

General Research: Impressionism

“For me a picture should be a pleasant thing, joyful and pretty—yes, pretty! There are quite enough unpleasant things in life without the need for us to manufacture more.”

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Stokstad, II, p.1013)

“Impressionists”

In 1879 Degas proposed that they call themselves “Independents, Realists and Impressionists.”

(The New Painting, p. 19)

Scientific Advances

“Without paint in tubes there would have been no Cezanne, no Monet, no Sisley or Pissarro—nothing of what the journalists were later to call Impressionism.”

Jean Renoir quoting his father (Art in the Making, p. 41)

Objectivity: Observing and Recording

“When you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have in front of you—a tree, a house, a field or whatever. Merely think here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape, until it gives your own naïve impression of the scene before you.”

Monet, in a conversation with Lila Cabot Perry

(Art in the Making, p. 80)

Optical Theories: Complementary colors

“Color owes its brightness to force of contrast rather than inherent qualities. . . primary colors look brightest when they are brought into contrast with their complementaries.”

(Monet, 1888 (Art in the Making, p. 88)

Myths about Impressionism: Spontaneity

“I do not paint my tableaux (paintings) directly from nature: I only do that with my etudes (studies). It is only in the studio that our impressions, previously scattered, are coordinated and we can create the true poem of the countryside.”

Pissarro (Art in the Making, p.27.)

Myths about Impressionism: Scientific Objectivity

The Tâche

Tâche, transl. = blob, patch, stroke. Can have pejorative overtones, i.e. a stain or inkblot.

“The more the tâche takes importance on itself, the more the modeling disappears.” Felix Braquemond, *Du Dessin and de la Couleur*, 1885).

They are Impressionists in the sense that they render not the landscape but the sensation produced by the landscape.

Jules Castagnary, 1874 (The New Painting, pp.51-2)

They paint not the thing itself, but the effect produced by the thing (peindre non la chose mais l'effet qu'elle produit.)

Monet's Letters from Bordighera, 1884

(from Monet, the Ultimate Impressionist, pp. 84-5)

To paint the Mediterranean landscape, Monet wrote "One would need a palette of diamonds and gemstones." To Theodore Duret

[Bordighera is] "an earthly paradise. . . I should like to paint orange and lemon trees standing against the blue sea. . ." the blue of the sky and sea are impossible (i.e. impossible to capture, unimaginable).

To Alice Hoschede

It may draw howls from the enemies of blue and pink, for it has exactly that brightness and fairy light, and I am determined to capture it. Everything is the color of pigeon breast and flaming punch—it is wonderful, and I am enchanted.

To his dealer, Durand Ruel

Suggestions for Further Study

David Bomford, Jo Kirby, John Leighton, Ashok Roy, Art in the Making: Impressionism, National Gallery, London, 1990

Richard Brettell, From Monet to Van Gogh: A History of Impressionism, 24 videos plus course guidebook, 2002 (The Teaching Company)

Robert L. Herbert, Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society. Yale, 1998

Charles Moffett, et al. The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886, exhibition catalogue, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986

Sylvie Patin, Monet, The Ultimate Impressionist, 1993, Abrams Discoveries series.

Marilyn Stokstad, Art History, 2 volumes, 1999, Abrams

The Dictionary of Art, ed. Jane Turner, 1996