

# Outside

Outside & Out of the Box

A GUIDE TO IMPRESSIONISM

# The Shocking New Art Movement

The word “impressionism” makes most people think of beautiful, sunlit paintings of the French countryside; glorious gardens and lily ponds; and fashionable Parisians enjoying life in charming cafés. But in 1874, when the men and women who came to be known as the Impressionists first exhibited their work, their style of painting was considered shocking and outrageous by all but the most forward-thinking viewers. Why did these young artists cause such an uproar? The following comparison shows how their radical ideas, techniques, and subjects broke the time-honored rules and traditions of art in late 19th-century France.

“What do we see in the work of these men?  
Nothing but defiance, almost an insult to  
the tastes and intelligence of the public.”

1874

— Etienne Carjat, “L'exposition du boulevard des  
Capucines,” *Le Patriote Français*

“There is little doubt that Impressionist landscape paintings  
are the most . . . appreciated works of art ever produced.”

1984

— Richard Brettell and Scott Schaefer, *A Day in the Country:  
Impressionism and the French Landscape*



**The Judgment of Paris, 1808**  
François Xavier Fabre (French, 1766–1837)

## The accepted style of painting often featured

- great historical subjects or mythological scenes that were meant to be morally uplifting;
- an emphasis on line, filled in with color;
- smooth, almost invisible brushstrokes;
- paintings primarily done in the artist's studio.



**The Watering Pond at Marly with Hoarfrost, 1876**  
Alfred Sisley (English, 1839–1899)

## The Impressionist style of painting often featured

- ordinary subjects from everyday life;
- an emphasis on color, lines “dissolved”;
- highly visible brushstrokes referred to as “painterly”;
- paintings completed outdoors, or *en plein air*.

RIGHT “Daisy” **Cantering, Saddled**, 1885,  
Eadweard Muybridge (English born, 1830–1904)  
See page 10



# Challenging the Establishment

What happened to artists who dared to challenge established tastes and standards? Many of them found that their work was not accepted for display at the government-sanctioned, annual Paris Salon, the most important art show of the time. Acceptance by the Salon was critical to those hoping to achieve success and sell their work.

As seen in the image below, thousands of artists competed for entry into this distinguished exhibition, subjecting their work to the scrutiny of a small committee of judges that had the power not only to accept or reject a painting but to rank it as well. If each member of the committee approved a work, it was accepted for display and hung “on the line,” meaning at the ideal viewing height in the gallery. Works receiving fewer positive votes were placed in less advantageous positions. Indeed, they might be “skyyed,” placed so close to the ceiling that viewing them was virtually impossible. The works that were turned down were stamped on the back with a red *R*—meaning *refusé*. This humiliating badge of rejection made it more difficult for the artist to sell the painting to a private buyer. All in all, artists typically had about a fifty-fifty chance of being accepted. In 1863, those odds dropped significantly, when only 988 artists were accepted out of three thousand. With artists’ livelihoods depending to such a large degree on Salon acceptance, frustration with the judging hit an all-time high and reached the ears of the emperor.



## The 1863 Salon des Refusés

After so many artists were rejected from the Salon competition of 1863, Napoleon III stepped in to still the outcry. He ordered a separate exhibition of the rejected works that came to be called the Salon des Refusés. It drew a crowd of seven thousand people on the first day alone. One of the works displayed was Édouard Manet’s *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe*, today considered one of art history’s most important paintings. The depiction of two fully dressed men with a nude woman in a contemporary setting shocked traditional critics and viewers, especially since the figures were identifiable. Younger critics, however, recognized *Le déjeuner* as a manifesto of artistic freedom granting painters the authority to create according to their own sensibilities rather than blindly follow accepted modes of representation.



TOP LEFT Storeroom of the Palais de l’Industrie before the opening of the 1863 Salon

LEFT *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe*, 1863, Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883)

# A New Society of Artists



Studio of French photographer Félix Nadar located at 35 de Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, site of the first exhibit of Impressionist paintings in 1874.

The majority of artists continued to struggle for acceptance into the Salon in the years following the famous 1863 Salon des Refusés—the Impressionists among them. But while they wanted the recognition and financial stability the Salon’s approval could offer, they also wanted to pursue new ways of painting. As a result, their works were often returned, stamped with the infamous red *R*.

In 1874, determined to make the public aware of their art, the Impressionists organized their own exhibition separate from the Salon. A year earlier, the group took the unprecedented step of forming a private, independent association of artists called Société anonyme des artistes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc. (Anonymous society of artists, painters, sculptors, and printmakers). The decision to hold an exhibition that was essentially a capitalistic enterprise was a bold one in many ways. Unlike the multitude of artists who exhibited at the Salon, only thirty artists participated in this exhibit, and each could display several works as opposed to the limit of two imposed by the Salon. The works were exhibited in a casual, intimate manner; some were displayed on easels, almost as if the viewers were visiting an artist’s studio. Held in the large, modern, glass-fronted studio of the great French photographer Félix Nadar, the exhibition opened two weeks earlier than the Salon, a tactic chosen to garner advance publicity and negate any notions that the exhibition consisted of rejected works. The strategy worked; the exhibit attracted a great deal of media attention. In fact it was a journalist, mocking Claude Monet’s painting *Impression, Sunrise*, who gave the group the name that would later become synonymous with beauty: Impressionism.

“The common view that brings these artists together in a group and makes of them a collective force within our disintegrating age is their determination not to aim for perfection, but to be satisfied with a certain general aspect. Once the impression is captured, they declare their role finished. . . . If one wishes to characterize and explain them with a single word, then one would have to coin the word impressionists. They are impressionists in that they do not render a landscape but the sensation produced by the landscape. The word itself has passed into their language: in the catalogue the *Sunrise* by Monet is called not landscape, but impression. Thus they take leave of reality and enter the realms of idealism.” — Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Le Siècle*

1874

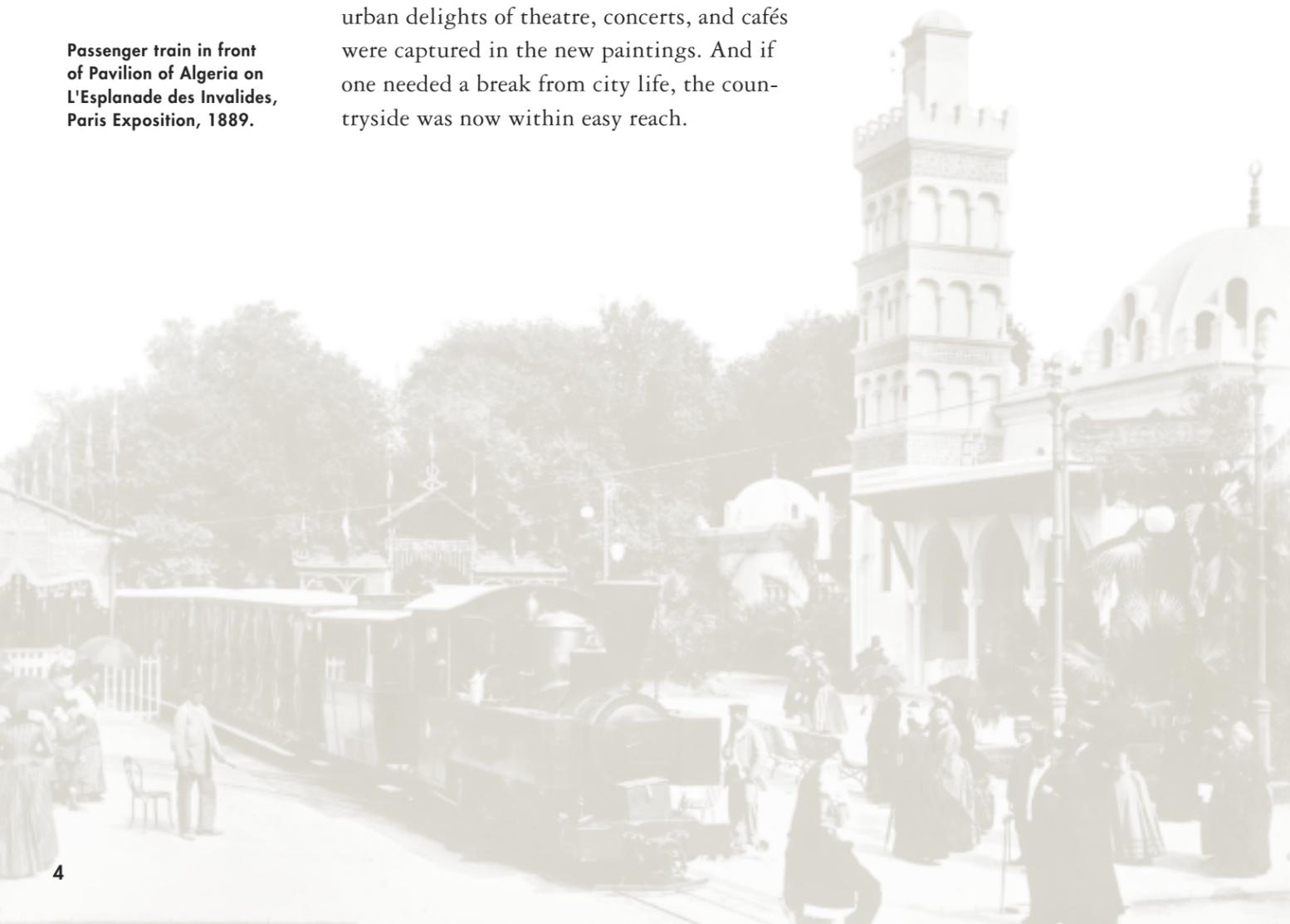


# A City under Construction

Although Paris at mid-century was Europe's second largest city, its infrastructure was antiquated and inadequate. Unlike London and Berlin, it lacked public systems for water and sewage, sufficient roads, and other urban resources to support its burgeoning population. The first act of the formerly exiled Napoleon III, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, was to modernize Paris. He appointed Baron Haussmann to mastermind one of the largest urban renewal projects the world had ever seen. Paris became a vast construction site, and much of the city was demolished to make way for wide boulevards and modern buildings. Thousands of people—primarily the working class—were evicted and relegated to degraded and poor suburbs, a decidedly political ploy since Napoleon III considered these neighborhoods hotbeds of left-wing radicals. The family of Pierre-Auguste Renoir was one of those displaced. Their home stood on the site where the Louvre's central courtyard is located today.

The negative aspects of living in the midst of urban renewal were offset by an exhilarating sense of change and vitality. Modern life in Paris attained a new vibrancy reflected in many Impressionist canvases. Middle-class Parisians enjoyed the increased leisure time made possible by the time-saving machines of the Industrial Revolution. The urban delights of theatre, concerts, and cafés were captured in the new paintings. And if one needed a break from city life, the countryside was now within easy reach.

Passenger train in front of Pavilion of Algeria on L'Esplanade des Invalides, Paris Exposition, 1889.



# Artists on the Move

The increase of rail travel was a key component in the emerging drama of Impressionism, especially with regard to landscape painting. During the 1800s railroad tracks crisscrossed France to create one of the finest transportation systems in Europe. People took advantage of this economical means of travel to enjoy the beautiful countryside or seashore away from the bustle of Paris.

Artists were also on the move, leaving their studios to paint the same landscapes and seascapes their fellow citizens were enjoying. New developments in artists' equipment—lightweight, portable easels; folding chairs; and especially collapsible metal paint tubes that replaced unwieldy pouches made from pigs' bladders and prevented paint from drying out—made it easy for artists to paint outdoors. In addition, explorations in the science of color and innovations in photography, the latter still a relatively recent invention, inspired artists to look at the world around them in a new way.



The collapsible metal paint tube replaced unwieldy pouches made from pigs' bladders.



## In Open Air **en plein air**

Advances in transportation made tourism ever easier for the French middle and upper classes. Holidays by the sea were all the rage, and visitors flocked to scenic ports along the coast of the English Channel (referred to as La Manche in France) to take advantage of the healthful sea breezes. They enjoyed the opportunity to see and be seen, as evidenced by the stylish clothing of the vacationers in this painting by Eugène Boudin.



**The Beach at Trouville, 1864**  
Eugène Boudin (French, 1824–1898)

Like artists today, 19th-century painters worked hard to make a living from their art. Boudin's pictures of fashionable figures on the beach were very popular, no doubt reminding those who bought them of their own seaside excursions. But Boudin's upbringing and childhood—his father was a seaman and the artist himself spent time as a cabin boy—sometimes made him feel “ashamed at painting the idle rich.”



**A French Fishing Fleet with Packet Boat, 1889**  
Eugène Boudin (French, 1824–1898)

The subject that truly captured Boudin's heart was the ever-changing play of light and clouds billowing across the sky. To capture these fleeting effects, he painted directly from nature, using short, rapid brushstrokes to sketch the scene.

Boudin influenced the new generation of artists coming along, especially the young Claude Monet. In fact, Boudin exhibited along with the Impressionists in their groundbreaking exhibition of 1874.



**Camille at the Window, Argenteuil, 1873**  
Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)

Boudin's unofficial student, Claude Monet, became the driving force in the new style of art. Following Boudin's example, the passionate young artist began his lifelong love of painting outdoors. Monet later said, “Boudin, with untiring kindness, undertook my education. My eyes were finally opened and I really understood nature; I learned at the same time to love it.”

Like Boudin, Monet used short, quick brushstrokes to convey the rich details in this painting. Although titled *Camille at the Window*, the work is more than a portrait of the artist's wife: she becomes, almost, one of the flowers he has vigorously depicted.

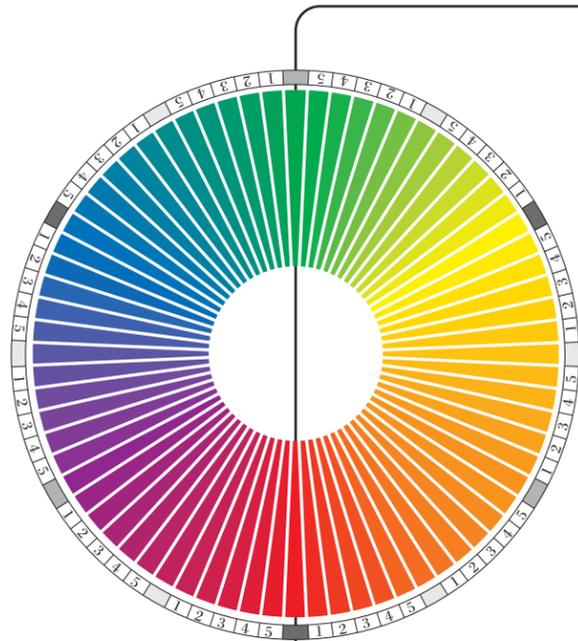


# The Science of Color



**Field of Poppies, Giverny, 1885**  
Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)

Over the next ten years, Monet continued to explore the effects of light on his outdoor subjects. He also began to push the boundaries of what was acceptable treatment of color in his paintings. By the time he completed *Field of Poppies, Giverny*, the features that would become trademarks of the Impressionist style were in place: bright, contrasting colors; distinctive brushwork; and subjects from daily life painted outdoors.



The science of color, especially the studies of the French chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul, influenced the work of the Impressionist painters. Chevreul’s “law of simultaneous contrast” states that placing two colors next to each other will change how they are perceived. For example, complementary colors (those colors opposite each other on the color wheel: red and green; blue and orange; yellow and purple) placed side by side will seem more vibrant and intense than when viewed separately. Monet’s interest in these optical effects can be observed in the painting above. Notice the brilliant red poppies against the lush green of the meadow.

# Scenes from Daily Life



**“Pensive” (La Songeuse), 1875**  
Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)

The son of a tailor and a dressmaker, Pierre-Auguste Renoir spent his teenage years decorating ceramics in a porcelain factory. By 1860, however, he began attending painting classes at the private studio of the Swiss artist Charles Gleyre. Here Renoir became friends with Claude Monet, and soon the two artists were journeying to the countryside to paint directly from nature.

From a technical point of view, both Renoir and Monet painted in the Impressionist style: both used fresh, bright colors applied in short, rapid brushstrokes, and both showed scenes from daily life. But compare Renoir’s *Pensive* with Monet’s *Camille at the Window* (both painted in the 1870s). How are they different? Renoir’s brushstrokes appear more delicate, almost feathery. More than any painter in the Impressionist group, Renoir focused on people, especially women and children, in quiet, gentle scenes.



## Capturing Movement



**At the Races: Before the Start**  
ca. 1880  
Edgar Degas  
(French, 1834–1917)

Unlike his fellow Impressionists, Edgar Degas preferred to work in his studio rather than outdoors. While Monet and Renoir painted directly on their canvases, Degas more often prepared detailed drawings before he put a brush to his paintings. “No art,” he declared, “is less spontaneous than mine.” But in his choice of modern-day subjects, this serious young artist allied himself with the Impressionist group, joining in almost all of their exhibitions. He was also the most influenced by photography, especially Eadweard Muybridge’s revolutionary work showing the horse in motion that was published in Paris in 1874. (Flip through these pages to see Muybridge’s horse gallop in the lower righthand corner of this booklet.)

Degas’ *At the Races: Before the Start* freezes the restless activity of sleek thoroughbreds and their jockeys as they prepare to approach the post. The eye follows the line of horses across the canvas, from the cropped figure on the right to those that ride off into the distance. The colorful silks sparkle in the sunlight against the lush fields of green and gold.

Nineteenth-century Paris was an important center for the photographic arts given the presence of pioneers such as Félix Nadar. He befriended the young Impressionists, whom he came to know at the Café Guerbois, where the group gathered to discuss and debate art. For their first exhibition, he leased them his modern studio located in the commercial district of Paris. Although many painters regarded photography with suspicion and saw it as a threat to their livelihood, Edgar Degas believed it was a powerful tool to study movement and capture the fleeting moments of daily life so important to the Impressionists.



## A Modern Woman



**Young Woman Watering a Shrub**, 1876  
Berthe Morisot (French, 1841–1895)

Berthe Morisot was the first woman in the history of French art to be fully accepted as a peer by a group of male artists. A radical idea in itself, Morisot’s inclusion reinforced Impressionism as an art movement for modern life. As a well-bred young woman from a successful bourgeois family, it would not have been unusual for her to pursue painting as a hobby. She studied under Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and other instructors, but her art took a decidedly serious turn under the influence of her friend Édouard Manet. At that time it was very difficult for women of her rank to pursue careers other than marriage and motherhood, but Morisot managed to accomplish all three. She married Manet’s brother, had a child, and exhibited in all but one of the eight Impressionist exhibitions.

Morisot specialized in depicting modern life as lived by women like her. Her subjects tend to be members of her family or close friends, not unusual since young women, even married women, were limited in their excursions to public places and were always chaperoned.

The woman in this painting has just stepped outside to water a plant in a jardiniere. She lifts the hem of her white house gown to keep it clean. The loose brushwork is characteristic of Morisot’s desire to capture the subject with as few strokes as possible. While some critics objected to this economy of brushwork, others praised her spontaneity and delicate sense of color—once compared to crushed jewels and flower petals.



# New Directions **Directions**

The Impressionist painters, though united in many aspects, maintained their individuality as artists throughout their careers. Their influence guided a generation of painters who followed the paths established by the Impressionists and then forged new directions of their own. For example, beneath the painterly surface of Paul Cézanne's 1877 portrait of Victor Chocquet, there is an underlying structure based on geometric shapes that would later revolutionize how artists understood and portrayed the world. Vincent van Gogh's energetic, expressive brushwork in *Wheat Field behind St. Paul's Hospital, Saint Rémy* reflects an Impressionist heritage but speaks more to an inner reality of mind and spirit than an outward representation of the land.

The Impressionists' revolutionary way of looking at, depicting, and understanding the world forever changed the course of art, opening doors to ever-diverse means of artistic expression in response to an ever-changing modern society.



**Victor Chocquet**, ca. 1877  
Paul Cézanne (French, 1839–1906)



**Wheat Field behind St. Paul's Hospital, St. Rémy**, 1889  
Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890)

# Lesson Plans

**Bring the Impressionists into your classroom.**

Impressionist painters thought outside the box. They applied new technology, inventions, and ideas to their work. These lesson plans—designed for kindergarten through 12th grade—will allow you and your students to explore the history, culture, and art of 19th-century France through the works of these painters.

## Finish

LESSON PLAN ONE

**Finish the picture with Berthe Morisot.**

## Tour

LESSON PLAN TWO

**Tour the French coast with Eugène Boudin.**

## Explore

LESSON PLAN THREE

**Explore the relationship between colors with Claude Monet.**

## Learn

LESSON PLAN FOUR

**Learn how science informed the art of Edgar Degas.**

## Discover

LESSON PLAN FIVE

**Discover the Post-Impressionist style of Vincent van Gogh.**

## See

LESSON PLAN SIX

**See how Japanese art affected the work of Pierre-Auguste Renoir.**

