Lesson 17 Part 1: Reactions to the Modern World-Introduction and Impressionism

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Introduction

This course explores the world’s visual arts, focusing on the development of visual awareness, assessment, and appreciation by examining a variety of styles from various periods and cultures while emphasizing the development of a common visual language. The materials are meant to foster a broader understanding of the role of visual art in human culture and experience from the prehistoric through the contemporary.

This is an Open Educational Resource (OER), an openly licensed educational material designed to replace a traditional textbook.

Course Materials

Presentations
The course materials consist of 24 presentations examining art across the globe from prehistory though the contemporary art world. These introduce key vocabulary, explore the way that culture and art are linked, describe the varying methods and techniques of the featured artists, and encourage classroom discourse.

Reading Lists
Each of the 24 presentations has an accompanying reading list which provides links to articles, videos, and other resources. The reading list is meant to reinforce and clarify information covered in each of the presentations.

Sample Assignments
A list of sample assignments is also included. Ranging from brief essays to simple art projects, these are designed to be completed in a sketchbook to more deeply explore course concepts. Intended to encourage learners to think like artists, art critics, and art historians, assignments emphasize practices of creative thinking and artistic method, while reinforcing concepts addressed in classroom lectures and required readings.
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Adopting, Adapting, or Expanding the Resource

The goal for this OER is to build an educational resource that is flexible enough to address concepts relevant to the contemporary discourse and scholarship in the visual arts. For those interested in utilizing these course materials, I am providing below some additional information that may be useful in expanding, adapting, or reinterpreting the materials. Editable versions are available in Microsoft PowerPoint and Word at https://dc.etsu.edu/art-appreciation-oer/

The font used to create the presentations and written documents for this OER is Calibri.

Finding Additional Readings, Lessons, and Articles

Smarthistory: https://smarthistory.org/
Smarthistory is an extensive open educational resource which publishes outstanding essays and video lectures about art. The Creating + Conserving section of Smarthistory includes wonderful informational articles and videos about materials and processes: https://smarthistory.org/tag/conservation/

MoMA Learning: https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/
MoMA Learning provides a wonderful selection of essays on works of modern art and also has assignment suggestions at the bottom of each section.

KhanAcademy: https://www.khanacademy.org/. Khan Academy is an outstanding platform of open educational resources covering a variety of academic and scholarly topics.
Trivium Art History: https://arthistoryproject.com/
Trivium Art History is a free, online art history book with clean design and approachable descriptions of works of art, periods of art history, and fun artist biographies. The Themes of Art section is a nice tool to helping students explore works that match their interests. The World of Art section is a useful tool for an exploratory World Art sketchbook prompt. The Timeline section is useful, as it separates works of art into galleries based on period.

Introduction to Art: Design, Context, and Meaning: https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/arts-textbooks/3/
For a more traditional, textbook approach, there is an Introduction to Art open educational resource textbook available.

Locating Images
If you are utilizing the course materials and would like to add new images that are public domain or licensed under Creative Commons, there are several useful tips provided below for finding images.

The Met Museum: https://www.metmuseum.org/
The Met has an option to search for Open Access images within the collection here. Make sure that the “Open Access” box is checked. The image license is CC0 1.0, and will be marked OA Public Domain at the lower left of the image.

Google Images: https://www.google.com/imghp?hl=en&tab=wi&ogbl
Google Images has an option under “Settings” > “Advanced Search” to search by “Usage Rights”. Choosing “Free to use share or modify” will allow a search for images suitable for expanding our OER.

Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/
Wikimedia Commons is an outstanding resource for finding open source images, with a strong collection of works of art.

Flickr: https://www.flickr.com
Flickr allows users to specify image licenses on uploaded photographs. Click “Some rights reserved” at the lower right of the image to check the licensing. Some images will say “Public Domain” or will be licensed under a Creative Commons (CC) license, allowing for the use in an OER.

Smarthistory Flickr: https://www.flickr.com/groups/smarthistory/pool/
The Smarthistory Flickr is expansive with images licensed for educational purposes.

Acknowledgements
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IMPRESSIONISM versus EXPRESSIONISM
Reactions to the Modern World
The goal of modern art (according to modern art critic and poet Baudelaire) is to be infused with the idea of modernity, to depict contemporary manners, and to speak for the modern time and place.

For Baudelaire, “Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent...”
IMPRESSIONISM
Captures impressions of the external,
Like the shifting of light,
Or transitory moments from modern life.

EXPRESSIONISM
Expresses the internal experience of the modern world,
Like the anxiety and alienation of urban life.
While the Impressionists were part of a cohesive group of artists who exhibited together and who shared the same principles...

...the Expressionists are a looser group of 19th and 20th century artists linked by stylistic tendencies and an interest in emotional impact.
There is also a third set of important artists called the Post-Impressionists...

The style of the Post-Impressionists is between Impressionism and Expressionism.
IMPRESSIONISM versus
EXPRESSIONISM
Reactions to the Modern World:
Part I: IMPRESSIONISM
The First Impressionist Exhibition of 1874 was held in the Parisian studio of the photographer Nadar, who was a friend to several of the Impressionist artists to be featured.

How fitting it is that an art movement which embraced abstraction is linked so closely with the development of photography. For we will see that as photography becomes more common in the mid-19th century, paintings become more abstract.

Nadar, *Self-Portrait in Balloon Basket*
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
The Impressionist artists were interested in answering Baudelaire’s call for art that expresses modernity, through the transient and the fleeting. They were fascinated by the transitory effect of light and atmosphere and the way the study of these lent themselves to the making of modern paintings.

Following the model of the 1863 Salon Des Refusés, the Impressionists rejected the French Academy and established Impressionist exhibitions as an alternative to Academy’s Salon.
The Impressionists particularly valued the experience of painting outdoors, *en plein air*, which was made possible largely by the 1841 invention of collapsible metal tubes for oil paint. No longer were artists confined to their studio with their assistants grinding pigment and mixing paint. Instead, the Impressionists could easily carry their supplies with them out of doors to paint.
The Impressionists were a close-knit group of artists working in and around Paris. We will discuss several notable figures from the larger group, including:

Claude Monet,
Pierre-Auguste Renoir,
Edgar Degas,
And Mary Cassatt.
Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*, Oil on canvas, 1872.
Source: Wikimedia Commons, *Color retouched from original*, License: Public Domain
It was as a result of the First Impressionist Exhibition of 1874 that the group found its name. A critic, having seen the title of Monet’s *Impression: Sunrise* complained that the artists did not present finished works, that they were nothing but “Impressionists”. The artists found the name quite fitting and adopted it for their own.
In *Impression: Sunrise*, Monet paints the sun rising in morning fog using strokes of pure color, creating a shimmering effect.

The horizon line disappears and the space between foreground and background is indistinct.

Monet presents a sketch-like image as a final work of art.

Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*, Oil on canvas, 1872.
Source: Wikimedia Commons, *Color retouched from original*, License: Public Domain
“When you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you—a tree, a house, a field, or whatever. Merely think, Here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape, until it gives you your own naïve impression of the scene before you.”

- Claude Monet
During the summer of 1874, Edouard Manet vacationed across the Seine from his friend Claude Monet where the artists painted one another. Here Manet paints the Impressionist Monet’s family.
Pierre-Auguste Renoir, another important Impressionist painter, arrived as Manet began his painting of the young Monet family and set up his easel to paint the scene as well.

Renoir, *Madame Monet and Her Son*, Oil on canvas, 1874.
Author: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain
The Impressionists (along with Manet who was never an official Impressionist) were a tightly knit group of artist friends, who holidayed together and shared ideas, exhibited their works together, and influenced one another immensely.
Monet

*Woman with a Parasol (Madame Monet and Her Son)*

Oil on canvas, 1875.

Author: Google Art Project

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain
The Impressionists were interested in capturing the fleeting moment of contemporary life, the passing light, the atmosphere. This painting, a portrait of Monet’s own wife, seems to capture the perfect beauty of a fleeting moment in springtime.
Monet painted his wife many times throughout their brief marriage, including in this heartrending deathbed portrait.
“I one day found myself looking at my beloved wife's dead face and just systematically noting the colours according to an automatic reflex!”

-Monet on painting *Camille Monet on her Deathbed*, as recorded in an essay by art critic John Berger

Monet
*Camille Monet on Her Deathbed*
Oil on canvas, 1879
Author: Musée d’Orsay
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
Monet was fascinated with the way in which light creates, or dissolves, form.

Between 1892 and 1894, he painted over 30 paintings of Rouen Cathedral from a rented studio space overlooking the facade. He worked on several paintings at a time, changing paintings as the light shifted.
“Everything changes, even stone.”
- Claude Monet
Monet paints the transitory light and atmosphere, not the architectural details of a Gothic church.

Claude Monet
Rouen Cathedral (The Portal and the Tour d'Albane in full Sunlight) also called Harmony in Blue and Gold
Oil on canvas, Painted 1893, dated 1894

Author: Steven Zucker, Source: Flickr, License: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
Claude Monet, *Rouen Cathedral* also called *Harmony in Blue and Gold*, Oil on canvas, Painted 1893, dated 1894

Author: Steven Zucker, Source: Flickr, License: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
For the last two decades of his life, Monet completed a series of paintings of the pond at his home at Giverny, France. The paintings from the series, the *Water Lilies*, approach non-representational abstraction.
Toward the beginning of the *Water Lilies* series, Monet includes more details that allow the viewer to understand the space within the painting. Here, for example, we see a bridge and a clear line between where the water ends and the foliage begins.
As Monet continues to paint the pond and water lilies in Giverny, the paintings become increasingly abstracted and more purely about light, color, and form.
Here, there is no visible horizon line but the forms of lily pads and flowers are clearly visible.
The more mature examples of Monet’s *Water Lilies* paintings are both monumental and strikingly abstract. Here is Monet’s painting of clouds reflected in water.
Interacting with these monumental paintings allows the viewer to fully enter into Monet’s world of color and light.
Monet's Water Lilies Room, Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris

Author: Sailko, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: CC BY-SA 3.0
The mature painting by Monet approaches pure non-representational abstraction.
Exhibition in Cleveland reuniting water lilies triptych with paintings from the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Author: Erik Drost
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY 2.0
Monet

Water Lilies (Agapanthus)

1915-1926

Author: Google Art Project

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain
Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain
The Impressionist Renoir is perhaps best known for his crowded paintings of fashionable young people enjoying the company of one another.
In Renoir’s *Moulin de la Galette*, a crowd relaxes at an old-fashioned dance on Sunday afternoon.

Renoir glamorized the working class scene by filling the foreground with his bourgeois artist friends and their models.
A sense of ease and innocence permeates the scene with dancing, chatting, and smiling children.

Dappled sunlight glimmers across this scene of modern paradise.

“For me a picture should be a pleasant thing, joyful and pretty—yes pretty! There are quite enough unpleasant things in life without the need for us to manufacture more.”

-Renoir on his own work

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Moulin De La Galette, Oil on canvas, 1876.
Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain
In a lively scene of joyful, wealthy artists and young people interacting on an outing to the country, Renoir presents us with a modern utopia.
The gazes and glances of the various figures in Renoir’s *Luncheon of the Boating Party* encourage the viewer’s eye to travel from place to place within this Impressionist snapshot. Renoir utilizes the Impressionist loose brushwork in order to capture a scene that is remarkable lively and believable.
Renoir’s future wife, Aline, is depicted in the scene, talking to a little dog. Notice the masterful way in which Renoir captures the gesture of her speech.
Mary Cassatt was an American painter who moved to Paris to join the Impressionists. She is best known for her intimate portraits of mothers with children. These portraits, rather than presenting the mother and child as divine figures, show the intimacy of daily life.
In *Mother and Child*, she focuses on the tender connection between mother and child.

Cassatt uses Impressionist loose brushwork to describe the clothing and interior. However, she more tightly renders the faces and hands to emphasize the connection between the figures where their bodies touch.

Mary Cassatt
*Mother And Child*
Oil on canvas, c. 1890
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)
License: Public Domain
Mary Cassatt’s paintings of mothers and children focus on the connection and relationship between the figures as they complete their daily activities.
Mary Cassatt offers us a glimpse into the private, daily intimacies of the women and children in her paintings.
Mary Cassatt was close friends with the Impressionist artist Edgar Degas for many years. Here we see a portrait of her painted by Degas.
What is happening in this painting?

Degas

*The Dance Class*

Oil on canvas, 1874

Source: MET Museum

License: CC0 1.0
Edgar Degas presents a painted snapshot showing the inside of a dance studio.

Degas paints the commotion and activity of preparations for performance. The reflection in the mirror reveals the modern city outside.

Degas
*The Dance Class*
Oil on canvas, 1874
Source: MET Museum
License: CC0 1.0
The figures within the scene seem caught within their own individual activities. One dancer practices her routine while the others slouch, scratch, chat, chew fingernails, and adjust costumes.

Degas
*The Dance Class*
Oil on canvas, 1874
Source: MET Museum
License: CC0 1.0
Degas carefully planned his compositions through sketching, sculpting, and photography. The oddly overlapping and stacked figures are purposely placed by Degas to emphasize the candid quality of the scene.

Degas
*The Dance Class*
Oil on canvas, 1874
Source: MET Museum
License: CC0 1.0
Sculpted studies by Degas, which were used to plan compositions.
Edgar Degas *The Rehearsal On Stage*

Oil colors freely mixed with turpentine, with traces of watercolor and pastel over pen-and-ink drawing on cream-colored woven paper, laid down on bristol board and mounted on canvas, c. 1874.

Source: MET Museum, License: CC0 1.0
In another of Degas’ contrived scenes of ballet practice, we are offered a glimpse of a dress rehearsal prior to a performance.

Bored and exhausted dancers wait to perform while men lounge to the side watching the rehearsal.

Edgar Degas *The Rehearsal On Stage*, c. 1874. 
Source: MET Museum, License: CCO 1.0
The carefully planned composition is meant to both delight the eye and remind viewers of the realities of modern life.

Rather than painting scenes such as this one from life during rehearsals, Degas hired models to pose in his studio which he then combined into more complex compositions.

Edgar Degas *The Rehearsal On Stage*, c. 1874.
Source: MET Museum, License: CCO 1.0
The scrolls of a double bass stick up from the orchestra pit in the foreground toward the bottom of the frame.

The arbitrary cropping of figures suggests photography, which Degas certainly utilized.

Edgar Degas *The Rehearsal On Stage*, c. 1874.
Source: MET Museum, License: CC0 1.0
Here is a photograph taken by Degas, which compositionally relates to his paintings.

Author: Google Art Project
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
Notice the boldness of Degas’ compositional decisions, such as the way the spiral staircase juts into the space of this rehearsal. Degas leaves a large space of floor in the center of the space empty, dividing the composition strangely into smaller groups of figures around the large empty floor.
Again here we see an example of Degas’ bold decisions in composing his paintings.

A large pole intersects the foremost horse and rider in this scene of jockeys preparing for a race. The strong vertical shape visually traps the jockey and his horse strangely at the right edge of the canvas. The larger portion of the canvas seems strangely pale and empty in comparison.
Reading List: 17_Reactions to the Modern World, Part 1: Impressionism

Article about the First Impressionist Exhibition of 1874:
https://smarthistory.org/how-the-impressionists-got-their-name/

Article about the photographer Nadar:

Article about Impressionism:
https://smarthistory.org/a-beginners-guide-to-impressionism/

Louis Leroy’s scathing review of the First Exhibition of the Impressionists, from 1874:
https://arthive.com/publications/1812~Pictorial_Louis_Leroys_scathing_review_of_the_First_Exhibition_of_the_Impressionists

Article about the optical realism of Monet:
https://smarthistory.org/impressionism-optical-realism-monet/

Video lecture about Monet’s Rouen Cathedral Series:
https://smarthistory.org/monet-rouen-cathedral-series/

Video lecture about Monet’s The Water Lilies:
https://smarthistory.org/claude-monet-les-nympheas-the-water-lilies/

Selected Essays of John Berger include the quote about Monet’s painting of his wife on her deathbed:
https://books.google.com/books?id=dYIUu5rKvCC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Images of Monet’s bridge paintings from Giverny with studio shots and photographs of the artist:
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437127

Video lecture about Renoir’s Moulin de la Galette:
https://smarthistory.org/auguste-renoir-moulin-de-la-galette/

149 Painting You Really Need to See in Europe includes the Renoir quote on pretty paintings:
https://books.google.com/books?id=Mi812FeRwj4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Video lecture on Renoir’s Luncheon of the Boating Party:
https://smarthistory.org/renoir-luncheon-of-the-boating-party/

Article about Mary Cassatt’s Mother and Child from 1890:
https://www.kmuw.org/post/art-review-mary-cassatt-and-american-impressionism
Video lecture on Mary Cassatt’s *A Child’s Bath*:
https://smarthistory.org/mary-cassatt-the-childs-bath/

Video lecture on Degas’ *The Dance Class*:
https://smarthistory.org/edgar-degas-the-dance-class/

Article on Degas’ *The Rehearsal on Stage*:
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436155
Choose a specific favorite animal or pet and create an impression of it. Describe in a detailed paragraph the way that the animal looks by analyzing its physical appearance. What are its physical qualities (size, color, texture, shape, etc.) of the animal? You may also sketch or photograph some of its physical features if you choose.