

Pissarro



Synopsis

Camille Pissarro became a pivotal artist and mentor within the movement. While the Impressionists are known for their depictions of city streets and country leisure, Pissarro covered his canvases with images of the day-to-day life of French peasants. His greatest work joins his fascination with rural subject matter with the study of nature under different conditions of light and atmosphere, deriving from intense study of French [Realism](#)

- E.L.B.O.W.

Like those of his Impressionist cohorts, his paintings are delicate studies of the effect of light on colour in nature. However, he continually sought out younger, progressive artists as colleagues, and his articulation of scientific colour theory in his later work would prove indispensable for the following generation of avant-garde painters....post-impressionists

Key Ideas

- Pissarro's earliest artistic studies were carried out in Paris, France, and Caracas, Venezuela. In Paris, his artistic education stressed Realism that carried through his entire career; in Caracas, he studied nature and peasant life under tropical conditions, focusing on the effects of light on colour
- Pissarro's art cannot be divorced from his politics. Influenced artistically by the Realist painter [Gustave Courbet](#), Pissarro's paintings dignify the labor of peasants in communal villages, reflecting the socialist-anarchist political leanings that the two artists shared.

- Pissarro, working closely with the younger [Neo-impressionists Georges Seurat](#) and [Paul Signac](#) late in his life, was one of the earliest artists to experiment with colour harmonies.
- Unlike the Impressionists who lived in Paris, Pissarro chose to live most of his life in the French countryside, where he received younger artists interested in studying his techniques. More than any other member of the movement, he is known for the gentle demeanor and passion for experimentation that made him an artistic mentor. His longtime collaboration with the young Cézanne, for example, made him an indispensable influence on twentieth-century modernism

Childhood

Jacob Abraham Camille Pissarro was born to a Jewish-Portuguese family and grew up in St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands, then the Danish West Indies. His parents, Frederic Pissarro and Rachel Petit, owned a modest general hardware business and encouraged their four sons to pursue the family trade. In 1842, Pissarro was sent away to a boarding school in Passy near Paris, France, to complete his education. His artistic interests began to emerge thanks to the school's headmaster, Monsieur Savary, who encouraged him to draw directly from nature and to use direct observation in his drawings, empirically rendering each object in its truest form. At age 17, Pissarro returned to St. Thomas to immerse himself in the family business; however, the artist quickly tired of the work and continued to draw ship scenes in his leisure time at the shipping docks.

Early Training

In the early 1850s, Pissarro abandoned the family business after meeting the Danish painter Fritz Melbye, following Melbye to Caracas, Venezuela, and committing himself to becoming a painter. This act signals a dedicated independence that Pissarro would never abandon in his career; largely if not entirely self-taught, Pissarro was uncompromising in his commitment to his art, a major factor that contributed to his persistent poverty. By 1855, Pissarro had returned to Paris, where he was exposed to the artwork of [Eugène Delacroix](#), [Camille Corot](#), [Gustave Courbet](#), [Charles-François Daubigny](#), and [Jean-François Millet](#) at the Exposition Universelle and where he began attending private classes at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1856.

Taking classes at the Academie Suisse in 1859, Pissarro met Cézanne, who would become one of his closest lifelong friends. In 1861, Pissarro registered as a copyist at the Musée du Louvre, and around this same time he met Julie Vellay, the daughter of a vineyard owner in the Burgundy region. They married in London in 1871, eventually having eight children. His daughter Jeanne-Rachel (nicknamed "Minette") grew ill and died of tuberculosis in 1874 at the age of eight, an event that deeply impacted Pissarro, leading him to paint a series of intimate paintings detailing the last year of her life.



Pissarro began submitting to the Salon in the late 1860s. His landscapes of that decade reflect his profound knowledge of and exposure to the compositional techniques of the eighteenth-century French masters. However, it was in these years that Pissarro also grew close with the Impressionist circle. Keeping a studio in Paris, he preferred to spend his time in Louveciennes, a rural region about 12 miles west of Paris favored by the Impressionists. There, distanced from the urban environment, he painted *en plein air*, depicting peasant subjects in natural settings and focusing on light effects and atmospheric conditions created by the change of the seasons. These new concerns in his art resulted in a more purely Impressionist mature style.

- He had an easygoing and friendly manner and got on with everyone- even Degas. He was 10 years older than the majority of the impressionists and they regarded him as their teacher.
- He organised there Impressionist exhibitions and was the only one to exhibit in all 8

- Pissarro absorbed the Impressionist ideas of LIGHT & COLOUR in nature, but he never forgot the importance of solid structure in paintings. He explored REALISM and NEO-CLASSICISM.
- He was highly influenced by the Barbizon painters

Working with the Impressionists

- In the mid-1860's, Pissarro settled in Louveciennes on the River Seine. He lived on the road to Versailles and was the first impressionist to paint snow/



Loose brushwork creates the effect of snow and thick blotches of pink, lilac and violet blend with white

Pissarro captures a fleeting sensation of the winter season, constructing his composition through the use of quick dashes of color. The long shadows cast on the new-fallen snow by passersby explore the atmospheric effects of cold winter light. The freshness and thickness of the brushstrokes, most easily identified in the trees' branches and the colorful garments of the townspeople, are the sort of constructive building blocks Pissarro would eventually pass down to Cézanne. The more smoothly distributed paint of the sky and the snow-covered ground demonstrate Pissarro's transformation of Realist naturalism into what would become the experimental, rough Impressionist aesthetic.



- Red Roofs, Corner of the Village, Winter
- This painting shows corner of a village through a pattern of bare branches. The trees create a feeling of winter in spite of the bright colours



In this painting we see a small cluster of houses through the trees of an orchard. The buildings appear to be the subject of the painting, but the cobweb of trunks and branches stops the eye from resting on them for a second at a time. They physically block our view. Rather than being able clearly to look through and see the houses, our eye skids across the surface of the composition.

Neo-Impressionism

- Dissatisfied with his own ability, Pissarro moved in a new direction. He became involved with the artist's Paul Signac and Seurat. He exhibited with them in the last impressionist exhibition but found their method too laborious.

- The depth in the picture is achieved simply by decreasing the size of the objects.
- The painting is built up of small, thick brushstrokes in a wide range of colours. The orange-reds and browns are spread across the surface, on the fields, the plants and the hillside. The thick impasto strokes catch the light to create a vibrant intensity and give a feeling of movement

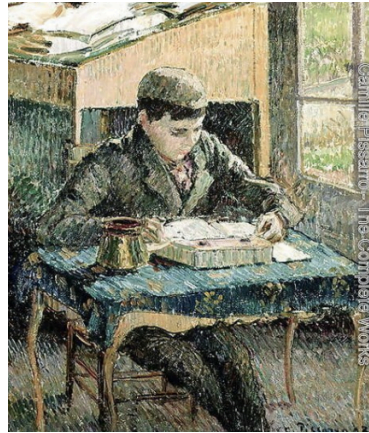
The Church and Farm of Eragny

- This is freely painted but beautiful study of diffuse light sunlight. The colours are warmer than in his earlier works; but the artist has remained faithful to the origins of impressionism.



Pissarro painted rural and urban French life, particularly landscapes in and around Pontoise, as well as scenes from Montmartre. His mature work displays an empathy for peasants and laborers, and sometimes evidences his radical political leanings. He was a mentor to Paul Cezanne and Paul Gauguin and his example inspired many younger artists, including Californian Impressionist Lucy Bacon.

Pissarro's influence on his fellow Impressionists is probably still underestimated; not only did he offer substantial contributions to Impressionist theory, but he also managed to remain on friendly, mutually respectful terms with such difficult personalities as Edgar Degas, Cezanne and Gauguin. Pissarro exhibited at all eight of the Impressionist exhibitions. Moreover, whereas Monet was the most prolific and emblematic practitioner of the Impressionist style, Pissarro was nonetheless a primary developer of Impressionist technique.



Pissarro experimented with Neo-Impressionist ideas between 1885 and 1890. Discontented with what he referred to as "romantic Impressionism," he investigated Pointillism which he called "scientific Impressionism" before returning to a purer Impressionism in the last decade of his life.

12. "Route to Versailles, Louveciennes" by Camille Pissarro (1830-1903) is *illustrated on the accompanying sheet*.

Answer (a) and (b).

(a) Describe and discuss this work under the following headings:

- subject matter
- composition
- technique and use of colour.

(b) Give some general information on Impressionism.

Illustrate your answer.