

# Impressionism and the Modern City

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Impressionism. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the historical context of the development of Impressionism, describe the stylistic characteristics of Impressionism, and identify examples of Impressionist painting. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

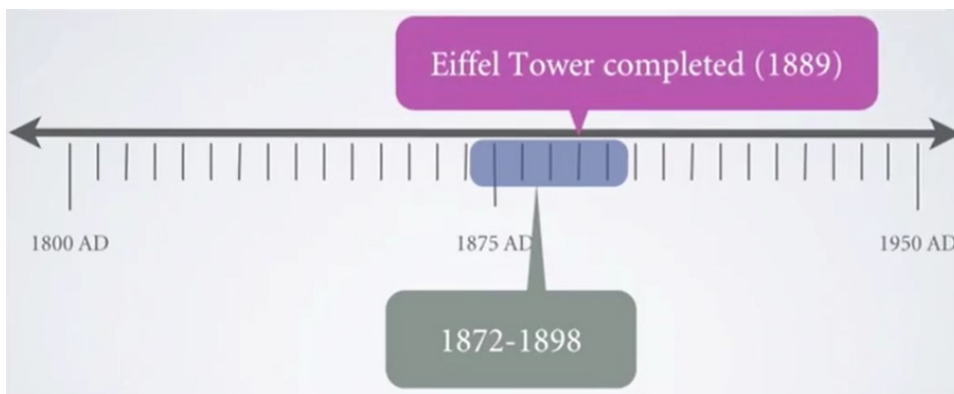


### BIG IDEA

The style of Impressionism is to depict a fleeting moment—the light of a certain time of day, a review of people passing by—which contributes to its characteristic painterly appearance.

## 1. Period and Location: Impressionism

The artwork that you will be looking at today dates from between 1872 and 1898 and focuses geographically on Paris, France.



## 2. Stylistic Characteristics of Impressionism

Interestingly enough, the term “**Impressionism**” was first used as an insult from an art critic based on the unfinished appearance and obvious brush strokes of the painting. Rather than take offense, Impressionists, such as Monet, embraced the term and adopted it as the official label for their style of art.

Impressionism wasn't particularly popular among Traditionalists and Academics in the art world. Since they were banned from the Salon, which was the official exhibition hall of the Academy, Impressionists opened their own salon in order to exhibit their artwork. They called it the Salon des Refusés, or “Exhibition of the

Rejects.”

Impressionism as a style consists of:

- Generally, but not always, a painterly look, which refers to the brush strokes and sketchiness of the style
- Experimentation with light
- Most importantly, the depiction of a fleeting moment

Keep an eye out for these elements as you look at the following examples.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Impressionism**

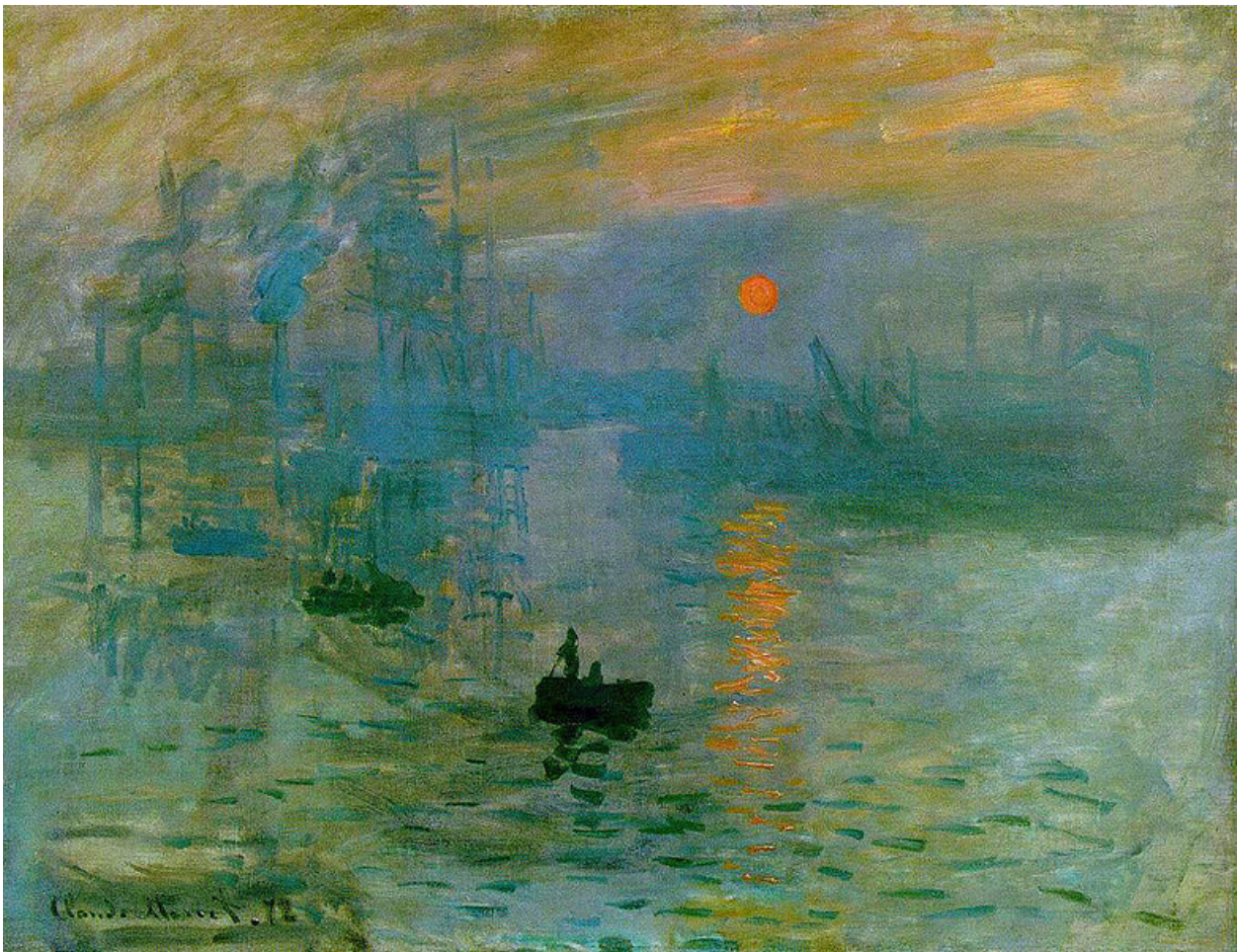
An artistic movement of the 19th century that emphasized depictions of fleeting moments, in particular the changing appearance of light.

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## 3. Examples of Impressionism

### 3a. Claude Monet

This first image is of a landmark painting. It's the first example of Impressionist artwork and serves to embody the overall style of Impressionism. It's a simple picture depicting a fleeting moment—the sunrise over the water with some fishing boats passing by.



Impression Sunrise by Claude Monet

1872

Oil on canvas

Notice the obvious brush strokes. Unlike Academic artists, Monet makes no effort at all to hide them; they're an essential part of the painting. The painting is very much like an oil sketch and approached the same way as one would a sketch. It's an exercise in brevity, capturing a moment in time.

This next image depicts a scene of **urbanism**, capturing a fleeting moment of city life. Monet's work, and the work of other Impressionists, provide an experience that photography would later take over.





Gare St. Lazare Train Station by Claude Monet

1877

Oil on canvas

St. Lazare reflects increasing **urbanization** in Paris in the late 19th century. This painting isn't a carefully arranged composition—Monet is at the mercy of the elements in front of him. Perhaps this lack of control makes examples such as this seem more natural or “real,” despite the painterly execution of the image. A depiction of truth is woven within the spontaneity of the moment rather than in the way the figures are rendered.



HINT

It's important to reiterate the common thread that Impressionists share. It isn't necessarily the way the artwork is painted, although Impressionist paintings often have a similar style. The common thread is really the depiction of a fleeting moment, such as the random people walking down the street with the edges of the painting also cropped in a way that appears to be random.



TERMS TO KNOW

#### Urbanism

The way of life of people who live in a city.

#### Urbanization

The migration of large numbers of people from agricultural areas to cities.

### 3b. Gustave Caillebotte

This next image, once again, is an example of an artist depicting a scene of urbanism or capturing a fleeting moment of city life. It's a moment captured that could never be repeated again, which makes the subject matter even more unique in this painting of Paris.



Paris: A Rainy Day by Gustave Caillebotte

1877

Oil on canvas

Notice the key elements of Impressionism that present themselves in the painting:

- First, notice the painterly style. Look at the sky and you can see the appearance of brush strokes, which are apparent throughout the painting, though less overtly than in Monet's work. Caillebotte's painting is much less sketchy in this regard.
- Second, notice the design of the street. Caillebotte's composition makes the street appear as the subject of the painting, rather than the people in it.



#### DID YOU KNOW

During the 19th century, Paris's layout and design as a city was completely overhauled by the civic designer Georges-Eugène **Haussmann**. It was an incredibly ambitious and expensive project that sought to modernize the layout of the city, transforming Paris from a medieval city with narrow, winding streets to a modern city with large, wide, straight boulevards.





## TERM TO KNOW

### **Haussmann**

The civic planner responsible for the complete renovation of Paris in the late 19th century.

### **3c. Camille Pissarro**

In this work by Camille Pissarro, “La Place du Théâtre Français,” you can get an impression of width. It’s also notable for its interesting perspective: you’re looking down at an angle rather than from the ground. You get the sense, as the viewer, of sitting by a window looking at the hustle and bustle of Parisienne life below.



La Place du Théâtre Français by Camille Pissarro

1898

Oil on canvas

Haussmann’s project may have been controversial, but it’s difficult to find fault with the result as it’s depicted here. The streets are teeming with activity. Paris was moving from indoors to the outdoors. The **Haussmannization** of Paris provided space for Parisians to get in touch with their city, and the visionary project helped transform Paris into one of the most important cities of culture for decades to come.



## TERM TO KNOW

### **Haussmannization**

The physical transformation of Paris from a medieval city with winding, narrow streets to a modern



city with wide, straight boulevards.

### 3d. Pierre-Auguste Renoir

The painting of “Le Moulin de la Galette,” by Renoir, epitomizes his desire to display joy and beauty in his artwork. It’s a happy image of average people enjoying each other’s company in the outdoors of Paris. Renoir captures the levity of the moment on the faces of the people in the painting and the movements of the dancers in the middle ground.



Le Moulin de la Galette by Pierre-Auguste Renoir

1876

Oil on canvas

This painting also serves as an example of the Impressionists’ ability to capture the light at a certain time of day. Notice the spots of color, which suggest the light as it’s filtered through what is likely the leaves of a tree standing outside the borders of the painting. Impressionism is a style of painting that allowed the artist to genuinely capture and depict the human condition.



#### SUMMARY

Today you learned about **Impressionism**. You learned how to identify and define today’s key terms and describe the **stylistic characteristics of Impressionism**, noting the common theme of the artists’ depiction of a fleeting moment. By exploring the artwork of noted Impressionists **Claude Monet**, **Gustave Caillebotte**, **Camille Pissarro**, and **Pierre-Auguste Renoir**, you learned how to identify

examples of Impressionist painting.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia authors Ian McConnell and Aleisha Olson.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Hausmann**

The civic planner responsible for the complete renovation of Paris in the late 19th-century.

### **Hausmannization**

The physical transformation of Paris from a medieval city with winding, narrow streets to a modern city with wide, straight boulevards.

### **Impressionism**

An artistic movement of the 19th-century that emphasized depictions of fleeting moments, in particular the changing appearance of light.

### **Urbanism**

The way of life of people who live in a city.

### **Urbanization**

The migration of large numbers of people from agricultural areas to cities.