

The Late Modern Period

Romanticism to Realism and Beyond

Ways of Thinking

UG ONLINE SHORT COURSE



The Modern Age

The Evolution of Culture

How Did We Get Here?

- **Modern history** is the history of the world beginning after the **Middle Ages**. Generally the term "modern history" refers to the history of the world since the advent of the Age of Reason and the **Age of Enlightenment** in the 17th and 18th centuries and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.
- The **Early Modern Period (1500-1750)** lasted from the end of the 15th century to the **Industrial Revolution** at the end of the 18th century,^[1] circa 1450/92 to 1750/92.
- **Late Modern Period (1750 – 1945)** are the period from **Enlightenment** and the 18th century until today.
- **Modernity**, based on **Modernism**, explores the changes of society due to the **industrialization**.
- **Postmodernity** and **Postindustrialism** are theories to apply the art movement term of *postmodernism* to social and cultural history, or to refer to the rise of the **service sector** during the late 20th century when industry was no longer predominant; the **prefix "post-"** implies a reaction to modernity and in that sense does not cover all contemporary history.^[1]
- The modern period has been a time of many advances in science, politics, warfare, technology, and **globalization**. During this time, the European powers began expanding their political, economic, and cultural influences to the rest of the world
- **Modernism** - modernism is a term for an artistic, cultural movement, rather than era. **Modernism** refers to the artistic movement of late-19th and early-20th centuries that arose out of the widespread changes that swept the world during that period. Most notably, modernism questioned the limitations of “traditional” forms of art and culture.

The Modern Age

The Evolution of Culture

How Did We Get Here?

- **A cultural period is a time marked by a particular way of understanding the world through culture and technology.** Changes in cultural periods are marked by fundamental changes in the way we perceive and understand the world. **The modern era began after the Middle Ages and lasted through the early decades of the 20th century, when the postmodern era began.**
- **The modern era was marked by Enlightenment philosophy,** which focused on the individual and placed a high value on rational decision making. This period saw the wide expansion of capitalism, colonialism, democracy, and science-based rationalism. **The Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the American and French Revolutions, and World War I** are all significant events that took place during the modern era. One of the most significant, however, was the **Industrial Revolution;** its emphasis on routinization and efficiency helped society restructure itself along those terms as well.
- **Postmodernity differed from modernity** in its questioning of reason, rejection of grand narratives, and emphasis on subcultures. Rather than searching for one ultimate truth that could explain all of history, the postmodernists focused on contingency, context, and diversity.

The (Age of) Enlightenment

The Enlightenment's emphasis on reason shaped philosophical, political and scientific discourse from the late 17th to the early 19th century. Matthew White traces the Enlightenment back to its roots in the aftermath of the Civil War, and forward to its effects on the present day.

The Enlightenment – the great ‘Age of Reason’ – is defined as the period of rigorous scientific, political and philosophical discourse that characterised European society during the ‘long’ 18th century: from the late 17th century to the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815.

This was a period of huge change in thought and reason, which (in the words of historian Roy Porter) was ‘decisive in the making of modernity’. Centuries of custom and tradition were brushed aside in favour of exploration, individualism, tolerance and scientific endeavour, which, in tandem with developments in industry and politics, witnessed the emergence of the ‘modern world’.



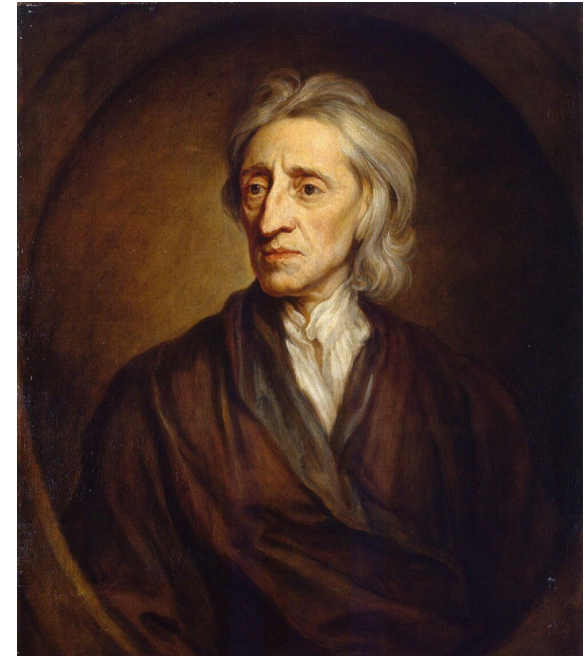
The Age of Reason

Enlightenment Thinking

- The Early Enlightenment: 1685-1730
- The High Enlightenment: 1730-1780
- The Late Enlightenment and Beyond: 1780-1815



Francis Bacon



John Locke

Five Enlightenment Ideas...

1. **reason.** divine force; makes humans human; destroys intolerance.
2. **nature.** good and reasonable; nature's laws govern the universe.
3. **happiness.** achieved if you live by nature's laws; don't have to wait for heaven.
4. **progress.** ...
5. **liberty and freedom.**

Modern Art

1860s – 1970s

Modern art includes artistic work produced during the period extending roughly from the **1860s to the 1970s**, and denotes the styles and philosophies of the art produced during that era. The term is usually associated with art in which the traditions of the past have been thrown aside in a spirit of experimentation.

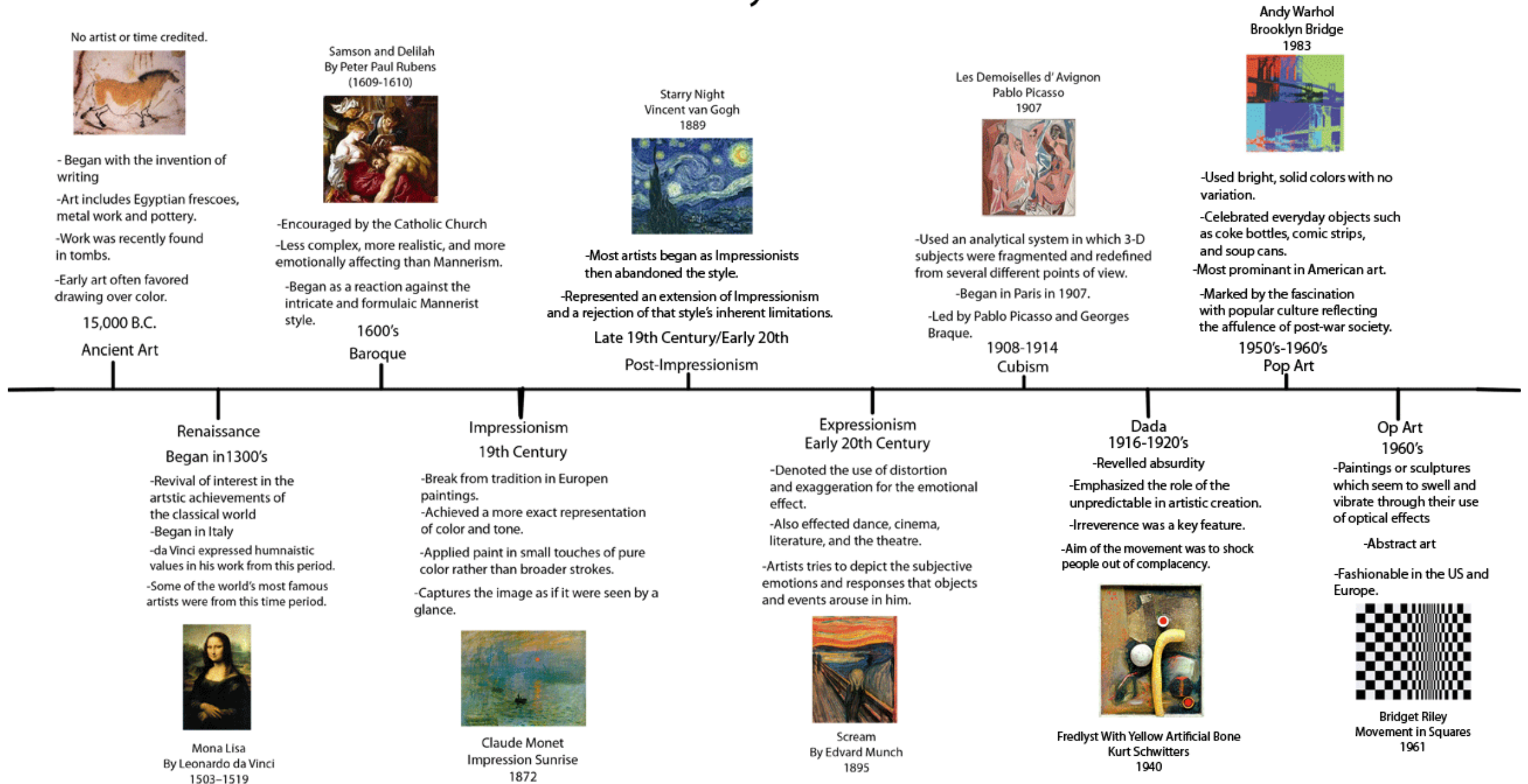
Modern art is the creative world's response to the **rationalist practices** and perspectives of the new lives and ideas provided by the **technological advances** of the **industrial age** that caused contemporary society to manifest itself in new ways compared to the past. Artists worked to represent their experience of the newness of modern life in appropriately innovative ways.

Modern artists experimented with new ways of seeing and with fresh ideas about the nature of materials and functions of art. A tendency away from the **narrative**, which was characteristic for the traditional arts, toward **abstraction** is characteristic of much modern art. More recent artistic production is often called **contemporary art** or **postmodern art**.



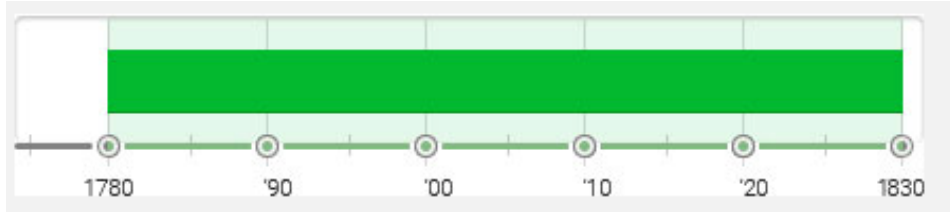
Édouard Manet, *The Luncheon on the Grass* (*Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*), (1863)

Art History Timeline



Romanticism

Started: c.1780 Ended: 1830



At the end of the 18th century and well into the 19th, Romanticism quickly spread throughout Europe and the United States to challenge **the rational ideal** held so tightly during the **Enlightenment**. The artists emphasized that sense and emotions - not simply reason and order - were equally important means of understanding and experiencing the world. Romanticism celebrated **the individual imagination and intuition** in the enduring search for individual rights and liberty. Its ideals of the creative, subjective powers of the artist fueled [avant-garde](#) movements well into the 20th century.

Romanticist practitioners found their voices across all genres, including literature, music, art, and architecture. Reacting against the **sober style of Neoclassicism** preferred by most countries' academies, the far reaching international movement valued originality, inspiration, and imagination, thus promoting a variety of styles within the movement. Additionally, in an effort to stem the tide of increasing industrialization, many of the Romanticists emphasized the individual's connection to nature and an idealized past



The Nightmare (1781) Henry Fuseli

Romanticism

Key Ideas & Accomplishments



- In part spurred by **the idealism of the French Revolution**, Romanticism embraced the struggles for **freedom and equality and the promotion of justice**. Painters began using current events and atrocities to shed light on injustices in dramatic compositions that rivaled the more staid Neoclassical history paintings accepted by national academies.
- **Romanticism embraced individuality and subjectivity** to counteract the excessive insistence on logical thought. Artists began exploring various emotional and psychological states as well as moods. The preoccupation with the hero and the genius translated to new views of the artist as a brilliant creator who was unburdened by academic dictate and tastes. As the French poet **Charles Baudelaire** described it, "***Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subject nor in exact truth, but in a way of feeling.***"
- In many countries, Romantic painters turned their attention to nature and ***plein air*** painting, or painting out of doors. Works based on close observation of the landscape as well as the sky and atmosphere elevated landscape painting to a new, more respectful level. While some artists emphasized humans at one with and a part of nature, others portrayed nature's power and unpredictability, evoking a feeling of the sublime - awe mixed with terror - in the viewer.
- Romanticism was closely bound up with **the emergence of newly found nationalism that swept many countries after the American Revolution**. Emphasizing local folklore, traditions, and landscapes, Romantics provided the visual imagery that further spurred national identity and pride. Romantic painters combined the ideal with the particular, imbuing their paintings with a call to spiritual renewal that would usher in an age of freedom and liberties not yet seen.

The Slave Ship (1840)

J.M.W. Turner

This painting depicts a seascape, the ocean a swirl of chaotic waves beneath a stormy sky that is lit up with red and yellow as if on fire. On the horizon, a ship with its sails unfurled appears to be headed directly into rough dark waters. Shackled human forms, some partially glimpsed, are scattered in the foreground like debris, as sharks and other fish circle and close in upon the flailing swimmers.

Turner painted this image after reading Thomas Clarkson's *The History and Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1808) that recounted how the captain of the slave ship Zong ordered 133 slaves thrown overboard so that he could collect the insurance payments on his human cargo. An ardent abolitionist, Turner hoped that the work would inspire Prince Albert to do more to combat slavery around the globe.

Turner captured the philosopher Edmond Burke's concept of the "sublime," the feeling one senses in the presence of nature's overwhelming grandeur and power. In this image, the human figures, and even the ship on the horizon, are minuscule, and the emphasis on the water and the sky conveys a sense of humanity overwhelmed. The blood red color of the sky and the black caps of the waves convey the emotional intensity of the natural world, and the vertical ray of light from the sun that divides the ocean in half seems almost an apocalyptic vision, the presence of a divine witness. Turner's quick brush strokes create a sense of frenzy and chaos, overpowering the barely visible struggling human forms. His work influenced Romanticism's depiction of nature as a dramatic and tumultuous struggle.



The Third of May (1808) Francisco Goya

This groundbreaking work depicts the public execution of several Spaniards by Napoleonic troops. On the left, lit up against a hill, a man in a white shirt holds out his arms as he kneels and faces the firing squad. Several men cluster around him with facial expressions and body language expressing a tumult of emotion. A number of the dead lie on the ground beside them and, to their right, a group of people, all with their faces in their hands, knowing they will be next. On the right, the firing squad aims their rifles, forming a single faceless mass. A large square lantern stands between the two groups, dividing the scene between shadowy executioners and victims.

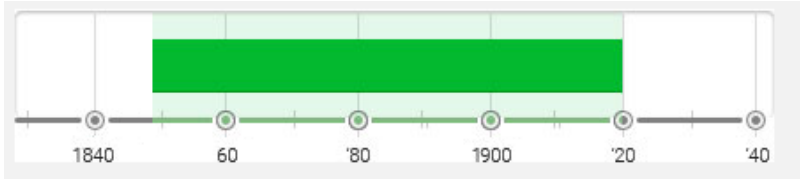
The painting draws upon the traditional religious motifs, as the man in the white shirt resembles a Christ-like figure, his arms extended in the shape of the cross, and a close-up of his hands reveals a mark in his right palm like the stigmata. Yet, the painting is revolutionary in its unheroic treatment, the flatness of its perspective, and its matte almost granular pigments. Additionally, its depiction of a contemporary event experienced by ordinary individuals bucked academic norms that favored timeless Neoclassical vignettes. Goya intended to both witness and commemorate Spanish resistance to Napoleon's army during the Peninsular War of 1808-1814, a war marked by extreme brutality. The painting's dark horizon and sky reflect the early morning hours in which the executions took place, but also convey a feeling of overwhelming darkness.

The art historian Kenneth Clark described it as, "the first great picture which can be called **revolutionary** in every sense of the word, in **style, in subject, and in intention**. Goya's revolutionary painting would be instrumental in the rise of **Realism's** frank depictions of everyday life, of **Picasso's** declarations against the horrors of war, and the **Surrealists'** exploration of dream-like subject matter.



The Pre-Raphaelites

Started: 1848 Ended: 1890



The Pre-Raphaelites opposed the dominance of the British Royal Academy, which championed a narrow range of idealized or moral subjects and conventional definitions of beauty drawn from the early Italian **Renaissance** and **Classical art**. In contrast, the Pre-Raphaelites took inspiration from an earlier (pre-Raphaelite - before the artist Raphael) period, that is, the centuries preceding the **High Renaissance**.

They believed painters before the Renaissance provided a model for depicting nature and the human body realistically, rather than idealistically, and that collective guilds of medieval craftspeople offered an alternative vision of artistic community to mid-19th-century academic approaches.



Ophelia (181-2) John Everett Millais

The Pre-Raphaelites

Key Ideas & Accomplishments



- The Pre-Raphaelites rejected not only the British Royal Academy's preference for Victorian subjects and styles, but also its teaching methods. They believed that rote learning had replaced truth and experience. Theirs was one of the first major challenges to "official" art, and their early "institutional critique" is a crucial piece of the history of modern art in Britain.
- Above all, Pre-Raphaelitism espoused **Naturalism: the detailed study of nature** by the artist and fidelity to its appearance, even when this risked showing ugliness. It also named a preference for natural forms as the basis for patterns and decoration that offered an antidote to the industrial designs of the machine age.
- As part of their reaction to the negative impact of industrialization, Pre-Raphaelites turned to the medieval period as a stylistic model and as an ideal for the synthesis of art and life in the applied arts. Their revival of medieval styles, stories, and methods of production greatly influenced the development of the **Arts and Crafts** and **Art Nouveau** design movements.

Ophelia(1851-2)

John Everett Millais

Ophelia is arguably both John Everett Millais' masterpiece and the most iconic work of the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**. Painted when he was only 22 years old, Millais worked for months in the open air in the countryside, composing the background with painstaking detail. In addition to flowers and boughs, Millais included reeds, the muddy bank, and a water rat.

Elizabeth Siddall, a cutlery-maker's daughter whose unusual looks were highly regarded by Pre-Raphaelite artists, modeled the figure of **Ophelia, whose death is described in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*** by Queen Gertrude. Ophelia, having gone mad from Hamlet's rejection, sinks slowly into the river while singing. Millais posed his model in a bathtub filled with water to accurately capture the effect of water on her clothes and hair. Famously, the model nearly died after the candles warming the water went out and she caught pneumonia. **Well beyond earlier Victorian genre paintings, in *Ophelia* Millais strived to recreate a moment from a fictional work as it really happened, in a way that is highly realistic, while being simultaneously romantic and dramatic.**



***Our English Coasts (Strayed Sheep)* (1852)**

William Holman Hunt

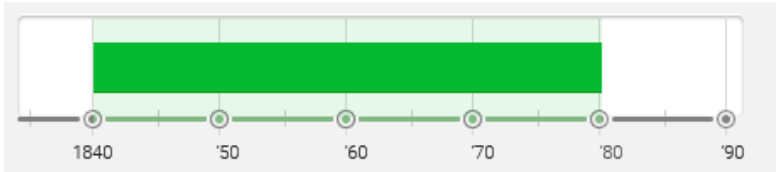
Landscape painting was an important expression of the Pre-Raphaelite commitment to nature and Hunt painted much of this scene outside, on the cliffs near Hastings. This pastoral painting was celebrated for its Naturalism: Hunt's special attention to the specific changing effects of light across a wide variety of surfaces (field, flower, wool, water, sky), all of which would have appeared extremely modern to the Royal Academy where it was first exhibited in 1853. In a bold departure from idealized scenes of the English countryside, the asymmetrical composition traps the lost sheep in a disorderly tangle of coastal vegetation.

The picture also carried a deep political significance. The cliffs of southern England face toward France and hint at the possibility of foreign invasion. For a populace nervous about Napoleon III's 1851 *coup d'etat*, Hunt's untended sheep, perched precariously on the cliff's edge, **may have represented the vulnerability of the British nation** and her coasts. Hunt further **emphasizes this political reading of the landscape with the sheep's expressions; their appealing individuality** draws the viewer's concern to their fate and the future of England.



Realism

Started: 1840s Ended: 1880s



Though never a coherent group, **Realism** is recognized as the first modern movement in art, which rejected traditional forms of art, literature, and social organization as outmoded in the wake of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution.

Beginning in France in the 1840s, Realism revolutionized painting, expanding conceptions of what constituted art.

Working in a chaotic era marked by revolution and widespread social change, Realist painters replaced the idealistic images and literary conceits of traditional art with real-life events, giving the margins of society similar weight to grand history paintings and allegories. Their choice to bring everyday life into their canvases was an early manifestation of the [avant-garde](#) desire to merge art and life, and their rejection of pictorial techniques, like perspective, prefigured the many 20th-century definitions and redefinitions of modernism.



Realism

Key Ideas & Accomplishments



Luncheon on the Grass (1862/63) Edouard Manet)

- **Realism is broadly considered the beginning of modern art.** Literally, this is **due to its conviction that everyday life and the modern world were suitable subjects for art.** Philosophically, **Realism embraced the progressive aims of modernism,** seeking new truths through the reexamination and overturning of traditional systems of values and beliefs.
- Realism concerned itself with how life was structured socially, economically, politically, and culturally in the mid-19th century. This led to unflinching, sometimes "ugly" portrayals of life's unpleasant moments and the use of dark, earthy palettes that confronted high art's ultimate ideals of beauty.
- Realism was the first explicitly anti-institutional, nonconformist art movement. Realist painters took aim at the social mores and values of the bourgeoisie and monarchy upon who patronized the art market. Though they continued submitting works to the Salons of the official Academy of Art, they were not above mounting independent exhibitions to defiantly show their work.
- Following **the explosion of newspaper printing and mass media** in the wake of the **Industrial Revolution**, Realism brought in a new conception of the artist as self-publicist. **Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet,** and others purposefully courted controversy and used the media to enhance their celebrity in a manner that continues among artists to this day.

The Gleaners (1857)

Jean-Francois Millet

Part of a "trilogy" of paintings celebrating France's rural denizens, *The Gleaners* serves as something of a feminine pendant to Courbet's *The Stone Breakers* (1849-50).

Gleaning was perhaps the lowest form of work for women in French society, a practice wherein female peasants were allowed to comb the fields after the harvest, "gleaning" bits of grain that were left behind to take home for food; hours of hunched-over labor would often be rewarded with a small amount of meal. Millet certainly meant for the painting to call attention to the plight of the rural poor.

Nevertheless, Millet's women are tied visually to the land, their bowed bodies glance the horizon, suggesting a quiet dignity and sense of belonging. Despite the calm warmth with which his subject is portrayed, Millet received intense criticism for *The Gleaners* from a wealthy art public to whom the painting spoke to contemporary concerns about the possibility of violent Socialist revolution by an exploited proletariat.



***Le déjeuner sur l'herbe (Luncheon on the Grass)*
(1862-63)
Édouard Manet**

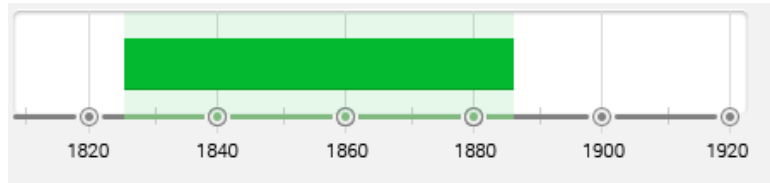
After Courbet's *succès de scandale* at the Salon of 1850-51, Manet was the next major Realist artist to actively court controversy. *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, exhibited at the Salon des Refusés of 1863, did so with its rendering of a pair of well-dressed Parisian dandies entertaining two women - one naked, one semi-naked - at an outdoor picnic. Indeed, *Le déjeuner* was connected with prostitution in the Bois de Boulogne, a park where male middle-class city dwellers went with hired escorts.

Beyond the social scandal created by this lascivious scene of mixed company, Manet's combination of a figural group borrowed from several Old Master works with the flattened snapshot aesthetic of Realism infuriated many art critics. **Manet called attention to the false refinement of wealthy** Parisian society, with nudes available in its museums and naked call girls in its forests, while creating a work that modernized classic painting. His **distortion of perspective, a refusal to follow the Renaissance model** of the canvas as a "window onto the world," laid the groundwork for the formal experimentation of Impressionism and later movements.



Naturalism

Started: 1820s Ended: 1880s



"Naturalism" is a term with a vexed and complex history in art criticism. It has been used since the 17th century to refer to any artwork which attempts to render the reality of its subject-matter without concern for the constraints of convention, or for notions of the 'beautiful'. But since the late 19th century, it has also been used to refer to a movement within painting - initially seen to be based in France, but whose origins and legacies were latterly found to extend all over the world - which attempted to depict the human subject in its formative relationships with natural habitats and social *milieus*, with a visual accuracy approaching that of photography. Informed by elements of **Romanticism** and **Realism**, Naturalism was at one time the dominant trend in Western art, only retrospectively eclipsed by the attention paid to its contemporary movement, **Impressionism**.



The Hay Wain (1821) John Constable

Naturalism

Key Ideas & Accomplishments



Hay Making (1877) Jules Bastien-Lepage

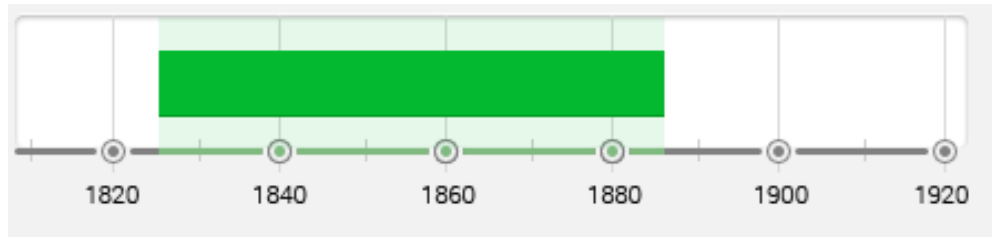
- Naturalism partly inherited the legacy of Realism, a school of French painting which rose to prominence in the mid-19th century, whose exponents, such as **Gustave Courbet**, focused on scenes of everyday working life. **Naturalism is often equated with Realism**, but it was only defined some decades later - experiencing its heyday during the 1870-80s - and was more concerned than the older movement with a hyperreal visual compositional precision; and with integrating the human figure into an enveloping landscape or scenario. In this sense, the unique achievement of **Naturalism** was perhaps to fuse the **ideology of Realism** with the **techniques and effects of Romantic landscape painting**.

- Naturalism was one of the first movements in modern art to give expression to nationalist and regionalist sentiments. From the Norwich School of painters based in rural east England to the **Peredvizhniki** group whose touring exhibitions took them all over Russia, Naturalist artists tethered their aesthetics to particular locations: often rurally located, and always ones with which the artists were deeply and intimately familiar. This was one of the ways in which Naturalist painters helped to democratize art, making its subjects comprehensible and familiar to a larger viewership.

- The development of Naturalism**, like the evolution of modern art in general, was profoundly impacted by the development of **photography**. But whereas the general effect of this new technology was to force painters into other areas of creativity than the lifelike representation which the camera could achieve in minutes, Naturalist painters took on the new medium on its own terms, creating works of hypnotically lifelike effect which were unparalleled in art history.

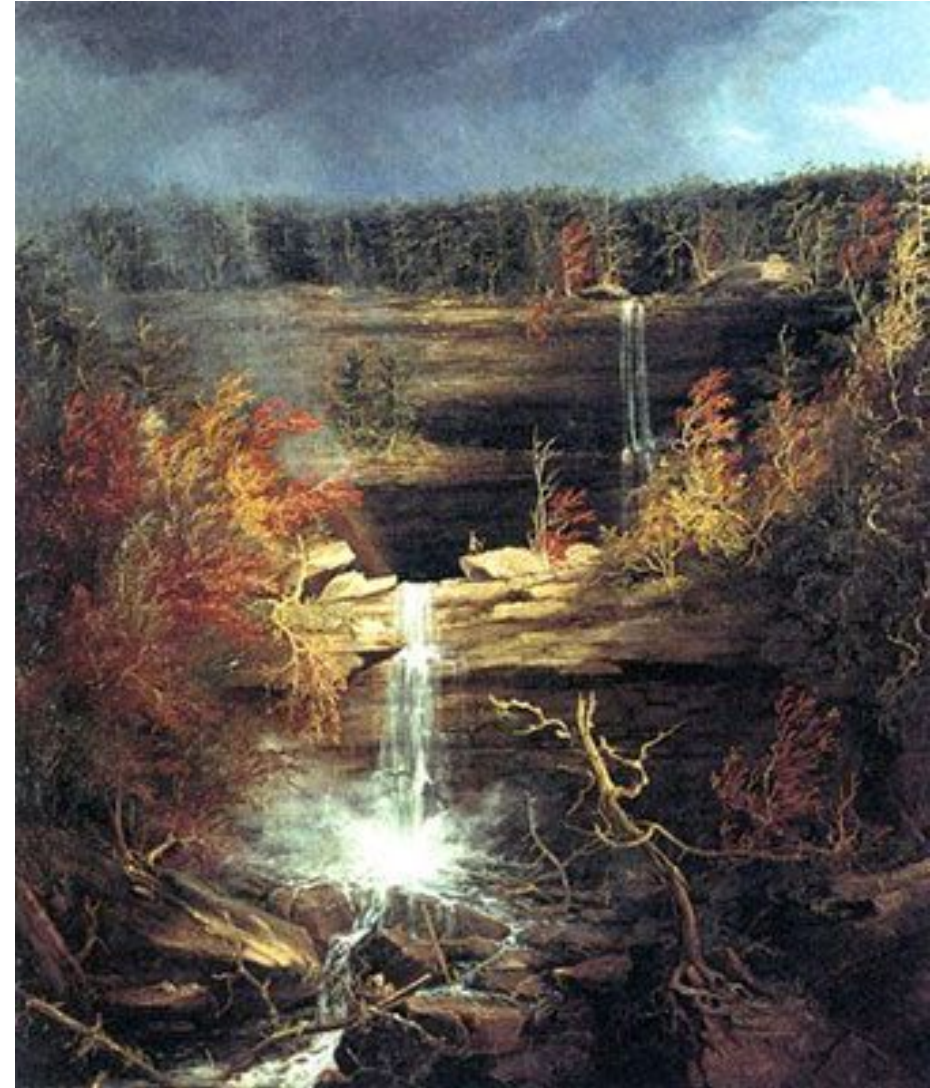
The Hudson River School

Started: 1826 Ended: 1870



Searching for a national style of art, the American landscape itself - large and untamed - was the primary focus of the Hudson River School painters. American expansion and Manifest Destiny imbued the untamed countryside with the symbolism of the country's promised prosperity and limitless resources.

The terrain provided an alternative to European culture and history; it became a picturesque, patriotic, and inspirational theme. This loosely connected group of painters explored the nation, returning to their New York studios to paint large-scale works that thrilled audiences and celebrated the awesome power of nature and the progress of man.



The Hudson River School

Key Ideas & Accomplishments



- Long considered a profitable, but lowly, subject for serious artists (since it involved merely copying what was seen), landscape painting received new attention in the mid-19th century. Like **Romantic** painters in Britain and Germany, Hudson River School artists embraced the landscape as a meaningful subject, precisely as industrialization began to change terrains and reshape man's connection to his environment. The Americans both championed these forces of modernization and lamented what was lost in the name of "progress."
- Generations of American painters had returned to Europe for training and adopted the styles and subjects of Old World artists. The Hudson River School painters desired a more native tradition, painting recognizably American scenes. Personally and professionally, they formed networks with writers and philosophers to create a distinct American culture.
- Artists like **Thomas Cole** invested the landscape with symbolism, suggesting that these natural scenes could be transformed into meaningful allegories, as well as immersive and transformative experiences for the viewer. With their careful attention to realism and precise illusionism, as well as complex messaging and awe-inspiring vistas, the resulting canvases could be appreciated on both intellectual and emotional levels.
- The second generation of Hudson River School painters left the New York area to explore more far-flung regions of America. Their painting documented westward expansion and reinforced the concept of Manifest Destiny. During the Civil War, their majestic images of an unspoiled West provided hope for post-war reconciliation and the promise of expanses of wild country, full of promise and unscarred by battle.

Luminism

Just before the outbreak of the Civil War, a handful of landscape painters, instead of painting monumental, dramatic scenes of American wilderness, began painting on a smaller, quieter scale.

The Luminist style had much in common with the **Transcendentalist writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau**, which advocated that one immerse oneself in nature in order to know oneself and the divine.

While the artists did not cohere as a unified movement, they did share stylistic tendencies. Marked by a certain rendering of light as a uniform glow that infuses the entire scene, Luminist paintings reveal no brushstrokes of the artist, thus maintaining a silent, almost impersonal, surface.

The particularly American style has continued to influence contemporary landscape painting.



Luminism

Key Ideas & Accomplishments

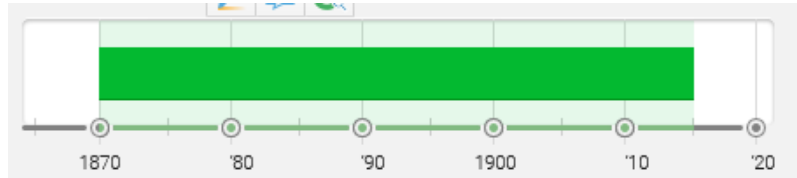


Cattleya Orchid and Three Hummingbirds (1871) Martin Johnson Heade

- While partly influenced by **Romanticism**, Luminist paintings do not tend to depict nature as grand and imposing, nor do they strive to convey a sense of spectacular, awe-inspiring sublimity. Instead, Luminist paintings with their smaller size evoke a quiet spirituality based on closely observed natural phenomena, especially the quality of light.
- Luminist light is particularly distinct. It is often cool and hard, almost palpable. The painters use slight tonal modulations, and not brushstrokes, to create the effect of radiant light.
- Luminist compositions are very ordered, emphasizing the horizontal expanse with a deep spatial recession. The surfaces are precisely rendered, leaving no hint of brushstrokes. This clarity of the picture plane facilitates the viewer's communion with the natural scene presented and lends the scene a certain silence.

Tonalism

Started: 1870 Ended: 1915



Working within a carefully chosen palette of closely related colors, the Tonalists aspired to emulate musicality and inspire contemplation.

By arranging color and forms, they believed that landscapes could evoke emotion and suggest deep, cosmic harmonies. Their gentle color schemes and softly brushed contours quickly became popular, influencing musicians and poets.

Unlike their contemporaries, such as the **Luminists** and the **Impressionists**, the Tonalists favored cool palettes and often chose nocturnal or modest scenes of contemplative quiet. The simplicity and attention to composition found in **Tonalism contributed to the abstractions that would develop in 20th-century American modernism.**



Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1 (1871) James Whistler

Tonalism

Key Ideas & Accomplishments

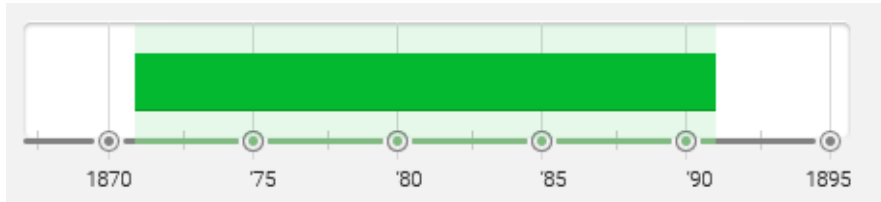


Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket (1875) James Whistler

- Inspired by strategies of musical composition, the **Tonalists developed theories of color and line that they believed heightened the symbolic potential of landscape painting.** Building on the example of the **Hudson River School** artists, they rearranged elements of the observed world in order **to better convey musical and visual harmonies.**
- Tonalist painters emphasized both the **formal components** of their work - **color, line, and shape** - and the **symbolic** meaning conveyed to the viewer. Bypassing narrative as a means of communicating spirituality, their example was instrumental to the development of early-20th-century abstraction.
- **The aesthetics of Tonalist painting appealed to Pictorialist photographers who wanted to establish photography as an artistic medium.** By manipulating their exposures and printing, these photographers were able to simulate the atmospheric effects and tonal relationships that defined the style. This emphasis on process would influence generations of photographers, even after this style faded from popularity.

Impressionism

Started: 1862 Ended: 1892



Impressionism is perhaps the most important movement in the whole of modern painting. At some point in the 1860s, a group of young artists decided to paint, very simply, what they saw, thought, and felt. They weren't interested in painting history, mythology, or the lives of great men, and they didn't seek perfection in visual appearances. Instead, as their name suggests, the Impressionists tried to get down on canvas an "impression" of how a landscape, thing, or person appeared to them at a certain moment in time.

This often meant using much lighter and looser brushwork than painters had up until that point, and painting out of doors, [en plein air](#). The Impressionists also rejected official exhibitions and painting competitions set up by the French government, instead organizing their own group exhibitions, which the public were initially very hostile to. All of these moves predicted the emergence of [modern art](#), and the whole associated philosophy of the avant-garde.



Impressionism

Key Ideas & Accomplishments



- The Impressionists used looser brushwork and lighter colors than previous artists. They abandoned traditional three-dimensional perspective and rejected the clarity of form that had previously served to distinguish the more important elements of a picture from the lesser ones. For this reason, many critics faulted Impressionist paintings for their unfinished appearance and seemingly amateurish quality.

- Picking up on the ideas of **Gustave Courbet**, the Impressionists aimed to be **painters of *the real***: they aimed to extend the possible subjects for paintings. Getting away from depictions of idealized forms and perfect symmetry, they concentrated on the world as they saw it, which was imperfect in a myriad of ways.

- Scientific thought in the Impressionist era was beginning to recognize that what the eye perceived and what the brain understood were two different things. The Impressionists sought to capture the former - the optical effects of light - to convey the fleeting nature of the present moment, including ambient features such as changes in weather, on their canvases. Their art did not necessarily rely on realistic depictions.

- Impressionism records the effects of the massive mid-19th-century renovation of Paris, led by civic planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann, which included the city's newly constructed railway stations; wide, tree-lined boulevards that replaced the formerly narrow, crowded streets; and large, deluxe apartment buildings. The works that focused on scenes of public leisure - especially scenes of cafés and cabarets - often conveyed the new sense of alienation experienced by the inhabitants of the first modern metropolis.

Impression, Sunrise (1872)

Claude Monet

Monet's *Impressionism, Sunrise* is sometimes cited as the work that gave birth to the Impressionist movement, though by the time it was painted, Monet was in fact one of a number of artists already working in the new style.

What is striking about *Impression, Sunrise* is the continuity of the color palette between sea, land and sky. All are bathed in the gentle blues, oranges, and greens of sunrise. The subject of the painting is not the city it depicts nor the anonymous boatmen setting out across the water, but the enveloping warmth and color of sunlight itself, or rather the "impression" it makes on the senses at a certain moment in time. This painting of light and the time-specific effects of light was the hallmark of the new style.

Impression, Sunrise was one of a number of sketches of the same scene that Monet created in 1872. This serial approach to subject-matter was typical for the painter. In other cases, Monet would create large cycles of work depicting the same scene at different times of day, or during different seasons, emphasizing the way in which light and atmosphere shifted in time-specific ways.

The most famous examples of this effect are in the 25 paintings that make up the series *Les Meules à Giverny* (1890-91), known in English as "The Haystacks".



The Boulevard Montmartre, Afternoon (1897) Camille Pissarro

Pissarro's *Boulevard Montmartre, Afternoon* applies the techniques of his earlier *plein-air landscapes* to the modern city. The work uses broad strokes of paint, carefully applied to the canvas, to represent the fleeting nature of modern life, and the visual impression made by the metropolis. It is one of a series of paintings, painted in Pissarro's room at the Hotel de Russie overlooking the street, that depict the same scene during different points of the day and different seasons of the year. The series emphasizes the changing effects of natural light upon the urban setting, resulting in a reflection on the passage of time and the transformation of the city.

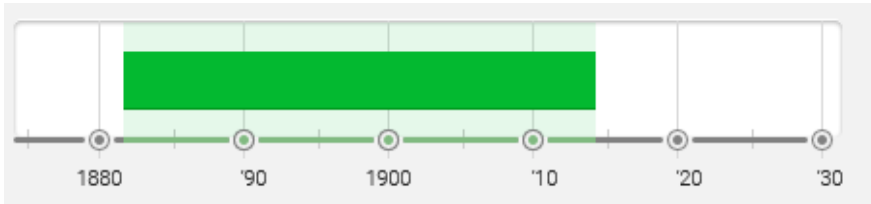
Pissarro was one of the oldest of the Impressionist group, referred to by **Cézanne** as "**the first Impressionist.**" Of mixed Jewish-French-Portuguese heritage, he was born into a merchant family in 1830 on the tiny Caribbean island of St. Thomas. Pissarro's early paintings depict the sun-drenched beaches and palm trees of his island home, but he attended boarding school in Paris as a child, and moved there permanently in 1855.

He became respected amongst the other Impressionist painters both for his artistic skill and for his wisdom, his works characterized by a bright palette, depiction of quiet landscapes, and representation of natural light. Pissarro served as a mentor to many of his younger friends, **including Paul Cézanne**, and was among the most radical of the Impressionist painters.



Post-Impressionism

Started: Early 1880s **Ended:** 1914



Post-Impressionism encompasses a wide range of distinct artistic styles that all share the common motivation of responding to the **opticality** of the **Impressionist** movement. The stylistic variations assembled under the general banner of Post-Impressionism range from the scientifically oriented **Neo-Impressionism** of **Georges Seurat** to the lush **Symbolism** of **Paul Gauguin**, but all concentrated on **the subjective vision of the artist**.

The movement ushered in an era during which painting transcended its traditional role as a window onto the world and instead became a window into the artist's mind and soul. The far-reaching aesthetic impact of the Post-Impressionists influenced groups that arose during the turn of the 20th century, like the **Expressionists**, as well as more contemporary movements, like the identity-related **Feminist Art**.



Vision After the Sermon (1888) Paul Gauguin

Post-Impressionism

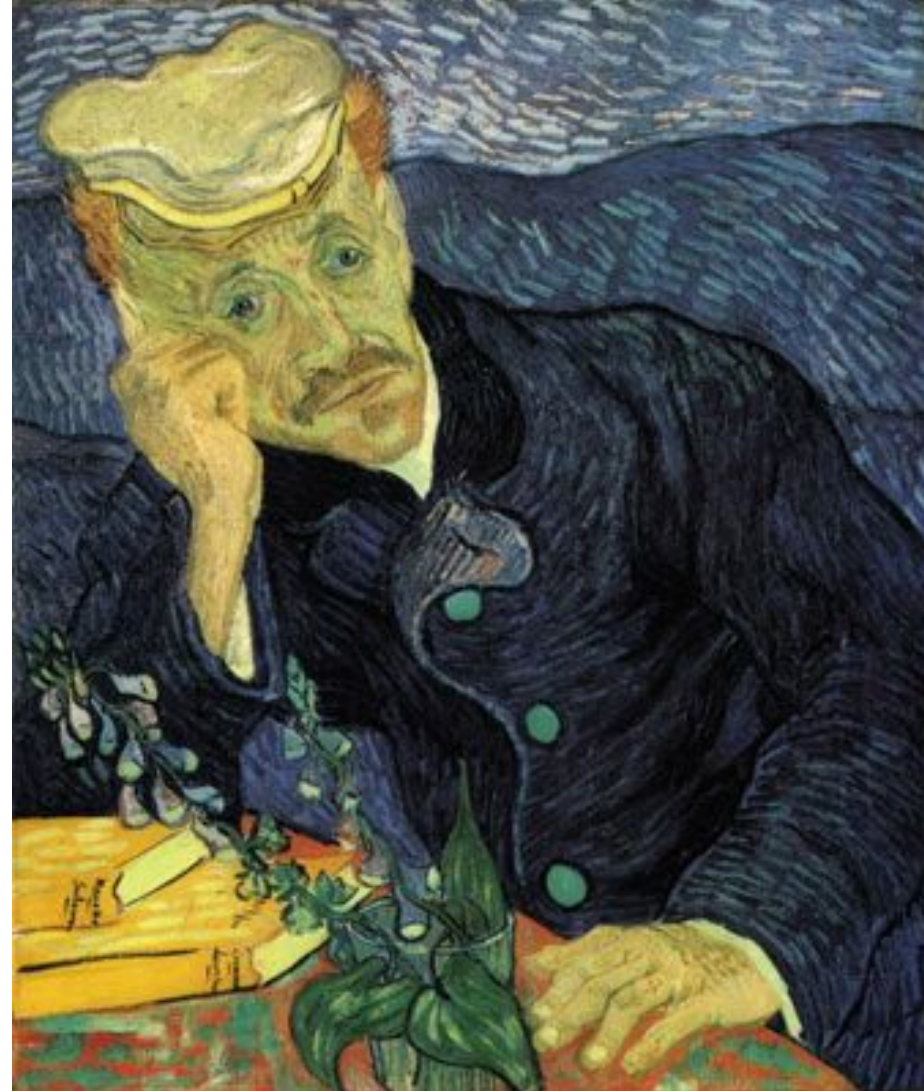
Key Ideas & Accomplishments



- **Symbolic and highly personal meanings** were particularly important to Post-Impressionists such as [Paul Gauguin](#) and [Vincent van Gogh](#). Rejecting interest in depicting the observed world, they instead looked to their memories and emotions in order to connect with the viewer on a deeper level.
- **Structure, order, and the optical effects of color** dominated the aesthetic vision of Post-Impressionists like [Paul Cézanne](#), [Georges Seurat](#), and [Paul Signac](#). Rather than merely represent their surroundings, they relied upon the interrelations of color and shape to describe the world around them.
- Despite the various individualized styles, **most Post-Impressionists focused on abstract form and pattern** in the application of paint to the surface of the canvas. Their early leanings toward abstraction paved the way for the radical modernist exploration of abstraction that took place in the early-20th century.
- Critics grouped the various styles within Post-Impressionism **into two general, opposing stylistic trends** - on one side was the structured, or **geometric style** that was the precursor to [Cubism](#), while on the other side was the **expressive, or non-geometric art** that led to [Abstract Expressionism](#).

Portrait of Doctor Gachet (1890) Vincent Van Gogh

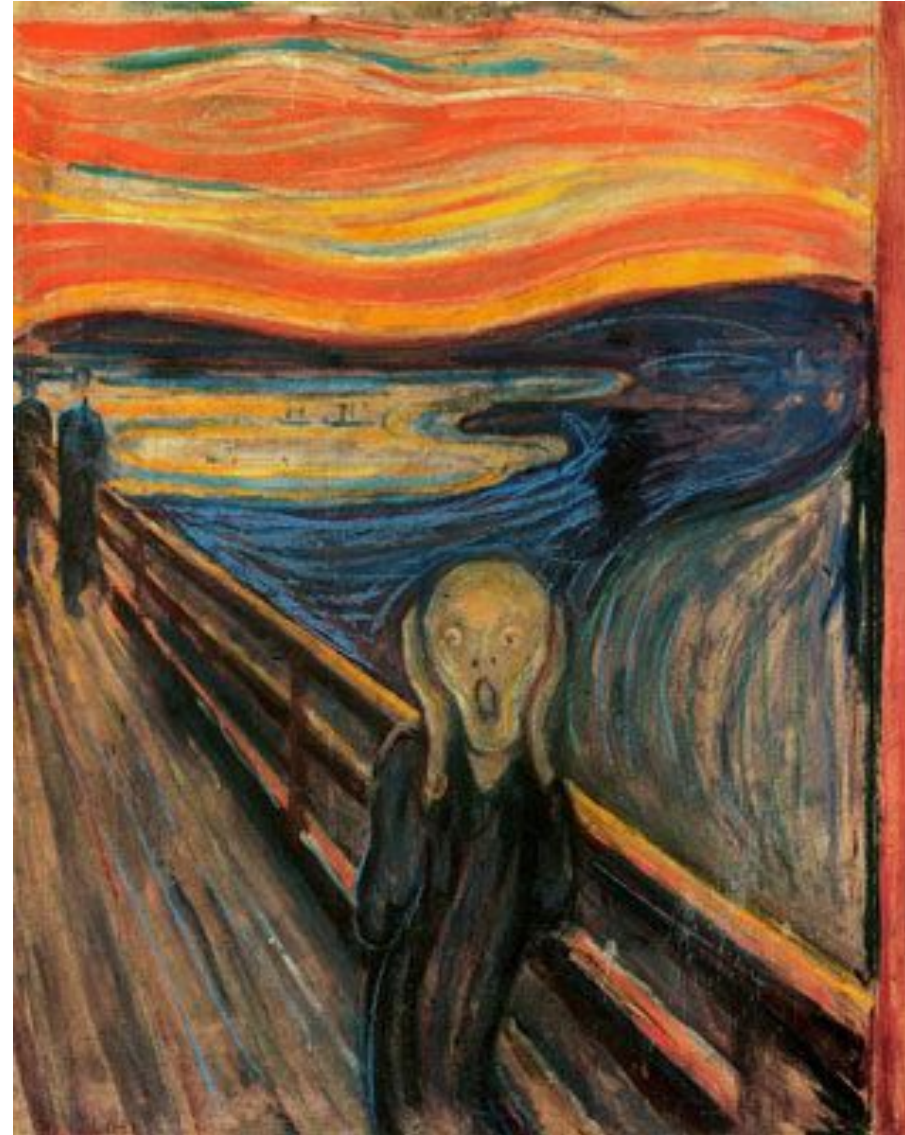
- Van Gogh was one of the **modern era's** most gifted and emotionally troubled artists. Although grossly underappreciated in his lifetime, Van Gogh was an impulsive and often spontaneous painter who embodied many of the ideals of the Post-Impressionist movement. In ***Portrait of Doctor Gachet***, Van Gogh strove to elicit a complex mixture of emotions within the viewer, rather than portray a naturalistic description of the sitter.
- Van Gogh created **painterly rhythms and swirling forms** within the arrangement of the figure in order to convey **elements of strength, intelligence, and melancholy**. Through such intimate and personalized interpretations, Van Gogh epitomized the **rejection of Impressionistic optical observation** in favor of an **emotionally laden representation** that appealed to the viewer's heart, rather than his mind.



The Scream (1893)

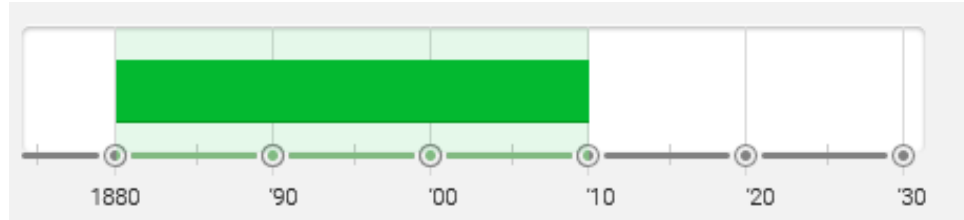
Edvard Munch

- Through its **saturated hues** and expressive content, Munch's most famous painting, *The Scream*, articulates the central tenets of his aesthetic mode. While many critics interpret the work as an expression of the modern condition, Munch himself called it a "study of the soul, that is to say the **study of my own self.**"
- Through the nightmarish image of the anguished individual and the abstract rendering of form, the artist created this highly provocative and personal painting. **Unlike the Impressionists' idyllic images of rural scenes**, Munch poses **an alternate view of man's relationship with nature.** Here, the protagonist's emotions are reflected throughout the surrounding scenery, which create a symbolic plane for the expression of internal being.



Symbolism

Started: 1880 Ended: 1910



As opposed to **Impressionism**, in which the emphasis was on the reality of the created paint surface itself, Symbolism was both an artistic and a literary movement that suggested **ideas through symbols and emphasized the meaning behind the forms, lines, shapes, and colors**. The works of some of its proponents exemplify the **ending of the tradition of representational art** coming from Classical times.

Symbolism can also be seen as being at the **forefront of modernism**, in that it developed **new and often abstract means to express psychological truth** and the idea that behind the physical world lay a spiritual reality.

Symbolists could take the ineffable, such as **dreams and visions**, and give it form.



The Eye Like a Strange Balloon Mounts Toward Infinity (1882) Odilon Redon

Symbolism

Key Ideas & Accomplishments

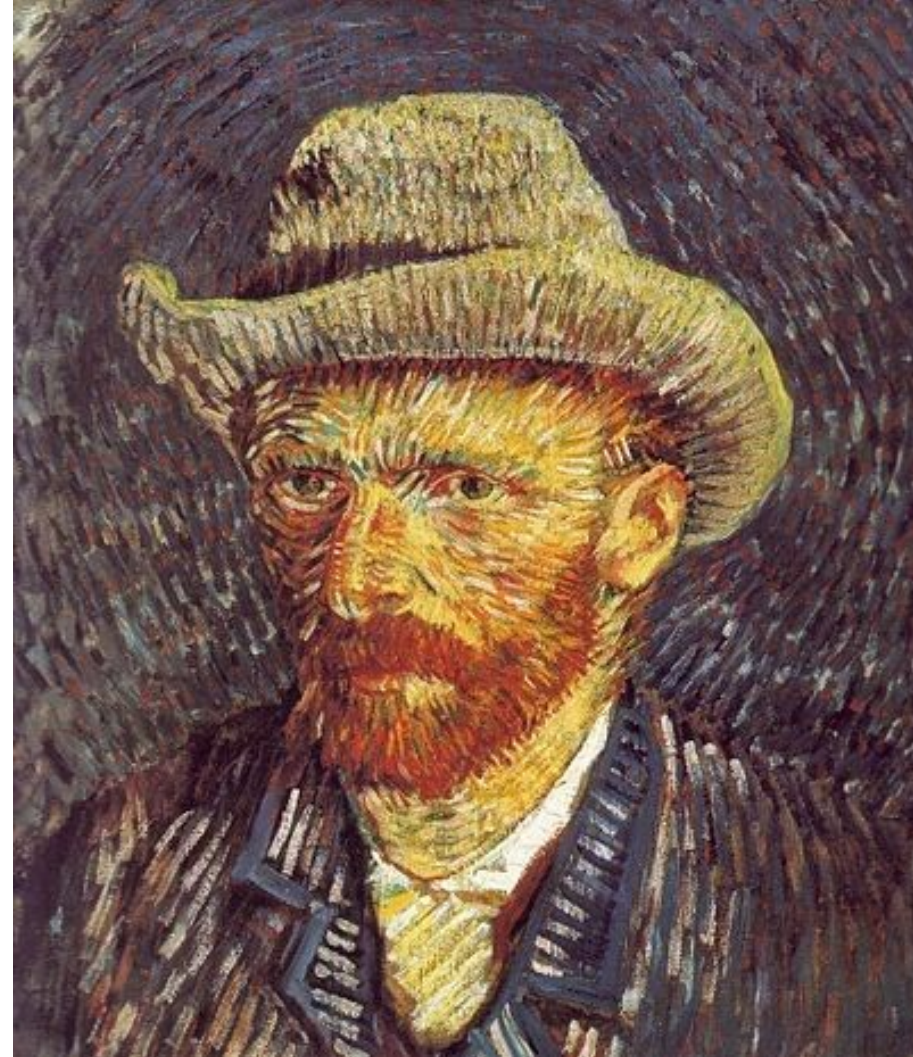


- What unites the various artists and styles associated with Symbolism is the emphasis on emotions, feelings, ideas, and subjectivity rather than realism. Their works are personal and express their own ideologies, particularly the belief in the artist's power to reveal truth.
- In terms of specific subject matter, the Symbolists combined religious mysticism, the perverse, the erotic, and the decadent. Symbolist subject matter is typically characterized by an interest in the occult, the morbid, the dream world, melancholy, evil, and death.
- Instead of the one-to-one, direct-relationship symbolism found in earlier forms of mainstream iconography, the Symbolist artists aimed more for nuance and suggestion in the personal, half-stated, and obscure references called for by their literary and musical counterparts.
- Symbolism provided a transition from [Romanticism](#) in the early part of the 19th century to modernism in the early part of the 20th century. In addition, the internationalism of Symbolism challenges the commonly held historical trajectory of modern art developed in France from [Impressionism](#) through [Cubism](#).

Neo-Impressionism

In the latter part of the 19th century, Neo-Impressionism foregrounded the science of optics and color to forge a new and methodical technique of painting that eschewed the spontaneity and romanticism that many Impressionists celebrated.

Relying on the viewer's capacity to optically blend the dots of color on the canvas, the Neo-Impressionists strove to create more luminous paintings that depicted modern life. With urban centers growing and technology advancing, the artists sought to capture people's changing relationship with the city and countryside. Many artists in the following years adopted the Neo-Impressionist technique of Pointillism, the application of tiny dots of pigment, which opened the door to further explorations of color and eventually abstract art.



Neo-Impressionism

Key Ideas & Accomplishments



- In order to more fully capture the luminosity seen in nature, the Neo-Impressionists turned to science in finding their painting technique of juxtaposing various colors and tones to create a shimmering, illuminated surface. By systematically placing contrasting colors, as well as black, white, and grey, next to each other on the canvas, the painters hoped to heighten the visual sensation of the image.
- Neo-Impressionists aimed to produce correspondences between emotional states and the forms, lines, and colors presented on the canvas that spoke to the modernity of urban life in the age of industrialization.
- Two terms closely associated with **Neo-Impressionism - Divisionism and Pointillism** - are practically interchangeable. Most broadly, **Divisionism** is a color theory that advocates placing small patches of pure pigment separately on the canvas in order that the viewer's eye will optically blend the colors. **Divisionism** became widely applied to any artist dividing or separating color while using small brushstrokes. Pointillism relied on the same theory of optical blending but specifically applied tiny separate "points," or dots, of pigment.
- **Most of the Neo-Impressionists held anarchist beliefs.** Their depictions of the working class and peasants called attention to the social struggles taking place as the rise of industrial capitalism gained speed, and their search for harmony in art paralleled their vision of a utopian society. The freedom they sought in scientific study furthered their abilities to overthrow bourgeois norms and conventions that hampered their individual autonomy.

Beginnings of Neo-Impressionism

Georges Seurat
and *Chromoluminarism*



Bathers at Asnières (1884) Georges Seurat