

# Impressionism

## When?

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century

## Where?

Paris, France

Impressionism is an art movement that was developed in France by Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas and others from early 1860s. In 1874 at Nadar's studio in Paris, the group had its first show independent from the official art scene, represented by the Salon of the French Academy, which had consistently rejected most of their works. Monet's painting *Impression: Sunrise* (1872) earned them the initially derisive name "Impressionists" from the journalist Louis Leroy writing in the satirical magazine *Le Charivari* in 1874. The artists themselves soon adopted the name as descriptive of their intention to accurately convey visual "impressions." Their paintings were shocking for the art scene and the audience of their time, both in terms of subject matter and their formal feature.

**Subject matter** Impressionists rejected the conventional idealizing treatments of academic painting. The importance of subject matter was downgraded and attention was shifted to the artist's manipulation of colour, tone, and texture as ends in themselves. Contemporary everyday life, landscape and urban scenes replaced the traditional historical or mythological subject with literary or anecdotal overtones. In Manet's painting the subject became a vehicle for the artful composition of areas of flat colour, and perspectival depth was minimized so that the viewer would look at the surface patterns of the picture rather than into the illusory three-dimensional space it created.

**Formal aspects** These artists abandoned the traditional landscape palette of muted greens, browns, and grays and instead painted in sunnier, more brilliant key. They began by painting the play of light upon water and the reflected colours of its ripples, trying to reproduce the animated effects of sunlight and shadow and of direct and reflected light that they observed. In their efforts to reproduce immediate visual impressions as registered on the retina, they abandoned the use of grays and blacks in shadows and used complementary colours instead. Forms in their pictures lost their clear outlines and became dematerialized and vibrating in a re-creation of actual outdoor conditions. Traditional formal compositions were abandoned in favour of a more casual and less contrived disposition of objects within the picture frame, often influenced by photographs, adding tension and movement to the images (see for examples Degas' paintings).

**Technique** In 19<sup>th</sup> century, photography, invented by J. N. Niépce and Daguerre in the 30s, caused some sort of revolution in the world of visual art. Painters had to respond to a medium that let anybody be able to make up accurate reproductions of reality. During the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, industrial produced oil paint became available in lead tubes replacing pigments and pig bladder. With their lighter equipment, Impressionists adopted the practice of painting entirely out-of-doors while looking at the actual scene, instead of finishing up his painting from sketches in the studio, as was the conventional practice. New colors based on chrome and cadmium endowed their palette with bright hues of yellow and green.