

# Post-Impressionism

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Post-Impressionism. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the influences behind the development of Post-Impressionism, and identify examples of Post-Impressionist artwork through the exploration of:

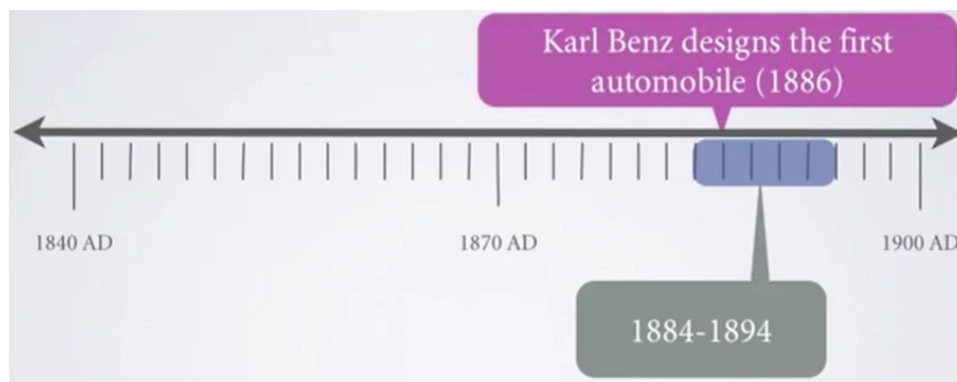


### BIG IDEA

Post-Impressionist artists experimented with line, form, and color but in ways that were all very different. For this reason, Post-Impressionism is more of a chronological than stylistic reference.

## 1. Period and Location: Post-Impressionism

The artwork that you will be looking at today dates from between 1884 and 1894 and focuses geographically on Paris, France. It's important to point out that Post-Impressionism, as more of a chronological reference than a specific style, literally means “after impressionism.” However, aside from the literal meaning, Post-Impressionism also refers to the spirit of the style rather than a specific time period. In other words, some Post-Impressionists were painting at the same time as Impressionists.



## 2. Post-Impressionism: Influences and Development

**Post-Impressionism** developed out of the belief many artists had that Impressionism had essentially run its course—that it couldn't be taken any further—and they had grown weary from an overall lack of structure and focus on trivial subject matter, such as fleeting moments. Impressionism lingered into the early 20th century

alongside Post-Impressionism.

Post-Impressionism was a different approach to painting and as a stylistic movement, it emphasized experimentation, such as in the type of brushstroke used, color experimentation, the distortion of form, and—in the case of Paul Cezanne—the existence of an underlying geometry. In many ways, it moved beyond the sketchiness of Impressionism and incorporated a bit more structure while retaining many of the painterly aspects of Impressionism. This, however, can make the distinction between Impressionism and Post-Impressionism a little difficult for the art history novice.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Post-Impressionism**

A movement in painting that rejected aspects of Impressionism while retaining an interest in color and expressive brushstroke.

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## 3. Paul Cezanne

Paul Cezanne is an important painter, not only for his contributions to Post-Impressionism, but for serving as a bridge of sorts between the art of the 19th and 20th centuries—specifically bridging Impressionism with the modern art movements of the early 20th century.

Cezanne sought to make something solid out of Impressionism, articulating space and volume through color and geometric forms, which is what makes Cezanne's work so recognizable. You can start to see these repeated patches of square color applied to more traditional forms of painting, such as the landscape shown below or the still life. Cezanne also gives this a sense of three-dimensionality with the use of **atmospheric perspective**.



Mont Saint-Victorie by Paul Cezanne

1887

Oil on canvas

In this example of a still life with a basket of apples, notice how the space and volume of the painting are articulated through color rather than through shadow. It's an analytic approach to painting that makes his artwork appear, to some, as more experimental than emotional.



Still Life with Basket of Apples by Paul Cezanne

1890-1894

Oil on canvas



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Atmospheric Perspective

A form of perspective in which more distant objects are depicted in a grayish or bluish haze.

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## 4. Vincent Van Gogh

In contrast, the Post-Impressionist work of Vincent Van Gogh has more of the emotional closely attributed to it.



#### DID YOU KNOW

The correct (Dutch, since he was from the Netherlands) pronunciation of Van Gogh's name is something more like "Van Hoch," like the sound you make when you're clearing your throat. In the UK, it's often pronounced "Van Goff." However, the standard pronunciation (like "go," with a long "o") is quite ubiquitous and acceptable.

In reality, Van Gogh's life is a fascinating and tragic look at the effects of mental illness on an individual and the emotional turmoil that results, articulated through his work. Below is one of his most famous pieces, "Starry Night."



#### DID YOU KNOW

This work was supposedly painted from memory of a view outside his sanitarium, or asylum, window in France. He had checked himself in while going through a particularly bad spell.



**Starry Night by Vincent Van Gogh**

**1889**

Oil on canvas

Van Gogh uses **impasto**, which is the buildup of paint on a surface to create a tactile effect. He uses color and form to create an expressive and emotional piece of art. Notice how the serenity of the evening is lost in the frenetic activity and vibration of the sky. It's a personal interpretation by Van Gogh of a realistic scene, an interpretation that may have mirrored the internal frenzy of his own mind. It's also an early example of Expressionist art that undoubtedly influenced later artists of the 20th century.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Impasto**

The thick buildup of paint, usually oil or acrylic, on the surface of a painting.

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## 5. Georges Seurat and Pointillism

Pointillism was a form of experimental art developed in part by Georges Seurat. It was an exercise in color

**theory** as much as it was a new way to paint. Pointillism is, in many ways, a precursor to modern pixels and how they are assembled to form a picture.

➞ **EXAMPLE** For example, look at this image of Mount Hood. From a distance, the image appears completely cohesive and realistic.



**Mount Hood**  
**Oregon**

However, if you were to zoom in on a particular area, such as the one delineated within the red box, you would see that the picture is actually made up of millions of individual blocks of color—little points called pixels, as shown below.



**Pointillism** is essentially the same idea, except that the dots are applied painstakingly by hand. In this method, as opposed to mixing colors, the artist relies on distance and the light color of the canvas showing through to help blend the colors together. It's an effective method and creates a unique look. Colors tend to pop a bit more, which may have to do with the fact that the canvas is actually visible between the dots, similar to the visual effect of color television static.

The painting below, sometimes referred to colloquially as “Sunday in the Park,” is an enormous canvas held at the Art Institute in Chicago. Its size is rather impressive; it literally takes up an entire wall.



Sunday on La Grande Jatte by Georges Seurat

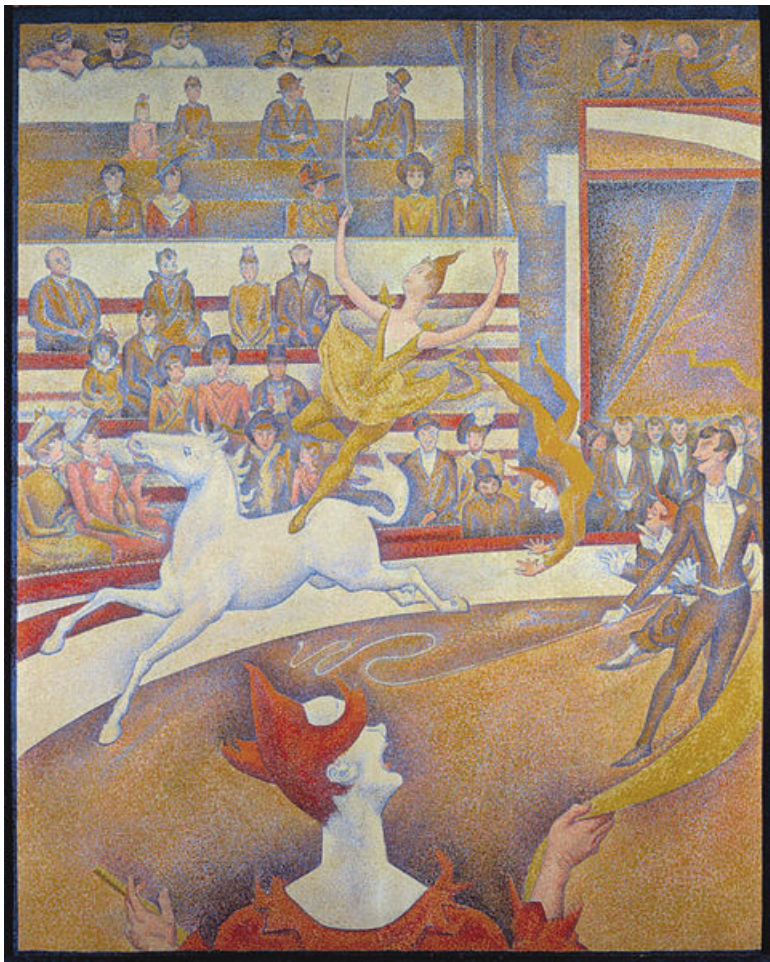
1884-1886

Oil on canvas

As shown below, it's helpful to see paintings such as this up close to truly appreciate the effect.



Seurat died quite young, around the age of 31. His final painting, which was incomplete at the time of his death, shows how refined his technique had become in such a short period of time. As you can see below, of particular note is how he's capable of depicting shadow, as shown on the horse. Each dot of color stands alone in a pointillist painting, meaning there was very little margin for error.



The Circus by Georges Seurat

1891

Oil on canvas



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Color Theory

The study of how colors relate to one another, including color mixing, the color wheel, and warm and cool colors.

##### Pointillism

A Post-Impressionist movement in painting characterized by the use of tiny dots instead of brushstrokes that blend together when viewed from a distance.

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## 6. Experimentation in Post-Impressionism

One of the most unifying attributes of Post-Impressionism is the idea of experimentation. This final image shows just how varied the art of Post-Impressionism was.



#### HINT

This work of art also shows the influence of Japanese prints, which you will explore in a separate lesson,

on the art of the late 19th century.

The flatness of the image and interesting use of contour lines is drastically different from Seurat's work, for example, but shares a vision common to all Post-Impressionist artists, which is to take the concept of what art could be and move it in bold new directions.



La Reine de Joie by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

1892

Chromolithograph (print)



## SUMMARY

In today's lesson about **Post-Impressionism**, you learned how to identify and define today's key terms, and explored the **influences behind the development of Post-Impressionism**. You also learned how to identify examples of Post-Impressionist art work by exploring works by artists such as **Paul Cezanne** and **Vincent Van Gogh**. You learned about artist **Georges Seurat** and his method of painting known as **pointillism**. Lastly, you saw an example of Post-Impressionist art that exemplified the unifying attribute of **experimentation in Post-Impressionism**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.

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**Pointillism**

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**Post-Impressionism**

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