."

"Then do I look like that when I'm walking along the Boulevard des Capucines? Blood and thunder!"

But such was the power of the new vision (admittedly helped by the emergence of photography) that today we perfectly accept the idea of resembling those vivid dabs of Monet's brush as we stroll on a sidewalk. And we even look at this picture with a certain nostalgia, as a witness of times gone by.

Yet here Racine's lament is only partly true:

*Cet heureux temps n'est plus,
tout a changé de face.*

For though the aspect of everything has indeed changed, and though those happy times no longer are, they still remain with us in paintings such as this, in which the impression of a specific place, a season, no, a day, nay, a single hour lives on forever.



18 SISLEY – THE FLOOD AT PORT-MARLY, 1876
 Oil on canvas, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 32 inches
 Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume, Camondo
 Bequest, 1908

In the dictionary that is nature, Sisley seems to have looked solely for synonyms of terms expressing poetry, tenderness, delicacy, or beauty. He concentrated so exclusively on landscapes that – unlike any of the other Impressionists – he found no attraction in portraits, still lifes, or nudes. And if his paintings sometimes appear more serene than those of his friends, it is possibly because human beings are, more often than not, excluded from them. Thus he may have felt little need for the amazing “shorthand” technique that Pissarro and Monet had developed (Figures 14, 15). It is true that Pissarro himself only resorted to it when the specific character of a subject warranted a hasty execution; when he painted a flooded field in 1873 (inside front cover), large, calmly assured brush strokes better

suited his purpose. On the other hand, Sisley, in a series devoted to the heavy flood at Port-Marly in 1876, is sensitive to the agitation that accompanies the disaster; the rapid yet deft strokes with which he transfixes the attitudes of rescuers in their barges shows that he had been impressed with Monet’s boulevard strollers.





19 MANET – BOATING, ARGENTEUIL, 1874
Oil on canvas, 38¼ x 51¼ inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer,
The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.115

Manet steadfastly refused the entreaties of his friends to participate in their exhibition at Nadar's, yet he may well have been the visitor most impressed with their innovations. As a result, he joined Monet during that summer of 1874 at Argenteuil and there converted to out-of-door work.

It was doubtless a strange spectacle to see an accomplished painter shed his old-masterly technique and embark upon completely new pursuits of color and light. For the first time placing his models against natural backgrounds, Manet now concerned himself with what the others had tried for years: achieving a unity of figures and surroundings. He searched for this unity through bright tonalities that indicate the presence of the sun, through rapid brushwork, and through simplification of forms (no longer modeling these with broad and blended strokes, but adopting a "sketchy" technique).

The stripes on the woman's dress are painted – if not drawn – summarily and without apparent regard for verisimilitude. Instead, the freshness of execution conveys the fleeting character of the depicted moment, as well as the artist's resolve not to stifle his perceptions by a meticulous rendition.

If nothing else, Manet's new palette and brush strokes attest to the fact that he has finally left behind the examples of the past and has resolutely stepped into his own times, the times whose artistic expression was being determined by the Impressionists.

20 MANET – THE ARTIST'S GARDEN, VERSAILLES, 1881
Oil on canvas, 25¾ x 32 inches
Private collection, New York

Once Manet had adopted the Impressionist approach, he began to perfect a brushwork consistent with its basic tenets. As Pissarro, Monet, Renoir, and Sisley had done before him, he discovered the possibilities afforded by a rapid execution, a volatile brush combined with a more luminous palette. He also discovered the intimate aspects of nature that offered nothing but the sheer pleasure of color and light observed on the most unpretentious subjects.

When poor health compelled him to remain in the outskirts of Paris, Manet complained to a friend that "the country has charms only for those who are not obliged to stay there." But he was too much of a painter not to take advantage of his surroundings. Unlike Monet, whose landscapes often favored certain effects of softness, Manet, in his "slapdash" technique, remained surprisingly firm. The individual brush strokes seldom fuse, each bringing to the whole its precise, essential accent. The swirls and splotches, the energetic strokes of a pigment-loaded brush, the rashly drawn lines, the short commas, the scattered spots appear as inescapable necessities. They *build* the picture not just by suggesting shapes bathed in vibrant air but by evenly defining the place of everything without giving prominence to a single element. Together they re-establish the total image that – for the purpose of greater animation – the artist's brush seemed to have fractured.



21 RENOIR – NUDE IN THE SUN, 1875-1876

Oil on canvas, 31 7/8 x 25 1/2 inches

Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume, Caillebotte Bequest, 1894

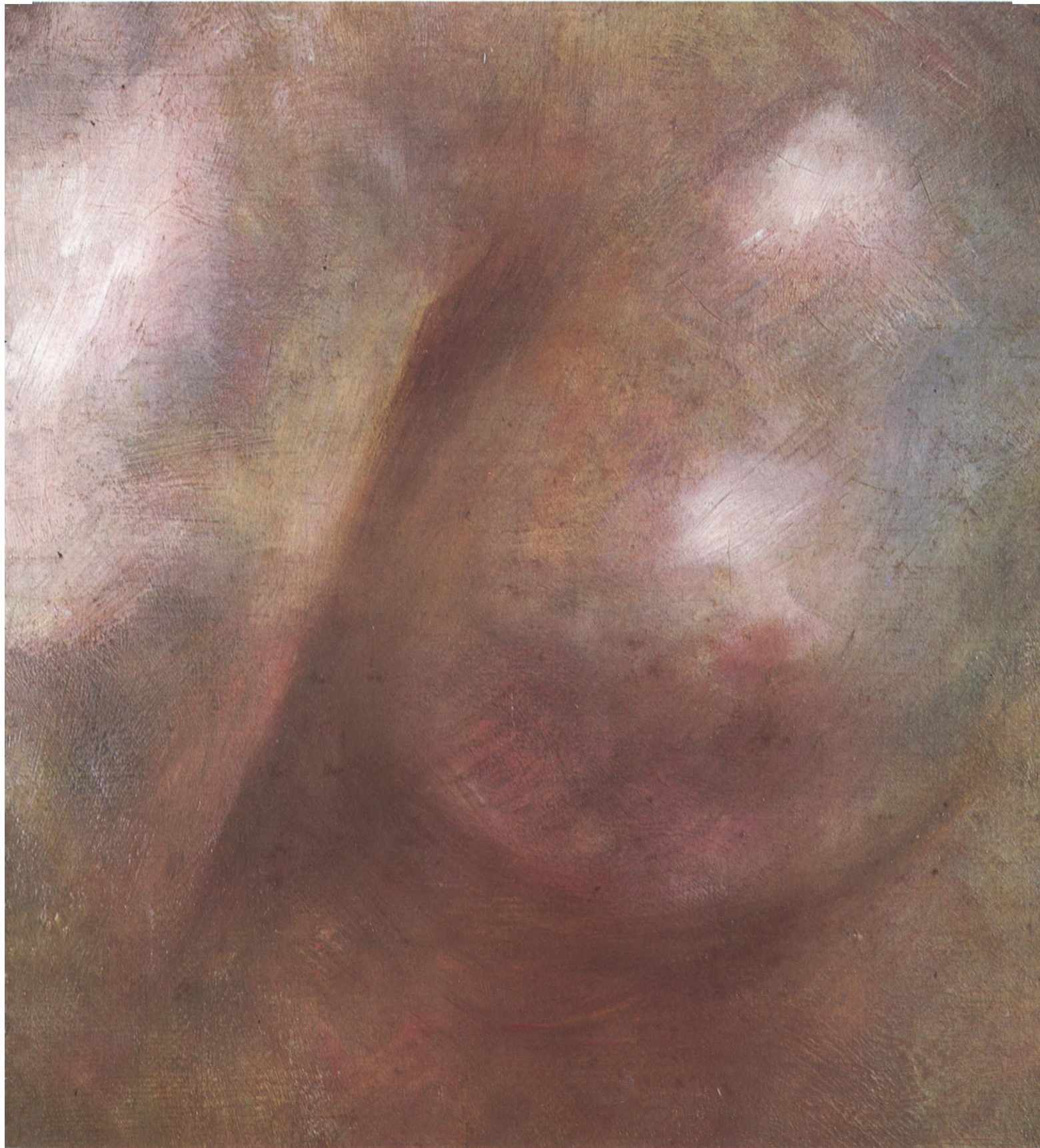
It seems only logical that in their preoccupation with various and changing light effects the Impressionists should have wished to paint nudes in the open. But while Cézanne all his life dreamt of doing this, only Renoir actually did work in this fashion.

Placing his model under a tree so that she was sprinkled with spots of light falling through the foliage, Renoir studied the strange effects of reflections and luminous speckles on her delicate skin. Her body thus became a medium for the representation of curious and momentary phenomena that partly dissolved forms and offered to the observer the gay and capricious spectacle of dancing light.

With a tender, almost caressing, brush, Renoir proceeded, through warm shadows and cool spots of light (quite the opposite of what is usually done), to shape forms softly and detach them from the vibrant and colorful background.

"Art is never chaste," Picasso once told Malraux. Might it not have been better to use a positive rather than negative expression, saying: Art is always voluptuous? There can be little doubt that Renoir would have wholeheartedly approved of such a definition.





22 RENOIR – DANCING AT THE MOULIN DE LA GALETTE, 1876

Oil on canvas, 51 ½ x 68 ⅞ inches

Musée du Louvre, Galerie du Jeu de Paume, Caillebotte Bequest, 1894

After their early endeavors, large compositions lost favor with the Impressionists, doubtless because these did not allow the kind of spontaneous execution to which their brushwork had become geared. Monet's elaborate arrangements for his *Women in the Garden* (Figure 6) had demonstrated the almost insurmountable challenges presented by a huge canvas painted out of doors. Yet, the cheerful spectacle of the open-air dance hall at the Moulin de la Galette close to his Montmartre studio in 1876 inspired Renoir to depict the festive crowd, not on an easel-size canvas but on a much bigger scale. The speckles of light which he had studied on a nude were now observed in this scene, where soft green acacia trees filtered the sun that is sprinkled gaily over the dancers. Actually, it is this effect of light, bathing the entire picture, which assures the unity of the composition.

There exist several versions of this painting, but almost no preparatory sketches, as though the artist had tackled his complicated subject without working out beforehand the attitudes of the numerous figures. While it is known that Renoir, aided by his friends, who also posed for the picture, used to carry a large canvas from his nearby studio to the dance hall for each session, it may nevertheless have been the smaller of the two finished versions (measuring 30 ⅞ by 44 ⅝ inches, in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. John Hay Whitney, New York) that was painted on the spot. It features a more diffused light that softens all contours and appears to be the result of direct observation. The larger version (shown here) – originally owned by the painter Gustave Caillebotte, friend and patron of the Impressionists – shows a somewhat stronger insistence on outlines and volumes, so that the dancers as well as the seated figures in the foreground are detached more sharply from their surroundings. Yet the deftness of the brush stroke avoids the problem with which Monet had been confronted: that of the contrast between figures and background not being completely resolved by the ambient light.

Whichever version preceded the other, both show an amazing and wholly new attempt at submitting an almost anecdotal subject to the reign of atmospheric conditions. Among the Impressionists Renoir was the only one to be attracted by such chronicles of contemporary life, though without the slightest inclination toward social comment. It was simply that what he found at the Moulin de la Galette appeared irresistible to a man always willing to transfix on canvas the carefree aspects of life that he so readily enjoyed.

More than once the apologists of the Salon painters had explained that the reason why such artists as Meissonier took refuge in the past, depicting models in eighteenth-century attire, was the fact that their own times did not provide them with attractive styles or costumes. The fallacy behind this argument is that it is not the period that "provides" its artists with a ready-made style, but it is the artists' role to extricate the typical aspects of their period and thus *create* its style. Renoir did just that. The exquisite gowns, the lovely colors, the charming hairdos, the velvet ribbons worn by our grandmothers enchant us today (and inspire nostalgia) because Renoir depicted them with such evident truthfulness and delight. The French milliners probably lost their most gifted recruit the day Renoir decided that it would be more fun to paint!







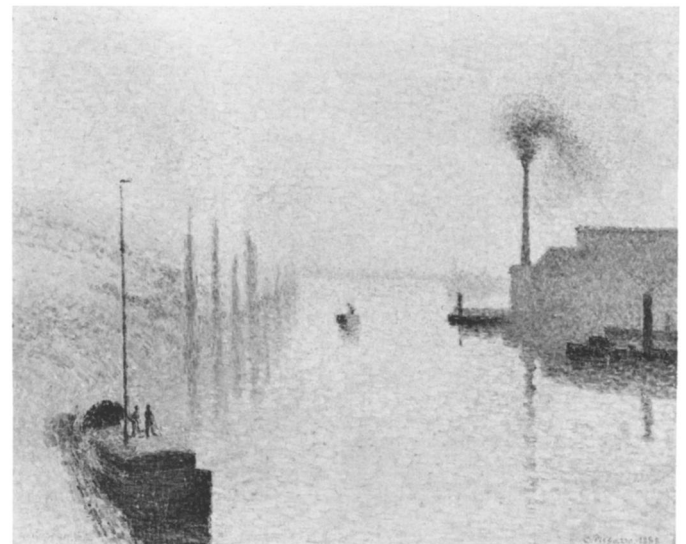
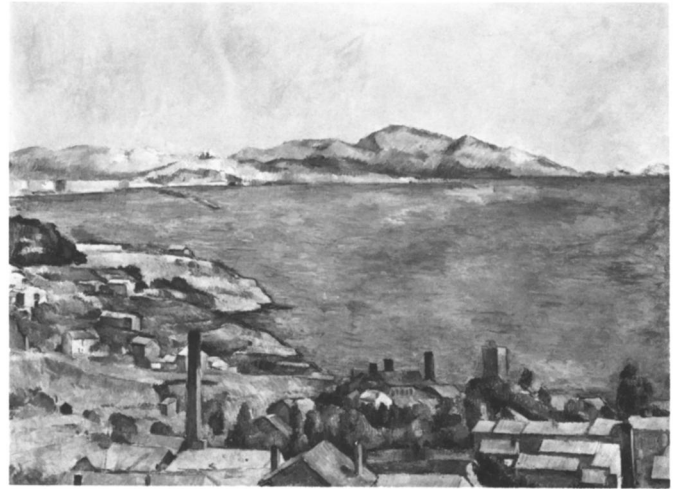


23 RENOIR – BY THE SEASHORE, GUERNSEY, 1883
Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 28½ inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer,
The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.125

Renoir was of course no mindless artist subservient only to the pleasures of his eye. Like every true creator, he periodically struggled with doubts and was dissatisfied with his work. His most critical period occurred around 1883 when he suddenly felt that he had pursued “the impossible” and needed some kind of discipline to attain “the simplicity and grandeur of the ancient painters,” such as Raphael. As he himself later said: “I had gone to the end of Impressionism and was reaching the conclusion that I didn’t know how either to paint or to draw. . . .” As a result, Renoir now tried to combine a sometimes almost stilted linear approach with the delicate touch that his brush simply could not shake off. In this painting of a woman by the seashore he worked with great care on the face, its perfectly drawn oval, the minute details of the eye, the hues of the lips, and the delicate albeit conventional pink of the cheek. While every button on the woman’s outfit is shown, Renoir somehow succumbed to his painterly instinct for the rest. With an inspired and vivid brush he established not only the natural setting but also the flimsy white bow tied around the model’s neck.

In subsequent works the artist was to do his best to eliminate such discrepancies of handling until, in a

large composition of *Bathers* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Carroll S. Tyson Collection), he concentrated on line to such an extent that the figures turned into separate entities. This became the antithesis of Impressionism. Despite the success he achieved with such paintings, however, Renoir’s brush proved to be too spontaneous an instrument to remain for long the slave of a rigid design or to forego Delacroix for Raphael.



OVERLEAF

24 CEZANNE – THE GULF OF MARSEILLES SEEN FROM L’ESTAQUE, about 1885. Oil on canvas, 28¾ x 39½ inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer,
The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.67

25 PISSARRO – RIVER – EARLY MORNING: ILE LACROIX, ROUEN, 1888
Oil on canvas, 18¼ x 21⅞ inches
The John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia

24 CEZANNE – THE GULF OF MARSEILLES SEEN FROM L'ESTAQUE, about 1885. Oil on canvas, 28¾ x 39½ inches. Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.67

While Monet and Sisley remained faithful to their explorations of the phenomena of light which tends to dissolve volumes, the others began to look for new approaches and techniques. Cézanne slowly dissociated himself from the Impressionist group and withdrew to his native Provence. At L'Estaque he found a panorama of which he never tired. "It is like a playing card, red roofs against the blue sea," he told Pissarro. "The sun is so terrific that it seems to me as if the objects were silhouetted not only in black and white, but in blue, red, brown, and violet. I may be mistaken, but this seems to me to be the opposite of modeling. . . ."

It was not to modeling, therefore, that Cézanne turned, but to the deliberate and regular brushwork he had evolved and which has been characterized by Theodore Reff as his "constructive stroke." It represented an effort "to systematize and strengthen

Impressionism, whose spontaneous application of irregular, freely juxtaposed touches . . . no longer seemed adequate to the demand for a more formal, cohesive, or expressive style." This tendency reflects Cézanne's desire to "make of Impressionism something solid and lasting like the art of museums."

In this landscape, planes – seen from above – are established with great neatness; the subject of course lent itself to such treatment, but precisely that may have been the reason why the artist chose this view, in which the compact mass of buildings interspersed with spots of green is wedded to the serene surface of water. So as to delineate forms more explicitly, Cézanne uses here and there blue contours, notably in the dominating chimney-tower where the surrounding impasto indicates the artist's difficulty in detaching its quadrangular shape from the blue expanse behind it.

Cézanne's brush stroke appears here more disciplined and confident than it had been at Auvers (Figure 16). Its firmness is a telling reaction against a sensation about which he complained throughout his later years: "*Le contour me fuit.*" (The contour escapes me.)



25 PISSARRO – RIVER – EARLY MORNING: ILE LACROIX, ROUEN, 1888

Oil on canvas, 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches

The John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia

When Pissarro, dissatisfied with what he considered the “roughness” of his execution, decided in 1885–1886 to adopt Seurat’s divisionist theories, he did so mainly because these would enable him to replace the “disorder” of Impressionist brushwork with a meticulous technique of carefully posed small strokes and occasional dots. Thus he hoped to reproduce more faithfully the various interactions of colors, while the multitudinous small spots would melt at a proper distance into more subtle harmonies and result in a greater luminosity. But this necessarily slow execution precluded all spontaneous work from nature; direct sensations became less important than submission to the rigors of optical laws by which each tone posed on the canvas almost automatically dictated the colors – specifically the complementaries – that were to surround it.

The pointillist technique appeared particularly appropriate for a landscape such as this one: an effect of fog which obliterates all distinct forms and throws a veil over the motif. Some features, however, do not dissolve in the mist and thus constitute delicate accents of color and shape in this low-keyed composition.

Nevertheless, the fastidious execution hampered the artist’s freedom of expression to such an extent that he gave it up after a few years, happy to regain his former, less deliberate approach (see Figure 28).







26 CÉZANNE – MADAME CÉZANNE IN THE CONSERVATORY, about 1891
Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 28¾ inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Stephen C. Clark, 61.101.2

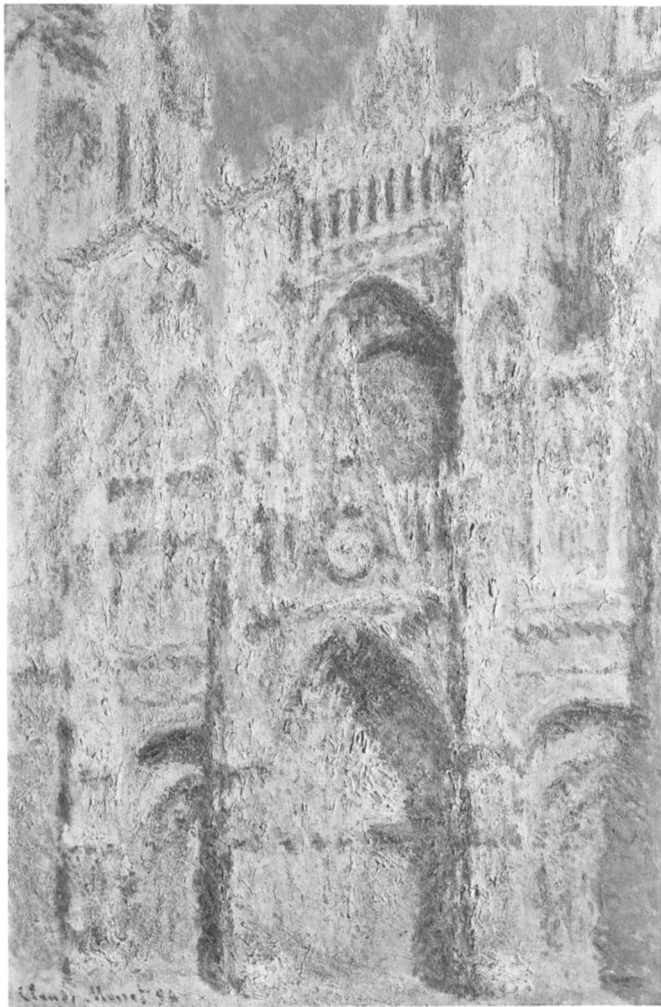
Hortense Fiquet, who has been called the most patient and long-suffering of models, had borne Cézanne a son in 1872; they were married in Aix in 1886 and only after that date was she admitted to the Jas de Bouffan, the property the artist's father owned on the outskirts of the town. Though their relations were often strained, Cézanne painted a great many portraits of his wife, but in few of them does he seem to have treated her with as much sympathy – admittedly a somewhat aloof sympathy – as in this likeness. And in very few of her portraits does she appear with the softly placid features shown here, which suggest she may have been a rather handsome woman. Cézanne was never interested in the specifics of portraiture, so that it is practically impossible to guess the age of his models. But according to their son, his mother sat for this painting in 1891; she was then forty-one years old.

This portrait is unfinished, and while this precludes an analysis of the artist's final aims, it offers an excellent

insight into the way in which he *began* a work, though this applies only to the period from which this canvas dates, since Cézanne's technique underwent many changes over the years. In the second half of the eighties he definitely abandoned the last remnants of his "constructive stroke" (Figure 24) and adopted a much looser and actually very crisp execution. Here the turpentine-diluted paint is brushed on sweepingly, once the general forms have been roughly sketched with pencil on the light canvas. How very approximate these pencil indications were can be seen clearly wherever they have not been obliterated by the first thin coat of paint. While the artist seems to have been intent primarily on blocking in the main areas of color, he did so with a very firm brush that "drew" with precision the different elements of the picture: the egg-shaped head with its strict hairdo, the diagonal wall behind the sitter, the plants in the background, and even the seams of the dress. Simultaneously, Cézanne shows himself preoccupied with various textures, an interest that is much less manifest in his finished paintings, where texture often is little more than an accident, since his brush seldom differentiates between a face and an apple, or between a flower and a mountain. But here the dark upper part of the dress is distinguished from the apparently lighter bodice and from the middle section of the sleeves, joined by a lower, transparent stretch that breaks the solid mass of the garment (on the left-hand side the pink of the skin shimmers through, on the right – being in the shade – appears a light, bluish tone). The dress may have been black though Cézanne established it with blue, a color remindful of Balzac's description of "*la teinte bleue des ailes noires du corbeau*" (the blue tint of the raven's black wings).

How much of the sketchy indications would have been "solidified" in the course of further work nobody can tell, but it is a fact that other portraits of that period show Cézanne aiming increasingly at thin coats of paint and simple, clearly defined shapes. Yet the attraction of the painting does not reside in these alone, for as Renoir once said: "All Cézanne has to do is to put a touch of color on a canvas and it becomes interesting; it's nothing and yet it is beautiful."





27 MONET – ROUEN CATHEDRAL, 1894
Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 25 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches
Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis,
The Theodore M. Davis Collection, 30.95.250

Around 1890 Monet launched a completely new endeavor, that of representing the same subject in a series of paintings, each showing a fleeting phase among many fleeting phases. This meant that day after day he had to change canvases as the light changed, in order, as he said, “to get a true impression of a certain aspect of nature and not a composite picture.” The subject itself thus became an accessory on which the ever-changing atmosphere could be observed.

The most famous among Monet’s series is that of Rouen Cathedral, to which he devoted several years. In a strange way it lent itself particularly well to the artist’s purpose because here was a subject whose form never varied, so that he could concentrate his efforts on what dawn or dusk, sun or mist did to the solid and inert structure. Untiringly he scrutinized the imposing, richly textured façade as the light played with its arches, gables, and turrets or as shadows invaded the deep recesses of its niches and etched the profiles of the

Gothic skeleton. In general, however, he used the overall effect of softening light to obtain the unity of his pictures.

His execution shows a mixture of spontaneous discovery and sober purpose, due possibly to the fact that these many paintings were finished in Monet’s studio where – removed from the strenuous concern for evanescent nuances – he could, with a few decisive strokes, provide hints of shapes and delicate accents of color. Though it has been said that the impasto of the Rouen paintings is partly the result of “Monet’s deliberate attempt to suggest the tactile quality of the stone,” this does not seem very plausible. Indeed, in Monet’s many pictures of water lilies (Figure 32) the impasto is, if anything, still heavier. It is more likely that the artist found in the manipulation of a rapid brush, accumulating layer over layer of paint, both a means of devoting numerous sessions to the same canvas (something he had seldom done before) and a way to obtain a marvelous richness of hues.

“At close range,” George H. Hamilton has observed, “the image seems to disappear entirely and the spectator sees only the thickly encrusted surface built up of a myriad of small brush strokes of the most delicately varied tints.” The same author has also defined that what we witness here is “an absorption in the process of the brush, a simultaneous identification of the structure and direction of the paint with the artist’s consciousness, in the course of which subject-matter as such, as a set of objects existing apart from the painter and his paint, has almost ceased to exist.”

Contemplating Monet’s Rouen series, Pissarro stated: “Cézanne agrees with me that this is the work of a purposeful and well-balanced man, pursuing the elusive nuance of effects that no other artist captures. Some painters deny the necessity of this pursuit, but I myself consider any pursuit legitimate that is felt to such a degree.”

And Cézanne later said: “Monet is but an eye, yet what an eye!”

28 PISSARRO – THE OLD MARKET AND THE RUE DE L'EPICERIE, ROUEN, 1898

Oil on canvas, 32 x 25 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches. Metropolitan Museum, Mr. and Mrs. Richard J. Bernhard Fund, 60.5

After four years of a divisionist application of color and brushwork (1886-1890; Figure 25), Pissarro found that this process made it impossible for him “to be true to my sensations and consequently to render life and movement, impossible to be faithful to the so random and so admirable effects of nature. . . .” He therefore decided to abandon his attempt at “scientific Impressionism.” He did so, he explained, “not without painful and obstinate struggles to regain what I had lost and not to lose what I had learned.”

Very soon the artist found once more his old freshness of vision and vigor of execution. From a hotel room in Rouen, facing north and looking down on a busy market spilling out of a narrow street of gabled houses behind which rises the cathedral, Pissarro tackled a subject that combined rigid masses with animation and color. The extent to which he had regained his immediate response to his observations is illustrated by his swift execution. A brush heavy with pigment seems almost to be modeling in relief the innumerable small details of the scene. But even more amazing, possibly, are the radical, broad strokes representing awnings that form such a daring contrast with the swarm of figures beneath them (their simplification parallels the tendencies then being expressed by the young Nabis).

There can be no doubt that the veteran of Impressionism had successfully reverted to his original concepts and that his technique was once again dominated by that superb mixture of spontaneity and deliberation which was his contribution to the movement.







29 CÉZANNE – CHATEAU NOIR, 1904-1906

Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 36 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. David M. Levy

If words could describe pictures there would be no need to paint them; it is where words fail that the artist's image begins.

With advancing age Cézanne increasingly renounced any descriptive brushwork. He had gone through many phases, as any artist in quest of perfection must. His path had led from youthful self-assurance (Figure 9) to hesitation and an almost painfully slow execution (Figure 16), but he had overcome his doubts and eventually gained a considerable freedom of brush (Figure 26). Once this freedom was achieved, he elaborated a new, broader technique and a completely different palette of deeper and more glowing colors.

Cézanne's last works show the glorious mastery of a painter conscious of his strength and driven by the premonition that there is little time left for the ultimate statement of his concept of nature. He more and more restricted his world to a few sites and subjects to which he constantly returned. The features of the "motifs" before him, with which he was intimately familiar, were reduced to pictorial elements, to spots of color in an irregular weave of strokes. "One must have a feeling for the surface," said Matisse, "and know how to respect it. Look at Cézanne. Not a single spot in his pictures sinks in or weakens. Everything has to be brought to the same plane in the mind of the painter."

Because of the strange way in which Cézanne humbly submitted to his perceptions while dominating them, he remained attached to nature's permanence rather than allowing himself to be distracted by the charm of evanescent conditions of light. His concern lay in the complete integration of his observations on the picture plane.

Though Cézanne previously had often set aside by side several short strokes of the same tint (as in the roofs of L'Estaque, Figure 24), he now seemed to pick up a different hue from his palette whenever he re-loaded his brush, a brush that was wide and heavy with paint, so that it could deposit large patches on the canvas. These combine into an opaque surface on which they are so densely assembled that they lose their individuality and become mere blotches of indistinct shape. Yet while they are put down with remarkable authority, these blotches are interlocked so freely that the surface seems to be alive. It is from this cohesion of an apparently loose brushwork, from the compactness of its web, from the richness of subtly attuned or opposed nuances that rises an image of supreme power or, as Cézanne would have put it more modestly, *a harmony parallel to nature*.









30 DEGAS – DANCERS, about 1903

Pastel on paper, 37¼ x 31¾ inches

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of William S. Paley

The final blossoming of Degas's style strangely contradicts the very principles on which his earlier work had been based. As his eyesight began to fail, he increasingly turned to pastel, a medium halfway between drawing and oil painting. Until then pastel had been used almost exclusively for delicate creations, rendered more delicate still by the fragile character of the chalky dust that provides color and texture. But Degas applied chalks in completely new ways: instead of rubbing them gently on paper to obtain soft harmonies, he squashed them with vehemence and drew from their proverbially muted tonalities unexpected and vibrant oppositions. At the same time he gradually reduced emphasis on line in order to seek pictorial effects. Every pastel stroke became a color accent, its function often not different from that of the Impressionist brush stroke upon which Degas had frowned for so long.

The most peculiar aspect of Degas's late pastels is that many of them are based on earlier, meticulously executed works. In this picture, beneath the almost abstract fabric of frequently clashing pastel strokes, lies a more delicately executed image, possibly done years before the artist covered it with emphatic colors. These colors no longer follow precisely drawn outlines or planes but form patterns that appear to be independent of representational exigencies.

The work of aging artists often shows a slackening of their creative powers or else the exact opposite, a constant forward thrust, undimmed by the burden of years. In such cases – and most Impressionists fall into this rare category – each new work seems to go beyond past achievements, summing up the experiences of a lifetime while spurred by fresh impulses.

Shortly before his death at eighty-three, Goethe told his friend Eckermann that the second part of his *Faust* did not contain anything subjective but that "there appears a higher, wider, brighter, and less passionate world; he who has not been around a bit and has not lived fully will not be able to do much with it."

This has been in many instances the fate of the last works of great masters. Even those who had accepted and become used to their innovations were not always ready to follow them into their ultimate explorations of color, line, form, and space. It was simply that they had not "been around" sufficiently. But as the final works of the Impressionists sink further into the past and as we, who have lived more fully, now see everywhere new solutions spawned by their discoveries, we begin to recognize in the last creations of Cézanne, of Renoir, of Monet or Degas a higher, wider, brighter – though not necessarily less passionate – world.





31 RENOIR – TILLA DURIEUX, 1914

Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 29 inches

Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Stephen C. Clark,
61.101.13

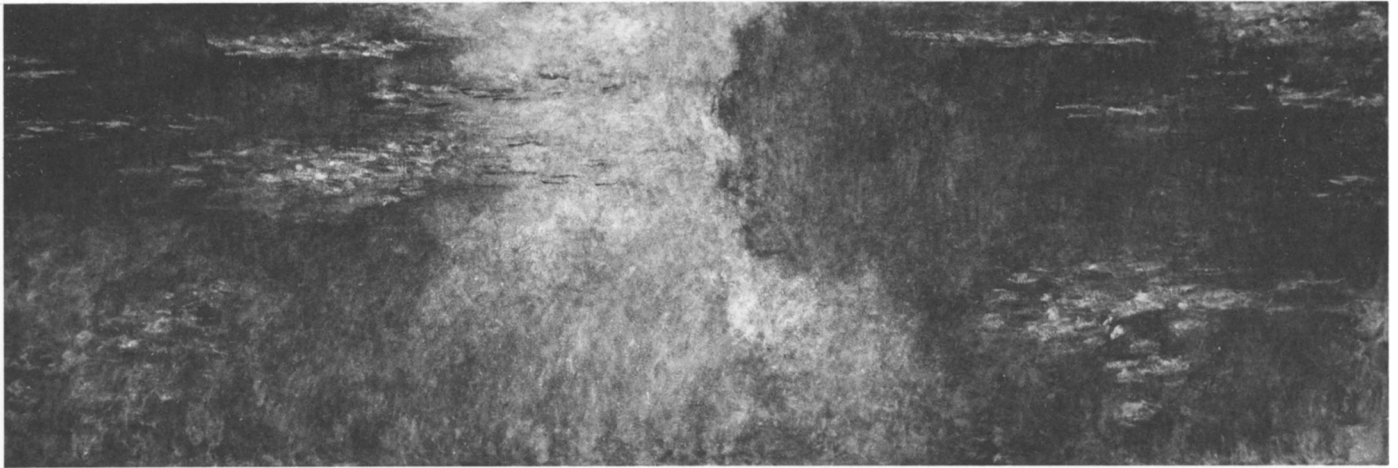
Ever since his early days Renoir had been attracted to the transparent veils that draped the odalisques of Delacroix. The sensuous spectacle of rosy skin shimmering through sheer materials could not fail to delight him. And his passion for such visual pleasures by no means faded with age.

When the young German actress Tilla Durieux sat for him in 1914 in a gown by Poiret, Renoir was seventy-three. His body was riddled with arthritis, but his eyes were still greedy and his secluded life was still devoted to the two deepest gratifications he knew: the enjoyment of beauty and the satisfaction of painting. It is a miracle how a crippled man who moved with the utmost difficulty could have achieved this lightness of touch, this immediate response to his perceptions, this almost capricious freedom of the brush. There is nothing “labored” about his execution; on the contrary, he seems to have reached with the greatest ease the synthesis of his lifelong quest for expression.

The old Renoir never tired of proclaiming that, “though one should take care not to remain imprisoned in the forms we have inherited, one should neither, from love of progress, imagine that one can detach oneself completely from the past.”

Renoir didn’t. His accomplishment here is ageless and almost timeless. Scrutinizing, adoring, and recreating *das ewig Weibliche*, he joined the great Venetian masters.





32 MONET – WATER LILIES, about 1920
Oil on canvas, 6 feet 6½ inches x 19 feet 7½ inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mrs. Simon
Guggenheim Fund

While working on his Rouen Cathedral series, Monet, in his garden at Giverny, established a pond of water lilies which was dug, irrigated, and planted exactly to his specifications. Thus he took nature into his own hands: he shaped the shores of the pool, dotted it with blossoms whose colors he carefully selected, ringed it with weeping willows, iris, and bamboos, crossed it with a Japanese footbridge, and supervised the changes that the seasons wrought. Having lovingly contemplated his creation, he made it the subject of innumerable, mostly large canvases to which, with an all but obsessional singlemindedness, he devoted the rest of his life. He was the first painter to subject nature to his will until she offered him the aspect he desired.

Monet and his pond became one. He not only watched it incessantly, observing the most intimate changes (sometimes merely a cloud casting an ephemeral shadow), he also adapted a special brushwork to

his constant attempt at catching the fleeting spectacle. His large brush, heavily loaded with pigment, again and again swept over the canvas, leaving behind a surface so granulous that subsequent swift strokes most often did not penetrate into its crevices. Despite the thick crust of paint, each coat therefore retains a certain transparency since underlying coats shimmer through. The colors frequently are light pastel shades as befits the insubstantial subject of still water, mirrored sky, and floating leaves. And everything is formless, for as sifted light plays over the scene, the eye no longer distinguishes between what is solid and what is reflection. Not a single brush stroke stoops to the task of defining an object. The picture is a sea of dissolved forms, drifting between sky and water. But as the viewer steps back, the process is reversed: what Monet knew was there but chose to reduce to flickering spots of light, at a given distance coagulates into distinct features, into the subject that had been the artist's point of departure.

Whatever succeeding generations may see and appreciate in his final works, Monet, the eternal Impressionist, never told them to neglect nature.

emerged, during later years, as definitely stronger or weaker personalities? We know only that their selfless communion was necessary to shape their individualities. Once that Impressionist moment, which lasted less than ten years, had passed and the painters began to separate, their potential for renewal may have been strengthened in some instances, but in others it was diminished. The latter seems to have been the case for Sisley.

Cézanne, though deeply affected by his isolation, stubbornly overcame its paralyzing effect and built with brush and color a new universe no longer subject to the whims of ephemeral sensations. Even a man of such sturdy poise and wisdom as Pissarro, who in contact with nature had achieved a rustic simplicity of the highest order, went through a period of groping. It was then that he turned to Seurat's optical and technical innovations in the hope of finding there new structural elements (Figure 25). But his Impressionist eye could not submit to cold calculations and – once freed from narrow theories – Pissarro found again the vigorous spontaneity of which his later works bear witness (Figure 28). Renoir likewise suffered for a while from lack of self-confidence and thought that insistence on line might help him establish a link with tradition (Figure 23), until he discovered that tradition did not exclusively mean Raphael and Ingres but also Watteau and Fragonard.

Only Monet does not seem to have ever looked back. This does not mean that he was spared doubts, never was dissatisfied with his work, or did not, on occasion, destroy paintings that would not measure up to his standards; what it means, rather, is that there was not much room for introspection in the life of this positive force of nature. A constant forward thrust runs through his entire work, preventing him from pausing after any achievement (or arguing its merits or faults), and steadily driving him on to new conquests. If any painter ever was inspired by the longing of the dying Faust, after he had seen visions of a new humanity, it was Monet:

*Zum Augenblicke dürrt' ich sagen:
Verweile doch, du bist so schön!*

(And to the instant I could say: Please linger on, you are so beautiful!)

Artists have always been preoccupied with the instant. Michelangelo depicted it as God stretched a finger to the awakening Adam; Rembrandt caught it as the knife fell from the grasp of Abraham, about to sacrifice his son; so did Delacroix when he painted Sardanapalus on

his deathbed, surrounded by expiring concubines and a rearing horse being slaughtered. Others did not see the instant, despite its action-charged significance, as a phase among phases but chose to freeze it into a kind of sublime, motionless eternity: as did Poussin when he represented the Rape of the Sabines, or Velázquez the Surrender of Breda, or Greco the Burial of Count Orgaz, or David the Oath of the Horatii. Still others preferred a moment of timeless permanence, pregnant with what had been and would always be; Vermeer selected this all-encompassing stillness for his view of Delft, Corot for his panorama of the Forum Romanum, and, in a strange way, so did Turner in his vaporous landscapes.

Only the Impressionists pursued the instant for the instant's sake, not as the climax of biblical or historical or mythological events, not as a symbol, not as a distillation of intimate visions, but as the immediate response of their retinas and brushes to their observations of nature.

They were no revolutionaries nor did they intend to be. They looked with admiration to their elders, ambitious to be worthy of them. But they were adamant about one thing: they wished to find the expression of their perceptions outside of ready-made formulas. Rather than philosophers or historians, they were the visual conscience of their time!

In their quest for ways of rendering what they saw, they not only fashioned new techniques but introduced a new element into painting: since their enchantment with nature's spectacle released their creative urge, some of that enchantment had to be transfixed upon their canvases. Thus not only poetry, but optimism and joy became ingredients of their work.

Was it really so difficult to understand that an artist could rise in the morning and find in the play of early light an incentive to paint? Was it really unheard-of that an artist, enamored of nature, should put up his easel in the middle of a meadow to retain on his canvas his immediate impressions? Was it inconceivable that an artist's eye should find beauty everywhere?

In those days it was. And Pissarro expressed something new when he said: "Happy are those who see beauty in modest spots where others see nothing! Everything is beautiful, the whole question lies in knowing how to interpret."

Interpretation was the crucial factor. Since nobody had ever done what the Impressionists set out to do, they had to invent a new "language," a new brushwork adapted to their unorthodox con-

cepts. But each of them had to elaborate and test for himself the technique best suited to his intentions. Despite the many things that bound them together, the Impressionists were individualists. It is not surprising, therefore, that their brushwork should reflect both their personalities and their incessant search for improved means of expression. Like handwriting, the brush stroke is a mirror of the individual and of his mood. Whoever is truly familiar with the Impressionists may be able to identify the hands that painted each of the details here reproduced. Who is not will find here one of many keys to Impressionism. He will discover how years of work and probing wrought changes in each painter's technique and how intimately their observation and expression were linked. He will also find that spontaneity being one of the sacred tenets of Impressionism, there are no rules or guidelines, so that each new canvas, each new subject presents the artist with another challenge.

But merely to study and reproduce the colored vibrations of nature does not result in a work of art. What could not be done by the photographic lens (which appeared on the scene simultaneously with Impressionism) was achieved by the painters: a projection of their inner sensibility, the selection of what was pictorially "needed" and what was not, the clear concept of what would constitute a balanced composition, the acute observation that never was allowed to dominate the creative conscience, and finally the experience that guided the hand. Rapidity had never been such an essential part of the artistic process as it became with the Impressionists while they observed nature's evanescent wonders. Their technical proficiency thus gained importance since it had to be adapted both to the painter's instant perception and to his lasting intentions.

"I want to reach that state of condensation of sensations which produces the picture," Matisse wrote in 1908. It is remarkable that although he wished to achieve something totally alien to the Impressionists, this basic idea was also theirs. What they observed had to become a picture. But then what any artist sees, remembers, imagines, or thinks must produce a picture. The miracle to accomplish that confronts every painter is how to transform a surface into an illusionistic representation. The Impressionists covered the surface with countless hatchings, loose scrawls, or tightly knit strokes until from them emerged the image that transmits their experience and emotion. Yet when they sent it out into a hostile world in order to

communicate their discoveries of nature's neglected aspects, it turned out that nobody could "read" their transcriptions. For it is the eye of the beholder that establishes the cohesion of the countless signs scattered over the canvas, it is his eye that endows the painter's image with its ultimate gloss.

Non-artists are without visual initiative. Our perception is based on tradition and schooling; it is without originality. That is why artists who mark out new paths meet with such resistance (or, at best, apathy). The Impressionists paid a heavy price for daring to follow fresh concepts. The historic importance of their first exhibition held one hundred years ago – an importance of which they themselves may not have been fully aware – is that it eventually changed our perception of nature. Nature herself does not change, but artists can teach us to see her differently, can bring her closer to us, can unveil her hidden beauties. Thus a small group of determined innovators transformed the world for us. It liberated us from stagnant habits and literally opened new vistas that in turn have been and will be replaced by those of succeeding artists. But that is as it should be, since art is not a question of progress; it is one of vitality, of flux and reflux. Among the experiences that are now an indelible part of our culture is the Impressionist vision of nature.

"The great use of a life," William James has said, "is to spend it for something that outlasts it."

1 Souvenir hunters who, for want of other distractions, are presently "rediscovering" or even "rehabilitating" various producers of anemic Salon wares seem completely unconcerned with the fact that what those people painted were *unnecessary* pictures.

2 In the legacy of the Impressionists – aside from their work and influence – is the fact that since their simultaneous appearance in 1874 many new endeavors have been presented by groups. Though there were such outsiders as van Gogh and Lautrec, and major figures clearly dominating their following such as Gauguin and Seurat, the history of art from Neo-Impressionism and Symbolism to the Nabis, from the Fauves to the Expressionists and Cubists, from Dada and Surrealism to today is a history not only of individuals but also of collective efforts. And many of these efforts were received with the same hostility that greeted the Impressionists.

3 By the same token it is of course impossible to guess whether Seurat's *Grande Jatte*, executed when he was twenty-five, would not have borne the same relationship to what he might have done later on, as does Cézanne's *House of the Hanged Man* (Figure 16) of 1874 to his *Château Noir* (Figure 29), painted thirty years later.

If van Gogh had reached the age of Monet, as Malraux has pointed out recently, he would have lived until 1939.

On the cover MANET – THE ARTIST'S GARDEN, VERSAILLES (detail), 1881. Discussed in the caption for Figure 20

Inside front cover PISSARRO – LANDSCAPE WITH FLOODED FIELDS (detail), 1873. Oil on canvas, 25½ x 32 inches. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection

How atmospheric conditions and subject matter influence an artist's brushwork is shown in this landscape of a clear, early spring day. The subtle yet vigorous and supremely self-possessed execution of this picture is in sharp contrast to that of blooming trees (Figure 14), painted the year before.

Inside back cover RENOIR – MADAME CHARPENTIER AND HER CHILDREN (detail), 1878. Oil on canvas, 60½ x

74⅞ inches. Metropolitan Museum, Wolfe Fund, 07.122

The agility of Renoir's brush, with its casual grace, delicate colors, and joy in felicitous details, turned what might have become a staid and even banal composition into a major work, in which Marcel Proust discovered a true reflection of the elegance and opulence of the period.

Back cover MONET – SUNFLOWERS (detail), 1881. Oil on canvas, 39¾ x 32 inches. Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.107

William C. Seitz has characterized this powerful still life as a "luxuriant and highly charged intensification of nature. By means of heavy, intertwining strokes of rich pigment, the great blossoms are made to glow symbolically before their complementary background."

