

Impressionism

Nada Najar

P152393

Research in Context

ADAD5003

Alex Duncan

Word Count: 2719

Choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess consider primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

Impressionism

It is an art movement that was dominant in Paris in the 1870s and 1880s and faced a strong disparagement from the art establishment of that time in France, presented by the Salon exhibition, with its jury refusing almost half of the Impressionists work in the 1860s. Yet, instead, they were able to show and prove their new and original paintings in the (Salon of the Refused), which exhibited the artists' works that were rejected by the art establishment, sabotaging the influence of the official salon, while the Impressionists gained better recognitions (Wallis, 2002,p8). In 1873 several artists such as Edgar Degas, Paul Cezanne, Camille Pissarro, and Pierre August Renoir, and many others decided to exhibit independently their paintings and they established the "Cooperative and Anonymous Association of Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers" (Pickeral, 2018, P13). Then they had their first exhibition in 1874, which draw different critical reactions, and the critic Louis Leroy considered Claude Monet's work (Impression, Sunrise) a mere sketch and not a complete painting, and from its title, he came up with the artists' name The Impressionists (Rubin, 1999, P9). This name related to the new way of painting were well expressed by Manet few years before Leroy:

“One does not paint a landscape, a seascape, a figure”

“One paints the impression of an hour of the day”



(Impression, Sunrise), Claude Monet, 1872

when the Impressionism movement started, the Académie des Beaux-Arts reflected and dominated the principles of French art of the mid 19th century, and landscapes were not as highly regarded as the religious and historical works. Early 1860s Renoir, Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, and Frédéric Bazille were interested in going to the countryside and painting outdoors to emphasize the effect of light in their paintings, instead of the conventional working inside the studio, and they were interested in painting realistic subjects of landscape and contemporary ordinary life (Wallis, 2002, P11). Furthermore, conventional works of nature did not reflect its rough reality, but instead, it was rearranged in an optimal and perfectly imagined composition. Yet, the Impressionists came to challenge all conventions

and presented works of nature reflecting the raw perception of mind and eye of the viewer (Pool, 1991, P19,20).



(The Bridge at Villeneuve-la-Garenne), Alfred Sisley, 1872

A cultural Interest in outdoor life has developed reflecting the political and social change of that time, the impressionists' attitude against industrialisation lead them to have a refuge in nature.

According to Pissarro:

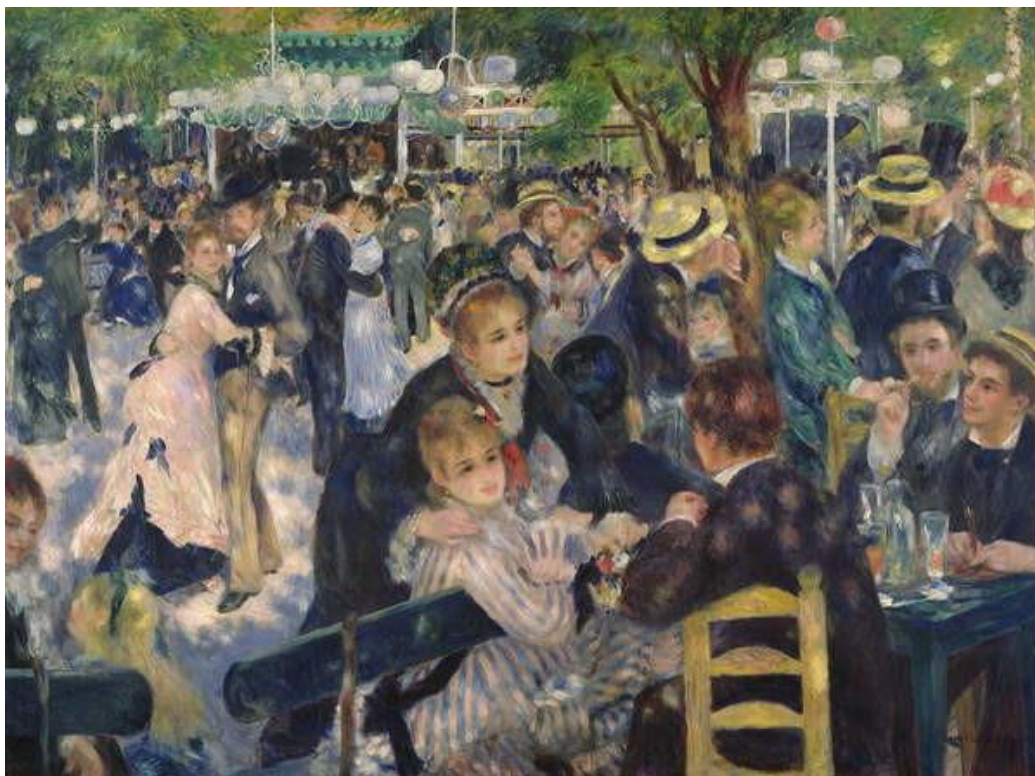
“Salvation reside in nature”

Nature for them is the whole outdoor world, thus they focused their paintings on the landscape as well cityscape (Pool, 1991, P10-12). So, the Impressionists' theory took place

in the surrounding contemporary life of the city, with the critic Charles Baudelaire and his essay (The painter of modern life), claiming that:

“the modern life is the only worthy subject matter for the modern artist”

He exposed the modern materialism and the neglect of the soul, finding that art is an important source of beauty and freedom which create a sense of balance in the contemporary society, and that Impressionism’s free and skilful techniques reflect a subjective joy with its quick and hasty deployment (Rubin, 1999, P29).



(Dance at the Moulin de la Gallette), August Renoir, 1876

Besides, Impressionism challenged the conventional painting of nudity. There were hurdles of prejudices which had to be overcome for the subject of nudity to be painted and presented

before the art establishment, such as the subject has to be historical, endogenous or not related to the present time, a part of an ancient world, Manet who had a big influence on the Impressionists produced works that was successful in bringing the subject of nudity into the present time with his painting of Olympia, where he replaced the mythological subject of Titian painting with a prostitute(Wallis, 2002, P26). After Edouard Manet, Cezanne painted (A Modern Olympia) with free techniques reflecting a sense of humour to further challenge the conventional art sphere's opinion in this subject matter (Pickeral, 2018, P152).



(A Modern Olympia), Paul Cezanne, 1873

The Impressionists longed for freedom from the art conventions, reacting to the political events that were happening at their time. They were capable of doing that by creating a storm of new techniques and forms (Rubin, 1999, p12) as such, using visible, loose, and free brushstrokes neglecting the lines and the contour, they were inspired by previous painters

such as Joseph Mallord William Turner and Eugene Delacroix. They used paint to create forms directly with paint, without making any basic drawings unlike the conventional practice. As such, Renoir and Monet paintings of the La Grenouillere, which was completed in a short time without any basic preparation (Wallis, 2002, P32).



(La Grenouillere), Claude Monet, 1869

Paint can reflect reality because of its modelling ability, because it is a matter by itself and has a body which could be understood sensually, using of thick unmixed paint reflect what was seen in reality and create an internal emotional and sensual charge, a novel practice that was facing the rising materialism according to Baudelaire (Rubin, 1999, P32,34), the

Impressionists painters were able to do that because of the newly developed ready-mixed paints in tin tubes which also allowed them to paint outdoor.

They also captured movement with the use of short fragmented strokes, they used a free composition and unusual points of vision such as the painter Gustave Caillebotte's use of unusual perspectives and angles (Wallis, 2002, P13). Meanwhile, well-balanced composition and perfectly finished work with precise lines, carefully blended brushstrokes, restrained and shaded colours, was the tradition of the Académie (Pool, 1991, P10-12).



(Paris Street, Rainy day), Gustave Caillebotte, 1877

They took a chance of the newly available bright and light premixed pigments, by using them directly without mixing the colours or otherwise with a slight mixing without a proper blending, with that they were able to create new ways of observing and painting which reflect intensely the effect of light and which produce brighter paintings, following and improving

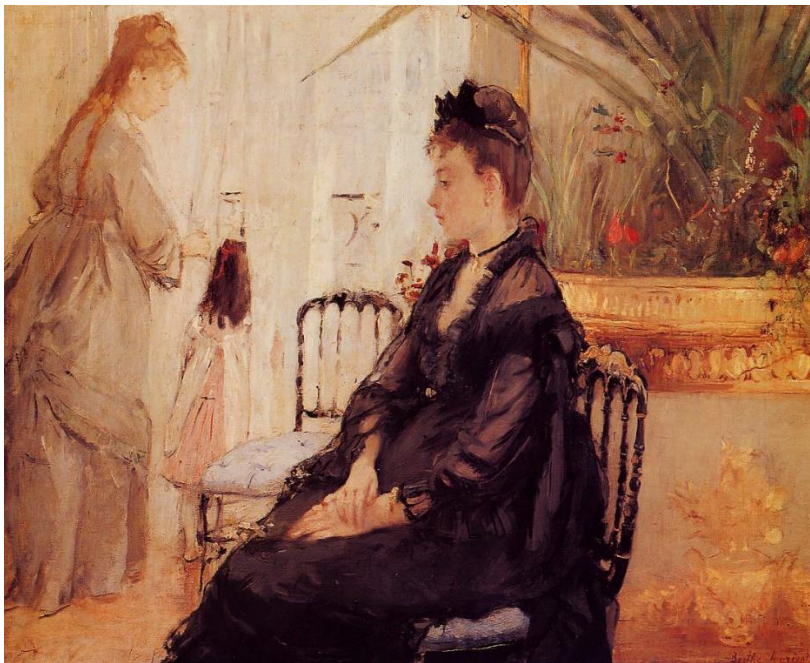
the Gustave Corbet Realism and Corot of the Barbizon school which influenced the Impressionists with the direct representation of nature and the emphasis on the reflection of light, yet, the impressionist did not just copy nature they rather longed for the subjective and the personal sensations and emotional charge which was reflected on the individual from his personal experience of nature. The art historian Richard Shiff considered the Impressionists to be reflecting the context of modern thriving life of France in the new era of industrialisation as their paintings were concerned with life in its pure and true form and with the subjective as a freedom of the ways of expression (Rubin, 1999, P22-24).



(The Road to Sevres), Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, 1858-1859

Women artists were as much interested in the Impressionists' ideals and fit very well in this movement. The techniques used in Impressionism as well as featuring contemporary life as a subject for painting were correlated with femininity, the sensual and emotional charge reflected from using directly thick paint for creating spontaneous unprepared work with a physical representation is more related to womenkind feelings and expression (Rubin, 1999, P221).

but female painters had to overcome several obstacles, socially, in their study, in their practice, and with the art sphere. They were banned from many social circles where artists had their meetings and useful and important discussions resulted from sharing ideas between male artists (Engelmann, 2018, P 82) Academically, women were banned from the established art institutions and the fortunate ones were taught by private teachers, thought only domestic life paintings, still life and portrait because it was believed that they were not able to handle different subjects. It was also not socially acceptable for a woman to take art as a profession since women's place was at home and she had to excel in domestic life and motherhood only. Even though the well-recognised Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot was exhibiting in the Salon and her painting (Interior) brought the highest price in the auction, she was considering herself as an amateur. (Rubin, 1999, P222,223). Yet several women were able to become successful impressionists' painters. Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassat, Eva Gonzales, Marie Bracquemond, were the most known, yet, although well recognised and successful they remained omitted from the art books for a long time.



(Interior), Berthe Morisot, 1872

Women Impressionists were also exploring new technical methods and new ways of observation and expression, and while each of them had a unique style, there were many similarities in their choice of subject matter and the feelings reflected in their paintings. Their subject was often a woman interacting at ease within the limitation of the domestic life by her gaze or her movement, and although the Impressionism movement considered that as legitimate, it confined women painters to this subject matter (Pickeral, 2018, P58). Yet, there were some women impressionists who challenged these prejudices and changed the way women were presented in their works, so they did not give them a mere decorative and objectivating representation but they paint women who are interacting with their environment and in control of their surroundings. There was an awareness of this power change in women depicted in Cassatt's works, as she showed women engaging actively through sewing, reading, thinking or conversing and drinking tea, she also took advantage of the Opera and theatre as subjects, because women at that time were allowed to have access to this modern cultural life, and she made several paintings related to these settings. Her painting (In The Loge) shows a woman as an intent observer rather than a decorated object of the casual gaze (Jacobi, 2017, P24), she also did not paint a chaperone or a man sitting by her, which was the costume of that time.



(In the Loge), Mary Cassatt, 1879

Berthe Morisot was a leading female Impressionist, and although much of her work presented females and their lives, she had paintings that involve a masculine occupation as a subject for her painting, which indicates her longing for practicing freedom in the subject she wanted to explore in her work, such as (Boat building) where she used minimal lines but was successful in creating the right impression and was able to add something new to what male Impressionist achieved in their works. (Pickeral, 2018, P48), and her painting (In the cornfield),

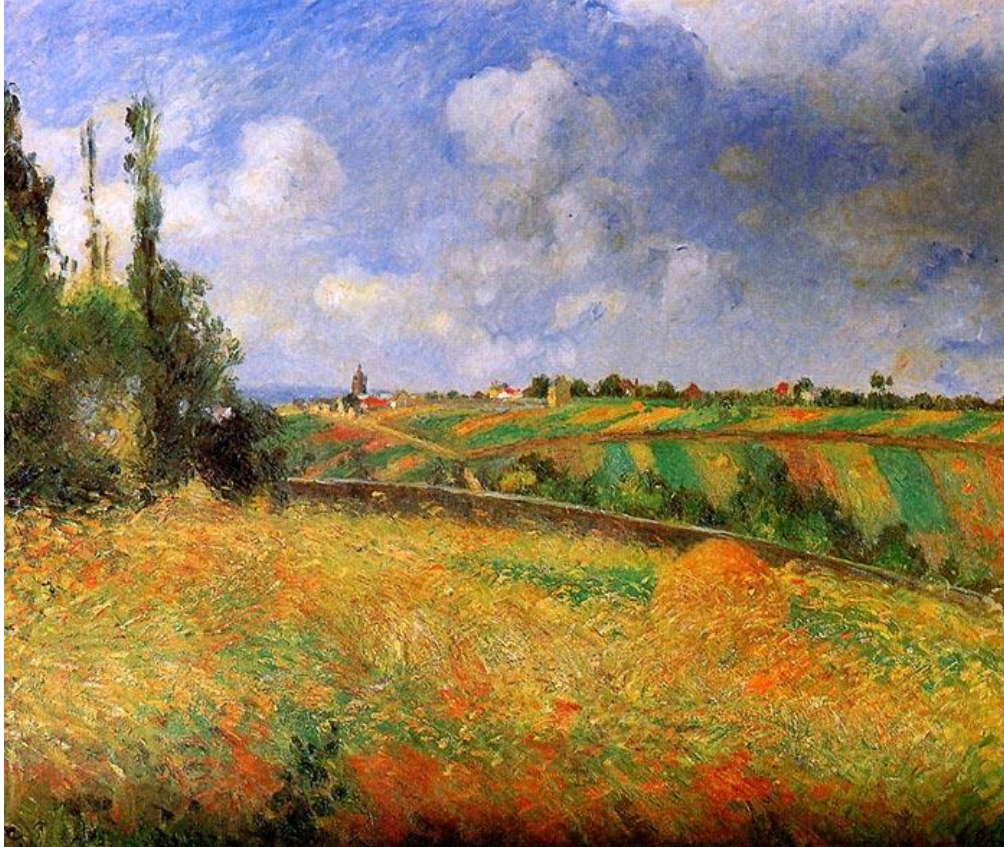


(Boat Building), Berthe Morisot, 1874

There was a tendency for writers and painters to be engaged with science during that era and many Impressionists painted nature with a scientific curiosity representing it as it is in its true image rather than the conventional practices of idealising it. In this context, Rousseau painted rocks and marshy growth in details, and Degas studies of bread making and smoke, in addition the writer Sainte-Beuve emphasised the direct observation and gave the upper hand to the true things rather than the imaginary (Pool, 1991, P10-12)

Besides, the Impressionists' choices of colours have scientific origins, they were based on a book by Eugene Chevreul (The principle of colours and their application to the arts). They constructed a colour theory, using the complementary colours next to each other in large areas to intensify their effects, and using them in the small amount resulting in a neutral tone, also making shadows with the complementary colour of the painted object's colour rather

than using black for shadow. Furthermore, Seurat and Pissarro broke the light into its principle colours after studying the work of physicists on light (Pool, 1991, P12,14)



(Rye Fields at Pointoise), Camille Pissarro, 1877

Furthermore, new technology had a big impact on Impressionists, and the invention of photography inspired them in many ways exemplified by the invention of portable camera. In photography, the images are made without the use of a contour line it is drawn naturally by light, and the Impressionist imitated the same technique, drawing on the previous landscape painter Corot who saw the works of the Fontainebleau forest photographers, where painters used to venture as well (Rubin, 1999, P32), his paintings with hazy effects were based on the blurring of the first and not very advanced cameras, which worked perfectly for the ambiance of the impressionists' works and effect (Pickeral, 2018, P242). Also, Degas studied the

photographer Eadweard Muybridge's works of animal movement (Wallis, 2002, P21). Before the Impressionists, some painters focussed their paintings on common subjects such as the Dutch painter Jan Steen, yet, they painted with a conventional composition, drawing the attention of the viewer on the main subject. But Photography inspired Impressionists to paint the momentary action, in daily life as well as the landscape, they made paintings like the camera's snapshot without a prior arrangement, and subjects were painted with blurring edges to reflect their movement in the captured moment similar to the camera. An example of that is Monet's (Boulevard des Capucines) which represent the similar effects of photographs of the same subject (Katz and Dars, 2016, P103)



(Boulevard des Capucines), Claude Monet, 1873-1874.

Aaron Scharf explained that photographs were the basis for the Impressionists' compositions. In his research on the painting and photograph, Scharf explained the way Impressionists relaxed the boundary between subject and background with the Halation effect resulting from the movement of objects that cause the blurring of the lines forming the contour of objects when light falls on them. Meanwhile, Joseph M W Turner who was from the Romantic school of painting was the precedent of this style, (Pool, 1991, p15,16).

Furthermore, in the 1870s Monet attempted to reflect the effect of time and environment on the subjects of his paintings by producing series of painting of the same subject in different times, such as the Westminster Bridge series, Saint-Lazar railway station sequence, and the Waterlilies, and this Serialism was the most important innovation of his work (Wallis, 2002, P34), he was a visionary with the production of these paintings resembling the cinematic photos with the cinema invention in 1895.



(Westminster Bridge), Claud Monet, 1871

Many French painters paved the way for Impressionism, such as Gustave Courbet an important creature of the Realism school, the elements of his paintings put the foundation for the work of the Impressionists, in portraying modern life and he believed that art should reflect the truth, and painting nature and life as it was in its roughness and in an expressive and real manner (Pickeral, 2018, P234), and painters of the Barbizon school such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot who was the most influential landscape artist to precede the Impressionists (Pickeral, 2018, P240,242), also, Théodore Rousseau (Pickeral, 2018, P262), Eugène Delacroix, who was of enormous influence in the development of modern art, not just the Impressionists (Pickeral, 2018, P244) They also were largely influenced by Eugène Boudin who paved the way from Corot for the Impressionists, they also learned from Johan Berthold Jongkind, he worked directly and spontaneously in nature, and painted with an expressive and light style that prefigured Impressionism (Pickeral, 2018, P252).



(After Dinner at Ornans), Gustave Courbet, 1848-1849

Impressionism movement was not confined to visual art, it was followed by other cultural dimensions, such as impressionist literature and music. Impressionism also had a great influence on several future painting schools such as Neo-impressionism founded by the artist George Seurat, Post-impressionism led by Paul Cezanne, Fauvism leader Henri Matisse and Cubism of Pablo Picasso.

In conclusion, Impressionists were interested in contemporary life as subjects for their paintings and were exploring new ways to present the visual and sensual experience, they used specific techniques and working practices that led to the creation of the impressionism style. Although these methods had been used by previous painters like Joseph William Millard Turner, John Constable, and many others, the Impressionists were revolutionary in using these methods altogether and on regular basis. They created an impressionism movement that reflected the social, political, and scientific development of its time with the rise of industrialisation in France and its capital Paris which offered great cultural opportunities with its rising prosperity. Consequently, they became exemplary of that modern life, they also succeeded in gaining plenty of support, and their vision took place in the art Salon (Rubin, 1999, P22) after years of facing harsh critics from the established art sphere. Impressionism also took place in music and literature and paved the way for future visual art developments such as Neo and post-impressionism.

Word Count: 2719

References

- Engelmann, I, J. (2018) 50 Impressionist Paintings you should know, London, Prestel publishing Ltd.
- Gaunt, W. (1970) The impressionists, London, Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Jacobi, C. (2017) impressionists, London, Tate enterprises Ltd.
- Katz, R. and Dars, C. (2016) The Impressionists Handbook and the world that inspired them, London, Anness publishing Ltd, London.
- Pickeral, T. (2018) Impressionism, London, Flame Tree publishing.
- Pool, P. (1991) Impressionism, London, Thames and Hudson Ltd.

- Rubin, J. H. (1999) Impressionism, London, Phaidon press Limited.
- Wallis, J. (2002) Impressionists, Oxford, Reed educational and Professional publishing Ltd.