

Impressionism: The Spontaneity of Life, Caught in the Moment

In our modern world of digital photography and digital lectures it is sometimes hard to envisage just how revolutionary the art of Impressionism was. So in this lecture I will endeavour to show just how radical the Impressionist artists such as Claude-Oscar Monet (1840-1926), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), Alfred Sisley (1839-1899), Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), Paul Cezanne (1839-1906), Berthe Morisot (1841-1895) and Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas (1834-1917) were, and what can, and always happens when artists do not do as we want them to.

I will also be looking at the traditionalism and yet at the same time modernity of these artist in their move away from the traditional subjects of painting, their relationship with the medium of the paint itself, and their relationship with the relatively new medium of photography.

This lecture will not only looking at the other, more traditional art, that co-existed around this independent group of artist in their day, but also trace the roots of the opposition to the new. This aspect will be achieved by looking at the precedence of painting quickly by artists who can now be seen in retrospect as the progenitors of this movement; although in some cases previous generations judged their work as an affront to decency and art.

However, what will become apparent in this lecture is that the shock of the new or what would later be seen as stunning effects becomes the engine of change and modernity that would eventually be called Impressionism.

Short Reading list:

Bomford, David, Kirby, Jo, Leighton, John and Roy, Ashok, ***Art in the Making: Impressionism***, (National Gallery Publications Ltd, 1990)

Brettell, Richard R., ***Impressionism: Painting Quickly in France 1860- 1890***, (Yale University Press, 2000)

Green, Chistopher (Ed), ***Art Made Modern: Roger Fry's Vision of Art***, (Merrell Holberton, 1999)

Harrison, Charles, ***Painting the Difference***, (University of Chicago Press, 2005)

House, John, ***Impressionism for England: Samuel Courtauld as Patron and Collector***, (Yale University Press, 1994)