

A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk



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27-05 CAMILLE PISSARRO

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

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Camille Pissarro, *Self-Portrait*, 1903, Tate

- This is Section 27 on Impressionism and this is talk 5 on Camille Pissarro known as the "Father of Impressionism".

CAMILLE PISSARRO: A CHRONOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHY

BIO:PISSARRO

- **Camille Pissarro** (1830-1903) was a **Danish-French artist** who was born in St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands (previously the Dutch West Indies). When he was 12 he was sent to boarding school in France and developed an appreciation of French art. On his return to St. Thomas his father gave him a job as a clerk in the family business. For the next five years he spent all his spare time drawing. When he was 21 a Danish artist taught him to paint and convinced him to become a full-time professional artist. He left the family business and went to Venezuela where he spent the next two years working as an artist.
- **In 1855, he moved to Paris** and work for an artist and photographer. He enrolled for various art classes but was impressed by the work of Courbet, Charles-François Daubigny, Jean-François Millet, and Corot. He received training from Corot and in 1859 he had a work accepted by the Paris Salon, the only marketplace for young artists at the time. He was **inspired by Corot to paint en plein air** and to appreciate the beauties of nature as seen directly rather than as taught in the art schools. Although Corot would finish his paintings in the studio Pissarro would finish his work **outdoors at a single sitting** which gave them a greater immediacy but was heavily criticised as too

'vulgar'. Also in **1859** he attended **Académie Suisse** and became friends with **Claude Monet** (1840-1926), Armand Guillaumin and **Paul Cézanne** (1839-1906). Cézanne remembered years later how Pissarro had comforted him when he was criticized by other artists.

- In **1863** almost all the groups work was rejected by the Salon and Napoleon III decided to exhibit the rejected work in an exhibition called the **Salon des Refusés**. However, only works of **Pissarro and Cézanne** were included and their work brought a hostile response from the Salon and the public. A few critics such as Émile Zola did appreciate his work and at the age of 38 Pissarro began to establish a reputation. Also in 1863 his son **Lucien Pissarro (1863-1944)** was born, the oldest of seven children. Lucien first visited Britain in 1870-1 with his father. He returned in 1883-4, and in 1890 settled permanently in London.
- In **1870-71** having only Danish nationality Camille moved his family to Norwood and in 1871, in Croydon, he **married** his mother's maid, Julie Vellay. Later they lived outside Paris in Pontoise and later in **Louvenciennes** and had seven children. At this time, both in England and France, as he wrote to a friend, '**my painting doesn't catch on, not at all**'. He met the art dealer **Paul Durand-Ruel** who introduced him to Claude Monet and they were both reinforced in their belief that art must be painted outdoors by the work of **John Constable** and **J.M.W. Turner**. He painted some **12 oil paintings of Upper Norwood** and on his return in **1890** another ten scenes of central London. He came back in **1892** and painted Kew Gardens and Kew Green and in **1897** several oils around the Stamford Brook area.
- Pissarro proposed to his **friends Cézanne, Monet, Manet, Renoir and Degas** that they set up their **own exhibition** rather than rely on the Salon. In 1873 fifteen artists formed the **Société Anonyme des Artistes, Peintres, Sculpteurs et Graveurs**. The group was held together by the **prematurely greying father figure** of Pissarro as he also brought a youthful exuberance and creativity and spiritual guidance to the group. In **1874 their first exhibition horrified the critics and their work was mocked as merely 'impressions'**. Critics disliked the 'vulgar' subject matter, the sketchy, incomplete brushwork and their novel use of colour, for example, painting shadows with the reflected colour of their surroundings. In **1876** the group adopted the name **Impressionists** and their work continued to divide the critics. Cézanne described Pissarro as the first Impressionist and Mary

Cassatt described how **the 'gentle' Pissarro, 'could have taught the stones to draw correctly'**.

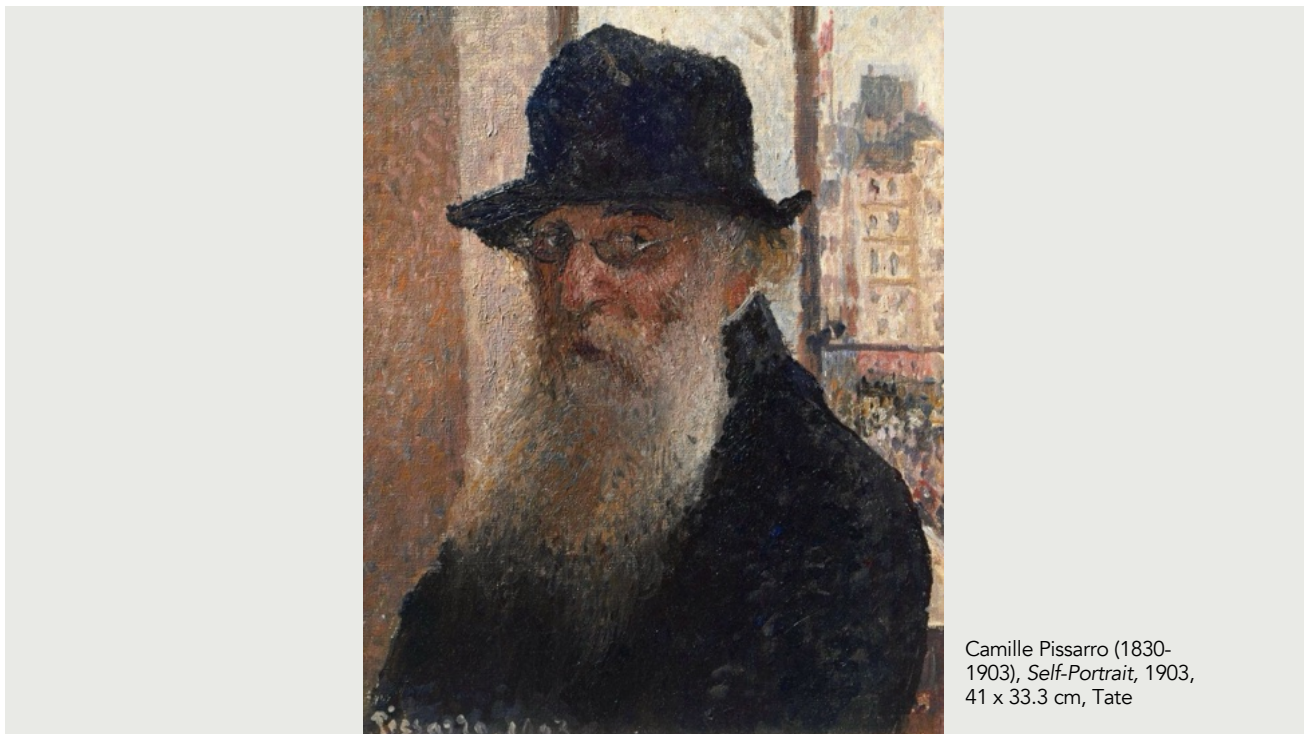
- In the 1880s Pissarro started to **paint peasants** at work in an attempt to educate the public. In 1885 he met **Georges Seurat and Paul Signac** who had a more **'scientific' approach** to colour theory and for the next three years **Pissarro adopted pointillism**. In the eighth and final Impressionist exhibition of 1886 his work was exhibited in a separate section and the critics were impressed by his ability to reinvent himself and take on new challenges.
- **In 1884, for a short while Pissarro taught Vincent van Gogh**, an artist who was 23 years younger and who had impressed Pissarro. After four years he **rejected pointillism** as not suited to his natural style and he returned to his earlier style but with a firmer hand and more subtle colours. In old age he suffered from a **recurring eye infection** and would sit at hotel windows painting. Pissarro was the 'most real and most naïve member' of the Impressionists and his **quiet dignity and utmost sincerity** pulled together the group which was always threatening to break apart. He sold few works in his lifetime but they now sell for many millions. In 2014 one of his works sold for £19.9 million.

LITTLE KNOWN FACTS ABOUT PISSARRO

- When he returned to France after the Franco-Prussian war he found that **of the 1,500 paintings he had completed over the past 20 years only 40 remained** and the rest had been destroyed by soldiers who used them as door mats. It is possible that those early paintings would have shown Pissarro as the inventor of the Impressionist style but it is now Monet who is seen as the group's guiding force.
- Pissarro was the only artist to exhibit in all eight of the official Impressionist exhibitions.
- Pissarro was not wealthy; he came from a wealthy family but was disinherited because his parents disapproved of him becoming an artist. He struggled with poverty throughout his life despite the later high value of his art. In 1871, his house was destroyed during the Franco-Prussian War and he faced financial instability for much of his career, though he did achieve some financial stability later in his life after he stopped using pointillism and began painting more urban scenes.
- His fellow artists referred to him affectionately as "father Pissarro" due to

his age and kindly supportive nature. He is now widely considered the father of the movement because of his role in bringing the group together and his constant support for them. Some sources even state that without him, there would be no Impressionist movement. His contemporaries, including Cézanne, called him "a father for me,". He was also a mentor and supporter to several younger painters, including Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin.

- During the Franco-Prussian War, Pissarro lived in Upper Norwood in London and created works reflecting the local English landscape.
- Later in life, an eye infection limited his ability to paint outdoors, leading to notable window-view cityscape series.
- His son Lucien Pissarro became an influential artist and printer, working mainly in London and contributing to the Arts and Crafts movement.



Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Self-Portrait*, 1903, 41 x 33.3 cm, Tate

- This is a self-portrait he painted the year he died, aged 73.
- He was born on July 10, 1830, on the island of St Thomas in the Danish West Indies now a US territory. He was named Jacob Abraham Camille Pissarro and was raised in a Jewish family that was marginalised by the local community because of his parents' unconventional marriage. His father married his widowed aunt and although they were not related by blood it was forbidden by Jewish law and their four children were barred from the local Jewish school and had to attend an all-black primary school.
- Camille spent his childhood on the island until he was 12 when he was sent to boarding school in France, where he developed an early interest in French art. He returned briefly to St Thomas, Pissarro worked in his father's trading business but was drawn increasingly to art, inspired and encouraged by his friend and mentor Fritz Melbye.
- He this self-portrait was painted in his Paris apartment in the Place Dauphine, overlooking the Pont Neuf. It is painted with the dabbing brushstroke that was typical of his later work. He was a modest and self-critical man, but had strongly held artistic and political beliefs which influenced many younger artists. Something of his air of personal authority can perhaps be sensed in this portrait. Towards the end of his life Pissarro began to enjoy financial security, and, indeed, received official recognition in 1903, the year he painted this, when two of his works were bought by the Louvre. (based on the Tate caption)

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Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), *Two Women Chatting by the Sea, St. Thomas*, 1856, 41 × 27.7 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
1852–1856 (St Thomas, West Indies)

- This is a remarkable early work in his career. Created soon after Pissarro left his native island of St Thomas for France, it belongs to a period when he was still under the influence of the Caribbean environment and inspired by his mentor Fritz Melbye. The painting depicts two Afro-Caribbean women engaged in casual conversation on a sunlit path beside the sea, one carrying laundry and the other with a basket—an everyday moment rendered with dignity and subtle realism. The women's figures stand out prominently against the generalised tropical landscape, bathing in warm West Indian sunlight with long shadows cast on the ground.
- This scene illustrates Pissarro's lifelong empathy for working people, which would become a central theme throughout his career. Even at this stage, he was more interested in portraying the life of ordinary individuals than idealised or classical subjects. The painting's warm palette and gentle modelling provide a sense of tranquility and respect for its subjects, foreshadowing his commitment to social realism. It is also notable for bearing the original **Sephardic spelling of his surname, "Pizarro,"** before he adopted "Pissarro".
- St Thomas itself played a formative role in Pissarro's artistic development. His family ran an import-export business, exposing him to all sectors of local society. By 1856, Pissarro had not yet married or started his own family, though

this period marked his decision to become a full-time artist and ultimately pursue a path that distanced him from the family business. The painting therefore represents both personal and artistic transition—rooted in his Caribbean origins but pointing forward to the universal themes of rural life and dignity that would define his career.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Donkey in Front of a Farm, Montmorency*, c. 1859, 21.5 x 27.2 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Donkey in Front of a Farm, Montmorency*, c. 1859, 21.5 x 27.2 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

1857–1866 (Paris)

- 1850s-1860s: In 1852, Pissarro relocated to Venezuela with the Danish artist Fritz Melbye, working together in a studio while Melbye taught him. In 1855, Pissarro moved to Paris, where exposure to artists such as Ingres, Delacroix, and Corot, and informal mentoring by Corot, shaped his emerging style. Throughout the 1860s, he preferred outdoor painting of natural and rural scenes and registered as a Louvre copyist.
- *Donkey in Front of a Farm, Montmorency*, is an important early work. Notice he is still spelling his name with a "z". It was created during his time in Montmorency, a small village near Paris, it shows his dedication to capturing rural landscapes and simple everyday scenes, themes that would remain central throughout his career. Montmorency was significant for Pissarro as it was part of the Barbizon-influenced countryside where he honed his skills in naturalistic depictions and plein air painting, heavily inspired by Corot and the Barbizon School artists.
- This period coincides with Pissarro's growing artistic development before fully joining the Impressionist movement. Around 1859, he was experimenting with loose brushwork and a focus on natural light, setting the foundation for his later hallmark style. Montmorency's pastoral setting offered Pissarro a rich environment to observe changing seasons, light, and rural labor, providing

authentic subject matter that differentiated him from many contemporaries focused on urban scenes.

- Pissarro began his relationship with Julie Vellay, in the early 1860s and they started a family before they were married in 1871. Julie was his mother's maid and her father was a vineyard worker. His family life in the French countryside added a layer of personal significance to his rural scenes, often including peasants and humble domestic animals such as the donkey here.
- An interesting anecdote from this time is that Pissarro's work was not initially successful in the Paris Salon — rejected for its unconventional approach. Donkeys were not an acceptable subject for the Salon. This pushed him toward alternative exhibition venues and eventually led to his critical role in founding Impressionism. His scenes from Montmorency thus represent both his artistic roots and the beginning of his rebellious, independent path in modern art.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Hermitage at Pontoise*, c. 1867, 150.3 x 200 cm, Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Hermitage at Pontoise*, c. 1867, 150.3 x 200 cm, Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York

- We see a cluster of houses at the end of a winding path through the village of Pontoise. Pissarro lived there on and off between 1866 and 1882.
- Unlike the romanticised landscapes typical of the era, Pissarro's approach is remarkably modern: his relaxed brushwork, naturalistic colours, and fidelity to the changing effects of light reveal an early embrace of what would soon become core Impressionist principles. The absence of historical or sentimental overtones, and the focus on ordinary villagers and their environment, signals his belief in the dignity and value of peasant life—a radical subject choice in a period when high art favoured classical themes and privileged leisure.
- It is a large painting and these early large-scale paintings are his early masterpieces. The conventions he used were the product of the Barbizon school, Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet, and but this painting puts Pissarro's stamp upon the landscape. However, it is not yet Impressionistic, shortly after this he abandoned this Realist style for a looser brush and the atmospheric effects for which he is popularly known, the true trademarks of Impressionism.
- The painting's immersive scale and rhythmic brushwork suggest a lived experience, inviting viewers to step into the tranquil countryside that Pissarro experienced firsthand. The ornate frame, traditional for the Paris Salon, juxtaposes strikingly with the work's naturalism, underscoring its historical

significance as a bridge between the old and the new.

- During the late 1860s, Pissarro was already fiercely independent—he distanced himself from the academic system and found inspiration in direct observation, community, and egalitarian ideals. This painting not only represents Pissarro's artistic evolution, but also stands as a manifesto for modern art's embrace of everyday life and landscape.

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Camille Pissarro (1830 – 1903), *Fox Hill, Upper Norwood*, 1870, 35.3 x 45.7 cm, National Gallery

Camille Pissarro (1830 – 1903), *Fox Hill, Upper Norwood*, 1870, 35.3 x 45.7 cm, National Gallery

Acquisition: Presented by Viscount and Viscountess Radcliffe, 1964

- Pissarro was Danish and so could not join the French army at the start of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. He left France and settled in Norwood in South London. It was then a village on the edge of London but now it is part of London, the road has been straightened and it is now lined both sides with suburban houses.
- He went with Claude Monet and Charles-François Daubigny.
- There was also a commercial reason for going. French Impressionists found it **hard to sell their paintings in France** and hoped they might sell to wealthy English industrialists who were building large art collections.
- The dealer **Paul Durand-Ruel** believed in the Impressionists and held **10 exhibitions** in his gallery in New Bond Street **between 1870 and 1874** entitled 'Society of French Artists'. This was before the first Impressionist exhibition in Paris. He found it difficult to sell their work and difficult to deal with them, not to put too fine a point on it, Claude Monet was an atheist republican, Camille Pissarro a Jewish anarchist, Edgar Degas a bad tempered anti-Semite and Pierre-Auguste Renoir a reactionary misogynist.
- Durand-Ruel had a hard time, his wife died and he never remarried so he brought up his five children on his own. He came close to bankruptcy while supporting the Impressionists through thick and thin. He believed there was a

market but it was **slow to materialise** and **the artists returned to France after the war**. He continued to show French art in his gallery in London and it was a favourite meeting place for young British artists such as George Clausen.

- In the end he and the Impressionists **were saved** not by English buyers but by **American buyers**, Durand-Ruel said, '**Without America,' he said, 'I would have been lost, ruined'**.'

NOTES

- London, with its thriving art market, was an attractive destination for refugee artists. Charles-Francois Daubigny had already come twice to explore its potential in the 1860s and sought refuge here in autumn 1870. He met with the art dealer **Paul Durand-Ruel, who had moved his family and stock to safety in London a month earlier**, settled in Knightsbridge and opened a gallery on New Bond Street.
- While painting by the Thames, **Daubigny also encountered the impoverished** twenty-nine-year-old **Claude Monet**, who had crossed the Channel to avoid conscription. He urged Durand-Ruel to buy Monet's work and a long and fruitful partnership between the dealer, Monet and his fellow refugee Camille Pissarro began. The forty-year-old Pissarro, whose house in Louveciennes had been used as stables by the Prussians, joined his mother and other relations in south London in December.
- **Alfred Sisley's home** in Bougival was **also destroyed by the Prussians**, and his **family ruined** by the conflict. **He came to London in 1874 to salvage his financial situation**, sponsored by a patron, opera singer Jean-Baptiste Faure, Durand-Ruel's friend, client and neighbour."



Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Crystal Palace, London, 1871*, 35.3 x 45.7 cm, National Gallery, London

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Crystal Palace, London, 1871*, 35.3 x 45.7 cm, National Gallery, London

- Pissarro **came to London in late 1870** to escape the Franco-Prussian War and the turmoil of the Paris Commune, settling with his family in Lower Norwood, then a quiet London suburb. This period profoundly influenced his art: inspired by the misty suburban landscapes, Pissarro painted around a dozen canvases depicting Norwood, Sydenham, and the Crystal Palace.
- The Crystal Palace itself had a dramatic history. Originally constructed in Hyde Park between 1850 and 1851 for the Great Exhibition, it was designed by Joseph Paxton and was celebrated for its revolutionary use of glass and iron. In 1852–1854, the structure was dismantled and expanded in Sydenham, south London, becoming a beacon of Victorian ingenuity, hosting exhibitions, concerts, and even pioneering public dinosaur sculptures. The palace tragically burned down in 1936, but its legacy endures in Crystal Palace Park and Museum.
- Pissarro's rendering is striking for its compositional choices. Unlike the celebratory depictions by Manet and Renoir of Paris's universal exhibitions, Pissarro subtly tucks the Crystal Palace into the scene's left margin, camouflaged amid newly-built suburban villas and the bustle of modern British middle-class life. This approach underscores his interest in ordinary existence and atmospheric effects rather than grand spectacle. During his London stay, Pissarro befriended Monet, studied Turner and Constable, and began working

with art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel—key experiences that shaped his later Impressionist innovations.

- In 1871, he married Julie Vellay (1838-1926) in Croydon, south London (the town where I got married). They had eight children, Lucien Pissarro (1863–1944), Jeanne Rachel (1865-1874) who died when she was nine, Georges Henri Manzana Pissarro (1871–1961), Félix Pissarro (1874–1897), Ludovic-Rodo Pissarro [fr] (1878–1952), Jeanne Bonin-Pissarro [fr] (1881–1948), and Paul-Émile Pissarro (1884–1972) of whom six became painters. One of their children died at birth making eight.

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*Portrait of the Artist's
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called Minette, with a
Bouquet*, 1872, 72.7 × 59.5
cm, Yale University Art
Gallery

Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter or Jeanne Pissarro, called Minette, with a Bouquet*, 1872, 72.7 × 59.5 cm, Yale University Art Gallery

- When he returned to France after the Franco-Prussian war he found his house was destroyed and **of the 1,500 paintings he had completed over the past 20 years only 40 remained** and the rest had been destroyed by soldiers. It is possible that those early paintings would have shown Pissarro as the inventor of the Impressionist style but it is now Monet who is seen as the group's guiding force.
- There was another greater sadness in his life. This is a portrait of Jeanne-Rachel known as "Minette" his first and much beloved daughter who was born in 1865 and so she is about seven in this painting. Tragically two years later in 1874 aged nine she died.
- In Paris, he reestablished his life. He renewed his friendships with the other Impressionist artists, including Cézanne, Monet, Manet, Renoir, and Degas and with Pissarro they create an alternative to the Salon so their group could display their own unique styles.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Hoar Frost, Old Road to Ennery, Pontoise*, 1873, approx. 65.5 x 93.2 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- *Hoar Frost, Old Road to Ennery* (1873) is a quintessential example of **early Impressionism** and a testament to the artist's lifelong preoccupation with rural life and the changing seasons. Painted during his productive period in Pontoise, the work depicts a gently undulating country road dusted with morning frost. The scene is tranquil yet alive with the crispness of winter: the pale, refracted light, the subtle purples and blues of the shadows, and the soft, earthy reds of the freshly turned soil.
- This painting's importance lies in its technical innovation and its subject matter. Pissarro employs broken brushstrokes and a nuanced palette to capture transient atmospheric effects—hallmarks of the Impressionist movement he helped pioneer. Rather than focusing on dramatic subjects or historical events, he turns his attention to the everyday—here, a humble country lane with a single peasant figure advancing slowly, their form blending into the landscape. This choice was radical for its time, celebrating ordinary people and the cycles of nature.
- in 1873 he helped establish a separate collective, called the "Société Anonyme des Artistes, Peintres, Sculpteurs et Graveurs," (the "Anonymous Society of Artists, Painters, Sculptors and Engravers") which included fifteen artists. Pissarro created the group's first charter and became the key figure in establishing and holding the group together.

- *Hoar Frost* was likely painted in the months **leading up to their first exhibition of 1874, in which Pissarro played a leading role**. It "shocked" and "horrified" the critics, who primarily appreciated only scenes portraying religious, historical, or mythological settings. They found the subject matter "vulgar" and "commonplace," as there were scenes of street people going about their everyday lives. Also, the manner of painting was too sketchy for them and looked incomplete, especially compared to the traditional styles of the period. The use of visible and expressive brushwork by all the artists was considered an insult to the craft of traditional artists, who often spent weeks on their work.
- The term "Impressionism" was coined as an insult in a satirical review by the critic Louis Leroy but it was adopted by the group and two years later the second exhibition was called the Second Impressionist Exhibition and was held in the gallery of the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Côte des Bœufs at L'Hermitage*, 1877, approx. 114.9 x 87.6 cm, National Gallery, London



Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), *The Orchard, Côte Saint-Denis*, 1877, 66 x 54.5 cm

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Côte des Bœufs at L'Hermitage*, 1877, approx. 114.9 x 87.6 cm, National Gallery, London

Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), *La Côte Saint-Denis à Pontoise (The Orchard, Côte Saint-Denis)*, 1877, 66 x 54.5 cm

- *The Côte des Bœufs at L'Hermitage* is a landmark of his **mature period** and of Impressionist landscape painting. Painted on a hillside near his home in L'Hermitage outside Pontoise, this work **signals a shift** in Pissarro's practice: moving away from fleeting atmospheric effects towards a **more structured, densely worked composition**, with layered vertical and horizontal lines. The wooded vista is rendered with thick, deliberate brushstrokes, creating a tapestry-like surface; trees in the foreground form intricate rhythms, while small figures and houses are almost hidden, discovered only upon sustained viewing.
- The subject—an ordinary rural hillside with modest homes—embodies Pissarro's democratic vision and respect for peasant life, themes tied to his own family existence in the area. The painting's scale is **unusually large** for Pissarro, and he described the effort as the "**work of a benedictine**"—a testament to its ambition and complexity. Exhibited at the **Third Impressionist Exhibition** in Paris in 1877, the work was immediately recognized by critics and peers as a masterpiece and later inspired contemporaries such as Cézanne, who also painted the region that year.
- Technical analysis reveals a sophisticated palette: ultramarine blue, vermillion, viridian, and emerald green apply vivid accents to a subdued tonal ground. The

painting stands as a bridge between Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, foreshadowing Cézanne's structural innovations.

- (CLICK) Pissarro lived with his wife Julie and children in Pontoise at this time, and often **collaborated with Cézanne**, fostering one of the era's most important artistic exchanges. "The Côte des Bœufs at L'Hermitage" is both an intimate record of Pissarro's environment and a manifesto for a new art of egalitarian observation and technical daring. This is Cézanne's *The Orchard, Côte Saint-Denis* of the same year. It appears to be the same or a very similar location. Modern scholarship confirms that the Côte des Bœufs and Côte Saint-Denis refer to the same slope. The collaboration between Pissarro and Cézanne during this period—1872 to 1885—was a foundation for modern painting, bridging the transition from Impressionism to early modern abstraction. (CLICK)

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903),
The Red Roofs, Corner of a Village, Winter, 1877, 66 x 54 cm, Musée d'Orsay in Paris

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Red Roofs, Corner of a Village, Winter*, 1877, 66 x 54 cm, Musée d'Orsay in Paris

- **Red Roofs** was painted in the area of Côte Saint-Denis near Pontoise, the scene features a small cluster of houses distinguished by their vivid orange-red roofs, glimpsed through a network of bare winter trees. Such subject matter reflects Pissarro's commitment to rural and semi-urban life, showing the everyday architecture and landscape of the French countryside not as picturesque or staged, but as lived-in and subtly complex.
- Rather than foregrounding the village itself, Pissarro intentionally "blocks" the view with twisting tree trunks and branches, turning the space between the viewer and the houses into a vibrant interplay of line and colour. This choice shifts attention from anecdotal storytelling to the formal qualities of the painting, with parallel planes and intense impasto capturing the effect of winter light and movement. The work's brushwork—thick, energetic strokes—infuses the surface with feeling and dynamism, so that the play of colour in the roofs, fields, and distant slopes echoes throughout the canvas.
- Pissarro completed this painting during a period of productive collaboration with Paul Cézanne, who painted similar motifs nearby. "The Red Roofs" was exhibited at the **Third Impressionist Exhibition in 1877**, where it **received praise** for its strong, simple touch and poetic quietness. Its significance lies in Pissarro's ability to blend structure and spontaneity—balancing detailed observation of nature with an expressive handling of paint—making it a

powerful tribute to the Impressionist vision of ordinary reality.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903),
Young Peasant Having Her Coffee, 1881, 65.3 x 54.8 cm,
Art Institute Chicago

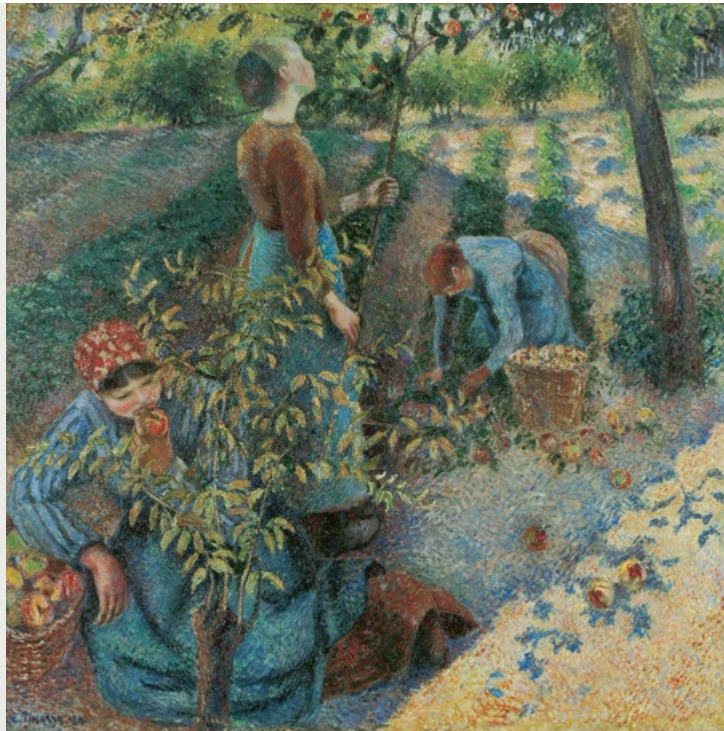
Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Young Peasant Having Her Coffee*, 1881, 65.3 x 54.8 cm, Art Institute Chicago

- Painted during a period when many Impressionists were veering toward individual paths, Pissarro remained committed to the movement's social themes, depicting the dignity and quiet heroism of peasant life in the French countryside.
- The painting portrays a young woman, likely a **local farmworker**, absorbed in the **simple act of drinking coffee**. Pissarro's brushwork—small, adjacent strokes with occasional dabs of thick paint—integrates the figure and her humble setting, evoking the rough texture of her wool clothing and the muted light filtering in through a farmhouse window. The pose is sincere and unposed, a result of Pissarro's practice of finishing preparatory figure drawings before working directly on the painted canvas. This approach imbued his figures with a natural stillness and authenticity, as seen here in the thoughtful contemplation of the subject. The painting's palette is earthy and restrained, underscoring the ordinariness of rural labor, yet also its dignity.
- It was exhibited in the **Seventh Impressionist Exhibition of 1882**, alongside other portrayals of peasant girls, this work illustrates Pissarro's egalitarian ideals and his technical evolution toward a more structured, pointillist-inspired brushwork—anticipating his later interest in Neo-Impressionism. The painting's monumentality for such a humble subject was unusual: Pissarro asserted the worth of ordinary existence, elevating simple daily acts to the status of high art.

- Pissarro's portraits of peasants were inspired by his **political beliefs**. He subscribed to the **radical anarchist publication *Le Révolté*** and was in consistent communication with leading anarchist theorizer Jean Grave as well as fellow anarchist artists such as Paul Signac. His views included a belief in individual freedom, the rejection of authority, and rejection of capitalism's inequalities but he rejected violence like Pierre Proudhon but unlike Peter Kropotkin who saw it as inevitable.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Apple Picking, Eragny*, 1886, 128 x 128 cm, Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Apple Picking, Eragny*, 1886, 128 x 128 cm, Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki

- *Apple Picking, Eragny* (pronounced ear-an-ee sur ep") is set in the orchard of his beloved home in Eragny-sur-Epte, the painting shows three figures—two women bending to gather fallen apples and one reaching up into the tree—immersed in a harmony of natural forms and glowing autumnal light. Unlike sweet, sentimental rural scenes, Pissarro's canvas is rigorously composed: the crooked apple tree and its shadow anchor the design, and the figures' gestures are both animated and meditative.
- In 1884, for a short while Pissarro taught Vincent van Gogh, an artist who was 23 years younger and who had impressed Pissarro. Then, **in 1885** he met **Georges Seurat and Paul Signac** who had a more '**scientific**' approach to colour theory known as Neo-Impressionism and for the next three or four years **Pissarro adopted the painting technique known as divisionism or pointillism** which consisted in putting on small dots of purple colour.
- This work marks Pissarro's brief embrace of Neo-Impressionism, a movement defined by optical colour theories and the use of pointillist brushwork, exemplified here by lively, multicoloured dots and dappled effects. Inspired by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, Pissarro experimented with breaking light and form into parts and letting the viewer's eye blend these back into coherence, achieving a vibrant, tactile surface of shimmering colour. He made three major apple harvest paintings between 1881 and 1888, each reflecting his fascination

with agricultural rhythm and peasant dignity. This version, **exhibited at the final Eighth Impressionist Exhibition of 1886**, represents his move beyond his earlier style into a new synthesis of sensation and structure.

- By this stage the group fragmented as the Neo-Impressionism of Georges Seurat and Paul Signac divided the group. The critics were impressed by Pissarro's ability to reinvent himself and take on new challenges. He became the '**only artist who went from Impressionism to Post-Impressionism**'.
- Interestingly although Monet, Renoir and Sisley did not exhibit Pissarro did, in fact he exhibited at every one of the eight exhibition over the twelve year period the only artist to have done so although Paul Degas and Berthe Morisot exhibited at seven. Altogether 56 artists exhibited but half exhibited only once and Pissarro, the guiding light and fatherly figure exhibited about 10% of all the work exhibited.

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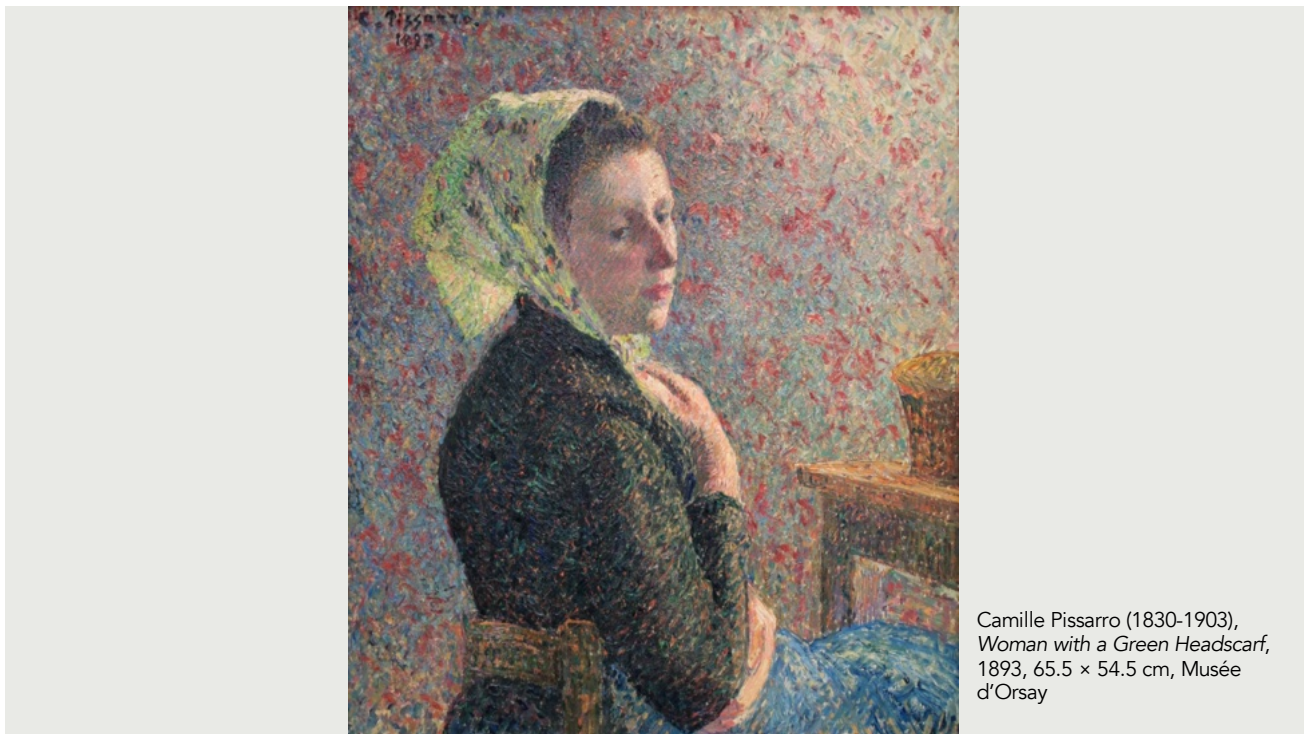
Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Charing Cross Bridge, London*, 1890, 60 x 90 cm,
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Charing Cross Bridge, London*, 1890, 60 x 90,
National Gallery of Art, Washington

- Pissarro **returned to London in 1890 mainly to see his son Georges** and his other son Lucien who settled in London the same year. This is one of the paintings he made of central London. He came back again in **1892 when Lucien married**, painting in Kew Gardens and Kew Green, and also in **1897 when Lucien was ill**.
- After four years he **rejected pointillism** as not suited to his natural style and he returned to his earlier style but with a firmer hand and more subtle colours. So this work, *Charing Cross Bridge, London* is one of his last pointillist paintings.

NOTES

- In old age he suffered from an eye infection and could only paint outside in warm weather so he started to paint from his hotel room including hotels in London, Rouen, Paris, Le Havre and Dieppe.



Camille Pissarro (1830-1903),
Woman with a Green Headscarf,
1893, 65.5 × 54.5 cm, Musée
d'Orsay

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Woman with a Green Headscarf*, 1893, 65.5 × 54.5 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- Pissarro's *Woman with a Green Headscarf* (1893) exemplifies his fascination with portraying rural women in their everyday environments and marks an important phase in his late career, closely linked to his years in Éragny-sur-Epte. Painted with short, vibrant, pointillist-inspired brushstrokes, the portrait bathes its subject in a shimmering light that blurs boundaries between figure and background. Pissarro here takes the Neo-Impressionist techniques he had explored in the late 1880s—developed in dialogue with Georges Seurat and Paul Signac—and adapts them, infusing the rigid scientific approach of his peers with his own warmth and humanity.
- The woman's green headscarf, rendered with lively dabs of yellow and blue, becomes a focal point. Her contemplative, slightly distant expression hints at both strength and reserve, and her modest setting—a rustic chair and a woven basket—grounds the composition in the everyday reality of peasant life. For Pissarro, these subjects were not decorative but documentary: he sought to record with empathy the dignity of rural working women, reflecting the social and agricultural rhythms of Éragny where he lived with his family.
- By 1893, Pissarro was a respected elder among the Impressionists but maintained his egalitarian conviction that the lives of ordinary people deserved monumental treatment. Anecdotes from Éragny recall him as a familiar, kindly figure among villagers, often seen sketching outdoors, ever attentive to the

nuances of light and color. "Woman with a Green Headscarf" stands as a testament to Pissarro's mature style—a synthesis of modern technique, social consciousness, and a deep affection for the humble lives he observed.

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pissarro,_Femme_au_fichu_vert.jpg



Camille Pissarro (1830-1903),
Peasant Woman Standing Naked,
1895, 35.3 x 27.3, National Gallery
of Art, Washington D.C

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Peasant Woman Standing Naked*, 1895, 35.3 x 27.3, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C

- Pissarro's rare engagement with the nude is exemplified by his series of peasant women bathing, especially from 1894 onward.
- Anecdotally it is believed the series may have been partly prompted by prolonged bad weather in Éragny that forced Pissarro to work indoors, shifting his focus from landscape to figure drawing. These nudes, described by Pissarro as **"romantic prints and drawings ... many Bathers in all sorts of poses, in landscapes of paradise,"** reflect his democratic approach, highlighting peasant women in intimate, everyday moments rather than as mere idealized forms.
- He found it difficult to find models willing to pose in a modest rural community. In addition, his wife, Julie, is said to have disapproved of him using nude models, and practical constraints—including finances and local customs—meant such paintings were relatively few. It was only by 1894 that he completed these nudes, producing several variations over the next couple of years.
- These works feature naturalistic lighting and divisionist brushwork, showing Pissarro openly experimenting with the interplay of light on the nude form, as well as the technique known as pointillism. The earthy honesty and absence of mythological or idealized elements distinguish his peasant nudes from those of academic art or Impressionist peers.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Boulevard Montmartre at Night*, 1897, 53.3 x 64.8 cm, National Gallery, London

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Boulevard Montmartre at Night*, 1897, 53.3 x 64.8 cm, National Gallery, London

- This is one of 14 views of the Boulevard Montmartre that he painted in 1897. These include the boulevard seen in snow, rain, fog, mist and sunlight, and in the morning, afternoon, at sunset and at night. The picture is the **only example of a night painting** by Pissarro.
- The composition contrasts the cool white glow of newly installed electric street lamps with the warm yellows of gaslights from shops and oil lamps on horse-drawn cabs. Electric street lights were first installed in Paris and in London in 1878 but did not extend to Boulevard Montmartre until the mid-1890s and they were still regarded as a wonder.
- Pissarro employed loose, gestural brushstrokes—a hallmark of Impressionism—using a patchwork of dashes and daubs to evoke the vibrancy and motion of the city's crowds and shimmering lights. The resulting effect is almost abstract, capturing the ephemeral qualities of light and atmosphere in urban life. This work exemplifies his ability to portray the fast-changing modern world through his distinct painterly approach.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Rue Saint-Honoré, Afternoon, Rain Effect*, 1897, 81 × 65 cm, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Rue Saint-Honoré, Afternoon, Rain Effect*, 1897, 81 × 65 cm, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

- By the 1890s his eyesight was failing but he adapted his methods and continued painting vibrant scenes until his death in 1903.
- *Rue Saint-Honoré, Afternoon, Rain Effect* shows a rainy day on a bustling Parisian street. It is part of a series of urban views he created from a window in the Hôtel du Louvre, capturing the effects of light and weather on the city. The painting, which is part of the collection at the Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, is known for its vibrant brushwork, reflections on the wet street, and dynamic atmosphere.
- It is one of a series of about fifteen paintings he made from the same hotel room, exploring how light and weather conditions, such as rain, mist, and different times of day, altered the appearance of the street.
- Note his signature Impressionist style — the use of thick impasto, complementary colours mixed directly on the canvas, and loose, dynamic brushstrokes that convey a sense of movement and light.
- It was painted near the end of his career and reflects his return to Impressionism after experimenting with Pointillism.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Morning Sunlight Effect, Eragny*, 1899, approx. 66 x 81.7 cm, Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *Morning Sunlight Effect, Eragny*, 1899, approx. 66 x 81.7 cm, Israel Museum, Jerusalem

- This is an outstanding late work that demonstrates his lifelong dedication to capturing the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere in rural settings. Painted in Eragny-sur-Epte (pronounced ear-an-ee sur ep"), the village in Normandy where Pissarro settled with his family from the mid-1880s until his death, the canvas features a peasant woman resting on a grassy knoll, dappled sunlight filtering through the trees around her.
- The composition's intimacy and naturalness reflect Pissarro's egalitarian outlook, that all humans are of equal worth and should have equal rights and opportunities. He gives dignity and centrality to working-class subjects and provides us with a window onto the rhythms of rural life. The artist's handling of paint is loose and shimmering, with quick, vibrant brushstrokes that evoke the sensation of early-morning light as it touches foliage, clothing, and earth. This optical sensitivity is characteristic of Pissarro's mature Impressionist style, but the measured, almost contemplative atmosphere hints at his interest in Neo-Impressionism, which he explored later in life.
- Late works from Eragny frequently focus on the light-filled landscape and the quiet moments of labor or repose among villagers. By the time he painted this scene, Pissarro had **become a highly respected elder of the Impressionists** and was surrounded by family—his wife Julie and their children had long settled in Eragny, which provided ongoing artistic inspiration.

- Pissarro would tramping the fields each morning, poised to catch the changing effects of sunlight and season, as well as his unwavering belief in representing the ordinary moments of people's lives. *Morning Sunlight Effect, Eragny* is a masterwork that condenses his visual philosophy: democracy, light, and nature entwined in harmony.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Seine and the Louvre, Paris*, 1903, 46.5 × 55 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), *The Seine and the Louvre, Paris*, 1903, 46.5 × 55 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- This was painted in 1903 and shows a view of the **Seine River and the Louvre Palace** in Paris, capturing the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere using loose brushwork. It is part of a series of Parisian cityscapes Pissarro created from a high vantage point, likely from a dwelling due to his poor eyesight.
- After devoting decades to **rural scenes**, **Pissarro shifted** in the 1890s to Parisian and other city views, drawn by the complex light and activity of modern life.
- In this canvas, executed from the **second floor of a house at Place Dauphine**, Pissarro presents a panoramic and geometric view of the Seine River, the Pont des Arts, and the Louvre, softened by winter mist. His loose brushwork and harmonious palette—cool earth tones and touches of watery light—create a subtle, poetic impression of a **cold Parisian day**. Trees line the embankment, and figures stroll along the riverside, while barges glide through the waterway, giving a sense of everyday life in turn-of-the-century Paris. The grand architecture of the Louvre emerges through the haze in the distance, reinforcing the painting's sense of temporal layering—history set against fleeting moment.
- Between 1900 and 1903, Pissarro **created nearly thirty views** from this same window, each with distinct light and weather effects, and this work epitomises his lifelong quest to capture atmosphere and movement.
- He died on 13 November 1903 in Paris at the age of 73 due to sepsis or blood

poisoning, brought on by an abscess in his prostate, after a period of declining health worsened by a recurring eye infection and a bad cold. His belief in homeopathic medicine led him to delay necessary surgery, which ultimately proved fatal.

- He was buried alongside his parents in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, one of the city's most renowned resting places for notable cultural figures. While details of his funeral ceremony itself are scant in the contemporary record, Pissarro was by this time recognized as a central figure in French art, admired by both peers and younger artists. His reputation for generosity and mentorship—described as "Father Pissarro"—was widely acknowledged among both the Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist communities.
- His son **Lucien Pissarro** played an important role in preserving and extending the legacy of his father. Lucien was himself a **distinguished artist** and printmaker, actively working in London, deeply influenced by Impressionism and later contributing to the Arts and Crafts movement. However, Lucien forged his own path, while helping promote Camille's work and memory, especially through exhibitions and publications. Lucien aided in the organisation of Pissarro retrospectives and offered firsthand insights into his father's working methods and artistic ethos. He did not, however, lead a Pissarro "atelier" or found a school, but was instrumental in ensuring Camille Pissarro's posthumous reputation remained strong.

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27-05 CAMILLE PISSARRO

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Camille Pissarro, *Self-Portrait*, 1903,, Tate

- Pissarro's enduring legacy is profound: he was the **only artist to exhibit at all eight Impressionist exhibitions** and played a critical role as **advisor and friend to major artists such as Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh**. He championed **new artistic ideas**, advised younger painters, and helped shape the trajectory of both Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, earning Van Gogh's and Cassatt's praise as a teacher and visionary. Today, Pissarro's work is recognised not only for its **technical innovation and beauty** but for embodying **democratic and humane ideals** at the heart of modern art.



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