

# ART HUMANITIES: PRIMARY SOURCE READER

## Section 9: Monet

### Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 36

#### *Edmond Duranty*

EXCERPT FROM **THE NEW PAINTING, 1876**

Here they are then, these artists who exhibit in the Durand-Ruel Gallery, linked to those who precede or accompany them. They are no longer isolated. One must not consider them as thrown upon their own devices.

I have, therefore, less in view the present exhibition than the *cause* and the *idea*.

What do they produce? What does the movement produce? And, consequently, what do these artists produce, wrestling with tradition body-to-body, admiring it and wanting to destroy it at the same time, realizing that it is great and powerful, and for that very reason attacking it?

Why then should we be interested in them? Why do we then forgive them for too often producing (though not out of laziness) nothing but sketches and abbreviated summaries?

It is really because it is a great surprise in a period like this one, when it seemed that there was no longer anything left to discover, when preceding periods had been analyzed so much, when we seem stifled beneath the mass and weight of the creations of past centuries, to see new ideas suddenly spring up, a special creation. A young branch has developed on the old tree trunk of art. Will it cover itself with leaves, flowers, and fruits? Will it extend its shade over future generations? I hope so.

What, then, have they produced?

A color scheme, a kind of drawing, and a series of original views.

Among their number, some limit themselves to transforming tradition and attempt to translate the modern world without turning too far from the old and magnificent formulas which served to express preceding worlds, while others sweepingly discard the techniques of the past.

As far as method of coloring is concerned, they have made a real discovery, whose origin cannot be found elsewhere-neither with the Dutch, nor in the pale tones of fresco painting, nor in the light tonalities of the eighteenth century. They are not merely concerned with that fine, flexible play of colors which results from the observation of the most delicate value in tones which contrast with or penetrate one another. Their discovery actually consists in having recognized that full light de-colors tones, that the sun reflected by objects tends (because of its brightness) to bring them back to that luminous unity which melts its seven prismatic rays into a single colorless radiance: light.

Proceeding from intuition to intuition, they have little by little succeeded in breaking down sunlight into its rays, its elements and to reconstitute its unity by means of the general harmony of spectrum colors which they spread on their canvases. From the point of view of sensitivity of the eye, of subtle penetration of the art of color, it is a completely extraordinary result. The most learned physicist could find nothing to criticize in their analyses of light ....

The romantic artist, in his studies of light, was only familiar with the orange colored strip of the sun setting beneath dark hills, or the white impasto, tinged with either chrome yellow or rose lake, which he threw over the bituminous opacities of his forest floors. No light without bitumen, without ivory black, without Prussian blue, without contrasts which, it is said, make the tone appear warmer, more heightened. He believed that light added color and animation to the tone and he was persuaded that it [light] only existed on condition that it was surrounded by shadows. The basement with a ray of light coming through a narrow air hole-such was the governing idea of the romantic artist. Even today, in every country, the landscape is treated like the depths of a fireplace or the interior of the back of a shop.

And yet everyone has gone through some thirty leagues of countryside in the summer and has been able to see how hillocks, meadow, and field vanished, so to speak, in a single light-filled reflection which they receive from the sky and give back to it; for this is the law which engenders light in nature-aside from the particular blue, green, or composite ray which each substance absorbs; and over and above this ray, it [light] reflects both the ensemble of all the rays and the color of the vault which covers the earth. Now indeed, for the first time, painters have understood and reproduced, or tried to reproduce, these phenomena. In some of their canvases we can feel like light and the heat vibrate and palpitate. We feel an intoxication of light, which, for painters educated outside of and in opposition to nature, is a thing without merit, without importance, much too bright, too clear, too crude, and

too explicit ....

And the aim of drawing, in these modern attempts, is precisely that of becoming so intimately acquainted with nature and of embracing it so strongly that it [drawing] will become unexceptionable in all its relationships of form and familiar with the inexhaustible diversity of character. Farewell to the human body treated like a vase with a decorative, swinging curve; farewell to the uniform monotony of the framework, the flayed figure jutting out beneath the nude; what we need is the particular note of the modern individual, in his clothing, in the midst of his social habits, at home or in the street ....

By means of a back, we want a temperament, an age, a social condition to be revealed; through a pair of hands, we should be able to express a magistrate or a tradesman; by a gesture, a whole series of feelings. A physiognomy will tell us that this fellow is certainly an orderly, dry, meticulous man, whereas that one is carelessness and disorderliness itself. An attitude will tell us that this person is going to a business meeting, whereas that one is returning from a love tryst. *A man opens a door, he enters; that is enough: we see that he has lost his daughter.* Hands that are kept in pockets can be eloquent. The pencil will be steeped in the marrow of life. We will no longer see mere outlines measured with a compass, but animated, expressive forms, logically deduced from one another ....

The idea, the first idea, was to take away the partition separating the studio from everyday life .... It was necessary to make the painter leave his sky-lighted cell, his cloister where he was in contact with the sky alone, and to bring him out among men, into the world ....

For the observer, there is a whole logic of color-method and drawing which proceeds from a viewpoint, according to whether it was chosen at a certain hour, in a certain season, in a certain place. This viewpoint cannot be expressed, this logic cannot be captured by using Venetian fabrics against Flemish backgrounds ....

If one imagines . . . that at a given moment one could take a colored photograph of an interior, one would have a perfect accord, a truthful and typical expression, everything participating in the same feeling. If one waited until a cloud came to veil the daylight and immediately took a new picture, one would obtain a result similar to the first. But if one now took a portion of the details of the first photograph and joined them to a portion of the details of the second to make a painting, then homogeneity, accord, truthfulness, the impression-all would disappear, replaced by a false, inexpressive note. This is, however, what is done every day by painters who do not deign to observe and instead use extracts from ready-made painting ....

Views of people and things have a thousand ways of being unexpected in reality. Our point of view is not always in the center of a room with two lateral walls receding toward that of the rear; it does not always gather together the lines and angles of cornices with a mathematical regularity and symmetry. Nor is it always free to suppress the great swellings of the ground and of the floor in the foreground; it [one's viewpoint] is sometimes very high, sometimes very low, missing the ceiling, getting at objects from their undersides, unexpectedly cutting off the furniture ....

From within, we communicate with the outside through a window; and the window is the frame that ceaselessly accompanies us .... The window frame, depending upon whether we are near or far, seated or standing, cuts off the external view in the most unexpected, most changeable way, obtaining for us that eternal variety and unexpectedness which is one of the great delights of reality.

If one now considers the person, whether in a room or in the street, he is not always to be found situated on a straight line at an equal distance from two parallel objects; he is more confined on one side than on the other by space. In short, he is never in the center of the canvas, in the center of the setting. He is not always seen as a whole: sometimes he appears cut off at mid-leg, half-length, or longitudinally. At other times, the eye takes him in from close-up, at full height, and throws all the rest of a crowd in the street or groups gathered in a public place back into the small scale of the distance. A detailed description of all these viewpoints would go on infinitely, as would a description of all the settings: the railway, the linen-drafter's shop, the scaffoldings of construction, the lines of gas lights, the boulevard benches with the newspaper stands, the omnibus and the carriage, the café with its billiard tables, the restaurant with its tablecloths and place settings.

They [the Impressionists] have tried to render the walk, the movement, the tremor, the intermingling of passersby, just as they have tried to render the trembling of leaves, the shivering of water, and the vibration of air inundated with light, and just as, in the case of the rainbow colorings of the solar rays, they have been able to capture the soft ambiance of a grey day . . . .

However, when I see these exhibitions, these attempts, I become a bit melancholy in my turn and say to myself: these artists, who are almost all my friends, whom I have seen, with pleasure, take off on an unknown path, who answered in part the demands of those art programs we set forth in our youth where are they going? Will they increase their endowment and keep it?

Will these artists be the primitives of a great movement of artistic renewal and will their successors, if they are relieved of the first difficulties of sowing and manage to reap abundantly, have the piety toward their precursors that the sixteenth-century Italians had for the *quattrocentists*? . . .

And now, I wish a good wind to the fleet, so that it may be carried to the Islands of the Blessed. I urge the

pilots to be careful, resolute, and patient. The navigation is dangerous, and they should have set sail in larger and sturdier boats; several vessels are quite small and narrow, good only for coastline painting. Let us remember that, on the contrary, it is a question of ocean bound painting!

### ***Théodore Duret***

#### EXCERPT FROM **THE IMPRESSIONIST PAINTERS, 1878**

The Impressionists did not create themselves all alone; they did not grow like mushrooms. They are a product of a regular evolution of the modern French school. *Natura non fecit saltum* no more in painting than in anything else. The Impressionists descend from the naturalistic painters; their fathers are Corot, Courbet, and Manet. It is to these three masters that the art of painting owes the simplest methods of construction and that impulsive brushwork proceeding by means of large strokes and masses, which alone defies time. It is to them that we owe light-colored painting, finally freed from litharge, from bitumen, from chocolate, from tobacco juice, from burnt fat and bread crumbs. It is to them that we owe the out-of-doors study, the sensation not merely of colors, but of the slightest nuances of colors, the tones, and still further, the search for the connection between the condition of the atmosphere which illuminates the painting and the general tonality of the objects which are painted in it. To that which the Impressionists received from their predecessors was added the influence of Japanese art.

If you stroll along the banks of the Seine, at Asnières for example, you can take in with a single glance the red roof and the dazzlingly white wall of a cottage, the tender green of a poplar, the yellow of the road, the blue of the river. At noon, in the summer, every color will seem harsh to you, intense, without possible loss of saturation or shrouding in a general half-tone. Well, this may seem odd, but it is true nevertheless; we had to wait until the arrival of Japanese albums before anyone dared to sit down on the bank of a river to juxtapose on canvas a boldly red roof, a white wall, a green poplar, a yellow road, and blue water. Before Japan it was impossible; the painter always lied. Nature with its frank colors was in plain sight yet no one ever saw anything on canvas but attenuated colors, drowning in a general half-tone.

As soon as people looked at Japanese pictures, where the most glaring, piercing colors were placed side by side, they finally understood that there were new methods for reproducing certain effects of nature which had been neglected or considered impossible to render until then, and which it might be good to try. For these Japanese pictures, which so many people at first took for a mere gaudy mixture of colors, are strikingly faithful. Ask those who have visited Japan. I find myself continually rediscovering on a fan or in an album the precise sensation of the scenes and landscape I saw in Japan. I look at a Japanese album and say: yes, yes, that is exactly how Japan looked to me .... Japanese art conveys the specific appearances of nature by means of bold, new methods of coloring. It cannot fail to strike inquiring artists, and thus [it] strongly influenced the Impressionists.

After the Impressionists had taken from their immediate predecessors in the French school their forthright manner of painting out-of-doors from the first impression with vigorous brushwork, and had grasped the bold, new methods of Japanese coloring, they set off from these acquisitions to develop their own originality and to abandon themselves to their personal sensations.

The Impressionist sits on the banks of a river; depending on the condition of the sky, the angle of vision, the hour of the day, the calm or agitation of the atmosphere, the water takes on a complete range of tones; without hesitating, he paints on his canvas water which has all these tones. When the sky is overcast, the weather rainy, he paints glaucous, heavy, opaque water. When the sky is clear, the sun bright, he paints sparkling, silvery, brilliant blue water. When there is wind, he paints the reflections produced by the ripples; when the sun sets and darts its rays into the water, the Impressionist, in order to fasten down these effects, plasters his canvas with yellow and red. At this point, the public begins to laugh.

When winter comes, the Impressionist paints snow. He sees that the shadows on the snow are blue in the sunlight; unhesitatingly, he paints blue shadows. Now the public laughs outright. If certain clayey soils of the countryside have a lilac tinge, the Impressionist paints lilac landscapes. At this point, the public begins to get indignant.

Under the summer sun, with reflections of green foliage, skin and clothing take on a violet tint. The Impressionist paints people in violet woods. Then the public lets loose violently the critics shake their fists, call the painter a "communist" and a rascal. The poor Impressionist vainly asserts his complete honesty, declares that he only reproduces what he sees, that he remains faithful to nature; the public and the critics condemn him. They don't bother to find out whether or not what they discover on the canvas corresponds to what the painter has actually observed in nature. Only one thing matters to them: what the Impressionists put on their canvases does not correspond to what is on the canvases of previous painters. If it is different, then it is bad.

### Louis Leroy

Louis Leroy was a French painter and critic who exhibited his paintings at the Salon between 1835 and 1861. These were mainly academic landscapes depicting the Fontainebleau forest outside Paris, and they stood in strong contrast to the contemporary painting of Manet, Cezanne, and Monet, whose work Leroy disdained. He is primarily known, however, for his 1874 article in the satirical magazine, *Le Chivari*, where he presents his arguments against the new mode of painting through the vehicle of a spirited dialogue between the author and the agitated Mr. Joseph Vincent as they survey the first exhibition of Impressionists. The two men discuss Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* and *Le Boulevard des Capucines* in detail, consequently revealing not only current negative opinions regarding such work, but also its innovative features. His frequent play on the term "impression" in the article has led to his association with giving movement its name, though others used it at this time as well. (Introduction by Christine Sciacca)

### "EXHIBITION OF THE IMPRESSIONISTS," 1874

#### A REVIEW FROM LE CHARIVARI

Oh, it was indeed a strenuous day . . . when I ventured into the first exhibition on the boulevard des Capucines in the company of M. Joseph Vincent, landscape painter, pupil of [the academic master] Bertin, recipient of medals and decorations under several governments! The rash man had come there without suspecting anything; he thought that he would see the kind of painting one sees everywhere, good and bad, rather bad than good, but not hostile to good artistic manners, devotion to form, and respect for the masters. Oh, form! Oh, the masters! We don't want them any more, my poor fellow! We've changed all that.

Upon entering the first room, Joseph Vincent received an initial shock in front of the *Dancer* by M. Renoir.

"What a pity," he said to me, "that the painter, who has a certain understanding of color, doesn't draw better; his dancer's legs are as cottony as the gauze of her skirts."

"I find you hard on him," I replied. "On the contrary, the drawing is very tight."

Bertin's pupil, believing that I was being ironical, contented himself with shrugging his shoulders, not taking the trouble to answer. Then, very quietly, with my most naive air, I led him before the *Ploughed Field* of M. Pissarro. At the sight of this astounding landscape, the good man thought that the lenses of his spectacles were dirty. He wiped them carefully and replaced them on his nose.

"By Michalon!" he cried. "What on earth is that?"

"You see . . . a hoarfrost on deeply ploughed furrows."

"Those furrows? That frost? But they are palette-scrapings placed uniformly on a dirty canvas. It has neither head nor tail, top nor bottom, front nor back."

"Perhaps . . . but the impression is there."

"Well, it's a funny impression! Oh . . . and this?"

"*An Orchard* by M. Sisley. I'd like to point out the small tree on the right; it's gay, but the impression. . ."

"Leave me alone, now, with your impression . . . it's neither here nor there. But here we have a *View of Melun* by M. Rouart, in which there's something to the water. The shadow in the foreground, for instance, is really peculiar."

"It's the vibration of tone which astonishes you."

"Call it sloppiness of tone and I'd understand you better -- Oh, Corot, Corot, what crimes are committed in your name! It was you who brought into fashion this messy composition, these thin washes, these mudsplashes in front of which the art lover has been rebelling for thirty years and which he has accepted only because constrained and forced to it by your tranquil stubbornness. Once again, a drop of water has worn away the stone!"

The poor man rambled on this way quite peacefully, and nothing led me to anticipate the unfortunate accident which was to be the result of his visit to this hair-raising exhibition. He even sustained, without major injury, viewing the *Fishing Boats Leaving the Harbor* by M. Claude Monet, perhaps because I tore him away from dangerous contemplation of this work before the small, noxious figures in the foreground could produce their effect.

Unfortunately, I was imprudent enough to leave him too long in front of the *Boulevard des Capucines*, by the same painter.

"Ah-ha!" he sneered in Mephistophelian manner. "Is that brilliant enough, now! There's impression, or I don't know what it means. Only be so good as to tell me what those innumerable black tongue-lickings in the

lower part of the picture represent?"

"Why, those are people walking along," I replied.

"Then do I look like that when I'm walking along the boulevard des Capucines? Blood and thunder! So you're making fun of me at last?"

"I assure you, M. Vincent. . . ."

"But those spots were obtained by the same method as that used to imitate marble: a bit here, a bit there, slapdash, any old way. It's unheard of, appalling! I'll get a stroke from it, for sure."

I attempted to calm him by showing him the *St. Denis Canal* by M. Lépine and the *Butte Montmartre* by M. Ottin, both quite delicate in tone; but fate was strongest of all: the *Cabbages* of M. Pissarro stopped him as he was passing by and from red he became scarlet.

"Those are cabbages," I told him in a gently persuasive voice.

"Oh, the poor wretches, aren't they caricatured! I swear not to eat any more as long as I live!"

"Yet it's not their fault if the painter . . ."

"Be quiet, or I'll do something terrible."

Suddenly he gave a loud cry upon catching sight of the *Maison du pendu* by M. Paul Cézanne. The stupendous impasto of this little jewel accomplished the work begun by the *Boulevard des Capucines*; père Vincent became delirious.

At first his madness was fairly mild. Taking the point of view of the impressionists, he let himself go along their lines: "Boudin has some talent,"

he remarked to me before a beach scene by that artist; "but why does he fiddle so with his marines?"

"Oh, you consider his painting too finished?"

"Unquestionably. Now take Mlle. Morisot! That young lady is not interested in reproducing trifling details. When she has a hand to paint she makes exactly as many brushstrokes lengthwise as there are fingers and the business is done. Stupid people who are finicky about the drawing of a hand don't understand a thing about impressionism, and great Manet would chase them out of his republic."

"Then M. Renoir is following the proper path; there is nothing superfluous in his *Harvesters*. I might almost say that his figures. . . ."

". . . are even too finished."

"Oh, M. Vincent! But do look at those three strips of color, which are supposed to represent a man in the midst of the wheat!"

"There are two too many; one would be enough."

I glanced at Bertin's pupil; his countenance was turning a deep red. A catastrophe seemed to me imminent, and it was reserved to M. Monet to contribute the last straw.

"Ah, there he is, there he is!" he cried, in front of No. 98. "I recognize him, papa Vincent's favorite! What does that canvas depict? Look at the catalogue."

"*Impression, Sunrise*."

"*Impression* -- I was certain of it. I was just telling myself that, since I was impressed, there had to be some impression in it . . . and what freedom, what ease of workmanship! Wallpaper in its embryonic state is more finished than that seascape."

In vain I sought to revive his expiring reason . . . but the horrible fascinated him. *The Laundress*, so badly laundered, of M. Degas drove him to cries of admiration. Sisley himself appeared to him affected and precious. To indulge his insanity and out of fear of irritating him, I looked for what was tolerable among the impressionist pictures, and I acknowledged without too much difficulty that the bread, grapes, and chair of *Breakfast*, by M. Monet, were good bits of painting. But he rejected these concessions.

"No, no!" he cried. "Monet is weakening there. He is sacrificing to the false gods of Meissonier. Too finished, too finished! Talk to me of the *Modern Olympia*! That's something well done."

Alas, go and look at it! A woman folded in two from whom a Negro girl is removing the last veil in order to offer her in all her ugliness to the charmed gaze of a brown puppet. Do you remember the *Olympia* of M. Manet? Well, that was a masterpiece of drawing, accuracy, finish, compared with the one by M. Cézanne.

Finally, the pitcher ran over. The classic skull of père Vincent, assailed from too many sides, went completely to pieces. He paused before the municipal guard who watches over all these treasures and, taking him to be a portrait, began for my benefit a very emphatic criticism.

"Is he ugly enough?" he remarked, shrugging his shoulders. "From the front, he has two eyes . . . and a nose . . . and a mouth! Impressionists wouldn't have thus sacrificed to detail. With what the painter has expended in the way of useless things, Monet would have done twenty municipal guards!"

"Keep moving, will you!" said the "portrait."

"You hear him-he even talks! The poor fool who daubed at him must have spent a lot of time at it!"

And in order to give the appropriate seriousness to his theory of aesthetics, père Vincent began to dance the scalp dance in front of the bewildered guard, crying in a strangled voice: "Hi-ho! I am impression on the

march, the avenging palette knife, the *Boulevard des Capucines* of Monet, the *Maison du pendu* and the *Modern Olympia* of Cézanne. Hi-ho! Hi-ho!"

"Exhibition of the Impressionists" by Louis Leroy is reprinted from *The History of Impressionism* by John Rewald. Copyright ©1973 The Museum of Modern Art.

### Jules LaForgue

The French poet and critic, Jules LaForgue was a Reader of French at the Prussian court from 1881 to 1886, during which time he reviewed German art exhibitions for the *Gazette des beaux-arts*. He became interested in Impressionism in 1881 and subsequently devoted his attention to analyzing and defending the new movement. Even more significantly, he sought to devise a theory that would link Impressionism with current studies in optics and the psychology of perception. In this text he sets up an opposition between the traditional elements of painting, such as line, theoretic perspective, and studio lighting, all of which he sees as artifice, and the Impressionist use of the *plein-air* technique, and employment of the vibration of color to create form and perspective, which he states engages the "natural eye." He also describes the Impressionist practice of painting during a brief span of time, as Monet did in his series of paintings depicting Rouen Cathedral and haystacks in a field at different times of day and during different seasons. LaForgue was notable among critics of the time for his support of originality, and his insistence on engagement with art primarily as a visual experience. (Introduction by Christine Sciacca)

### "IMPRESSIONISM," 1883

*Physiological Origin of Impressionism: The Prejudice of Traditional Line.* It is clear that if pictorial work springs from the brain, the soul, it does so only by means of the eye, the eye being basically similar to the ear in music; the Impressionist is therefore a modernist painter endowed with an uncommon sensibility of the eye. He is one who, forgetting the pictures amassed through centuries in museums, forgetting his optical art school training—line, perspective, color-by dint of living and seeing frankly and primitively in the bright open air, that is, outside his poorly lighted studio, whether the city street, the country, or, the interiors of houses, has succeeded in remaking for himself a natural eye, and in seeing naturally and painting as simply as he sees. Let me explain.

Leaving aside the two artistic illusions, the two criteria on which aestheticians have foolishly insisted — *Absolute Beauty and Absolute Human Taste* one can point to three supreme illusions by which technicians of painting have always lived: line, perspective, studio lighting. To these three things, which have become second nature to the painter, correspond the three steps of the Impressionist formula: form obtained not by line but solely by vibration and contrast of color; theoretic perspective replaced by the natural perspective of color vibration and contrast; studio lighting—that is, a painting, whether representing a city street, the country, or a lighted drawing room, painted in the even light of the painter's studio, and worked on at any hour—this replaced by *plein-air*, open air—that is, by the painting done in front of its subject, however impractical, and in the shortest possible time, considering how quickly the light changes. Let us look in detail at these three points, these three dead language procedures, and see them replaced by Life itself.

Line is an old deep-rooted prejudice whose origin must be sought in the first experiments of human sensation. The primitive eye, knowing only white light with its indecomposable shadows, and so unaided by distinguishing coloration, availed itself of tactile experiment. Then, through continual association and interdependence, and the transference of acquired characteristics between the tactile and visual faculties, the sense of form moved from the fingers to the eye.

Fixed form does not originate with the eye: the eye, in its progressive refinement, has drawn from it the useful sense of sharp contours, which is the basis of the childish illusion of the translation of living non-dimensional reality by line and perspective.

Essentially the eye should know only luminous vibration, just as the acoustic nerve knows only sonorous vibration. The eye, after having begun by appropriating, refining, and systematizing the tactile faculties, has lived, developed, and maintained itself in this state of illusion by centuries of line drawings; and hence its evolution as the organ of luminous vibration has been extremely retarded in relation to that of the ear, and in respect to color, it is still a rudimentary intelligence. And so while the ear in general easily analyzes harmonics like an auditory prism, the eye sees light only roughly and synthetically and has only vague powers of decomposing it in the presence of nature, despite the three fibrils described by Young, which constitute the facets of the prisms. Then a natural eye—or a refined eye, for this organ, before moving ahead, must first become primitive again by ridding itself of tactile illusions—a natural eye forgets tactile illusions and their convenient dead language of line, and acts only in its faculty of prismatic sensibility. It reaches a point where it can see reality in the living atmosphere of forms, decomposed, refracted, reflected by beings and things, in incessant variation. Such is this first characteristic of the Impressionist eye.

*The Academic Eye and the Impressionist Eye: Polyphony of Color.* In a landscape flooded with light, in

which beings are outlined as if in colored grisaille, where the academic painter sees nothing but a broad expanse of whiteness, the Impressionist sees light as bathing everything not with a dead whiteness but rather with a thousand vibrant struggling colors of rich prismatic decomposition. Where the one sees only the external outline of objects, the other sees the real living lines built not in geometric forms but in a thousand irregular strokes, which, at a distance, establish life. Where one sees things placed in their regular respective planes according to a skeleton reducible to pure theoretic design, the other sees perspective established by a thousand trivial touches of tone and brush, by the varieties of atmospheric states induced by moving planes.

The Impressionist eye is, in short, the most advanced eye in human evolution, the one which until now has grasped and rendered the most complicated combinations of nuances known.

The Impressionist sees and renders nature as it is—that is, wholly in the vibration of color. No line, light, relief, perspective, or chiaroscuro, none of those childish classifications: all these are in reality converted into the vibration of color and must be obtained on canvas solely by the vibration of color.

In the little exhibition at the Gurlitt Gallery, the formula is visible especially in the work of Monet and Pissarro . . . where everything is obtained by a thousand little dancing strokes in every direction like straws of color—all in vital competition for the whole impression. No longer an isolated melody, the whole thing is a symphony which is living and changing like the "forest voices" of Wagner, all struggling to become the great voice of the forest—like the Unconscious, the law of the world, which is the great melodic voice resulting from the symphony of the consciousness of races and individuals. Such is the principle of the *plein-air* Impressionist school. And the eye of the master will be the one capable of distinguishing and recording the most sensitive gradations and decompositions on a simple flat canvas. This principle has been applied not systematically but with genius by certain of our poets and novelists.

*False Training of the Eyes.* Now everyone knows that we do not see the colors of the palette in themselves but rather according to the illusions which the paintings of the past have developed in us, and above all we see them in the light which the palette itself gives off. (Compare the intensity of Turner's most dazzling sun with the flame of the weakest candle.) What one might call an innate harmonic agreement operates automatically between the visual effect of the landscape and the paint on the palette. This is the proportional language of painting, which grows richer in proportion to the development of the painter's optical sensibility. The same goes for size and perspective. In this sense, one might even go so far as to say that the painter's palette is to real light and to the tricks of color it plays on reflecting and refracting realities what perspective on a flat canvas is to the real planes of spatial reality. On these two things, the painter builds.

*Mobility of Landscape and Mobility of the Painter's Impressions.* You critics who codify the beautiful and guide the development of art, I would have you look at this painter who sets down his easel before a rather evenly lighted landscapean afternoon scene, for example. Let us suppose that instead of painting his landscape in several sittings, he has the good sense to record its tonal values in *fifteen minutes* -- that is, let us suppose that he is an Impressionist. He arrives on the scene with his own individual optic sensibility. Depending on the state of fatigue or preparation the painter has just been through, his sensibility is at the same time either bedazzled or receptive; and it is not the sensibility of a single organ, but rather the three competitive sensibilities of Young's fibrils. In the course of these fifteen minutes, the lighting of the landscape—the vibrant sky, the fields, the trees, everything within the insubstantial network of the rich atmosphere with the constantly undulating life of its invisible reflecting or refracting corpuscles—has undergone infinite changes, has, in a word, lived.

In the course of these fifteen minutes, the optical sensibility of the painter has changed time and time again, has been upset in its appreciation of the constancy and relative values of the landscape tones. Imponderable fusions of tone, opposing perceptions, imperceptible distractions, subordinations and dominations, variations in the force of reaction of the three optical fibrils one upon the other and on the external world, infinite and infinitesimal struggles.

One of a myriad examples: I see a certain shade of violet; I lower my eyes toward my palette to mix it and my eye is involuntarily drawn by the white of my shirt sleeve; my eye has changed, my violet suffers.

So, in short, even if one remains only fifteen minutes before a landscape, one's work will never be the real equivalent of the fugitive reality, but rather the record of the response of a certain unique sensibility to a moment which can never be reproduced exactly for the individual, under the excitement of a landscape at a certain moment of its luminous life which can never be duplicated.

There are roughly three states of mind in the presence of a landscape: first, the growing keenness of the optical sensibility under the excitement of this new scene; second, the peak of keenness; third, a period of gradual nervous exhaustion.

To these should be added the constantly changing atmosphere of the best galleries where the canvas will be shown, the minute daily life of the landscape tones absorbed in perpetual struggle. And, moreover, with the spectators the same variation of sensibility, and with each an infinite number of unique moments of sensibility.

Subject and object are then irretrievably in motion, inapprehensible and unapprehending. In the flashes of identity between subject and object lies the nature of genius. And any attempt to codify such flashes is but an

academic pastime.

*Double Illusion of Absolute Beauty and Absolute Man! Innumerable Human Keyboards.* Aestheticians have always talked a great deal of nonsense about one or the other of two illusions: the objectivity of Absolute Beauty, and the subjectivity of Absolute Man-that is, Taste.

Today we have a more exact feeling for the life within us and outside us.

Each man is, according to his moment in time, his racial milieu and social situation, his moment of individual evolution, a kind of keyboard on which the exterior world plays in a certain way. My own keyboard is perpetually changing, and there is no other like it. All keyboards are legitimate.

The exterior world likewise is a perpetually changing symphony (as is illustrated by Fechner's law, which says that the perception in differences declines in inverse proportion to their intensities).

The optical arts spring from the eye and solely from the eye.

There do not exist anywhere in the world two eyes identical as organs or faculties.

All our organs are engaged in a vital struggle: with the painter, it is the eye that is dominant; with the musician, the ear; with the philosopher, the powers of the mind, etc.

The eye most deserving of our admiration is the one which has evolved to the greatest extent; and consequently the most admirable painting will be not that which displays the academic fancies of "Hellenic beauty," "Venetian color," "Cornelius' thought," etc., but rather that which reveals this eye in the refinement of its nuances or the complication of its lines.

The atmosphere most favorable to the freedom of this evolution lies in the suppression of schools, juries, medals, and other such childish paraphernalia, the patronage of the state, the parasitism of blind art critics; and in the encouragement of a nihilistic dilettantism and open-minded anarchy like that which reigns amid French artists today: *Laissez faire, laissez passer*. Law, beyond human concerns, must follow its automatic pattern, and the wind of the Unconscious must be free to blow where it will.

*Definition of Plein-Air Painting.* Open air, the formula applicable first and foremost to the landscape painters of the Barbizon School (the name is taken from the village near the forest of Fontainebleau) does not mean exactly what it says. This open air concept governs the entire work of Impressionist painters, and means the painting of beings and things in their appropriate atmosphere: out-of-door scenes, simple interiors, or ornate drawing rooms seen by candlelight, streets, gas-lit corridors, factories, market places, hospitals, etc.

*Explanation of Apparent Impressionist Exaggerations.* The ordinary eye of the public and of the non-artistic critic, trained to see reality in the harmonies fixed and established for it by its host of mediocre painters-this eye, as eye, cannot stand up to the keen eye of the artist. The latter, being more sensitive to luminous variation, naturally records on canvas the relationship between rare, unexpected, and unknown subtleties of luminous variation. The blind, of course, will cry out against willful eccentricity. But even if one were to make allowance for an eye bewildered and exasperated by the haste of these impressionistic notes taken in the heat of sensory intoxication, the language of the palette with respect to reality would still be a conventional tongue susceptible to new seasoning. And is not this new seasoning more artistic, more alive, and hence more fecund for the future than the same old sad academic recipes?

*Program for Future Painters.* Some of the liveliest, most daring painters one has ever known, and also the most sincere, living as they do in the midst of mockery and indifference-that is, almost in poverty, with attention only from a small section of the press-are today demanding that the State have nothing to do with art, that the School of Rome (the Villa Medici) be sold, that the Institute be closed, that there be no more medals or rewards, and that artists be allowed to live in that anarchy which is life, which means everyone left to his own resources, and not hampered or destroyed by academic training which feeds on the past. No more official beauty; the public, unaided, will learn to see for itself and will be attracted naturally to those painters whom they find modern and vital. No more official salons and medals than there are for writers. Like writers working in solitude and seeking to have their productions displayed in their publishers' windows, painters will work in their own way and seek to have their paintings hung in galleries. Galleries will be their salons.

*Framing.* In their exhibitions the Independents have substituted intelligent, refined, imaginative frames for the old gilt frames which are the stock in trade of academic convention. A green sunlit landscape, a white winter page, an interior with dazzling lights and colorful clothes require different sorts of frames which the respective painters alone can provide, just as a woman knows best what material she should wear, what shade of powder is most suited to her complexion, and what color of wallpaper she should choose for her boudoir. Some of the new frames are in solid colors: natural wood, white, pink, green, jonquil yellow; and others are lavish combinations of colors and styles. While this new style of frame has had repercussions in official salons, there it has produced nothing but ornate bourgeois imitations.

"Impressionism: The Eye and the Poet" by Jules La Forge, William Jay Smith, trans., is reprinted from the May 1956 issue of *Art News*. Copyright ©1956 Art News.

**Diego Martelli**

**"THE IMPRESSIONISTS," 1880**

***Ladies and Gentlemen:***

When at another time in this room I had the honor to read something about art and about the artists, I indicated to you how the instinct for art and for ornament in man perhaps precedes the feeling for scientific reflection; how in the maturity of the history of a people, artistic expression might be clearly defined and appear complete to us; and how, when a period of civilization is exhausted, the old forms lose their vitality and are replaced by others that contain in themselves (note the Byzantines) all the agony of the present, all the potentialities of the future; and, in concluding, I recounted to you the vicissitudes of the artistic life of the Englishman, Turner, and the struggles and suffering of our so-called "Macchiaioli" and exhorted you to be benevolent and attentive toward those who study and suffer, because in the work of these poor men there is contained a great lesson and the seeds of a great future.

When I spoke to you thus in 1877, I did not know that the following year I would be swept by the vicissitudes of fortune to the Universal Exposition in Paris, nor did I know that, given time, I would find myself in that great center of human thought, once more living the life of an artist, and coming close to a society of painters who were in the midst of privation and struggle, pushed on out of necessity by the new forms that dominate modern thought; despised by the crowd, offended and trampled on by the authorities, they nevertheless follow their own way, animated by the spirit of the apostles that enjoins them to find the new truth through paths unknown to the satisfied masses.

I come before you today to describe the phases and relate the history of this movement, believing that your time will not be spent in vain; not because of my own poor self and my humble words, but because of the importance of the events that I shall unfold before your eyes.

The bad customs of modern society, always oscillating between quick gains and sudden losses, pushes the masses toward luxury and pleasure, reviving the adage of the Romans of the decadence, *Edamus et bibamus, post mortem nulla voluptas*. Thus the super-strength of gold has given real social importance to the "Nana's" that rule over caprice and vie in luxury and exaggeration with the richest and most aristocratic ladies of the manor today.

For this reason also, art has taken on a particular manner that the French call "chic," and that characterizes art of the "mode." This art, which came especially from Paris rather than elsewhere, requires brilliance of handiwork rather than brilliance of the brain . . .

It always happens, however, that-when the traditions of the past burn themselves out, just like a torch for lack of fuel, and when the flood of adventurers and adventuresses, revelling, invade the proscenium-a few men of genius and of good will, recognizing the futility of going against the current of the times [and] scornful of a present that has meaning only in the label of hairdressers, concentrate once more upon themselves, and with prophetic minds strain toward the future and deepen themselves in the search for truth. Some of those who are most conscious of their position arm themselves with the whip of satire and caricature and they lash it around without pity; others, unconscious of themselves, work with the security and tranquility of masters, aware of their greatness, ignorant, however, of their social importance.

The first of these two types died a poor man in a country village on the outskirts of Paris at the age of eighty: Honoré Daumier, son of a glassworker from Marseilles ....

Daumier is very strong with the chiaroscuro, which he forces a bit too much, misusing the asphalts and the bitumens in the manner of Decamps, and he is almost unbeatable in the analysis of forms and the character of movements. I like to recall, among many others, a little picture representing an acrobat Hercules, stupidly leaning against one of the wings backstage in a theater, on the stage of which one sees two of his companions who are fighting like dogs . . .

A giant of the second type was Gustave Courbet, whom, since his death, all France honors, although he was wrong to have demolished the Vendome column and to belong to the Commune. Just as in the compositions of Daumier one discovers the thinker and the satirist beneath the brush and pencil of the artist, so beneath the brush of Courbet one finds only the finely organized eye that sees well and the hand that successfully reproduces that which the eye has seen ....

The following words summarize the entire biography of the famous artist: knowledge without consciousness, the gift of seeing an effect in its truth and of knowing how to find upon the palette the colors for seeing it. A man created with so much power of spontaneous assimilation must necessarily be a very important

coefficient in the revolution of ideas. With the indifference and serenity of a pachyderm, he literally had to crush all the Lilliputian painters of cabinet pictures and all the mummies of the Academy, and show by his actions that art is something that lives by and for itself. As devoid of thought as he was full of natural energy, he beat his own indomitable way onward, confident of himself and an enemy of every artificiality; perfectly in equilibrium, he was and felt himself to be a great artist. When he wanted to discuss ideas, everyone recognized in him an ignorant man; when he worked, [they saw] a painter of the first order.

I remember in 1863, when I had gone to Paris, I saw two pictures by Courbet at the Salon: one, very large, a snow scene, represented The Stag Hunt; the other, not small, *Midday Siesta in a Field in Normandy*, and I must confess I was very disconcerted by the absolute lack of unusualness revealed by these canvases. The two paintings were done with great sincerity and breadth, but did not confirm the reputation of eccentricity of which their author had taken advantage.

In that same exhibition I saw for the first time the works of Edward Manet, which seemed ugly to me and whose originality seemed to me absolutely pretended ....

I told you shortly before that I did not like Manet and now I must add that I like Manet very much, and moreover, I like those same works that at first made such a bad impression upon me. In 1878, as soon as arrived in France, I had the luck, through my friends, Desbutin [sic] and Zandomeneghi, to meet this artist, who by this time was famous and who, together with many of his kind, frequented the café Nouvelle Athènes on the Place Pigalle, a café which, considering the change of time and the different city, reminded me of the very gay confusion of the old café Michelangiolo in Florence, which also played such a big part in the rebirth of art in our country.

Edward Manet is a handsome man of forty-seven, tall and with blond beard and hair. In the midst of which streaks of silvery white are beginning to appear. His eyes are very lively and acute, his mouth expresses the irony of a good boy, a characteristic of Parisians, and his manners are the exquisitely courteous ones of a well brought up person ....

Degas, working more for his own edification than out of desire to offer canvases to the admiration of the public, was struck by the effort and by the specialized kind of movement that the ironers make when they work and by the interesting play of light produced in their shops by the great quantity of whites that one finds hung up all about. Those white collarless blouses, a big hole for the neck, reflected by the surrounding whites, the design and the color of the arms, stirred by the particular action of the woman who holds the iron, became, after the first look, the starting point for a series of very penetrating and beautiful studies that constitute a large part of his work.

Just as the ironers were his subjects by day, so the ballerinas of the *Foyer de l'Opéra* were by night, and we find in the portfolios of this master a series of most admirable studies that have been, and are, used for his graceful compositions.

We must not forget that the great Leonardo da Vinci, roaming through the countryside, continually studied human deformities and drew very witty caricatures; the relationship between the study of the beautiful and that of the ugly is intimate, and Degas, through his own genius, had to wed and harmonize these two sentiments in an originality all his own, by means of which the feeling for truth of the primitives is invested with the light and phosphorescent scintillations of our times.

Up to now I have spoken to you about artists who represent modernity in an outstanding way, but I have not spoken to you of true and actual Impressionists, who more at the present moment represent in their works the dawn of the future, and it is absolutely necessary for me to throw you into a field that is a little abstract and metaphysical, in which I hope you will have the patience to follow me with your kind attention.

*Impressionism* is not only a revolution in the field of thought, but is also a physiological revolution of the human eyes. It is a new theory that depends on a different way of perceiving the sensations of light and of expressing the impressions. Nor do the Impressionists fabricate their theories first and then adapt the paintings to them, but on the contrary, as always happens with discoveries, the pictures were born of the unconscious visual phenomenon of men of art who, having studied, afterward produced the reasoning of the philosophers.

### *Pierre-Auguste Renoir*

#### EXCERPTS FROM THE SOCIETY OF THE IRREGULARISTS, 1884

In all the controversies matters of art stir up daily, the chief point to which we are going to call attention is generally forgotten. We mean irregularity

Nature abhors a vacuum, say the physicists; they might complete then axiom by adding that she abhors regularity no less.

Observers actually know that despite the apparent simplicity of the laws governing their formation, the works of nature are infinitely varied, from the most important to the least, no matter what their species or family. The two eyes of the most beautiful face will always be slightly unlike; no nose is placed exactly above the center of the mouth; the quarters of an orange, the leaves of a tree, the petals of a flower are never identical; it thus seems that every kind of beauty draws its charm from this diversity.

If one looks at the most famous plastic or architectural works from this viewpoint, one easily sees that the great artists who created them, careful to proceed in the same way as that nature whose respectful pupils they have always remained, took great care not to transgress her fundamental law of irregularity. One realizes that even works based on geometric principles, like St. Mark's,<sup>1</sup> the little house of Francis I in the Cours La Reine . . . as well as all the so-called Gothic churches . . . have not a single perfectly straight line, and that the round, square, or oval forms which are found there and which it would have been extremely easy to make exact, never are exact. One can thus state, without fear of being wrong, that every truly artistic production has been conceived and executed according to the principle of irregularity; in short, to use a neologism which expresses our thought more completely, it is always the work of an irregularist.

At a time when our French art, until the beginning of this century still so full of penetrating charm and exquisite imagination, is about to perish of regularity and dryness, when the mania for false perfection makes engineers diagram the ideal, we think that it is useful to react against the fatal doctrines which threaten to annihilate it, and that it is the duty of all men of sensitivity and taste to gather together without delay, no matter how repugnant they may otherwise find combat and protest.

An association is therefore necessary.

Although I do not want to formulate a final platform here, a few projected ideas are briefly submitted:

The association will be called the society of irregularists, which explains the general ideas of the founders.

Its aim will be to organize as quickly as possible exhibitions of all artists, painters, decorators, architects, goldsmiths, embroiderers, etc., who have irregularity as their aesthetic principle.

Among other conditions for admission, the rules stipulate precisely, as far as architecture is concerned: All ornaments must be derived from nature, with no motif-flower, leaf, figure, etc., etc. being exactly repeated; even the least important outlines must be executed by hand without the aid of precision instruments; as far as the plastic arts are concerned, the goldsmiths and others. . . will have to exhibit alongside of their finished works the drawings or paintings from nature used to create them.

No work containing copies of details or of a whole taken from other works will be accepted.

A complete grammar of art, dealing with the aesthetic principles of the organization, setting forth its tendencies, and demonstrating its usefulness, will be published by the founding committee with the collaboration of the members who offer their services.

Photographs of celebrated monuments or decorative works which bring forth evidence of the principle of irregularism will be acquired at the expense of the society and placed in a special room for the public.<sup>2</sup>

### SAYINGS ON ART

I like beautiful materials, rich brocades, diamonds flashing in the light, but I would have had a horror of wearing such things myself. I am grateful to those who do wear them, provided they allow me to paint them. On the other hand, I would just as soon paint glass trinkets and cotton goods costing two sous a yard. It is the artist who makes the model.-Yes and no. I need to feel all the excitement of life stirring around me, and I'll always need it.

I have a horror of the word "flesh," which has become so shopworn. Why not "meat," while they're about

it? What I like is skin, a young girl's skin that is pink and shows that she has a good circulation. But what I like above all is serenity

It's all very well to be sentimental about the past. Of course, I miss those plates decorated by hand, and the furniture made by the village carpenter; the days when every workman could use his imagination and put something of himself into whatever little practical object he was making. To get that kind of pleasure nowadays you have to be an artist and sign your work, which is something I detest. On the other hand, under Louis the Fifteenth I would have been, obliged to paint nothing but specified subjects. And what seems most significant to me about our movement is that we have freed painting from the importance of the subject. I am at liberty to paint flowers, and call them simply flowers, without their needing to tell a story.

The artist who seeks to present himself entirely naked to his public ends by revealing a conventional character, which is not even himself. It is merely romanticism, with its self-confession, tears, and agony, in reality the posings of a third-rate actor. But it sometimes happens that a Raphael who only wished to paint nice girls with little children-to whom he gave the title of "Virgin"-reveals himself with the most touching intimacy

I've spent my life making blunders. The advantage of growing old is that you become aware of your mistakes more quickly.

There isn't a person, a landscape, or a subject that doesn't possess at least some interest-although sometimes more or less hidden. When a painter discovers this hidden treasure, other people immediately exclaim at its beauty. Old Corot opened our eyes to the beauty of the Loing, which is a river like any other; and I am sure that the Japanese landscape is no more beautiful than other landscapes. But the point is that Japanese painters knew how to bring out their hidden treasure.<sup>3</sup>

## FROM RENOIR'S NOTEBOOK

Everything that I call grammar on primary notions of Art can be summed up in one word: Irregularity.

The earth is not round. An orange is not round. Not one section of it has the same form or weight as another. If you divide it into quarters, you will not find in a single quarter the same number of pips as in any of the other three; nor will any of the pips be exactly alike.

Take the leaf of a tree-take a hundred thousand other leaves of the same kind of tree-not one will exactly resemble the other.

Take a column. If I make it symmetrical with a compass, it loses its vital principle.

Explain the irregularity in regularity. The value of regularity is in the eye only . . . the non-value of the regularity of the compass.

It is customary to prostrate oneself in front of the (obvious) beauty of Greek art. The rest has no value. What a farce! It is as if you told me that a blond is more beautiful than a brunette; and vice versa.

Do not restore; only remake the damaged parts.

Do not think it is possible to repeat another period.

The artist who uses the least of what is called imagination will be the greatest.

To be an artist you must learn to know the laws of nature.

The only reward one should offer an artist is to buy his work.

An artist must eat sparingly and give up a normal way of life.

Delacroix never won a prize.

How is it that in the so-called barbarian ages art was understood, whereas in our age of progress exactly the opposite is true.

When art becomes a useless thing, it is the beginning of the end .... A people never loses half, or even just a part, of its value. Everything comes to end at the same time.

If art is superfluous, why caricature or make a pretense of it? . . . I only wish to be comfortable? Therefore I have furniture made of rough wood for myself, and a house without ornament or decoration .... I only want what is strictly necessary... If I could obtain that result, I should be a man of taste. But the ideal of simplicity is almost impossible to achieve.

The reason for this decadence is that the eye has lost the habit of seeing.

Artists do exist. But one doesn't know where to find them. An artist can do nothing if the person who asks him to produce work is blind. It is the eye of the sensualist that I wish to open.

Not everyone is a sensualist just because he wishes to be.

There are some who never become sensualists no matter how hard they try

Someone gave a picture by one of the great masters to one of my friends, who was delighted to have an object of undisputed value in his drawing room. He showed it off to everyone. One day he came rushing in to see me. He was overcome with joy. He told me naively that he had never understood until that morning why the picture was beautiful. Until then he had always followed the crowd in being impressed only by the signature. My

friend had just become a sensualist.

It is impossible to repeat in one period what was done in another. The point of view is not the same, any more than are the tools, the ideals, the needs, or the painters' techniques.

A gentleman who has become newly rich decides that he wants a chateau. He makes inquiries as to the style most in fashion at the time. It turns out to be Louis XIII; and off he goes. And of course, he finds an architect who builds him an imitation Louis XIII. Who is to blame?

The art lover is the one who should be taught. He is the one to whom the medals should be given-and not to the artist, who doesn't care a hang about them.

Painters on porcelain only copy the work of others. Not one of them would think of looking at the canary he has in a cage to see how its feet are made.

They ought to have cheaply priced inns in luxuriant surroundings for those in the decorative arts. I say inns; but, if you wish, schools minus teachers. I don't wish my pupils to be polished up any more than I want my garden to be tidied up.

Young people should learn to see things for themselves, and not ask for advice.

Look at the way the Japanese painted birds and fish. Their system is quite simple. They sat down in the countryside and watched birds flying. By watching them carefully, they finally came to understand movement; and they did the same as regards fish.

Don't be afraid to look at the great masters of the best periods. They created irregularity within regularity. Saint Mark's Cathedral in Venice: symmetrical, as a whole, but not one detail is like another!

An artist, under pain of oblivion, must have confidence in himself, and listen only to his real master: Nature.

The more you rely on good tools, the more boring your sculpture will be.

The Japanese still have a simplicity of life, which gives them time to go about and contemplate. They still look, fascinated, at a blade of grass, or the flight of birds, or the wonderful movements of fish, and they go home, their minds filled with beautiful ideas, which they have no trouble in putting on the objects they decorate.

I believe that I am nearer to God by being humble before this splendor (nature); by accepting the role I have been given to play in life; by honoring this majesty without self-interest, and, above all, without asking for anything, being confident that He who has created everything has forgotten nothing.

I believe, therefore, without seeking to understand. I don't wish to give any name, and especially I do not wish to give the name of God, to statues or to paintings. For He is above everything that is known. Everything that is made for this purpose, is, in my humble opinion, a fraud.

Go and see what others have produced, but never copy anything except nature. You would be trying to enter into a temperament that is not yours and nothing that you would do would have any character.

The greatest enemy of the worker and the industrial artist is certainly the machine.

The modern architect is, generally speaking, art's greatest enemy.

Since you love the Republic so much, why are there no statues of the Republic as beautiful as the Athenas of the Greeks? Do you love the Republic less than the Greeks did their gods?

There are people who imagine that one can re-do the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with impunity. One can only copy: that is the watchword. And after such folly has continued long enough, go back to the sources. You will see how far away we have got from them.

God, the King of artists, was clumsy.<sup>4</sup>

Silver white, chrome yellow, Naples yellow, ocher, raw sienna, vermilion, rose lake, Veronese green, viridian, cobalt blue, ultramarine blue. Palette knife, scraper, oil, turpentine--everything necessary for painting. The yellow ocher, Naples yellow, and sienna earth are intermediate tones only, and can be omitted since their equivalents can be made with other colors. Brushes made of marten hair; flat silk brushes.<sup>5</sup>

*Algiers, March 1881*

My Dear Monsieur Durand-Ruel,

I have just been trying to explain to you why I send pictures to the Salon. In Paris there are scarcely fifteen people capable of liking a painter who doesn't show at the Salon. There are 80,000 who won't buy so much as a nose from a painter who is not hung at the Salon. That's why I send in two portraits every year, little as that is. Besides, I do not want to fall in with the mania for believing that a thing is bad because of where it happens to be. In short, I don't want to waste time cherishing grudges against the Salon. I don't even want to seem to do so. In my opinion one should paint as well as possible, and that is all. Ah! If I were accused of neglecting my art, or sacrificing my opinions to idiotic ambition, I would understand my critics. But as that is not so, there is nothing they can reproach me with; on the contrary. At this moment, as always, I am concerned solely with doing good work. I want to paint stunning pictures that you can sell for very high prices. I shall manage it before long, I hope. I have been keeping away from all other painters, in the sun, to think things out. I believe I have come to an end

and found what I wanted. I may be wrong, but it would very much surprise me. Be patient for a little longer, and I hope I shall soon prove to you that one can show at the Salon and still do good painting.

So please plead my cause with my friends. I send to the Salon for purely commercial reasons. Anyhow, it's like with certain medicines. If it does no good, it does no harm.

I think I'm quite fit again now. I'm going to be able to work hard and make up for lost time.

At which point I wish you excellent health. And a lot of rich collectors. But keep them till I get back. I shall stay here another month. I don't want to leave Algiers without bringing back something from this marvelous country

A thousand greetings to my friends and to you.

Renoir<sup>6</sup>

*Naples, 21 November 1881*

Dear Monsieur Durand-Ruel,

I have been meaning to write to you for a long time, but I wanted to send you a mass of pictures as well. But I am still bogged down in experiments—a malady. I'm not satisfied, so I clean things off, again and again. I hope the mania is coming to an end; that is why I am giving you this sign of life. I do not think I shall bring back very much from my travels. But I think I shall have made progress, which always happens after experimenting for a long time. One always comes back to one's first love, but with a note added. Anyhow, I hope you will forgive me if I don't bring you back a great deal. Besides, you'll see what I shall do for you in Paris.

I am like a child at school. The new page is always going to be neatly written, and then pouf! . . . a blot. I'm still making blots . . . and I am forty years old. I went to look at the Raphaels in Rome. They are very fine and I ought to have seen them earlier. They are full of skill and wisdom. He didn't try to do the impossible, like me. But his work is fine. I prefer Ingres for oil paintings. But the frescoes are admirable in their simplicity and nobility.

I take it you are well, as usual, and your little family too. But I shall be seeing you soon, for Italy is very fine. But Paris . . . Ah! Paris . . .

I am beginning something. I won't tell you what, because then I should spoil it. I have my superstitions.

A thousand greetings,

Renoir<sup>7</sup>

#### NOTES

1. St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice.

2. Pierre-Auguste Renoir. "La Société des irregularistes," in Lionello Venturi, *Les Archives de l'Impressionisme* (Paris, New York: Durand-Ruel, 1939), 1, 127-129. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

3. Pierre-Auguste Renoir in Jean Renoir, *Renoir, My Father*, trans. Rudolph and Dorothy Weaver (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), pp. 102, 114-115, 186, 221-222. Reprinted by permission of the publisher. Copyright Jean Renoir 1958, 1962.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 240-245. 5. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

6. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Letter to Paul Durand-Ruel from Algiers, March, 1881, in Friedenthal, *Letters of the Great Artists* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963), pp. 133-136.

7. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Letter to Paul Durand-Ruel from Naples, November 21, 1881, in Richard Friedenthal, *Letters*, p. 136.

### Charles Baudelaire

#### "CROWDS"

It is not given to every man to take a bath of multitude; enjoying a crowd is an art; and only he can relish a debauch of vitality at the expense of the human species, on whom, in his cradle, a fairy has bestowed the love of masks and masquerading, the hate of home, and the passion for roaming.

Multitude, solitude: identical terms, and interchangeable by the active and fertile poet. The man who is unable to people his solitude is equally unable to be alone in a bustling crowd.

The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or some one else, as he chooses. Like those wandering souls who go looking for a body, he enters as he likes into each man's personality. For him alone everything is vacant; and if certain places seem closed to him, it is only because in his eyes they are not worth visiting.

The solitary and thoughtful stroller finds a singular intoxication in this universal communion. The man who loves to lose himself in a crowd enjoys feverish delights that the egoist locked up in himself as in a box, and the slothful man like a mollusk in his shell, will be eternally deprived of. He adopts as his own all the occupations, all the joys and all the sorrows that chance offers.

What men call love is a very small, restricted, feeble thing compared with this ineffable orgy, this divine prostitution of the soul giving itself entire, all its poetry and all its charity, to the unexpected as it comes along, to the stranger as he passes.

It is a good thing sometimes to teach the fortunate of this world, if only to humble for an instant their foolish pride, that there are higher joys than theirs, finer and more uncircumscribed. The founders of colonies, shepherds of peoples, missionary priests exiled to the ends of the earth, doubtlessly know something of this mysterious drunkenness; and in the midst of the vast family created by their genius, they must often laugh at those who pity them because of their troubled fortunes and chaste lives.

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## Art Humanities Primary Source Reading 43

Roger Marx

### "ON MONET'S 'WATER LILIES,'" 1909

#### JUNE 1909

Before transcribing one's own impressions, one would like to retrace one's steps and put them in order to give them better definition. One's first reaction to these 48 pictures is bewilderment. In most of them, objections having little to do with painting are the cause of this malaise; they have to do more with the identity of the subject and the number of duplications and with the at first seemingly fragmentary aspect of these pictures. The paintings manifest an authority and independence, an egocentric quality that is offensive to our vanity and humbling to our pride. M. Claude Monet is interested in pleasing only himself. His exertions are directed at recording the multifaceted differences of the pleasures he experiences during the course of the day as he works in one single place: such are the apparently selfish goals of his art, and it suits him to subordinate everything to this era. The value of a theme lies in its potential for increasing the number of sensations aroused in the viewer and enriching their quality. His system is a familiar one, but M. Claude Monet has not heretofore undertaken to push its consequences quite so far.

Rounded haystacks on a level field; poplars standing in ordered sequence against the sky; a Gothic porch displaying its sculptures in dazzling light; a cliff overlooking the ocean; the Seine embracing a wooded islet; water lilies rippling the surface of a serene pond in the park; in London, a bridge pressing its heavy pilings into the deepest part of the Thames, or the Houses of Parliament looming ghostlike out of the mists—all these are scenes complete in themselves, in which the composition is circumscribed, where lines are harmoniously contrasted, and where the depiction of the subject is determined by the emphasis accorded the theme.

M. Claude Monet has now severed his last ties to the Barbizon School; he is pursuing the renewal of his art according to his own vision and his own means; his manifest preference for a familiar site is conducive to painting different-but-parallel versions of the same subject. These variations on a theme clearly indicate the stages of his progression.

Besides being an artist, M. Claude Monet is also, like Emile Gallé and M. Maurice Maeterlinck, knowledgeable and passionately interested in plants. The paradox of aquatic flora has for a long time intrigued and captivated his imagination; he promised himself he would rise to the challenge and enjoy it. The Epte, near his residence in Giverny, flows silently and peacefully; it was quick work to take advantage of its course and to plant, in small hollows, the water lilies that emblazon the ponds in the summer. From now on this will provide periodic celebrations in honor of the painter; the lilies will be under his very eyes and within daily reach, and, as summer returns every year, he will continue to be eager to fix the ephemeral vision and to immortalize the field of flowered water and the spell it casts.

This is the task he set himself and which for so many years he has performed. The *Water Lily Pond* had already provided the general theme of the "series" that made up the exhibition held in 1900. The group that M. Claude Monet brings together this time, is related to it and is its logical sequel. Let us, in turn, try to subdivide it, not chronologically as the show's catalogue does, but thematically.

One painting serves as a transition between the present and the past. The background is set there as in the landscapes that were exhibited in 1900: tall trees with their melancholy branches, luxuriant and thick vegetation, and the little Japanese bridge covered with lichen and moss. But this is only an isolated reminder, perhaps even a fortuitous one. Let us move along. A new intention immediately surfaces: M. Claude Monet intends to do away with the terrestrial setting that delimited the horizon, enclosed and "fixed" the composition. He changed his viewpoint with the result that the shore moves back and very soon is obliterated. It is scarcely visible at the top of the early pictures: a narrow strip of land encircles with verdure the slight thinning of the wooded area, which the floating clusters streak with speckled moiré. No more earth, no more sky, no limits now; the dormant and fertile waters completely cover the field of the canvas; light overflows, cheerfully plays upon a surface covered with verdigris leaves. The water lilies emerge from these and proudly stretch their white, pink, yellow, or blue corollas to the sky, avid for air and sun. Here the painter deliberately broke away from the teachings of Western tradition by not seeking pyramidal lines or a single point of focus. The nature of what is fixed, immutable, appears to him to contradict the very essence of fluidity; he wants attention diffused and scattered everywhere. He considers himself free to place the small gardens of his archipelago wherever he pleases: to the right, to the left, at the top, or at the bottom of his canvas. In this context, within the necessary boundaries of their frames, these "eccentric" representations are reminiscent of some lightcolored "fuokusa," printed with bouquets scattered as capriciously as clouds that are interrupted by the folds of the hem.

M. Claude Monet's decision was a wise one and tends to justify even more the subtitle given to this series: *Water Landscapes*. We would imagine shores forever receding and the painter's inspiration confined within a narrow field. Far from it. The magical evocation of the reflections supplements the evidence of reality; it is these reflections that evoke the vanished shores. Here once more are the poplars, quivering and inverted; the tall willows with their weeping branches; and here, among the trees, is the clearing, the path of light on which shines the gold and purple sky. The blazes of dawn and sunset fire the transparent mirror, and such is the brilliance of these lights of apotheosis—that their reflection makes it difficult at first to distinguish the humble plants lost in the shadows, which extend along the surface of the waters.

In addition to these moments that bestow magnificence upon nature, there are others equally poetic, less sublime perhaps but more enduring and grandly suggestive. These are the hours that in the summertime mark the middle of the day. Their charm counteracts the violence of the contrasts; these hours are redolent of harmonious languor and gentle voluptuousness. One's soul relaxes in the beneficence of daydreams. The afternoons are blessed with a profusion of dazzling light, a powdering of iridescent brightness; the rays of the sun become volatile, contours soften, elements merge and mingle. At the height of the heat, near the ponds, nature appears to be floating in the moist air, fading away and promoting the play of imagination. These are mirages transposed to a minor key of bluish and ash-colored hues, reflected in the lily pond, which is now like a soft azure cover. It is dappled by flecks of pale green foam highlighted here and there by flashes of topaz, ruby, sapphire, or mother-of-pearl. Through the incense of soft vapors, under a light veil of silvery mist, "the indecisive meets the precise." Certainty becomes conjecture, and the enigma of the mystery opens the mind to the world of illusion and the infinity of dreams.

The artist protests:

What diabolic ideal torments you, and why tax me with being a visionary? Do you really think that the excitement and ecstasy with which I express and fulfill my passion for nature simply leads to a fairyland? You mustn't assume that I have labyrinthine, visionary plans. The truth is simpler; the only virtue in me is my submission to instinct; it is because I rediscovered and allowed intuitive and secret forces to predominate that I was able to identify with creation and become absorbed in it. My art is an act of faith, an act of love and humility. Yes, humility. People who hold forth on my painting conclude that I have arrived at the ultimate degree of abstraction and imagination that can be found in reality. I should much prefer to have them acknowledge the gift, my total absorption in my work. I applied paint to these canvases in the same way that monks of old illuminated their books of hours; they owe everything to the close union of solitude and silence, to a passionate and exclusive attention akin to hypnosis. I have been denied the liberty of concentrating on a single motif and of drawing it under all possible conditions, at all times of the day, in all the infinite variety of its successive charms. Yet sparing oneself the effort required to broach a new theme is one way of conserving one's strength; it is also the means of capturing the ephemeral changes of atmosphere and light that are the very essence of painting. The subject doesn't matter! One instant, one aspect of nature is all that is needed.

I have set up my easel in front of this body of water that adds a pleasant freshness to my garden; its circumference is less than 200 meters. Looking at it, you thought of infinity; you were able to discern in it, as in a microcosm, the presence of the elements and the instability of a universe that changes constantly under our very eyes. Nonetheless, to exile my painting "anywhere, out of the world" is going too far. This leads, I know, to the inevitable comparison with Turner. What would be the fate of art criticism without the prop of comparisons? Claude Lorrain was no master of mine; I never built, along distant shores, unlikely palaces with terrace upon terrace climbing to an oriental sky. My landscapes would fail as a backdrop for the tragic gesture of Salammbo or Akedysseril. The richness I achieve comes from nature, the source of my inspiration. Perhaps my originality boils down to being a hypersensitive receptor, and to the expediency of a shorthand by means of which I project on a canvas, as if on a screen, impressions registered on my retina. If you absolutely must find an affiliation for me, select the Japanese of olden times: their rarified taste has always appealed to me; and I sanction the implications of their esthetic that evokes a presence by means of a shadow and the whole by means of a fragment. Bring out my affinity, if you like, to our own eighteenth-century painters, with whom I recognize a close kinship of sensitivity and technique.

But how much wiser it would be not to cut myself off from my own period, a period to which I belong with every fiber of my being! It would be much more accurate to describe me -- a disciple of Courbet and Jongkind -- as a contemporary of Stéphane Mallarmé and Claude Debussy. I agree with them and with Baudelaire that all the arts have points in common, that there are harmonies and concerts of color that are self-sufficient and that affect us just as a musical phrase or a chord can strike us deeply, without reference to a precise and clearly stated theory. The indeterminate and the vague are modes of expression that have a reason for existing and have their own characteristics; through them sensations become lasting; they are the key to symbolism and continuity. I was once briefly tempted to use water lilies as a sole decorative theme in a room. Along the walls, enveloping them in the singleness of its motif, this theme was to have created the illusion of an endless whole, of water without horizon or shore. Here nerves taut from overwork could have relaxed, lulled by the restful sight of those still waters, and to whosoever lived there, the room would have offered a refuge for peaceful meditation at the center of a flowering aquarium. This makes you smile; the name of des Esseintes is on the tip of your tongue. Isn't it a pity, really, to deny strength the right to express something fragile and to be so ready to declare the search for refinement incompatible with robust health? No, des Esseintes is not my prototype, it's closer to Maurice Barrès' Philippe who "methodically cultivates spontaneous emotions." I have half a century of experience and soon I shall have passed my sixty-ninth year, but my sensitivity, far from diminishing, has been sharpened by age, which holds no fears for me so long as unbroken communication with the outside world continues to fuel my curiosity, so long as my hand remains a ready and faithful interpreter of my perception. One of your colleagues, and not the least among them, said: "When looking at water, sky, mountains one feels they are forever young, untouched by events; they are as they were at the beginning. Confronted by their strength, our weakness vanishes." I have no other wish than to mingle more closely with nature, and I aspire to no other destiny than to work and live in harmony with her laws, as Goethe prescribed. Nature is greatness, power, and immortality; compared with her, a creature is nothing but a miserable atom.

"Granted," we answer, "but nature cannot do without man; her beauty, which is quite subjective, would not be apparent without the thought that defines it, without the poetry that sings her praises, without the art that portrays her. She has never before been shown in such sumptuous and new variety. Supper guests at Madame Faustin's claim that the French language "has not, in the past, striven for precision, whereas at the present time it is cultivated by the most sensitive people, by those most eagerly seeking to convey indescribable sensations .... " This is also true of painting, and M. Claude Monet is not one to be satisfied with the lack of precision of his predecessors. He differs from them by his hyperesthesia and also by the contradictions inherent in his temperament. With a cold but passionate eye he can examine his impulses and reason them out; he is obstinate and lyrical, coarse and subtle; his art throbs with all the fires of enthusiasm; serenity flows from it. Dedication to his art does not hinder his search for a range of soft hues. In some paintings the medium, which has been

lovingly applied, bestows upon the surface of the canvas the porous feel of a dull granite, which one longs to caress. Never, in all the years since mankind has existed and men have painted, has anyone painted better or quite like this. As I looked at length, making notes in the exhibition catalog, an artist with a foreign accent accosted me: "You are writing about this exhibition, sir. Say that we are all ignorant. Proclaim that, compared with this, the pictures in the Salons, all the Salons, are just daubs, nothing but daubs." And he continued on his way, his arms raised to heaven.

It seems to us that this is proof of a high level of technical knowledge, and that this great mastery reveals an approach to landscape painting in tune with our times and essentially characteristic of its author. Painters in the past attempted to separate the eternal from the transitory. They distinguished elements, bodies, substances in an effort to be specific about volumes and planes. The temper of the era, its tents, its leisurely pace encouraged these artists to take their time in perfecting their work. The rush to live and to produce was alien to a serene period when calmness prevailed. M. Claude Monet belongs to a quite different age, one in which dizzying speed is the rule, where the creative person wants instant awareness of the universe and of himself through quick and violent impressions. The question is no longer a matter of fixing what is there but of seizing what is going by. The concrete reality of things is less important than an interdependence established by impermanent relationships. A number of artists took pride in depicting a palpable reality, whereas the atmosphere that envelops it is what defies the minutiae of transcription. This is the very thing M. Claude Monet aspires to do and does so well. He is the painter of air and light, of affinities and reflexes, of clouds fleeing, of mists dissipating, of shafts of light displaced by the earth as it turns. He is also the painter of atmosphere and harmonies, not so much of the solemn harmonies so dear to de Lamartine, but to those "pleasant and light" ones celebrated by the saint of Assisi in his "Canticle of the Creatures." M. Claude Monet's heart beats responsively as soon as he comes into contact with the intimate life of the out-of-doors. His enthusiasm animates his vision; he causes us to know and to love beauty everywhere, a beauty that eludes both a casual glance and scientific examination with lens and compass. It would be difficult to resist the appeal of an artist of such extraordinary sensitivity, who is so steeped in his work that he succeeds in making us share his own emotion, joy, and humanism. We are reminded of the criteria Novalis sets forth: "constant contact with everyday life; free association of ideas; close attention to even the minutest details; an inner poetic life; a simple soul." Without these, the title "harbinger of nature" is not merited. So, the more one thinks about it, the more he seems to merit it.