

## ENGLISH IMPRESSIONISM

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE  
ART@SHAFE.UK  
WWW.SHAFE.UK

Philip Wilson Steer (1860–1942), *Seated Nude: The Black Hat*, c. 1900, Tate

Philip Wilson Steer (1860–1942), *Seated Nude: The Black Hat*, c. 1900, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, Tate

- What is **English Impressionism**? We all know that French Impressionism is concerned with **working outdoors** and **capturing the fleeting moment**, placing an emphasis on the **effects of light** and is characterised by **small, individual brushstrokes, an absence of fine details**, and the **use of pure, unmixed colour**. **English Impressionist was less well defined** and its artists had different motivations. To understand them better let us start at the beginning...

### SOCIETY & ART

- By the late Victorian period the importance of the Royal Academy and the old academic style of painting had declined. With the decline of the Royal Academy artists in various geographic locations were able to form substantial and influential groups of like minded artists.
- It was a time of contradictions. It was a time of prosperity (although the 'Long Depression' was from 1873-79) and the Empire was the largest it had ever been yet among intellectuals there was a feeling of pessimism and impending doom. Max Nordau expressed this well in his book *Decadence*, in which he made the surprising claim that art, starting with the Pre-Raphaelites, was the product of diseased minds. The disease was mysticism and irrational thinking that he thought would lead to the collapse of civilization. From an art historical perspective, this shows that the Pre-Raphaelites had begun a profound change,

which indicates that they should be regarded as an early vanguard (an 'avant garde') of what we now call the modern art movement.

- A related concern was physical health. The 1880-81 and particularly the 1899-1902 Boer Wars were a shock to public confidence in the Empire. Britain used 450,000 troops to defeat 35,000 Boers. During the Boer War a half of all the young men conscripted were in too poor health to serve. In some towns 90% of men were rejected. It was found to be caused by poor diets and in 1906 schools provided meals to their pupils. There was a movement to improve the health of the nation both physically and mentally. It was related to 'muscular Christianity' where godliness was equated with manliness, and Thomas Arnold's educational system at Rugby School.

### **ORIENTALISM AND FAIRY PAINTING**

- Orientalism was concerned with representing scenes from the Middle East but more generally there was an interest in other societies, sometimes called the 'Other' (Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1979). This included what were known as 'primitive' societies that were geographically remote, such as fishing villages like Newlyn and exotic societies such as Japan as well as those that were remote in time such as classical and medieval societies.
- The idea of other worlds also included literary and fantasy worlds that included fairy painting.

### **NEW ART MOVEMENTS**

- The stranglehold of the Royal Academy was being broken by art movements, such as the Pre-Raphaelites and by artists, such as Whistler, that were outside the establishment.
- It was further weakened when the Grosvenor Gallery opened in 1877 and promoted 'modern' art.
- British attitudes to modern art were "polarized" at the end of the 19th century. Modernist movements were both cherished and vilified by artists and critics; Impressionism was initially regarded by "many conservative critics" as a "subversive foreign influence", but became "fully assimilated" into British art during the early-20th century.
- The New English Art Club (NEAC) started in 1885 and became another alternative to the Royal Academy and led to other groups including:
  - English Impressionism was influenced by Jules Bastien-Lepage.

- Newlyn School, was founded by Stanhope Forbes and it became a large artistic community.
- Glasgow School which includes the Glasgow Boys and the Glasgow Girls.
- Walter Sickert, the Fitzroy Street Group and the Camden Town Group developed an English style of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism with a strong strand of social documentary. They combined with the English Vorticists in 1913 to form The London Group and artist-led organisation that still holds exhibitions.
- There were also smaller artistic communities, such as:
  - Staithes Group, an art colony in North Yorkshire, 25 artist, inspired by Monet, Cezanne and Renoir. It included Laura Knight.
  - Cullercoats, Winslow Homer spent two years there 1881-2.

## **NOTES**

- Royal Academy became increasingly ossified; the unmistakably late Victorian figure of Frank Dicksee was appointed President in 1924.
- The NEAC conveniently used the Egyptian Hall opposite the Royal Academy. Today the NEAC remains figurative and the Royal Academy is mostly abstract and conceptual art. Early members included Thomas Cooper Gotch, Frank Bramley, John Singer Sargent, Philip Wilson Steer, George Clausen and Stanhope Forbes
- Jules Bastien-Lepage had a profound effect upon a group of young Scottish painters who came to be known as the "Glasgow Boys", who included Sir John Lavery and George Henry. They straddled Impressionism, and Art Nouveau, Japonisme and the Celtic Revival in design, with the architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh now their best-known member. Painters included Thomas Millie Dow, George Henry, Joseph Crawhall and James Guthrie.
- The Camden Town Group included Walter Sickert, Harold Gilman, Spencer Frederick Gore, Charles Ginner, Robert Bevan, Malcolm Drummond and Lucien Pissarro (the son of French Impressionist painter Camille Pissarro).
- The Scottish Colourists indeed mostly used bright light and colour; some, like Samuel Peploe and John Duncan Fergusson, were living in France to find suitable subjects. They were initially inspired by Sir William McTaggart (1835–1910), a Scottish landscape painter associated with Impressionism.

- Victorian art also includes British Orientalism (John Frederick Lewis, Holman Hunt, David Roberts, Edward Lear) and Fairy painting.
- Important artists not mentioned include:
  - Samuel Palmer, mystic landscape artist in the tradition of William Blake
  - James Tissot, French painter of middle-class social scenes.
  - Gustave Dore, engraver of scenes including the London poor
- In photography Pictorialism aimed to achieve artistic indeed painterly effects; The Linked Ring (founded 1892) was founded by Henry Peach Robinson, George Davison, and Henry Van der Weyde with the aim of bringing art back into the science of photography.
- The American John Singer Sargent was the most successful London portraitist at the start of the 20th century, with John Lavery, Augustus John and William Orpen rising figures. John's sister Gwen John lived in France, and her intimate portraits were relatively little appreciated until decades after her death.
- The London-born Irish artist Jack Butler Yeats (1871–1957), was based in Dublin, at once a romantic painter, a symbolist and an expressionist.
- In the early 20th century, Vorticism was a brief coming together of a number of Modernist artists in the years immediately before 1914; members included Wyndham Lewis, the sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein, David Bomberg, Malcolm Arbuthnot, Lawrence Atkinson, the American photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn, Frederick Etchells, the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Cuthbert Hamilton, Christopher Nevinson, William Roberts, Edward Wadsworth, Jessica Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Dorothy Shakespear.
- The early 20th century also includes The Sitwell's artistic circle and more notably the Bloomsbury Group a group of mostly English writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists, including painter Dora Carrington, painter and art critic Roger Fry, art critic Clive Bell, painter Vanessa Bell, painter Duncan Grant among others; very fashionable at the time, their work in the visual arts looks less impressive today. British modernism was to remain somewhat tentative until after World War II, though figures such as Ben Nicholson kept in touch with European developments.

## **WHAT WAS THE STATE OF THE BRITISH ECONOMY DURING THE 19TH**

## **CENTURY?**

The agricultural economy was dependent on the weather and the import and export laws. The manufacturing economy depended on the availability of capital, a skilled workforce, political stability and the availability of raw materials.

1814 the last 'Frost Fair' held on the Thames. The 'Little Ice Age' started in 1350 and ended in the 1850s, with three particularly cold periods from 1650, 1770 and 1850.

1815 Implementation of the 'Corn Laws' to artificially fix the price of corn. The start of an agricultural depression leading to the Swing Riots of the 1830s.

1816 Terrible harvest, the 'Year Without a Summer'

1825 Banking crisis

1840s 'The Hungry Forties'

1846-49 Great Irish Famine

1846 the repeal of the 'Corn Laws' by Robert Peel, a Conservative with the support of the Whigs against his own party.

1847 Rail stock crash

1873-79 the Long Depression, particularly in the US where it extended into the 1890s.

1877-95 agricultural depression caused by wet summers, US imports and animal diseases

1870-1914 foreign trade tripled

1880-1913 the 'Golden Age' for international finance

1900-1914 the Edwardian Era was a time of peace and prosperity with no depressions and widespread prosperity.

1913 US overtook the UK as the largest economy in the world. London became the world's financial capital and the export of capital became the basis of the UK economy.

## **UK POPULATION**

- From 1801 to 1901 the UK population increased from 10.5m to 40m (fourfold in a century). The population in 1701 was estimated to be 6.5m.
- In 1700 only 17% of the population lived in urban areas, by 1800 it was 25.5% and by 1900 it was 77%. That is, during the nineteenth century

roughly half the population moved from rural to urban areas. This was to meet the demand for labour and because of the 'agricultural revolution' that pre-dated 1750 a was a combination of good harvests, crop rotation and increased mechanisation.

John Constable  
(1776-1837), *The  
HayWain*, 1821,  
130 x 185 cm,  
National Gallery



John Constable (1776-1837), *The HayWain*, 1821, 130 x 185 cm, National Gallery

- Constable and Turner produced work in the early part of the nineteenth century that influenced French landscape artists who, in turn, influenced the next generation of Impressionists.
- Constable's realism and use of colour was revolutionary at the time. Today the ***The Hay Wain*** today is so uncontroversial it has been described as 'chocolate box' but then it earned a great deal of criticism. Critics described his '**disagreeable**', '**disfigured**' and '**mannered**' surface and complained his scenes were scattered with '**a huge quantity of chopped hay**'.
- *The Times* noted his habit of '**scattering white spots over the surface of his picture**', a criticism later applied to Turner. *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, May 1829, commented on a Constable as '**...an execrable taste, having no resemblance to any appearance in Nature**'.
- There was great resistance to Constable using lighter shades of green, there is a legend that his patron, George Beaumont, criticized him for not making grass the required mellow brown of an old violin. It is said, Constable, took a real violin and put it on the grass to show his patron the difference.
- However, despite this criticism in England he was very successful and influential in France. In 1821, this picture, ***The Hay Wain*, then called *Landscape: Noon*, was shown at the Royal Academy** and it failed to find a buyer. It was seen by two Frenchmen, the artist **Théodore Géricault** and writer **Charles Nodier** (pronounced 'no-di-ay'). According to the painter Eugène Delacroix, **Géricault**

returned to France 'quite stunned' by Constable's painting. While Nodier suggested French artists should also look to nature rather than relying on trips to Rome for inspiration. **The Hay Wain** was purchased, along with two other paintings (*View on the Stour near Dedham* and a small painting of Yarmouth Jetty) by the **Anglo-French dealer John Arrowsmith** for £250. Both paintings were **exhibited at the Paris Salon that year**, where they **caused a sensation**, with the *Hay Wain* being **awarded a gold medal by Charles X**. Delacroix wrote in his journal: "**What he says here about the green of his meadows can be applied to every tone**" and he repainted the background of one of his painting (*Massacre de Scio*, 1824). In other words, French artists immediately grasped Constable's novel idea that an artist should base their colours on what they see in nature.

## NOTES

- This led to his most commercially successful period when he sold about twenty paintings in France through his French dealer John Arrowsmith. He had problems early in their relationship when Constable refused to ship any painting without being paid first. Arrowsmith promptly sent £400 and Constable sent the paintings. Arrowsmith told him that in France his paintings were causing a sensation and one critic described them as 'a miracle'. In 1825 Arrowsmith arrived at Constable's studio to find out what progress had been made on £400 painting he had ordered. Arrowsmith was short of money at the time and spoke poor English. Constable later wrote that the French dealer was '**so excessively impertinent and used such language as never was used to me at my easel before**'. Arrowsmith apologised but Constable refused to accept the apology and Arrowsmith left. Constable may have been worried about his wife's ill-health, he disliked living in Brighton and was under the pressure of many outstanding commissions and as a result he **lost his French outlet. Arrowsmith later went bankrupt**. Constable's friend John Fisher thought that Constable had been impetuous and paranoid. Fisher wrote, '**We are all given to torment ourselves with imaginary evils — but no man had ever this disease in such alarming paroxysms as yourself. You imagine difficulties where none exist, displeasure where none is felt, contempt where none is shown and neglect where none is meant.**'
- In his lifetime, Constable sold only 20 paintings in England, but in France he sold more than 20 in just a few years. Despite this, he refused all invitations to travel internationally to promote his work, writing to Francis Darby: 'I



would rather be a poor man [in England] than a rich man abroad.' A Romantic sentiment.

- The shadowy figure in the centre foreground was originally a man on a horse which was changed to a barrel and then painted out. The paint has become more transparent over time so the shadow of the underpainting can now be seen. The dog was added late in the composition but is an essential part of the balance as it leads the eye across over the hay wagon into the distance scene.
- Driving a hay wagon through water had a practical benefit as in hot weather the metal rim expanded and the wooden wheel dried out and shrank. The water cooled the metal which shrank and it expanded the wood as it absorbed water thus ensuring the metal rim became a tight fit.
- The flash of red on the fisherman (right, middle distance, in the reeds) and on the horse intensify the green by the juxtaposition of its complementary colour.
- The cottage was owned by Willy Lot a local tenant farmer admired by Constable as he lived in the cottage for 80 years and only spent four nights away. He was a deaf, eccentric tenant farmer and the smoke from the chimney shows his unseen presence. The woman outside is probably gathering water using a jug as she is too far above the water surface to clean clothes effectively. The men in the distant field are gathering hay in a manner that had been abandoned in Suffolk 20 years earlier. Constable is presenting a traditional, reactionary view of the countryside that invokes the nostalgia of the previous century. In fact, his brother Abram wrote in 1822 about, 'never a night without seeing fires near or at a distance'.

## **REFERENCES**

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Joseph Mallord William  
Turner (1775-1851), *Norham  
Castle, Sunrise*, c.1845, 90.8  
x 121.9 cm, Tate Britain



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Norham Castle, Sunrise*, c.1845, 90.8 x 121.9 cm, Tate Britain

- This is **Norham Castle, Sunrise** and it is an **typical example of late Turner**. This is the style he painted in from about 1835, when he was 60, to his last exhibition in 1850. The cold, ghostly blue of the castle contrasts with the fireball of the glowing sun and the soft browns of the riverbanks. An umber cow appears ethereal and suspended between air and water until we realise that we are looking at its reflection in the river.
- He had painted his first picture of Norham Castle nearly fifty years before, in 1797 when he was just 22 and over the years he produced more than **fifteen version of Norham Castle**.
- Some see it is an early example of a modernist work years ahead of its time and others as simply an unfinished painting. It is possible this work was never finished and never intended for exhibition, we shall never know.
- So were Constable and Turner Impressionist painters? No, Impressionism was a particular art movement In France in the 1860s and 70s. However, they certainly influenced French artists and their approach encouraged artists to look at nature in fresh ways.

### **NOTES ON 'NORHAM CASTLE, SUNRISE', C.1845**

- The work was never seen by the public. It was first shown in 1906 at an exhibition at the Tate that marked the rediscovery of Turner. *The Spectator*

commented that Turner was an artist who, more than any other before him, painted light rather than the objects themselves. Edward Lear reported that his late paintings were seen as the wreck of a great mind although, to Lear, they were 'the glorious setting of a glorious sun.' In the twentieth century, many people saw this painting as the forerunner of the whole of modern art but more recently cynical historians have said that that is imposing too much on Turner and it is simply an unfinished painting. What do I think? I am reminded of a story told by the great abstract impressionist Mark Rothko. When he first saw this painting in New York in 1966 he joked, "This man Turner, he learnt a lot from me."

- This beautiful scene suggests that towards the end of his life not all his paintings had a bleak message. However, some would disagree. Today we look at the countryside as a place where nothing much happens full of beautiful scenery. Turner though always saw the bloody background, the hungry workers and the bloody battles. Norham Castle was the scene of more bloody battles than any other on the Scottish border and it changed hands many times. It is an imposing, dark medieval castle that dates to 1121 and was built to protect Northumberland from the Scots. The light has been described as corpse-like and that Turner saw the sun as a cruel and terrible God.
- The interesting thing is that Turner leaves it up to us how we interpret it. You can see it either way, as an idyllic sunrise in a beautiful setting or as the scene of many terrible and bloody battles.
- Tate display caption, 'Turner first saw Norham, bordering Scotland on the river Tweed in Northumberland, in 1797. He was at the limits of his trip to northern England, when he also visited Buttermere, seen in the painting of nearly fifty years earlier shown nearby. After that first visit he made watercolours showing the ruin at sunrise, and visits in 1801 and 1831 resulted in further views. Here, finally, is one of a series of unfinished, unexhibited paintings reworking his monochrome Liber Studiorum landscape prints. Pure colours rather than contrasting tones express the blazing light as the historic building and landscape merge.'
- Turner first visited Norham Castle in 1797 at the age of 22 and he liked to explain that his first picture of the castle was the work that launched his career. Norham Castle was to become a favourite subject always from the Scottish side of the river looking towards England across the Tweed.

## **REFERENCES**

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Alfred Sisley, *Molesey Weir, Hampton Court*, 1874, 51.1 × 68.8 cm, National Gallery of Scotland



Alfred Sisley, *Molesey Weir, Hampton Court*, 1874, 51.1 × 68.8 cm, National Gallery of Scotland

- This is an example of an Impressionist painting by Alfred Sisley. **It has a particular fascination for me as it is five minutes walk from where I live.**
- Sisley was born in Paris to wealthy British parents and he retained British citizenship all his life. His work did not sell well and he depended on a generous allowance from his father but then, in 1870, his father's business was destroyed by the Franco-Prussian War and Sisley remained poor for the rest of his life.
- Occasionally, a wealthy patron would pay for a trip abroad and that is how he arrive in south-west London in 1874 shortly after the first Impressionist exhibition. He painted nearly twenty painting of East Molesey and Hampton Court Bridge.
- We recognise this painting immediately as an Impressionist painting but in England there were many influences mixed together and **English Impressionism is therefore a loose term** describing British art of the late nineteenth century that was influenced by French art of the period.

## **NOTES**

- French artists influenced by Constable went to Barbizon in the Forest of Fontainebleau to paint a new form of landscape and they became known as the Barbizon School. These artists included Jean Corot and Jean Millet and

their painting became known as the Realism art movement, a reaction against Romanticism.

- In the late 1860s artists such as Claude Monet, **Pierre-Auguste Renoir**, and **Alfred Sisley were influenced by the Barbizon School** and in the 1870s their work became known as **Impressionism**.
- In the spring of **1829, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot** came to **Barbizon** to paint in the Forest of **Fontainebleau**. He returned to Barbizon in the autumn of 1830 and in the summer of 1831, where he made drawings and oil studies, from which he made a painting intended for the Salon of 1830; "View of the Forest of Fontainebleau". While there he met the members of the **Barbizon school**; Théodore Rousseau, Paul Huet, Constant Troyon, **Jean-François Millet**, and the young Charles-François Daubigny.
- During the Revolutions of **1848** artists gathered at **Barbizon** to follow **John Constable's** ideas, making nature the subject of their paintings. The French landscape became a major theme of the Barbizon painters. They were formed as a reaction against Romanticism and it was part of the Realism art movement.
- During the late 1860s, the Barbizon painters attracted the attention of a **younger generation of French artists** studying in Paris. Several of those artists visited Fontainebleau Forest to paint the landscape, including **Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley** and Frédéric Bazille. and it led in the 1870s to **Impressionism**.
- In **September 1870**, the **Franco-Prussian war** caused **Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro** and Charles-François Daubigny to flee to London.
- French Impressionists found it **hard to sell their paintings in France** and hoped they might sell to English industrialists.
- From the 1840s onwards many **British artists** studied in the **ateliers** in Paris as part of their art training.
- The dealer **Paul Durand-Ruel** held **10 exhibitions** in his gallery in New Bond Street **between 1870 and 1874** entitled 'Society of French Artists'. Durand-Ruel co-ordinated the careers of atheist republican Claude Monet, Jewish anarchist Camille Pissarro, curmudgeonly anti-Semite Edgar Degas and reactionary misogynist Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Durand-Ruel lost his wife and never remarried and brought up his five children alone. He came close to bankruptcy while supporting the Impressionists. Despite his belief that there was a market in London it was **slow to materialize** and the artists

returned to France after the war. He continued to show French art in London and it was a favourite for young artists such as George Clausen. In the end they were saved not by English buyers but by **American buyers**, Durand-Ruel said, '**Without America,**' he said, '**I would have been lost, ruined**'.

- The art historian Kenneth Clark later described it as "**the perfect moment of Impressionism**".
- The importance with which Impressionism is regarded today was far from inevitable at the time. Artists worked in many ways with different motives and there was **no clear school of Impressionism**.
- The first exhibition of 'impressionist' work **in France was not until April 1874** in Nadar's studio on the Boulevard-des-Capucines ('Street of Nasturtiums') **after** Durand-Ruel's 10 exhibitions in London. It was at the first exhibition that Monet showed *Impression, Sunrise* ('Impression: soleil levant') and the critic Louis Leroy satirized the exhibition with a review in the French equivalent of *Punch* (*Le Charivari*) entitled 'The Exhibition of the Impressionists'. There were eight exhibitions over the next 12 years (1874-1886).
- **Alfred Sisley** made an important **visit to London** in the **spring of 1874**. He stayed in the Castle Inn, East Molesey, one of the most famous inns on the Thames.
- In **1877** Sir Coutts-Lindsay opened the **Grosvenor Gallery** and in 1880 he had a small retrospective exhibition of the works of **Bastien-Lepage**. His prominence in Britain dates from this point.
- Whistler won the **Whistler v. Ruskin trial of 1878** but it was a pyrrhic victory and collectors remained cautious about buying his work.
- But by the **end of the 1870s** English artists were becoming exposed to trends in French art and **accurate reproductions** became possible for the first time.

### **REALISM, NATURALISM, IMPRESSIONISM AND AESTHETICISM**

- It is difficult to separate these terms as there is a large overlap between them.
- **Realism** and naturalism in art are often used as synonyms but Realism was a school of French art exemplified by Gustave **Courbet** (1819–1877) and Jean-François Millet (1814–1875) which depicted the everyday lives of

working people. Courbet said that 'painting is essentially a concrete art and can only consist in the representation of real and existing things'.

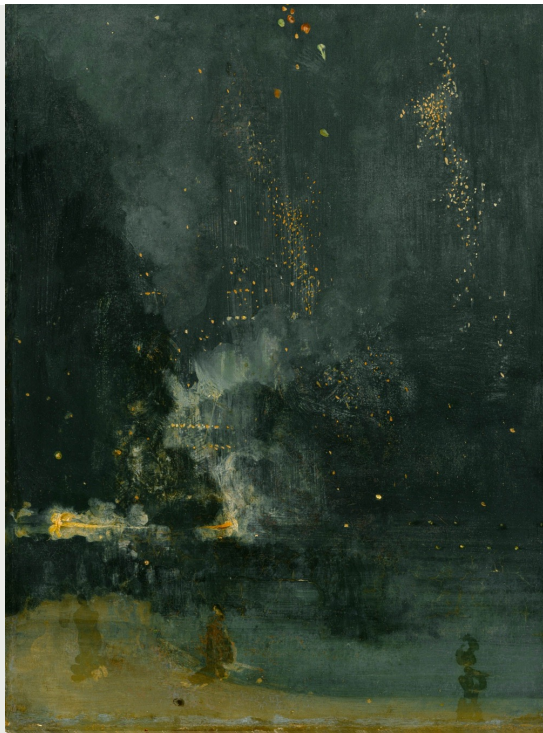
- **Naturalism** as a philosophy is based on natural laws and opposed to the spiritual or supernatural. In painting it is the attempt to represent subject matter truthfully, without artificiality and avoiding artistic conventions, implausible, exotic and supernatural elements.
- **Impressionists** painted realistic scenes of everyday modern life, generally outside (*en plein-air*). Monet, Sisley, Morisot, and Pissarro are the 'purest' Impressionists, in the sense their art was spontaneous and captured the scientifically accurate effects of sunlight and colour. Degas rejected much of this, as he believed in the primacy of drawing over colour and considered the practice of painting outdoors unimportant. Renoir turned away from Impressionism for a time during the 1880s, and never entirely regained his commitment to its ideas. Édouard Manet, although regarded by the Impressionists as their leader, never abandoned his liberal use of black as a colour, and never participated in the Impressionist exhibitions.
- **Aestheticism** or the 'Cult of Beauty' or 'art for art's sake' was concerned with creating a beautiful effect rather than accurately representing the natural world. It supported the emphasis on aesthetic values more than social-political themes and was associated later with decadence and the Symbolists in France. British decadent writers and artists were influenced by the work of Walter Pater.

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James Abbot McNeil Whistler (1834-1903), *Nocturne in Black and Gold – The Falling Rocket*, 1875, 60.3 × 46.4 cm, Detroit Institute of Art



James Abbot McNeil Whistler (1834-1903), *Nocturne in Black and Gold – The Falling Rocket*, 1875, 60.3 × 46.4 cm, Detroit Institute of Art

- Another of those influences was an American artist James Abbot McNeil Whistler who travelled between Paris in London. In 1855, aged 21, he trained in Paris in the the studio of Marc-Charles-Gabriel Gleyre (1806-1874) whose students included Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir and Alfred Sisley and so Whistler was influenced by and knowledgeable of the work of these artists.
- Whistler settled in London in 1863 and his pupils included **Walter Sickert** and **Philip Wilson Steer** who both developed forms of impressionism that are called **English Impressionism**.

## NOTES

- Whistler arrived in Paris in 1855, aged 21, and moved to London in 1859 which he adopted as his home.
- In 1866 Whistler decided to travel to Valparaiso, Chile to fight the Spanish. Scholars have puzzle over his motivation. Whistler stated he was asked by some South Americans as a 'West Point' man and he was very proud of his military training but, unlike his brother, he had never fought. He may have thought this the opportunity to display his military prowess as a swashbuckling Southern gentleman (even though he was born in New England). Whatever the reason Whistler's painted his first three night paintings while he was there. He later, thanks to the suggestion of his patron Frederick Leyland he re-titled them 'nocturnes'.

- On his return he contributed *Symphony in White, No. 3* but critics in England and France were not sympathetic and between 1868 and 1870 he showed only a single painting at the Royal Academy and none in France. He experimented with classical nudes in drapes but criticized himself for his lack of formal training in the life class. He had lost his sense of artistic direction. He was short of money, despised the English and began a major family crisis by arguing with his brother-in-law and pushing him through a plate glass window. In 1869 his half-brother George died.
- In 1871 he painted his ailing mother, *Arrangement on Grey and Black, No. 1* (colloquially called Whistler's Mother) and this to have been a turning point. At the same time he was rejecting Realism for Aestheticism and he chose to go out on the Thames at night with Walter Greaves (1846-1930) and paint his Nocturnes. Greaves was a neighbour who was a boat builder and waterman and his father had been the boatman for J. M. W. Turner.
- Whistler painted several more nocturnes over the next ten years, many of the River Thames and of Cremorne Gardens, a pleasure park famous for its frequent fireworks displays, which presented a novel challenge to paint. In his maritime nocturnes, Whistler used paint he had thinned with copal, turpentine and linseed oil, creating what he called a 'sauce', which he applied in thin, transparent layers, wiping it away until he was satisfied. To this ground he applied lightly flicked colour to suggest ships, lights, and shore line. Some of the Thames paintings also show compositional and thematic similarities with the Japanese prints of Hiroshige.
- Whistler was short and slim with a curling moustache and he often wore a monocle and dressed like a dandy. He was self-confident, arrogant and selfish and enjoyed shocking his friends. He had a biting wit and on one occasion, young Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) attended one of Whistler's dinners, and hearing his host make some brilliant remark, apparently said, "I wish I'd said that", to which Whistler riposted, "You will, Oscar, you will!" In fact, Wilde did repeat in public many witticisms created by Whistler.

### **THE WHISTLER V. RUSKIN TRIAL**

- This painting gave rise to one of the central artistic controversies of the Victorian period, known as the Whistler v. Ruskin trial. The trial tells us a lot about how the Victorians regarded art and the nature of the changes Whistler helped bring about.
- This painting and the next were exhibited in the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877,

the year it opened. John Ruskin reviewed Whistler's work in his publication *Fors Clavigera* on July 2, 1877. Ruskin praised Burne-Jones, while he attacked Whistler:

- For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay [founder of the Grosvenor Gallery] ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face.
- Critics by convention did not criticise paintings as they knew the artist had to make a living. If they did not like a painting they ignored it or made a critical comment alongside some positive points.
- Whistler, seeing the attack in the newspaper, replied to his friend George Boughton, "It is the most debased style of criticism I have had thrown at me yet." He then went to his solicitor and drew up a writ for libel which was served to Ruskin. Whistler hoped to recover £1,000 plus the costs of the action. The case came to trial the following year after delays caused by Ruskin's bouts of mental illness, while Whistler's financial condition continued to deteriorate. It was heard at the Queen's Bench of the High Court on November 25 and 26 of 1878.
- Although, we do not have a transcript of the Whistler v. Ruskin trial sufficient reports were published to enable it to be reconstructed.
  - When asked 'Are those figures on the top of the bridge intended for people?'
  - Whistler replied 'They are just what you like.'
  - When the judge asked if it was a barge beneath the bridge,
  - Whistler replied 'Yes, I am very much flattered at your seeing that. The picture is simply a representation of moonlight. My whole scheme was only to bring about a certain harmony of colour.'
- Whistler stressed the colour rather than a harmony of form and the form is suppressed by the overall similarity in tone and hue; with the exception of the gold dots the painting is a wash of blue, in places a thin wash that allows the canvas to show. Whistler mixed large quantities of the predominant tone that he called his 'sauce', and although he started on an

easel, he often had to throw the canvas on the floor to stop the sauce running off. The sky and water were rendered by 'great sweeps of the brush of exactly the right tone.'



Albert Moore (1841-1893), *The Quartet, a Painters Tribute to Music*, 1868, 61 × 89 cm, private collection

Albert Moore (1841-1893), *The Quartet, a Painters Tribute to Music*, 1868, 61 × 89 cm, private collection

- The painting makes little sense to modern viewers but in 1869 it inspired young artists. It is not a recreation of a classical scene because of the anomaly of modern instruments. It is a harmonious, decorative design without a subject, like a piece of music itself. Moore revived formal qualities of beauty inspired by the human body and nature.
- Of the last painting Rossetti dismissed critics who tried to evaluate its merits base on historical accuracy. They were missing the point. "**Whether or not azaleas were known to Grecian ladies, whether or not they came from America,**" wrote Rossetti, "**are questions not difficult of solution, but of sublime indifference to Mr. Moore**". The same applies to the musical instruments in this painting.

## NOTES

- He was influenced by Greek sculpture and Japanese art.
- He had a complex multi-stage process he used to create his work that consisted of a sketch, a full-size cartoon that was transferred and a method of tearing out sections of tracing paper as he added the colours. He first painted the nude figure and then painted the drapery over the top in order to produce an accurate nude form.
- The painting of the nude figure became a central project for artists associated

with the Aesthetic Movement from the 1860s onwards.

- Although this painting makes little sense to the modern viewer when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1869, the painting 'fired so many young brains with enthusiasm, which inspired so many sonnets, and furnished so many aesthetic drawing rooms' (Robin Asleson, Albert Moore, 2000). For Moore, producing genuinely authentic ancient settings was of little importance; rather his goal was to produce graceful, elegant paintings without a subject. Known as the quintessential aesthetic painter, Alfred Moore's works sublimate everything to composition and a subdued color palette.
- Moore sought to revive the formal qualities responsible for the beauty which the Greeks had drawn from nature and the human body. Moore was greatly influenced by Greek sculpture and Japanese art. In his biography on Moore, Robyn Asleson comments on Moore's extensive preparatory work.

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William Orpen (1878-1931), *Group Associated with the New English Art Club*, National Portrait Gallery

William Orpen (1878-1931), *Group Associated with the New English Art Club*, National Portrait Gallery

- That brings us to **1886 when the New English Art Club** was founded by a group of about 50 young British artists many of whom had studied in **Paris** and at the **Slade School of Art**.
- It was set up by **15 founding members**, sought to establish an **exhibiting society** along French lines and all the artists were influenced by the French artist **Jules Bastien-Lepage** and the French **Barbizon School (1830-1870)**.
- **Whistler was one of the founding members** but he submitted a work, the one we have just seen (*Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*) and it was rejected by the committee. This led to a heated public argument with Walter Sickert and Whistler resigned.
- The important artists at the time who were pushing the boundaries should all be mentioned as they are the foundation of late nineteenth-century British art:
  - **Philip Wilson Steer** (the leading English Impressionist),
  - **John Singer Sargent** (the leading society portraitist),
  - **George Clausen** (the leading landscape painter),
  - **Stanhope Alexander Forbes** (the founder of the Newlyn School),
  - **Frank Bramley** (the leading Realist painter),
  - **Henry Scott Tuke** (painter of maritime scenes and naked young men),
  - **Laura Knight** (the first women to become an Academician by members')

vote),

- **The Glasgow School**, including **Margaret MacDonald Mackintosh** and her husband **Charles Rennie Mackintosh**, **Bessie MacNicol**, **John Lavery** and **James Guthrie**,
- And finally the **Camden Town Group**, found later, in 1911, and which met in **Walter Sickert's studio**. It included **Walter Sickert**, **Harold Gilman**, **Augustus John**, **Wyndham Lewis** and **Lucien Pissarro**.

### THE NEW ENGLISH ART CLUB (NEAC)

- The origin of the Club was in the studios of a group of fifty young London artists in **1886**. These painters had studied and worked in Paris, and felt a dissatisfaction with the exhibition potential of the very academic R.A. which was under the presidency of Sir Frederick, later Lord **Leighton**. They saw themselves as **Anglo-French painters** and at the first exhibition the majority of works were **rural naturalism**.
- It was decided to mount a **rival show**, so in **April 1886** the first exhibition of the **New English Art Club** was organised at which about fifty artists were represented, including **George Clausen**, **Stanhope Forbes**, **J.S. Sargent**, **Frank Bramley** and **Philip Wilson Steer**, Fred Brown, and Thomas Cooper Gotch.
- William Orpen's drawing is a **satire** on the most influential artists, teachers and critics of his early years and the **French influence** on British art as **taught at the Slade** and **exhibited at the NEAC**. **Alphonse Legros** (1837-1911), Slade Professor of Fine Art from 1876 to 1892, is seen with the **sculptor Auguste Rodin** (1840-1917) leading members of the English avant garde along a windy cliff top. Orpen joined the NEAC in 1900. Rodin first visited England in 1881 to see his friend Alphonse Legros.
- Left to right:
  1. **Alphonse Legros** (1837-1911), painter, sculptor and etcher, encouraged by Whistler to come to London in 1863, Professor at the Slade 1875-92 where his insistence on the quality of line laid the foundation of its teaching.
  2. **Auguste Rodin** (1840-1917), sculptor
  3. **Philip Wilson Steer** (1860-1942), trained in Paris, became the leading British Impressionist painter, taught at the Slade and later explored the



landscape tradition of Constable and Turner.

4. **Henry Tonks** (1862-1937), painter; doctor and teacher, became Principal of the Slade School of Art.
5. **Frederick Brown** (1851-1941), painter and teacher, Head of Westminster School of Art, Slade Professor.
6. **William Rotherstein** (1872-1945), artist and teacher of art.
7. **Augustus John** (1878-1961), remained largely independent of trends and became a leading portraitist.
8. **Charles Edward Conder** (1868-1909), second from right with his hands in his pockets, a friend of Toulouse-Lautrec and Aubrey Beardsley.
9. **Dugald Sutherland MacColl** (1859-1948), critic, painter and gallery director of the Tate and Wallace Collection, the leading advocate of Impressionism in *The Spectator* and *Saturday Review*.



Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, opposite the Royal Academy

Photograph of the Egyptian Hall (built 1812, demolished 1905), Piccadilly, opposite the Royal Academy, now offices at 170-173 Piccadilly

- The New English Art Club was founded in 1885 as an alternative to the Royal Academy which was increasingly seen as conservative and out-of-date.
- The Club held regular Spring and Autumn exhibitions, a number of which were held at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, opposite the royal Academy.
- **Walter Sickert's** arrived at the NEAC in 1887 (the year after it was founded) and his arrival crystallised a split within the group between the more **conservative artists** and those who looked to the example of **French impressionism**.
- Sickert resigned in 1887 and with Philip Wilson Steer led a breakaway group known as the '**London Impressionists**'. They held an exhibition at the Goupil Gallery in December 1889.

## NOTES

- The Egyptian Hall was the first building in England to be influenced by the Egyptian style. It was built in 1812 at a cost of £16,000 as a museum of natural history. It was commissioned by William Bullock to house his collection of curiosities from Central America and the South Seas. It was almost opposite Burlington House and the replacement building contains an arcade leading to Jermyn Street.
- It was also referred to as the London Museum or Bullock's Museum. It was the

only London venue that could display very large works. Admittance was one shilling.

- In 1820, ***The Raft of the Medusa*** by Théodore Géricault was exhibited overshadowing **Benjamin Robert Haydon's** (1786-1846) painting, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*. This was typical of his lack of commercial success. In 1844, he exhibited *The Banishment of Aristides from Athens* at the Egyptian Hall (the painting sold at Christies in 2011 for £2,750). The American dwarf Charles S. Stratton, who was known as (General) 'Tom Thumb' was also appearing and over the Easter week 12,000 people paid to see him, while only 133½ visited Haydon's exhibition (the half was a little girl). This failure led to further decline, he was £3,000 in debt and wrote 'Stretch me no longer on this rough world' and he attempted suicide by shooting himself in 1846. This failed to kill him so he cut his throat leaving a widow and three children who were supported by his friends including Sir Robert Peel and Lord Carlisle.
- In the '**Dudley Gallery**' (see photograph) at the Egyptian Hall, the Earl of Dudley's paintings were displayed during the building of his own gallery at Dudley House, Park Lane.
- By the end of the 19th century, the Hall was also associated with **magic and spiritualism**. It was also showed some of the first films. It became known as England's Home of Mystery and many illusions were staged including the exposing of fraudulent spiritualistic manifestations.
- It was demolished in 1903-5.

Theodore Roussel (1847-1926), *The Reading Girl*, 1886, 152.4 × 161.3 cm, Tate Britain



Theodore Roussel (1847-1926), *The Reading Girl*, 1886, 152.4 × 161.3 cm, Tate Britain

- Unlike Whistler's painting, this nude by Theodore Roussel was exhibited at the **first exhibition of the New English Art Club and it caused a sensation**. The public argument helped identify a group of artists known as the English Impressionists or, if we include the influential Glasgow School, the British Impressionists. As you can see the style is unlike any of the French Impressionists.
- It was controversial, *The Spectator* magazine, wrote: "**...it is Realism of the worst kind: The eye of the artist sees only the vulgar appearance of his model, making it blunt and crude...**". In career terms, however, it made Roussel a well-known avant garde artist and later William Orpen described it as **the best nude of the period**.
- Roussel was a French artist and a close friend of Whistler and they both shared a love of all things Japanese, shown here by the kimono hung over the back of the chair.
- The model is Hetty Pettigrew (1867-1953) who posed for both of them as well as Millais and Holman Hunt. She met Roussel two years before he painted this and they became lovers and she had their daughter. Roussel was married to Frances Amelia Smithson Bull (1844–1909) but when she died he married Ethel Melville the widow of the Scottish artist Arthur Melville, rather than Hetty Pettigrew.

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Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884),  
*Potato Gatherers (Saison d'octobre, récolte des pommes de terre)*, 1878,  
Melbourne National Gallery of  
Victoria

Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884), *Potato Gatherers (Saison d'octobre, récolte des pommes de terre)*, 1878, Melbourne National Gallery of Victoria

- Another major influence on European art was the French painter **Jules Bastien-Lepage** who helped define a style of Impressionism in Britain. Lepage influenced many artists including the English artist **George Clausen** as well as the **Glasgow Boys**, such as **John Lavery**.
- This perhaps his most famous painting and he was awarded the **Legion de Honour**. A friend wrote, 'his success at the last Salon has put him in the first rank of painters. **All Europe talks of him, Paris resounds with his name.**'
- He became extremely influential in Britain as he was seen as a **middle way** that combined **Millet's realism with Monet's Impressionism** thus overcoming what was regarded as the **weakness of Impressionism**, that it often failed to transform impressions into something greater and lasting.
- For younger painters disenchanted with the excesses of both the conservative and the radical schools this middle way or '**juste milieu**' (pronounced 'juhst mi-lyuh') approach seemed the way forward.
- The art critic Roger Fry thought that the public saw Monet's sincerity and honesty as pure humbug and he credited the **public's wide acceptance of Impressionism to Bastien-Lepage as he acted as a half-way point, a stepping stone from conventional art to the work of Monet and others**. Today he is little known except as a stepping stone towards the widespread acceptance of Impressionism.

## NOTES

- In **1877** Sir Coutts-Lindsay opened the **Grosvenor Gallery** and in 1880 he had a small retrospective exhibition of the works of **Bastien-Lepage**. His prominence in Britain dates from this point.
- This painting marked the emergence of a style called Naturalism that combined **scientific accuracy with moral truth**. It was also used as a **catch-all term** to mean **anything outside of Impressionism and Academic art**.
- His botanical detail and luxuriant foliage were **influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite** painters. He was equally conscious of emerging currents in the **seventies** – **Impressionism, proto-Symbolism**, new strains of **Realism**, and the advancements in **photography** – that were vying for recognition with the prevailing Academic hierarchy.

## JULES BASTIEN-LEPAGE

- His father operated a small farm and vineyard and was an artist. Jules started as 'Jules Bastien' but soon added his mother's name 'Lepage' to improve his credibility.
- He obtained a degree and trained at the École des Beaux-Arts, whilst working as a postal clerk in Paris. In 1868 he entered the prestigious studio of Alexandre Cabanel. His first painting to be accepted by the French Salon was in 1870 but the Franco-Prussian war started and he joined up and was wounded in the chest. In 1875 he came second in the prestigious Prix de Rome competition to an older but less gifted artist, another student of Cabanel. Bastien-Lepage returned to his native village to reassess his art and from then on focused more on his rural scenes and portraits rather than academic works. He again exhibited at the Salon and in 1879 won the Legion of Honour for *Portrait of Mlle Sarah Bernhardt*.
- His strength was not in academic paintings but in paintings of the countryside. His farm labourers are not downtrodden, like Millet's, but resolute despite their weariness. His success enabled him to travel to England, Switzerland and Italy.
- He was **avidly collected** in England and America and had a **tremendous influence** which made Naturalism the dominant movement in the Paris Salon of the 1880s and 1890s.
- He visited London from 1880 to 1882 because of his disappointment at the reception of *Joan of Arc* at the Paris Salon in 1880. In 1880 and 1883 he

travelled to Italy.

- He became extremely ill and died of stomach cancer in 1884 **aged 36**.
- Zola called him 'the grandson of Millet and Courbet'.
- Bastien-Lepage became **famous** and won **many prizes** in France and England through the **public's love of his paintings**. The influential English art critic Roger Fry thought that **Monet's sincerity** and innocence were taken by the public as '**audacious humbug**' and that Bastien-Lepage, by compromising between the truth and accepted conventions brought the world round to seeing the countryside in Monet's way, so he was provided a **more acceptable route to Impressionism**.





36), *Haymaking (Les Foins)*, 1877, Musée d'Orsay

Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884, aged 36), *Haymaking (Les Foins)*, 1877, Musée d'Orsay

- Another Lepage.
- The almost **overnight emergence** of followers of Bastien-Lepage led one critic said, 'In each room, on each wall, everywhere you turn—Bastien-Lepage! Everywhere, constantly, and incessantly. **The whole world paints so much today like Mr. Bastien-Lepage that Mr. Bastien-Lepage seems to paint like the whole world.**'
- However, he was **not universally admired** one critic described him as 'a **sly trickster who fakes naturalism** in order to please', and another critic wrote, 'Bastien-Lepage has neither ideas, nor style, nor a personal point of view; his vision is ordinary and myopic ... **there's art here but of the smallest kind.**'
- Bastien-Lepage started to be criticized for being **too photographic**. One wrote, '**the truth of art is not that of photography, as so many apparently believe these days.**'
- **(CLICK)** The success of the painting ultimately hinged on the viewers interpretation of the **look of the woman**, was she a **realistic worker** or an **model playing a part** created by the artist? Was she a humble, earthy, hard-working peasant, the critics asked, or was she what they described as a repugnant, slack-jawed beast? That is, simply a model posing, a fake. I will leave it to you to judge.

## NOTES

- See the Marnin Young article at Academia.edu in which he argues that if the moment of absorption convinces and the peasant woman and her world persist outside of 'measured time' then a timeless rural scene has been created. On the other hand, if it fails to convince, as it increasingly did after 1878, it becomes a moment in time and the myth of the countryside becomes irrelevant. The kind of rural worker becomes irrelevant as she must have been a model posing, playing at being a peasant. Later critics saw this as a fatal flaw in his work. From 1879 he was increasingly accused of being **too photographic** and one historian claims he used photographs. Whether this true or not, fin-de-siècle artists increasingly used the poses people put on when having their photograph taken.
- *Haymaking* is inspired by a poem by Andre Theuriet:  
"The reaper stretched out on his bed of fresh grass  
Sleeps with clenched fists while  
The tedder, faint and fuddled, tanned by the sun,  
Sits vacantly dreaming beside him [...]. "
  - (a 'tedder' is someone who spreads hay to assist with drying).
  - It is daringly photographic with an unusually high horizon.

## NATURALISM AND REALISM

- As general terms, 'realism' and 'naturalism' in art are synonymous and refer to the accurate depiction of nature. Such artworks are generally painted outdoors or *en plein air*.
- Realism was a movement in French painting that followed the 1848 revolution. Key artists were Gustave Courbet, Jean-François Millet and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. **Realist painters rejected Romanticism**, which had dominated art since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and wanted to represent **subjects truthfully** without artificiality and avoiding artistic conventions. This specifically meant representing **common labourers** and it overlapped with **Social Realism**. **Naturalism took it further** and looked for illusionism, **the most accurate representation of nature**.
- In terms of realism or naturalism we might think of Francisco Goya's (1746-1828) portraits of Spanish nobility or Northern European fifteenth century representations of Christ suffering on the cross, such as Rogier van der Weyden (1399 or 1400-1464, *The Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435, Museo

del Prado). There is a conflict between naturalism and ideal beauty or flattering the subject. In late nineteenth century France Naturalism distinguished itself from Realism by avoiding politics and social issues.

### **ROGER FRY AND CLIVE BELL**

- Fry was an artist and art historian who coined the term 'Post-Impressionist' and arranged the first exhibition of 'Post-Impressionism' in England in 1910 and again in 1912. He is well known for promoting the term 'significant form' although the term was coined by Clive Bell (1881-1964) an English art critic. Bell married Vanessa Stephen, sister of Virginia Woolf and both he and Fry were closely associated with the Bloomsbury Group.
- **Fry was a formalist**, that is he believed it is a work's formal properties that make a work of art. Clive Bell wrote, 'to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions.' **Significant form** is the combination of lines and colours which make an object a work of art and the key aspect is its ability to create an aesthetic emotion. Bell thought that the artist sees ordinary objects in the world as pure form: the experience one has when one sees something not as a means to something else, but as an end in itself. He believed that works of visual art were among the most valuable things there could be as 'there is no state of mind more excellent or more intense than the state of aesthetic contemplation'.

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Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942), *The Bridge*, 1887-8, Tate Britain

Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942), *The Bridge*, 1887-8, Tate Britain

- From the beginning of the 1890s Philip Wilson Steer was the **leading follower of French Impressionism in England**. This picture was strongly attacked by the critics and dismissed by one as '**either a deliberate daub or so much mere midsummer madness**'. What upset the critics was its **lack of detail**, and for the uncertainly about its subject. It was influenced by the work of Whistler and the view is probably at Walberswick in Suffolk.

### **PHILIP WILSON STEER**

- He has a Post-Impressionistic technique that produced a balance between the formal properties of the surface and the naturalistic representation of the subject. He had been influenced by Whistler and Degas but from about 1895 he began to reassess the work of the Old Masters such as Constable and Turner and he started to paint the English countryside.
- In 1927 he began to lose his sight in one eye and started to paint almost exclusively in watercolour with a looser style sometimes verging on total abstraction. He continued to teach at the Slade until 1930.

### **REFERENCES**

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip\\_Wilson\\_Steer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Wilson_Steer)



Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942), *Girls Running, Walberswick Pier*, 1888-94, Tate Britain

Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942), *Girls Running, Walberswick Pier*, 1888-94, Tate Britain

- Steer made many visits to Walberswick in Suffolk (south of Lowestoft). *Girls Running, Walberswick Pier* was one of the **most authentic Impressionist works in Britain** and was regarded as either uncompromisingly avant garde or, **according to one critic, 'evil'**. The painting captures the warmth of late afternoon sunlight but unlike Monet there are darker elements.
- **At first** it appears **carefree** with two girls dancing down the pier in the sunshine but there is a closeness and a feeling of **claustrophobia** accentuated by the **three shadows** in the foreground. The girls **hold hands** in the shadow but they have parted perhaps signifying a friendship breaking apart. The long shadows at the end of the day suggest **night falling and death** but the flat perspective and the **heavily worked paint surface** bring us back from meaning to seeing paint on a flat surface. The painting balances precariously yet successfully between **abstract pattern and profound meaning**.
- In 1927 Steer began to **lose his sight in one eye** and started to paint almost exclusively in watercolour with a looser style sometimes verging on total abstraction. He continued **to teach at the Slade until 1930**.

## NOTES

Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942)

- British **landscape and portrait painter** and **leader of the Impressionist**

### **movement in England.**

- He was born in Liverpool, the son of a portrait painter. From 1880-1 he studied at the South Kensington Drawing School. He was rejected by the Royal Academy and went to Paris to study at **Académie Julian**, and then in the École des Beaux Arts under Cabanel.
- Between 1883 and 1885 he exhibited at the Royal Academy and in 1886 became a **founder of the New English Art Club**.
- In 1887 he spent some time at the **Etaples art colony in Northern France** and later painted a number of works at **Walberswick**.
- He was influenced by Whistler, Boucher, Gainsborough, Constable and Turner.
- He was a WWI painter of Royal Navy scenes. His self-portrait is in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

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See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip\\_Wilson\\_Steer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Wilson_Steer)

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Philip Wilson Steer (1860–1942),  
*Seated Nude: The Black Hat*,  
c. 1900, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, Tate



Philip Wilson Steer (1860–1942), *Seated Nude: The Black Hat*, c. 1900, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, Tate

- A final work by Steer, the most Impressionist of British painters.
- He painted a number of young female nudes and this is probably the most famous, ***Seated Nude: The Black Hat***. His young women were always posed in a believable setting, and here the model is playfully trying on a hat she has found in the studio. Steer did not exhibit this sketch, and it was chosen for the Tate directly from his studio in 1941, by the Director Sir John Rothenstein.
- Steer told him '**friends told me it was spoiled by the hat; they thought it indecent that a nude should be wearing a hat, so it's never been shown**'.
- That is an interesting comment. A distinction is often drawn in art between the acceptable, "balanced ... and confident" nude and the unacceptable "huddled and defenceless" naked body. This distinction was created by the art critic and historian Kenneth Clark in his book *The Nude: a Study in Ideal Form* (1956). However, the distinction dissolves even in Clark's writing and he acknowledges that sexuality is part of the attraction of the nude and no nude should fail to arise in some slight way. A view that would be more carefully nuanced in today's art world.
- **The artist must walk a tightrope** that sways between coarse sexuality and bland photographic representation. A picture of a body deprived of clothes is potentially embarrassing or shameful. One of the characteristic of modern art is the blurring of Clark's distinction between the naked and the nude. In this case,

Steer played safe and never exhibited the work on the advice of friends who felt the painting makes the viewer feel uncomfortable because of the implied sexuality of the hat.

- The well-known art historian **Lynda Nead pointed out that the female nude is a construct that controls sexuality**. Artists use many conventions to achieve this control such as a reference to classical mythology, a hairless body, a posed and static body and a pure and innocent expression. It is a measure of modern art and the representation of the nude that the artist breaks or loosens one or more of these hidden controls and so unleashes a potentially uncontrollable or unacceptable sexual force that embarrasses the viewer or makes the viewer feel uncomfortable in a social context. In this way the artist draws attention to some aspect of our society and its norms or expectations.
- A final comment of my own is that I find **the hat amusing, the naked body is harmless, the pose is demure but the hat adds a jaunty note of humour**.





John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), *Claude Monet Painting by the Edge of a Wood*, ?1885, 54 x 64.8 cm, Tate

John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), *Claude Monet Painting by the Edge of a Wood*, ?1885, 54 x 64.8 cm, Tate

- That leads us to the other great influencer who brought French artistic ideas to London—**John Singer Sargent**.
- **He first met Monet in 1876**, but the two artists were closest ten years later. It was probably in 1885 that they painted together at Monet's home at Giverny.
- Sargent admired the way that Monet worked out of doors, and imitated some of his subjects and methods in sketches such as this. It is characteristic of Sargent to give a human view of Monet's practice and of the patience of his wife, who sits behind him. When he settled in London in 1885 Sargent was initially viewed as avant-garde, but he became the greatest society portraitist of his day.



John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885-6, Tate Britain

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885-6, Tate Britain

- This was Sargent's **first major success at the Royal Academy in 1887**. ***Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose***, received an enthusiastic response. It was a large piece, **painted on site**, of two young girls, Dolly (left, aged 11) and Polly (right, aged 7), lighting lanterns in his friends house in the Cotswolds. Sargent had moved to the Cotswolds to escape the **scandal of the *Portrait of Madame X*** (1884) that he had painted in Paris.
- The response to this painting was not entirely enthusiastic. Some reviewers regarded it as '**Frenchified**' although it was immediately purchased by the Tate. The term 'Frenchified' shows that the opposition of many critics to the avant garde in France was fuelled by nationalism and their attempt to prevent French art from influencing English art.

## NOTES

- **Every day from 6:35pm to 7pm from August to early November 1885 and again in August/September and late October 1886**, he painted in the very few minutes **when the light was perfect**, giving the picture an **overall purple tint** of evening. He made many preliminary sketches and he would often scrape the paint off the canvas after a day's painting. The flowers in the garden died as summer turned to autumn, and they were replaced with **artificial flowers**. Sargent resumed painting the following summer at the Millet new home nearby in Broadway, and finally **finished** the painting by the end of **October 1886**. In the course of working, Sargent cut down the rectangular canvas, removing

approximately 2 feet (61 cm) from the left side, to leave an approximately square shape. Sargent himself described it as a 'fearfully difficult subject ... Paints are not bright enough & then the effect only lasts ten minutes.' The seemingly effortless solution is the result of Sargent being willing to scrape off and redo his efforts again and again. This painting possibly takes *alla prima* (wet-on-wet, Italian for 'first attempt') painting to an extreme level that has rarely even been attempted before or since. Cross-sectional analysis of the paint shows that he even painted wet-on-wet for the final touches on the faces, something few other artists would ever attempt.

- These three enlargements of areas of the painting show Sargent's skill drawing with the brush and invoking an effect with the minimal brushwork. A few rapid strokes of the brush create a lily or a rose of a glowing lantern. This ability suggests he worked rapidly but we know from the length of time he spent that he also worked very carefully.
- The painting can be read as a botanical allegory of flower-maidens, with subtle sexual overtones of lighting a lantern (slang in French for vagina), and the taper as a symbolic paintbrush (also used to hand-pollinate flowers) used to illuminate the paper of the lantern in the same way that a painter uses a paintbrush to create an image on a canvas. The larger flowers at the top bring the background forward and flatten the painting.
- The unusual title comes from a popular song 'Ye Shepherds Tell Me' (also called 'The Wreath').

### JOHN SINGER SARGENT

- John Singer Sargent was an American artist who was considered the '**leading portrait painter of his generation**' specialising in Edwardian aristocracy. He was prolific and painted about 900 oil paintings and 2,000 watercolours.
- He was **trained in Paris** before moving to London. His early submission *Portrait of Madame X* caused a scandal rather than the positive publicity he was expecting.
- He was a master of **drawing with the brush** and his portraits were painted in the grand manner but his landscapes were influenced by Impressionism.
- His father was an eye surgeon but when Sargent's older sister died aged two his **mother** (Mary née Singer) **had a breakdown** and they **travelled through Europe** for the rest of their lives. Sargent was born in Florence in 1856. He had no official schooling but grew up speaking **fluent French**,

**Italian and German** and accomplished in art, music and literature.

- He began his art studies with Carolus-Duran a French portrait painter with bold techniques and modern teaching methods. He taught painting *alla prima* working directly on the canvas with a loaded brush derived from Diego Velázquez. In 1874 he gained entry to the École des Beaux-Arts at his first attempt and won a silver prize.

### **CHANTREY BEQUEST**

- On his death Sir Francis Legatt Chantrey (1781-1841) left £150,000 to the Royal Academy for the purchase of 'works of Fine Art ... executed in Great Britain'. The first purchase was made in 1877 following the death of Lady Chantrey. Although the Trustees of the RA still decide on the selection of the purchases, the exhibition and preservation of the collection has become the responsibility of the Tate Gallery.

Henry Herbert La Thangue (1859–1929), *The Return of the Reapers*, 1886, 119 x 69.5 cm, Tate



Henry Herbert La Thangue (1859–1929), *The Return of the Reapers*, 1886, 119 x 69.5 cm, Tate

- La Thangue (pronounced 'la tang' or in French 'la tong') was an English artist who was born in Croydon, but he trained in Paris and was particularly inspired by French artists. The work of **Gustave Courbet and Jules Bastien-Lepage** encouraged him to paint realist rural pictures, and he was **also influenced by the Impressionists'** commitment to painting before nature. In France, La Thangue adopted the 'square brush' technique used here to striking effect. It allowed him to cover the canvas quickly and to capture fleeting light effects. He painted this work in Norfolk, and characteristically placed the figures against a high horizon, flattening the picture space.

George Clausen  
(1852–1944), *The  
Girl at the Gate*,  
1889, Tate Britain

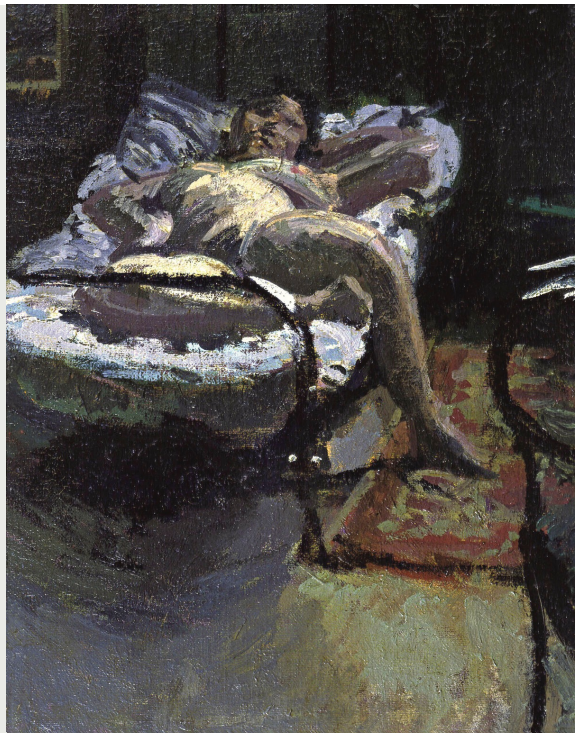


George Clausen (1852–1944), *The Girl at the Gate*, 1889, Tate Britain

- Painted at **Cookham Dean** in Berkshire, where the artist **George Clausen lived**. The model was **Mary Baldwin**, the family's nanny who lived in the village.
- Clausen was one of the 'rural naturalists', a young generation of artists who painted **realistic scenes of everyday country life**. Like La Thangue, Clausen was greatly influenced by **Jules Bastien-Lepage**.
- Clausen exhibited this painting at the **Grosvenor Gallery** (in 1890) and *The Saturday Review* singled out Clausen for truthfulness observed in the open air. The *Art Journal* admired his skill but criticized the way he **followed the late Bastien-Lepage** (he died in 1884) too closely. It thought that although the **life-size figure** of a **16 year-old girl** with her **abstracted and joyless look** had been treated from the standpoint of Bastien-Lepage the end result was '**purely English**'. It was so successful that it was acquired by the Tate (Chantrey Bequest, in 1890).
- The painting has been arranged to suggest a narrative and shows Clausen's ability to examine a psychological state and create a mood. The girl at the gate looks sad and wistful, as if she has been waiting for a long lost lover or a husband who has gone off to war. Her parents in the background and her mother looks towards her in a concerned way.

## GEORGE CLAUSEN

- The son of an artist, he attended the South Kensington School and then worked in Edwin Long's studio and **Paris under Bouguereau**. He was an admirer of **Jules Bastien-Lepage**.
- One of the **foremost modern British painters of landscape**.
- Elected ARA in 1895 and full Academician in 1906. He became **Professor of Painting** and gave a series of memorable lectures published as *Six Lectures on Painting* (1906).
- He became an official war artist in WWI and was knighted in 1927.



Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942), *Nuit d'été* c.1906, 45 × 38 cm, private collection

Walter Richard Sickert (1860-1942, aged 81), *Nuit d'été* c.1906, 45 × 38 cm, private collection, used as the front cover of *Walter Sickert: Camden Town Nudes* (2007)

Walter Sickert, Tate, 2022

- That brings us to the last of the artists I wish to cover today and one of the most influential artists of the early twentieth century - **Walter Richard Sickert**.
- This is *Nuit d'été* or *Summer Night* and we have moved a long way from French Impressionism and the **gentle nudes of Renoir**. We are in the territory of **Gustave Klimt** (1862-1918, aged 55) and **Egon Schiele** (1890-1918, aged 28).
- Sickert produced a series of female nudes on beds called the **Camden Town Nudes**. There is no attempt to idealise the figures, they are gross, lumpen shapes and yet they are honest portrayals of relaxed naked figures. The rooms typical contain an iron bedstead, a worn carpet and crumpled sheets. Sickert criticised artists who idealised the naked form (see *New Age*, July 1910) and he found his chief source of pleasure was in "**a gleam of light and warmth and life**". Many commentators see a **dark side to these paintings** suggested by the poor surroundings, the rough painterly style and the coarse poses. However, they can be seen as sensitive renderings of a sexually-active working-class life.
- Sickert said, "**the more our art is serious, the more will it tend to avoid the drawing-room and stick to the kitchen**". This profound thought could be said to be the foundation of British Realism up to the present day and is the antithesis of Sargent's pretentious high-society portraits.



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Walter Sickert (1860-1942), *The Camden Town Murder*, originally titled, *What Shall We Do for the Rent?*, c. 1908, Yale Center for British Art



Walter Sickert (1860-1942), *The Camden Town Murder*, originally titled, *What Shall We Do for the Rent?*, c. 1908, Yale Center for British Art

- The previous painting, *Summer Night* was painted in 1906. On 12 September 1907 a London prostitute called **Emily Dimmock** was brutally murdered in Camden Town where Sickert had his studio. He painted at least three paintings at this time showing a clothed man and a naked woman. However, there is no overt violence and the women appear to be sleeping. It seems that Sickert wanted to represent the murder as this is one of the titles he used but he is also examining the working-class life of the area around his studio.
- On one drawing he wrote another title, "**What shall we do for the rent?**" Implying he was interested in the experiences of the poor. He has been accused of painting sordid scenes but a more accurate description might be an **honest depiction of the degrading effects of poverty**.
- We must bear in mind that Sickert's titles were often intentionally misleading or frivolous. For example, this painting was later exhibited as *Father Comes Home* and was sold with the title *The Germans in Belgium*.
- We should ignore his titles as he was mostly interested in the effect of light rather than any deep or subtle meaning. What others saw as '**a forlorn hole, cold, cheerless**' Sickert saw as **the beauty of a strong side light, the balance of tones and the walls "watching us in the quiet dusk"** (Marjorie Lilly, *Sickert: The Painter and his Circle*, Elek, London 1971, pp.42–3).

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Walter Sickert (1860–1942),  
*Ennui*, 1914, 112.4 × 152.4 cm,  
 Tate Britain

Walter Richard Sickert (1860–1942), *Study for 'Ennui': Hubby and Marie*, c.1913, pen and brown ink over black chalk, with red ink, on pale brown paper, 38 x 28 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Walter Richard Sickert (1860–1942), *Ennui*, 1914, 112.4 × 152.4 cm, Tate Britain

- I end with *Ennui*, boredom, the best known and most widely discussed of his paintings. This is a study he did for the painting. He squared up the paper to make it easy to transfer to the canvas which is much larger, unusually large for Sickert at this time. Note the area behind the man and beneath the mantelpiece.
- (CLICK) In the painting there have been a few changes and the dark area behind him has become a dark area, perhaps a coat on the back of the chair or maybe just a dark area. Under the mantelpiece is another dark area that is difficult to identify but which was clearly drawn in the study.
- Sickert suggests the strained relationship between the figures by their lack of communication. Despite being close together, the man and woman face in opposite directions, staring off into space. They appear almost trapped in their surroundings. The furnishings reinforce the theme, in particular the bell jar containing stuffed birds, suggesting a suffocating environment. Sickert's works give us no moral or narrative certainty. He leaves it up to us to interpret the image.
- It is 1913 and we have moved from English Impressionism to British Realism.

## NOTES

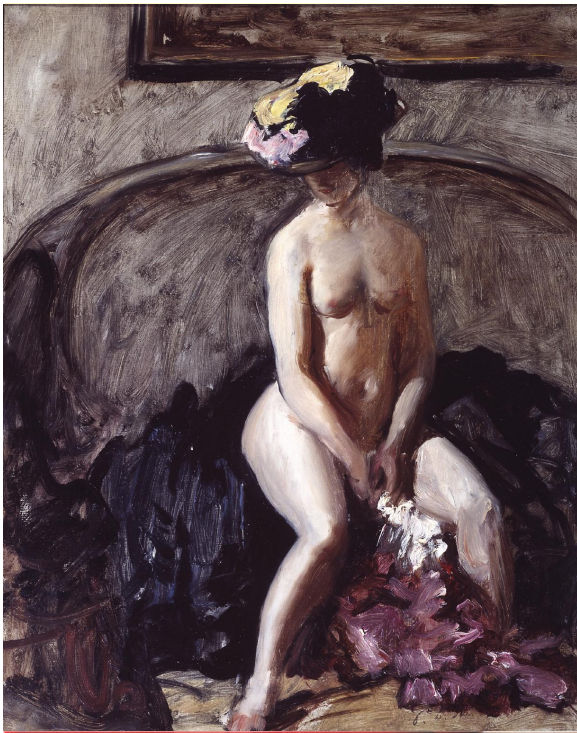
- There are another four painted versions of *Ennui*, many drawings and preparatory studies and three etched plates in various sizes, indicating that Sickert himself considered it an important subject.
- The 1913 edition of Webster's dictionary defines ennui as '**a feeling of weariness and disgust, dullness and languor of spirits, arising from satiety or want of interest; tedium**'.
- *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1914 referred to the painting as '**a long chapter from the ugly tale of commonplace living**'.
- The painting of the bare shouldered woman hanging in the background is believed by some to be Queen Victoria. It appears in other works by Sickert but the exact work has not been identified.

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## ENGLISH IMPRESSIONISM

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE  
ART@SHAFE.UK  
WWW.SHAFE.UK

Philip Wilson Steer (1860–1942), *Seated Nude: The Black Hat*, c. 1900, Tate

Philip Wilson Steer (1860–1942), *Seated Nude: The Black Hat*, c. 1900, 50.8 x 40.6 cm, Tate

- I have shown English Impressionism was a broad church that covered a wide range of artists and styles. **The unifying theme** was simply a group of artists who **claimed to have been influenced by French Impressionism** and Post-Impressionism.
- The full impact of French Impressionism did not hit the British public and the artistic community until 1910 when Roger Fry organised an exhibition called ***Manet and the Post-Impressionists***. For many it was their first contact with late-nineteenth-century French art and it created outrage among critics and the public. French art was described as "**bizarre, morbid and horrible**" and proof of **French artists moral degeneracy**. Ten years later Fry summarised the uproar, "**the artists were roundly accused of sexual perversion and moral depravity: This of course was only the Englishman's way of saying that he disliked the pictures**".
- However, as we have seen there was a group of British artists who had been producing exciting and experimental art that had been pushing the boundaries of modernity for many years but it was Fry's exhibition that launched modern art into the mainstream of British culture.
- Thank you.

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