

IMPRESSIONISM

Impressionism is one of the most beloved styles of painting to have emerged in Western art. The term Impressionism comes from the title of Claude Monet's painting *Impression, Sunrise*, which was exhibited in 1874 at the first Impressionist exhibition. A critic picked up on the word and used it negatively to describe pictures in which the artist aimed to capture a visual impression rather than record the realistic details of a factual scene. Eventually, the word came to be associated with paintings of middle class life and recreation, as well as breaking with tradition.

One break with the past initiated by the Impressionists was to be recognized outside the official Salon exhibition structure that controlled the presentation of art to the public. Sidestepping the established system, they broke new ground by holding their own alternative, independent exhibitions, in 1874, 1875, 1877, 1879, 1880, 1881, 1882, and 1886.

The Impressionists also took advantage of technological advances in the manufacturing of paint. In 1840, ready-made oil paint was available for the first time in collapsible tubes allowing artists to paint en plein air (in open air) and concentrate on capturing the changing effects of natural light and atmospheric conditions.

Technically, they studied the way light affects a subject, whether a portrait, a landscape, or a still



life. Rather than use the polished, porcelain-like finish of many traditional painters, the Impressionists favored an overall pattern of broken brushstrokes and unmixed color. When viewed from a distance, these separate strokes and colors merge and energize the surface of the canvas to give the viewer an impression of the image. This technique gave each painting a sense of life and movement.

Monet became the unofficial leader of the Impressionism, developing the themes of color and broken brushstroke into the early Twentieth Century until they began to border on abstraction. Spending his later years at his home in Giverny, out living most of his Impressionist companions, Monet would create the world famous Water lily paintings based on his own water garden.

Image: Claude Monet, *Nymphéas (Water Lilies)*, 1903.
On loan from the Musée Marmottan, Paris.