

## **Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials**

**Programme: Bachelor of Arts (First Year)**

**Subject: History**

**Paper Code: HSG 105**

**Paper Title: History of Western Art and Culture**

**Unit: II**

**Module Name: Impressionist & Post-Impressionist Art: Claude Monet,  
Van Gogh**

**Module No: 05**

**Name of the Presenter: Ms. Yogeeta Lopes**

---

### **Notes**

#### **IMPRESSIONIST AND POST-IMPRESSIONIST ART**

Impressionism is a 19th-century art movement characterized by relatively small, thin, yet visible brush strokes, emphasis on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities, ordinary subject matter, inclusion of movement as an important part of human experience. Impressionism originated with a group of Paris-based artists whose independent exhibitions brought them to prominence during the 1870s and 1880s.

The Impressionists faced harsh opposition from the conventional art community in France. The name of the style derives from the title of a Claude Monet work,

Impression, *soleil levant* (Impression, Sunrise). which provoked the critic Louis Leroy to coin the term.

## OVERVIEW

Early Impressionists violated the rules of academic painting. They constructed their pictures from freely brushed colours that took priority over lines and contours. They also painted realistic scenes of modern life, and often painted outdoors. Previously, still lifes and portraits as well as landscapes were usually painted in a studio. The Impressionists found that they could capture the momentary and transient effects of sunlight by painting outdoors or *en plein air*. They portrayed overall visual effects instead of details, and used short "broken" brush strokes of mixed and pure unmixed colour—not blended smoothly or shaded, as was customary—to achieve an effect of intense colour vibration.

The public, at first hostile, gradually came to believe that the Impressionists had captured a fresh and original vision, even if the art critics and art establishment disapproved of the new style.

**Beginnings:** The Académie was the preserver of traditional French painting standards and style. Historical subjects, religious themes, and portraits were valued; landscape and still life were not. The Académie preferred carefully finished images that looked realistic. The Académie had an annual, art show, the Salon de Paris, and artists whose work was displayed in the show won prizes.

In the early 1860s, four young painters—Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, and Frédéric Bazille—met while studying under an academic artist. They discovered that they shared an interest in painting landscape and contemporary life rather than historical or mythological scenes. Following a practice that had become increasingly popular by mid-century, they went into the countryside together to paint in the open air, made use of bright colours.

During the 1860s, the Salon routinely rejected about half of the works submitted by Monet and his friends in favour of works by artists who followed the approved style. After Emperor Napoleon III saw the rejected works he decreed that the public will judge the paintings themselves, and the Salon des Refusés (Salon of the Refused) was organized.

In December 1873, Monet and several other artists founded an Association of artists to exhibit their artworks independently. The term Impressionist was accepted by the artists themselves and the public.

## **IMPRESSIONIST TECHNIQUES**

A number of identifiable techniques and working habits contributed to the innovative style of the Impressionists. The Impressionists were the first to use them all together, and with such consistency. These techniques include:

- Short, thick strokes of paint quickly capture the essence of the subject, rather than its details. The paint is often applied impasto.
- Colours are applied side by side with as little mixing as possible, to make the colour appear more vivid to the viewer.
- Greys and dark tones are produced by mixing complementary colours. Pure impressionism avoids the use of black paint.
- Wet paint is placed into wet paint without waiting for paints to dry, producing softer edges and intermingling of colour.
- Impressionist paintings do not exploit the transparency of thin paint films (glazes), which earlier artists manipulated carefully to produce effects. The impressionist painting surface is typically opaque.
- The paint is applied to a white or light-coloured ground. Previously, painters often used dark grey or strongly coloured grounds.
- The use of natural light is emphasized. Close attention is paid to the reflection of colours from object to object. Painters often worked in the evening to produce the shadowy effects of evening or twilight.
- In paintings made *en plein air* (outdoors), shadows are boldly painted with the blue of the sky as it is reflected onto surfaces, giving a sense of freshness previously not represented in painting. (Blue shadows on snow inspired the technique.)

## **POST-IMPRESSIONISM**

Post Impressionism is a French art movement that developed roughly between 1886 and 1905. Post-Impressionism emerged as a reaction against Impressionists' concern for the naturalistic depiction of light and colour. The Post-Impressionists were not happy the loss of structure in Impressionist paintings along with the choice of subject matter of the paintings.

The movement was led by Paul Cézanne (known as father of Post-impressionism), Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and Georges Seurat. The term was used in 1906, and again in 1910 by Roger Fry in the title of an exhibition of modern French painters: Manet and the Post-Impressionists.

Post-Impressionists extended Impressionism but the same time rejected some of its limitations: they continued using vivid colours, often thick application of paint, and real-life subject matter, but emphasized more on geometric forms, and use unnatural or arbitrary colour. Vincent van Gogh used colour and vibrant swirling brush strokes to convey his feelings and his state of mind.

## **CLAUDE MONET**

Oscar-Claude Monet was a French painter, a founder of French Impressionist painting. The term "Impressionism" is derived from the title of his painting

Impression, *soleil levant* (Impression, Sunrise), which was exhibited in 1874 in the first of the independent exhibitions by Monet and his associates.

Monet's ambition of documenting the French countryside led him to adopt a method of painting the same scene many times in order to capture the changing of light and the passing of the seasons.

**Life:** Claude Monet was born in the Paris. Monet from early on in his life wanted to become an artist and wanted to pursue a career in art. Monet entered a school of the arts and undertook his first drawing lessons from Jacques-François Oichard. Around 1856 he met artist Eugène Boudin, who became his mentor and taught him to use oil paints. Boudin taught Monet "*en plein air*" (outdoor) techniques for painting.

**Impressionism:** From the late 1860s, Monet and other like-minded artists were rejected by the conservative Académie des Beaux-Arts, which held its annual exhibition at the Salon de Paris. During the latter part of 1873, Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, and Alfred Sisley organized an Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers to exhibit their artworks independently. At their first exhibition, held in April 1874, Monet exhibited the work that was to give the group its lasting name.

Impression, Sunrise was painted in 1872, depicting a port landscape. From the paintings title the art critic Louis Leroy, in his review coined the term "Impressionism".

The first Impressionist exhibition was held in 1874. The main purpose of the participants was not so much to promote a new style, but to free themselves from the restrictions of the Salon de Paris. In addition to Impression: Sunrise, Monet presented four oil paintings and seven pastels.

**Monet's methods:** Monet has been described as "the driving force behind Impressionism". Important to the Impressionist painters was the understanding of the effects of light on the local colour of objects, and the effects of colours with each other.

His meeting with Eugene Boudin, opened his eyes to the possibility of *plein-air* painting. From that time, with a short interruption for military service, he dedicated himself to searching for new and improved methods of painterly expression.

He visited the Paris Salon and familiarised himself with the works of older painters, and made friends with other young artists. He began to think in terms of colours and shapes rather than scenes and objects. He used bright colours in dabs and dashes of paint.

A series of paintings had Monet looking at smoke and steam and the way that they affected colour and visibility, being sometimes opaque and sometimes translucent. He was to further use this study in the painting of the effects of mist and rain on the landscape.

## VINCENT VAN GOGH

Vincent Willem van Gogh was a Dutch post-impressionist painter who is among the most famous and influential figures in the history of Western art. In just over a decade, he created about 2,100 artworks, including around 860 oil paintings, most of which date from the last two years of his life. They include landscapes, still lifes, portraits and self-portraits, and are characterised by bold colours and dramatic, impulsive and expressive brushwork that contributed to the foundations of modern art.

Born into an upper-middle-class family, Van Gogh drew as a child and was serious, quiet, and thoughtful. As a young man he worked as an art dealer, often travelling. He turned to religion and spent time as a Protestant missionary in southern Belgium. He drifted in ill health and solitude before taking up painting in 1881, having moved back home with his parents.

In 1886, he moved to Paris, where he met Émile Bernard and Paul Gauguin, who were reacting against Impressionism. As his work developed he created a new approach to still lifes and local landscapes. His paintings grew brighter in colour as he developed a style that became fully realised during his stay in



France. During this period he broadened his subject matter to include series of olive trees, wheat fields and sunflowers.

Van Gogh was unsuccessful during his lifetime, and was considered a madman and a failure. He became famous after his suicide. His reputation began to grow in the early 20th century. Today, Van Gogh's works are among the world's most expensive paintings to have ever sold, and his legacy is honoured by a museum in his name, the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, which holds the world's largest collection of his paintings and drawings.

## **ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT**

Van Gogh drew, and painted with watercolours while at school. Van Gogh turned to well-known artists and received technical advice from them, as well as from.

He was aware that many of his faults were due to lack of experience and technical expertise, so in November 1885 he travelled to Antwerp and later Paris to learn and develop his skills.

During Van Gogh's stay in Paris he tried to master a new, lighter palette. Charles Blanc's treatise on colour interested him greatly, and led him to work with complementary colours. Van Gogh came to believe that the effect of colour went beyond the descriptive; he said that "colour expresses something in

itself". Yellow meant the most to him, because it symbolised emotional truth. He used yellow as a symbol for sunlight, life, and God.

## **MAJOR SERIES**

Van Gogh's stylistic developments are usually linked to the periods he spent living in different places across Europe. His evolution as an artist was slow, and he was aware of his painterly limitations.

**Portraits:** The portraits gave Van Gogh his best opportunity to earn. He wrote to his sister that he wished to paint portraits to capture their emotions and character rather than aiming for photographic realism. Those closest to Van Gogh are mostly absent from his portraits.

**Self-portraits:** Van Gogh created more than 43 self-portraits between. Generally the portraits were studies, created during introspective periods when he did not want to mix with others, or when he did not have models, and so painted himself. The self- were intended to mark important periods in his life. Van Gogh's gaze is hardly focused at the viewer.

**Flowers:** Van Gogh painted several landscapes with flowers, including roses, lilacs, and sunflowers. There are two series of dying sunflowers. Both are built from thickly layered paintwork. In these series, Van Gogh intended to display his technical skill and working methods.

**cypresses and olives:** Fifteen canvases depict cypresses, a tree he became fascinated with. He brought life to the trees, which were traditionally seen as a symbol of death.

**Orchards:** The Flowering Orchards (also the Orchards in Blossom) are among the first groups of work completed after Van Gogh's arrival in Arles. The 14 paintings are optimistic, joyous and visually expressive spring.

During this period Van Gogh mastered the use of light by subjugating shadows and painting the trees as if they are the source of light – almost in a sacred manner

**Wheat fields:** Van Gogh made paintings of harvests, wheat fields and other rural landmarks of the area, including The Old Mill. At various points, Van Gogh painted the view from his window. These works culminated in The Wheat Field series.

Many of the late paintings optimistic and, right up to the time of Van Gogh's death, reflect his desire to return to a good mental health.