

## Realism - Post-Impressionism c. 1830-1900

### Realism (1830-1900)

A large middle class is created as a result of the Revolutionary Wars. The middle-class people are not excessively wealthy but they do have leisure time and some money for a few luxuries.

The art that this new working-class cared about showed things they had experienced and related to first-hand. Realism celebrates the hard-working middle class who has the potential for upward mobility.



Gustave Courbet *The Stone Breakers* 1849

With Realism, regular people can now be the subjects of monumental artworks. In the past, large scale paintings would have been reserved for “important subjects” such as kings, queens, gods and goddesses.

This painting by Courbet is about 5 ½ feet by 8 ½ feet. The landscape and the subject matter are not idealized. This huge painting is dedicated to ordinary people doing ordinary work. The subjects have not been idealized, they are shown just as they are because putting in a hard day’s work is noble and heroic in and of itself.

Courbet would often obscure the faces of his subjects so that they were more relatable. This man is “every” man and the child is “the kid next door.” They have their lunch near them so we know they will be putting in a long day stooping over the rocks.

The boy seems young to be out doing this work all day and the lower part of the man’s face suggests that he is a little older than would be ideal for this type of work. The man has a torn vest and the boy has tattered clothes as well. They are doing back breaking work of breaking up and moving rocks so that they can improve the quality of their field for planting. There is pride in owning land and improving that land to pass down to the next generation. This was what the Revolutionaries fought to achieve.

## Impressionism (1874-1890s)

The Impressionists were interested in the visual effects of color and light. The Impressionists were fascinated with light and color theory.

For the first time, artists could buy commercially made paints instead of grinding their own pigments and mixing the pigments with oil. The new paints could be easily taken along when artists wanted to paint on location and the paint. The paint made in factories also had a very thick consistency.

So, Impressionist painters often worked outdoors and applied pure colors with rapid, short brush strokes. The thick application of their paint is known as *impasto*.



Monet *Boulevard des Capucines (The Grand Boulevard)* 1873-74

Impressionism is not known for its elaboration of details.

Impressionism was given its name by a critic who meant it as an insult. The art critics of 1874 were accustomed to seeing paintings with sharp, crisp outlines and tightly controlled brushwork. One critic called Monet's pedestrians "black tongue-lickings." Monet indicates people with dark blobs and trees with a blue haze.

The Impressionists were also inspired by advancements in photography.

Photography was becoming more popular and available to average person. It could record moving subjects and capture even the smallest details accurately.

Some painters were afraid that painting would become obsolete. They realized that they needed to compete with the new technology if they are going to remain relevant.

They stopped trying to paint every little detail, accurate and true to life. They decided to focus on the one thing photography couldn't offer - COLOR. (Color photography was not available until after 1904.)

Photography and commercially available paints created the characteristic look of Impressionism - thick textured paint application and bold, experimental use of color.

### **Post-Impressionism** (1885-1900)

The Post-Impressionists were also interested in the visual effects of color. Their use of color seems almost arbitrary as they continue to challenge the traditional use of color even more than their predecessors. Post-Impressionist artists built upon the Impressionists color theories with their own unique stylistic approaches.

The Post Impressionists are really not concerned with the formal properties of color. They are more interested in using color to create images with spiritual or mystical qualities.



Vincent Van Gogh *The Night Cafe* 1888

Vincent van Gogh is one of the most well-known Dutch Post-Impressionist artists.

Early in his career he used dark, dull colors. He began using brighter colors after he saw the work of the Impressionists. Although he incorporates the Impressionists' blotchy brushwork, his colors are less dispersed.

Van Gogh's use of color had an enormous impact on the 20<sup>th</sup> century Expressionists.