

Chapter 29

THE RISE OF MODERNISM

Art of the Later 19TH Century

Summary:

This chapter introduces the student to the later nineteenth century and the Second Industrial Revolution. There was a continued emphasis on science and provable fact over the intangibles of faith. The colonization of the “primitive” worlds had been completed. This exposure to change and other cultures laid the foundation for modernism and its tenets in the visual arts.

I. Lecture Model

This chapter allows for a broader range of methodologies. Placing the art and the explanations in context will help in bring a level of understanding to the student. It would be useful to place the works in context and illustrate the impact of those works but also the perceptions that promoted this change in not only the visual world but also the intellectual world the context fit. A number of possible approaches can be used: sociological, political and some formal analysis to illustrate the continuing thread of development.

1) The art of the later nineteenth century is complex, with many styles and substyles. The artist, whether painter or writer, was aware of the inaccessibility of the ideal, of the tragedy of existence, because for the artist reality often meant a coexistence of opposites. As has been stated of the Romantics, *"Their vision of man was that he is simultaneously great and wretched."*

Artists expressed a restless yearning, aspiring for the infinite as well as inner subjective feelings. Because of this, artists chafed against rules or mechanical standards that said how art should be made. **The result for this was a wide stylistic diversity.** In the earlier nineteenth century he following ideas had been associated with **Romanticism: concern with heroism, love and death, extreme or painful emotion, religious ecstasy, ghosts and the occult, things weird or fantastic, dreams, intoxication, and wonder.** While **Classicism** stressed uniformity, the things that are common to all rules and intellectual control, Romanticism stressed the individual as opposed to the norm, uniqueness as opposed to uniformity, absolute freedom as opposed to controls on society.

The Romantics were dissatisfied with the here and now and dreamt of distant places or of the past. **Into this stream of romanticism, which permeated the nineteenth century, came realism, a movement that examined the unidealized events and people of the period.**

Artists such as Courbet, Millet and Daumier became the social conscience and documentarians of nineteenth century France.



29-02 GUSTAVE COURBET, Burial at Ornans, 1849.

Oil on canvas



Courbet presented the workers and the mundane (20-1 and 29-2); there was no glorification of the task of breaking stones or aggrandizement of a funeral.

Realists wanted to move away from the forms of the past toward a confrontation with their contemporary world, they were renouncing the sentimentality and nostalgia of the past. What mattered to these artists were not the heroic and the sublime, nor the good, the true, and the beautiful, but rather the concept of reality.

These artists were interested in coming to grips with the world, as it existed, the world that was expressing discontent with political and economic climates. *This world, which saw great wealth and great poverty, was the world of the later nineteenth century artists and they could no longer support traditional images and to this end they tried to cast off history and create anew.*

They did not want to paint heroes, but rather ordinary people (20-3).



29-03 JEAN-FRANÇOIS MILLET, The Gleaners, 1857. Oil on canvas, approx. 2'9" x 3'8". Louvre, Paris.

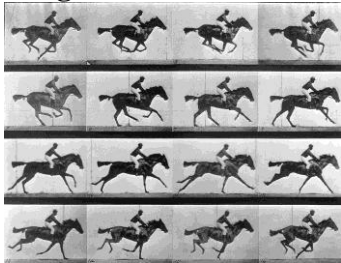
Courbet formulated what might be called the credo of the Realist about 1855. He made three major points that can assist in understanding what nineteenth-century artists meant by Realism:

1. Beauty is a quality in objects.
2. The labor of the painter is exact copying of his model.
3. The work of art is an imitation of its model.

Although there are many varieties of Realism in the later nineteenth century, and many philosophical questions can be raised about what is actually real, ***technically most Realist painting deals with replication of an optical field that is achieved by duplicating its color tones on a flat surface.*** Different means were explored to achieve that end, but the true representation of the artist's visual sensations was the goal.

Photography

The early nineteenth-century invention of the photograph, whether daguerreotype or calotype was a challenge to painters. **Photography allowed painters and photographers to interact with each other in their search to depict the visual world as it was as well as the world of imagination.**



29-13 EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE, Horse Galloping, 1878.

Collotype print. George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.

Muybridge (29-13) showed the scientific worth of the medium to prove motion studies or anatomy studies.



29-19 GERTRUDE KÄSEBIER, Blessed Art thou Among Women, 1899.

Platinum print on Japanese tissue

In contrast to Muybridge's precision use of the camera as a scientific instrument, Gertrude Käsebier created images of real people (29- 19) in real situations, yet imbuing them with a romance and emotion that demonstrated her understanding of how the camera can be used to create an evocative pictorial image. Artists in the United States also saw Realism as an intellectually more expressive style that they preferred;



29-12 THOMAS EAKINS, The Gross Clinic, 1875. Oil on canvas, 8'x 6'6".

Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia

Thomas Eakins used Realism to present uncompromising visual documents. He valued knowledge and deliberate presentations. In his *The Gross Clinic* (29-12), he presents a dispassionate image of the doctor conducting a teaching session in the surgery. The work is reminiscent of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (24-44),

yet Eakins has given it more meaning as a teaching tool. The characters (surgical students) are all focused on the operation. There is no discourse with the viewer as in the Rembrandt work. Eakins has highlighted Dr. Gross, the white linen and the patient, all the pertinent facts.



29-17 JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS, Ophelia, 1852. Oil on canvas, 2'6" x 3'8". Tate Gallery, London.

In England Realism was used as a vehicle to present a yearning for *visual accuracy and moral truth*. This was the original intent of the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** as founded by William Holman Hunt. Group of young British painters, led by [Dante Gabriel Rossetti](#), [William Holman Hunt](#), and [John Everett Millais](#), who banded together in 1848 in reaction against what they considered the unimaginative and artificial historical painting of the 18th and early 19th centuries, seeking to express a new moral seriousness and sincerity in their works. Their name, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, honoured the simple depiction of nature in Italian art before [Raphael](#); the symbolism, imagery, and mannered style of their paintings often suggest a faux-medieval world.

However, Millais was not in search of moral truth but rather presenting a marriage of literature and art as in his *Ophelia* (29-17), Millais followed the first tenet of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Millais sought to create an *aesthetic sensibility*, her slightly opened mouth reverberates the text of Shakespeare, and “she chanted snatches of old tunes,” The worship of nature became almost a religion for people of the eighteenth century.

For painters of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century nature served as a screen against which they projected their inner feelings or conceptions of the natural and universal order of things. Under Rousseau and the poets, landscape took on importance in the life of the soul. Many endowed nature with a divine mystique, seeing in it both tender joys and meditative melancholy. *This mode of feeling depended on the imagination of the artist rather than on the character of the landscape.*

Thus the presentation of a real objective landscape is simultaneously a transcription of the picture inhabiting the painter's conscious and subconscious minds.

Impressionism

Impressionism becomes a movement, which addresses the reality of the moment even more finitely. In Impressionist paintings there is no influence of the museums, no attempt to moralize, but merely to depict light. This new style was dubbed "Impressionism" at an exhibition in Paris in 1874; it was a pejorative statement.



29-07 ÉDOUARD MANET, Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe (Luncheon on the Grass), 1863

The artists all had seen **Manet's** Déjeuner sur l'herbe (29-7) at the Salon des Refusés in 1863 and had been fascinated with the problem of showing figures outdoors in natural light. They met together with Manet at the **Café Guerbois** to discuss the problem.

Monet had also been attempting to solve the problem of figures in natural light; the problem set earlier by Manet. The breakthrough came in 1869 when Monet and Renoir began painting together at Argenteuil, a small town along the Seine River.

Monet illustrated his complete confidence in nature as perceived by the eye and his remarkable grasp of tone, while Renoir contributed his brilliant handling and rainbow palette. The subject that united them was the sparkle and reflection of light on water (27-20).



29-20 CLAUDE MONET, Impression: Sunrise, 1872. Oil on canvas, 1'7 1/2" x 2'1 1/2". Musée Marmottan, Paris.



29-25 PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR, *Le Moulin de la Galette*, 1876.

Oil on canvas, approx. 4'3" x 5'8". Louvre, Paris.

In **Renoir's** *Le Moulin de la Galette* (29-25), light dissolves the entire scene into broken touches of pure color. The dappled outdoor light falls on the dancers, blending all together in a symphony of color. Another artist who addressed the issue of light and tone and the immediacy of the impression is Caillebotte.



29-22 GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE, *Paris: A Rainy Day*, 1877. Oil on canvas, approx. 6'9" x 9'9".

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Worcester Fund.

In his *Paris: A Rainy Day* (29-22), we see the city as it is being transformed by Hausmann. The artist has given us a moment in the city's life on a rainy day, the use of black, white, and gray tones and the asymmetrical setting all contribute to the momentary and the impression. One factor that separates work of Monet and Renoir in the 1860s from painting done in the early 1870s is the brilliance and luminosity of the tonal level. To achieve this they had put into practice a concept that was known but rejected by Leonardo, and that was the fact that there is color in shadow, shadows are not just grayed, but contain colors of their own. The Impressionists gave visual form to the concept that whatever is seen is seen by virtue of light and that the object's appearance is conditioned by that light. Objects are colored shapes, but one perceives the shapes only because they are colored.



29-29 CLAUDE MONET, *Rouen Cathedral: The Portal (in Sun)*, 1894. Oil on

canvas, 3'3 1/4" x 2'1 7/8". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Theodore M. Davis Collection, bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915)

In works like the series of the façade of Rouen Cathedral (29-29), Monet concentrated on the surface of reality, on the artist's visual impressions of it. This was Monet's forte. As Cézanne was to say later, "Monet is just an eye, but Lord, what an eye."



29-33 JAMES ABBOTT MCNEILL WHISTLER, *Nocturne in Black and Gold (The Falling Rocket)*, ca. 1875. Oil on panel, 1'11 5/8" x 1'6 1/2". Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit (gift of Dexter M. Ferry Jr.

Under the influence of Monet, the American artist **Whistler**, living in London, painted visual impressions such as *Nocturne in Black and Gold (The Falling Rocket)* (29-33).

Whistler used the same idea of light and color to create arrangements of color and shapes on a canvas, a progression in art. One of the great gifts of art is that it can make us see and the Impressionists saw and painted things that no one had seen before.

ARCHITECTURE

2) The *most important nineteenth-century contributions to the development of architectural form* were not the Romantic borrowings from the past, like Vignon's La Madeleine in Paris (28-25), but rather *the idea that form follows function and the bare and naked use of materials*. The engineer came to rival the artist in the realm of architecture.



Vignon's La Madeleine in Paris (28-25),

Two structures erected in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century symbolize the old and the new.



The Paris Opera (**28-60**) is built in a neo-Baroque revival style by Charles Garnier. It is an impressive and ostentatious building. Its façade copies to some extent the sixteenth-century façade of the Louvre (**23-14**), but from the side it swells like a good Italian Baroque building. Its interior, with its sweeping staircase, is even more Baroque.



29-57 ALEXANDRE-GUSTAVE EIFFEL, Eiffel Tower, Paris, 1889 (photo: 1889-1890). Wrought iron, 984'high.

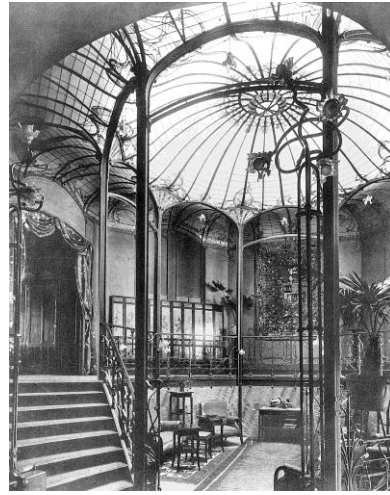
The Eiffel Tower (29-57) was erected for the Paris World's Fair of 1889 and immediately became a symbol of what the new processes and new materials might achieve.

The use of cast iron was economical and produced a kind of beauty of its own. **ART NOUVEAU** became a blend of the **Arts and Crafts Movement**, sharing their goal of fine artisanship. Art Nouveau also represents the global view.

- The artists and architects admired the flat, bold patterns and abstract linear designs seen in Islamic and Asian architecture and decorative programs (**13-25** and **27-8**).



They used these designs as a base to create their own architectural innovations.



The work of **CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH (29-52)** and **VICTOR HORTA (29-53)** illustrate *the amalgamation of design and the adaptation of design to fit into a new format*.

- **Flat patterns appear** in the Ladies' Luncheon Room, Glasgow and Horta has incorporated **the serpentine lines and organic rhythm of nature** into his Van Eetvelde House, Brussels.



29-61 RICHARD MORRIS HUNT, The Breakers, Newport, Rhode Island, 1892.

In the United States, Richard Morris Hunt has also used the revival motifs in his architecture that was seen in the Paris Opera.

- In *The Breakers (29-61)*, Hunt has created a “palace” for one of the railroad barons, Cornelius Vanderbilt II.
- This structure echoes the Renaissance, the grand estate of aristocratic England. That idea and identity has been applied to this “summer villa”, the country house becomes a site for the nouveau riche of late nineteenth century America.



29-59 LOUIS SULLIVAN, Guaranty (Prudential) Building, Buffalo, 1894-1896.

➤ One of the most important steps was taken by an American architect, Louis Sullivan, in the Guaranty (Prudential) Building in Buffalo (29-59), **The Metal Skeleton Of This Building Begins To Show In The Base And In The Division Of The Floors.**

➤ *It was Sullivan who coined the famous phrase "form follows function."* For him, the **Exterior Of The Building Should Reflect What Actually Went On Inside, Both Functionally And Structurally.**

➤ He felt that architects should not disguise a bank as a classic temple, as was so commonly done in the nineteenth century. New functions called for new forms, not for outworn conventions from the past.



29-58 HENRY HOBSON RICHARDSON, Marshall Field wholesale store (demolished), Chicago, 1885-1887.

POST IMPRESSIONISM

3) Impressionism, whose aim had been to translate the visual surface of reality onto canvas, had been the most challenging style of the 1870s. By the 1880s new tendencies had begun to develop within the works of the newer members of the Impressionist group. Younger painters like Seurat, Cézanne, van Gogh, and Gauguin all had learned the lessons of Impressionism, but felt the need to push beyond the limits of that style. Today these artists are all grouped under the heading of Post-Impressionism, but Post-Impressionism is no single style; rather it is a group of individual styles, all of which grew out of Impressionism. All of these artists accepted the highly keyed color of Impressionism, but they came to reject the idea that a painting should attempt to reproduce the visible world. Instead, they believed that the task of the artist was to make visible a world that could not be perceived by the senses.

The explorations of the Post-Impressionist artists went essentially in two directions.

Seurat and Cézanne were concerned with structure, with order. Seurat, whose *Sunday*



AFTERNOON ON THE ISLAND OF LA GRANDE JATTE (29-39) used Impressionist light and color, but his forms are much more classic and controlled than any created on previous Impressionist canvases. He tried to combine the world of visual reality with classic structure and monumentality. He applied his colors very carefully, placing small dots of pure color next to each other on the canvas, allowing the eye to mix the colors to create the varied tones. **Seurat believed that color was controlled by fixed laws that "could be taught like music."**

➤ His theories were based on those of Delacroix and Michel Chevreul, a scientist who worked at the Gobelins tapestry factory. **The term divisionism**, which Seurat used, refers to the breakup of color into the small dots. His style is also called Neo-Impressionism and Pointillism.



29-40 PAUL CÉZANNE, Mont Sainte-Victoire, 1902-1904. Oil on canvas, 2'3 1/2" x 2'11 1/4". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (The George W. Elkins Collection).

CÉZANNE'S MONT SAINTE-VICTOIRE (29-40) illustrates the three-dimensional quality of the landscape he sought to create by using color applied in geometric shapes. *He wrote that he "wanted to make of Impressionism a lasting art like that of the museums" and that he "wanted to do Poussin over again according to nature."*

- He was particularly concerned with resolving the conflict between nature, which is three dimensional, and the canvas, which is two-dimensional.
- To this end he flattened planes and eliminated atmospheric perspective, creating recession by pure color alone, working with small patches or modules of color and locking together various areas of the canvas.

In Cézanne's painting every thrust into depth is compensated by an equal return. Cézanne has created a tension between the three-dimensional forms and two-dimensional quality of the canvas, and it is this tension that gives vitality to his art, as well as the tension between abstract forms and the forms of nature.

In 1904 he wrote his now famous statement: "See nature as a cylinder, sphere, and cone." Although Cézanne sought a geometric underpinning for his art, he never abandoned the forms of nature for those of the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone, as his followers, the Cubists, were to do. *Art for him was a struggle, but out of that struggle came his ideal, "Art as a harmony parallel to nature."*



Van Gogh and Gauguin took another Post-Impressionist path. These artists were not as concerned with form as were Seurat and Cézanne. Instead, their work embodied a spiritual response to nature. They transformed line into an expressive arabesque and color into expressive color.

- Vincent van Gogh's work is very different from Cézanne's, and their modes of working were very different, too. In the three years of his major production from 1886 to 1889, van Gogh painted as many pictures as Cézanne produced in fifty years. In one of his many letters

to his brother Theo, van Gogh wrote, "The emotions are sometimes so strong that one works without knowing one works, and sometimes the strokes come with a sequence and coherence like words in a speech or a letter." Vincent's passionate intensity is apparent in this painting of the stars, which seem to writhe with an inner life of their own (29-35).

➤ The unconscious coherence of the rapid strokes is very different from Cézanne's careful modulation. Whereas Cézanne was concerned with structure, van Gogh was concerned with expression. Although the term Expressionism had not been coined when van Gogh as painting, his work can be considered Expressionistic.

➤ **Expressionists distort both the form and color of natural objects in order to emphasize their emotional content.** Expressionist art is direct, impulsive, and rapid, and its passion often attains a kind of ecstasy. **VAN GOGH** said that he used color arbitrarily in order to express himself forcefully.

➤ He had taken to walking at night and wrote that he had found a religion in the sky. In his painting he has moved into the realm of the visionary, the mystic, into the merger of individual consciousness with the cosmic forces of the universe. He has, with *Starry Night*, achieved the goal he wrote of: "*to express the love of two lovers by a marriage of complementaries, their mingling and their opposition, the mysterious vibrations of kindred tones. to express the thought of the brow by the radiance of a light tone against a somber background. To express hope by some star, the eagerness of a soul by a sunset radiance.*"

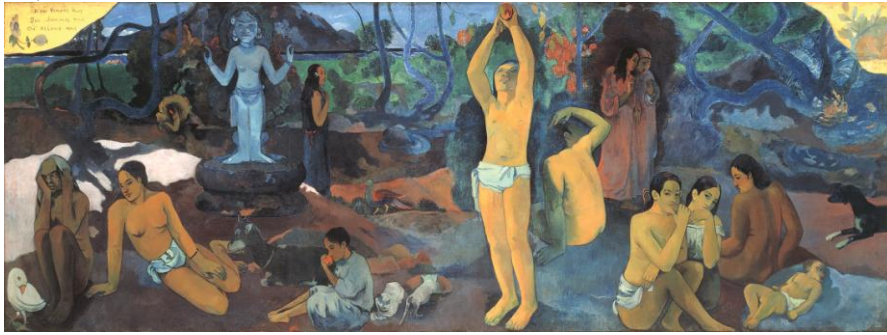
Paul Gauguin was a very different type of man than van Gogh, but for both men painting was a necessity, and it furnished a kind of salvation for them.



29-36 PAUL GAUGUIN, *The Vision after the Sermon or Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 2'4 3/4" x 3'1/2". National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

The works of both artists were symbols of their own emotions. **AS GAUGUIN** said, "*The work of art for him who can see is a mirror wherein is reflected the state of the soul of the artist.*" The simplified color planes seen in works like *The Vision After the Sermon* (29-36) are the result of his contact with Japanese prints, his work with van Gogh, and, above all, the influence of a young painter, Emile Bernard, whom Gauguin had met in Brittany and who urged him to simplify and exaggerate. Bernard once said, "If half an object is green, paint it the greenest green you can." In this new style, Gauguin renounced light and shade, because he wanted to restore to color the value that the Impressionists had attributed to light. As he said, "Color being an enigmatic thing in the sensations it gives you, can logically only be used enigmatically, like musical sensation which proceeds out of its own nature, its own interior, mysterious enigmatic force." He mirrored this statement in his Tahitian work. He created a great tableau in forceful color and

mysterious force in his *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (29-37).



Gauguin attributed expressive, symbolic qualities to line and color alike. "***There are noble lines, lying lines, etc. A straight line signifies the infinite, the curve limits creation. Colors are even more indicative because of their effect on the eyes. There are noble tones, others that are commonplace, tranquil harmonies, consoling ones, and others which excite you by their boldness.***" For Gauguin, art was an abstraction, and he counseled artists to "***derive the abstraction from nature while dreaming before it.***"

Although the spiritual goals of Gauguin and van Gogh, on the one hand, and the goals of Seurat and Cézanne, on the other, were divergent, there was unity. In the coming twentieth century this led to such divergent styles as Expressionism and Cubism; their common concern with the canvas as a flat plane laid the groundwork for much of twentieth-century painting. Their common contribution can be summed up in the words of the **PAINTER MAURICE DENIS**: "***Remember that a picture, before being a war horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.***"

Resources:

Videotapes

Claude Monet 32 min. BVL7790 \$89.95

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The Last Days of Vincent van Gogh 26 min. BVL9032 \$129.95

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Books

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Web Resources

<http://cmp1.ucr.edu>

<http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/collections/exhibits/secrets/index.html>

<http://www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk/>

<http://www.rodinmuseum.org>

http://www.engl.duq.edu/servus/PR_Critic