

The essence of Impressionism: outstanding names, history and painting techniques

Author: Snejco Alexei

Ling. cons.: E. Cuşnir

In this article the author gives a brief but many-sided characteristic of Impressionism, an outstanding art movement of the 19th century.

Impressionism was a 19th-century art movement that began as an association of Paris-based artists exhibiting their art publicly in the 1860s. The name of the movement is taken from the title of a Claude Monet work, *Impression, Sunrise* [1].

The main features of Impressionist paintings include visible brush strokes, open composition, emphasis on light in its changing qualities, ordinary subjects, movement as the main element of human perception and experience, and unusual visual angles.

A brief historical overview:

The Academie des Beaux-Arts dominated the French art in the middle of the 19th century. The Academie was the upholder of traditional standards for French painting in content and style. Historical subjects, religious themes and portraits were valued, colour was somber and conservative. Some young artists painted in a lighter and brighter manner. Radicals in their time, early Impressionists broke the rules of academic painting. They began by giving colours and drawing inspiration from the works of painters such as Eugene Delacroix. They also took the act of painting out of the studio and into the modern world. Before, still portraits and landscapes had usually been painted indoors. Painting realistic scenes of modern life, they underlined vivid overall effects rather than details. They used pure and unmixed colours in order to achieve the effect of intense colour vibration. Each year, they submitted their art to the Academie, but the juries always rejected their best efforts in favour of works by artists of the approved style. Monet, Sisley, Morisot, and Pissarro may be considered the 'purest' Impressionists for their art of spontaneity,

sunlight, and colour. Degas rejected much of this, as he believed in the primacy of drawing over colour. Renoir turned against Impressionism in the 1880s, and never completely came back to its ideas. Edouard Manet, being a leader of the group, however, never abandoned his liberal use of black as a colour, and never participated in the Impressionist exhibitions. All these artists were a diverse group in style and temperament, but were unified by their spirit of independence and rebellion.

The public, at first hostile, gradually began to believe that the Impressionists had captured a fresh and original vision, even if it did not receive the approval of the art critics. By the early 1890s the methods of Impressionist painting had been accepted by the Academie too. Impressionism became a base to various movements in painting which followed, including Neo-Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism.

Impressionist techniques:

- Short, thick strokes of paint are used to quickly capture the essence of the subject rather than its details.
- Colours are applied side-by-side with as little mixing as possible, creating a vibrant surface.
- Greys and dark tones are produced by mixing complementary colours. In pure Impressionism the use of black paint is avoided.
- Wet paint is placed into wet paint without waiting for applications to dry, producing softer edges.
- The play of natural light is emphasized.

Painters throughout the history had occasionally used these methods, but Impressionists were the first to use all of them together, and with such boldness.

Bibliography:

1. *Словарь по искусству*, Moscow, 1999, pp. 67-68.
2. *World Book Encyclopedia*, World Book Inc., 1991, Vol. 10.
3. <http://arthistory.about.com/od/impressionism/>