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A Companion to Impressionism

Edited by André Dombrowski



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A Companion
to Impressionism

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A Companion to Impressionism

Edited by

André Dombrowski

WILEY Blackwell

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Contents

List of Figures	ix
About the Editor	xiv
Notes on Contributors	xv
Series Editor's Preface	xxiii
Acknowledgments	xxv
Introduction	1
<i>André Dombrowski</i>	
Part I What Was Impressionism? What Is an Impression?	
Definitions and New Directions	9
1 Impressionism and Criticism	11
<i>Marnin Young</i>	
2 Rethinking the Origins of Impressionism: The Case of Claude Monet and <i>Corner of a Studio</i>	27
<i>Mary-Dailey Desmarais</i>	
3 Monet in the 1880s: The Motif in Crisis	43
<i>Marc Gotlieb</i>	
4 As a Glass Eye: Manet's Flower Paintings	61
<i>Briony Fer</i>	
5 Figuring Perception: Monet's Leap into <i>Plein Air</i> , 1866–1867	75
<i>Michael Marrinan</i>	

6	Pater, Impressionism, and the Undoing of Sense <i>Jeremy Melius</i>	93
7	The Impressionist Mind: Modern Painting and Nineteenth-Century Readerships <i>Ségolène Le Men</i>	107
Part II Painting as Object: Tools, Materials, and Close Looking		127
8	Impression, Improvisation, and Premeditation: New Insights into the Working Methods and Creative Process of Claude Monet <i>Gloria Groom and Kimberley Muir</i>	129
9	<i>Piquer, Plaquer</i> : Cézanne, Pissarro, and Palette-Knife Painting <i>Nancy Locke</i>	146
10	John Singer Sargent's <i>Lady with a Blue Veil</i> and the Matter of Paint <i>Susan Sidlauskas</i>	162
Part III New Visual Media and the Other Arts		181
11	Painting Photographing Ballooning: At the Boulevard des Capucines <i>Carol M. Armstrong</i>	183
12	Series and Screens: Seeing Monet's <i>Cathedrals</i> through the Lens of the Cinematograph <i>Marine Kisiel</i>	201
13	Critical Impressionism: A Painting by Mary Cassatt and Its Challenge to the Social Rules of Art <i>Anne Higonnet</i>	219
14	James McNeill Whistler: Veiling the Everyday <i>Caroline Arscott</i>	234
Part IV Impressionism and Identity		251
15	Cassatt's Alterity <i>Hollis Clayson</i>	253
16	Bazille, Degas, and Modern Black Paris [Excerpt from <i>Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today</i> , Yale University Press, pp. 70–83, with a new preface. Reprinted with permission from Yale University Press] <i>Denise Murrell</i>	271

17	Expert Hands, Infectious Touch: Painting and Pregnancy in Morisot's <i>The Mother and Sister of the Artist</i> <i>Mary Hunter</i>	287
18	Painting the Prototype: The (Homo)Sexuality of Bazille's <i>Summer Scene</i> <i>Jonathan D. Katz, with André Dombrowski</i>	304
Part V Public and Private		323
19	Revival and Risk: Renoir, Fragonard, and the Epistolary Theme <i>Nina L. Dubin</i>	325
20	"The Little Dwarf and the Giant Lady:" At Home with Gustave Caillebotte <i>Felix Krämer</i>	343
21	Renoir, Impressionism, and the Value of Touch <i>Martha Lucy</i>	357
22	Morisot's Urbane Ecologies <i>Alison Syme</i>	375
23	Incorporating Impressionism: The <i>Société anonyme</i> and the First Impressionist Exhibition in 1874 <i>André Dombrowski</i>	393
Part VI World Impressionism		415
24	"Plume Mania:" Degas, Feathers, and the Global Millinery Trade <i>Simon Kelly</i>	417
25	Home and Alienation in the Colonies: Auguste Renoir in Algiers, Jean Renoir in India <i>Todd Porterfield</i>	435
26	Impressionism in Japan: The Awakening of the Senses <i>Takanori Nagai</i>	452
27	Impressionism in Argentina: A Historiographical Discussion <i>Laura Malosetti Costa</i>	466
28	Turkish Impressionism: Interplays of Culture and Form <i>Ahu Antmen</i>	484

29	Impressionism and Naturalism in Germany: The Competing Aesthetic and Ideological Imperatives of a Modern Art <i>Alex Potts</i>	499
Part VII Criticism, Displays, and Markets		517
30	Degenerate Art: Impressionism and the Specter of Crisis in French Painting <i>Neil McWilliam</i>	519
31	Impressionism through the Prism of New Methods: A Social and Cartographic Study of Monet's Address Book <i>Félicie Faizand de Maupeon</i>	533
32	Against the Grain: Gustave Caillebotte and Paul Durand-Ruel's Impressionism <i>Mary Morton</i>	547
33	Are Museum Curators "Very Special Clients?" Impressionism, the Art Market, and Museums (Paul Durand-Ruel and the Musée du Luxembourg at the Turn of the Twentieth Century) <i>Sylvie Patry</i>	566
34	The Museum of Impressionism, 1947 <i>Martha Ward</i>	583
	Index	601

List of Figures

1.1	Claude Monet, <i>Impression, Sunrise</i> , 1872.	12
2.1	Claude Monet, <i>Corner of a Studio</i> , 1861.	28
2.2	Eugène Delacroix, <i>The Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha</i> , 1835.	31
2.3	Gustave Courbet, <i>The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life</i> , 1854–1855.	33
2.4	Claude Monet, <i>Hunting Trophy</i> , 1862.	36
2.5	Eugène Boudin, <i>Still-Life: White Duck on a Console</i> , c. 1854–1857.	37
3.1	Claude Monet, <i>On the Cliff at Pourville, Clear Weather</i> , 1882.	44
3.2	Claude Monet, <i>Antibes</i> , 1888.	45
3.3	Claude Monet, <i>Argenteuil</i> , 1872.	49
3.4	Claude Monet, <i>La Grenouillère</i> , 1869.	50
3.5	Claude Monet, <i>The Church at Varengeville</i> , 1882.	52
3.6	Claude Monet, <i>The Four Trees</i> , 1891.	56
4.1	Édouard Manet, <i>Vase of White Lilacs and Roses</i> , 1883.	63
4.2	Édouard Manet, <i>Vase of Peonies on a Pedestal</i> , 1864.	65
4.3	Édouard Manet, <i>Lilacs in a Vase</i> , c. 1882.	68
4.4	Édouard Manet, <i>Moss Roses in a Vase</i> , 1882.	69
4.5	Édouard Manet, <i>Flowers in a Crystal Vase</i> , c. 1882.	71
5.1	Claude Monet, <i>Women in the Garden</i> , 1866–1867.	78
5.2	Claude Monet, <i>Flowering Garden at Sainte-Adresse</i> , 1867.	83
5.3	Claude Monet, <i>Woman in the Garden: Sainte-Adresse</i> , 1867.	84
5.4	Claude Monet, <i>Adolphe Monet Reading in a Garden</i> , 1867.	85
5.5	Claude Monet, <i>Garden at Saint-Adresse</i> , 1867.	86
7.1	Gustave Courbet, <i>Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and His Children in 1853</i> , 1865.	109
7.2	Paul Cézanne, <i>Gustave Geffroy</i> , 1895–1896.	110
7.3	Claude Monet, <i>Rue Saint-Denis, Celebration of June 30</i> , 1878, 1878.	112
7.4	Vincent van Gogh, <i>Still-Life with Bible</i> , October 1885.	115
7.5	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>Claude Monet Reading</i> , 1872.	119

8.1	Claude Monet, <i>The Beach at Sainte-Adresse</i> , 1867.	131
8.2	X-ray of Claude Monet, <i>Stacks of Wheat (Sunset, Snow Effect)</i> , 1890–1891.	134
8.3	Transmitted-infrared image of Claude Monet, <i>Poppy Field (Giverny)</i> , 1890–1891.	138
8.4	Canvas weave match group. Left (top to bottom): Claude Monet, <i>Étretat: The Beach and the Falaise d'Amont</i> , 1885; Claude Monet, <i>The Departure of the Boats, Étretat</i> , 1885; and Claude Monet, <i>Rocks at Port-Goulphar, Belle-Île</i> , 1886.	139
8.5	Detail of Claude Monet, <i>On the Bank of the Seine, Bennecourt</i> , 1868.	141
9.1	Camille Pissarro, <i>A Square in La Roche-Guyon</i> , 1867.	147
9.2	Camille Pissarro, <i>Banks of the Marne in Winter</i> , 1866.	149
9.3	Paul Cézanne, <i>The Lawyer (Uncle Dominique)</i> , 1866.	151
9.4	Camille Pissarro, <i>The Climb, Rue de la Côte-du-Jalet, Pontoise</i> , 1875.	154
9.5	Paul Cézanne, <i>The Étang des Soeurs, Osny, near Pontoise</i> , c. 1875.	155
10.1	John Singer Sargent, <i>Lady with a Blue Veil (Sally Fairchild)</i> , 1890.	163
10.2	Photograph of Violet Sargent (dated 21 February 1889 on verso).	164
10.3	Photograph of John Singer Sargent in Nahant (Lucia Fairchild is in the background), August 1890.	165
10.4	John Singer Sargent, <i>Henry Cabot Lodge</i> , 1890.	166
10.5	John Singer Sargent, <i>Claude Monet Painting by the Edge of a Wood</i> , c. 1885.	168
10.6	Photograph of Sally Fairchild, n. d.	172
10.7	Édouard Manet, <i>Young Woman in a Round Hat</i> , c. 1877–1879.	174
11.1	Claude Monet, <i>Boulevard des Capucines</i> , 1873–1874.	184
11.2	Claude Monet, <i>Boulevard des Capucines</i> , 1873–1874.	185
11.3	Gaspard-Félix Tournachon [Nadar], <i>Aerial View of Paris (Premier résultat de la photographie aérostatique)</i> , c. 1868.	188
11.4	Victor Navlet, <i>General View of Paris from a Hot-Air Balloon</i> , 1855.	191
11.5	Gaspard-Félix Tournachon [Nadar], <i>Interior of Le Géant Inflating</i> , 1863.	193
12.1	Demonstration of the cinematograph, in G. Mareschal, “Le Cinématographe à l’exposition de l’enseignement de la Ville de Paris,” <i>La Nature</i> , 29 September 1900.	203
12.2	Exhibition view of four of Claude Monet’s <i>Rouen Cathedral</i> paintings in the galleries of the Musée d’Orsay, Paris, 2016.	204
12.3	Claude Monet, <i>Rouen Cathedral: West Façade, Sunlight</i> , 1894.	206
12.4	Claude Monet, <i>Rouen Cathedral: West Façade</i> , 1894.	207
12.5	Detail of Claude Monet, <i>Rouen Cathedral: West Façade and Saint-Romain Tower, Morning Effect</i> , 1893.	208
13.1	Mary Cassatt, <i>Lady at the Tea Table</i> , 1883–1885.	220
13.2	Berthe Morisot, <i>The Sisters</i> , 1869.	221
13.3	Unknown artist, <i>Two Ladies and an Officer Seated at Tea</i> , c. 1715.	224
13.4	Henri Guérard, after James McNeill Whistler, <i>Madame Whistler</i> , 1883.	225
13.5	Unknown artist, Tea set, Chinese, nineteenth century (prior to 1883).	227
13.6	Unknown artist, Lappet, Flemish, early-eighteenth century.	231

14.1	Rembrandt van Rijn, <i>Self Portrait Leaning on a Stone Sill</i> , 1639.	239
14.2	Percy Thomas, after James McNeill Whistler, 1874.	240
14.3	James McNeill Whistler, <i>The Dance House: Nocturne</i> , 1889.	243
14.4	Rembrandt van Rijn, <i>Slaughtered Ox</i> (or <i>Carcass of Beef</i>), 1655.	244
14.5	James McNeill Whistler, <i>Brown and Gold</i> , 1895–1900.	246
15.1	Stone plaque mounted in 2012 by the American Club of Paris on the façade of Mary Cassatt's apartment building at 10 rue de Marignan, Paris.	254
15.2	Mary Cassatt, <i>Under the Lamp</i> , c. 1882.	258
15.3	Mary Cassatt, <i>The Tub</i> (or <i>The Bath</i>), 1890–1891.	260
15.4	Mary Cassatt, <i>Mother and Child</i> , c. 1890.	263
15.5	Mary Cassatt, <i>Seated Woman with an Infant in Her Arms</i> , 1889–1890.	264
16.1	Édouard Manet, <i>Olympia</i> , 1863.	273
16.2	Thomas Eakins, <i>Female Model</i> , c. 1867–1869.	274
16.3	Frédéric Bazille, <i>Young Woman with Peonies</i> , 1870.	276
16.4	Frédéric Bazille, <i>Black Woman with Peonies</i> , 1870.	277
16.5	Edgar Degas, <i>Miss Lala at the Cirque Fernando</i> , 1879.	281
16.6	Edgar Degas, <i>Miss Lala at the Fernando Circus</i> , 1879.	282
17.1	Berthe Morisot, <i>The Mother and Sister of the Artist</i> , 1869–1870.	288
17.2	Berthe Morisot, <i>Portrait of Madame Edma Pontillon</i> , 1871.	292
17.3	Cham [Charles Amédée de Noé], “Madame! This Is Not Prudent. Stay Back!,” <i>Le Charivari</i> , 16 April 1877.	295
17.4	Paul Gavarni, “Philanthropy Bump,” <i>Le Charivari</i> , 30 March 1838.	296
17.5	Antoine Chazal, “Placenta above the Orifice,” in Jacques-Pierre Maygrier, <i>Nouvelles démonstrations d'accouchemens</i> , Paris: Béchét, 1822.	297
18.1	Frédéric Bazille, <i>Summer Scene (Bathers)</i> , 1869–1870.	305
18.2	Arthur Belorget [“The Countess”], “The Countess Putting on Make-Up,” in Henri Legludic, “Confidences et aveux d'un Parisien: La Comtesse (1850–1861),” <i>Notes et observations de médecine légale: Attentats au moeurs</i> , Paris: G. Masson, 1896.	307
18.3	Frédéric Bazille, <i>Young Male Nude Lying in the Grass</i> , 1870.	311
18.4	Frédéric Bazille, <i>Fisherman with a Net</i> , 1868.	312
18.5	Detail of Figure 18.1.	313
18.6	Bertall [Charles Albert d'Arnoux], Caricature of Frédéric Bazille's <i>Summer Scene</i> , in “Promenade au Salon de 1870,” <i>Journal amusant</i> , 28 May 1870.	315
19.1	Gustave Jean Jacquet, <i>The Love Letter</i> , c. 1900.	326
19.2	Édouard Manet, <i>Woman Writing</i> , before 1866.	327
19.3	Jean-Honoré Fragonard, <i>The Love Letter</i> , early 1770s.	328
19.4	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>Woman with a Letter</i> , c. 1890.	332
19.5	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>The Letter</i> , c. 1895–1900.	333
20.1	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Young Man Playing the Piano</i> , 1876.	345
20.2	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Luncheon</i> , 1876.	346
20.3	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Interior, Woman at the Window</i> , 1880.	347
20.4	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Interior, a Woman Reading</i> , 1880.	349

20.5	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>A Game of Bezique</i> , 1881.	350
21.1	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>The Great Bathers</i> , 1884–1887.	358
21.2	Anonymous, <i>The Touch</i> , 1635, in <i>Collection Michel Hennin: Estampes relatives à l'histoire de France</i> , vol. 30, no. 2650.	360
21.3	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>Bather Arranging Her Hair</i> , 1885.	361
21.4	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>After the Bath</i> , 1910.	363
21.5	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>Sleeping Girl</i> , 1880.	364
22.1	Berthe Morisot, <i>Landscape at Gennevilliers</i> , 1875.	377
22.2	Berthe Morisot, <i>Venus at the Forge of Vulcan</i> (after François Boucher), 1884.	379
22.3	Berthe Morisot, <i>On the Lake</i> , 1884.	383
22.4	Berthe Morisot, <i>On the Lake</i> , 1889.	385
22.5	Berthe Morisot, <i>Duck at Rest on the Bank</i> , 1888/90.	386
23.1	Cover of Société anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc., <i>Première exposition 1874, Boulevard des Capucines, 35: Catalogue</i> , Paris: Alcan-Lévy, 1874.	394
23.2	Hadol, Caricature of the first impressionist exhibition, in “La Semaine comique,” <i>L’Éclipse</i> , 26 April 1874.	395
23.3	Minutes of the liquidation meeting of the Impressionists’ société anonyme, 17 December 1874, in John Rewald, <i>Histoire de l’impressionnisme</i> , Paris: Albin Michel, 1955.	401
23.4	Bertall [Charles Albert d’Arnoux], Caricature “The End of the Exposition,” in “Revue comique du mois,” <i>L’Illustration</i> , 5 June 1875.	406
23.5	<i>May-Triptych</i> , consisting of (from left to right) Alfred Sisley, <i>L’Île Saint-Denis</i> , 1872; Camille Pissarro, <i>Entrance to the Village of Voisins</i> , 1872; and Claude Monet, <i>Pleasure Boats</i> , 1872–1873.	408
24.1	Edgar Degas, <i>At the Milliner’s</i> , 1882.	418
24.2	G. Gonin, “Jolie Miss” <i>Chapeau by Madame Hélène</i> , in <i>La Modiste universelle</i> , January 1882.	422
24.3	Advert for Morin-Hiéland, 27, rue des Pyramides, Paris, in “Plumassiers,” <i>Annuaire-almanach du commerce, de l’industrie, de la magistrature et de l’administration</i> , Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1892.	424
24.4	Ostrich Park at Misserghin, close to Oran, Algeria, in Lacroix-Danliard, <i>La Plume des oiseaux</i> , Paris: J.B. Ballière, 1891.	425
24.5	“Feathers and Flowers,” in <i>Au Bon Marché: Catalogue de la saison d’été</i> , Paris, 1882.	428
25.1	Drawing of a Rangoli circle, from <i>The River</i> , 1951, directed by Jean Renoir.	436
25.2	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>Mosque in Algiers</i> , 1882.	438
25.3	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <i>Banana Trees</i> , 1881.	442
25.4	View inside the jute mill, from <i>The River</i> , 1951, directed by Jean Renoir.	444
25.5	The Knight family residence, from <i>The River</i> , 1951, directed by Jean Renoir.	445

26.1	Kiyoteru Kuroda [Seiki Kuroda], <i>A Maiko Girl</i> , 1893.	453
26.2	Keiichirō Kume, <i>Late Autumn</i> , 1892.	454
26.3	Chū Asai, <i>Farmers Returning Home</i> , 1887.	455
26.4	Torajirō Kojima, <i>Green Shade</i> , 1909.	456
26.5	Kijirō Ōta, <i>Reading by the Window</i> , c. 1909–1910.	462
27.1	Eduardo Sívori, <i>Plains, or La Porteña Ranch, Moreno</i> , 1899.	468
27.2	Eduardo Schiaffino, <i>After the Bath</i> , 1888.	470
27.3	Eduardo Schiaffino, <i>The Funeral of Victor Hugo</i> , 1885.	471
27.4	Martín Malharro, <i>Grainstacks: The Pampa Today (Parvas)</i> , 1911.	474
27.5	Pío Collivadino, <i>Factory</i> , c. 1910.	480
28.1	Avni Lifij, <i>Self-Portrait with a Red Book</i> , n. d.	485
28.2	Halil Pasha, <i>Fenerbahçe Bay</i> , 1902.	488
28.3	Namık İsmail, <i>Morning at Sea</i> , 1925.	489
28.4	Nazmi Ziya Güran, <i>Istanbul Harbor</i> , n. d.	491
28.5	Ibrahim Çallı, <i>Lovers in a Caique</i> , n. d.	494
29.1	Max Liebermann, <i>Workers in the Beet Field</i> , 1873–1876.	501
29.2	Max Liebermann, <i>Beer Garden in Brannenburg</i> , 1893.	501
29.3	Max Liebermann, <i>Old Men's Home in Amsterdam</i> , 1881.	503
29.4	Max Liebermann with his canvas, <i>Striding Peasant</i> (completed in 1894 and destroyed during World War II) and the model, photograph taken in 1894 at Kaatwijk, Holland.	509
29.5	Max Liebermann, <i>Woman with Goats in the Dunes</i> , 1890.	510
31.1	Double-page of addresses from Monet's account book of 1882–1912.	535
31.2	Map of Paris showing contacts contained in Monet's first address book overlaid with the geography of the Parisian art scene (1877–1881).	538
31.3	Map of Paris showing contacts contained in Monet's second address book overlaid with the geography of the Parisian art scene (1882–1912).	539
32.1	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Luncheon</i> , 1876.	553
32.2	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Portrait of Madame X</i> , 1878.	556
32.3	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Man at His Bath</i> , 1884.	558
32.4	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Nude on a Couch</i> , c. 1880.	559
32.5	Gustave Caillebotte, <i>Calf's Head and Ox Tongue</i> , c. 1882.	560
34.1	Photograph of the Jeu de Paume museum entrance in the Tuileries Gardens, Paris, August 1959.	587
34.2	Photograph of the vestibule, Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1947.	589
34.3	Photograph of the exhibition panel on impressionist technique, Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1947.	591
34.4	Photograph of the Monet room, Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1947.	593

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Series Editor's Preface

Blackwell Companions to Art History is a series of edited collections designed to cover the discipline of art history in all its complexities. Each volume is edited by specialists who lead a team of essayists, representing the best of leading scholarship, in mapping the state of research within the sub-field under review, as well as pointing toward future lines of enquiry.

This *Companion to Impressionism* aims to move beyond established histories to assemble examples that have proliferated over recent decades both of the various approaches to interpreting impressionist art and of new ways of experiencing and examining the works themselves as physical objects. Attention is paid to how and why Impressionism became a near-global phenomenon around 1900. Essays trace how the style spread to across continents, and the ways in which its underpinning concepts spoke to different cultures.

Impressionist painting as practised by the principal artists who participated in the eight impressionist exhibitions between 1874 and 1886 is the main concern of this volume. The tight focus on these artists (and their international followers) opens up the rich range of approaches to Impressionism that have evolved over recent decades. The thematic and methodological interconnectedness of the essays in the seven sections of the volume underscore the depth of this investigation. And this detailed enquiry is intended to show how the movement was in fact an artistic and intellectual challenge to the art world in the nineteenth century.

Together, these essays combine to provide an exciting and challenging revision of our conception and understanding of Impressionism that will be essential reading for students, researchers and teachers across a broad spectrum of interests. *A Companion to Impressionism* is a very welcome addition to the series.

Dana Arnold, 2021

Acknowledgments

I owe my unwavering conviction that Impressionism deserves the highest level of academic inquiry to my training with T.J. Clark at Berkeley and the late John House at the Courtauld. Both scholars, along with others, instilled in me the belief that what academia understands as merely pleasing, benign, and somewhat vacuous (such as it currently tends to regard Impressionism proper), requires a special ingenuity to make complex and ambivalent. First and foremost, I thank the contributors to this volume for having achieved just that. Working with such a large group of eminent scholars over the past few years on Impressionism as this volume developed and was completed has been an immense privilege that I will cherish for the rest of my career.

My thanks go to the Series Editor, Dana Arnold, and my editors at Wiley, Liz Wingett, and Catriona King, for their expertise, care, and patience, as well as their colleagues with whom I had the pleasure of interacting over the years. I also thank my colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania for their manifold support during the time I worked on this volume. The final stretch of this project was completed during a year of leave in 2020–2021 as Paul Mellon Senior Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. My deepest thanks go to Ramey Mize, PhD candidate in the History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania, who helped me read, edit, and polish the contributions. Ramey has the most exacting eyes and mind I know, and it has been a privilege to oversee the coming into being of this volume with her. I would also like to thank Hollis Clayson for her guidance, as well as Lindsay Grant and Naoko Adachi. Finally, my warmest gratitude to my partner, art historian Jonathan David Katz, not only for the excellent contribution in this volume that was our first exercise in limited co-authorship, but also for all the many issues and questions he helped me think through on the spot.

Introduction

André Dombrowski

We think we know Impressionism well. Its history told many times over since the late nineteenth century as a crucial episode in the rise of modernist painting in France, it pleases museum-goers at an ever more frenetic pace as impressionist exhibition chases impressionist exhibition. Celebrated for its painterly bravura, accelerated sense of life and depiction, and innovative modern subject matter, among other aspects, Impressionism pushed the world of art to new sensuous heights and realms of pictorial openness and possibility. But after receiving much scholarly attention during the heyday of the revisionist art history of the 1970s to 1990s – through the social history of art and feminist art history in particular – academic interest in Impressionism has since diminished, along with interest in European art and visual culture of the nineteenth century more broadly. This volume does not mourn this fact or try to return us to an art historical place and time when the art of Édouard Manet and the painters that followed in his footsteps served as a litmus test of art history writ large. Instead, it seeks to give an account and an overview – and hopefully a fresh introduction for a new generation of scholars less burdened by the art historical canon of the past 50 or so years – of what critical issues the study of Impressionism might productively entertain in the twenty-first century.

Those issues are broad and varied, and this volume seeks to showcase the wide-ranging topics and methodologies relevant to the study of Impressionism now. They include old favorites such as analyzing the period conceptions of an “impression” and the impressionist eye itself, the vexed chronologies of the movement, as well as the particular forms of avant-garde collectivity and exhibition culture the group of artists brought to the fore. Impressionism’s early critical reception and its collecting history receive as much attention as do new interpretations of key paintings. Analyses foregrounding the thematic, historical, and contextual frames of Impressionism return with an updated set of examples and concerns, and new feminist questions are front and center as well. Impressionism as a form of modernist painting is analogized to a

host of the period's new media and its visual culture more broadly construed, which the style often emulated, at times even directly incorporated, despite being primarily represented by the easel picture.

This volume, containing a total of 34 new scholarly contributions, expands the study of Impressionism into other new territories. A large section is devoted to how and why Impressionism became a near-global phenomenon around 1900, spreading its stylistic propositions and ideological tenets to a host of other continents, countries, and cultures with different social, economic, political, and religious paradigms. Several contributions consider impressionist paintings as objects, emphasizing the materiality of representation through new approaches in conservation and heightened attention to description and close observation, while others explore new digital methods and the environmental humanities. The result is a volume that is not a *history* of Impressionism in the traditional sense of the term and should not be consulted with that expectation in mind, even though an overall picture of Impressionism will surely emerge. Rather, it assembles new examples of the manifold approaches to interpreting impressionist art that have proliferated over recent decades, trying to give a representative, though certainly by no means exhaustive, survey of current studies in Impressionism.

What "Impressionism" comes to mean in this volume can best be taken as the sum total of those varied interpretations. But from the outset, it has been this editor's intention to keep the focus relatively narrow in order to broadcast a diversity in approach instead. Centering on the group of artists (and their international followers) who constituted the core of those participating in the eight impressionist exhibitions between 1874 and 1886 means that artists like Édouard Manet and Paul Cézanne, whose careers intersected with Impressionism at times, are more sparsely represented. Stretching from the 1860s to World War I, there is only a limited number of studies falling outside this chronological parameter, except when it comes to issues of reception. Although other media are discussed, impressionist painting stands at the heart of this volume. Therefore, the various ways in which Impressionism infiltrated other disciplines or was influenced by them (such as impressionist music, film, literature, and philosophy) are not of central concern to this book, even though, of course, highly worthy topics of inquiry.

* * *

Besides providing an overview of the current landscape of impressionist study in art history, this volume set for itself the goal to re-evaluate the intellectual stakes of impressionist art and to analyze the style's artistic risks as well as practical and conceptual innovations anew. Despite its often pleasing, fashionable, and innocuous-seeming content, Impressionism opened a view onto some of the most vexing and crucial questions of the late nineteenth century. It is mostly for that reason – and not merely for its pleasing character – that Impressionism became the aesthetic force it turned out to be, sustaining its import for as long and as widely as it did.

Two critics visiting the first impressionist exhibition in 1874 had rather strange – even preposterous – responses to what they saw. They were not alone in verbalizing the experience that year, as is well known, but what they said was remarkable enough to make one pause. The first is the poet Henry Hardy (using the pseudonym Henri Polday), penning a mixed review of the art on display for the art journal *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique* on 3 May 1874. In an early usage of the word "impression" in this context, Hardy says:

It is painting of impressions. And the impression being as variable as nature itself, [the Impressionists] paint less what they see than what they *have seen*. – Take an evening effect. Would you be able to stop the sun and clouds? The time it takes to put your objects in place, grab the palette, and prepare your colors, the sun sets, the clouds drift away or transform. At the second stroke of the brush, the sky has changed, yet your canvas is not fully covered while twenty effects have appeared: it would have been necessary to start over twenty times. Do you come back the next day to the same place, at the same time? You will find nothing but a silhouette, and only memory can resuscitate yesterday's spectacle.¹

Impressionism appears in Polday's words as a conceptual failure, a set of unfulfilled promises, delayed responses, and ghostly traces of memory – hardly an affirmation. It epitomized a kind of painting of what had just been and what had just departed, making room for a visual experience of loss and absence as much as presence.

The second comes from the art writer Philippe Burty, in *La République française* of 25 April 1874, more positive and equally prescient:

Even though one finds some faults in these works, and even though the transcribed sensations are sometimes as fugitive as the sensations themselves – the freshness of undergrowth, a puff of the warmth of straw, the length of an autumn evening, the scent of the seashore, the redness of young cheeks, or the shine of a new outfit – one has to be grateful to these young artists for pursuing and fixing them in the first place.²

The power of Burty's reading lies in the synesthetic metaphors with which he fills the impressionist instant. For him, Impressionism captured the uncapturable, made us see what could hardly be seen otherwise, giving the barely there, the almost nothing, visual terms and setting aside mass, substance, duration, and even essence itself.

Both these quotations contain hefty propositions about art and take us quickly to the impressionist heart of the matter. As one spoken from a more doubtful perspective and the other from a more supportive angle, the true impact of Impressionism must surely lie somewhere in between. Broadly speaking, much painting of the prior decades and centuries understood itself in terms of transcendence and atemporality, establishing a presumably stable relationship between viewer and depiction (fictitious as that position was of course). What Impressionism, including its forebearers, achieved was to turn this position on its head. The Impressionists introduced an explicit nonallegorical temporality into the process of painting (unlike, say, the allegorical representation of time via the god Chronos or the many memento mori that populate Old Master paintings), instating a deep-seated instability into the processes of making and viewing art.

After all, an impressionist picture does not merely upset academic standards of completion and fetishize the sketch and a sketch-like look (even in its more "realist" and composed practices like those developed by Frédéric Bazille, Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, and Gustave Caillebotte), it throws any preconceived ideas about what starting and finishing meant generally into question. It tends to interrogate the duration of any undertaking – any act of the hand, the eye, and even consciousness – destabilizing the imaginative confidence that helps us unify actions, objects, and selfhoods. It turns the eye into a restless, mobile entity – and a collective, communal one at that – that

actively participates in, and even structures, the act of painting from the bottom up. Impressionist paintings (even highly composed and belabored ones) based on what appear to be ephemeral glances try to convince their viewers that they contain the truth and nothing but the truth. Impressionism insinuated that our sensory abilities are never fully trustworthy and that we constantly miss visual information, although vision is all we can rely on for measure. We are therefore hardly the sole generators of our own experience, knowledge, and being, Impressionism suggests.

A represented moment is not long even if the painting of it potentially exists for centuries, and it is never much to go on. Whatever scene or scenery the Impressionists channeled through their understanding of instantaneity had to make its impact felt in and as the second in which it occurred. This elevation of present-ness and now-ness to the most crucial pictorial timeframe had profound implications for the meanings of past, present, and future in representation. Letting anything exist – even the most heated political topics of their day – as here now and potentially gone the next instant, turned the world of depiction on its head, reversing long-held beliefs about the power of the past over the present. The result was a style that appeared to some merely sensuous, immediate, and disrespectful of convention, but also assiduous in acknowledging the full panoply and true richness of experiencing the here and now.

That is a lot to hang on a set of presumably pretty pictures, but there is more. As a result of its often harried-seeming processes of representation, the world represented in Impressionism began to adapt to the style's need for brevity. Even if oblique views and bodies cut off by the frame were highly composed and painted over the course of months rather than minutes, they stood arrested as mere moments. Fashionable trends, sideways glances, or short sunsets – at times seen in reflections on water or refractions in mirrors – became essential and necessary to behold. This made the world seem rather insubstantial and shallow (especially to Impressionism's contemporary and later detractors), yet also gave the present an unmistakable urgency and profundity, the crucial key to meaning. Impressionism thereby pronounced the instability and malleability of all values and systems of signification like few other styles before it.

All of the above is to say that Impressionism poked at ontological certainties and epistemological givens, questioning the nature of materiality, experience, time, and even being itself. In an age when so much that was solid melted into air, when both political and industrial revolutions as well as the arrogance of empire wreaked havoc on social life, Impressionism made nothing matter much. It prettified the world even as it knew it to be sullied by coal dust and expendable bodies; it eased the tensions of the late nineteenth century even while exposing them. These were no small feats, and eventually the Impressionists (and Claude Monet especially) were richly rewarded for them when the collection craze began in the 1890s.

* * *

Even though these issues are not all directly addressed in this volume, I hope nonetheless that the collection of work assembled between these covers demonstrates what was at stake – artistically, aesthetically, phenomenologically, socially, and politically – when Impressionism blasted the world of painting wide open. Each of the sections that make up this book would have deserved its own edited volume, truly crisscrossing the entire globe, covering a broader set of modern identities, or charting each new visual medium the Impressionists encountered during their lifetimes. Rather than

going into depth in one or two such areas, this volume puts forth a set of works exemplifying a broad range of methods and concerns. I am certain that missing themes can be identified (and will hopefully be published elsewhere), but my hope in constructing this volume has been to let the plurality of approaches take center stage. To that end, I have asked both established scholars in the field as well as younger ones. Even if the majority of writers are Anglo-American academics (who have traditionally dominated the interpretation of, if not the data sets associated with, Impressionism for the past 50 or so years), efforts have been made to broaden the scope: scholars from France, Germany, Turkey, Japan, and Argentina join those from North America and the United Kingdom; and curators and conservators join academics.

Crafting this volume with a thematic and methodological focus meant giving up on questions of chronology and coverage. Having left the authors much leeway in establishing their own topics, I had to accept certain trends, and also gaps. There is perhaps more on Monet in this volume than I had initially planned, too little on Camille Pissarro and Degas, and nothing much on Alfred Sisley, to name but a few of the crucial Impressionists left out of the conversation. The whole range of artists loosely associated with the movement at the time do not receive new critical readings here (those, for instance, who participated in the first impressionist exhibition but are largely forgotten today, or those who demonstrated some impressionist tendencies in their work but stuck to more traditional subject matter and technique). Berthe Morisot, Caillebotte, and Bazille, on the contrary, are those Impressionists who have traditionally played a lesser role in our overall accounts of the movement, but receive attention from several studies in this volume. This shift in emphasis itself is telling when it comes to the current priorities in impressionist scholarship.

Given that some avant-garde painters, like Manet, Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, or Georges Seurat, have received more continued academic interest over the past decades than the group of core Impressionists, it was crucial to keep the focus on that latter group of artists. To that end, the volume focuses on the mid-1860s to mid-1880s, excluding, by and large, Manet and the painting of modern life, as well as the post-impressionist turn. Reasons for this imbalance can easily be identified, and explain the current academic hesitations around Impressionism. Unlike the Post-Impressionists (like Gauguin), the Impressionists focused much of their painterly energy on the French landscape, and traveled abroad rather rarely. Painting was by far their favored mode of expression, often to the exclusion of the full panoply of modern media culture of the period, such as photography and film (the current focus of much scholarship). Despite the inclusion of some women, the majority of the Impressionists were male, and straight – to the point of period-typical misogyny. Despite the fact that some were born outside Metropolitan France, even as far afield as the island of Saint Thomas (now among the US Virgin Islands) in the Caribbean, the group kept to French sites and subjects – to a degree that makes many suspect (myself included) that Impressionism tended to look away, largely, from the French Empire and its subjects. When North Africa came into view on an impressionist canvas, or models of African descent, it was often with an uncomfortable dose of orientalist stereotyping. The exceptions of course exist (like several Bazilles and some of Pierre-Auguste Renoir's Algerian paintings), and they are the topic of chapters in this volume, but in general it would be safe to say that these features – the focus on France and on painting – have impeded Impressionism's continuing centrality in current academic art historical inquiry. Museums have filled this lacuna over the past decades, and many of the most revelatory new discoveries and interpretations around

Impressionism have been in association with exhibitions or museum-collection study. With few exceptions since the 1980s, the major scholarship on the movement can be found in exhibition catalogs. Yet, not all issues the Impressionists painted and addressed are by necessity visible and exhibitable, and this volume hopes to expand the purview of what can be asked of Impressionism today, precisely because loan requests were not at stake.

* * *

This volume is subdivided into seven parts. The first reconsiders crucial questions around the chronology of French Impressionism, the movement's beginning, end, and internal development. It also interrogates perceptual and cognitive issues around the nature of an "impression" and the new eye-mind relationships Impressionism developed. The second part is devoted to studying the impressionist picture as a material object, delving deeply into matters of practice (paints, supports, and tools), as well as offering new languages of description to account for an especially close attention to painterly materiality. Part three studies Impressionism's relationship to the new media of the nineteenth century (like photography and film) and other media as well (like printmaking and the decorative arts). Part four examines Impressionism's account of modern identity, proposing new feminist and queer interpretations, as well as new readings of alterity in Impressionism associated with race and nationality. The fifth part interrogates anew the sites and places of Impressionism and arrays the style's version of home against its construct of the public sphere. Stretching from Impressionism's account of privacy and physical proximity to its links to period debates around ecology and finance, this part demonstrates the broad range of impressionist themes and interests. Part six turns to an Impressionism stretching around the world by the year 1900, expanding our usually French purview on Impressionism to include areas reaching from Europe to the Middle East, East Asia, North Africa, and the Americas. This part also includes interpretations that map the style's entanglements within the period's global trade. The final part, seven, is devoted to questions concerning the impressionist market and clientele, period criticism, and exhibition displays, reaching to the mid-twentieth century. Many, if not most of the chapters, however, far exceed the boundaries of the part in which they are placed and would easily fit into several. The overall framework is thus an open and flexible one, and I invite the reader to peruse the volume for all the manifold affinities and thematic overlaps that can be identified among the chapters not easily captured in thematic groupings.

Already by the mid-1880s, when barely a full history of Impressionism existed, neo-impressionist and especially symbolist critics went to work to discredit the style. Félix Fénéon was one of the better ones among them, accusing the Impressionists famously of false naturalness and exaggeration when he said, in 1887, that "From there resulted the necessity to paint a landscape in one session and a propensity to make nature grimace in order to prove that the minute was unique and that one would never see it again."³ Now considered to be the last gasp of a long European tradition of verisimilitude, fetishizing an accurate representation of looking, Impressionism was soon dismissed as having neglected the deeper structures and abstract patterns of art, no matter how much the style (especially in Monet's later work) began to repeat itself in series and embraced more symbolist themes and techniques. Even though the first full accounts of Impressionism soon appeared, written by the critics and art historians Théodore Duret, Séverin Faust (writing as Camille Mauclair), and Julius

Meier-Graefe, among many others, the post-impressionist and symbolist critiques of Impressionism were hard to shake, even though the international market broadened and flourished. Impressionism had to wait for a fuller critical revival until John Rewald's careful and detailed telling of its narrative in the 1940s and the mid-twentieth century modernist reappraisal of the artistic qualities and pictorial power of Impressionism. Over the following decades, Impressionism received its share of brilliant sociohistorical, feminist, and psychoanalytic readings that decoded the style's class and gender presumptions, and the style's innovative techniques and painterly ingenuity were analyzed in great detail as well. What remains for this volume to do is to take stock of where the study of Impressionism has been since, but mostly what it might continue to investigate in the decades to come.

I hope this volume will stimulate the reader to read more and further on Impressionism – on the artists and issues covered, and by the authors represented in this book – and see the movement again as the true artistic and intellectual challenge that it represented in the nineteenth century, and still does today when shown in the right light. Impressionism was once difficult to look at and impossible to disregard. It was a challenge to prevailing artistic norms rather than a norm itself, part of established taste. If this volume manages, even just in small measure, to take our eyes and minds back to the moment in history when Impressionism made beholders alert and uncomfortable, its mandate will have been achieved.

Notes

- 1 Polday, 3 May 1874, pp. 186–188 (in Berson, 1996, pp. 32–33).
- 2 Burty, 25 April 1874, p. 2 (in Berson, 1996, pp. 36–38).
- 3 Fénéon, 1 May 1887, p. 139 (in Halperin, 1970, pp. 71–76, here p. 73).

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Part I



What Was Impressionism?
What Is an Impression?

Definitions and New Directions

Impressionism and Criticism

Marnin Young

Art critics defined Impressionism. The standard histories of the movement tell us that Louis Leroy “coined” the term in his “derisive” attack on a painting by Claude Monet, published in *Le Charivari* on 25 April 1874.¹ As if in response, however, other critics immediately elaborated a full-blown defense and explanation of the new painting. “They are Impressionists,” Jules-Antoine Castagnary wrote in *Le Siècle* just four days later, “in the sense that they render not the landscape but the sensation produced by the landscape.”² The ease with which such a definition of Impressionism emerged and ultimately stuck was no doubt conditioned by more than a decade of critical and artistic reflection on the role of an “impression” in modern painting. As Castagnary readily acknowledged, the word had “already entered their language.”³ It was not for nothing that Monet had called his painting – the same one that Leroy attacked – *Impression, Sunrise* (Figure 1.1). And just as the title derived from earlier critical and theoretical discourses, so too did Leroy and Castagnary’s responses to it. Painters borrowed from critics, and critics from painters. The histories of impressionist painting and art criticism are thus much more complexly intertwined than they might appear at first glance.

Taking the 1874 exhibition as its fulcrum of analysis, this chapter will revisit the critical invention of Impressionism. It will focus especially on the consistent misinterpretation and limited reading of Leroy’s now infamous review, a review that still defines the reception of Impressionism. By doing so, I will demonstrate that the critic’s text was much more coherent, but much less inventive than is usually asserted. The evidence that Leroy was the source of the words “Impressionism” (or *Impressionnisme* in French) and “Impressionist” rests entirely on precedence – he was certainly the first to use the words in print – but there is very little contemporary evidence that the words entered into common usage *because* of Leroy’s article. How critics invented Impressionism becomes, therefore, a rather different story. That story hinges on the wider transition from “impression” to “Impressionism.”



FIGURE 1.1 Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*, 1872, oil on canvas, 48 × 63 cm. Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris. Source: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

Tellingly, the earliest attribution of the term “Impressionism” was given not to Leroy but to Castagnary. Writing for a British audience in May 1874, Philippe Burty stated that the critic had “christened these independent young artists, happily enough, ‘The Impressionists.’”⁴ He spoke here with a certain authority. He had first-hand knowledge of the group of artists from time spent in the cafés of the Nouvelle Athènes. He also knew something about artistic neologisms, having coined the term *Japonisme* only two years earlier.⁵ In giving credit to Castagnary, Burty more or less ignored Leroy’s article – most likely because he had simply not encountered it. Art historian John Rewald once claimed that, “rumors about Leroy’s article spread even beyond France.”⁶ But he offers no evidence at all that this was the case. My research has unveiled only two contemporary references to Leroy’s naming of Impressionism: Philippe Marsal in the rather obscure *Revue des idées nouvelles* of 1877 and Victor Champier’s meta-review of the fourth impressionist exhibit in his retrospective *Année artistique* of 1880.⁷ These are the exceptions that test the rule, as not many seem to have actually read the review. And with good reason. In the early 1870s, *Le Charivari* had fewer than 2,000 subscribers, as compared with the almost 40,000 in the case of a daily newspaper like *Le Siècle*.⁸ That Leroy’s readership was so small suggests that the priority given to him emerged later. Indeed, it emerged much later.

When the first histories of Impressionism came to be written, even the better-known critical reactions were barely mentioned except in passing. Georges Lecomte remarked simply that the impressionist exhibitions provoked a “clamor of reprobation.”⁹ In his 1894 *Histoire de l'impressionnisme*, Gustave Geffroy noted the origin of the term in the response to Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*, but he failed to name or quote a single critic.¹⁰ The first historically oriented writer to attribute the term “Impressionist” specifically to Leroy appears to have been Théodore Duret. Duret stands out as an early champion of Impressionism, having published a widely read defense of the movement in 1878.¹¹ And he clearly asserted at the time that Monet's work in general had “suggested” the name. Yet, his account of the critical reaction in 1874 and the attribution to Leroy first appeared not in 1878, but in his *Histoire des peintres impressionnistes* of 1906.¹² Why did this now legendary history crystallize only at this late date?

1906 can be understood as a watershed year in the public reception of modern art. Leo Steinberg once singled it out as a convenient starting point for his own account of “Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public.”¹³ Perhaps most significantly in Steinberg's view, Henri Matisse exhibited his *The Joy of Life* (1905–1906; Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia), a work that apparently “made people very angry.” Such a reaction exemplified the “bewilderment or the anger or the boredom,” which the public had consistently experienced since the early 1860s when confronted with “an unfamiliar new style.”¹⁴ Less than a year earlier, for example, the critic Louis Vauxcelles had mockingly referred to Matisse and his colleagues as “fauves,” hence introducing the term Fauvism.¹⁵ That Vauxcelles dedicated his famous review of the 1905 Salon d'Automne to Duret has rarely if ever been noted. Even less noted is the fact that Duret reframed and concretized the now standard account of the critical reception and invention of Impressionism immediately on the heels of the critical invention of Fauvism. Leroy was to Impressionism what Vauxcelles was to Fauvism. Once such an equivalence could be established, the posterior logic of the invention of Impressionism became clear. The historical priority given to the critical coining of “Impressionism” was thus refracted through the lens of the twentieth-century avant-garde.

This no doubt continued throughout the century. In 1924, the same year as the first Surrealist Manifesto, Leroy again came to prominence as the source of Impressionism in an article by Adolphe Tabarant.¹⁶ Two decades later, Rewald repeated this now common knowledge in his 1946 *History of Impressionism*. He used Leroy's article to frame and exemplify the critical misunderstanding of, and hostility to, Impressionism, this time definitively for an English-language audience – Rewald's is now the standard translation of the 1874 text.¹⁷ For readers at mid-century, looking back across the historical avant-garde, earlier critical befuddlement in front of new art must have seemed inevitable if not natural. At the same moment, for example, Clement Greenberg could confidently proclaim that Jackson Pollock's “ugliness” will in time become “a new standard of beauty” – just as Monet was then becoming the mid-twentieth-century standard of beauty.¹⁸ As if to illustrate the epochal blunder of misrecognizing the beauty or value of Impressionism, Rewald quotes Leroy at length. With its wider impact taken for granted, it could stand in for the sweep of critical reaction to the 1874 show and by extension Impressionism, if not Modernism as a whole.¹⁹ In Duret's terms, it came to exemplify the critics' “ignorance and presumption.”²⁰

The Origins of “Impressionism”

The critical attitude of Leroy's text is nonetheless not quite as clear as later historians have claimed. First published in *Le Charivari* 10 days after the exhibition of 1874 had opened, “L'Exposition des impressionnistes” offers a fictional dialogue between a narrator (is it Leroy?) and an academic landscapist named Joseph Vincent. As the two move through the exhibition in Nadar's studio on the boulevard des Capucines, M. Vincent becomes more and more apoplectic in front of each new painting. The narrator, by contrast, calmly attempts to explain and defend the works on display, although M. Vincent presumes he is “being ironic.”²¹ Such irony forms the backbone of what Jean Renoir once called the article's “Boulevard wit,” and it is hard to determine, at least at first read, if the narrator actually shares his friend's hostility.²² Indeed, the humor of the text more obviously mocks the stick-in-the-mud mentality of the academic painter. For his part, however, Vincent is clearly appalled by the “smears” and “splashes” of paint.²³ The *factice* in Camille Pissarro's *Hoarfrost* (1873; Musée d'Orsay, Paris) consists of “palette scrapings spread uniformly across a dirty canvas.”²⁴ The pedestrians in the lower part of Monet's *Boulevard des Capucines* (1873; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City) are just so many “black dashes” (*lichettes noires*).²⁵ The narrator defensively insists that, “the impression is there,” despite the lack of finish.²⁶ But in response to the impasto in Paul Cézanne's *Maison du pendu* (1873; Musée d'Orsay, Paris), Vincent goes off the deep end, taking the “point of view of the Impressionists” and satirically assaulting anything he finds “too finished.”²⁷ He ironically defends the “Impressionism” of Berthe Morisot, because she is “not interested in reproducing a mass of pointless details.”²⁸ The narrator in turn positively suggests that “there is nothing superfluous” in the painting of Auguste Renoir.²⁹ When they eventually come across Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*, an implicit definition of Impressionism has already been laid out, and the picture functions more as a confirmation of a logic than as a source for the terminology. (If anything, Cézanne and Morisot prompted the coining of the words “Impressionist” and “Impressionism.”) The logic of Monet's painting held, as Duret later wrote, that the “title was in keeping with the light rapid touch and the general indefiniteness of the outlines. Such a work adequately expressed the formula of the new painting.”³⁰ But the presumption that Monet's title stood as the source of Leroy's neologisms is borne out neither by the text itself, which uses both these terms *before* introducing *Impression, Sunrise*, nor by the history of the artistic usage of the word *impression*.

Even as he definitively assigned credit to Leroy for the origin of the word “Impressionist,” Duret also asserted that the term was in use even before the critic picked it up. He claimed, in fact, that the public had begun using the term and critics like Leroy, or more precisely his editor, simply borrowed it. Duret corresponded extensively with Pissarro at the time, so this assertion may be based on close testimony.³¹ It also helps explain how Castagnary was able to provide his own definition of Impressionism so quickly, possibly before or separate from Leroy. Indeed, his review in *Le Siècle* has increasingly been treated in recent decades as the “first serious attempt to define ‘impressionism’.”³² “The common concept which unites them,” Castagnary says of the various artists showing on the boulevard des Capucines in 1874,

is the determination not to search for a smooth finish (*rendu*), but to be satisfied with a general aspect. Once the impression is seized and fixed, they declare their role is done. ... If one wants to characterize them with a single word that explains their efforts, one would have to forge the new term, *Impressionists*. They are *Impressionists* in the sense that they render not the landscape but the sensation produced by the landscape. This very word has entered their language: in the catalogue, M. Monet's *Sunrise* is not a *landscape*, it is an *impression*. In this respect, they leave reality behind and enter into full idealism.³³

As a longstanding defender of an older generation of painters – Gustave Courbet, Jean-François Daubigny, Camille Corot – Castagnary is equally keen to point out that “we cannot really say that the *Impressionists* invented” a lack of finish.³⁴ What the critic points to here is the widespread use of the term “impression” in the decades that preceded the first impressionist exhibition.

Throughout the 1860s, as John House has pointed out, a “quick notation of an atmospheric effect was already widely described as an *impression*.”³⁵ The evidence for this usage is overwhelming and has been only partially documented. In another satirical piece published in 1868, Leroy himself gave an account of a kind of painter not far off from what he later termed an Impressionist. Interested above all in reducing painting to *taches* – stains or marks – the “*Fantaisiste*” was concerned not to lose touch with the “magic of the first impression.”³⁶ Somewhat earlier, Théophile Gautier had regretted that a talented painter like Daubigny “contents himself with the first impression and neglects to such an extent the details.”³⁷ Castagnary, too, had mixed feelings about painters like Johan Jongkind, for whom “everything can be located in the impression.” With his pictures you “need not worry about the execution; it disappears before the power and charm of the effect.”³⁸ In general, followers of Corot “contented themselves with ‘rendering the impression,’” wrote Charles Blanc in 1866, “a big word in a certain camp.”³⁹ Duret knew this full well when he used the word to explain the work of both Corot and Jean-François Millet in 1867.⁴⁰ The catalogue for Édouard Manet’s exhibition that same year declared that what might seem like a “protest” was simply the artist’s attempt to “render his impression.”⁴¹ In his Salon review of 1868, Edmond About worked to sum up the current state of landscape painting in France, “the slightest fragment of nature is material for a picture, provided one knows how to paint and how to render an impression.”⁴² Reviewing the Salon of 1872, Jules Claretie echoed the common view that contemporary landscapists were habituated to accept “an impression, an effect, for their quickly painted pictures.”⁴³ Younger landscapists in particular were “too satisfied with an *impression* to make a real picture [*tableau*], without taking the care and the time to compose.”⁴⁴

This admittedly hodge-podge set of quotations serves mostly to demonstrate the pervasive use of the word “impression” to describe a certain tactic in landscape painting. As the critical language suggests, however, that tactic is twofold. On the one hand, artists increasingly attached value to the rendering of an optical or physiological impression of the visual world. In his 1873 dictionary, Émile Littré defines this use of the term as “the more or less pronounced effect that external objects make upon the sense organs.”⁴⁵ As Richard Shiff and others have pointed out, this sense of the term dates back at least to David Hume, but it is in the work of nineteenth-century

positivists like Littré himself that it comes to have the distinctly psychological and philosophical connotations we now recognize as consistent with Impressionism.⁴⁶ Because “one’s view of the world is induced from one’s experience of impressions” – this is Shiff paraphrasing Littré – “the most personal impression, if somehow presented publicly (say, by means of a painting), would reveal as much ‘truth’ about the world as any other genuine impression.”⁴⁷ The intertwining of the subjective and objective now seems to comprise the primary sense of the “impression” in Impressionism. Within the practice of painting, on the other hand, there was yet another meaning to the word, one that has received scant attention in art history. As Littré defines it, this sense of the “impression” is a “Term of painting. The color that is put on the canvas or on a panel, either in oil or distemper, and which serves as the first coat.”⁴⁸ This is distinctly different from a painterly sketch – what artists would have called an *esquisse* or *pochade* – but the various uses of the term “impression” in the 1860s suggest a collapsing of the two senses: the first (sensory) impression is equal to the first (painterly) impression.

This syntactical doubling goes some distance, I believe, toward explaining the humor (and hence the meaning) of Leroy’s review. It is a kind of *quiproquo*, a humorous misunderstanding, when the narrator is talking about the rendering of a sensory impression and M. Vincent thinks he is talking about the lack of painted detail. Or at least, the two go back and forth between the two definitions of the term. An attentive reading of the text shows a repeated play of words: impression, impressive, Impressionism. The confusion and punning are the substance of Leroy’s comedy. And other critics consistently played with the word. Three years later, and a bit more seriously, Émile Bergerat laid out the double meaning of “impression” to ensure his readers understood that “Impressionism” meant the “rapid and unreasoning sensation” of objects on the eye and brain, not merely the first coat of paint.⁴⁹

Leroy knew very well that the word “impression” derived from an earlier landscape painting tradition, and he certainly expected his readers to understand this as well. Discussions of “L’Exposition des impressionnistes” have, however, consistently failed to elucidate this obvious point. From start to finish, Leroy repeatedly underlines the fact that M. Vincent is a landscape painter, a student of Jean-Victor Bertin. This would have put him in good company. Bertin taught some of the major landscapists of the early nineteenth century, including Achille-Etna Michallon, the first winner of the Prix de Rome in landscape painting, and Corot himself in the 1820s. Bertin had been a much-praised student of the preeminent neo-classical landscape painter, Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes.⁵⁰ One of the most important principles that Valenciennes articulated to his students was the need to build a Salon-oriented landscape painting out of a “repertoire” of “extremely rapid” sketches – he uses the words *maquette* and *croquis* – rendered directly from nature.⁵¹ “If the effect is that of the rising or setting sun,” he writes, “no more than half an hour should be spent on it.”⁵² Everyone understood the preparatory function of such sketches, although they were rarely if ever shown on their own before the mid-nineteenth century. At the liberalized Salon of 1849, following the establishment of the Second Republic, most notably, Corot exhibited his sketches for the first time – he was on the jury – risking the ire of critics who expected only polished and contrived academic *tableaux*. Leroy knew this risk first hand. He himself exhibited a landscape at the same Salon of 1849, prompting one critic to complain of the “habit of putting in the Salon the slightest of sketches [*pochades*].”⁵³ It is clear, from the context of the word’s usage and the article itself, that both the narrator and his companion understood the concept of the

“impression” as originating in their own tradition, the tradition of academic landscape painting. “Oh, Corot, Corot,” exclaims M. Vincent, “what crimes are committed in your name!”

Rewald’s translation oddly misses this connection. Some evidence suggests he simply did not understand the history of the word “impression” and its origins in the academic landscape tradition. Although the history of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century *plein air* painting had already become common knowledge when sketches by Michallon and Valenciennes entered the Louvre in 1930, Rewald still describes Bertin as simply an “academic master.”⁵⁴ And, while he corrects factual errors like the attribution of Renoir’s *Danseuse* (1874; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC) to Armand Guillaumin – a problematic tactic in any translation – he leaves Leroy’s misspelling of “Michalon” intact. Rewald also cuts a passage in which the narrator lays out more clearly the relation of earlier landscape painting and the new painting of 1874. The missing section, not insignificantly, comes right on the heels of the encounter with Monet’s *Impression, Sunrise*, when Vincent decries the lack of finish, that the painting is merely an impression. The narrator responds:

– Nevertheless what would Michalon, Bidault, Boisselier and Bertin have said in front of this impressive canvas [*toile impressionnante*]?
 “– Don’t talk to me about those hideous old fossils!” shouted M. Vincent. “When I

get home, I’m going to puncture their chimney screens [*devants de cheminée*]!”

– The poor devil was renouncing his gods!⁵⁵

M. Vincent here compares the academic landscape painting of Michallon, Jean-Joseph-Xavier Bidault, Antoine-Félix Boisselier, and his teacher, Bertin, to painted chimney covers. These so-called *devants de cheminée* – paintings popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France to cover the fireplace in summer – were often rendered in *trompe l’œil*, so as to give the appearance of a still life or an object inside the fireplace. It is hard to say how obscure this reference would have been to contemporary readers in 1874, but when unpacked, the cut passage here emphasizes a couple of key points about *Impression, Sunrise* and Impressionism in general. First, it clearly assimilates Monet into a specific history of landscape painting, as all four of the academic landscape painters mentioned worked with *plein air* sketches from nature. The narrator thus makes the now widely accepted point that Monet’s painting theoretically harmonizes with this well-established tradition. In contrast, however – and this is the second point – M. Vincent retroactively, and sarcastically, asserts that tradition’s lowliness and excessive detail when compared to Monet and company. Such humorous inversions of value are the stuff of Leroy’s “Boulevard wit,” but at the heart of the comparison lies the more lasting claim that Impressionism was merely the logical outcome of the academic *croquis*, which became the Barbizon painters’ *impression* and in turn, Monet’s Impressionism. Any sophisticated reader would have immediately grasped this in 1874.

The first definitions of Impressionism, both implicit and explicit, articulated by critics like Leroy and Castagnary were thus hardly inventions. They simply concretized and popularized a slightly earlier way of talking about painting techniques. Indeed, the published criticism around the first impressionist exhibit clearly demonstrates a widespread understanding of the meaning of impression and consequently what an Impressionist might be. For example, on 20 April 1874, Jean Prouvaire spent the first part of his sympathetic review in *Le Rappel* reminding his readers that, “before

anything else the painter must give ‘the impression’ of things, not their own reality.”⁵⁶ Armand Silvestre quickly followed up, arguing from close contact with the group, that their “vision of things” pursues “an effect of *impression*.”⁵⁷ Both these reviews appeared even before Leroy’s. In turn, Etienne Carjat could declare that what Monet and company sought above all else was the “IMPRESSION, a word which was invented expressly to support their cause.”⁵⁸ He linked this perceived effect to the artistic means of achieving it: “flat, multicolored marks, juxtaposed by chance.”⁵⁹ As if in competition with Leroy and Castagnary, various critics scrambled to call the painters “the school of the impression” or the “impressionalistes.”⁶⁰ When Burty referred to them as “The Impressionists,” for the first time in English, he underlined the shared concern with “strictly aesthetic” elements: “lightness of colouring, boldness of masses, blunt naturalness of impression.”⁶¹ Here Burty seems to evoke, again, the twofold nature of the “impression,” as the perceptual impression can hardly equate to an aesthetic element like color or mass. Thus, the definition of Impressionism in 1874, as it emerged in and around Castagnary and Leroy’s coining of the term, remained ambiguous: is the impression in Impressionism to be found in an ideal form of the mind or in a concrete set of marks on a surface?

Defining “Impressionism”

In the years that followed what we now call the first exhibition of the Impressionists, critics continued to cycle around the ambiguity of the term. Although alternate names for the group – “intransigents,” “intentionists,” and “impressionalistes” – still floated in the air, the question “what is an impressionist?” framed the reception of the second exhibition in 1876. Answers rested on a fairly explicit understanding of the term “impression,” but the relation of the painted marks to the impression or sensation of nature experienced by the artist emerged as the core of the problem. Some critics asserted that the Impressionists simply rendered “the summary impression” that had been “awakened in them by aspects of reality.”⁶² Others agreed, but lamented the “unthinking” quality of the transmission of this “impression” from the mind to the hand to the canvas, something compared to “a kind of telegraphic mechanism.”⁶³ Writing in *Le Figaro*, Albert Wolff famously seized on the seeming arbitrariness of the impressionist brushstroke to decry the new school: “they take canvases, some color and brushes, throw on a few tones here and there at random, then sign the result.”⁶⁴ A handful of critics argued, however, that these colors gave the spectator of the painting an “impression” of something.⁶⁵ The critical understanding of the “impression” in Impressionism thus wavered between the experience of the artist and the effect of the painted marks on a surface. Impressionism was, variously, the attempt “to give” or “to render” or “to communicate” an impression – or so Émile Zola vacillated in his own definition in the spring of 1876.⁶⁶

At their third exhibit, Monet, Pissarro, and company finally embraced the name “Impressionists.” Although a quasi-official journal appeared with the title *L’Impressionnisme*, it explicitly declined to offer any definition of the term.⁶⁷ Critics, however, continued to puzzle it out. Perhaps even more than the previous year, they moved back and forth between two senses of “impression.” On the one hand, quite a few asserted that Impressionism sought “to render” (*rendre*) or “to fix” (*fixer*) the “impression” of the artist or the “appearance” of nature.⁶⁸ On the other hand, the

technique could be said “to produce” (*produire*), “to give” (*donner*), or “to make” (*faire*) an impression on the spectator.⁶⁹ The resolution of the ambiguity could be resolved – it seems obvious now – by stating that an Impressionist is one who “receives an *impression* and expresses it,” one who can “transmit to the public the impressions of their mind and their heart, sincerely, naively, without alteration.”⁷⁰

Some months after the exhibition, Impressionism finally entered the dictionary. “Impressionnisme” was, for Littré, a “procedure in painting that consists of producing impressions by any means possible and without modification.”⁷¹ An “*impressionniste*” was simply a “partisan” of this procedure.⁷² Yet the quotes provided in the 1877 dictionary supplement suggest the complexities and ambiguities of these terms remained quite open. An Impressionist could be understood, in the first sense, as a painter who “provides impressions.”⁷³ At the same time, Impressionism could be reduced to a drunken artistic play with “brilliant colors and vague outlines.”⁷⁴ Only Paul Mantz seemed to have worked out the full logic of Impressionism. He provided a sharp and sympathetic description of an Impressionist as a “sincere and free” artist, who “translates, simply and with as much frankness as possible, the intensity of the experienced impression.”⁷⁵ In other words, an impression of the world enters the physiological and mental makeup of an artist, who mobilizes colored pigment as directly as possible to convey that same impression to a spectator. For both artistic practice and theory questions only proliferate here, but for a general public such an explanation seemed to resolve hereafter the problem of defining Impressionism.

Remembering “Impressionism”

As for the painters who came to be called the Impressionists, the matter of their critical definition was never particularly well received. Renoir bitterly recounted to his son the origin of his own art-historical classification at the “disastrous failure” that was the 1874 exhibition: “The only thing we got out of it was the label ‘Impressionism,’ a name I loathe.”⁷⁶ Monet by contrast seemed rather less bothered. He told Émile Taboureaux in 1880 that he had always been and always would be an Impressionist – it was he, after all, who had inspired the word with the exhibition of his *Impression, Sunrise*. He claimed that the title had “furnished some reporter at *Le Figaro* the opportunity to lance his polemic.”⁷⁷ Two articles on the exhibition of 1874 had indeed appeared in the mass-circulation daily *Le Figaro*, but both of them insistently called the group the “intransigeants.”⁷⁸ Did Monet thus forget the name of *Le Charivari*? Or, more likely, did he mix up the origins of the term in the various reviews of 1874 with the more explicit attacks in papers like *Le Figaro* in 1876? Either way, by 1880 the details of the critical invention of “Impressionism” had already been forgotten even by the very artist who had prompted it.

Perhaps in response to this state of affairs, Leroy himself made a claim to patrimony the very same year. In a book called *Les Pensionnaires du Louvre*, the critic toured the museum galleries accompanied by an “Impressionist” painter named Jean Potet. (The critic’s literary tricks apparently had their limits.) He paused at one point in his account to “teach the art world” the origin of this word:

A year or two after the war, a group of free painters – too free! – organized an exhibition in Nadar’s galleries on the boulevard des Capucines. On every page of the

catalogue we read: *View of the port of Le Havre; Impression of morning. – View of this; Impression of evening; – View of that: Impression of fog.* There were so many like this, that I entitled my uproarious review: *The Exhibition of the Impressionists.*

The word having prospered ever since, I am not upset to claim the rights. – One word, you say, that's not much. – That anyone should leave behind as much! ⁷⁹

If Monet could no longer remember Leroy in 1880, it would seem in turn that Leroy could no longer remember Monet. Strange as it may now seem, *Impression, Sunrise* appears nowhere in the critic's fanciful list of "impressions" on display in 1874. Perhaps the omission was merely a defense mechanism. Perhaps it was deliberate. Still, it is more than a little telling that Leroy had to go out of his way to remind his readers, only six years after the fact, that he had indeed coined the word "Impressionist." All sorts of factors, from the deep origins of the word in the painterly "impressions" of an earlier decade to the multiple uses and variations of it from 1874 onward, led to the quick forgetting of the critic's place of precedence. By 1906 or 1946, Leroy was indeed remembered, as he predicted, for just one word – or rather two: "Impressionist" and "Impressionism." And yet, the later reduction of the origin of these words to their place of first appearance has flattened their meaning. As I have argued in this chapter, they emerged not merely from a spur-of-the-moment witticism, but out of a dense and decades-long weave of interactions between painters and writers, Impressionists and critics of Impressionism.

Notes

- 1 Dayez, 1974, p. 150. See Leroy, 25 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, pp. 25–26. On Leroy having "coined the noun 'Impressionists,'" see more recently Lobstein, 2015, p. 108.
- 2 Castagnary, 29 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 17. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
- 3 Castagnary, 29 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 17.
- 4 Burty, 30 May 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 9.
- 5 See Burty, 1872.
- 6 Rewald, 1973, p. 324.
- 7 M. [Marsal], 1 May 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 163; and, Champier, 1880, p. 176. This latter review does not appear in Berson, 1996.
- 8 For circulation figures, see Allen, 1991, pp. 323, 326.
- 9 Lecomte, 1892, p. 27.
- 10 Geffroy, 1894, pp. 44–45.
- 11 Duret, 1878, p. 17.
- 12 Duret, 1906, pp. 20–21.
- 13 Steinberg, 1972, p. 3.
- 14 Steinberg, 1972, p. 5.
- 15 Vauxcelles, 1905.
- 16 See Tabarant, 1924.
- 17 Leroy, 1874, in Rewald, 1973, pp. 318–324; reprinted in Nochlin, 1966, pp. 10–14, and Harrison and Wood, 1998, pp. 573–576.

- 18 Greenberg, 1986, p. 74.
- 19 For a more balanced view of Leroy's place in the critical reaction, see Tucker, December 1984, p. 469; and Roos, 1996, pp. 204–220.
- 20 Duret, 1906, p. 21; trans. in Duret, 1910, p. 113.
- 21 Leroy, 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 25.
- 22 Renoir, 1962/2001, p. 149.
- 23 Leroy, 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 25.
- 24 Leroy, 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 25.
- 25 Leroy, 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 25. Rewald famously translates “lichettes” as “tongue-lickings,” but nineteenth-century dictionaries define “liche” more simply as a “small piece,” as in a small portion, a smidgen, or a dash. See Larchey, 1872, p. 220.
- 26 Leroy, 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 25, trans. in Rewald, 1973, p. 320.
- 27 Leroy, 1874, in Berson 1996, p. 25.
- 28 Leroy, 1874, in Berson 1996, p. 25.
- 29 Leroy, 1874, in Berson 1996, p. 25., trans. in Rewald, 1973, p. 322.
- 30 Duret, 1906, p. 20, trans. in Duret, 1910, p. 113.
- 31 See Bailly-Herzberg, 1980, pp. 93–94.
- 32 Shiff, 1984, p. 3. See also Lobstein, 2015, p. 114.
- 33 Castagnary, 29 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 17.
- 34 Castagnary, 29 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 17.
- 35 House, 2004, p. 46. See also Boime, 1971, p. 170; Smith, 1995, pp. 19–20; and, more recently, Roos, 2016, pp. 83–84.
- 36 Leroy, 1868, p. 70.
- 37 Gautier, 1861, p. 119.
- 38 Castagnary, 15 August 1863, p. 75.
- 39 Blanc, 1 July 1866, p. 40.
- 40 Duret, 1867, pp. 30, 47.
- 41 Manet, 1867, p. 5.
- 42 About, 1 June 1868, p. 739.
- 43 Claretie, 1874, p. 173.
- 44 Claretie, 1874, p. 287. On the problem of the *tableau* and the invention of a “new paradigm for painting,” see Levine, 1974, pp. 3–4 and *passim*.
- 45 Littré, 1873, p. 38.
- 46 Shiff, 1984, p. 18. See also Eisenman, 1986.
- 47 Shiff, 1984, p. 19.
- 48 Littré, 1873, p. 38. On this sense of the term, see Callen, 2015, p. 193.
- 49 Bergerat, 17 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 127.
- 50 On Bertin and the “school of Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes,” see Josenhans, 2009; and Conisbee, 1996.
- 51 Valenciennes, 1800, pp. 408 and 417–418.
- 52 Valenciennes, 1800, p. 407.
- 53 Galimard, 1849, p. 125.
- 54 Rewald, 1973, p. 318. On the significance of the 1930 Louvre acquisition, see Huyghe, 1930.
- 55 Leroy, 25 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 26.
- 56 Prouvaire, 20 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 34.
- 57 Silvestre, 22 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 39.
- 58 Carjat, 27 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 14.

- 59 Carjat, 27 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 15.
- 60 Cardon, 29 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 13; and Ariste, 13 June 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 9.
- 61 Burty, 30 May 1874, in Berson, 1996, pp. 9, 10.
- 62 Olby, 10 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 99; and Blémont, 9 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 62. See also Silvestre, 2 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 109; and M., 15 June 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 90.
- 63 Bertall, 15 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 56; and Baignères, 13 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 54.
- 64 Wolff, 3 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 110. See also Porcheron, 4 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 102; and Schop, 7 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 107.
- 65 Chaumelin, 8 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 67. See also James, 13 May 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 86.
- 66 [Zola], 2–3 April 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 107; [Zola], 30 April–1 May 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 108; and Zola, June 1876, in Berson, 1996, p. 112.
- 67 Rivière, 21 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 184.
- 68 See B. [Burty], 25 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 124; Ballu, 14 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 125; Bigot, 28 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 134; Descubes, 20 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 143; Grimm, 7 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 151; and P., 7 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 173.
- 69 See Argus, 21 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 123; Bertall, 9 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 131; Fillonneau, 20 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 145; Fournel, 25 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 146; Grimm, 5 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 151; and Anonymous, 5 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 191.
- 70 Maillard, 9 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 164; and O'Squarr, 6 April 1877, in Berson, 1996, p. 172.
- 71 Littré, 1877, p. 196.
- 72 Littré, 1877, p. 196.
- 73 Cherbuliez, 1 June 1876, as quoted in Littré, 1877, p. 196.
- 74 Gautier, 8 February 1876, as quoted in Littré, 1877, p. 196.
- 75 Mantz, 22 April 1877, as quoted in Littré, 1877, p. 196.
- 76 Renoir, 1962/2001, p. 149.
- 77 Claude Monet, as quoted in Taboureux, 12 June 1880, p. 380.
- 78 Masque de fer, 24 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 28; and Masque de fer, 28 April 1874, in Berson, 1996, p. 28.
- 79 Leroy, 1880, p. 8.

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Rethinking the Origins of Impressionism

The Case of Claude Monet and *Corner of a Studio*

Mary-Dailey Desmarais

A consummate painter of light outdoors, Claude Monet is not usually associated with the studio. In fact, Monet painted only one picture of a studio interior: *Corner of a Studio* of 1861 (Figure 2.1). Among Monet's earliest and least known paintings, *Corner of a Studio* does not show an actual studio corner (in French the term *coin* is not always so literal), and yet the painting conjures something of a corner's closeness – its quiet, solitary intimacy. A single studio wall covered entirely in a tapestried landscape (or wallpaper made to look like a tapestry¹) recedes only slightly from the front of the picture plane so that, while not literally in a corner, we are cornered in a communion with the space of the studio and the objects contained therein: an unframed landscape and antique weapons on the wall; a Louis XVIII-style desk on top of which are piles of books, a paintbox, and paintbrushes; a red, North African hat called a *chéchia*; and, on the floor, what looks to be a Persian rug and a shotgun.

Although *Corner of a Studio* was made when Monet was only 20, before he began his *plein air* practice in earnest, in many ways the painting anticipates Monet's eventual move outdoors. The unframed landscape on the wall has been identified as a painting by Charles-François Daubigny, which Monet claimed to have found “among the rubbish piled up in the corners” of his aunt Marie-Jeanne Lecadre's house in Le Havre, the seaside town where he spent his youth.² In the corner of Monet's studio, Daubigny's landscape seems to acknowledge Monet's early admiration for, and debt to, Barbizon landscape painting. Likewise, the paintbox on the desk is a portable one, used to paint outdoors. In 1861, Monet had just purchased his first paintbox of this sort for his earliest *plein air* painting excursions in Le Havre with Eugène Boudin. What appears to be the back of a small canvas inside the box is one that would have been used for painting sketches *en plein air* on just such occasions. Meanwhile, the tapestried landscape on the wall suggests that Monet was already envisioning landscape as a room in unwitting anticipation of the studio he would cultivate outdoors in his garden in Giverny – and of his late water-lily paintings, which now span the walls



FIGURE 2.1 Claude Monet, *Corner of a Studio*, 1861, oil on canvas, 182 × 127 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay, MNR 136. Source: Tony Querrec, RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

of the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. *Corner of a Studio* would thus seem to chart in advance the well-understood progression in Monet's practice from studio painting to the *plein air* sketch, from *ébauche* to *décoration*.³ But *Corner of a Studio* also

contains the seeds of a Monet much more unexpected, complicating received wisdom about the origins of Impressionism.

It is generally understood that Impressionism was the natural outgrowth of the Realists' objective to depict contemporary subject matter – in the words of Gustave Courbet, “real and existing things”⁴ – coupled with a preference for the spontaneity of painting on-the-spot, or *en plein air*, which developed primarily from the example of the Barbizon School. Impressionism, or so the story goes, privileged the seen over the felt, the outdoors over the interior, the moving over the still. *Corner of a Studio* can help us to see that Impressionism, at least for Monet, was a much less binary endeavor. Not only does *Corner of a Studio* link Monet to the studio, a site fundamentally at odds with the practice of painting *en plein air*, but it also shows Monet imagining books, weapons, and North African dress as the tools of painting as much as paintbrushes and paint. Although the items Monet included in his painting were not unique to his practice, in the closeness of his studio corner the relationship between them becomes more pointed and specific. The crossed emblems of the duel hovering over the paintbox associate the practice of making a picture with battle, just as the paintbrushes pointing directly at the shotgun, which in turn is aimed at two birds embedded in the landscape, posit a connection between painting and the pursuit of prey. Meanwhile, the red *chéchia* and the books on the table infuse Monet's studio with something of the élan of a romantic and orientalizing imagination. A picture that offers a glimpse of Monet before his world became bound so closely to the “impossible” task of chasing down the shimmer and fade of the sunshine,⁵ *Corner of a Studio* presents a model of painting, and of landscape painting in particular, that is bound to the imagined as much as to the real, to battle, to the hunt, and to a bookish imagination. In short, *Corner of a Studio* is a painting that reveals that for Monet, from the very beginning, landscape was always about more than meets the eye.

Monet and Romanticism

Monet's reputation as a painter of light outdoors and his admiration for pioneers of *plein air* painting, ranging from Camille Corot and Daubigny in the Forest of Fontainebleau to Boudin on the Normandy coast, has tended to obscure the more romantic roots of his practice, hinted at in *Corner of a Studio*. The very subject of the studio corner itself was a romantic trope that figured prominently in numerous period articles, paintings, and books, including Alfred de Musset's *Le Fils du Titien* (1838), Henry Murger's *Scènes de la vie bohème* (1845), and Balzac's widely read text “Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu” (1831), which Monet owned.⁶ If we understand the studio to be a “symbol of the artist's mind,” as Balzac once wrote, then *Corner of a Studio* suggests that Monet identified with a romantic sensibility that placed a premium on imagination.⁷ Consider the similarity between the items in Monet's *atelier* and those of the fictional artist, Pétrus, in Alexandre Dumas's *Mohicans de Paris* (1854), whose atelier was described as having “a thousand different objects [that] pulled the eye in all directions.” Among such objects were “weapons of all kinds, of all the ages, of all countries ... from the primitive club, the bow and poison arrows of New Zealand savages, to the curved sabers of Turkish pashas and the pistols with the silver cross, chiseled by Arnauts soldiers.”⁸ Monet's *Corner of a Studio* looks much more like a

bourgeois interior than Pétrus's fictional *atelier*, and yet the objects included in his *atelier* were objective correlatives to a romantic imagination at work.

Certainly the items that Monet included in his *atelier* figured prominently in the practice of the leading figure of Romanticism in Monet's time, Eugène Delacroix, whom Monet referred to as one of his "idols"⁹ and whose journal (published in 1893) would become Monet's favorite reading later in life.¹⁰ Monet also liked to recount how, together with Pierre-Auguste Renoir, he would spy on Delacroix while working from a neighboring studio on the rue de Furstemberg in the early 1860s.¹¹ Given Monet's admiration for the older artist Delacroix, we might imagine the weapons embedded in the landscape in Monet's picture as a distant evocation of what critics described as the "battle" between Delacroix and his rival, Jean-Dominique Ingres, dueling it out for the forces of color and line, respectively.¹² If this is so, then the spotlight colors on the palette and the absence of drawing tools on the table in *Corner of a Studio* seem to be clear signs that Monet came down on the side of color. Moreover the colors on the palette and of the painting as a whole – deep, oaky browns, hunter greens, vibrant reds, and rich burgundy – are in the same tonal range as many of Delacroix's battle paintings that Monet would have seen in the years leading up to *Corner of a Studio*, notably *The Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha*, which was shown in an exhibition that Monet visited at Martinet's gallery in 1860 (Figure 2.2).

The spontaneous immediacy that resulted from Delacroix's rejection of academic tradition in favor of the direct application of color to the canvas is rightly credited as an important precursor to the development of Impressionism. Nevertheless, the positioning of the books among the painting tools in *Corner of a Studio* suggests that Monet may have looked to Delacroix for his literary imagination as well as for his technical innovation. After all, one of the qualities Charles Baudelaire most extolled in Delacroix was the artist's literary sensibility.¹³ Many of the paintings Delacroix exhibited in 1859 and 1860, paintings that Monet referred to as "splendid" and full of "verve," were of literary subjects.¹⁴ Monet never painted subjects drawn from literature, but he was an avid reader. He possessed an extensive library containing works by authors ranging from Baudelaire to Balzac, and from William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes to Guy de Maupassant, who Monet counted among his friends.¹⁵ With its books and weapons juxtaposed with painting tools and set against a landscape backdrop in a studio, *Corner of a Studio* indicates that early in his career Monet approached the task of painting with something of the Romantic "feeling," that Baudelaire alluded to in writing, "Romanticism is neither precisely in the choice of subjects, nor in exact truth, but in a manner of feeling."¹⁶

Despite the fact that Monet's approach to painting has often been portrayed as merely an optical exercise (we need only think of Cézanne's oft-cited remark, "Monet was only an eye, but my god what an eye!"¹⁷), Monet's most sensitive critics, both in the nineteenth century and the present day, turned attention to the subjective aspects of his "impressions." Indeed the word itself implies a degree of subjectivity.¹⁸ Consider the reflections of the critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary upon seeing the first impressionist exhibition in 1874: "They are *impressionists* in the sense that they render not the landscape, but the sensation produced by the landscape."¹⁹ In the same review, Castagnary added that, if taken to the extreme, the Impressionists "will arrive at that degree of Romanticism without bounds, where nature is no more than a pretext for dreams, and that the imagination becomes incapable of formulating anything other than personal subjective fantasies, without any echo in general knowledge, because they are without regulation and without any possible verification in reality."²⁰ As



FIGURE 2.2 Eugène Delacroix, *The Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha*, 1835, oil on canvas, 73 × 61 cm. Paris: Musée du Petit Palais, PDUT1162. Source: HIP/Art Resource, NY.

Richard Schiff has pointed out, Castagnary feared that Impressionism could prompt a return to the fantastical Romanticism he himself had rejected.²¹ Interestingly, in 1886, the year of the last impressionist exhibition, Camille Pissarro announced that he was distancing himself from the movement, in rejection of the ideas of the “romantic impressionists,” including Monet.²² *Corner of a Studio* lays bare the latent Romanticism of Monet’s practice.

At the time the picture was painted, Romanticism was a waning movement. Nevertheless, in debates about landscape painting, certain critics, notably Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier, argued for an approach to landscape painting imbued with the kind of imagination that characterized the work of the Romantic painters they most admired. Discussing the Salon of 1859, Baudelaire lamented what he saw as the decline in French painting due to the widely acknowledged “triumph” of landscape and corresponding lack of imagined subject matter. “I will admit, along with everybody,” he wrote, “that the modern school of landscape painters is singularly powerful and skilled; but in this triumph and predominance of an inferior genre, in this inexperienced cult of nature, unrefined, unexplained by imagination, I see an evident sign of a general lowering of standards.”²³ The disaffected tone of Baudelaire’s remarks stemmed in part from his anger over the inclusion of photography in the Salon that year. To him, photography was the “refuge of all failed painters” and was largely responsible for the broader demise of French painting.²⁴ Gautier was less dramatic in tone, but he noted “Landscape painters are divided into two camps ... dreams and reality.” For Gautier, the ideal artist was somewhere between: “We conceive that an artist opt between these two realms.”²⁵ *Corner of a Studio* appears to strike this very middle ground.

Monet and Orientalism

Corner of a Studio also signals aspects of an orientalist imagination involved in Monet’s early practice. Interestingly, in paintings and in the popular press, Delacroix, among many other figures of his generation on whose work Monet commented, including Eugène Fromentin and Alexandre Descamps, was pictured wearing exactly the type of North African hat that appears in the painting. *Chéchias* were common items of apparel in North Africa where they formed part of the uniform of Zouaves, but in Paris they were an orientalist fashion trend.

Monet had very real reasons to be thinking of North Africa around the time he painted *Corner of a Studio*. In 1861, Monet’s draft number was called, which meant that he would have to join the army. He chose to join the ranks of the *Chasseurs d’Afrique*, a cavalry corps that was stationed in Algeria. But long before Monet was enlisted, he demonstrated an interest in orientalist subject matter.²⁶ Sketchbooks from Monet’s youth contain a number of orientalist subjects including two Zouaves.²⁷ In 1859 and 1860, Monet also saw and commented on orientalist paintings on view in the Salon and on the boulevard des Italiens. For example, he made special note of the work of Théodore Frère who exhibited 14 paintings of what Monet and his contemporaries referred to as “the Orient” in the Salon of 1859²⁸: “Théodore Frère has a group of paintings of the Orient that are magnificent. In all of these paintings there is a grandeur, a warm light, and it is also very beautiful at the level of detail and movement,” he told Boudin.²⁹ Monet also singled out Prosper Marilhat, Descamps, and Delacroix, each of whom had orientalist paintings on view in the years surrounding the creation of *Corner of a Studio*.³⁰

As Monet’s letter to Boudin suggests, part of the appeal of orientalist paintings was the quality of light in the landscape they achieved. Critics at the time Monet painted *Corner of a Studio* spoke of the “Orient” as a training ground for aspiring landscape

painters. In one of the many articles he devoted to the Salon of 1859, Gautier wrote the following:

In the Sahara, one can now see as many landscape painters' parasols as could once be found in the Fontainebleau Forest. Decamps and Marilhat, driven by the superior instinct of great artists, had understood all the resources offered to painting by these vast countries, traversed by inattentive caravans, which seem unaware of their beauty.³¹

The links between landscape painting and what was called “the Orient” in critical debates make the close association of the *chéchia* to the landscape in Monet's *Corner of a Studio* more significant. The painting shows that from this early formative stage in Monet's career, the primacy he placed on direct observation was imbued with a romantic and orientalist imagination.

Despite the painting's allusions to the East and to the imagination, however, *Corner of a Studio* does not depict a wholly fictive space. We are, after all, presented with the actual, physical space of a studio. The table in particular, with its weighty stillness and knobby knee-like legs, roots the painting in the embodied materiality of the world and, in so doing, reveals Monet's debt to Gustave Courbet, who, like Monet, studied at the Académie Suisse (Paris), and on whose work Monet made numerous comments in letters to friends around the time he painted *Corner of a Studio*. Moreover, Courbet's own studio painting, *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life* of 1854–1855, was one of the most notorious studio paintings of the nineteenth century (Figure 2.3).



FIGURE 2.3 Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life*, 1854–1855, oil on canvas, 361 × 598 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay, RF 2257. Source: Hervé Lewandowski, RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

Monet, Courbet, and the *Atelier*

At first glance *Corner of a Studio* and Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* appear more different from each other than they are similar. Intended as a public statement, Courbet's painting is more than five times the size of Monet's and has numerous people in it – and yet, like Monet after him, Courbet frames his practice in terms of landscape painting, a genre that had become increasingly important to Courbet's work in the years surrounding the creation of his studio picture.³² Spanning the entire length of the back wall is a *pentimento* of a landscape painting Courbet did not fully complete, while, at center, Courbet is shown seated at an easel and at work on a landscape.³³ Between Courbet and the *pentimento* on the back wall, characters ranging from Georges Sand and Champfleury to Baudelaire are shown crowding the studio, including all manner of other visitors – stretching from peasants, aristocrats, and a priest to other artists and authors – that Courbet may have imagined or seen, read about or knew, who informed his identity as a painter.³⁴ In his *Studio*, Courbet positions his practice as much as a product of accumulated experience registered in the mind as of facts observed in external reality – to the chagrin of many of the painting's observers, including Delacroix, who were confused by the combination of the “real” and “allegorical” aspects of the painting.³⁵

For Courbet, however, the matter was more straightforward. In the brochure simply titled *Realism* that accompanied Courbet's one-artist exhibition in 1855, where his *atelier* painting was shown, Courbet explained that, for him, terms like Realism and Romanticism were arbitrary and that the act of painting was never really just about seeing exactly what was in front of one's face. In fact, many of Courbet's earlier works, such as *Lovers in the Country*, *Sentiments of Youth* of c. 1844 (Petit Palais, Paris), are more closely associated with what we think of as Romanticism than they are with the socially engaged Realism for which Courbet was known. Meanwhile, Delacroix, who at the time was – and still today is – heralded as an icon of Romanticism, disavowed the label. In *Realism*, Courbet explains his thinking on these terms as follows:

The title of Realist was thrust upon me just as the title of Romantic was imposed upon the men of 1830. Titles have never given a true idea of things: if it were otherwise, the works would be unnecessary. ... I have studied the art of the ancients and the art of the moderns, avoiding any preconceived system and without prejudice. I no longer wanted to imitate the one than to copy the other; nor, furthermore, was it my intention to attain the trivial goal of “art for art's sake.” No! I simply wanted to draw forth, from a complete acquaintance with tradition, the reasoned and independent consciousness of my own individuality. To know in order to do, that was my idea.³⁶

In the small space of the studio corner Monet condenses the larger lesson of Courbet's *Studio*: landscape painting need not only be one thing or the other, only fact or fantasy, the imagined or the real. *Corner of a Studio* works hard to sustain the possibility that these realms coexist in the context of landscape painting.

Monet the Painter as Hunter

Corner of a Studio also points to a latent violence in Monet's practice, evident in the shotgun aimed at two birds embedded in the landscape covering the wall. The juxtaposition between the paintbrushes and the shotgun in the painting creates a link between the act of painting and the pursuit of prey that offers a further point of connection between Monet's and Courbet's respective practices. Like Monet, Courbet included signs of the hunt in his studio painting. Among the cast of characters included in Courbet's atelier are two hunters: one is seen in the far left corner with a gun over his chest, and the other is in the foreground with two hunting dogs at his feet. Hélène Toussaint has identified these figures as veiled portraits of Giuseppe Garibaldi and Louis XVIII, respectively.³⁷ Yet, the inclusion of hunters in this "real allegory" of Courbet's practice takes on another layer of meaning in light of Castagnary's comment that Courbet was "as much a painter as a hunter."³⁸ Courbet painted numerous hunt-themed paintings throughout his career. Michael Fried has interpreted certain of these works, including *The Quarry* of 1856 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), which was on view in the exhibition at Martinet's gallery that Monet visited in 1860, as metaphors for the embodied materiality and sheer physicality of Courbet's painting practice.³⁹ In different but related ways, *Corner of a Studio* indicates that for Monet, too, there was a connection between painting and pointing a gun.

Writing in 1886, more than 20 years after Monet painted *Corner of a Studio*, Maupassant observed that Monet was "no longer a painter but a hunter."⁴⁰ Maupassant was not the last person to apply hunting terms to Monet. Describing Monet's paintings of the Gare St. Lazare, Hugues Le Roux also referred to Monet as a hunter, chasing each fleeting ray of light.⁴¹ Although Monet, unlike Courbet, was not a hunter in the literal sense of the term, *Corner of a Studio* illuminates the predatory intensity that undergirded Monet's practice and his eventual pursuit of light outdoors.

This aspect of Monet's work becomes more evident in considering his hunt-themed still lifes, a genre of his practice in which *Corner of a Studio* can also be included. As much as the painting is a studio picture, it is also a still life that contains elements of the hunt. Furthermore, both studio pictures and still lifes were understood to reveal certain truths about the artist that created them.⁴² Although the entire endeavor of still life may appear wholly antithetical to the central tenets of Impressionism – painting movement and light outdoors – many Impressionists painted still lifes throughout their career.⁴³ In fact, Monet relied on still life to establish himself as a professional. In 1859, it was a still life that Monet presented to the Le Havre Municipal Council to apply for a grant of 12,000 francs to pursue his budding career as an artist. Monet also took two still lifes with him when he introduced himself to Constant Troyon in Paris in 1859, when he went to see the Salon for the first time.⁴⁴ We do not know the subject of each of these still life paintings, but we do know that from 1860 to 1862 the majority of Monet's still lifes dealt with dead animals.

One among these early works, *Hunting Trophy* of 1862, is especially relevant to *Corner of a Studio* and can help us see the painting in a different way (Figure 2.4). *Hunting Trophy* shows a tabletop on which are piled the bodies of dead birds – pheasant and woodcock, to be more specific – as well as a shotgun and a leather satchel. The straps of the gun and satchel are hung on a hook on the background wall, which abuts the table and spans the entire length of the picture. Also attached to the wall, although

from a point outside the picture space, is a powder horn. A comparison between Monet's *Hunting Trophy* and Boudin's *Still-Life: White Duck on a Console*, suggests that Monet painted his own *Hunting Trophy* in Boudin's studio or even in his house (note especially the similarity of the tabletop and the intersection between it and the



FIGURE 2.4 Claude Monet, *Hunting Trophy*, 1862, oil on canvas, 104 × 75 cm. Paris: Musée d'Orsay, on deposit in Montpellier: Musée Fabre, MNR 213. Source: Hervé Lewandowski, RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

molding on the wall) (Figure 2.5). In addition, it is important to note that in his *Hunting Trophy* Monet includes the powder horn and leather satchel seen also in Boudin's painting. In the 1850s and 1860s, Monet would be especially attentive to the example of Boudin, who lived in Monet's hometown of Le Havre and was among the first artists of major import to encourage Monet at a young age. Later in life, in an expression of gratitude toward Boudin, Monet said, "If I became a painter, it is to Eugène Boudin that I owe the fact."⁴⁵ *Hunting Trophy* indicates that Boudin's influence on Monet went beyond painting *en plein air* and was also important to his paintings of stillness, which allowed for a slower, more studied meditation on the act of picture making.

In Monet's *Hunting Trophy*, the molding on the wall insists on the painting as picture – announces, that is, the act of framing and arranging a certain group of objects into a composition on a flat surface. More than in Boudin's painting of what appears to be the same space, the molding of the wall in *Hunting Trophy* is aligned with the painting's edge and thus serves as its painted double. Within the larger picture, Monet's painted molding creates a second picture by delimiting a rectangular space on the painted wall. Here the strap on the leather satchel combines with the gun strap to form orthogonal perspectival lines that converge on a single vanishing point, the nail in the wall. Extending from the rounded bodies of the dead birds to the flattened space of the framed wall, the positioning of the gun indicates a perceived violence, on Monet's part, in the movement from the haptic to the optical aspects of his practice.⁴⁶



FIGURE 2.5 Eugène Boudin, *Still-Life: White Duck on a Console*, c. 1854–1857, oil on canvas, 56 × 82 cm. Private collection. Source: Mary-Dailey Desmarais.