

Impressionism through the eyes of Edouard Manet and Claude Monet

Impressionism is a movement that had a major impact in France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is no exact date for the beginning of this movement. Louis Leroy, an art critic, gave this period its name when he went to an independent exhibition and came across Claude Monet's *Sunrise*. He said it looked impressionistic, meaning not finished. Impressionists liked to be called Independents. During this time, being called an Impressionist was not a good thing. Impressionistic works were not accepted in the world of art at this time, and art critics were referring to these painters as being lazy. Most of the public did not support Impressionism. People wondered why the artists were not finishing their brush strokes and they did not like the colors being used.

Among some of the Impressionist painters are Claude Monet, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Paul Cezanne, and Camille Pissarro. Characteristics of this movement include noticeable brush strokes that are not blended together, applying the paint in a thick, impasto style, and mixing the colors right on the canvas. Some Impressionists like to take an optical approach to painting and place the hues right next to each other on the canvas. This allows the eyes to do the mixing. Optical color mixing makes paintings look lighter than if the colors were mixed, and gives the paintings the effect of being in motion.

Impressionists were interested in painting the everyday world around them. They painted urban and country life. Painters of this period painted objects that were coming out of the Industrial Revolution. Some subjects of the time include railroad tracks and trains, the steam engine, power loom, and street lights.

Impressionist painters were influenced by Eugene Chevreul's book *On the Law of Simultaneous Contrast of Colors*, which was published in 1839. This book deals with the issues of color. Eugene found that colors change when placed next to other colors. Complementary colors, which are colors that are directly across from each other on the color wheel, are the most intense when placed side by side. For example, green next to red or orange next to blue. When placed next to each other, they cause a vibration in the eye, which makes the colors appear to be coming off of the canvas.

When painters were working outside, they had to work relatively fast to create their subjects before the lighting changed. Some painters, like Claude Monet, painted the same subjects a number of times. Painters would create the same works during different times of the day or during different weather conditions. When the development of ready-to-use paints came along, artists could spend more time outdoors. Paint was preserved for longer periods of time.

The impressionistic painting style was not favored by the French Academy of Fine Arts because it did not follow their rules. The academy is an art institution that has been training artists since 1648. This was a very conservative school that based their teachings on Greek and Roman traditions. The Academy also disliked the paintings done by the Barbizon School as well, which paved the way for Impressionism. This group got its name from the town of Barbizon. Painters from this group include Theodore Rousseau, Jules Dupre, Narciso Diaz de la Pena, and Charles Daubigny. They were part of the French Realist Movement, and painted landscapes and the outside world around them.

While the Academy painted historical, mythological, and Biblical scenes, the Impressionists were painting people going about their everyday lives. They did not have people posing for pictures. Impressionists were painting people in genuine positions and

had them sometimes in mid task. They painted what they saw, rather than what was idealized. They believed this was more truthful than painting art from the past.

The development of photography had a big impact on Impressionism. Cameras could capture special moments in life. The Impressionists were interested in the way the camera would cut off figures at the ends of pictures. They started to create their paintings in this manner. An example of this technique is shown in Edgar Degas' *Four Dancers*. He has three dancers on the left side of the painting, and has only an arm of the fourth dancer showing from the end of the painting. With the invention of the motion picture camera, painters like Degas studied gestures and movement of people. Monet was interested in blurring his moving subjects, which he learned through using slow shutter speed. By allowing the subjects to blur slightly, one can express the idea of movement. The art critics often did not associate his blurred figures with that of photography.

Another influence on Impressionism was Japonisme. In 1854, after the ports reopened for trade with the west, Japanese artifacts started coming into Europe. During the 1890's, the Japanese style of Ukiyo-e was becoming popular in France. Ukiyo-e is known for its woodblock prints. This style of Japanese art depicts settings from everyday life. Among some of the other printmaking techniques used by the Impressionists were lithography and etching. Lithography is based on the resistance of oil and water.

Drawings are done using ink or crayons on limestone. The stone is covered with water, and the areas that do not have crayon take on the water. Ink used on a roller, stays only to

the drawing and is resisted by the wet part of the limestone. A print can be made by putting a piece of paper against the inked drawing.

In etching, a metal plate is covered in ground, a waxy substances. The next step is to make a design by drawing through the ground to uncover parts of the plate. The plate

is then put into acid and the acid dissolves the uncovered design. One feature the Impressionists liked about the printmaking techniques was that they could make multiple copies.

There were two people from this movement who were inspired by each other. These two people are Edouard Manet and Claude Monet. Edouard Manet constructed a painting that the public found to be very inappropriate and scandalous, but Monet found to be inspiring. This painting is called *Dejeuner Sur l'Herbe*. Claude Monet was responsible for inspiring Edouard to paint en plein air- (to paint outdoors). Manet had more of a traditional way of painting before he met Monet. These two men have a lot in common and they have a lot of difference.

Among some of the things these two men had in common was the fact that both men were discouraged from going into the world of art. Edouard Manet was born into a well-to-do family, and his father, Auguste Manet, wanted his son to go into the family business. He wanted Edouard to become a judge. Claude Monet's father wanted him to take over the grocery store. His father was very unhappy when he learned he wanted to become an artist, and when Camille, Monet's wife, got pregnant he was forced to come home, leaving Camille to fend for herself.

Both men were also harshly criticized by the art critics and the public for the art that they produced. Edouard was deeply criticized for his painting *Dejeuner Sur l'Herbe*. This was considered to be a scandalous painting because a female nude is posing with two fully dressed men getting ready for lunch. Another painting done by Manet that caused an uproar was his painting of *Olympia*. This painting features a nude female stretched out on a bed with nothing but sandals on. During this time, it was frowned upon to paint female nudes unless they were goddesses.

Monet's work was criticized because it did not follow the guidelines of the art academy. His subjects included scenes from everyday life, and he would paint people in mid pose, like if one were to take a photograph. Some of his subjects include railroads and trains, water lilies, the bridge at Giverny, haystacks, and landscapes in general. His art had an unfinished quality to it, which was characteristic of the Impressionist movement, and the colors he used were mainly pastels.

Both men had served in wars. Monet served in Algeria, where he came to the realization that he wanted to become an artist. Manet served in the Franco-Prussian war as a gunner in the National Guard. While he was serving, he created works like *The Execution of Maximilian*.

These two men, while similar, had some differences as well. To start with, both men had different views about the Salon. Manet had a work that was selected by the Salon that is called *The Spanish Guitar Player*. He also held the belief that for one to establish themselves as an artist, they need the approval of the Salon. Monet's works were always rejected by the Salon, but he did not care if they approved of his art pieces.

Since both men were rejected by the Salon, they decided to put their works into the Salon des Refuses. This is where Manet entered his *Dejeuner Sur l'Herbe*, but it was under the name of *Le Bain*. The group of Impressionists also held eight Impressionist exhibitions, which Manet was the leader of, but he decided not to enter his works into any of the exhibitions because he was still focused on getting his pieces into the Salon.

Even though Manet was the leader of the Impressionist exhibitions, he is considered to be more than an impressionist. He is also considered to be a contemporary realist. Realism began in Europe during the eighteenth century, and is popular in the areas of art, literature, and drama. Realists try to recreate life as they see it, and rebel against classic and romantic art. Manet liked the realist movement because realists do

not

like classic art because that kind of art suggests that life is more calm and easy going than it really is, and romanticism suggests that life is more emotional than it really is.

In my opinion, I think that Edouard Manet's work is very bold. He works with a palette of mostly dark colors and uses a lot of light figures that stand out against dark backgrounds. For example, in *The Picnic*, he paints a nude woman that stands out against the dark scenery. In *The Balcony*, he paints two female figures in white dresses and a man standing behind them in a black suit with a dark background behind all of the figures. Manet also has a lot of paintings that caused a lot of talk during his day. He was not shy about painting female nude figures. Some of the female nude paintings he accomplished during his day besides *Dejeuner Sur l'Herbe* and *Olympia* are *Nude Combing her Hair*, *Blonde aux seins Nus*, and *Nu de Dos*.

I like Claude Monet's work because he paints the same subject several times in different lighting conditions and different weather conditions. Examples of works like this include the *Meule Series*, the *Popular Series*, and the *Rouen Cathedral Series*. Developing a series of paintings was a new idea back in Monet's day. He understood that by painting a series of the same object with different lighting effects, one can get the full value of that object. In the *Haystacks*, he did one painting during the winter months, one painting during the night hours, a couple of paintings during different hours of the day, and a few close up paintings. He did this with every series set of paintings he accomplished.

The painters of the Impressionists movement paved the way for the painters of the Post-Impressionist movement. Post-Impressionism was a term developed by Roger Fry when he was describing the Les Nabis, a group that was interested in graphic design.

Post-Impressionism has many branches that were part of this movement including Les

Nabis, Pointillism, and Fauvism. Some of the artists of this movement include Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Cezanne, Henri Matisse, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Paul Gauguin. These painters were influenced by the Impressionists and owe a lot to Edouard Manet and Claude Monet for developing the movement of Impressionism during a time when Impressionism was unpopular and not up to the standard of painting set by the French Academy.