



# BOULEVARD

## OVERVIEW

### Introduction to The Courtauld Gallery-Wolfson Room Experience

The Courtauld Gallery's Wolfson Room displays 11 permanent collection paintings by some of France's leading mid-late 19th-century artists: Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Paul Gauguin.

Boulevard offers an immersive encounter with these iconic Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works.

### Inspire Your Students Across Curriculum

This Boulevard experience provides particularly rich inspiration for learning in art/history, French (culture and language), literacy, geography, meteorology, technology, and art.

*Teachers of younger students may wish to exercise some discretion as a few of the paintings contain nudity.*

### How to Use This Resource

This resource is designed for use by teachers, educators, or students to support and enrich the Boulevard viewing experience. Our Boulevard curriculum will help you explore these paintings through a range of different themes inspired by the works, offering ideas for educational projects and activities.

### Looking at the Work

When looking at the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works within the Boulevard experience, you may find these suggestions helpful in engaging students to look closely and in generating general discussion.

Ask students to respond to one or more artworks. Here are some examples of open-ended questions that can be helpful for starting a discussion.

- What is your first reaction to this painting?
- How does it make you feel?

- What interests or appeals to you? Discuss and share your thoughts as a group and find out how different artworks mean different things to different people.
- What can you see?
- How do you think it was made?
- What does this painting remind you of?
- What words would you use to describe the world depicted in the work of art?
- If you could step into this painting, what would it feel like?
- Would you like to have this object in your house? Why or why not?

### Art/History in a Nutshell

In the 30 years between 1860 and 1890, France witnessed an enormous artistic shift manifest in two waves of avant-garde activity known by the terms Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. During the 1860s, a young group of Parisian artists rejected the tenets of traditional Academic painting and forged a new artistic path based on the representation of contemporary life, seen in asymmetrically-cropped compositions and rendered with a quick, visibly-applied brushwork, as if caught in a fleeting glimpse, or, as it was later said, an impression.

Even prior to the 1860s, the young artist, Édouard Manet, had blazed the trail with ambiguous, highly-staged scenes of modern life, which shocked the art-viewing public. By the late 1860s, and taking strength from Manet's bold example, painters like Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir (often side by side) began to paint landscapes and leisure scenes of Paris, its citizens and its environs, with a high-keyed palette and sketchiness reflecting the actuality of fleeting light and weather effects, captured en plein air (out-of-doors). By 1874, Monet and Renoir had banded together with other French painters, including Alfred Sisley, Camille Pissarro, Edgar Degas, to break the stronghold of the Academy and establish a new type of painting. These artists would eventually call themselves Impressionists and hold their own annual exhibitions in Paris, outside of the official state-sponsored system. Though he never showed at the Impressionist shows, Édouard Manet continued to be a mentor and friend to this group; from the 1870s on, his painting became increasingly sketchy, colorful, and light-filled. The originality of Manet's painting, and that of the Impressionists, attracted and influenced artists coming of age in the late 1870s and early '80s. Many, like Paul Gauguin, whom art historians tend to identify as a Post-Impressionist, were initially drawn to Impressionism, but soon sought to move away from this movement's emphasis on ephemerality, objectivity, and literalness. Starting in a style close to that of Camille Pissarro or Alfred Sisley, Gauguin quickly developed his own more mysterious hybrid language, culling from and synthesizing diverse artistic traditions and periods. Like that of sculptor Auguste Rodin, Gauguin's practice is often described as Symbolist, a term used to define European artists and writers who, after 1870, turned away from both Academicism and Naturalism. The

Symbolists sought to express a more interior realm, one of feeling and mystery, often associated with literary archetypes or dream-like states.

### **Impressionism**

Impressionism is a label given to a 19th-century art movement spearheaded by French artists Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, who formally banded together in 1874 with several other young artists in an attempt to create an alternate exhibition system for their avant-garde work. Between 1874 and 1886, the group held eight exhibitions (1874, 1876, 1877, 1878, 1879, 1881, 1882, and 1886).

Impressionism is often associated with the painting of landscapes and leisure scenes culled from contemporary life, created quickly en plein air (out of doors), and sketchily rendered in a bright palette of broken brushwork. Many of the Impressionist artists—Monet, Renoir, Alfred Sisley, Camille Pissarro, Berthe Morisot and others—painted this way in an attempt to capture the fleeting qualities of light and weather, as well as the instantaneity of modern life itself.

The Impressionist group, however, which included artists like Edgar Degas and Mary Cassatt, represented a broader range of styles under the auspices of the “new painting”, and included practices based on careful drawing and expressing a more Realist sensibility.

The majority of critics despised Impressionist art, which they felt was often subject-less, incomprehensible, and unfinished. Visitors to the Impressionists shows—far fewer than those who attended the official Salons—were also hard-pressed to accept the new work for several years. What many museum-goers find charming and fresh today, critics condemned as gestures of madmen rather than artists, marks adding up to little more than an impression. Indeed, the name Impressionism was meant to be an insult, but eventually the group adopted the “derogatory” term as a badge of honor.

Not all of the Impressionists agreed as to what values should be espoused or how painting should evolve. There was infighting about who should be invited into the group, and its exhibitors varied some with each show. Eventually the group disbanded after a final show in 1886 in which the most significant painting was created by the young and relative newcomer Georges-Pierre Seurat, whose practice now tends to be associated with Post-Impressionism rather than Impressionism.

### **Post-Impressionism**

Post-Impressionism is a term used to describe the art of a progressive group of painters working in France during the 1880s and '90s, including Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, and Georges-Pierre Seurat. Building upon new potentials opened by the Impressionist artists, each of these individuals took their art in a profoundly different direction, adding to the energy of the modernist cause in their own unique way.

None of these late 19th-century artists (two of whom had died by 1891) would have referred to themselves as a Post-Impressionist; in their time they went by other titles, such as leader of the New Painting, Symbolist, Synthetist, or by more specific terms describing particular methods, such as Seurat's Divisionism. In fact, the term Post-Impressionism was actually coined around 1910 by British art critic and curator, Roger Fry, in an attempt to find a catch-all phrase that might encompass the influential and incredibly diverse practices of these men. The "Post" of Post-Impressionism does not signify *after* as much as it does *beyond*. Indeed, Impressionism, which was still considered provocative and new at the turn of the century, continued through the 1920s in the careers of long-lived painters Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet.

### Symbolism

Often viewed as a continuation of the imaginative and emotive spirit of earlier 19th-century Romanticism, Symbolism had a considerable impact upon poetry and the visual arts from about 1870 through the beginning of the 20th century. Rejecting both the formulaic distance of Classicism and the reflection of phenomenological reality expressed in Naturalism and Impressionism, Symbolist artists took as their goal the experience and evocation of a deeply subjective state, steeped in mystery, inchoate feeling, and personal association. Divested of Impressionism's emphasis on immediacy and objectivity, Symbolism consciously employed artifice and archetype in forms that could be both ecstatic and foreboding, creating a more aestheticized world of images.

### Academicism

Academicism refers to the prevailing style of painting and sculpture associated with and taught at the official government-run academy, the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. This style was based on many years of rigorous study spent drawing an idealized version of the human figure, first in the form of plaster casts of Classical sculpture, and later with a live model in the studio. Painting was only permitted after the student had fully proven their skills in drawing, which stressed clearly defined contours and rationally applied shading. Painted surfaces were methodically built up from a saucy brown ground to a polished and illusionistic finish, devoid of visible brushwork. Heroic, historicized, or mythical subjects were the norm. Academic art was first criticized as false and detached in both technique and content by Realist artists, such as Gustave Courbet.

### The Salon

From the 1740s through 1890, the Salon in Paris (named after the Salon de Carré of the Louvre, where it was originally held) was the most important annual (or at times biannual) art exhibition in Europe. Each year, a few thousand works, including some by foreign artists,

were accepted into the Salon and hung floor to ceiling for visitors to view over the course of several weeks beginning in late August.

Display at the Salon was considered essential for French artists to demonstrate their talent, sell works, and gain commissions. Admission was zealously dictated by a jury made up of entrenched Academicians from the *École des Beaux-Arts*, who promoted their best students and safeguarded tradition from impinging new trends.

### The Salon des Refusés

Caving to extreme pressure by rejected artists, for the first and only time, in 1863, Emperor Napoleon III instituted an alternate venue for artists who had been refused from the official Salon to publicly display their work in Paris.

The Salon des Refusés was an important symbol of growing resistance against the Academy. More importantly, this unique event forged painter Édouard Manet's reputation among the younger artists and allowed the painter entry into the official Salon in 1865, where he exhibited an even more notorious and modern work, *Olympia*.