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Salon Alternatives

In addition to the growing number of Salons, art galleries played an important role in bringing art to the attention of the public. Dealers such as Paul Durand-Ruel and Georges Petit (1856–1920) organized exhibitions in their elegant galleries. Although these could not compete in numbers with any of the Salons, they offered a much more pleasant viewing experience (FIG. 16-20). Especially equipped for art exhibitions, with expensive textile wall hangings and gas spotlights (for evening viewing), dealer exhibitions surpassed the Salons in the tasteful presentation of art works and in the coherence of their arrangements. Moreover, unlike the Salons, which were open four to six weeks a year, galleries were open year-round.

If all these exhibitions were not enough, during the 1870s and 1880s there were also artists' initiatives that aimed at organizing private and group shows in borrowed or rented spaces. Courbet and Manet had given the lead for such initiatives with their private exhibitions of the 1850s and 1860s. But neither artist had continued his efforts, because both still looked upon the Salon as a major site of exposure and marketing potential. By contrast, during the 1870s and 1880s there was at least one effort to bypass official government shows and maintain autonomy from dealers by creating an independent market for new and innovative art. This initiative was taken by a group of artists, many of them admirers of Courbet and Manet, who had been trying in vain to break through the conservatism of Salon juries since the mid-1860s. Exasperated by the severity of the juries of the Salons of 1872 and 1873, these artists incorporated as the so-called Private Company of Artists, Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, Etc. in December 1873. Between 1874 and 1886 this cooperative organized eight group shows known today as the Impressionist exhibitions. In so doing they cast themselves in the role of an artistic *avant-garde*, determined to go their own way and willing to face all forms of criticism. Contemporary critics often cast the members of the Private Company of Artists as a group of political radicals. Ideologically, however, they ran the gamut from conservative to liberal, just as, artistically, they embraced a range of styles and approaches that ranged from conventional to innovative.

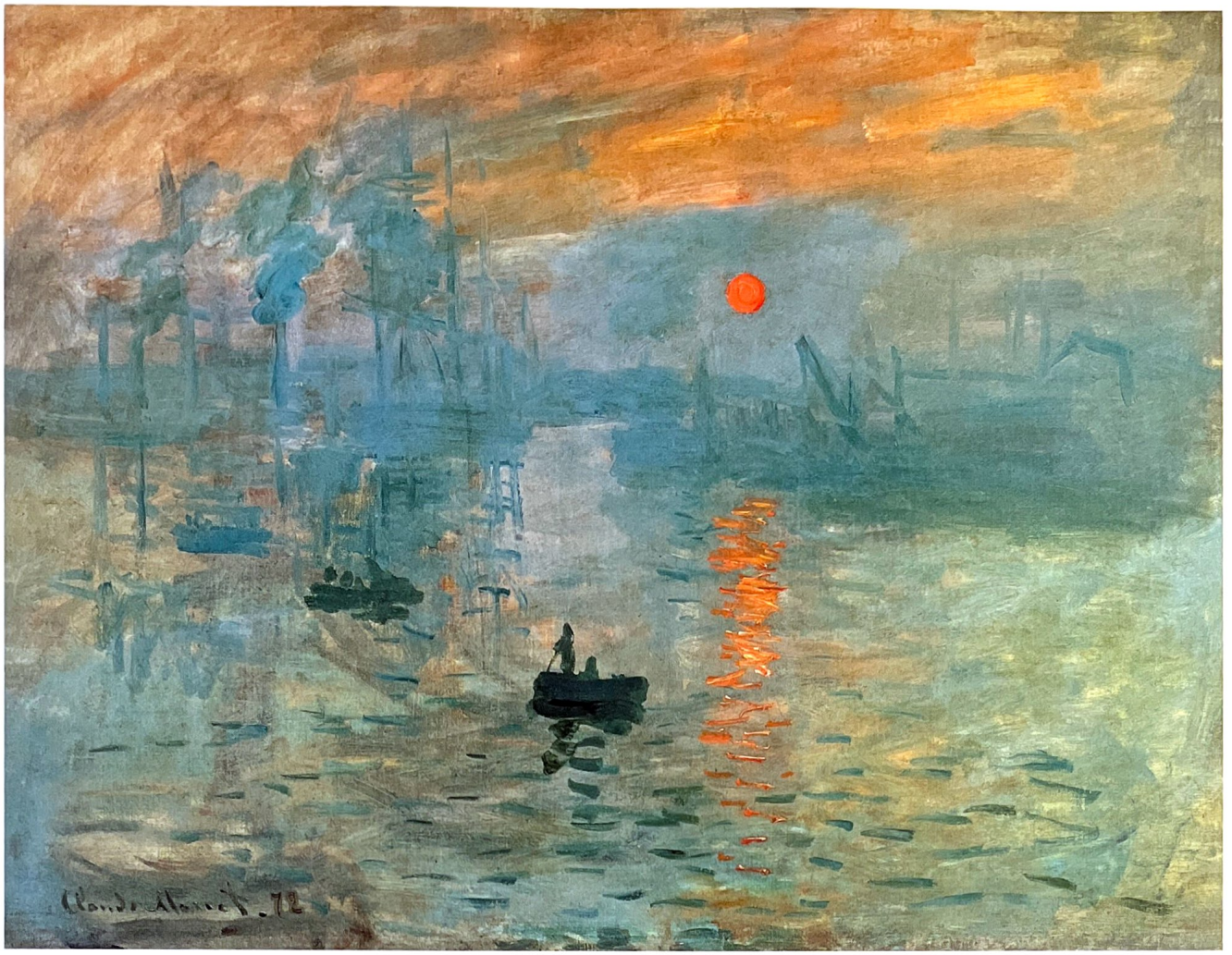
Origin and Definition of the Term "Impressionism"

The first exhibition organized by the Private Company of Artists took place in the recently vacated studio of the photographer Nadar (see page 300). It featured more than 150 works by thirty-three artists, and was well attended. Some 30,500 visitors came during the four weeks of the show, which was announced and reviewed in several papers.

One of the reviews, by a certain Louis Leroy, was entitled "The Exhibition of the Impressionists." Leroy had taken his cue from a landscape painting by Claude Monet (1840–1926) entitled *Impression, Sunrise* (FIG. 16-21). This painting and its title became the target of all the resentment that Leroy felt toward the exhibition. His nickname, "Impressionists," was meant to mock the artists, whose work, he felt, was "an attack on proper artistic custom, on the cult of form, and the respect for the masters."

Today the term "Impressionist" is applied to only a fraction of the fifty or sixty artists who participated in the eight exhibitions of the Private Company of Artists. Among them were, most importantly, Frédéric Bazille (1841–1870), Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894), Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), Edgar Degas (1834–1917), Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot (1841–1895), Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Alfred Sisley (1839–1899). At the time of the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, most of these artists

16-20 **E. Bichon,** *Exhibition of Watercolors in the Durand-Ruel Gallery,* 1879. Wood engraving. Durand-Ruel Archives, Paris.



16-21 **Claude Monet,** *Impression, Sunrise,* 1872. Oil on canvas, 18⅞ x 24″ (48 x 63 cm). Musée Marmottan, Paris.

were in their mid-thirties. They had submitted works to the Salon since the mid-1860s, with little success. Their works had either not been accepted or remained unnoticed.

The indifference of both juries and critics to the works of these young artists had to do with their subject matter as well as their mode of painting. For the most part, their paintings depicted landscapes and genre scenes, subjects less valued than history or portrait painting. Their genre painting, moreover, did not fit traditional categories of historical or peasant genre. Instead, they depicted the life of the contemporary urban middle class, and were emphatically modern.

These young artists also deliberately defied academic principles in the execution of their paintings. Admirers of Manet, they followed his example of underplaying or even dispensing with *chiaroscuro*. Some, in addition, flouted traditional rules of composition, while others neglected to "finish" their paintings, deliberately leaving them in a sketchlike state. Indeed, several among them strove for a mode of painting that, like the academic oil sketch, would faithfully and immediately reproduce the artist's perception. Unlike the Naturalists, who wanted to "freeze" reality like a photograph, the Impressionists wanted somehow to suggest the constantly changing aspect of reality. More than any artists before them, with the possible exception of Delacroix, they were interested in the nature of seeing. They wished to explore how people look at the world and what they really see. Some landscape painters, such as Monet, Pissarro, Morisot, and Sisley, were obsessed with the fact that the visual world is in constant flux. Others, such as Degas and Cassatt, realized that the neatly composed, perfectly centered images of reality that one sees in traditional paintings do not correspond to the random ways in which we normally view the world.

Claude Monet and the Impressionist Landscape

Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* exemplifies the novel vision of the Impressionists. It depicts the harbor of Le Havre, the port city in Normandy where the artist had spent his youth. The sun rises behind the high horizon, a red-hot disk burning through the early morning fog. Two rowboats are silhouetted against the light, scintillating water. In the dis-

tance, through the mist, we see a ghostlike forest of smokestacks and tall masts.

It is not hard to understand why this painting infuriated Leroy. It is painted in a sketchy manner, with loose, choppy brushstrokes that, seen up close, boldly assert that they are nothing but dabs of oil paint hastily applied to a canvas. Yet when one steps away from the painting a miraculous thing happens: as the strokes and colors blend in the viewer's eye, one suddenly sees the rippling of the water, the vibrations of the air, and the gentle movement of the smoke from the stacks mixing with the fog. Thus, paradoxically, the same picture that reminds the viewer that a painting is nothing but a mass of brushstrokes on a flat canvas surpasses earlier landscape paintings in its powerful evocation of the shimmering effect of light and atmosphere.

To understand the effect of Monet's work on contemporary viewers such as Leroy, one need only compare it with Bouguereau's *Young Girl Defending Herself against Eros* (see FIG. 16-14). In Bouguereau's work, as in most Salon paintings, the figures and the landscape background are painted in such a way as to dissimulate, even hide the brushwork. In Monet's work, by contrast, the brushwork attracts our attention. Had Monet exhibited *Impression, Sunrise* as a "sketch," Leroy might have been less critical of it. Within the Academy it was acceptable, even commendable, for an oil sketch to be loosely painted, with broad, free strokes. In the 1860s and 1870s it had become common practice for artists to submit sketches to the Salon, which were considered for exhibition as long as they were listed in the catalogue as such. But Monet did not call his work a sketch. In the catalogue of the first Impressionist exhibition, the word *étude*, sketch, was not mentioned in any of his entries.

Monet's decision to eliminate the distinction between sketch and finished painting had occurred some time between 1869 and 1874. In the summer of 1869 he had painted two pictures of a popular bathing place in the Seine river called *La Grenouillère*, or *The Frog Pond* (FIG. 16-22). Anticipating *Impression, Sunrise* in their loose and spontaneous brushwork, they were preliminary sketches for a large tableau or finished painting that Monet intended to submit to the Salon of 1870. But that painting never materialized, for both personal and artistic reasons. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, Monet left for London, to avoid being drafted. There he must have seen the works of Turner, whose bold brushwork may have set him thinking about the artificiality of the boundary between sketch and finished painting and about the possibility of producing exhibition paintings that retained the freshness and freedom of the sketch. Six years later, at the second Impressionist exhibition, he exhibited one of his sketches for *La Grenouillère* as if it were a finished work.

Of crucial importance to Monet's decision to ignore the distinction between a sketch and a finished painting was his growing conviction of the absolute necessity to paint landscapes outdoors. The traditional distinction between the landscape sketch and the finished painting had been that the first was painted outdoors, while the second was done in the studio. Monet, who had sketched outdoors since he was an aspiring artist in Normandy, came to the conclusion that it was impossible to paint finished landscapes indoors and retain the effect of the firsthand impression of light and atmosphere. To him, landscapes had to be done outdoors, on the spot, so that the artist could translate his visual sensations into paint immediately. At the same time, he realized that, to achieve that goal, the carefully finished paint surface of academic painting was altogether unsuited.

16-22 **Claude Monet,** *La Grenouillère (The Frog Pond)*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 29⅜ x 39" (74.6 x 99.7 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Other Impressionist Landscape Painters: Pissarro and Sisley

Monet was not the only artist who was interested in *plein-air* painting. In the 1850s outdoor sketching in oils had become a common practice, greatly facilitated by the invention of paint in tubes. Most Barbizon artists sketched outdoors, as did Courbet. Monet's own *plein-air* practice had been encouraged by Eugène Boudin (1828–1898), a local Norman painter who produced fashionable beach scenes for sale to summer tourists. Boudin's works were based on numerous sketches made outdoors (FIG. 16-23), often in the company of Monet. Monet, in turn, appears to have encouraged other artists to leave the studio. In Paris, as a student of the academic painter Charles Gleyre (1806–1874), he had befriended Pierre-Auguste Renoir, with whom he went sketching frequently. In 1869 Renoir worked with him at La Grenouillère, where he sketched the same scene that we have seen in Monet's work (FIG. 16-24).

In Gleyre's studio Monet had also met Frédéric Bazille and Alfred Sisley, who, like the Barbizon school artists, often sketched in the forest of Fontainebleau. Moreover, at the so-called Académie Suisse, a "drop-in" studio where artists could, for a small fee, draw from the nude, he had met Camille Pissarro and Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), who were likewise attracted to landscape painting outdoors.

All these artists eventually joined Monet in founding the Private Company in December 1873, because they had experienced similar difficulties in getting admitted to the Salon. To Leroy, their works looked so similar that he felt justified in calling them all "Impressionists." Yet in so doing he ignored the fact that the various members of the group were attracted to different types of landscape scenery and approached it in different ways. The works of Pissarro and Sisley may serve as examples.

Pissarro's *White Frost* (FIG. 16-25) shows a rural landscape near Pontoise, a small village outside Paris where the artist lived during the early 1870s. Such rural scenes are rare in the work of Monet, who preferred to center his landscapes on water. Pissarro's different brushwork was, in part, a result of his specific subject matter. Monet's broad, horizontal strokes, so effective for water scenes, were not suited to the painting of frozen fields. Pissarro, instead, used short, fuzzy dabs of paint that seem to meld together. Keenly sensitive to the effects of light and atmosphere, he knew how to translate them into paint. In *White Frost* the long, watery blue shadows cast by an invisible row of poplar trees beautifully suggest the clear, thin light of a bright winter day.

Like Monet, Alfred Sisley was interested in water. He never painted harbors or the sea, but was fascinated by rivers. Although he moved frequently in the course of his career, he always lived close to the Seine river or its tributaries. *Inundation at Loge Island* (FIG. 16-26), exhibited at the first Impressionist exhibition, depicts a river flooding, a frequent occurrence in the Seine system. A common subject in Sisley's art, river floodings offered the artist an opportunity to paint vast expanses of water, punctured by vertical elements such as houses, trees, and telegraph poles. Perhaps because of his British descent, Sisley seemed more attracted to the subdued, gray light of rainy days than to the sparkling sunlight effects that Monet so often depicted.

Monet's Early Painting Series

Throughout his career, Monet remained primarily focused on landscape painting, constantly experimenting with new kinds of subject matter and new ways of rendering light and atmosphere. At the third Impressionist exhibition of 1877 he exhibited three paintings of the Gare St-Lazare in Paris (one is seen in FIG. 16-27). The scenery depicted in these paintings is far removed from his earlier harbor, sea,

16-23 **Eugène Boudin,** *The Beach at Trouville,* 1865. Oil on canvas, 10⅜ x 16" (26.5 x 40.5 cm), Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

16-24 (above) **Pierre-Auguste Renoir,** *La Grenouillère,* 1869. Oil on canvas, 26 x 31⅞" (66 x 81 cm). Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

16-25 **Camille Pissarro,** *White Frost,* 1873. Oil on canvas, 25⅝ x 36⅝" (65 x 93 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

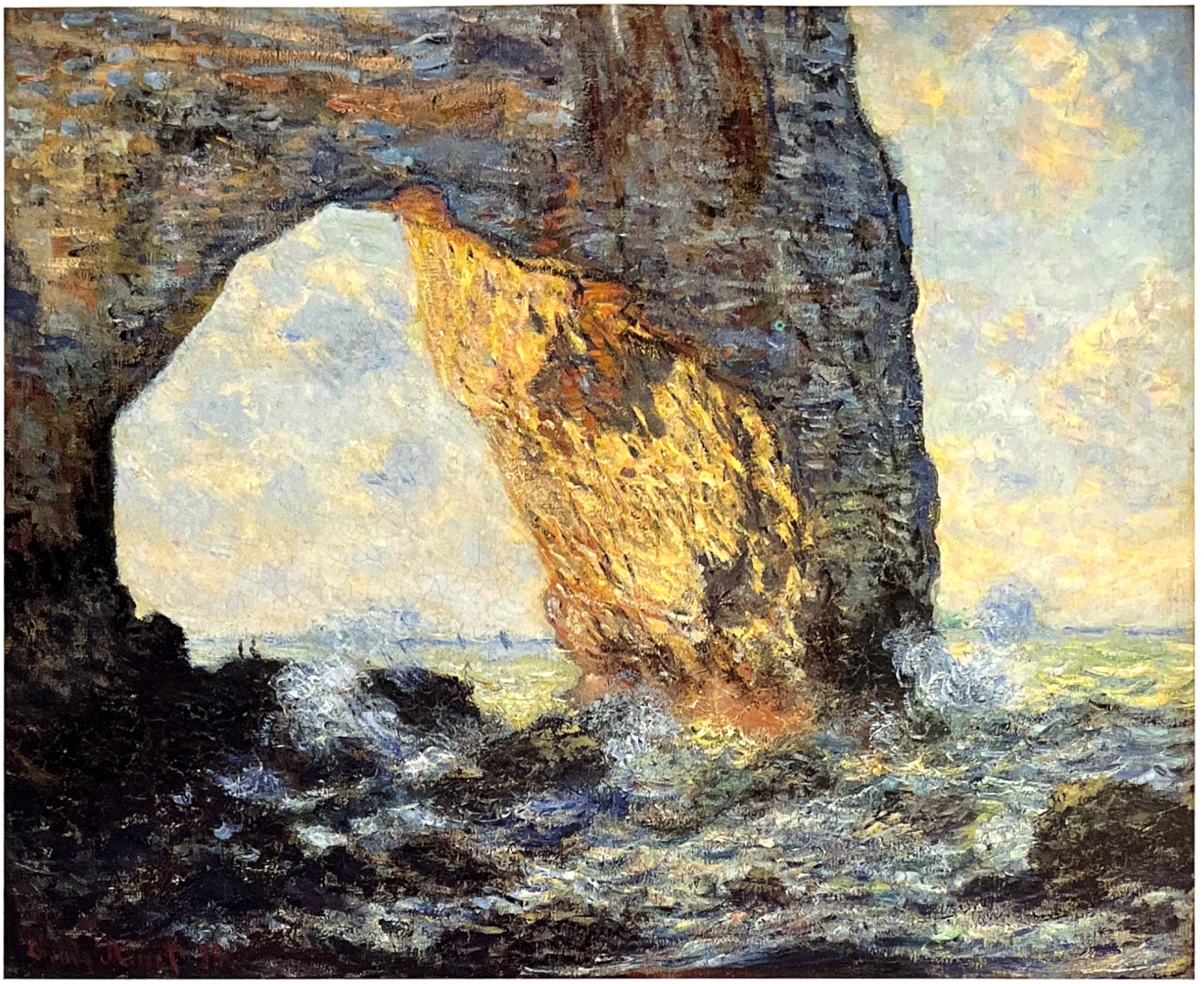
16-26 **Alfred Sisley,** *Inundation at Loge Island,* 1872. Oil on canvas, 17 x 23⅝" (45 x 60 cm). Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

and river canvases. Instead of trees, sky, and water, we see dark locomotives, the glass roof of the station overhead, and the dirty gravel under the railroad tracks. Altogether, Monet made twelve paintings of the station, seen from various viewpoints and at different times of day. The series leads viewers on a tour of the station and impresses them with the endless variety of spectacles it has to offer. With their trains coming and going, their billowing steam clouds evaporating into the air, their passengers hurrying along the platforms, the paintings in the Gare St-Lazare series exemplify modern life, in all its chaos and instability.

In the course of the 1880s Monet became increasingly interested in creating groups of paintings of the same subject. Between 1883 and 1886, during lengthy summer vacations spent at or near Etretat, on France's north coast, he made dozens of paintings of the steep chalk cliffs. In so doing, he became fascinated with the effects on the rocks of the changeable light, caused by the movement of the sun and the inconstant weather.

In one of these paintings, a close-up view of the dramatic Manneporte rock, the rock is composed of thin, straight strokes of orange, pink, blue, violet, green, and yellow (FIG. 16-28). Instead of painting it beige-gray—as he "knew" it to be—Monet tried to forget what he was looking at to capture the shifting sensations of color, caused by the reflection and refraction of light by the chalky, irregular rock surface. A few years later, he offered the following advice to a young American artist, Lilla Cabot Perry

16-27 **Claude Monet,** *Gare St-Lazare, Paris,* 1877. Oil on canvas, 32 x 39" (82 cm x 1 m). Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.



16-28 **Claude Monet,** *Manneporte, Etretat,* 1883. Oil on canvas, 25⅝ x 31⅞" (65 x 81 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

(1848–1933): "When you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you—a tree, a house, a field, or whatever. Merely think, here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape." He added that he "wished he had been born blind and then had suddenly regained his sight [so] that he could have begun to paint in this way without knowing what the objects were that he saw before him."

It has been suggested that a connection may exist between the Impressionist way of seeing and contemporary scientific theories of vision, notably those of the German Hermann von Helmholtz, whose two-volume *Handbook of Physiological Optics* was published in Germany between 1856 and 1867. In the second volume of this book Helmholtz noted that our brains often adjust what we see in reality to what we know or expect, causing our perception to be inadequate. To improve perceptions, Helmholtz encouraged viewers to focus attention on "individual sensations." If we do so, Helmholtz suggested:

> We have no difficulty in recognizing that the vague blue-gray of the far distance may indeed be a fairly saturated violet and that the green of vegetation blends imperceptibly through blue-green and blue into this violet, etc. This whole difference seems to me to be due to the fact that the colors have ceased to be distinctive signs of objects to us, and are considered merely as being different sensations.

Impressionist Figure Painting

Impressionist painting was not limited to landscape; it also encompassed the human figure. It is possible to distinguish two categories of Impressionist figure paintings. In the first, figures are rendered in an outdoor setting; in the second, they are placed in an urban context. In both categories, the figures are dressed in contemporary, bourgeois clothes and are engaged in some kind of leisure activity.

16-29 **Claude Monet,** *Women in the Garden,* 1866–7. Oil on canvas, 8′4″ x 6′8″ (2.55 x 2.05 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Those in outdoor settings are shown strolling, picnicking, or boating, while the protagonists of urban scenes are sitting in cafés and theaters, or, more rarely, at home. Urban figure paintings may also depict the providers of bourgeois entertainment—such as ballet dancers, cabaret singers, circus artists, and barmaids.

Their emphasis on contemporary bourgeois leisure life sets the Impressionists apart from both the Realists and the Naturalists, who focused on the working life of peasants and the urban poor. Impressionist pictures appear less politically charged than those of their Realist and Naturalist colleagues, whose works often seem intended to make bourgeois viewers feel guilty about their material comforts.

The subject of bourgeois leisure life was modern, *par excellence*. Leisure, a by-product of capitalism, was a new phenomenon in the second half of the nineteenth century, when most middle-class people were no longer forced to work throughout the year in order to make a living. Excess capital and new forms of transportation allowed them to spend part of the summer away from home, on vacation. In addition, new technologies of illumination enabled a vast expansion of recreational nightlife, ranging from nightclubs such as the Folies Bergère to operas, theaters, cafés, and cabarets. Bourgeois women, who were not expected to work at all, were the main protagonists of leisure life.

Monet's early *Women in the Garden* (FIG. 16-29) launched Impressionist outdoor figure painting. Begun during the summer of 1866 and completed in the spring of 1867, it was the artist's second attempt at emulating Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. The first attempt, an enormous painting three times the size of Manet's *Déjeuner* and intended for the Salon of 1866, was never completed. From a preliminary sketch and two fragments of the unfinished painting that remain we know that it depicted a group of young men and women gathered in the woods for a picnic.

Women in the Garden, submitted to the Salon of 1867 but refused, was more modest, though still monumental (roughly 8 feet by 6). Using his wife as a model, Monet painted four fashionably dressed women in an elegant garden, picking flowers to make bouquets. Rather than painting this large canvas in the studio, using outdoor sketches, Monet, in an unprecedented move, painted the entire picture outdoors. In so doing, he hoped to capture with full accuracy the effects of sunlight and atmosphere on the human figure.

It is instructive to compare Monet's painting with Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. At the Salon des Refusés of 1863 Monet and his friends had admired this painting both for the audacity of its subject matter and for Manet's attempt to narrow the gap between perception and representation. Yet in his *Women in the Garden* Monet went well beyond Manet. The latter had still painted his work in the studio. This accounts for a certain discrepancy between the figures, which were painted from models posed in the studio, and the landscape setting, which was based on sketches made outdoors. Monet achieved much greater coherence between figures and background by basing the entire picture on direct observation. As in Manet's *Déjeuner*, the figures in *Women in the Garden* look flat, for Monet has almost completely abandoned *chiaroscuro*. Where shading does occur, as in the face of the seated woman in the foreground, it is not grayish or beige, as in traditional paintings, but tinted green. Like Delacroix, who had made this observation several decades earlier (see page 219), Monet noted that shading and cast shadows are tinted by the reflections of surrounding colors, and he painted them that way.

Although Monet's *Women in the Garden* was not exhibited at the Salon, it became well known among his friends and young French painters in general. They were excited by Monet's success in painting the figure outdoors, because many of them had toyed with the idea themselves. Paul Cézanne, for example, wrote to Emile Zola, in 1866:

> But you know all pictures [*tableaux*] painted inside, in the studio, will never be as good as those done outside [*en plein air*]. When out-of-door scenes are represented, the contrast between the figures and the ground is astounding and the landscape is magnificent. I see some superb things, and I shall have to make up my mind only to do things out-of-doors.

One of the first works painted after Monet's example was *The Family Gathering* (FIG. 16-30), by Frédéric Bazille, a fellow student of Monet in the *atelier* of Gleyre. Bazille is little known today, for he painted only a handful of works. A soldier in the Franco-Prussian War, he was killed at the age of twenty-nine. *Family Gathering* was exhibited at the Salon of 1868, where it was seen by Zola, who wrote in a review: "One can see that the painter loves his time, like Claude Monet, and that he believes one can be an artist while painting a frock-coat."

The painting, comparable in size to Monet's, depicts a gathering, on a terrace, of a middle-class family dressed in their Sunday best. Its original title, *Portrait of the *** Family*, indicates that this is not a casual gathering but a family portrait (indeed of Bazille's own family), not unlike the numerous family photographs that were made at holiday gatherings (see the photograph of Victoria and Albert and their family; FIG. 14-1). The figures are carefully, even stiffly, posed, though clearly with a view to create a sense of informality. They are not lined up in a row, like the British royal family, but are freely distributed across the terrace, some standing, others seated, in a seemingly casual fashion. Like Manet, Bazille was greatly preoccupied with the integration of the figure in the outdoor setting, and he paid much attention to the light. His painting beautifully evokes the soft, dappled light of the tree-shaded terrace. Only in the representation of the figures was Bazille less daring than Monet, because he maintained the careful modeling of bodies and faces that he had learned in Gleyre's studio.

16-30 **Frédéric Bazille,** *The Family Gathering,* 1867. Oil on canvas, 5′ x 7′6″ (1.52 x 2.3 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

16-31 **Pierre-Auguste Renoir,** *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette,* 1876. Oil on canvas, 51 x 69″ (1.3 x 1.75 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Neither Monet's *Women in the Garden* nor Bazille's *Family Gathering* shows the choppy brushwork that was to characterize Impressionist landscape painting from the late 1860s. The first artist to apply the Impressionist brushstrokes to figure painting was Monet's close friend Renoir. His *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* (FIG. 16-31) represents a popular café in Montmartre, then still a largely rural area of Paris. The café was housed in an old windmill, which had a large garden where young people came to dance on summer Sundays to the music of a band. To suggest the liveliness of this outdoor ball, Renoir used short brushstrokes of color, freely applied. He aimed at evoking the movement of dappled light across the figures, the shimmering of hair and satin dresses, and the reflection of light in the glassware on the table.

Renoir's painting differs from Monet's and Bazille's not only in its brushwork, but also in its more engaging quality. The aloof figures of *Women in the Garden* and *Family Gathering* seem related to the stiffly posed figures in photographs. Renoir's painting, however, is closer to traditional genre painting in that the figures interact with one another. In the foreground, a girl and her chaperone talk to a young man, while his friends look on in amusement. Behind them, couples are dancing and kissing. It is easy to relate to the figures in the painting and to imagine oneself to be part of the scene.

Impressionism and the Urban Scene: Edgar Degas

The Dance Class (FIG. 16-32), by Edgar Degas, shown at the second Impressionist exhibition of 1876, differs so dramatically from all the Impressionist paintings we have seen so far that we may wonder if the term "Impressionist" is even appropriate for this work. If an Impressionist is defined as someone who took part in the Impressionist exhibitions, Degas certainly qualified. A founding member of the Private Company, he participated in all eight exhibitions it organized. If Impressionist painting is defined broadly as painting that shows a new vision, based on the artist's close scrutiny of how we perceive reality, then Degas was also an Impressionist. His interest in perception certainly equaled Monet's, but it had a different focus. Degas did not share the interest in light and atmosphere that fascinated Monet, Sisley, and Pissarro. Instead, he was intrigued by questions related to the field and angle of vision, as well as to the perception of moving bodies.

If we confine the term Impressionism to light-filled landscapes and figures in outdoor settings, however, then Degas was definitely not an Impressionist. He was a painter of urban life, who focused most often on indoor scenes. He has been called a Realist, and there is a connection between his works and some of Daumier's. He has also been categorized as a Naturalist, and the photographic

16-32 **Edgar Degas,** *The Dance Class,* c. 1874. Oil on canvas, 32⅝ x 29⅞" (82.9 x 75.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

quality of some of his early works does, indeed, relate to the urban scenes of Bastien-Lepage (see FIG. 18-9).

The Dance Class or, as it was originally entitled, *Dance Audition*, shows a room crowded with ballerinas who are waiting their turn to dance for the teacher, an old man in a baggy suit who is beating a rhythm with a long stick. Judging by the body language of the dancers, the audition is a tedious event. We see the ballerinas stretching, scratching, biting their nails, and adjusting their own and one another's tutus. This, of course, is the "backstage" aspect of the ballet, where the glamorous, ethereal creatures that the public admires on stage have been brought down to reality.

Even though it represents a scene of boredom, this painting is visually exciting because of its many compositional innovations. First, its unusual perspective creates the impression that the viewer is above the scene, standing on a ladder or perhaps on a platform like the one in the rear of the room where chaperones and mothers wait for the dance lesson to be over. Second, the distribution of the figures is highly unusual. While the lower right quarter of the painting is entirely empty, the figures in the lower left corner seem to crowd each other out, to the point where one of them is almost completely hidden by two others and a fourth has her face cut off. Meanwhile, the main event of the painting, the ballerina dancing for the dance master, has been denied the visual importance that seems her due. She is pushed to the rear and surrounded by ballerinas on all sides. To enhance the visual complexity of the scene, Degas has introduced a mirror on the left wall, in which more ballerinas and part of a view through a window are reflected.

Degas's compositional innovations are an attempt to come closer to the way we see the world. Rarely, indeed, does a subject present itself to us as in traditionally composed pictures—in the center of our field of vision and surrounded by a neutral space. Instead, our view of the world is composed of a succession of casual glimpses that are randomly framed and lack compositional order and symmetry. As we sit down, stand up, or climb a staircase, our viewpoint changes radically. In many cases we are not viewing reality at eye level, but at an oblique angle, looking down, or up, depending on our position.

Degas's painting represents the dancing audition much in the way that a chaperone might have seen it as she looked up from her book. It is a random glimpse of a fleeting moment that captures the scene much like a photographic snapshot. Degas's paintings have, indeed, been compared to photography. The seemingly haphazard way in which his compositions are framed, frequently cutting off figures, echoes the inadvertent way in which photography slices up reality. Yet the comparison of his paintings with photography should not be carried too far. Even if they look like photographic snapshots, Degas's paintings anticipate a kind of photography that, owing to technical limitations, was not really possible until the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, most photographs made in Degas's time are more traditionally composed than are his paintings.

16-33 **Suzuki Harunobu,** *Beauties Reading a Letter*, c.1765. Woodcut, 8 x 11" (20.3 x 28 cm). Collection of Mitsui Takaharu, Tokyo.

16-34 **Edgar Degas,** *Dancer with Bouquet*, 1876–7. Essence and pastel on paper, 25⅝ x 14⅛" (65 x 36 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

16-35 **Edgar Degas,** *Café Concert,* 1876–7. Pastel on monotype paper, 14 x 10⅝" (36.8 x 27 cm). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon.

16-36 **Edgar Degas,** *In Front of the Stalls,* 1866–8. Essence on paper mounted on canvas, 18⅛ x 24" (46 x 61 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Degas's works also call to mind Japanese prints. Almost all *avant-garde* artists of the period were looking at Japanese prints as an important alternative to Western forms of representation. Degas appears to have been especially interested in the Japanese choice of unusual viewpoints. The oblique "bird's-eye" viewpoint was popular in Japanese prints, as we see, for example, in Suzuki Harunobu's *Beauties Reading a Letter,* of about 1765 (FIG. 16-33).

As Degas matured, his viewpoints became increasingly daring and his compositions more striking. *Dancer with Bouquet* (FIG. 16-34), exhibited at the Impressionist exhibition of 1870, shows a ballerina greeting the public, holding the bouquet of an admirer in her upheld hand. Behind her, at the top of the painting, a fuzzy cloud of tutus represents the corps de ballet. The bird's-eye view is here more exaggerated than in *Dancing Class,* suggesting that the viewer sees the ballerina from a high opera box close to the stage. That could also be the explanation for the sliced-off tutu of the ballerina, which suggests that the rest of it is hidden from view behind a stage set or curtain.

Dancer with Bouquet is executed in pastels (see *Pastel,* page 402), Degas's favorite technique after the mid-1870s. Using pastels in combination with oils, in a complex technique that he had developed himself, Degas achieved a new luminosity of color that was especially suited to his brightly lit stage scenes. (From the middle of the nineteenth century, gas and limelight made it possible to have operatic and stage performances at night, illuminated from overhead and by footlights.) Degas's *Café Concert* (FIG. 16-35), also exhibited at the Impressionist exhibi-

Pastel

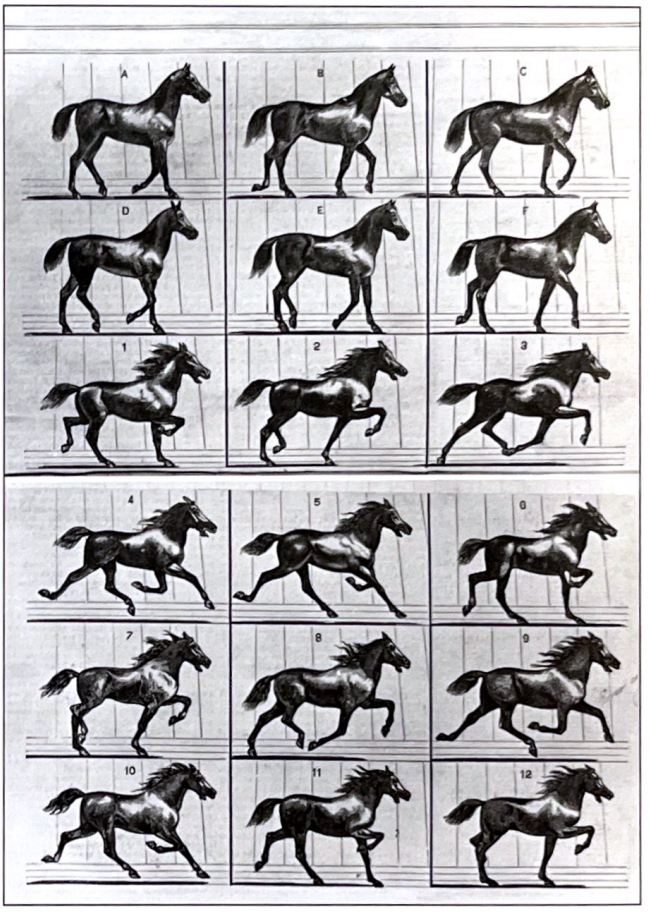
Pastels are crayons made of finely ground pigments mixed with a non-greasy binder, such as gum. They are generally applied to specially textured papers that easily take up the powdered pigments, which remain on the surface of the paper. Pastels can be used in drawings, using the crayons primarily to make colored lines. But they can also be used in a painterly way, by smearing and even blending the pigments with the finger or some rubbing tool. Because pastels contain very little binder, pastel drawings and paintings are very unstable. It is necessary to frame them behind glass or to treat them with a fixative spray.

Pastels were first used in the sixteenth century, but they did not become popular until the eighteenth, when they were used for portraiture by such artists as Maurice-Quentin de la Tour (see FIG. 1-11), Jean-Baptiste Chardin, and Anton Raphael Mengs. Considered a Rococo technique *par excellence*, pastel fell out of favor in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth but it was revived at the end of the nineteenth century by the Impressionists, most notably Degas and Renoir. It continued to be a favorite medium of Post-Impressionist and Symbolist artists, such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Gustave Moreau, and Odilon Redon.

tion of 1879, shows the wonderful effects of bright illumination and deep shadows that he managed to achieve with this technique. The work represents one of the numerous outdoor cafés that had become fashionable in Haussmann's Paris. This one provides a variety show of singers accompanied by a small pit orchestra. As opposed to the bird's-eye view in Degas's *Dancer with Bouquet*, we have here what we may call a worm's-eye view. Looking upwards rather than downwards, our eye is led past some colorful ladies' hats, past the heads of the musicians in the pit, towards the singer dressed in red, whose skirt is partly obscured by the neck of a double bass. The stage lighting, which, like our glance, comes from below, leaves the parts of the face and body that are usually highlighted (eyes, cheeks, chest) in a dark shade.

The ballet theater and the cabaret fascinated Degas because they were modern sites *par excellence*. And so was the horse race, another important subject in his work. (It may be seen as the counterpart of the ballet, calling for exterior scenes dominated by men, rather than interior scenes dominated by women.) What made these places modern? First, they were sites where those who were "with it"—who were, as the French say, *à la mode*—were found. Second, they were places where watching was an important activity. And watching was an eminently modern activity, judging by the numerous new opportunities for observation that presented themselves in the nineteenth century.

In Front of the Stalls (FIG. 16-36), dating from 1869–70, is a relatively early example of Degas's horse race pictures, representing the fashionable track at Longchamp. The jockeys are parading their horses in front of the spectators' stalls before the race. It is a crisp summer day, and a flowering of colorful parasols protects the viewers from the sun. The nervously dribbling horses cast fuzzy shadows on the ground. Factory chimneys in the background emit thin plumes of smoke that blow away in the wind. There is a sense of expectation, even tension, in the air



16-37 **Eadweard Muybridge,** *Horses Trotting and Galloping.* Reproduced in *La Nature*, 1878. Wood engravings from photographs. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

that seems to be condensed in the horse in the background, which, scared by a sudden movement, is galloping away.

Degas was a master of representing the moving horse, a subject that had always presented a challenge to artists. Horses move fast, and depicting their four legs, in motion, requires great powers of observation. Degas's preoccu-

pation with this challenge as well as his interest in photography led him to the so-called stop-action images of the British-born American photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), which were reproduced in 1878 in the French journal *La Nature* (FIG. 16-37). (See Box below.) Degas copied several of these photographs, incorporating his new knowledge into several of his later works on equine themes, such as *Jockeys before the Start* (FIG. 16-38), exhibited at the fourth Impressionist exhibition of 1879 as *Race Horses*. In this picture, all Degas's interests seem to have come together. The composition of this painting is startling. First, there is the starting pole, which divides the painting into two vertical panels, slicing the head of the horse in two. Then there is the large amount of empty space in the left foreground, which would have been unthinkable in earlier paintings. Reviewing the fourth Impressionist exhibition, the critic Arthureaux Rolland expressed what most people must have felt about Degas in general and this painting in particular:

> I won't say much more about this strange artist who, having made up his mind to paint only what he sees and how he sees it—but also, not to see what everyone else sees—invariably finds himself in front of ugly or bizarre things that others refrain from rendering in their works. When he represents a racehorse on the course, an enormous pole is in the foreground plane, cutting the racer in two parts, and allowing us to see only the extremities.

Impressionists and the Urban Scene: Caillebotte

While Degas's vision was certainly unique, there were other artists who were similarly interested in reproducing the randomness of the casual glimpse at reality. One artist whose compositions frequently equal those of Degas in their unexpected viewpoint is Gustave Caillebotte. Younger than most of the Impressionists, he, unlike most of them, was wealthy. Thus, he was a patron of the Impressionist group as well as a member. His important collection of Impressionist works, many of them bought while the paint was still wet, now forms the core of the Impressionist collection of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the chief museum of nineteenth-century art in France.

Caillebotte is best known today for his street scenes, which evoke the spectacle that the average *flâneur*, or casual walker, would see as he traversed the modern Paris of Haussmann. *Paris Street, Rainy Weather* (FIG. 16-39), a large painting measuring some 7 feet by 9, is among the artist's most striking works. It represents one of the numerous star intersections that were part of Haussmann's plan. On the wide sidewalks that flank the cobblestone streets, pedestrians walk and look at the shops and the people. It is a typical Parisian winter day. A drizzling rain falls from the leaden sky, making the city, with its stone buildings and stone streets, look even more gray than usual. The dark clothes of the men and women do little to enliven this dreary scene. This, Caillebotte seems to say, is modernity as well. It is not all color, light, and movement; it is also

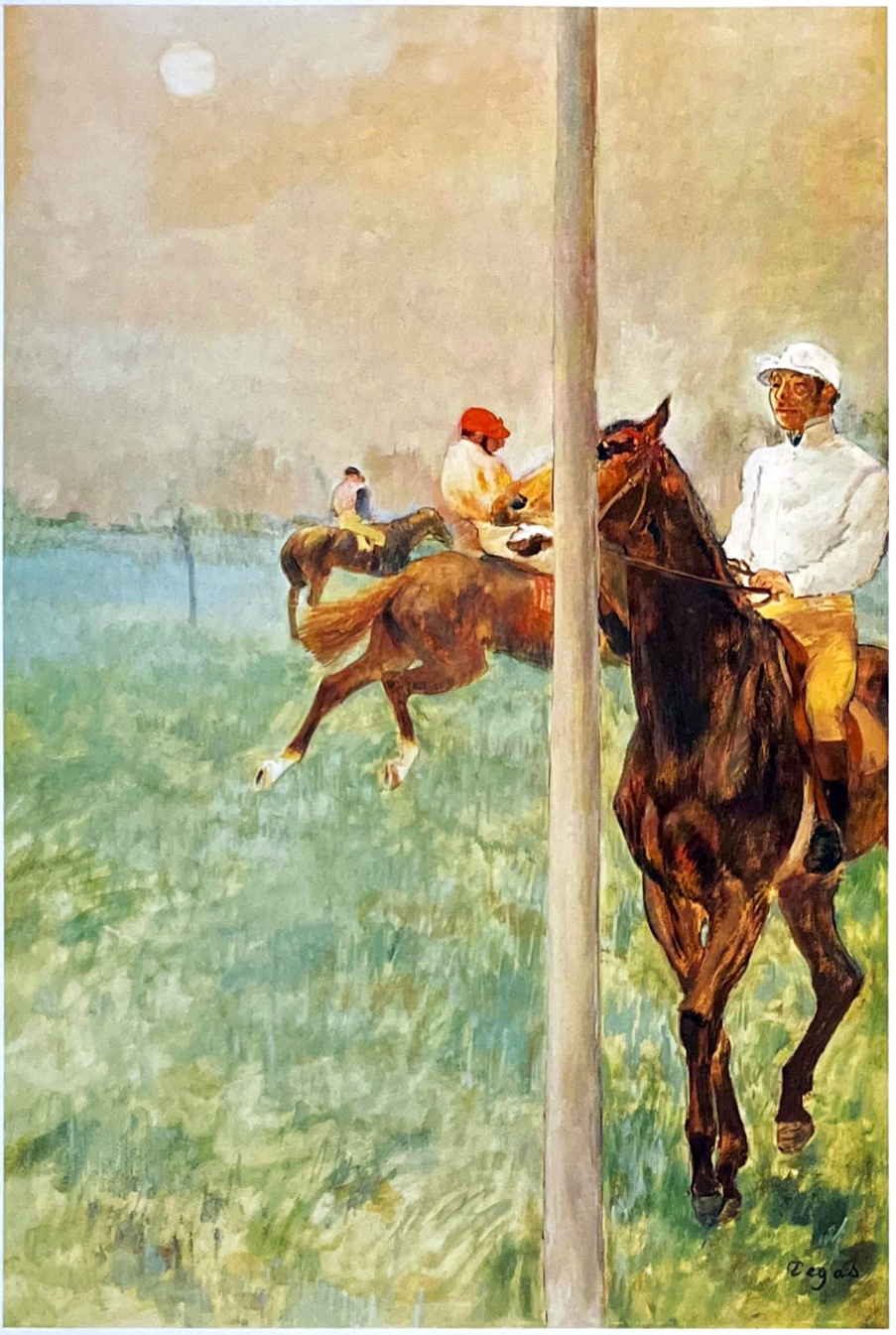
Eadweard Muybridge and Animal Locomotion

If adventurousness was a prerequisite to nineteenth-century landscape photographers, Eadweard Muybridge was predestined for success. Born Edward Muggeridge, in Kingston-on-Thames, in England, he emigrated to the United States when he was in his early twenties. In 1856, his last name changed to "Muygridge," he was established as a bookseller in San Francisco. Traveling by stage coach from San Francisco to New York in 1860, he was severely injured in a coach crash. He returned to England to recuperate and took up photography.

Back in California in 1867, he became well-known as a landscape photographer, producing over two thousand plates, including a series of extraordinary views of Yosemite Valley. His first photographs were sold under the pseudonym "Helios," or "Sun"; later he used his own name, now changed to "Eadweard Muybridge."

In 1872, Leland Stanford, the former governor of California, asked Muybridge to photograph his horse, Occident, while trotting. Stanford wanted to get the answer to a question that had bothered scientists and sportsmen for decades: Did a horse, when trotting or galloping, ever have all four feet off the ground? Stanford came down on the side of "unsupported transit" and sought proof of his theory in photography. Muybridge's earliest photographs were inconclusive, but by 1878 he had developed a system of photographing a running horse at rapid intervals so as to create a sequence of images. This he did by setting up, on the side of the track, a battery of cameras with electromagnetic shutters. These were attached to wires, which were laid across the track. As the feet of the running horse touched a wire, a shutter was activated and a snapshot taken. Muybridge was able to prove conclusively that, even though there are brief moments in the gallop when none of the horse's feet touch the ground, a horse never "flies" with all four legs outstretched. Thus he demonstrated that generations of artists had represented running horses in a way that was contrary to reality.

Having published his photographs of running horses in various American and European journals (see FIG. 16-37), in 1884 Muybridge went to work at the University of Pennsylvania to analyze, through photography, the motions of humans and animals. The results of his research, sponsored by the University, were published in an eleven-volume work with 20,000 photographs, called *Animal Locomotion* (London, 1887). The impact of Muybridge's research was enormous as his experiments laid the groundwork for the invention of "motion pictures," or film.



16-38 **Edgar Degas,** *Jockeys before the Start,* c.1878–80. Oil, essence, and touches of pastel on paper, 42 x 29″ (1.07 m x 73.7 cm). Barber Institute of Arts, University of Birmingham.

dreariness and uniformity. Caillebotte's painting shows the bird's-eye viewpoint, the random framing, and the deliberately unbalanced composition that we have encountered in Degas's painting, but his work is executed in a much more traditional manner. Indeed, the sharp focus of his painting matches that of the Naturalists, and, like them, Caillebotte may have used photographs in the preparation of his paintings.

Caillebotte came closest to the Naturalists in a group of paintings about work, of which *Floor Scrapers* (FIG. 16-40), of 1875, is perhaps the most striking. The painting, exhibited at the second Impressionist exhibition, in 1876, combines the bird's-eye view of Japanese prints with the verisimilitude of Naturalist painting. It reintroduces the subject of the male nude in painting, but in a strikingly updated form. Instead of the heroes of antiquity, here are the heroes of modern life—sinewy and strong—in stooped poses that would appear demeaning if they did not convey a sense of masculine strength and honest labor.

Caillebotte's renewed interest in the male nude, set in a modern context, has been linked to his presumed homosexuality. It must be noted, however, that it was part of a larger trend, not necessarily limited to homosexual artists, that was first introduced by Courbet in a painting of two wrestlers (Szépmüvészeti Museum, Budapest). Courbet's example was followed by, among others, Bazille, who in 1869 had painted a large painting of male bathers, *Summer Scene* (FIG. 16-41), in which

16-39 **Gustave Caillebotte,** *Paris Street, Rainy Weather,* 1877. Oil on canvas, 6'11" x 9' (2.12 x 2.76 m). The Art Institute of Chicago.

16-40 **Gustave Caillebotte,** *Floor Scrapers,* 1875. Oil on canvas, 39⅝ x 57⅛" (1 x 1.45 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

16-41 (above) **Frédéric Bazille,** *Summer Scene,* 1869. Oil on canvas, 63 7/16 x 63 7/16" (1.61 x 1.61 m). Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

16-42 **Gustave Caillebotte,** *Canoes,* 1877. Oil on canvas, 35 × 45" (88 cm × 1.17 m). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

16-43 **Berthe Morisot,** *The Cradle,* 1872. Oil on canvas, 20 x 16" (51 x 41 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

a theme traditionally associated with the female nude (see FIG. 17-17) was translated in both masculine and modern terms. In the 1880s and 1890s the male nude, adult and adolescent, became a common theme particularly in the works of Naturalist painters.

While Caillebotte's scenes of work, such as *Floor Scrapers*, relate closely to Naturalist painting, his scenes of leisure link him to Impressionism. An avid rower, he painted a series of paintings of canoeists, such as the one reproduced in FIG. 16-42. This oblique bird's-eye view of a river, with a number of men paddling downstream in their skiffs, differs from his street scenes and scenes of work in the loose, "Impressionist" treatment of the paint and the light coloring, quite different from the subdued, almost monochromatic coloring in his other paintings. These works seem closer to Monet than to Degas, even though neither artist could have painted this picture.

Women at the Impressionist Exhibitions

Women were not particularly well represented in the Impressionist exhibitions, but those who did participate equaled their male colleagues in the quality and quantity of the works they presented. This phenomenon paralleled the situation in the Salons, where, in the course of the Third Republic, a small but growing number of professional women artists exhibited both paintings and sculptures.

Before 1870, with some notable exceptions, such as Rosa Bonheur (see page 287), women who participated in the Salon had been amateurs. They worked in the "lower" genres (landscape, portrait, still life) and used "lesser" media and techniques, such as porcelain painting, watercolor, and pastel. From the 1870s onward an increasing number of women, ambitious to succeed in the arts on masculine terms, painted in oils or produced large-scale bronze and marble sculptures.

The new professionalism of female artists was aided by the increased availability of professional training. Although women were barred from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, because life classes for both sexes were considered taboo, a number of private schools emerged to offer training to women artists. Perhaps the best-known among them was the so-called Académie Julian, founded in 1868 by Rodolphe Julian, which accepted both male and female students. A particularly innovative aspect of Julian's *atelier* was that women were allowed to draw and paint from nude models, even working alongside male students.

Of the female artists who exhibited at the Impressionist exhibitions, Berthe Morisot and the American expatriate painter Mary Cassatt are best known today. Morisot began her career as an amateur. Together with her sister Edma, she was trained by a private drawing teacher. Her connection to the professional art world was facilitated by her close relationship to Manet, whose brother she married in 1874.

It is a credit to Morisot's independent spirit that, against Manet's advice and that of her drawing teacher (who told Morisot's mother that she was wrong to "associate with madmen"), she submitted two paintings to the first Impressionist exhibition, even though her works had been exhibited at the Salons of the late 1860s. She went on to show at almost all the subsequent Impressionist exhibitions.

Morisot's works, like those of Cassatt, focus on the public and private lives of women, partly by choice and partly by necessity. In spite of a certain degree of emancipation, the movements of bourgeois women in the 1870s and 1880s remained restricted, and much of the subject matter painted by their male colleagues would have been outside their normal visual experience. Morisot's *The Cradle* (FIG. 16-43) is by far her best-known work. It shows a young woman (perhaps her sister Edma) seated next to a cradle, contemplating the sleeping baby inside. Although several male artists, including Millet, had treated the theme of mothers and infants, they had generally depicted peasant women rather than bourgeois mothers. The reason for this was, no doubt, that the nursery in nineteenth-century middle-class homes was an exclusively female space that was rarely visited by men. Indeed, it has been argued that to find visual equivalents for Morisot's work, one should turn not to traditional painting but to images in fashion

magazines, which show women in nurseries modeling the latest "indoor" wear (FIG. 16-44).

The novelty of Morisot's subject matter is matched by that of her style. Like her male colleagues, Morisot seems to have felt that new subjects and ways of seeing demanded new and individual painterly approaches. She once wrote in her notebook: "What's needed is new, personal sensations; and where to learn those?" She developed a free, loose touch that became increasingly personal as she matured as an artist.

Unlike Morisot, Mary Cassatt received a formal training, first at the Philadelphia Academy of Art, then in the private *ateliers* of Gérôme, Couture, and others. She also traveled throughout Europe before settling down in Paris in 1874. Like Morisot, she sought out subject matter that was both modern and feminine, and felt this called for a

16-44 *House Dress and Little Boy's Suit.* Illustration in *Le Moniteur de la Mode,* June 1871. Wood engraving, 7⅝ x 6⅝" (19.5 x 17 cm). Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

16-45 **Mary Cassatt,** *Woman in a Loge,* 1879. Oil on canvas, 31⅝ x 23" (80.3 x 58.4 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art.

16-46 **Mary Cassatt,** *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair,* 1878. Oil on canvas, 35 x 51⅛" (89.5 cm x 1.3 m). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

new approach to painting. At the Salon of 1874 one of her works attracted the attention of Degas, who invited her to participate in the fourth Impressionist exhibition. Here she exhibited four works on a theme that would long preoccupy her, that of one or two women seated in a theater box. One of these paintings, *Woman in a Loge* (FIG. 16-45), shows a young woman at the opera before the performance, when the lights are still on. Behind her is a mirror-covered wall, in which we see the reflection of part of the curved balcony opposite her, dotted with spectators who are looking around the theater with their binoculars. The girl seems both excited and slightly uneasy, aware as she is of being on display. Dressed, perhaps for the first time, in a low-cut dress that is pulled down from the shoulder, she seems at once embarrassed about her nakedness and happy with the attention she attracts. Like Degas, Cassatt was interested in suggesting the effect of a casual glimpse. The cut-off arm and the unusual illumination, which brightens the side of the face while leaving eyes, nose, and mouth in shadow, resemble some of the effects seen in his work.

While Cassatt was fascinated with certain aspects of women's public life, like Morisot she was also interested in the depiction of women's private lives and in the related subject of the lives of children. Among her most striking paintings is *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* (FIG. 16-46), also exhibited at the fourth Impressionist exhibition. It shows a little girl alone in a large room filled with several overstuffed blue armchairs. Her skirt pulled up, legs wide spread, she reclines on one of them in a pose that expresses boredom and a rebellion against "good manners." This is a radically new image of childhood that evinces a degree of psychological insight not seen in earlier art. The perceptive insight into the child's mind is matched by a new way of representing the pictorial space. While the bird's-eye viewpoint suggests the way that we, adults, see the child, the device of cutting off the room near the bottom of the windows replicates the limited view that the child has of the room.

Impressionism and Modern Vision

Monet's little dabs of color, Degas's randomly framed compositions, Caillebotte's high viewpoint, and Cassatt's low ones all signal the Impressionists' interest in finding ways of representing reality, which matched the new kinds of viewing that had developed in the modern bourgeois world. In their attempts to find ways to represent the world as they saw it, rather than as they knew it, the Impressionists contravened traditional rules of perspective, shading, composition, and pictorial finish. In so doing, they called attention to the painterly aspects of their work, reminding the viewer that pictures are nothing but flat surfaces covered with lines and brushstrokes of different colors.

Impressionist paintings thus present a paradox: while offering a heightened illusion of reality, they also call attention to their artifice. Indeed, Impressionism occupies a pivotal position in nineteenth-century art, representing at once the culmination of a decades-long trend toward an ever more convincing realism and the beginning of a tendency toward abstraction.

17-10 **Camille Pissarro,** *Picking Apples at Eragny,* 1888. Oil on canvas, 23 x 28" (59 x 72.4 cm). Dallas Museum of Art.

The "Crisis" in Impressionism

The innovative works that were exhibited by Seurat, Signac, and Pissarro at the last Impressionist exhibition are often seen as symptomatic of what has been called a "crisis" in Impressionism. This expression seems to indicate that, some time during the mid-1880s, serious doubts arose in artists' minds about the validity of Impressionism and its essential goal of capturing reality as it presented itself to the human eye. Few artists or critics, however, would have used or even understood the term "crisis," because the

changes that took place in art at the time were more of an evolutionary nature. But change there was, not only in the works of these three artists but also, in different ways, in the works of established Impressionists such as Monet, Degas, and Renoir, and those of their younger followers.

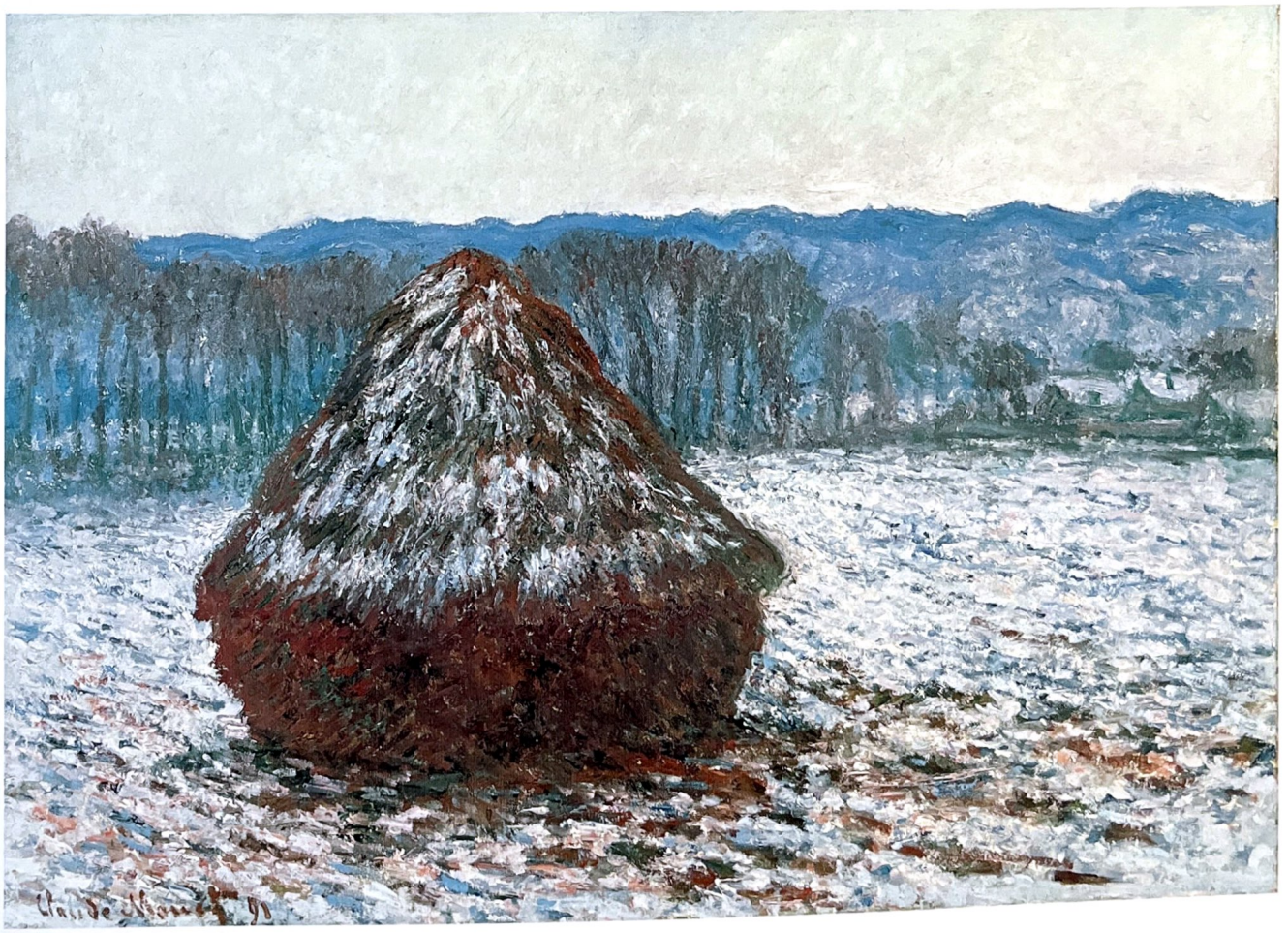
Monet and the Later Series Paintings

Monet's artistic approach, in the course of the 1880s, evolved from pictorial objectivity toward subjectivity. He had always been interested in painting the world as he saw it rather than as he knew it. Yet from the early 1880s onwards (see, for example, FIG. 16-28), he increasingly called attention to his personal vision of reality, presumably to suggest to the viewer that there was no knowable reality, that the appearance of reality depended both on exterior circumstances, such as light and atmosphere, and on the viewer's perception.

This point was made most emphatically in several series of paintings made in the 1890s, in which he represented the same subject—haystacks, the cathedral of Rouen, a row of poplars by a river—at different times of the day, in different seasons, and in different weather conditions. These series were different from the ones that he had made in the 1870s and 1880s (see page 394), in which he had frequently changed the viewpoint and the angle of vision. While in the earlier series the viewer is taken on a tour of the St-Lazare Station or the Normandy coast, in the later series he or she is asked to sit still and quietly to observe the dramatic changes wrought in a simple form by changing light and atmospheric effects.

The *Haystack* series (FIGS. 17-11 and 17-12) came first. The nearly thirty canvases were painted outside Monet's house in Giverny, a small village not far from Paris, where he had moved in 1883. Monet worked on the series for nearly two years, beginning some time in 1890. In May 1891 his dealer Durand-Ruel showed fifteen of the canvases in his gallery. It was an unprecedented event, not only because solo exhibitions were still uncommon at the time but also because of the simplicity and monotony of the subject. To a public used to the motley variety of the Salons and other contemporary exhibitions, this show must have appeared as an exercise in minimalism. Indeed, arranged as they were in Durand-Ruel's gallery, these paintings no longer functioned as individual pieces that each required attention. Instead, they had become a sort of decoration, enhancing the wall surface with their varied colors and textures. This increased importance of form and substance at the expense of content and meaning represented

17-11 **Claude Monet,** *Haystack,* 1890–91. Oil on canvas, 25⅞ x 36" (65.6 x 92 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago.



a radical redirection of pictorial art that paved the way for twentieth-century non-objective painting.

In 1890, however, things had not progressed that far. In Monet's painting the haystacks are still clearly recognizable for what they are. Haystacks, common signifiers of rural prosperity, had been frequent motifs in Barbizon painting, and Monet himself had painted them earlier in his career. In 1890 he may have selected them for their simple forms, which made them a suitable medium to depict the effects of sunshine, mist, rain, snow, dawn, and dusk. FIGS. 17-11 and 17-12 demonstrate that the *Haystack* paintings differ dramatically, in spite of their identical subject matter. Each painting depicts a single cone-shaped stack of hay in a field lined by trees, but the palette and brushwork are distinct. In one painting a haystack on a snowy field is painted with thick, heavy strokes in largely cool colors—blues, blue-greens, and whites—offset by reds in the lower part of the stack and the ground. In the other, a haystack painted in orange and violet is set against a barely defined background, composed of dense, short strokes of pink, orange, yellow, and violet. The painting's subtitle, *Sun in the Mist*, points to the remarkable effects that are visible in nature when light and atmosphere cooperate to transform the ordinary into the poetic. While both paintings were based on actual observation, the artist went beyond merely noting down his color sensations, as he had in earlier works. In these paintings he tried to intensify his sensations, condensing them into an ever smaller number of dominant colors. It also appears that Monet became interested in the aesthetic rather than the documentary aspect of his paintings. His formerly haphazard brushwork has been replaced by a much more orderly treatment of the paint surface, in which different surfaces (ground, sky, mountains, haystack) are marked by different paint textures. It is noteworthy that, from this time onward, Monet increasingly tended to finish his paintings inside the studio, taking more time to reach the desired coloristic and textural effects.

Monet's late series have sometimes been compared with musical compositions in which a theme is repeated several times in different variations. Just as a composer, in his variations, could change key, tempo, rhythm, and dynamics, so Monet altered colors, brushwork, and texture in his different versions of the haystack theme. The artist's interest in the analogy between painting and music may have been sparked by his friendship with the British-American painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler (see page 348), who was so fascinated with the parallels between the two art forms that he often gave his paintings musical titles.

Degas in the 1880s

While Monet's evolution in the 1880s and 1890s is marked by a changing pictorial approach, the work of Degas, during the later part of the 1880s, changed most visibly in its content. Without abandoning the ballet and racetrack

17-12 **Claude Monet,** *Haystack, Sun in the Mist,* 1891. Oil on canvas, 25⅝ x 39⅜" (65 cm x 1 m). Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

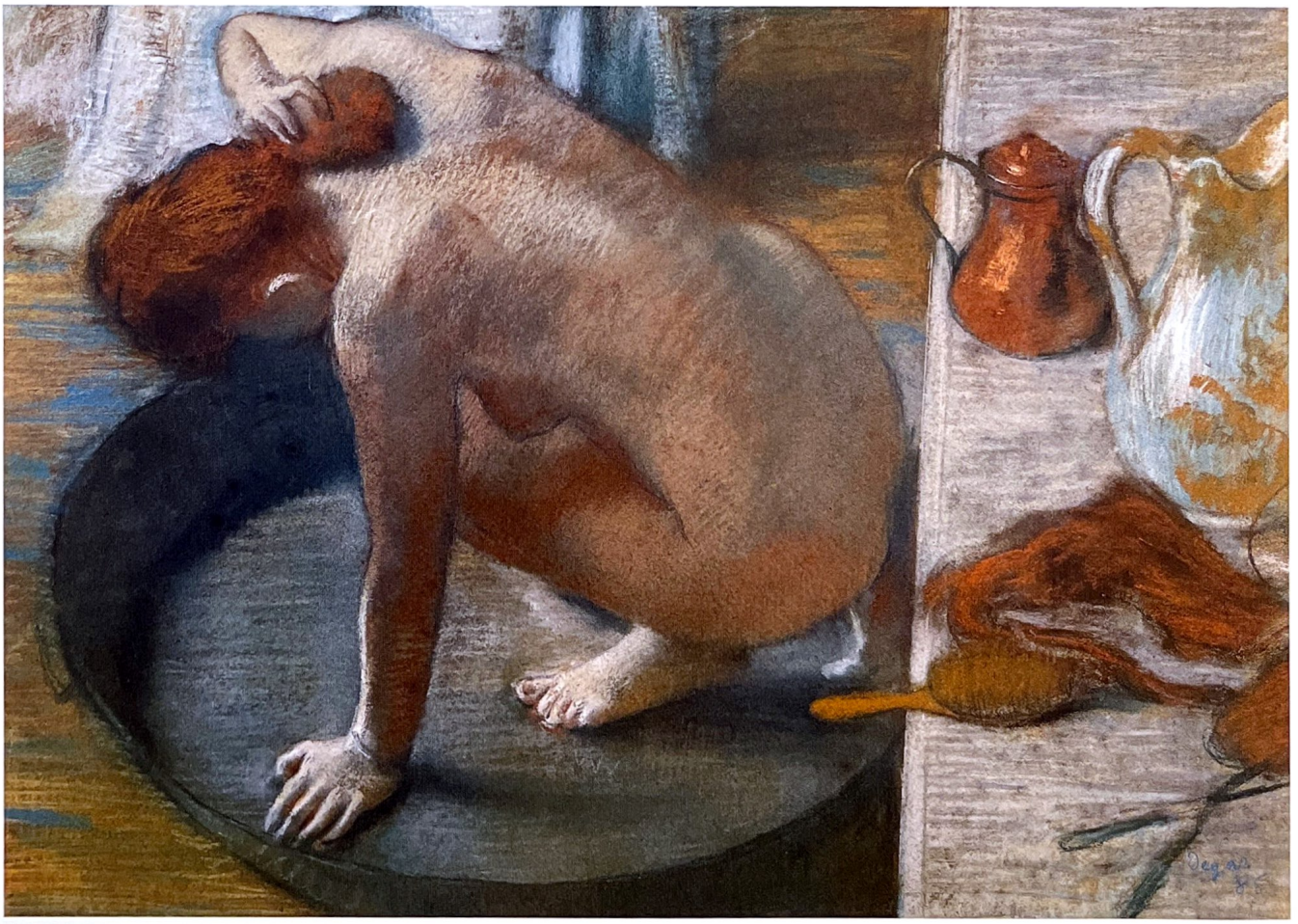
scenes that he had treated earlier, Degas became interested in the theme of women grooming themselves in the privacy of their bedrooms. This involved a shift in the presentation of his human subjects from the "theatrical" to the "absorptive." These two terms, coined by the art historian Michael Fried, help to distinguish between figure paintings in which the subject seems to be aware of the painter's (and, by extension, the spectator's) presence and those in which the subject is not. In "theatrical" paintings, figures look and act a certain way because they are conscious that they are being looked at. In "absorptive" paintings, figures are unaware of the observer, absorbed as they are in their private thoughts and actions.

Degas's pictures of ballerinas on stage exemplify theatricality, but his images of naked women are utterly absorptive. Looking at pictures such as *The Tub* (FIG. 17-13), exhibited at the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886, the viewer feels like a voyeur catching a forbidden glimpse through a keyhole. This pastel presents a woman crouching in a small tub and rubbing her neck with a sponge. On the counter next to her is a haphazard array of grooming tools. Nothing could be further from the elaborately posed "display" nudes of Ingres, Cabanel, or even Manet. This is truly the modern nude as Baudelaire had envisioned it when he wrote that naked women, in modern times, are seen only "in bed, . . . in the bath, or in the anatomy theater."

Pastel (see *Pastel*, page 402) was the medium of choice for Degas's *Toilettes*, as his pictures of women bathing were called in his day. As time went on, Degas used pastel in an ever more virtuoso manner, combining it with other media such as charcoal or tempera to reach rich, brilliant effects. Like Monet, and perhaps following the example of the Neo-Impressionists, he became increasingly interested in surface texture. In most of his late pastels the colors are applied in a carefully organized manner, often with a view to simulating the surface textures of the different objects and materials represented.

During this period Degas also turned to sculpture, not for the purpose of sales and exhibitions but as a private medium, for his own enjoyment. Indeed, only one of his sculptures was ever exhibited, a highly unusual work that became his most famous three-dimensional piece and remains one of the best-known and most loved nineteenth-century sculptures today. Shown at the Impressionist exhibition of 1881, Degas's *Little Dancer of Fourteen Years Old* was a wax statue of a child ballerina. She wore a tutu made of gauze and sports

17-13 **Edgar Degas,** *The Tub*, 1886. Pastel, 23⅝ x 32 1/16" (60 x 83 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



17-14 **Edgar Degas,** *Little Dancer of Fourteen Years Old,* 1881. Bronze, partially colored, cotton skirt, satin ribbon, wooden base, height 39" (99.1 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

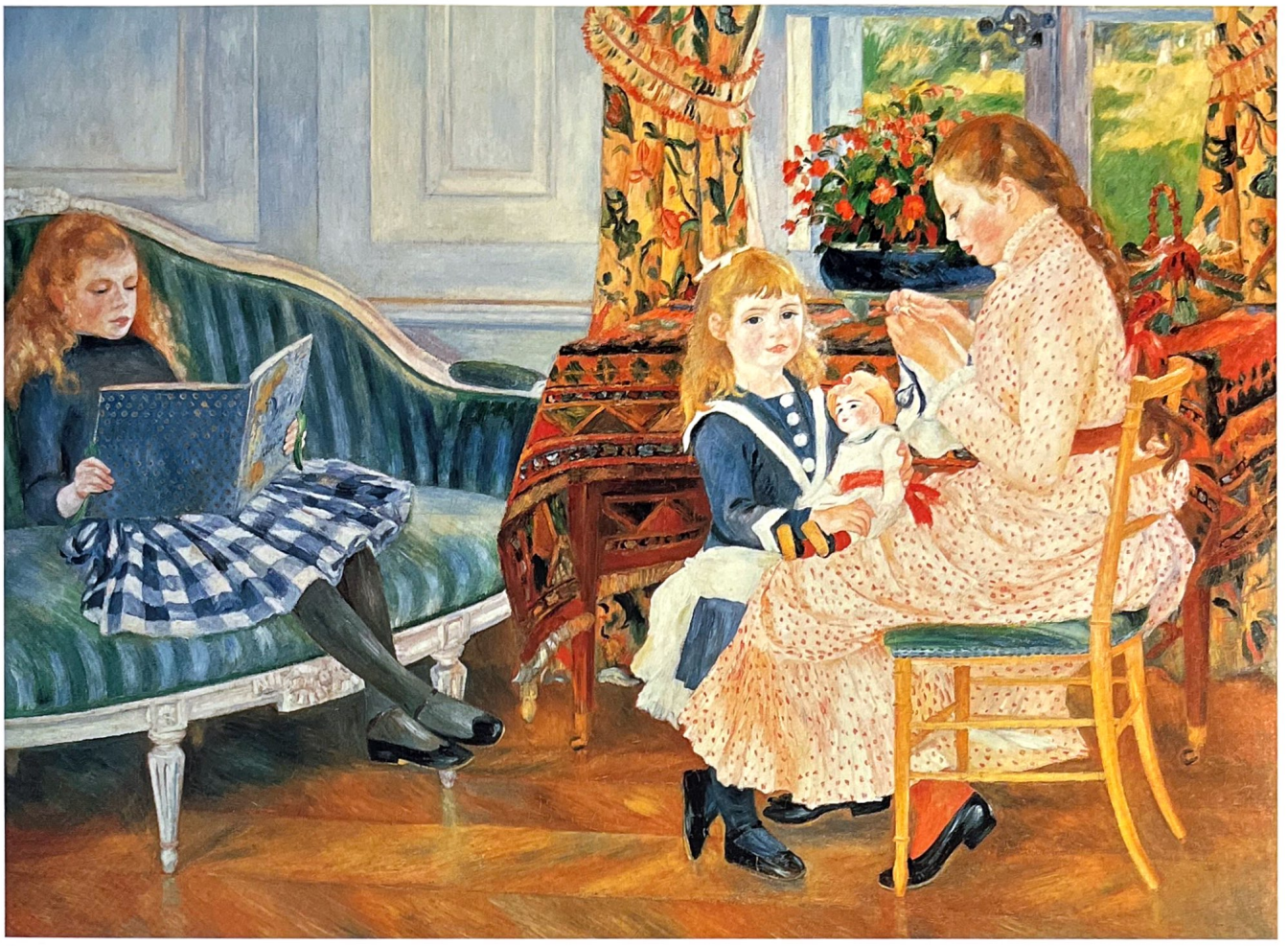
a wig of real hair, tied with a ribbon. The sculpture was exhibited in a glass case, much like the figures found in contemporary wax museums. Today the sculpture is better known through the twenty-eight bronze casts (FIG. 17-14) that were made of it in the twentieth century and which are distributed among museums across the world.

The sculpture raised something of an uproar, not only for the medium used by the artist but also for its "dreadful ugliness." One critic recommended that the work should be relegated to the Musée Dupuytren, a celebrated zoology collection that contained wax models of the heads of murderous criminals. The *Little Dancer* was perceived as a specimen of human degeneration, a much-feared biological trend that entailed a return to a lower stage in the evolutionary process traced by Charles Darwin. Degeneration, believed to manifest itself both in behavior and physical characteristics, was thought to occur in the lowest urban class, from which dancers and actresses were normally recruited. Believing that this class included a higher percentage of criminals and prostitutes than all others, scientists concluded that its children, girls like the one represented in *Little Dancer,* were destined to a life of depravity.

Even those who praised the work could not help seeing the *Little Dancer* as a human specimen. They applauded it for its "exact science," admiring the way Degas had captured the facial characteristic of the degenerate, such as a low forehead, which presumably indicated a return to an evolutionary state closer to the ape. According to the critic Joris Huysmans, the "terrifying reality" of the sculpture and its unusual materials made the work daringly modern. "The fact is that, at a stroke, M. Degas has upset all the traditions of sculpture in the same way that, already some time ago, he had rocked the very foundations of painting." Few critics saw the sculpture as we see it today—an image of a spirited teenager, proud of her lithe body and eager to show off the dance steps she has learned.

The *Little Dancer* aside, sculpture, for Degas, was primarily an experimental medium in which he explored relationships between form and space. Using wax and plasticene, he made

17-15 **Edgar Degas,** *Rearing Horse,* 1888–90. Bronze, height 12½" (30.8 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



17-16 **Pierre-Auguste Renoir,** *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont,* 1884. Oil on canvas, 50 x 68 3/16" (1.27 x 1.73 m). Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

hundreds of ballerinas, horses, and bathers, often reusing the materials to make new figures. At his death, some 150 pieces were found in his studio. Many of these were later cast in bronze and found their way into museums and private collections. *Rearing Horse* (FIG. 17-15) may serve as an example. Like Degas's paintings of horses (see FIGS. 16-36 and 16-38), it shows the artist's interest in exploring the way that horses move in real life. The work may be based on the artist's actual observation of a horse or on his study of the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge (see page 403). Clearly, Degas's horse is unlike the carefully orchestrated rearing or trotting horses we see in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sculpture (see FIGS. 5-11 and 9-1). Degas shows the complexity of the horse's movement as it simultaneously rears its front legs and turns its head, perhaps in a moment of fright.

Renoir in the 1880s

If any artist consciously experienced an artistic crisis in the 1880s, it was Renoir. Thanks to a business deal with Durand-Ruel in 1881, he was financially independent and, for the first time, able to travel abroad. A trip to Italy, where he was "seized by the fever to see the Raphaels," seems to have confirmed doubts in his mind as to the validity of all that he had accomplished up to that time. Many years later he told the dealer Ambroise Vollard (c. 1867–1939) that, by the early 1880s, he felt that he had "reached the end of Impressionism, and could neither paint nor draw." In despair, Renoir retraced his steps to his academic training in the studio of Charles Gleyre and began to study the works of Ingres, whom he saw as the greatest academic artist of the nineteenth century.

Renoir's works of the mid-1880s don't look as if they were painted by the same artist who had painted the *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette* (see FIG. 16-31). *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont* (FIG. 17-16), for example, shows a new emphasis on flowing, streamlined contours and a return to a smooth paint surface that are vastly different from the choppy brushwork of the 1870s. Even though we would never mistake the work for a painting by Ingres, in some ways it is more like that artist's paintings (see, for example, FIGS. 5-33 and 10-22) than Renoir's own earlier work.

Renoir's "Ingresque" period culminated in the *Bathers* (FIG.

17-17 **Pierre-Auguste Renoir,** *Bathers,* 1887. Oil on canvas, 46 x 67⅜" (1.18 x 1.71 m). Philadelphia Museum of Art.

17-17), of 1887, a large painting that not only recalls Ingres's painting style but also his subject matter. Indeed, *Bathers* would seem to be the consequence of what the literary critic Harold Bloom has called "anxiety of influence." Bloom's term refers to the feeling of awe an artist may feel in the presence of the work of an older, much-admired artist. Such a feeling can lead to creative impotence, yet it can also drive the artist to an attempt to emulate the older master. This is precisely what Renoir appears to have aimed at in *Bathers,* which he subtitled *Trial for Decorative Painting.*

Bathers is Renoir's attempt to create a modern, "improved" version of Ingres's nudes, an idealized, "decorative" work that lacks the older artist's anatomical distortions. Renoir felt strongly that art should be anchored in nature, the essence of which was, for him, irregularity and infinite variety. Rejecting what he called "false perfection," he aimed for an idealism that did not subject nature to rules of symmetry and geometric proportions. Thus, while his bathers show the flowing contours and large areas of smooth, soft flesh of Ingres's nudes, they differ from them in that they have spines and joints, dimples and skin folds. In addition, Renoir's bathers have varied bodily proportions, complexions, and hairstyles: they are individualized rather than generalized to conform to a single ideal of female beauty. What Renoir's painting does have in common with Ingres is an effect of timelessness and permanence. Indeed, Renoir's interest in creating such an effect was analogous to Seurat's, even though his method was quite different.

By the late 1880s Renoir had retreated from the linearism and stylization of the *Bathers. Gathering Flowers* (FIG. 17-18), of 1890, represents a return to looser brushwork and to contemporary subject matter. Yet the painting lacks the snapshot quality of earlier paintings such as *Ball at the Moulin de la Galette.* The poses of the two girls seem carefully studied rather than "snatched" from reality. Turned with their back to the viewer, they seem completely engrossed in the making of their wildflower bouquets. Their contemplative absorption is a far cry from the action and theatricality of Renoir's early paintings.