
Pissarro family

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French family of artists. The most famous member of the family was (1) Camille Pissarro, who held a key position in the development of French painting during the second half of the 19th century. His influence on a number of painters, chiefly Cézanne, Gauguin, van Gogh and the Neo-Impressionists, was of the greatest consequence. Of his eight children, the eldest, (2) Lucien Pissarro, as well as Georges Manzana Pissarro, Félix (1874–1906), Ludovico Rodolph (1878–1954), Paul-Emile (1884–1972) and his granddaughter, Orovida (1893–1968), were artists.

(1) (Jacob-Abraham-)Camille Pissarro

(*b* Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas, Danish Virgin Islands, July 10, 1830; *d* Paris, Nov 13, 1903).

Painter and printmaker. He was the only painter to exhibit in all eight of the Impressionist exhibitions held between 1874 and 1886, and he is often regarded as the ‘father’ of the movement. He was by no means narrow in outlook, however, and throughout his life remained as radical in artistic matters as he was in politics. Thadée Natanson wrote in 1948: ‘Nothing of novelty or of excellence appeared that Pissarro had not been among the first, if not the very first, to discern and to defend.’ The significance of Pissarro’s work is in the balance maintained between tradition and the avant-garde. Octave Mirbeau commented: ‘M. Camille Pissarro has shown himself to be a revolutionary by renewing the art of painting in a purely working sense; at the same time he has remained a purely classical artist in his love for exalted generalizations, his passion for nature and his respect for worthwhile traditions.’

Pissarro’s extensive correspondence reveals the sphere of his influence and the steadfastness of his character. Mary Cassatt is reported to have said that Pissarro ‘was such a teacher that he could have taught stones to draw correctly’. Cézanne called him ‘humble and colossal’. The intrinsic quality of Pissarro’s work has never been in doubt, but equally it has never enjoyed the universal acclaim associated with other Impressionist painters. Counter-balancing this is the high regard in which he was held by artists of different generations, his appearance and his manner prompting contemporaries to make comparisons with such biblical figures as Abraham (George Moore), Moses (Matisse) and even God the Father (both Cézanne and Thadée Natanson).

1. Life and painted work.

Pissarro was born into a Jewish family of French, originally Portuguese, descent. His parents ran a small business in general merchandise at a time when the commercial prospects of St Thomas (then a Danish dependency) were declining. It was assumed, however, that one of the four sons born to Rachel Petit (née Manzana Pomié) and Frédéric Pissarro would eventually assume responsibility for the family

business. The resources for formal instruction in art were obviously limited in St Thomas, and this was a determining factor in Pissarro's outlook. His artistic inclinations first surfaced while he was a schoolboy at Passy, near Paris, from 1842 to 1847, but he was essentially self-taught. Cézanne once remarked: 'Pissarro had the good fortune to be born in the Antilles. There he learnt to draw without masters'.

Pissarro's acquaintance around 1850 with a Danish artist, Fritz Melbye (1826-96), convinced him of his true vocation and also provided him with some academic instruction. Between 1852 and 1854 they travelled together to Venezuela and established a studio in Caracas, which they kept for over a year. Numerous drawings and watercolours survive from this period, although only two dated paintings are recorded. Five other paintings with scenes of St Thomas and Venezuela, including *Coconut Palms by the Sea, St Thomas (Antilles)* (1856; Upperville, VA, Mellon priv. col.), were made retrospectively after Pissarro's move to France. These are all surprisingly sophisticated in composition and technique, presumably, though not necessarily solely, as a result of Melbye's teaching. Two features of these early years are important as regards Pissarro's later development: direct confrontation with nature under tropical conditions (in particular his attention to the effects of natural light) and close observation of peasant life.

Pissarro's arrival in Paris in early October 1855 coincided with the Exposition Universelle of that year. It provided him with an immediate opportunity to broaden his artistic horizons. In Paris he was at first dependent on relatives (his parents had followed him to Paris) and kept up connections and shared a studio with the Danish artists Anton Melbye, brother of Fritz, and David Jacobsen (1821-71). He was also friendly at this time with such painters as Ludovic Piette and the Puerto Rican Francisco Oller. Pissarro attended private classes at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1856, and in 1861 he registered as a copyist in the Musée du Louvre. At the Académie Suisse, which he attended from about 1859, he met Cézanne, Monet and Armand Guillaumin, and his first submissions to the Salon date from this time. His works were accepted for exhibition almost every year until 1870. Although he kept a studio in Paris, Pissarro preferred to live in more rural places, such as Montmorency, La Roche-Guyon, Varenne-Saint-Maur, Louveciennes and Pontoise, where he lived from 1866 to 1868 and again from 1872 to 1882. Around 1860 Pissarro formed a liaison with Julie Vellay, a vine-grower's daughter from Burgundy who worked for the Pissarro family. They had eight children between the years 1863 and 1884 and were married in London in 1871.



Camille Pissarro: *Côté du Jallais, Pontoise* (or *Jalais Hill, Pontoise*), oil on canvas, 34 1/4 x 45 1/4 in. (87 x 114.9 cm), 1867 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William Church Osborn, 1951, Accession ID: 51.30.2); photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110001747> <<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110001747>>

By the early 1860s Pissarro's style reflected a knowledge of the works of Corot, Courbet and Daubigny. From Corot he derived his treatment of light and tonal nuance; from Courbet strength of form and bold brushwork; from Daubigny carefully constructed panoramic compositions on varying scales. It was to the work of these artists, particularly Corot, with whom he often painted during these years, that Pissarro harnessed the experiences of his childhood years abroad. Major paintings of this early period are the *Banks of the Marne at Chennevières* (1864–5; Edinburgh, N.G.), the *Banks of the Marne in Winter* (1866; Chicago, IL, A. Inst.), the 'Côté du Jallais', Pontoise (1867; New York, Met.), *L'Hermitage at Pontoise* (1867; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Mus.) and the *Hillsides of l'Hermitage, Pontoise* (c. 1867–8; New York, Guggenheim). All are on a large scale and were intended for exhibition in the Salon. They were specially praised in the reviews of Emile Zola. Pissarro's success in the Salon was intermittent, however, and he associated himself more closely with the artists he had met at the Académie Suisse who, following the lead given by Manet, were striving to be independent of official art.

Pissarro moved to Louveciennes in 1869 and began to paint in a pure Impressionist style, producing such pictures as the *Versailles Road at Louveciennes* (1870; Zurich, Stift. Samml. Bührle). During the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) the house in Louveciennes was ransacked by Prussian troops, and many works were lost. Pissarro meanwhile fled to London (1870), where he was in touch with Monet, Daubigny and the dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. On his return to France in 1871 he moved to Pontoise. Stylistically, the first half of the 1870s is often regarded as Pissarro's most successful period. The canvases painted in England and France are notable for their firmly controlled compositions, the

lighter brushwork and the use of a brighter palette applied in separate patches of unmixed pigments. These developments were evident in the work exhibited by Pissarro and other artists at the First Impressionist Exhibition of 1874, which Pissarro helped to organize. He showed five paintings, including *Hoar Frost, the Old Road to Ennery, Pontoise* (1873; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay), a work chosen for discussion by the reviewers. Philippe Burty drew attention to its affinities with Millet's works and called for more precise definition of relief, while Jules-Antoine Castagnary praised Pissarro's sobriety and strength, noting, however, that he had made the mistake of painting shadows cast by trees outside the picture.



Camille Pissarro: *A Cowherd on the Route du Chou, Pontoise*, oil on canvas, 21 5/8 x 36 1/4 in. (54.9 x 92.1 cm), 1874 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Edna H. Sachs, 1956, Accession ID: 56.182); photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110001748> <<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110001748>>

Pissarro's aim in such works was to record as accurately as possible on the canvas those feelings (*sensations*) he experienced in front of nature, and his various stylistic changes attest his willingness to experiment with different approaches. In his choice of subject-matter, Pissarro followed the advice of Théodore Duret, who in a letter of 6 December 1873 urged him to 'go your own way, your path of rustic nature', seeing him as a successor of Millet. Indeed, during the 1870s Pissarro seems to have been consciously emulating Millet in the exploration of rural themes around Pontoise (see fig.) and Auvers-sur-Oise, as well as Montfoucault in Brittany, a farm owned by Ludovic Piette.

Of greatest significance at this time was Pissarro's friendship with Cézanne; they often worked together, sometimes painting the same subjects and frequently re-examining motifs first painted by Pissarro in the late 1860s. In their search for a new sense of space they began to regulate their brushstrokes and restrict the colour range of their palettes. Such works as the *Quarry, Pontoise* (c. 1875; Basle, Staechlin Found.), the *Saint-Antoine Road at l'Hermitage, Pontoise* (1875; priv. col., on

loan to Basle, Kstmus.) and the *Climbing Path, l'Hermitage, Pontoise* (1875; New York, Brooklyn Mus.) are crucially important for an understanding of the evolution of modern art in that the principles first explored in them were later developed by Cézanne.

Pissarro reached a stylistic crisis at the end of the 1870s as he endeavoured to record the appearance of nature with a myriad of smaller, comma-like brushstrokes built up in layers on the surface of the canvas. Many of these paintings, such as the *Red Roofs, Corner of the Village, Winter* (1877; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay), the *Côte des Boeufs, Pontoise* (1877; London, N.G.) and the *Pathway at Le Chou, Pontoise* (1878; Douai, Mus. Mun.), are heavily worked. Ultimately Pissarro felt that such compositions lacked clarity, and again he sought to give a new emphasis to his work, this time in collaboration with Degas. For a time they worked together making prints. Degas was the chief advocate of figure painting among the Impressionists, and the primacy of the human figure at the expense of the landscape background is evident in a series of paintings dating from the early 1880s, among them the *Shepherdess (Young Peasant Girl with a Stick)* (1881; Paris, Mus. d'Orsay), the *Rest, Peasant Girl Lying in the Grass, Pontoise* (1882; Bremen, Ksthalle) and *The Harvest* (1882; Tokyo, N. Mus. W. A.). These works influenced Paul Gauguin, who had begun to paint with Pissarro in 1879 and who remained in close touch with him until 1883–4. Pissarro now began to devise more complex compositions, including crowded market scenes with greater numbers of figures, such as the *Pork Butcher* (1883; London, Tate). He moved away from Pontoise in 1882 to the small neighbouring village of Osny and two years later to the village of Eragny-sur-Epte in Normandy, where he rented, and later bought a large house, converting the barn into a studio.

Pissarro was introduced to Signac and Seurat in 1885, and in the years that followed he began to work in the pointillist style adopted by the Neo-Impressionists. He thereby aligned himself with the avant-garde, identifying himself with a younger generation of artists, which included van Gogh. Pissarro's interest in Neo-Impressionism was part of a very real concern with the theory and practice of painting, particularly with colour and the application of paint. Pointillism furthermore was a natural outcome of his own stylistic development at this time, being an extension of the smaller, more regular brushstrokes, the grander, more monumental compositions, and the purification of the much wider colour range he used during the late 1870s and early 1880s. Pictures executed in this style are therefore characterized by simplified compositions and an intense luminosity. However, few of his pictures can be strictly defined as pointillist. *View from my Window, Eragny-sur-Epte* (1888; Oxford, Ashmolean) and *L'Île Lacroix, Rouen, Mist* (1888; Philadelphia, PA, Mus. A.) adhere more closely than others to the basic principles of Neo-Impressionism. Several canvases in this style were shown in the last Impressionist Exhibition in 1886 and frequently with Les XX in Brussels, where Pissarro continued to exhibit his paintings during the 1890s. Ultimately he found that the technique was too restricting: his output declined, and his response to nature was blunted. Many of the technical advances made during this phase were redeployed in works dating from the beginning of the 1890s, notably in the series of paintings of Kew Gardens, London, undertaken in 1892.



Camille Pissarro: Morning: An Overcast Day, Rouen, oil on canvas, 21 3/8 x 25 5/8 in. (54.3 x 65.1 cm), 1896 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Grégoire Tarnopol, 1979, and Gift of Alexander Tarnopol, 1980, Accession ID: 1980.21.1); photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110001756> <<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110001756>>

In the last decade of his life, Pissarro returned to a purer Impressionist style, now achieved with greater technical ability, renewed confidence in his compositions and freer brushwork. The years from 1890 to 1903 represent a resolution of Pissarro's stylistic problems. He struck a balance between urban and rural subject-matter; his exploration of rural themes was limited mainly to areas around Eragny-sur-Epte, and for the first time he included depictions of the female nude. For urban motifs Pissarro concentrated on Rouen (e.g. Morning, an Overcast Day, Rouen, 1896 and Rue de l'Épicerie, Rouen, 1898; both New York, Met.), as well as Paris, Dieppe and Le Havre. Several of these paintings were executed in series, the most memorable perhaps being those devoted to the Boulevard Montmartre (see fig.) and the Avenue de l'Opéra. La Place du Théâtre Français, Spring (1898; St Petersburg, Hermitage) belongs to the latter series and is a good example of Pissarro's ability to create intensely pictorial evocations of city life.



Camille Pissarro: *La Place du Théâtre Français, Spring*, oil on canvas, 655×815 mm, 1898 (St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum); photo credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY

Pissarro's choice of themes in his late work may reflect his political thinking, which became more radical towards the end of his life, and by the 1890s he was a firmly committed supporter of anarchism. He was friendly with the leading representatives of the movement in France, such as Jean Grave and Elisée Reclus, and was well-versed in anarchist literature. His concern for contemporary issues is illustrated in the series of lithographs depicting homeless beggars he made for Grave's anarchist journal the *Temps nouveaux*. He also took a close interest in the Dreyfus affair, which reached its climax in the last years of the century. The extent to which Pissarro can be described as a political painter, however, is debatable. Certainly, his paintings of the 1890s can also be interpreted in the context of contemporary arguments about the relative virtues of rural as opposed to urban life, or indeed in the context of the public world of Rouen and Paris contrasted with the private world of Eragny-sur-Epte. Younger critics, such as George Lecomte, Octave Mirbeau and Gustave Geffroy, saw the artist as someone whose works revealed universal truths.

Despite suffering from the eye condition dacryocystitis, Pissarro maintained a large output of work during his last years. He remained active to the very end of his life, frequently travelling to England to visit his eldest son, Lucien, and spending a short period of self-enforced political exile in Belgium in 1894. The financial hardships of the 1870s and 1880s had eased by the end of his life, and his work

was beginning to sell well, not only in France, but also in Germany and the USA. Pissarro is buried in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. The principal collections of Pissarro's oil paintings are in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

2. Drawings.

Until 1870 Pissarro's working methods were strictly traditional in their progression from preparatory drawings and oil sketch to the finished picture. After this date, with the advent of the more spontaneous style adopted by the Impressionists, Pissarro only rarely used the oil sketch. He continued to rely on drawing, however, as a means of accumulating visual data and evolving his compositions. Like Manet, Degas and Cézanne, he was a prolific draughtsman, and a large number of drawings from each decade of his working life have survived. In compositions such as *The Harvest* (1882; Tokyo, N. Mus. W. A.), in which the human figure is emphasized, preparatory drawings played a particularly important role. Pissarro also made more finished drawings for sale, along with watercolours, pastels and painted fans, especially during his Neo-Impressionist phase when he produced fewer paintings. Such works commanded less exalted prices than oil paintings and could be sold more easily. Essentially Pissarro regarded drawing as a discipline of the eye and hand, but between 1885 and 1890 he often adopted watercolour as an antidote to the more restricted technique of pointillism.

The relationship between the preparatory process and the finished work is central to any discussion of Impressionist painting, and the fact that an artist such as Pissarro made drawings so consistently suggests it was through drawings rather than by painting directly on to the canvas that he was able to transmit the feelings he experienced before nature. Drawings were therefore of prime importance as the agents of spontaneity. There is an extensive collection of his drawings, with sheets dating from all periods of his life, in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

3. Prints.

Pissarro was one of the most original and prolific printmakers of the second half of the 19th century. Certainly he was the most prolific printmaker among the Impressionists. His graphic oeuvre falls into three phases: before c. 1879; c. 1879–82; mid-1880s and after. Up to c. 1879 his prints (mostly etchings but also some lithographs) were strictly traditional in the manner of the Barbizon school. Although he became a member of the Société des Aquafortistes in 1863, Pissarro never exhibited with them, and during the later 1870s he became more interested in unorthodox printing methods.

The second phase (c. 1879–82) was the most innovative and was inspired by Degas, with whom he collaborated on a projected journal (*Le Jour et la nuit*) intended to promote the sale of original prints. Such prints as *Landscape under the Woods at l'Hermitage, Pontoise*; *Horizontal Landscape*; *Twilight with Haystacks* and *Rain Effect* (all 1879; see Delteil, 1923) are complex works both in terms of the mixed process used to produce them and in the attempt to create a series of impressions suggesting the fluctuations of nature. *Twilight with Haystacks* was realized in three states, which exist in a number of impressions, some of them printed in colour. Each impression was carefully annotated by Pissarro (one or two were printed by Degas), so that each image in the sequence has a visual integrity of its own, thus eschewing the traditional hierarchical progression leading to a final state. The annotations themselves were often idiosyncratic, including such terms as *épreuve d'artiste*, *épreuve définitive*, *épreuve de choix*. During this second phase etching and drypoint were still used for outline,

while a host of different techniques, such as soft-ground, aquatint and granular resins containing salt and sugar, were deployed to create a wide range of tonal effects. Some of these techniques were traditional but applied in unorthodox ways, others totally novel (*see* Jacque, Charles(-Emile)). The emphasis was on experimentation, so that accidents or imperfections were turned to advantage in creating effects of light and texture. The exact process by which some of these prints were made is often difficult to discern. It is now widely acknowledged that printmaking acquired a different status as a result of this concern for the purely creative aspects of the art, whereby each print became a work of art in its own right instead of merely reproducing other works of art. The new-found freedom resulting from the commingling of techniques allowed Pissarro and Degas to obtain atmospheric effects that in general pertained to Impressionist principles and perfectly complemented their paintings of these years.

In the third phase, which began in the mid-1880s, Pissarro moved away from Degas's experimental methods (although he continued to make monotypes) and concentrated instead on producing prints more suitable for sale, often with a topographical emphasis. Having previously relied on professional printers, Pissarro obtained his own press in 1894. This final phase is also notable for the return to lithography, undoubtedly encouraged by print publishers such as André Marty and Ambroise Vollard. Pissarro included his prints in the 1880 and 1886 Impressionist exhibitions, and he also participated in the various exhibitions of the *Peintres-graveurs* organized by Durand-Ruel during the 1880s and by Vollard during the 1890s. The finest collection of Pissarro's prints is in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, originally presented by the artist to the Musée du Luxembourg. Other important collections are in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the New York Public Library.

4. Dealers and collectors.

Pissarro experienced considerable financial hardship for most of his life. His uncompromising style and treatment of subject-matter meant that he failed to find buyers for his paintings at the Salon, and there was no ready-made alternative market for his pictures. Although he was dependent on Durand-Ruel, a major dealer, from an early date, such smaller dealers as Père Martin, Henri de Louis Latouche and Portier also bought his works intermittently. It was Durand-Ruel, however, who, sometimes at considerable financial risk, supported Pissarro more whole-heartedly than anyone else by buying his works for stock, arranging one-man exhibitions and promoting the sale of his pictures in England, Germany and the USA. Only towards the very end of his life did the artist enter into detailed negotiations with a rival dealer, Bernheim-Jeune, although during the 1880s a further outlet for his pictures was provided by Georges Petit, and Goupil-Boussod & Valadon. The first collectors of Pissarro's works were fellow artists, critics and members of other professions related to the arts. Degas, Gauguin and Gustave Caillebotte owned works by Pissarro, as did Duret and the opera singer Jean-Baptiste Faure. Collectors including Eugène Müurer, an ex-pastry cook and hotelier, and the Romanian Georges de Bellio, who was Pissarro's homeopathic doctor, often received works of art as payment. Pissarro's name also occurs among the early Impressionist sales dating from the 1870s. Perhaps the most discerning collectors in France were Antonin Personnaz, Dr Georges Viau and Etienne Moreau-Nélaton. Towards the end of his life Pissarro also attracted the attention of local collectors, such as Edouard Décap and Félix François Depeaux of Rouen, or Pieter Van de Velde of Le Havre.

After Pissarro's death, much of his work was divided among his family, but a studio sale was held in the Hôtel Drouot, Paris, on 25 June 1906. On his wife's death in 1926, there were two further, larger sales of both Pissarro's work and of his collection of work by other artists (Galerie Georges Petit, 3 Dec 1928 and Hôtel Drouot, 12–13 April 1929). The sale of the collection of Alexandre Bonin (Hôtel Drouot, 26 June 1931), the artist's son-in-law, was also significant.

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For further bibliography see Impressionism.

(2) Lucien Pissarro

(b Paris, Feb 20, 1863; d Hewood, Dorset, July 10, 1944).

Painter, printmaker and typographical designer, son of (1) Camille Pissarro. His father played a prominent role in his formation as an artist. Lucien's chief contribution as a painter was his blending of French and English stylistic tendencies. Several early works are in the Neo-Impressionist style and were included in the exhibition organized by the Société des Artistes Indépendants in Paris until his resignation in 1896, and by Les XX in Brussels.

Lucien moved permanently to England in 1890 and married Esther Bensusan two years later, setting up house in Epping and then Chiswick, near London. His style remained firmly based on accurate drawing and subtle colour and changed little during the course of his life. He frequently painted English subjects but also made regular journeys to France, visiting especially the south from the early 1920s onwards. His inside knowledge of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism ensured him an influential position in the English art world, and he became involved in turn with the New English Art Club, the Fitzroy Street Group and the Camden Town Group, forming close friendships with Walter Sickert, J. B. Manson and the critic Frank Rutter.

Lucien's career as an illustrator, designer and printer of books ran parallel to his work as a painter and was perhaps of greater significance. In 1884 he studied wood-engraving with Auguste Lepère, and from an early date his illustrations were accepted for publication by French and English journals. He was also profoundly influenced by the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and English illustrators, such as Charles Keene and Walter Crane.

After meeting Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon shortly after his move to England, Lucien founded the Eragny Press (1894) in the tradition of William Morris, printing his books at first on the Vale Press (1896–1903). After designing his own typeface (Brook type), he set up a press in 1902 at The Brook, Stamford Brook Road, Chiswick, where he lived until 1939. The Eragny Press issued 32 books in Brook type between 1903 and 1914. His wife often collaborated with him, especially in the engraving or cutting of blocks and in the running of the Eragny Press. Some early work is signed L. Vellay (his mother's maiden name). An extensive collection of his work is in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, where it was presented together with the artist's papers by his widow in 1950.

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