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# Monticelli, Adolphe(-Joseph-Thomas)

(b Marseille, Oct 14, 1824; d Marseille, June 29, 1886).

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French painter. In 1846, after studying at the Ecole d'Art in Marseille, Monticelli left Provence to study in Paris with Paul Delaroche. Although he had been trained to work in a Neo-classical style by his teachers in Marseille, in Paris he admired the Troubadour pictures of such artists as Pierre Révoil and Fleury Richard and the bold colours and rich surface impasto of Delacroix's oil sketches. He also copied many of the Old Masters in the Louvre. When he returned to Marseille in 1847 Emile Loubon (1809–63), newly appointed director of the Ecole de Dessin in Marseille and a friend of many realist landscape painters in Paris, encouraged him and another local painter, Paul Guigou, to record the landscapes and traditional village scenes of Provence (e.g. *Rural Scene*, Marseille, Mus. Grobet-Labadié).

In 1855–6 Monticelli returned to Paris, where he met the Barbizon landscape painter Narcisse Diaz. They went on painting excursions to the Forest of Fontainebleau together; Monticelli often followed Diaz's example of including nudes and Watteau-inspired costumed figures in his landscapes, as in the *Island of Cythera* (1863–5; St Louis, MO, A. Mus.). Diaz, who was himself influenced by Delacroix's bright colours, encouraged Monticelli to use more spontaneous brushstrokes to achieve a sketch-like finish. Monticelli lived in Paris from 1863 to 1870, during the Second Empire, when interest in Rococo art and delight in the ballet, theatre and opera were at their height. He began to specialize in theatrical, brightly coloured *fêtes galantes* showing elegantly gowned women and gallant gentlemen relaxing in natural settings. Around 1869–70 Guigou introduced Monticelli to the Impressionists at the Café Guerbois, and Monticelli began to use small touches of paint in a landscape style close to that of Camille Pissarro, as in *Orchard in Flower* (c. 1871; Amsterdam, Rijksmus.).

After the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) Monticelli returned to Marseille, where he remained for the rest of his life and developed his mature style. He and Cézanne, whom he had known since the 1860s, often painted together in the region around Aix and Marseille, between 1878 and 1884. Although Monticelli earned his living by painting portraits, still-lives (e.g. *Still-life with White Jug*, c. 1878–80; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay) and *fêtes galantes*, his Provençal landscape sketches began to be more experimental (e.g. *Under the Trees*, c. 1883–5; New York, Lewyt priv. col.), their thicker textures and brighter colours giving them a quality of expressionistic abstraction. Their vigorous brushwork foreshadows later paintings executed by van Gogh in Saint-Rémy. Parts of the wooden support were left bare to act as a foil for the intensely coloured and thickly painted highlights. Monticelli's style was considered so unusual by local collectors and critics that he began to be described as insane. He took these reports with good humour, telling his friends that it would take 50 years for people to understand his experimentation with colour and impasto.

In 1886 van Gogh discovered some of Monticelli's mature works in the Galerie Delarebeyrette, Paris. He began to imitate Monticelli's flower-pieces, for example in *Hollyhocks in a One-eared Vase* (1886; Zurich, Ksthaus), and later bought six paintings for his personal collection. Van Gogh hoped that his paintings, such as *Seascape at Saintes-Maries* (1888; Moscow, Pushkin Mus. F. A.), would be understood as a continuation of Monticelli's later experimental pictures. In 1890 van Gogh and his

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brother Theo funded the publication of the first book about Monticelli; Guigou's text, which praises him as a genius of colour and refutes his insanity, is complemented by lithographs of Monticelli's work by A. M. Lauzet (1865-98), including several from the van Gogh brothers' collection. Most of Monticelli's experimental and stylistic innovations have been ascribed to van Gogh, although van Gogh readily acknowledged his indebtedness to the Marseille painter.

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## See also

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Marseille, §1(ii): Modern city

Ziem, Félix

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