

WESTERN ART FROM 18TH TO MID-20TH CENTURY



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Book: Western Art from 18th to Mid-20th Century
(Taylor)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Chapters

- 1.1: Materials and Techniques Artists Use
- 1.2: Neoclassicism and the French Revolution
- 1.3: Romanticism in Spain and France
- 1.4: Romanticism in England and Germany
- 1.5: Realism
- 1.6: Impressionism and Post-Impressionism
- 1.7: Modernism and Symbolism
- 1.8: Expressionism and Cubism
- 1.9: Futurism, Dada and World War I
- 1.10: de Stijl and Surrealism
- 1.11: The Great Depression and World War II

Index

Glossary

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in **Back Matter/Detailed Licensing**.

1: CHAPTERS

- 1.1: Materials and Techniques Artists Use
- 1.2: Neoclassicism and the French Revolution
- 1.3: Romanticism in Spain and France
- 1.4: Romanticism in England and Germany
- 1.5: Realism
- 1.6: Impressionism and Post-Impressionism
- 1.7: Modernism and Symbolism
- 1.8: Expressionism and Cubism
- 1.9: Futurism, Dada and World War I
- 1.10: de Stijl and Surrealism
- 1.11: The Great Depression and World War II

1.1: Materials and Techniques Artists Use

Direct Lost Wax Method

[Smarthistory > Art History Basics > The materials and techniques artists use > Sculpture > Adriaen de Vries's bronze casting technique: direct lost-wax method]

Adriaen de Vries, a 17th century Dutch sculptor, often used "direct lost-wax casting." Because the wax is "lost," each bronze cast is unique. If the casting fails, the sculptor begins again.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/art1/?p=25

Introduction to Printmaking

[Smarthistory > Art History Basics > The materials and techniques artists use > Printmaking > Introduction to printmaking]

Learn about the main types of printmaking: relief, intaglio and lithography.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/art1/?p=25

Introduction to Relief Printmaking

[Smarthistory > Art History Basics > The materials and techniques artists use > Printmaking > Introduction to relief printmaking]

Discover how artists create different effects with linocuts and woodcuts.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/art1/?p=25

Rococo

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Figure 1.1.1: Hyacinthe Rigaud, Louis XIV, 1701, oil on canvas, 114 x 62 5/8 in (The J. Paul Getty Museum)

In the early years of the 1700s, at the end of the reign of Louis XIV (who dies in 1715), there was a shift away from the classicism and “Grand Manner” (based on the art of Poussin) that had governed the art of the preceding 50 years in France, toward a new style that we call Rococo. The Palace of Versailles (a royal chateau that was the center of political power) was abandoned by the aristocracy, who once again took up residence in Paris. A shift away from the monarchy, toward the aristocracy characterizes the art of this period.

What kind of lifestyle did the aristocracy lead? Remember that the aristocracy had enormous political power as well as enormous wealth. Many chose leisure as a pursuit and became involved themselves in romantic intrigues. Indeed, they created a culture of luxury and excess that formed a stark contrast to the lives of most people in France. The aristocracy—only a small percentage of the population of France—owned over 90% of its wealth. A small, but growing middle class will not sit still with this for long (remember the French Revolution of 1789).

Fragonard's The Swing



Figure 1.1.1: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, The Swing, 1767, oil on canvas, 81 x 64.2 cm (Wallace Collection, London)

As with most Rococo paintings, the subject of Fragonard's The Swing is not very complicated. Two lovers have conspired to get an older fellow to push the young lady in the swing while her lover hides in the bushes. Their idea is that—as she goes up in the swing, she can part her legs, and her lover can get a tantalizing view up her skirt.



Figure 1.1.1: Female figure (detail), Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Swing*, 1767, oil on canvas, 81 x 64.2 cm (Wallace Collection, London)

The figures are surrounded by a lush, overgrown garden. A sculptured figure to the left puts his fingers to his mouth, as though saying “hush,” while another sculpture in the background shows two cupid figures cuddled together. The colors are pastel pale pinks and greens, and although we have a sense of movement and a prominent diagonal line—the painting lacks the seriousness of a baroque painting.

If you look closely you can see the loose brushstrokes in the pink silk dress—and as she opens her legs, we get a glimpse of her stockings and garter belt. It was precisely this kind of painting that the philosophers of the Enlightenment were soon to condemn. They demanded a new style of art, one that showed an example of moral behavior, of human beings at their most noble.

Watteau

[Smarthistory > Baroque, Rococo, and Neoclassical art in Europe > Rococo > “Antoine Watteau, Pilgrimage to Cythera”]

1717, oil on canvas, 4' 3" x 6' 4 1/2" (Louvre, Paris). Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker & Dr. Beth Harris



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François Boucher (1703–1770)

Read

Stein, Perrin. “François Boucher (1703–1770)” In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (October 2003).

Fragonard

[Smarthistory > Baroque, Rococo, and Neoclassical art in Europe > Rococo > “Fragonard, The Meeting“]

Jean-Honoré Fragonard, The Progress of Love: The Meeting, 1771-1773, oil on canvas, 317.5 x 243.8 cm (The Frick Collection, New York)



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1.2: Neoclassicism and the French Revolution

A Restructuring of Society: Industrial, Intellectual, and Political

Source^[1]

Toward the middle of the 18th century, a shift in thinking occurred, known as the Enlightenment. The thinkers of the Enlightenment, including Rousseau, Diderot, and Voltaire, influenced by the scientific revolutions of the previous century, believed in shedding the light of science and reason on the world in order to question traditional ways of thinking. The scientific revolution (based on empirical observation and not on metaphysics or spirituality) gave the impression that the universe behaved according to universal and unchanging laws. This provided a model for looking rationally at human institutions as well as nature.

The Enlightenment was a period of profound optimism, a sense that with science and reason—and the consequent shedding of old superstitions—human beings and human society would improve.

The Enlightenment encouraged criticism of the corruption of Louis XVI and the aristocracy in France, leading to the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789. In 1792, Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, were beheaded along with thousands of other aristocrats believed to be loyal to the monarchy.

During this period, Rococo art was condemned for being immoral and indecent, and a new kind of moral, instructive art was called for: Neoclassicism. In opposition to the frivolous sensuality of Rococo painters like Jean-Honoré Fragonard and François Boucher, the Neoclassicists looked to the artist Nicolas Poussin for their inspiration. Poussin's work predominantly features clarity, logic, and order, plus it favors line over color. His work served as an alternative to the dominant Baroque style of the 17th century. Poussin was the major inspiration for such classically oriented artists as Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and Paul Cézanne.



Figure 1.2.1: Et in Arcadia Ergo, by Nicholas Poussin, c. 1630s Poussin came to define Neoclassical artwork.

Neoclassicism is characterized by clarity of form, sober colors, shallow space, and strong horizontals. Its verticals render the subject matter timeless, instead of temporal, as in the dynamic Baroque works, and depicts classical subject matter—or classicizes contemporary subject matter. Neoclassicists believed that strong drawing was rational, and therefore morally superior, and that art should be cerebral, not sensual.

The Neoclassicists wanted to express rationality and sobriety that was fitting for their times. Artists like David supported the rebels in the French Revolution through an art that asked for clear-headed thinking, self-sacrifice to the State (as in Oath of the Horatii), and an austerity reminiscent of Republican Rome.



Figure 1.2.1: “Oath of the Horatii” by Jacques-Louis David, 1784. David was an extremely influential figure in the Neoclassical movement

Neoclassicism was strongest in architecture, sculpture, and the decorative arts, where classical models in the same medium were relatively numerous and accessible. Rococo architecture emphasizes grace, ornamentation, and asymmetry; Neoclassical architecture is based on the principles of simplicity and symmetry, which were seen as virtues in the arts of Rome and Ancient Greece, and were more immediately drawn from 16th century Renaissance Classicism.

The Grand Tour & Its Portraits

Source: ^[2]

The Grand Tour was a customary trip to Europe undertaken by wealthy Europeans and some Americans that flourished as a tradition from about 1660 to 1840. The trip was viewed as an educational rite of passage typically for young men, but sometimes women as well. It was intended for culturally broadening purposes and associated with a fairly standard itinerary. The Grand Tour tradition was extended to include the middle class when railroad and ship travel became more widespread in the second half of the 18th century.

The travel itinerary typically began in Dover, England and crossed the English Channel to Ostend or to Calais in France. From here the tourist and “bear-leader,” or tutor, and possibly a troupe of servants, could rent a coach and travel to Paris. From Paris they would travel to Switzerland, then Spain, and Northern Italy. Once in Italy, the tourist would visit Turin, and might spend a few months in Florence and Venice, which was the epitome of the Grand Tour for most British tourists. From Venice they would go to Rome to study the ruins and masterpieces and possibly to the archaeological sites at Pompeii. Next was the German section of Europe, such as Vienna, Dresden, Berlin, and Potsdam, and finally to Holland and Flanders before making the trip home. The journey generally involved the study of art at museums and universities, private collections, and notable architectural sites.

The pilgrimage was popularized further by the advent of tour guides, such as Thomas Cook, which became synonymous with the Grand Tour. Grand Tourists were known to travel with an entourage that included valets, coachmen, scholarly guide and possibly a cook. Souvenirs and mementos became an important element as they could demonstrate the specifics of which location was visited and what was seen or acquired. Their popularity created an industry of sorts, and prices rose with the growth of the trend. Some Grand Tourists invited artists from home to accompany them throughout their travels, painting views specific to their personal itineraries.

A popular souvenir of the Grand Tour was a portrait of the tourist themselves, often painted amidst the architecture, or famous art works of a particular European location. The artist, Pompeo Batoni, made a career of painting portraits of English tourists posed among Roman antiquities. He became very popular in Rome and his portraits of the British traveling through the city were in very high demand. There are records of over 200 portraits of visiting British patrons standing amidst ruins and great works of art by Batoni. These paintings made it into numerous private collections in Britain, thus ensuring the genre's popularity in the United

Kingdom.

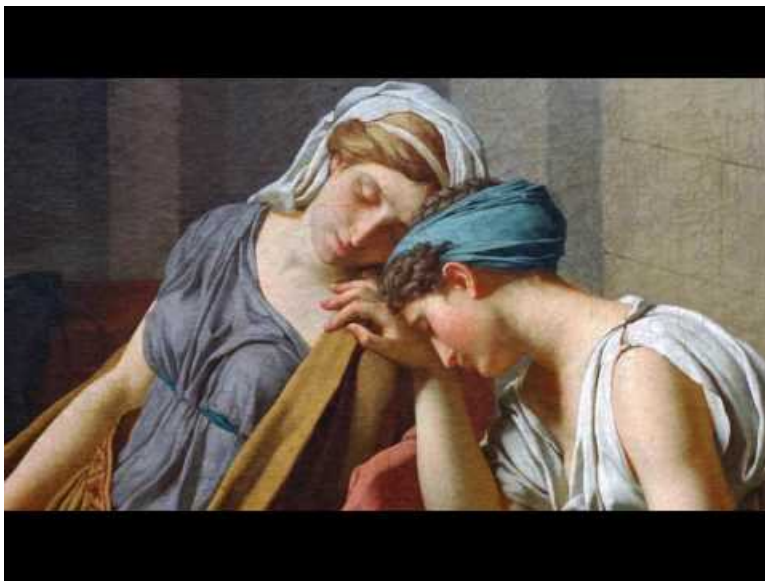


Figure 1.2.1: A portrait by Pompeo Batoni: A popular souvenir of the Grand Tour was a portrait of the tourist themselves, often painted amidst the architecture, or famous art works of a particular European location.

Jacques-Louis David

Oath of Horatii

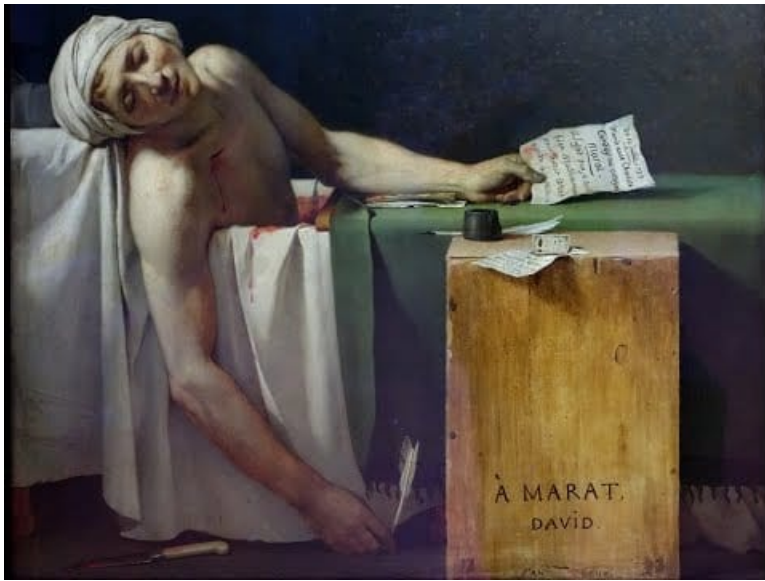
[Smarthistory > Baroque, Rococo & Neoclassicism in Europe > Neoclassicism > David, *Oath of the Horatii*]



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The Death of Marat

[Smarthistory > Baroque, Rococo & Neoclassicism in Europe > Neoclassicism > David, *The Death of Marat*]



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William Hogarth – “A Rake’s Progress”

Sex, Booze and 18th-Century Britain

Essay by Sophie Harland^[3]

If you ever needed proof that the sex, booze and a rock’n’roll lifestyle was not a twentieth century invention, you need look no further than the satirical prints of William Hogarth. He held up a moralising mirror to eighteenth-century Britain; the harlots, the womanizers—even the clergy could not escape. Hogarth’s prints play out the sins of eighteenth-century London in a kind of visual theatre that was entirely new and novel in their day.



Figure 1.2.1: William Hogarth, A Rake’s Progress, plate 2, “Surrounded by Artists and Professors,” 1735, engraving on paper, 35.5 x 31 cm

But it is not just Hogarth’s ‘take no prisoners’ approach to social commentary that made him so popular. Printed satire was actually already very common place and central London was full of bookshops and print sellers that displayed this kind of work.

What Hogarth did do that was so completely novel was to tell a story through pictures, *A Rake's Progress* is like a story board for a play. In fact, Hogarth's series were adapted into plays and pantomimes during his lifetime. His visual drama offered his audience a new way to enjoy satire. It is for this reason that to find comparisons and inspirations we should be looking at authors such as Hogarth's friend and fellow moraliser, Henry Fielding or Jonathan Swift—author of *Gulliver's Travels*, rather than contemporary artists. The title *A Rake's Progress* was referencing John Bunyan's *The Pilgrims Progress*. We can be quite sure that most people would have gotten this reference as it is thought that, at this time, this was the most read book in Britain after the Bible. Hogarth successfully borrows from popular culture in order to express complicated ideas through an enjoyable and totally accessible story. Of course Hogarth wasn't the first to do this, but he did it so well, he is celebrated to this day.

Marriage A-la-Mode

[Smarthistory > Baroque, Rococo & Neoclassicism in Europe > British art in the 18th century > Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode* (including Tete a Tete)]



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3. Smarthistory, CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0↵

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1.3: Romanticism in Spain and France

France & Spain

Source: ^[1]

Neoclassicism and Romanticism were competing artistic movements in France and Spain in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Neoclassicism

Neoclassicism was a revival of the styles and spirit of classic antiquity inspired directly from the classical period. This movement coincided with and reflected the Age of Enlightenment, and was initially a reaction against the excesses of the preceding Rococo style. While the movement is often described as the opposed counterpart of Romanticism, this is a great over-simplification that tends not to be sustainable when specific artists or works are considered. Ingres, the supposed main champion of late Neoclassicism, demonstrates this especially well.

Neoclassicism's Big Names

Neoclassicism in painting gained a new sense of direction with the success of Jacques-Louis David's "Oath of the Horatii" at the Paris Salon of 1785. David became the leader of French art, and after the French Revolution became a politician with control of much government patronage in art. He managed to retain his influence in the Napoleonic period, turning to explicitly propagandistic works.

David's many students included Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, who saw himself as a classicist throughout his long career. This despite a mature style that has an equivocal relationship with the main current of Neoclassicism, and many later diversions into Orientalism and the Troubadour style that are hard to distinguish from those of his unabashedly Romantic contemporaries.

Profoundly respectful of the past, Ingres assumed the role of a guardian of academic orthodoxy against the ascendant Romantic style represented by his nemesis Eugène Delacroix. He described himself as a "conservator of good doctrine, and not an innovator." Nevertheless, modern opinion has tended to regard Ingres and the other Neoclassicists of his era as embodying the Romantic spirit of his time, while his expressive distortions of form and space make him an important precursor of modern art.



Figure 1.3.1: The Envoys of Agamemnon, by Ingres, 1801. Ingres, though firmly committed to Neoclassical values, is seen as expressing the Romantic spirit of the times.

Romanticism

While the arrival of Romanticism in French art was delayed by the hold of Neoclassicism on the academies, it became increasingly popular during the Napoleonic period. Its initial form was the history paintings propagandising for the new regime. The key generation of French Romantics born between 1795–1805, in the words of Alfred de Vigny, had been “conceived between battles, attended school to the rolling of drums”. The French Revolution (1789–1799) followed by the Napoleonic Wars until 1815, meant that war, and the attending political and social turmoil that went along with them, served as the background for Romanticism.

History Painting

Since the Renaissance, history painting was considered among the highest and most difficult forms of art. History painting is defined by its subject matter rather than artistic style. History paintings usually depict a moment in a narrative story rather than a specific and static subject. In the Romantic period, history painting was extremely popular and increasingly came to refer to the depiction of historical scenes, rather than those from religion or mythology.

Théodore Géricault (1791–1824) had his first success with “The Charging Chasseur,” a heroic military figure derived from Rubens. However, his next major completed work, “The Raft of the Medusa”, remains the greatest achievement of Romantic history painting, which in its day had a powerful anti-government message.

Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) had great success at the Salon with works like “The Barque of Dante (1822),” “The Massacre at Chios” (1824) and “Death of Sardanapalus” (1827). Delacroix’s “Liberty Leading the People”(1830) remains, with the Medusa, one of the best known works of French Romantic painting. Both of these works reflected current events and appealed to public sentiment.



Figure 1.3.1: Liberty Leading the People, by Delacroix, 1830. The history paintings of Eugene Delacroix epitomized the Romantic period.

Spanish Involvement

Spanish artists were also influenced by Neo-classicism and Romanticism. The Neoclassicism of the French painter David was very influential in Spain; his impact is visible in works by Jose de Madrazo (1781–1859). His son, Federico de Madrazo (1781–1859), was a leading figure in Spanish Romanticism, together with Leonardo Alenza (1807–1845), Valeriano Domínguez Becquer and Antonio María Esquivel. Romanticism was strongly represented during the latter part of the century in history paintings in the works of Antonio Gisbert (1834–1901), Eduardo Rosales (1836–1873) and Francisco Pradilla (1848–1921). In these works, the techniques of Realism were frequently used with Romantic subjects.

Spanish painter Francisco Goya is today generally regarded as the greatest painter of the Romantic period. However, in many ways he remained wedded to the classicism and realism of his training. However, more than any other artist of the period, Goya exemplified the Romantic expression of the artist’s feelings and his personal imaginative world. He also shared with many of

the Romantic painters a more free handling of paint, emphasized in the new prominence of the brushstroke and impasto, which tended to be repressed in neoclassicism under a self-effacing finish.



Figure 1.3.1: The Milkmaid of Bordeaux, by Goya, ca. 1825-1827. Though he worked in a variety of styles, Goya is remembered as perhaps the greatest painter of the Romantic period.

Read

Voorhies, James. “[Francisco de Goya \(1746–1828\) and the Spanish Enlightenment](#)“. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, (October 2003).

Watch these videos

Ingres “La Grande Odalisque”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > Romanticism > France > Ingres, *La Grand Odalisque*]

1814, Oil on canvas, 36" x 63" (91 x 162 cm), (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

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Théodore Gericault “Raft of the Medusa”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > Romanticism > France > Gericault, *Raft of the Medusa*]

Oil on canvas, 193 x 282 inches, 1818-19 (Musée du Louvre, Paris).

Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



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Eugène Delacroix “Liberty Leading the People”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > Romanticism > France > Delacroix, Liberty Leading the People]

Oil on canvas, 2.6 x 3.25m, 1830 (Musée du Louvre, Paris).

Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



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1.4: Romanticism in England and Germany

Landscape Paintings

Source: ^[1]

Dutch and English Landscape Painting

Landscape painting depicts natural scenery such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers, and forests, in which the main subject is typically a wide view and the elements are arranged into a coherent composition. During the Dutch Golden Age of painting, in the 17th century, this type of painting grew in popularity, and many artists specialized in the genre. In particular, painters of this era were known for developing extremely subtle, realist techniques for depicting light and weather. The popularity of landscape painting in this region, during this time, was in part a reflection of the virtual disappearance of religious art in the Netherlands, which was then a Calvinist society. In the 18th and 19th centuries, religious painting declined across all of Europe, and the movement of Romanticism spread, both of which provided important historical ingredients for landscape painting to ascend to a more prominent place in art.

In England, landscapes had initially only been painted as the backgrounds for portraits, and typically portrayed the parks or estates of a landowner. This changed as a result of Anthony van Dyck, who, with other Flemish artists living in England, began a national tradition. In the 18th century, watercolor painting, mostly of landscapes, became an English specialty. The nation had both a buoyant market for professional works of this variety, and a large number of amateur painters. By the beginning of the 19th century, the most highly-regarded English artists were all, for the most part, dedicated landscapists, including John Constable, J.M.W. Turner, and Samuel Palmer.



Figure 1.4.1: The Hay Wain, by John Constable, 1821. Constable was a popular English Romantic Painter.

French Landscape Painting

French painters were slower to develop an interest in landscapes, but in 1824, the Salon de Paris exhibited the works of John Constable, an extremely talented English landscape painter. His rural scenes influenced some of the younger French artists of the time, moving them to abandon formalism and to draw inspiration directly from nature. During the revolutions of 1848, artists gathered in Barbizon to follow Constable's ideas, making nature the subject of their paintings. They formed what is referred to as the Barbizon School.

During the late 1860s, the Barbizon painters attracted the attention of a younger generation of French artists studying in Paris. Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley and Frédéric Bazille among others, practiced plein air painting and developed what would later be called Impressionism, an extremely influential movement.

In Europe, as John Ruskin noted, and Sir Kenneth Clark confirmed, landscape painting was the “chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century,” and “the dominant art. ” As a result, in the times that followed, it became common for people to “assume that the appreciation of natural beauty and the painting of landscape was a normal and enduring part of our spiritual activity. ”

Nationalism in Landscape Painting

Nationalism has been implicated in the popularity of 17th century Dutch landscapes, and in the 19th century, when other nations, such as England and France, attempted to develop distinctive national schools of their own. Painters involved in these movements often attempted to express the unique nature of the landscape of their homeland.

The Hudson River School

In the United States, a similar movement, called the Hudson River School, emerged in the 19th century and quickly became one of the most distinctive worldwide purveyors of landscape pieces. American painters in this movement created works of mammoth scale in an attempt to capture the epic size and scope of the landscapes that inspired them. The work of Thomas Cole, the school's generally acknowledged founder, seemed to emanate from a similar philosophical position as that of European landscape artists. Both championed, from a position of secular faith, the spiritual benefits that could be gained from contemplating nature . Some of the later Hudson River School artists, such as Albert Bierstadt, created less comforting works that placed a greater emphasis (with a great deal of Romantic exaggeration) on the raw, terrifying power of nature.



Figure 1.4.2: The Oxbow, by Thomas Cole, 1836. Thomas Cole was a founding member of the pioneering Hudson School

John Constable “View on the Stour Near Dedham”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > Romanticism > England > Constable, *View on the Stour near Dedham*]

1822, oil on canvas, 51 x 74 inches (The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA)

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Joseph Mallord William Turner “The Fighting Temeraire”

Essay by Abram Fox^[2]



Figure 1.4.3: Joseph Mallord William Turner, The Fighting Temeraire, 1839, oil on canvas, 90.7 x 121.6 cm (The National Gallery, London)Imagine that you were born in 1950.

How much has the world changed since when you were a kid? There was no internet, and no personal computers. Your parents didn't own a minivan or SUV—those didn't exist yet. Commercial airplanes were brand new. The world was still recovering from World War II, and if you lived in the United States you likely lived in mortal fear of a nuclear attack from the USSR. Life in 2013 may resemble life in 1950 in some ways, but there's no question the world is a different place, a more advanced, stranger place.

The Industrial Revolution Changed Everything

That was the point of view of British artist Joseph Mallord William Turner (commonly known by his initials J.M.W.) in 1839. J.M.W. Turner was born in 1775, less than a month after the start of the American Revolutionary War. He grew up in a United Kingdom whose empire stretched across the globe under the watchful eye of its navy, and whose military prowess was encouraged by a booming economy driven by the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution, between roughly 1760 and 1830, brought great positive change to Great Britain. Steam power heralded a machine age filled with factories and mechanical processes. Innovations in textile machinery increased industrial output thousands of times, iron became cheap and strong enough to become an everyday building material, and gas lamps meant people could be active at all hours of the day and night. Populations increased, consumer goods became more affordable, and the middle class exploded. There was a palpable understanding that the world was changing forever.

However, not all things improved. Even though the average income grew during the industrial age, standards of living plummeted for most, as did conditions in urban housing and in the new factories. Child labor was not only legal, it was expected. Despite its economic successes, the Industrial Revolution was not without serious problems.

Brave Historical Legacy



Figure 1.4.4: Clarkson Frederick Stanfield, Sketch for “The Battle of Trafalgar, and the Victory of Lord Nelson over the Combined French and Spanish Fleets,” 1805 1833 (Tate, London). Stanfield may have depicted the Temeraire, illuminated in the foreground and flying the British flag.

Ambiguity was on Turner’s mind when he began work on his painting, whose full title is *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up, 1838*. He was familiar with the namesake ship, HMS Temeraire, as were all Britons of the day. Temeraire was the hero of the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, where Napoleon’s forces were defeated, and which secured British naval dominance for the next century.

By the late 1830s, however, Temeraire was no longer relevant. After retiring from service in 1812 she was converted into a hulk, a ship that can float but not actually sail. She spent time as a prison ship, housing ship, and storage depot before she was finally decommissioned in 1838 and sent up the River Thames to a shipyard in London to be broken into scrap materials. That trip on the Thames was witnessed by Turner, who used it as inspiration for his famous painting.

Clash of Technology

For many Britons, Temeraire was a powerful reminder of their nation’s long history of military success and a living connection to the heroes of the Napoleonic Wars. Its disassembly signaled the end of an historical era. Turner celebrates Temeraire’s heroic past, and he also depicts a technological change which had already begun to affect modern-day life in a more profound way than any battle.

Rather than placing Temeraire in the middle of his canvas, Turner paints the warship near the left edge of the canvas. He uses shades of white, grey, and brown for the boat, making it look almost like a ghost ship. The mighty warship is being pulled along by a tiny black tugboat, whose steam engine is more than strong enough to control its larger counterpart. Turner transforms the scene into an allegory about how the new steam power of the Industrial Revolution quickly replaced history and tradition.

Believe it or not, tugboats were so new that there wasn’t even a word for what the little ship was doing to Temeraire. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Turner’s title for his painting is the first ever recorded use of the word “tugged” to describe a steamship pulling another boat.

In addition to the inventive title, Turner included in the exhibition catalog the following lines of text, which he modified from a poem by Thomas Campbell’s “Ye Mariners of England”:

The flag which braved the battle and the breeze
No long owns her

This was literally true: Temeraire flies a white flag instead of the British flag, indicating it has been sold by the military to a private company. Furthermore, the poem acknowledges that the ship now has a different function. Temeraire used to be a warship, but no more.

Creative Adaptation

In 1838 *Temeraire* was towed approximately 55 miles from its coastal dock to a London shipyard, and untold numbers of Britons would have witnessed the ship's final journey. However, the *Temeraire* they saw only lightly resembled the mighty warship depicted by Turner. In reality her masts had already been removed, as had all other ornamentation and everything else of value on the ship's exterior and interior. Only her barren shell was tugged to London.



Figure 1.4.5: *Temeraire* and tugboat (detail), Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire*, 1839, oil on canvas, 90.7 x 121.6 cm (The National Gallery, London)

Turner's painting doesn't show the reality of the event. He instead chose to depict *Temeraire* as she would have looked in the prime of her service, with all of its masts and rigging. This creates a dramatic juxtaposition between the warship and the tiny, black tugboat which controls its movements.

In fact there would have been two steamships moving *Temeraire*, but Turner exercised his artistic creativity to capture the emotional impact of the sight. Contemporary viewers recognized that *The Fighting Temeraire* depicts an ideal image of the ship, rather than reality.

Strong contrast is also visible in the way Turner applied paint to the various portions of his canvas. *Temeraire* is highly detailed. If you were to stand inches away from the painting, you would clearly see miniscule things like individual windows, hanging ropes, and decorative designs on the exterior of the ship. However, if you looked over to the sun and clouds you would see a heavy accumulation of paint clumped on the canvas, giving it a sense of chaos and spontaneity.



Figure 1.4.6: Accumulated paint visible in the sky (detail), Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire*, 1839, oil on canvas, 90.7 x 121.6 cm (The National Gallery, London)



Figure 1.4.7: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, oil on canvas, 1844 (National Gallery, London)

Many works by Turner in this period of his life, like *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)* and *Rain Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway* (left), use the same effect, but *The Fighting Temeraire* stands out because of the naturalistic portrayal of the ship compared to the rest of the work.

The Artist as a Warship

Turner thought *The Fighting Temeraire* was one of his more important works. He never sold it, instead keeping it in his studio along with many of his other canvases. When he died in 1851 he bequeathed it and the rest of the paintings he owned to the nation. It quickly became seen as an image of Britain's relationship to industrialization. Steam power has proved itself to be much stronger and more efficient than old technology, but that efficiency came with the cost of centuries of proud tradition.

Beyond its national importance, *The Fighting Temeraire* is also a personal reflection by the artist on his own career. Turner was 64 when he painted it. He'd been exhibiting at the Royal Academy of Arts since he was 15, and became a member at age 24, later taking a position as Professor of Painting. However, the year before he painted *The Fighting Temeraire* Turner resigned his professorship, and largely lived in secrecy and seclusion.

Although Turner remained one of the most famous artists in England until his death, by the late 1830s he may have thought he was being superseded by younger artists working in drastically different styles. He may have become nostalgic for the country he grew up in, compared to the one in which he then lived. *Rain, Steam, and Speed – The Great Western Railway* would reflect a similar interest in the changing British landscape several years later, focusing on the dynamic nature of technology. *The Fighting Temeraire* presents a mournful vision of what technology had replaced, for better or for worse.

Caspar David Friedrich “Abbey Among Oak Trees”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > Romanticism Germany > Freidrich, Abby Among Oak Trees]

1809 or 1810, oil on canvas, 110.4 x 171 cm (Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/art1/?p=31

1. “Neoclassicism & Romanticism: Landscape Painting” Boundless Art History. Boundless. 21 July 2015. [CC-BY-SA 4.0](#) ↩
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1.5: Realism

Early Photography

Essay by Dr. Rebecca Jeffrey Easby ^[1]

By modern standards, nineteenth-century photography can appear rather primitive. While the stark black and white landscapes and unsmiling people have their own austere beauty, these images also challenge our notions of what defines a work of art.

Photography is a controversial fine art medium, simply because it is difficult to classify—is it an art or a science? Nineteenth century photographers struggled with this distinction, trying to reconcile aesthetics with improvements in technology.

The Birth of Photography



Figure 1.5.1: Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, View from the Window at Gras (1826)

Although the principle of the camera was known in antiquity, the actual chemistry needed to register an image was not available until the nineteenth century.

Artists from the Renaissance onwards used a camera obscura (Latin for dark chamber), or a small hole in the wall of a darkened box that would pass light through the hole and project an upside down image of whatever was outside the box. However, it was not until the invention of a light sensitive surface by Frenchman Joseph Nicéphore Niépce that the basic principle of photography was born.

From this point the development of photography largely related to technological improvements in three areas, speed, resolution and permanence. The first photographs, such as Niépce's famous *View from the Window at Gras* (1826) required a very slow speed (a long exposure period), in this case about 8 hours, obviously making many subjects difficult, if not impossible, to photograph. Taken using a camera obscura to expose a copper plate coated in silver and pewter, Niépce's image looks out of an upstairs window, and part of the blurry quality is due to changing conditions during the long exposure time, causing the resolution, or clarity of the image, to be grainy and hard to read. An additional challenge was the issue of permanence, or how to successfully stop any further reaction of the light sensitive surface once the desired exposure had been achieved. Many of Niépce's early images simply turned black over time due to continued exposure to light. This problem was largely solved in 1839 by the invention of hypo, a chemical that reversed the light sensitivity of paper.



Figure 1.5.2: Louis Daguerre, *The Artist's Studio*, 1837, daguerreotype

Technological Improvements

Photographers after Niépce experimented with a variety of techniques. Louis Daguerre invented a new process he dubbed a daguerrotype in 1839, which significantly reduced exposure time and created a lasting result, but only produced a single image.

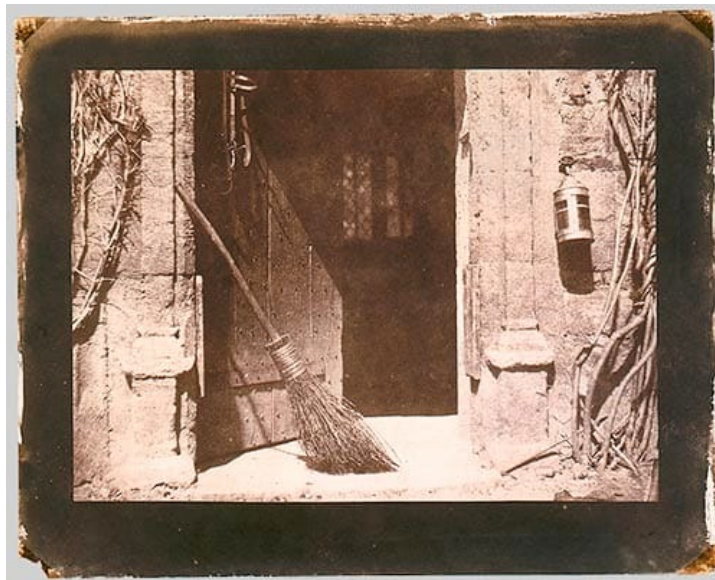


Figure 1.5.3: William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Open Door*, 1844, Salted paper print from paper negative

At the same time, Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot was experimenting with his what would eventually become his calotype method, patented in February 1841. Talbot's innovations included the creation of a paper negative, and new technology that involved the transformation of the negative to a positive image, allowing for more than one copy of the picture. The remarkable detail of Talbot's method can be seen in his famous photograph, *The Open Door* (1844) which captures the view through a medieval-looking entrance. The texture of the rough stones surrounding the door, the vines growing up the walls and the rustic broom that leans in the doorway demonstrate the minute details captured by Talbot's photographic improvements.



Figure 1.5.4: Honoré Daumier, *Nadar élevant la Photographie à la hauteur de l'Art* (Nadar elevating Photography to Art), lithograph from *Le Boulevard*, May 25, 1863

The collodion method was introduced in 1851. This process involved fixing a substance known as gun cotton onto a glass plate, allowing for an even shorter exposure time (3-5 minutes), as well as a clearer image.

The big disadvantage of the collodion process was that it needed to be exposed and developed while the chemical coating was still wet, meaning that photographers had to carry portable darkrooms to develop images immediately after exposure. Both the difficulties of the method and uncertain but growing status of photography were lampooned by Honoré Daumier in his *Nadar Elevating Photography to the Height of Art* (1862). Nadar, one of the most prominent photographers in Paris at the time, was known for capturing the first aerial photographs from the basket of a hot air balloon. Obviously, the difficulties in developing a glass negative under these circumstances must have been considerable.

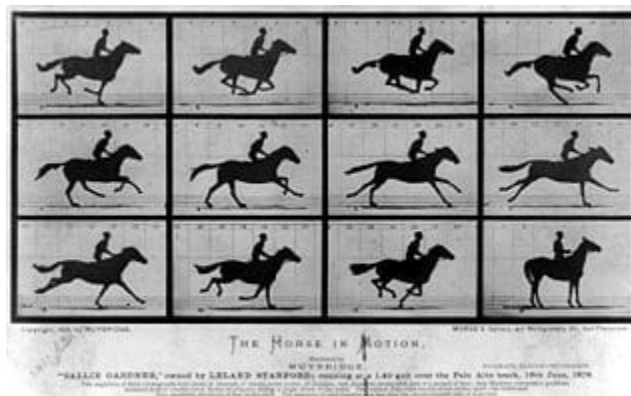


Figure 1.5.5: Eadweard Muybridge, *The Horse in Motion* ("Sallie Gardner," owned by Leland Stanford; running at a 1:40 gait over the Palo Alto track, 19th June 1878)

Further advances in technology continued to make photography less labor intensive. By 1867 a dry glass plate was invented, reducing the inconvenience of the wet collodion method.

Prepared glass plates could be purchased, eliminating the need to fool with chemicals. In 1878, new advances decreased the exposure time to 1/25th of a second, allowing moving objects to be photographed and lessening the need for a tripod. This new development is celebrated in Eadweard Maybridge's sequence of photographs called *Gallopig Horse* (1878). Designed to settle the question of whether or not a horse ever takes all four legs completely off the ground during a gallop, the series of photographs also demonstrated the new photographic methods that were capable of nearly instantaneous exposure.

Finally in 1888 George Eastman developed the dry gelatin roll film, making it easier for film to be carried. Eastman also produced the first small inexpensive cameras, allowing more people access to the technology.

Photographers in the 19th century were pioneers in a new artistic endeavor, blurring the lines between art and technology. Frequently using traditional methods of composition and marrying these with innovative techniques, photographers created a new vision of the material world. Despite the struggles early photographers must have had with the limitations of their technology, their artistry is also obvious.

Gustave Courbet “*The Artist’s Studio*”

[Smarthistory > The Avant-Garde: Realism, Impressionism & Post Impressionism > Realism > Courbet, *The Artist’s Studio*]

Gustave Courbet, *The Artist’s Studio*; A real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life, oil on canvas, 1854-55 (Musée d’Orsay, Paris)

Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



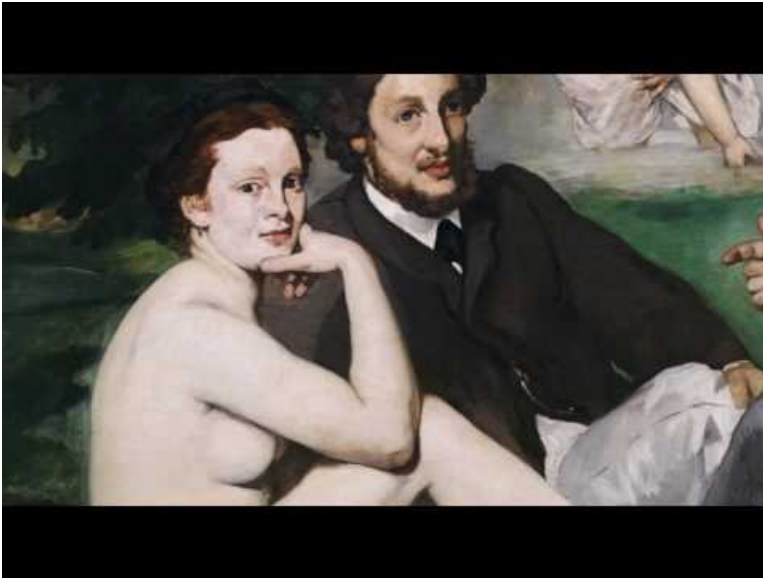
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Édouard Manet “*Le déjeuner sur l’herbe*”

[Smarthistory > The Avant-Garde: Realism, Impressionism & Post Impressionism > Realism > Manet, *Le de jeuner sur l’herbe*]

(Luncheon on the Grass), oil on canvas, 1863 (Musée d’Orsay, Paris)

Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/art1/?p=33

Thomas Eakins “The Gross Clinic”

Read: <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/299524.html>

Alternative (appears in print coursepack) www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-americas/us-art-19c/realism-us/a/eakins-the-gross-clinic

Winslow Homer “The Life Line”

[Smarthistory > Art of the Americas to World War I > Art of the United States in the 19th Century > Homer, *The Life Line*]

1884, oil on canvas, 28-5/8 x 44-3/4 inches / 72.7 x 113.7 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art).

Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

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1.6: Impressionism and Post-Impressionism

Impressionism

Read: "Impressionism: Art and Modernity" by Margaret Samu via Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (October 2004).

A Beginner's Guide to Impressionism

By Dr. Beth Gersh-Nesic ^[1]



Figure 1.6.1: Claude Monet, Impression Sunrise, 1872, oil on canvas, 48 x 63 cm (Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris). This painting was exhibited at the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874.

Apart from the salon

The group of artists who became known as the Impressionists did something ground-breaking in addition to painting their sketchy, light-filled canvases: they established their own exhibition. This may not seem like much in an era like ours, when art galleries are everywhere in major cities, but in Paris at this time, there was one official, state-sponsored exhibition—called the Salon—and very few art galleries devoted to the work of living artists. For most of the nineteenth century then, the Salon was the only way to exhibit your work (and therefore the only way to establish your reputation and make a living as an artist). The works exhibited at the Salon were chosen by a jury—which could often be quite arbitrary. The artists we know today as Impressionists—Claude Monet, August Renoir, Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, Alfred Sisley (and several others)—could not afford to wait for France to accept their work. They all had experienced rejection by the Salon jury in recent years and felt that waiting an entire year between exhibitions was too long. They needed to show their work and they wanted to sell it.



Figure 1.6.1: Edgar Degas, *The Ballet Class*, 1871-1874, oil on canvas, 75 x 85 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

The artists pooled their money, rented a studio that belonged to the photographer Nadar, and set a date for their first collective exhibition. They called themselves the Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Printmakers and their first show opened at about the same time as the annual Salon in May 1874. The Impressionists held eight exhibitions from 1874 through 1886.



Figure 1.6.1: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Bal du moulin de la Galette*, 1876, oil on canvas, 131 x 175 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

The impressionists regarded Manet as their inspiration and leader in their spirit of revolution, but Manet had no desire to join their cooperative venture into independent exhibitions. Manet had set up his own pavilion during the 1867 World's Fair, but he was not interested in giving up on the Salon jury. He wanted Paris to come to him and accept him—even if he had to endure their ridicule in the process.

Lack of finish

Monet, Renoir, Degas, and Sisley had met through classes. Berthe Morisot was a friend of both Degas and Manet (she would marry Édouard Manet's brother Eugène by the end of 1874). She had been accepted to the Salon, but her work had become more experimental since then. Degas invited Morisot to join their risky effort. The first exhibition did not repay the artists monetarily but it did draw the critics, some of whom decided their art was abominable. What they saw wasn't finished in their eyes; these were mere "impressions." This was not a compliment.



Figure 1.6.1: Berte Morisot, The Cradle, 1872, oil on canvas, 56 x 46 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

The paintings of Neoclassical and Romantic artists had a finished appearance. The Impressionists' completed works looked like sketches, fast and preliminary "impressions" that artists would dash off to preserve an idea of what to paint more carefully at a later date. Normally, an artist's "impressions" were not meant to be sold, but were meant to be aids for the memory—to take these ideas back to the studio for the masterpiece on canvas. The critics thought it was absurd to sell paintings that looked like slap-dash impressions and to present these paintings as finished works.

Landscape and contemporary life

Courbet, Manet and the Impressionists also challenged the Academy's category codes. The Academy deemed that only "history painting" was great painting. These young Realists and Impressionists questioned the long established hierarchy of subject matter. They believed that landscapes and genres scenes (scenes of contemporary life) were worthy and important.



Figure 1.6.1: Claude Monet, Coquelicots, La promenade (Poppies), 1873, 50 x 65 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Light and color

In their landscapes and genre scenes, the Impressionist tried to arrest a particular moment in time by pinpointing specific

atmospheric conditions—light flickering on water, moving clouds, a burst of rain. Their technique tried to capture what they saw. They painted small commas of pure color one next to another. When viewer stood at a reasonable distance their eyes would see a mix of individual marks; colors that had blended optically. This method created more vibrant colors than colors mixed as physical paint on a palette.



Figure 1.6.1: Claude Monet, La Gare Saint-Lazare, 1877, oil on canvas, 75 x 104 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

An important aspect of the Impressionist painting was the appearance of quickly shifting light on the surface of forms and the representation changing atmospheric conditions. The Impressionists wanted to create an art that was modern by capturing the rapid pace of contemporary life and the fleeting conditions of light. They painted outdoors (*en plein air*) to capture the appearance of the light as it flickered and faded while they worked.

Reception

By the 1880s, the Impressionists accepted the name the critics gave them, though their reception in France did not improve quickly. Other artists, such as Mary Cassatt, recognized the value of the Impressionist movement and were invited to join. American and other non-French collectors purchased numerous works by the Impressionists. Today, a large share of Impressionist work remains outside French collections.

Edgar Degas “The Dance Class”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > The Avant-garde: Realism, Impressionism & Post-Impressionism > Degas, *The Dance Class*] The Dance Class, oil on canvas, 1874 (Metropolitan Museum of Art). Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker, Dr. Beth Harris.

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Claude Monet “The Argenteuil Bridge”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > The Avant-garde: Realism, Impressionism & Post-Impressionism > Monet, *The Argenteuil Bridge*] 1874, oil on canvas, 60.5 x 80 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Speakers: Drs. Beth Harris and Steven Zucker

Please note that there is significant background chatter in this video. The Musée d'Orsay is happily a very busy museum and this painting is hung in a relatively small room.

Post-Impressionism

Source^[2]

Move from Naturalism

Post-Impression refers to a genre of painting that rejected the naturalism of Impressionism, in favor of using color and form in more expressive manners. The term “Post-Impressionism” was coined by the British artist and art critic Roger Fry in 1910 to describe the development of French art since Manet. Post-Impressionists extended Impressionism while rejecting its limitations. For example, they continued using vivid colors, thick application of paint, distinctive brush strokes, and real-life subject matter, but they were also more inclined to emphasize geometric forms, distort forms for expressive effect, and to use unnatural or arbitrary colors in their compositions.

Significant Artists of Post-Impressionism

Post-Impressionism developed from Impressionism. From the 1880s onward, several artists, including Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, envisioned different precepts for the use of color, pattern, form, and line, deriving these new directions from the Impressionist example. These artists were slightly younger than the Impressionists, and their work contemporaneously became known as Post-Impressionism. Some of the original Impressionist artists also ventured into this new territory. Camille Pissarro briefly painted in a pointillist manner, and even Monet abandoned strict *plein air* painting. Paul Cézanne, who participated in the first and third Impressionist exhibitions, developed a highly individual vision emphasizing pictorial structure; he is most often called a post-Impressionist. Although these cases illustrate the difficulty of assigning labels, the work of the original Impressionist painters may, by definition, be categorized as Impressionism.

A Diverse Search for Direction

The Post-Impressionists were dissatisfied with the triviality of subject matter and the loss of structure in Impressionist paintings, although they did not agree on the way forward. Georges Seurat and his followers, for instance, concerned themselves with Pointillism, the systematic use of tiny dots of colour. Paul Cézanne set out to restore a sense of order and structure to painting by reducing objects to their basic shapes while retaining the bright fresh colours of Impressionism. Vincent van Gogh used vibrant colors and swirling brush strokes to convey his feelings and his state of mind. Hence, although they were often exhibited together, Post-Impressionist artists were not in agreement concerning a cohesive movement, and younger painters in the early twentieth century worked in geographically disparate regions and in various stylistic categories, such as Fauvism and Cubism.



“Wheat Field with Crows”. Vincent Van Gogh used swirling brush strokes in many of his Post-Impressionist works.



Figure 1.6.1: A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte. Georges Seurat's works are Pointilist, using systematic dots of color to create form and structure.

Post-Impressionism

The work of van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne and Seurat together constitute Post-Impressionism and yet their work is so varied and unrelated, we might never otherwise think of these four artists as a group. Certainly van Gogh and Gauguin were friends and they briefly painted together, but each of these artists was concerned with solving particular issues that had to do with their own individual sensibility. Ironically, if anything ties these artists together it is this focus on subjectivity.

Vincent van Gogh “The Bedroom”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > The Avant-garde: Realism, Impressionism & Post-Impressionism > van Gogh, *The Bedroom*] 1889, oil on canvas, 29 x 36-5/8 inches / 73.6 x 92.3 cm (Art Institute of Chicago)

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Paul Gauguin “Vision After the Sermon”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > The Avant-garde: Realism, Impressionism & Post-Impressionism > Paul Gauguin, *Vision After the Sermon*] 1888, oil on canvas, 2' 4 3/4" x 3' 1/2" (National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh). Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker & Dr. Beth Harris.

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Cezanne “Still Life with Plaster Cupid”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > The Avant-garde: Realism, Impressionism & Post-Impressionism > Cezanne, *Still Life with Plaster Cupid*] Oil on canvas, c.1895 (Courtauld Gallery, London). Speakers: Beth Harris, Rachel Ropeik, and Steven Zucker.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/art1/?p=35

1. Gersh-Nesic, B. "A Beginner's Guide to Impressionism." Smarthistory/KhanAcademy. [CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0](#)↵
2. “Post-Impressionism.” Boundless Art History. 21 July 2015. [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#)↵

1.7: Modernism and Symbolism

Introduction: Modern Sculpture

Source^[1][\[1\]](#)

Modern sculpture arose symbiotically with similar artistic trends in painting and drawing in Europe during the 1800s, lasting until around 1950. While there is some disagreement among scholars as to the exact time period and definition of the term, it can be said that modernist artistic movements share a common trait of breaking with past ideals. Typically, modernist artists were concerned with the representation of contemporary issues as opposed to grand historical and allegorical themes previously favored in art. The Realist movement of the 1850s is often considered the beginning of modern painting, while the work of Rodin is seen as the progenitor of modern sculpture.

Auguste Rodin

Modern sculpture is widely considered to have begun in the 1800s with the work of the French artist Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), who is seen as the forefather of the movement. Rodin is credited with ushering in a new approach and subject matter to the creation of sculpture. He did not expressly set out to do so, however, since he was a proponent of traditional artistic conventions. Rodin's work signified a departure from the traditional themes of mythology and allegory prevalent during his time, and instead modeled the human body with intense realism, celebrating the individual character, psychological states, and physicality of his subjects.

Rodin was predominantly a naturalist and therefore concerned himself with character and emotion over monumental expression. He is known for turning away from the idealized traditions of the Greeks and decorative beauty of the Baroque and Neo-Baroque movements, thereby departing with centuries of tradition. Sculptural movements that developed as a result of Modernism include the following:

- Art Nouveau
- Cubism
- Geometric Abstraction
- De Stijl
- Suprematism
- Constructivism
- Dadaism
- Surrealism
- Futurism
- Formalism
- Abstract Expressionism
- Pop-Art
- Minimalism

Exposition Universelle

The Rodin exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle (world's fair) is widely believed to be the precise beginning of the modern sculptural movement. At this exhibition, Rodin showed his works *Burghers of Calais*, *Balzac*, and debuted his *Gates of Hell*. Rodin's sculptures at the World's Fair exhibit were incredibly well received by the public, and quickly ushered him to the forefront of the artistic community as a world-renowned artist.

The Gates of Hell is a group of sculptures depicting scenes of physical and psychological turmoil from Dante's *Inferno* in high relief. This work is comprised of 186 figures in its final form, including the renowned *The Thinker*. Many of Rodin's most well-known sculptures started as designs for this piece.



Figure 1.7.1: The Thinker. The Thinker is a bronze sculpture on marble pedestal by Auguste Rodin, whose first cast, of 1902.



Figure 1.7.1: The Gates of Hell. The Gates of Hell is a group of sculptures depicting scenes of physical and psychological turmoil from Dante's *Inferno*

The Burghers of Calais was first displayed in 1889 to great public acclaim. The sculpture is a monument to an event in 1347 during the Hundred Years War when Calais, an important French port, was under siege by the English. Originally a commission from the mayor of Calais for the town square, Rodin's design was controversial as it did not present the burghers in a heroic manner; rather they appear worried and worn, perhaps struggling with their expected fates. The monument is considered innovative for its emotional portrayal as well as for being displayed at the same level as the viewers, without being raised on a traditional pedestal.

A Move Toward Meaning

Source^[2]_[2]

Symbolism was a late 19th century art movement of French, Russian, and Belgian origin in poetry and other arts. The name "symbolist" itself was first applied by the critic Jean Moréas, who invented the term to distinguish the symbolists from the related decadent movement of literature and of art. Distinct from, but related to, the symbolist style of literature, symbolism of art is related to the gothic component of Romanticism

The term “symbolism” is derived from the word “symbol” which derives from the Latin *symbolum*, a symbol of faith, and *symbolus*, a sign of recognition. Symbolism was largely a reaction against naturalism and realism, anti-idealistic styles which were attempts to represent reality in its gritty particularity, and to elevate the humble and the ordinary over the ideal. Symbolism, on the other hand, favored spirituality, the imagination, and dreams.

Edvard Munch “The Storm”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > Symbolism & Art Nouveau > Munch, *The Storm*] The Storm, 1893, oil on canvas, 36 1/8 x 51 1/2” (91.8 x 130.8 cm), (MoMA)

Speakers: Dr. Juliana Kreinik, Dr. Amy Hamlin

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Gustav Klimt “The Kiss”

[Smarthistory > Art in the 19th Century Europe > Symbolism & Art Nouveau > Klimt, *The Kiss*] The Kiss, 1907-8, oil and gold leaf on canvas, 180 x 180 cm (Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna)

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1. Boundless Art History. “[Modern Sculpture](#).” 21 July 2015. CC-BY-SA 4.0↵
2. [Boundless Art History](#). 21 Jul. 2015. CC BY-SA 4.0↵

1.8: Expressionism and Cubism

Introduction: Fauvism

Read: “[Fauvism](#)” by Sabine Rewald (2004) via *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* – The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Henri Matisse “The Red Studio”

[Smarthistory > Expressionism to Pop Art > Early Abstraction: Fauvism, Expressionism, and Cubism > Fauvism & Matisse > Matisse, *The Red Studio*]



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Oil on canvas, 1911 (MoMA)

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner “Street Berlin”

[Smarthistory > Expressionism to Pop Art > Early Abstraction: Fauvism, Expressionism, and Cubism > Fauvism & Matisse > Kirchner, *Street Berlin*]

Walk the streets of 1913 Berlin with the Expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.

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Vasily Kandinsky “Improvisation 28”

[Smarthistory > Expressionism to Pop Art > Early Abstraction: Fauvism, Expressionism, and Cubism > Expressionism > Kandinsky, *Improvisation 28*]

Improvisation 28 (second version), 1912, oil on canvas, 111.4 x 162.1 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

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Cubism

Read the essay "[Cubism](#)" by Sabine Rewald (Oct 2004) in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*.

Pablo Picasso "Les Femmes d'Alger" (O.J.)

Essay by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, CC-BY-NC



Figure 1.8.1: Pablo Picasso, Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.), 1911-12, oil on canvas, 298 x 221 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Cézanne's ghost, Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre*, and Picasso's ego



Figure 1.8.1: Paul Cézanne, The Large Bathers, 1906, oil on canvas, 82 7/8 in x 98 3/4 in. (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

One of the most important canvases of the twentieth century, Picasso's great breakthrough painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* was constructed in response to several significant sources. First amongst these was his confrontation with Cézanne's great achievement at the posthumous retrospective mounted in Paris a year after the artist's death in 1907.

The retrospective exhibition forced the young Picasso, Matisse, and many other artists to contend with the implications of Cézanne's art. Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre* of 1906 was one of the first of many attempts to do so, and the newly completed work was quickly purchased by Leo & Gertrude Stein and hung in their living room so that all of their circle of avant-garde writers and artists could see and praise it. And praise it they did. Here was the promise of Cézanne fulfilled—and one which incorporated lessons learned from Seurat and Van Gogh, no less! This was just too much for the young Spaniard.



Figure 1.8.1: Henri Matisse, *Bonheur de Vivre*, 1906, oil on canvas, 175 x 241 cm. (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

Pablo becomes Picasso

By all accounts, Picasso's intensely competitive nature literally forced him to out do his great rival. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)* is the result of this effort. Let's compare canvases. Matisse's landscape is a broad open field with a deep recessionary vista. The figures are uncrowded. They describe flowing arabesques that in turn relate to the forms of nature that surround them. Here is languid sensuality set in the mythic past of Greece's golden age.



In very sharp contrast, Picasso, intent of making a name for himself (rather like the young Manet and David), has radically compressed the space of his canvas and replaced sensual eroticism with a kind of aggressively crude pornography. (Note, for example, the squatting figure at the lower right.) His space is interior, closed, and almost claustrophobic. Like Matisse's later *Blue Nude* (itself a response to *Les Femmes d'Alger*), the women fill the entire space and seem trapped within it. No longer set in a classical past, Picasso's image is clearly of our time. Here are five prostitutes from an actual brothel, located on a street named Avignon in the red-light district in Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia in northern Spain—a street, by the way, which Picasso had frequented.

Picasso has also dispensed with Matisse's clear, bright pigments. Instead, the artist chooses deeper tones befitting urban interior light. Gone too, is the sensuality that Matisse created. Picasso has replaced the graceful curves of *Bonheur de Vivre* with sharp, jagged, almost shattered forms. The bodies of Picasso's women look dangerous as if they were formed of shards of broken glass. Matisse's pleasure becomes Picasso's apprehension. But while Picasso clearly aims to "out do" Matisse, to take over as the most radical artist in Paris, he also acknowledges his debts. Compare the woman standing in the center of Picasso's composition to the woman who stands with elbows raised at the extreme left of Matisse's canvas: like a scholar citing a borrowed quotation, Picasso footnotes.

The creative vacuum-cleaner

Picasso draws on many other sources to construct *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon*. In fact, a number of artists stopped inviting him to their studio because he would so freely and successfully incorporate their ideas into his own work, often more successfully than the original artist. Indeed, Picasso has been likened to a "creative vacuum cleaner," sucking up every new idea that he came across. While that analogy might be a little coarse, it is fair to say that he had an enormous creative appetite. One of several historical sources that Picasso pillaged is archaic art, demonstrated very clearly by the left-most figure of the painting, who stands stiffly on legs that look awkwardly locked at the knee. Her right arm juts down while her left arm seems dislocated (this arm is actually a vestige of a male figure that Picasso eventually removed). Her head is shown in perfect profile with large almond shaped eyes and a flat abstracted face. She almost looks Egyptian. In fact, Picasso has recently seen an exhibition of archaic (an ancient pre-classical style) Iberian (from Iberia—the land mass that makes up Spain and Portugal) sculpture at the Louvre. Instead of going back to the sensual myths of ancient Greece, Picasso is drawing on the real thing and doing so directly. By the way, Picasso purchased, from Apollinaire's secretary, two archaic Iberian heads that she had stolen from the Louvre! Some have suggested that they were taken at Picasso's request. Years later Picasso would anonymously return them.

Spontaneity, carefully choreographed



Figure 1.8.1: Pablo Picasso, Study for Les Demoiselles D'Avignon, 1907, oil on canvas, 7.5 x 8 in. (18.5 x 20.3 cm) (irregular) (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Because the canvas is roughly handled, it is often thought to be a spontaneous creation, conceived directly. This is not the case. It was preceded by nearly one hundred sketches. These studies depict different configurations. In some there are two men in addition to the women. One is a sailor. He sits in uniform in the center of the composition before a small table laden with fruit, a traditional symbol of sexuality. Another man originally entered from the left. He wore a brown suit and carried a textbook, he was meant to be a medical student.

The (male) Artist's Gaze

Each of these male figures was meant to symbolize an aspect of Picasso. Or, more exactly, how Picasso viewed these women. The sailor is easy to figure out. The fictive sailor has been at sea for months, he is an obvious reference to pure sexual desire. The

medical student is trickier. He is not there to look after the women's health but he does see them with different eyes. While the sailor represents pure lust, the student sees the women from a more analytic perspective. He understands how their bodies are constructed, etc. Could it be that Picasso was expressing the ways that he saw these women? As objects of desire, yes, but also, with a knowledge of anatomy probably superior to many doctors. What is important is that Picasso decides to remove the men. Why? Well, to begin, we might imagine where the women focused their attention in the original composition. If men are present, the prostitutes attend to them. By removing these men, the image is no longer self-contained. The women now peer outward, beyond the confines of the picture plane that ordinarily protect the viewer's anonymity. If the women peer at us, like in Manet's *Olympia* of 1863, we, as viewers, have become the customers. But this is the twentieth century, not the nineteenth and Picasso is attempting a vulgar directness that would make even Manet cringe.

Picasso's perception of space

So far, we have examined the middle figure which relates to Matisse's canvas; the two masked figures on the right side who refer, by their aggression, to Picasso's fear of disease; and, we have linked the left-most figure to archaic Iberian sculpture and Picasso's attempt to elicit a sort of crude primitive directness. That leaves only one woman unaccounted for. This is the woman with her right elbow raised and her left hand on a sheet pulled across her left thigh. The table with fruit that had originally been placed at the groin of the sailor is no longer round, it has lengthened, sharpened, and has been lowered to the edge of the canvas. This table/phallus points to this last woman. Picasso's meaning is clear, the still life of fruit on a table, this ancient symbol of sexuality, is the viewer's erect penis and it points to the woman of our choice. Picasso was no feminist. In his vision, the viewer is male.

Although explicit, this imagery only points to the key issue. The woman that has been chosen is handled distinctly in terms of her relation to the surrounding space. Yes, more about space. Throughout the canvas, the women and the drapery (made of both curtains and sheets) are fractured and splintered. Here is Picasso's response to Cezanne and Matisse. The women are neither before nor behind. As in Matisse's *Red Studio*, which will be painted four years later, Picasso has begun to try to dissolve the figure/ground relationship. Now look at the woman that Picasso tells us we have chosen. Her legs are crossed and her hand rests behind her head, but although she seems to stand among the others, her position is really that of a figure that lies on her back. The problem is, we see her body perpendicular to our line of sight. Like Matisse and Cezanne before him, Picasso here renders two moments in time: as you may have figured out, we first look across at the row of women, and then we look down on to the prostitute of our/Picasso's choice.

African masks, Women colonized

The two figures at the right are the most aggressively abstracted with faces rendered as if they wear African masks. By 1907, when this painting was produced, Picasso had begun to collect such work. Even the striations that represent scarification is evident. Matisse and Derain had a longer standing interest in such art, but Picasso said that it was only after wandering into the Palais du Trocadero, Paris's ethnographic museum, that he understood the value of such art. Remember, France was a major colonial power in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much African art was ripped from its original geographic and artistic context and sold in Paris. Although Picasso would eventually become more sophisticated regarding the original uses and meaning of the non-Western art that he collected, in 1907 his interest was largely based on what he perceived as its alien and aggressive qualities.

William Rubin, once the senior curator of the department of painting and sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, and a leading Picasso scholar, has written extensively about this painting. He has suggested that while the painting is clearly about desire (Picasso's own), it is also an expression of his fear. We have already established that Picasso frequented brothels at this time so his desire isn't in question, but Rubin makes the case that this is only half the story. *Les Femmes d'Alger* is also about Picasso's intense fear...his dread of these women or more to the point, the disease that he feared they would transmit to him. In the era before antibiotics, contracting syphilis was a well founded fear. Of course, the plight of the women seems not to enter Picasso's story.

Pablo Picasso "Guernica"

Text by Lynn Robinson, CC-BY-NC

What would be the best way today to protest against a war? How could you influence the largest number of people? In 1937,

Picasso expressed his outrage against war with *Guernica*, his enormous mural-sized painting displayed to millions of visitors at the Paris World's Fair. It has since become the twentieth century's most powerful indictment against war, a painting that still feels intensely relevant today.



Figure 1.8.1: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 cm x 776 cm. (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid)

Antiwar icon

Much of the painting's emotional power comes from its overwhelming size, approximately eleven feet tall and twenty five feet wide. *Guernica* is not a painting you observe with spatial detachment; it feels like it wraps around you, immerses you in its larger-than-life figures and action. And although the size and multiple figures reference the long tradition of European history paintings, this painting is different because it challenges rather than accepts the notion of war as heroic. So why did Picasso paint it?

Commission



Figure 1.8.1: Postcard of the International Exposition, Paris, 1937 (from a series of 20 detachable cards, edited by H. Chipault)

In 1936, Picasso (who was Spanish) was asked by the newly elected Spanish Republican government to paint an artwork for the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris World's Fair. The official theme of the Exposition was a celebration of modern technology. Yet Picasso painted an overtly political painting, a subject in which he had shown little interest up to that time. What had happened

to inspire it?

Crimes against humanity: an act of war



Figure 1.8.1: Guernica in ruins, 1937, photograph (German Federal Archives, bild 183-H25224)

In 1936, a civil war began in Spain between the democratic Republican government and fascist forces, led by General Francisco Franco, attempting to overthrow them. Picasso's painting is based on the events of April 27, 1937, when Hitler's powerful German air force, acting in support of Franco, bombed the village of Guernica in northern Spain, a city of no strategic military value. It was history's first aerial saturation bombing of a civilian population. It was a cold-blooded training mission designed to test a new bombing tactic to intimidate and terrorize the resistance. For over three hours, twenty five bombers dropped 100,000 pounds of explosive and incendiary bombs on the village, reducing it to rubble. Twenty more fighter planes strafed and killed defenseless civilians trying to flee. The devastation was appalling: fires burned for three days, and seventy percent of the city was destroyed. A third of the population, 1600 civilians, were wounded or killed.

Picasso hears the news

On May 1, 1937, news of the atrocity reached Paris. Eyewitness reports filled the front pages of local and international newspapers. Picasso, sympathetic to the Republican government of his homeland, was horrified by the reports of devastation and death. *Guernica* is his visual response, his memorial to the brutal massacre. After hundreds of sketches, the painting was done in less than a month and then delivered to the Fair's Spanish Pavilion, where it became the central attraction. Accompanying it were documentary films, newsreels and graphic photographs of fascist brutalities in the civil war. Rather than the typical celebration of technology people expected to see at a world's fair, the entire Spanish Pavilion shocked the world into confronting the suffering of the Spanish people.

Later, in the 1940s, when Paris was occupied by the Germans, a Nazi officer visited Picasso's studio. "Did you do that?" he is said to have asked Picasso while standing in front of a photograph of the painting. "No," Picasso replied, "you did."

World traveler

When the fair ended, the Spanish Republican forces sent *Guernica* on an international tour to create awareness of the war and raise funds for Spanish refugees. It traveled the world for 19 years and then was loaned for safekeeping to The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Picasso refused to allow it to return to Spain until the country "enjoyed public liberties and democratic institutions," which finally occurred in 1981. Today the painting permanently resides in the Reina Sofia, Spain's national museum of modern art in Madrid.

What can we see?

This painting is not easy to decipher. Everywhere there seems to be death and dying. As our eyes adjust to the frenetic action, figures begin to emerge. On the far left is a woman, head back, screaming in pain and grief, holding the lifeless body of her dead child. This is one of the most devastating and unforgettable images in the painting. To her right is the head and partial body of a large white bull, the only unharmed and calm figure amidst the chaos. Beneath her, a dead or wounded man with a severed arm and mutilated hand clutches a broken sword. Only his head and arms are visible; the rest of his body is obscured by the overlapping and scattered parts of other figures. In the center stands a terrified horse, mouth open screaming in pain, its side pierced by a spear. On the right are three more women. One rushes in, looking up at the stark light bulb at the top of the scene. Another leans out of the window of a burning house, her long extended arm holding a lamp, while the third woman appears trapped in the burning building, screaming in fear and horror. All their faces are distorted in agony. Eyes are dislocated, mouths are open, tongues are shaped like daggers.



Figure 1.8.1: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 cm × 776 cm. (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid)

Color

Picasso chose to paint *Guernica* in a stark monochromatic palette of gray, black and white. This may reflect his initial encounter with the original newspaper reports and photographs in black and white; or perhaps it suggested to Picasso the objective factuality of an eye witness report. A documentary quality is further emphasized by the textured pattern in the center of the painting that creates the illusion of newsprint. The sharp alternation of black and white contrasts across the painting surface also creates dramatic intensity, a visual kinetic energy of jagged movement.

Visual complexity

On first glance, *Guernica*'s composition appears confusing and chaotic; the viewer is thrown into the midst of intensely violent action. Everything seems to be in flux. The space is compressed and ambiguous with the shifting perspectives and multiple viewpoints characteristic of Picasso's earlier Cubist style. Images overlap and intersect, obscuring forms and making it hard to distinguish their boundaries. Bodies are distorted and semi-abstracted, the forms discontinuous and fragmentary. Everything seems jumbled together, while sharp angular lines seem to pierce and splinter the dismembered bodies. However, there is in fact an overriding visual order. Picasso balances the composition by organizing the figures into three vertical groupings moving left to right, while the center figures are stabilized within a large triangle of light.

Symbolism

There has been almost endless debate about the meaning of the images in *Guernica*. Questioned about its possible symbolism, Picasso said it was simply an appeal to people about massacred people and animals. "In the panel on which I am working, which

I call *Guernica*, I clearly express my abhorrence of the military caste which has sunk Spain into an ocean of pain and death.” The horse and bull are images Picasso used his entire career, part of the life and death ritual of the Spanish bullfights he first saw as a child. Some scholars interpret the horse and bull as representing the deadly battle between the Republican fighters (horse) and Franco’s fascist army (bull). Picasso said only that the bull represented brutality and darkness, adding “It isn’t up to the painter to define the symbols. Otherwise it would be better if he wrote them out in so many words. The public who look at the picture must interpret the symbols as they understand them.”

In the end, the painting does not appear to have one exclusive meaning. Perhaps it is that very ambiguity, the lack of historical specificity, or the fact that brutal wars continue to be fought, that keeps *Guernica* as timeless and universally relatable today as it was in 1937.

1.9: Futurism, Dada and World War I

Introduction: Italian Futurism

Can you imagine being so enthusiastic about technology that you name your daughter Propeller? Today we take most technological advances for granted, but at the turn of the last century, innovations like electricity, x-rays, radio waves, automobiles and airplanes were extremely exciting. Italy lagged Britain, France, Germany, and the United States in the pace of its industrial development. Culturally speaking, the country's artistic reputation was grounded in Ancient, Renaissance and Baroque art and culture. Simply put, Italy represented the past.

In the early 1900s, a group of young and rebellious Italian writers and artists emerged determined to celebrate industrialization. They were frustrated by Italy's declining status and believed that the "Machine Age" would result in an entirely new world order and even a renewed consciousness.

Essay by Emily Casden^[1]



Figure 1.9.1: Umberto Boccioni, Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, 1913 (cast 1931), bronze, 43 7/8 x 34 7/8 x 15 3/4" (MoMA)

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the ringleader of this group, called the movement Futurism. Its members sought to capture the idea of modernity, the sensations and aesthetics of speed, movement, and industrial development.

A manifesto

Marinetti launched Futurism in 1909 with the publication of his "Futurist manifesto" on the front page of the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. The manifesto set a fiery tone. In it Marinetti lashed out against cultural tradition (*passatismo*, in Italian) and called for the destruction of museums, libraries, and feminism. Futurism quickly grew into an international movement and its participants issued additional manifestos for nearly every type of art: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, photography, cinema—even clothing.

The Futurist painters—Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Gino Severini, and Giacomo Balla—signed their first manifesto in 1910 (the last named his daughter Elica—Propeller!). Futurist painting had first looked to the color and the optical experiments of the late 19th century, but in the fall of 1911, Marinetti and the Futurist painters visited the Salon d'Automne in Paris and saw Cubism in person for the first time. Cubism had an immediate impact that can be seen in Boccioni's *Materia* of 1912 for example. Nevertheless, the Futurists declared their work to be completely original.



Figure 1.9.2: Umberto Boccioni, *Materia*, 1912 (reworked 1913), oil on canvas, 226 x 150 cm (Mattioli Collection loaned to Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

Dynamism of Bodies in Motion

The Futurists were particularly excited by the works of late 19th-century scientist and photographer Étienne-Jules Marey, whose chronophotographic (time-based) studies depicted the mechanics of animal and human movement.

[“Étienne Jules Marey – L’ Homme Machine”]

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A precursor to cinema, Marey’s innovative experiments with time-lapse photography were especially influential for Balla. In his painting *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, the artist playfully renders the dog’s (and dog walker’s) feet as continuous movements through space over time.



Figure 1.9.3: Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912, oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 43 1/4 " (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo)

Entranced by the idea of the “dynamic,” the Futurists sought to represent an object’s sensations, rhythms and movements in their

images, poems and manifestos. Such characteristics are beautifully expressed in Boccioni's most iconic masterpiece, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (see above).



Figure 1.9.4: Nike (Winged Victory) of Samothrace, c. 190 B.C.E. 3.28m high, Hellenistic Period, marge, (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

The choice of shiny bronze lends a mechanized quality to Boccioni's sculpture, so here is the Futurists' ideal combination of human and machine. The figure's pose is at once graceful and forceful, and despite their adamant rejection of classical arts, it is also very similar to the *Nike of Samothrace*.

Politics & War

Futurism was one of the most politicized art movements of the twentieth century. It merged artistic and political agendas in order to propel change in Italy and across Europe. The Futurists would hold what they called serate futuriste, or Futurist evenings, where they would recite poems and display art, while also shouting politically charged rhetoric at the audience in the hope of inciting riot. They believed that agitation and destruction would end the status quo and allow for the regeneration of a stronger, energized Italy.

These positions led the Futurists to support the coming war, and like most of the group's members, leading painter Boccioni enlisted in the army during World War I. He was trampled to death after falling from a horse during training. After the war, the members' intense nationalism led to an alliance with Benito Mussolini and his National Fascist Party. Although Futurism continued to develop new areas of focus (aeropittura, for example) and attracted new members—the so-called “second generation” of Futurist artists—the movement's strong ties to Fascism has complicated the study of this historically significant art.

Neue Sachlichkeit

Source^[2]

Neue Sachlichkeit (or The New Objectivity) was an artistic attitude that arose in Germany in the 1920s in reaction to Expressionism.

Public Life in Weimar Germany

The New Objectivity (in German: Neue Sachlichkeit) is a term used to characterize the attitude of public life in Weimar Germany, as well as the art, literature, music, and architecture created to adapt to it. Rather than some goal of philosophical objectivity, it was meant to imply a turn towards practical engagement with the world—an all-business attitude, understood by Germans as intrinsically American” (Dennis Crockett, *German Post-Expressionism: The Art of the Great Disorder, 1918-1984*).

The term was originally the title of an art exhibition staged by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, the director of the Kunsthalle in Mannheim, to showcase artists who were working in a post-expressionist spirit, but it took a life of its own, going beyond Hartlaub's intentions. As these artists rejected the self-involvement and romantic longings of the expressionists, Weimar intellectuals in general made a call to arms for public collaboration, engagement, and rejection of romantic idealism. The movement essentially ended in 1933 with the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazis to power.

Before the First world War

Leading up to World War I, much of the art world was under the influence of Futurism and Expressionism, both of which abandoned any sense of order or commitment to objectivity or tradition. Expressionism was in particular the dominant form of art in Germany, and it was represented in many different facets of public life—in theater, in painting, in architecture, in poetry, and in literature.

Expressionists abandoned nature and sought to express emotional experience, often centering their art around inner turmoil (angst), whether in reaction to the modern world, to alienation from society, or in the creation of personal identity. In concert with this evocation of angst and unease with bourgeois life, expressionists also echoed some of the same feelings of revolution as did Futurists. The New Objectivity was a reaction against this.

The External World: Verists and Classicists

The New Objectivity comprised two tendencies, characterized in terms of a left and right wing: on the left were the verists, who “tear the objective form of the world of contemporary facts and represent current experience in its tempo and fevered temperature;” and on the right the classicists, who “search more for the object of timeless ability to embody the external laws of existence in the artistic sphere.”

The verists' vehement form of realism emphasized the ugly and sordid. Their art was raw, provocative, and harshly satirical. George Grosz and Otto Dix are considered the most important of the verists. The verists developed Dada's abandonment of any pictorial rules or artistic language into a “satirical hyperrealism,” as termed by Raoul Hausmann, and of which the best known examples are the graphical works and photo-montages of John Heartfield. Use of collage in these works became a compositional principle to blend reality and art, as if to suggest that to record the facts of reality was to go beyond the most simple appearances of things. This later developed into portraits and scenes by artists such as Grosz, Dix, and Rudolf Schlichter. Portraits would give emphasis to particular features or objects that were seen as distinctive aspects of the person depicted. Satirical scenes often depicted a madness behind what was happening, depicting the participants as cartoon-like.



Figure 1.9.5: The Eclipse of the Sun by George Grosz, 1926. George Grosz exemplified the verist style of New Objectivity.

Other verists, like Christian Schad, depicted reality with a clinical precision, which suggested both an empirical detachment and intimate knowledge of the subject. Schad's paintings are characterized “an artistic perception so sharp that it seems to cut beneath the skin”, according to the art critic Wieland Schmied. Often, psychological elements were introduced in his work, which

suggested an underlying unconscious reality.

Max Beckmann, who is sometimes called an expressionist although he never considered himself part of any movement, was considered to be a verist and the most important artist of Neue Sachlichkeit.

Compared to the verists, the classicists more clearly exemplify the “return to order” that arose in the arts throughout Europe. The classicists included Georg Schrimpf, Alexander Kanoldt, Carlo Mense, Heinrich Maria Davringhausen, and Wilhelm Heise. The sources of their art include 19th-century art, the Italian metaphysical painters, the artists of Novecento Italiano, and Henri Rousseau.

Dada

Source^[3]

Dada was a multi-disciplinary art movement rejecting prevailing artistic standards by producing “anti-art” cultural works. In addition to being anti-war, Dada was also anti-bourgeois and had political affinities with the radical left.

In terms of artistic medium, dadaists worked in collage, creating compositions by pasting together transportation tickets, maps, plastic wrappers and other artifacts of daily life. Dada artists also worked in photomontage, a variation on collage which utilized actual or reproductions of photographs printed in the press. In Cologne, Max Ernst used photographs taken from the front during World War I to comment on the war. Another variation on collage used by Dadaists was assemblage, the assembly of everyday objects to produce meaningful or meaningless pieces of work, including war objects and trash.

Dada began in Zurich in 1916. Key figures in the Dada movement included Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Hans Arp and Raoul Hausmann, among others. The movement influenced later styles like avant-garde, and movements including surrealism, Nouveau réalisme, pop art and Fluxus.



Figure 1.9.6: Plaque commemorating birth of Dada movement. This plaque is from the Cabaret Voltaire, the first venue where Dada artists showcased their work in 1916.

Dada was an informal international movement with participants in Europe and North America. The beginnings of Dada correspond to the outbreak of World War I. For many participants, the movement was a protest against the bourgeois nationalist and colonialist interests that many Dadaists believed were the root cause of the war. The movement also spoke against cultural and intellectual conformity in art and society. According to Hans Richter, Dada was not art, it was “anti-art.”

When World War I ended in 1918, most of the Zurich Dadaists returned to their home countries, while some began Dada activities in other cities.

Marcel Duchamp

Read: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/duch/hd_duch.htm

Käthe Kollwitz “In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht”

Essay by Shawn Roggenkamp^[4]



Figure 1.9.9: Käthe Kollwitz, Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht (Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht), 1919–1920, Woodcut heightened with white and black ink, 37.1 × 51.9 cm (Art Institute of Chicago)

Printmaking

In the political turmoil after the First World War, many artists turned to making prints instead of paintings. The ability to produce multiple copies of the same image made printmaking an ideal medium for spreading political statements. German artist Käthe Kollwitz worked almost exclusively in this medium and became known for her prints that celebrated the plight of the working-class.

The artist rarely depicted real people, though she frequently used her talents in support of causes she believed in. This work, *In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht* was created in 1920 in response to the assassination of Communist leader Karl Liebknecht during an uprising of 1919. This work is unique among her prints, and though it memorializes the man, it does so without advocating for his ideology.

History and politics

From the end of the First World War in late 1918 to the founding of the Weimar Republic (the representative democracy that was the German government between the two World Wars) in August 1919, Germany went through a period of social and political upheaval. During this time, Germany was led by a coalition of left-wing forces with Marxist sympathies, the largest of which was the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Other, more radical groups were grappling for control of Germany at the same time, including the newly founded German Communist Party (KPD).

The Socialists and Communists both wanted to eliminate Capitalism and establish communal control over the means of production, but while the Socialists believed that the best way to achieve that goal was to work step by step from within the Capitalist structure, the Communists called for an immediate and total social revolution that would put governmental power in the hands of the workers. In this spirit, the KPD staged an uprising in Berlin in January 1919. Military units called in by the SPD suppressed the uprising and captured two of the leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were

murdered while in custody on January 15, 1919. Their deaths struck a chord across the left-wing landscape and they were widely celebrated as martyrs to the Communist cause.

Kollwitz was not a Communist, and even acknowledged that the SPD (generally more cautious and pacifist than the KPD), would have been better leaders. But she had heard Liebknecht speak and admired his charisma, so when the family asked her to create a work to memorialize him she agreed.

A Lamentation

Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht is in the style of a lamentation, a traditional motif in Christian art depicting the followers of Christ mourning over his dead body, casting Liebknecht as the Christ figure. The iconography would have been easily recognizable by the masses who were the artist's intended audience.



Figure 1.9.10: Max Beckmann, "The Martyrdom," plate 4 from *Hell*, 1919, lithograph, 54.7 x 75.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, NY)

Other memorial works

Several artists at the time created memorial works for Liebknecht and Luxemburg. The most well known (along with Kollwitz's work) are Max Beckmann's "The Martyrdom" from his portfolio *Hell* of 1919 (above), and Conrad Felixmüller's *People Above the World* from that same year. In contrast to those works, Kollwitz's *In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht* focuses not on the man himself, but on the workers who had put their faith in him. The focus on those broadly affected, rather than those in the spotlight is a constant theme in the artist's work, reflected in her most famous works from the *War* cycle, which depict not the soldiers or the fighting, but the suffering of the women and children left behind and starving.

The composition

The composition divides the sheet into three horizontal sections. The top section is densely packed with figures. Their faces are well modeled and have interesting depth in themselves, but the sense of space is very compressed – the heads push to the foreground and are packed into every available corner of space. It gives the impression of multitudes coming to pay their respects, without compromising the individuality of the subjects.

The middle strata contains comparatively fewer details, further emphasizing the crowding at the top of the printing plate. This section draws attention to the specific action of the bending mourner. His hand on Liebknecht's chest connects this section to the the bottommost level of the composition, the body of the martyred revolutionary.



Figure 1.9.12: Mourning woman holding a child (detail), Käthe Kollwitz, Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht (Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht), 1919-1920, Woodcut heightened with white and black ink, 37.1 x 51.9 cm (Art Institute of Chicago)

Above the bending mourner, a woman holds her baby up to see over the heads of those in front of them. Women and children were a central concern of Kollwitz's work, making her a unique voice in a creative environment dominated by young men (in fact, Kollwitz was the first woman to be admitted into the Prussian Academy).

Woodblock prints

Woodblock printing is a technique in which a design is carved into a slab of wood which is then covered with ink and printed onto paper. Ink coats the original surface of the wood block, which prints as black, while the cut away areas stay the color of the paper. This is different from printmaking methods such as engraving in which the ink is caught in the recesses carved into the metal plate by the stylus and therefore the lines print black and the untouched areas of the plate come out white in the print.

The German Expressionist artists, in particular Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and the Brücke group, used woodcuts as early as 1904 to capture the rough, vital energy that they perceived in the work of so-called "primitive" societies without a fine art tradition.

Kollwitz's career overlapped with the German Expressionists but she was not an Expressionist herself and was about a generation older than most of them. Her use of such a trendy technique was uncharacteristic, and in fact, she only worked in woodblocks for a few years after the First World War. Kollwitz created some of her most powerful and affecting work in this style, including the War print cycle of 1924. She embraced the raw effect of woodblock printing to create pieces works that have cast off the subtlety and finesse of her earlier work in etching and lithography. Kollwitz' felt that her protest against the horrors of war was best communicated in the rough edges and stark black and white that woodblock prints afforded.

1. Smarthistory [CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0](#)] ↩
2. [Boundless Art History](#) July 21 2015, [CC-BY-SA 4.0](#)↩
3. "Dada." [Boundless Art History](#). 21 July 2015. [CC-BY-SA 4.0](#)↩
4. Smarthistory [CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0](#)) ↩

1.10: de Stijl and Surrealism

Piet Mondrian “Composition No. 11 with Red & Blue”

[Smarthistory Video > Expressionism to Pop Art > Art between the wars: the avant-garde & the rise of totalitarianism > the International avant-garde > [Mondrian, Composition No. 11, with Red and Blue](#)] Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris, Dr. Steven Zucker

Oil on canvas, 1929 (original date partly obliterated; mistakenly repainted 1925 by Mondrian). 15 7/8 x 12 5/8" (40.3 x 32.1 cm) (The Museum of Modern Art)

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <http://pb.libretexts.org/art1/?p=43>

Surrealism

Source^[1][\[1\]](#)

The cultural movement of Surrealism began in the 1920s, and features the element of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions, and non sequiturs.

Surrealism is a cultural movement that began in the early 1920s, and is best known for writing and visual art. Surrealist works feature the element of surprise, along with unexpected juxtapositions and non sequiturs. First and foremost, Surrealist artists and writers regard their work as an expression of the philosophical movement, with the artwork being an artifact. Leader André Breton was explicit in his assertion that Surrealism was above all a revolutionary movement. Surrealism developed out of the Dada activities during World War I and the most important center of the movement was Paris. From the 1920s onward, the movement spread around the globe, eventually affecting the visual arts, literature, film, and music of many countries and languages, as well as political thought and practice, philosophy, and social theory.

Surrealist Inspiration

World War I scattered the writers and artists who had been based in Paris, and in the interim many became involved with Dada, believing that excessive rational thought and bourgeois values had brought the conflict of the war upon the world. The Dadaists protested with anti-art gatherings, performances, writings, and artworks. After the war, when they returned to Paris, the Dada activities continued.

During the war, André Breton, who had trained in medicine and psychiatry, served in a neurological hospital where he used Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic methods with soldiers suffering from shell shock. Meeting the young writer Jacques Vaché, Breton felt that Vaché was the spiritual son of writer and metaphysical thinker Alfred Jarry. He admired the young writer's antisocial attitude and disdain for established artistic tradition. Later Breton wrote, "In literature, I was successively taken with Rimbaud, with Jarry, with Apollinaire, with Nouveau, with Lautréamont, but it is Jacques Vaché to whom I owe the most."

Back in Paris, Breton joined in Dada activities and started the literary journal *Littérature* along with Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault. They began experimenting with automatic writing—spontaneously writing without censoring their thoughts—and published the writings, as well as accounts of dreams, in the literary journal. Breton and Soupault delved deeper into automatism and wrote *The Magnetic Fields* (1920).

The Development of the Surrealist Movement

Continuing to write, attracting more artists and writers, Breton and Soupault came to believe that automatism was a better tactic for societal change than Dadaist attacks on prevailing values. The group grew to include Salvador Dalí, Man Ray, Joan Miró, Marcel Duchamp, among other notable artistic figures. As the Surrealists developed their philosophy, they believed that Surrealism would advocate the idea that ordinary and representative expression was vital and important, but that expression must be fully open

to the imagination. Freud's work with free association, dream analysis, and the unconscious was of utmost importance to the Surrealists as they developed methods to liberate their imaginations. They embraced idiosyncrasy, while rejecting the idea of an underlying madness. Later, Salvador Dalí explained it as: "There is only one difference between a madman and me. I am not mad."

Along with dream analysis, the Surrealists emphasized that "one could combine inside the same frame, elements not normally found together to produce illogical and startling effects". Breton included the idea of the startling juxtapositions in his 1924 manifesto, taking it in turn from a 1918 essay by poet Pierre Reverdy, which said: "a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be — the greater its emotional power and poetic reality".



Salvador Dalí, The Persistence of Memory (1931)



René Magritte's La Trahison des Images ("The Treachery of Images") (1928-9) or Ceci n'est pas une pipe ("This is not a pipe"). Magritte's work frequently displays a collection of ordinary objects in an unusual context, giving new meanings to familiar things.

The group aimed to revolutionize human experience, in terms of the personal, cultural, social, and political aspects. They wanted to free people from false rationality, and also from restrictive customs and structures. Breton proclaimed that the true aim of Surrealism was "long live the social revolution, and it alone!" To this goal, at various times Surrealists aligned with communism and anarchism. In 1924 they declared their philosophy in the first "Surrealist Manifesto." That same year they established the Bureau of Surrealist Research, and began publishing the journal *La Révolution Surréaliste*.

Frida Kahlo “The Two Fridas”

By Doris Maria-Reina Bravo^[2]^[2]

16 inches (Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City)

Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas* (Las dos Fridas), 1939, oil on canvas, 67-11/16 x 67-11/16

inches (Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City)

Indelible marks

Facial hair indelibly marks the self-portraits of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. In an era when women still wore elaborate hairstyles, hosiery, and attire, Kahlo was a rebellious loner, often dressed in indigenous clothing. Moreover, she lived as an artist during a period when many middle-class women sacrificed their ambitions to live entirely in the domestic sphere. Kahlo flouted both conventions of beauty and social expectations in her self-portraits. These powerful and unflinching self-images explore complex and difficult topics including her culturally mixed heritage, the harsh reality of her medical conditions, and the repression of women.



Frida Kahlo, *Self-portrait in a Velvet Dress*, 1926, oil on canvas (private collection)

The double self-portrait *The Two Fridas*, 1939 (above) features two seated figures holding hands and sharing a bench in front of a stormy sky. The Fridas are identical twins except in their attire, a poignant issue for Kahlo at this moment. The year she painted this canvas she was divorced from Diego Rivera, the acclaimed Mexican muralist. Before she married Rivera in 1929, she wore the modern European dress of the era, evident in her first self-portrait (left) where she dons a red velvet dress with gold embroidery. With Rivera's encouragement, Kahlo embraced attire rooted in Mexican customs.

Dress



Frida Kahlo, Self-portrait (Time Flies), 1929 (private collection)

In her second self-portrait (left) her accessories reference distinct periods in Mexican history (her necklace is a reference to the pre-Columbian Jadeite of the Aztecs and the earrings are Colonial in style) while her simple white blouse is a nod to peasant women.

The portraits from the 1930s reflect Kahlo's growing penchant for indigenous attire and hair-styling, as is evident in *Frieda and Diego Rivera*, 1931 (below) and *The Two Fridas*. Yet Kahlo never abandoned dressing her subjects and herself in mainstream, European dress; her female relatives wear non-indigenous clothing in *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree)*, 1936 (below). In this painting, the bridal dress Kahlo's mother wears is reminiscent of the white, stiff-collared dress the artist wears in *The Two Fridas*. Indeed, the grotesque view into each woman's insides is heightened by the virginal whiteness of both dresses.

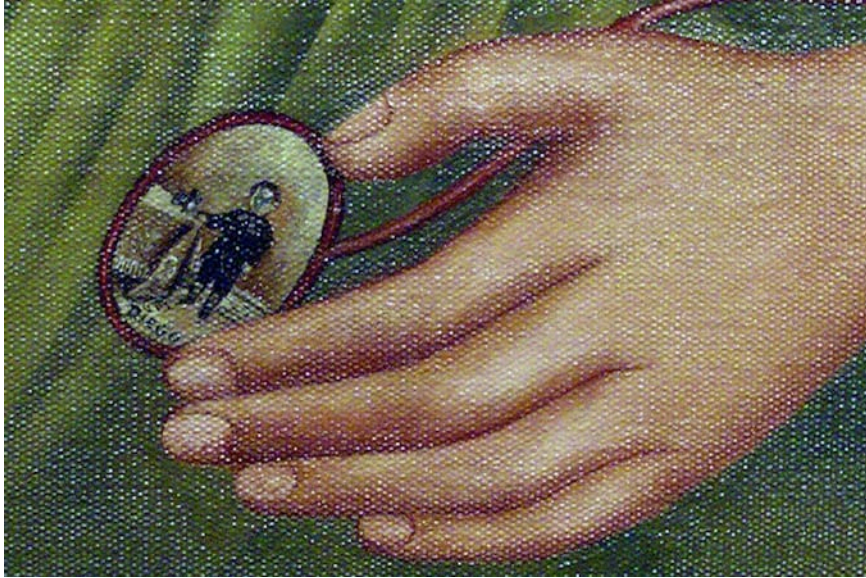
8 x 31 inches (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

Frida Kahlo, *Frieda and Diego Rivera*, 1931, oil on canvas, 39-3/8 x

31 inches (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

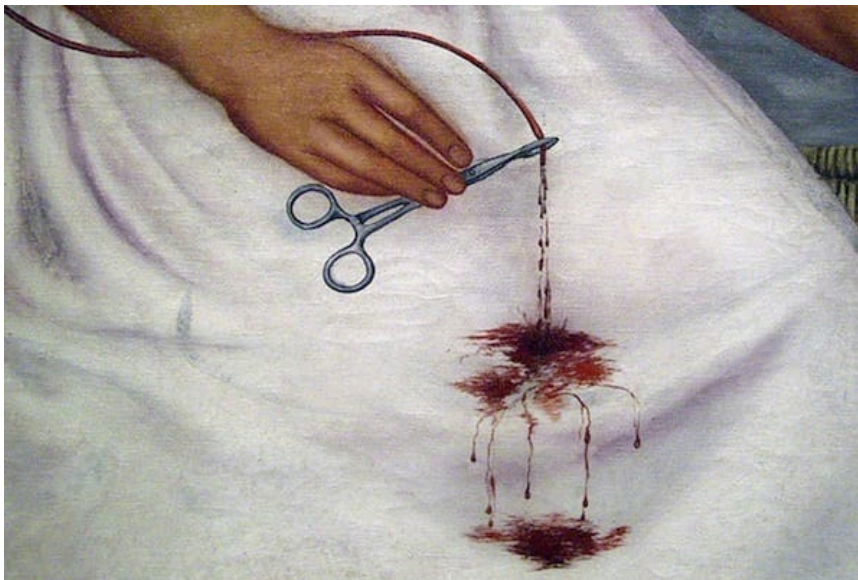
In her brief lifetime, Kahlo painted about two hundred works of art, many of which are self-portraits. With the exception of a few family trees, the double-portrait with Rivera and *The Two Fridas* represents a departure in her oeuvre. If a self-portrait by definition is a painting of one's self, why would Kahlo paint herself twice? One way to answer this question is to examine *The Two Fridas* as a bookend to the 1931 portrait, *Frieda and Diego Rivera*. Though this painting was meant to celebrate the birth of their union, their tentative grasp seems to reflect Kahlo's misgivings about her husband's fidelity. By contrast, the double self-portrait, though laden with suffering, exhibits resilience.

Anatomy of Two Fridas



Detail of The Two Fridas, with hand holding a portrait of young Diego (photo: Dave Cooksey, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The two Fridas clasp hands tightly. This bond is echoed by the vein that unites them. Where one is weakened by an exposed heart, the other is strong; where one still pines for her lost love (as underscored by the vein feeding Rivera's miniature portrait), the other clamps down on that figurative and literal tie with a hemostat.



Detail with Hemostat (photo: Dave Cooksey, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Human anatomy is often graphically exposed in Kahlo's work, a topic she knew well after a childhood bout with polio deformed her right leg and a bus accident when she was eighteen years old left her disabled and unable to bear children. She would endure 32 operations as a result. ♦♦♦Detail with Hemostat (photo: Dave Cooksey, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)♦♦♦Kahlo utilized blood as a visceral metaphor of union, as in the 1936 family portrait (below) where she honors her lineage through these bloody ties. She returns to this metaphor in The Two Fridas though with the added impact of two hearts, both vulnerable and laid bare to the viewer as a testament to her emotional suffering.

8" (The Museum of Modern Art)

Frida Kahlo, My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree), 1936, oil and tempera on zinc, 12 1/8 x 13 5/8" (The Museum of Modern Art)

“I am the person I know best”

Photographs by artists within her milieu, like Manuel Alvarez Bravo and Imogen Cunningham, confirm that Kahlo's self-portraits were largely accurate and that she avoided embellishing her features. The solitude produced by frequent bed rest—stemming from polio, her near-fatal bus accident, and a lifetime of operations—was one of the cruel constants in Kahlo's life. Indeed, numerous photographs feature Kahlo in bed, often painting despite restraints. Beginning in her youth, in order to cope with these long periods of recovery, Kahlo became a painter. Nevertheless, the isolation caused by her health problems was always present. She reflected, “I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best.”

1. Boundless. “Surrealism.” [Boundless Art History](#). Boundless, 21 Jul. 2015. [CC-BY-SA 4.0](#) ←
2. [CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0](#) ←

1.11: The Great Depression and World War II

Sculpture & Photography

Source^[1][\[1\]](#)

During the 1930s and 40s, photography and sculpture expanded into new realms of artistic expression that were influenced by the times.

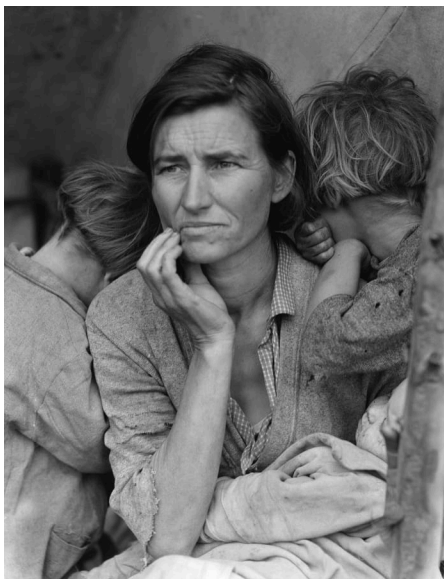
The period from 1930-1945 in American history is marked by the Great Depression and outbreak of the second World War. During this time, both photography and sculpture expanded into new realms of artistic expression, heavily influenced by the society and times.

Photography

Photographic technology continued to expand throughout the 20th century. Kodachrome, the first modern “integral tripack” (or “monopack”) color film, was introduced by Kodak in 1935, and Agfa’s similarly structured Agfacolor Neu was introduced in 1936. These new technologies allowed for the proliferation of color photography for the first time, and currently available color films still employ a multilayer emulsion and the same principles, most closely resembling Agfa’s product.

Social Realism

Social realism, also known as socio-realism, became an important art movement during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Social realism depicted social and racial injustice, and economic hardship through unvarnished pictures of life’s struggles, often depicting working-class activities as heroic. The movement was largely a style of painting that typically conveyed a message of social or political protest edged with satire; however it also extended to the art of photography. Prominent photographers at the time included Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Margaret Bourke-White, Lewis Hine, Edward Steichen, Gordon Parks, Arthur Rothstein, Marion Post Wolcott, Doris Ulmann, Berenice Abbott, Aaron Siskind, and Russell Lee, among several others. Each of these artists sought to depict the world—and often the poverty—they saw around them with the realistic portrayal that only photography could provide. In the 1930s, the Farm Security Administration employed several photographers to document the effects of the Great Depression on the population of America. Many of the photographs can also be seen as propaganda images to support the U.S. government’s policy distributing support to the worst affected, poorer areas of the country.



Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, 1936. A portrait of Florence Owens Thompson (1903-1983).

The caption of the original image reads: “Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California.” Lange’s image of a supposed migrant pea picker, Florence Owens Thompson, and her family has become an icon of resilience in the face of adversity.

Group F/64

Alongside social realism, another approach to photography referred to as “straight photography” was also gaining momentum. Group f/64 is perhaps the most well known example of this art movement. Group f/64 was a group of seven 20th century San Francisco photographers who shared a common photographic style characterized by sharp-focused and carefully framed images seen through a particularly Western viewpoint. In part, they formed in opposition to the pictorialism movement in photography that had dominated much of the early 20th century, but moreover they wanted to promote a new modernist [2]aesthetic that was based on precisely exposed images of natural forms and found objects. Photographers involved in the group included Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Sonya Noskowiak, Henry Swift, Willard Van Dyke, and Edward Weston.



Ansel Adams: Half Dome, Apple Orchard, Yosemite trees with snow on branches, April 1933.

Ansel Adams was one of the co-founders of Group f/64, a group of photographers known who shared a common style characterized by sharp-focused and carefully framed images.

Sculpture

As the century began, many young European sculptors migrated to the free, booming economy across the Atlantic. Thus, European trained sculptors such as Elie Nadelman, Albin Polasek, Gaston Lachaise and Carl Milles account for much of the great work created before 1950.

Modern Classicism and American Expressionism

Several notable American sculptors joined in the revitalization of the classical tradition at this time, most notably Paul Manship, who “discovered” archaic Greek sculpture while studying on a scholarship in Rome. C. Paul Jennewein and Edward McCartan were also leaders in this direction who fit easily with the art-deco tastes of the 1920s. In the 1930s and 1940s, the ideologies seen throughout European politics were also reflected in the associations of American sculptors: on the right were artists who were mostly native-born and old-school classical, modeling from clay; the left was often immigrant and expressionistic, with an emphasis on more current themes and direct carving in wood or stone. An example of a left-leaning leader would be Anna Hyatt Huntington, heiress and sculptor who founded and led the National Sculpture Society, and who endowed the sculpture park, Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina. Representing the right of the political divide was the New York-based Sculptors Guild, whose most famous member was William Zorach.

African-American Sculptors

With the Harlem renaissance, an African-American sculpture genre emerged. Richmond Barthé was an outstanding example, establishing a widely successful reputation for his many public works . Augusta Savage was a sculptor and teacher. Other contemporary sculptors include Elizabeth Catlett, Martin Puryear, Jerry Harris, Thaddeus Mosley, and Richard Hunt.



Richmond Barthe (1901 -1989) "Boxer", 1942, Art Institute of Chicago

Richmond Barthe is an outstanding example of American sculpture in the 1930's and 1940's, and was influential in the Harlem Renaissance.

Jacob Lawrence "The Migration Series"

[Smarthistory > Expressionism to Pop Art > Art between the wars; the avant-garde & the rise of totalitarianism > American art to World War II > [Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*](#) (short version)]

60 panels, tempera on hardboard (even numbers at The Museum of Modern Art, odd numbers at the Phillips Collection)

Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

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Hopper "Nighthawks"

By Christine Zappella^[2]^[3]

8 x 60 inches (Art Institute of Chicago).

Edward Hopper, Nighthawks, 1942, oil on canvas, 84.1 x 152.4 cm / 33-1/8 x 60 inches (Art Institute of Chicago).

Near Misses

In place of meaningful interactions, the four characters inside the diner of Edward Hopper's Nighthawks are involved in a series of near misses. The man and woman might be touching hands, but they aren't. The waiter and smoking-man might be conversing,

but they're not. The couple might strike up a conversation with the man facing them, but somehow, we know they won't. And then we realize that Hopper has placed us, the viewer, on the city street, with no door to enter the diner, and yet in a position to evaluate each of the people inside. We see the row of empty counter stools nearest us. We notice that no one is making eye contact with any one else. Up close, the waiter's face appears to have an expression of horror or pain. And then there is a chilling revelation: each of us is completely alone in the world.

The slickness of the paint, which makes the canvas read almost like an advertisement, and immediate accessibility of the subject matter draws the viewer into Hopper's painting. But he does not tell us a story. Rather than a narrative about men and women out for a festive night on the town, we are invited to ask questions about the characters' ambiguous lives. Are the man and woman a couple? Where are they coming from? Where are they going? Who is the man with his back to us? How did he end up in the diner? What is the waiter's life like? What is causing his distress?

The light

By setting the scene on one of New York City's oblique corners and surrounding the diner with glass, Hopper was able to exploit stark pictorial devices. First, the fluorescent light flooding the diner is the only light that illuminates the painting; in the absence of a streetlamp, it spills into the night through both windows onto both sides of the street corner. It throws a series of cast shadows onto the sidewalk and apartment buildings, but ultimately draws our attention back to the men and woman inside the diner. The angle also allows him to show the people in a mix of frontal and profile views, heightening the sense that no figure is really communicating with another.

4" (Whitney Museum of American Art)

Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930, oil on canvas, 35 3/16 x 60 1/4" (Whitney Museum of American Art)

This feeling can be understood by comparing *Nighthawks* to Hopper's earlier painting *Early Sunday Morning*. Both paintings are set in front of the red brick apartments of New York's Greenwich Village and show us an hour of the day when people are typically not awake. Like *Nighthawks*, which was created at the beginning of America's involvement in World War II, *Early Sunday Morning* was also painted at a historically important moment, the beginning of the Great Depression. But despite their similarities, *Early Sunday Morning* produces a sense of ease in the viewer, not anxiety.

Detail: Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942

Partially, this is because of the flooding light of dawn. But *Early Sunday Morning*, with its frilly awnings, brightly colored barber's pole, squat fire hydrant, and windows opening to meet the morning sun, presents a world that is about to bustle with life. *Nighthawks* shows the opposite. The windows of the shops and apartments are empty and dark. The only remnants of human activity outside the diner are a cash register in a shop window and a cigar advertisement above the glass pane. There is no clock in the restaurant, but the empty coffee tureens on the back counter betray the indecent hour of night. This is a world shut down. Because our characters are awake, they are alienated—not only from each other, but also from civilization itself.

A timeless feel

Nighthawks is one of Hopper's New York City paintings, and the artist said that it was based on a real café. Many people have tried to find the exact setting of the painting, but have failed. In his wife's diaries, she wrote that she and Hopper himself both served as models for the people in the painting. Despite these real-life details, the empty composition and flat, abstracting planes of color give the canvas a timeless feel, making it an object onto which one can project one's own reality. Perhaps this is why it has lent itself to so well to many parodies, even appearing as a motif on an episode of *The Simpsons*.

When it was completed the canvas was bought almost immediately by the Art Institute of Chicago where it remains, and has been wildly popular ever since. The painting's modern-day appeal can also be understood because of its ability to evoke a sense of nostalgia for an America of a time gone-by. Despite its inherent universality, the dress of the four people—the woman evoking a pin-up doll, the men in their well-tailored suits and hats, the worker in his soda jerk costume—as well as the "Phillies" advertisement, firmly plant the painting in a simpler past, making it a piece of Americana.

A subtle critique

But perhaps *Nighthawks*' enduring popularity can be explained because of its subtle critique of the modern world, the world in

which we all live. Despite its surface beauty, this world is one measured in cups of coffee, imbued with an overwhelming sense of loneliness, and a deep desire, but ultimate inability, to connect with those around us.

1. [Boundless Art History](#) 21 July 2015 [CC-BY-SA 4.0](#)↵
2. [Hopper "Nighthawks"](#) [CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0](#)↵

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INDEX

D _____

dada

1.9: Futurism, Dada and World War I

F _____

Futurism

1.9: Futurism, Dada and World War I

N _____

Neue Sachlichkeit

1.9: Futurism, Dada and World War I

GLOSSARY

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Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

GLOSSARY

S

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1