

IMPRESSIONISM

Impressionism came about as a reaction against ACADEMIC ART, which was the traditional style of painting in France in the 1800's. Academic art is the type of painting accepted by the academy. Academic Painting, involved very traditional methods of painting. Figures and objects were modelled very carefully in a gradation of tones. The tones slowly graduated from light to dark, there was no sudden change of tone. The Impressionists challenged this view, although every careful modelling in a range of carefully worked tones will give a very three-dimensional image, the impressionists felt this approach was not very true to nature. The academy taught artists to paint in false studio light, they even painted landscapes indoors!!! In natural sunlight there are often strong contrasts of light and shade. Also the reflections of light effects the colour of objects and the colour of shadows cast. All shadows are not the same colour, the shadow cast by an object depends on the colour of that object.

The Impressionist subject matter:

Unlike Academic Art, Impressionist paintings did not require knowledge of the Bible or of the Greek and Roman Classics. In the Academy the most prestigious form of painting was called History painting. Only the best artists could be history painters, the painted very large scale works of Historical events, Biblical stories and of stories from the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. Other painters in the Academy did paint still lifes, and landscapes but such subject matter not considered to be so important and was painted by lesser artists.

The Impressionists wanted to paint subjects that were entirely representative of modern life. They showed everyday life, people of their own time rather than characters from some myth or some event long gone!!!

They showed the fashionable pastimes of the time, the people relaxing in the parks, people dancing, eating or bathing in the Seine. They painted performers in the theatre and circus, and the racetracks where people gathered at weekends and holidays. Everything the Impressionists painted was a SYMBOL OF MODERNITY, it described their own time, the Paris of the 1870's and 1880's. To the Impressionists past events held no interest. Their art is not about the old historical subject matter, the Impressionist subject matter is VISUAL EXPERIENCE, they believed art is about how we see things not about telling a story. Light and Colour was the subject matter of art according to the Impressionists, and the best way to capture light and colour was to paint directly from your subject. The Impressionists painted exactly what they saw in front of them. They painted PLEIN AIR, which means painting directly from nature in the open air. Artists before the Impressionists did paint in the open air, but these studies they made were only sketches, when the Impressionists presented loosely and rapidly painted works directly from nature, as finished pieces the art critics, dealers and buyers were shocked.

Capturing the moment:

The Impressionists wanted to catch a particular instant, a brief moment. They were not concerned with what came before or after but the moment itself. Their rapid technique of painting, loose brushstrokes was used to describe a brief moment in time. They showed how nature is constantly changing. The Impressionists wanted to see everything afresh, as if for the first time. Their whole interest is on how we see nature, Monet said he wished he had been born blind and then might suddenly see!!!

(17) INFLUENCES ON IMPRESSIONISM-

Photography-

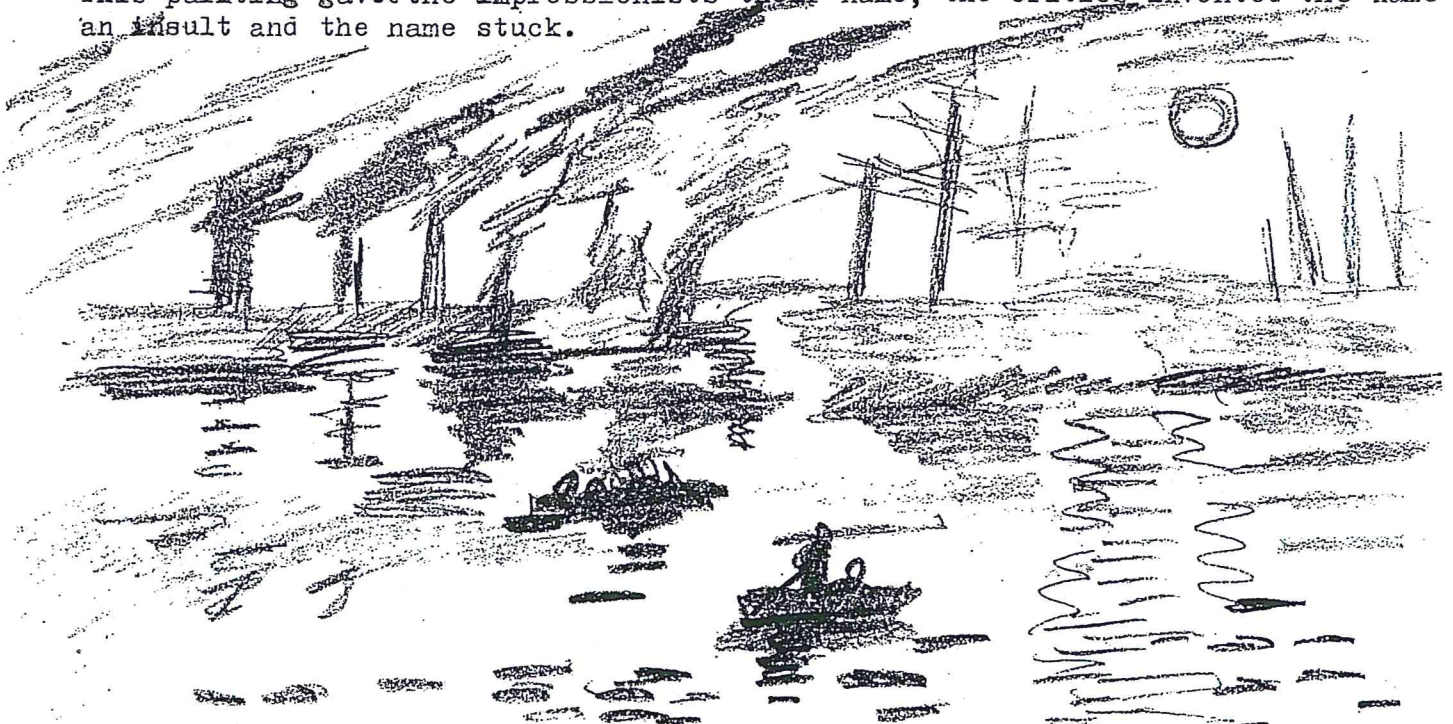
The portable camera, the snapshot were being developed during the 1870's and 1880's when Impressionism also came about. What the camera did was basically what painting had done before it....record eventsrecord a person's likeness.... now the camera could record the exact image of something or somebody - painting needed to have a different concern, such as an interest in colour, such as the Impressionists had. Many believe the development of photography is one of the major reasons for the development of modern art.

Japanese Colour Prints-

During this period, prints of Japanese woodcuts became very popular in Europe. Many of the Impressionists collected them. They admired them for their vibrant colour and simple unusual compositions. They were very different than the art that was accepted by the Salon in France. They had an influence on the Impressionists and on artists who came after them perhaps in particular the post-impressionist Vincent van Gogh.

Impressionist exhibition 1874-

In the spring of 1874 a group of artists whose work was not accepted by the Salon held an exhibition in Paris. The main exhibiting artists were MONET, DEGAS, RENOIR, PISARRO, SISLEY AND CEZANNE. The exhibition was a complete failure. Art critics and the public mocked the works exhibited. They felt the broad brushstrokes were a result of a lack of talent on the artists part, and felt it was ridiculous to present works so totally unfinished. The art viewing public was used to seeing highly finished worked up paintings in the salon. Also the subject matter appalled the people, some of the landscapes for example showed factories in the background this was hardly a fit subject for a work of art. It was perhaps Monet's IMPRESSION OF SUNRISE that caused the biggest shock. The painting is of Le Harve port in early morning. The critics mocked the technique.... it was like a sketch, there was no attempt made by the artist to hide the brushstrokes...was it really supposed to be finished?. This painting gave the Impressionists their name, the critics invented the name an insult and the name stuck.



IMPRESSIONISM → Industrial Revolution; Photography

Contributing factors: Industrial revolution - mass production through mechanisation - art of the craftsman died.

Less respect for a well made piece of artwork - decline in public taste.

- Rise in the working classes - saw artists as imposters who asked ridiculous prices for something which wasn't "real work". Artists began to see themselves as a race apart: dressed differently, wore long hair, etc. in an attempt to "shock the bourgeois".

PLEIN AIR painting

- Invention of paint in tubes: open air painting was now much easier. Artists began to paint outdoor scenes and explore the effect of bright sunlight as it fell on their subjects. People were so used to seeing the carefully drawn compositions from the studio with the blended tones and the subtle changes in light and shade, that they thought these outdoor scenes barbaric. Artists such as Manet flattened form and made harsh contrasts of light and shade because this is the way things appear in strong sunlight. However the artists and public saw this as ignorance and lack of skill on the part of the artist.
- Invention of the camera: artists were no longer needed to make records of families, state occasions, etc. The camera was a more accurate instrument than the eye of even the most accomplished portrait painter. Artists were now free to experiment with different techniques and new styles.

4 GENRES OF PAINTING (PRE-IMPRESSIONISM)

- HISTORY PAINTER (BEST KIND OF PAINTER)
- PORTRAITURE
- GENRE PAINTING (PAINTING OF SCENES FROM EVERYDAY LIFE)
- LANDSCAPE