Week 5 – 19th Century French Art

Impressionism

- Invention of the camera cast doubt over traditional function of painting as a means to record real life. The role of painting had to be re-examined
- Modernization, industrialisation and rise of intellectual class led to greater interest in contemporary life
- Influenced by realists' choice of subject matter (contemporary life) as opposed to academic art (history, mythology and portrait art)
- Inspired by Japanese wood cut prints (especially 2 dimensional effects and unconventional compositions)
- Impressionist artists include – Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Cezanne, Berthe Morisot, Edgar Degas

Philosophy

- Captures an 'impression' of a scene without any further analysis (mental input) whatsoever – The artist's eyes act like a camera
- Aimed to capture the instantaneous moment of a day, like taking a 'snap shot' with a camera
- Colour analysis – the impressionist's colour theory had tremendous influence on future artists

Painting theory

- Short, thick strokes of paint are used to quickly capture the essence of the subject, rather than its details. The paint is often applied impasto.
- Colours are applied side-by-side with as little mixing as possible, creating a vibrant surface. The optical mixing of colours occurs in the eye of the viewer.
- Grays and dark tones are produced by mixing complementary colours. In pure Impressionism the use of black paint is avoided.
- Wet paint is placed into wet paint without waiting for successive applications to dry, producing softer edges and an intermingling of colour.
- Impressionist paintings do not exploit the transparency of thin paint films (glazes) which earlier artists built up carefully to produce effects. The surface of an Impressionist painting is typically opaque.
- The play of natural light is emphasized. Close attention is paid to the reflection of colours from object to object.
- In paintings made en plein air (outdoors), shadows are boldly painted with the blue of the sky as it is reflected onto surfaces, giving a sense of freshness and openness that was not captured in painting previously. (Blue shadows on snow inspired the technique.)

Subject matter

- Contemporary life – definition of 'modern' – breaking away from Academic Art (history, religious and mythological paintings)
- Interest in fleeting lighting effects during changing times of the day (esp. Monet)
- Trademark - broken brushstrokes merge at a distance to form a cohesive picture. Abrupt cropping which produces a 'snapshot' effect.

Examples

- Monet – Waterlilies
- Renoir – Moulin de la Galette, 1876
- Edgar Degas – The Dancing Class, 1880

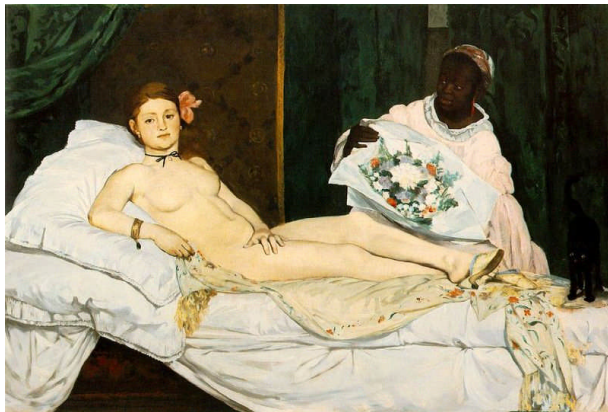| **Edouard Manet**

- 1832-1883
- One of the first 19th century artists to approach modern-life subjects
- Important figure in transition from Realism to Impressionism
- Early mastersworks – The Luncheon on the Grass (1863), Olympia (1863) |

The Luncheon on the Grass (1863)

- Was rejected by the Paris Salon in 1863, which |

Portrait by Nadar

- rejected more than 4,000 paintings that year
- Later exhibited at the Salon de Refuses, organized by the Emperor Napoleon III
- Highly controversial because of nude woman sitting among two clothed men, and sketch-like painting style
- Jury preferred more finished and polished style
- Composition derived from Old Masters

Venus of Urbino, 1538, Titian

Olympia, 1863

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- Pose is based on Titian's Venus of Urbino - Controversial painting because of its sexual tension, suggesting the comfortable courtesan lifestyle and sexuality - Symbols of sexuality of that time include orchid, upswept hair, black cat, bouquet of flowers - Flatness of Olympia is inspired by Japanese wood block art – flatness makes her more human and less voluptuous - Raised issue of prostitution within contemporary France and roles of women within society	
Alfred Sisley 1839-1899 - French Impressionist landscape painter of English origin - Live most of his entire life in France - Art historian Robert Rosenblaum described his art as "almost a generic character, an impersonal textbook idea of a perfect Impressionist painting"	

Lane Near a Small Town, 1864

Flood at Port Marly, 1876

Claude Monet

- 1840-1926
- Founder of French impressionist painting
- Took his first drawing lessons from Jacques-Francois Ochard, former student of Jacques-Louis David
- Fellow artist Eugene Boudin became his mentor who taught him to use oil paints, and 'en plein air' (outdoors) painting techniques
- Famous for paintings such as The Woman in the Green Dress, Impression: Sunrise
- His artwork Impression: Sunrise (Impression: soleil levant) lent its name to the Impressionist movement
- Favourite subjects – waterlilies, landscapes, seascapes, landmarks
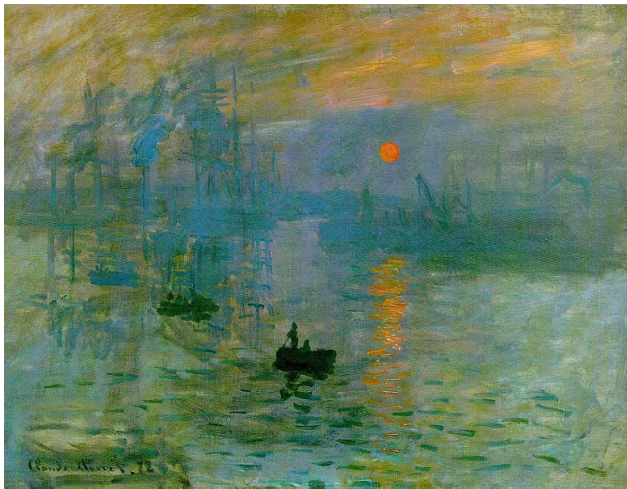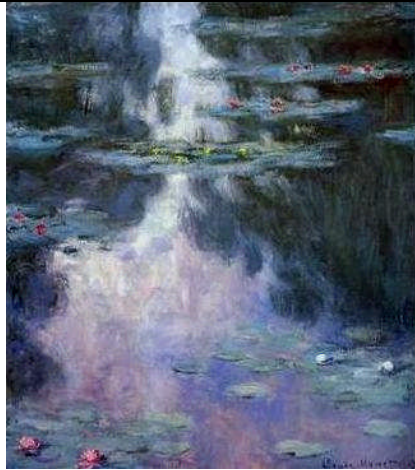

Impression: Sunrise, 1872
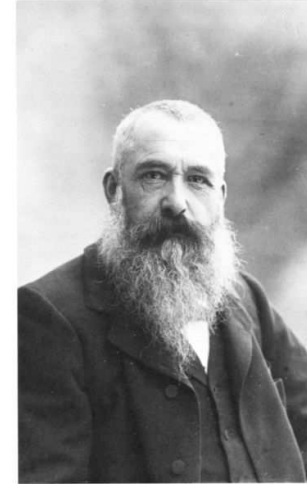
Portrait by Nadar

Waterlilies, 1916

Waterlilies, 1907

Berthe Morisot

- 1841 – 1895
- Woman painter and member of the Impressionists
- Her work was selected for the Salon six times since 1864 (she was only 23) until she joined the Impressionists in 1874
- Ancestor was famous Rococo painter, Fragonard
- Important landscape painter of Barbizon school, Camille Corot, became her instructor and mentor
- Married Manet's brother, Eugene
- Focused on domestic life and portraits

Edouard Manet's portrait of Morisot, 1872
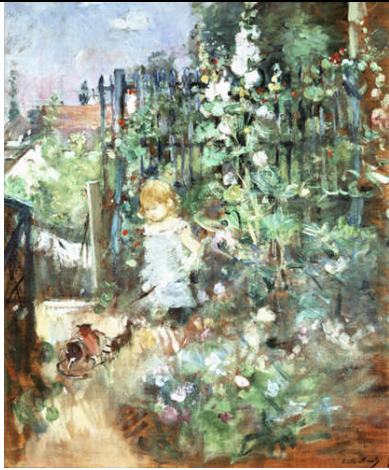
Child Among Staked Roses, 1881

At the Ball, 1875

Camilla Pissarro

- Father of Impressionism, primary developer of Impressionist technique
- Jewish ancestry
- Subjects include rural and urban French life
- Mentor to Paul Cezanne and Paul Gauguin
- His great-grandson, Joachim Pissarro is currently Head Curator of Drawing and Painting at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City

Pissarro and his wife Julie Valley, 1877
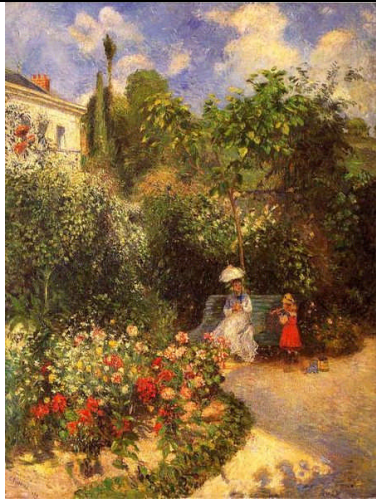
The Garden of Pontoise, 1875

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

- 1841-1919
- Leading painter in development of Impressionistic style

On the terrace, 1881

Dance at the Moulin de la Galette,1876

Neo-Impressionism

- Founded by Georges-Pierre Seurat
- Term coined by French art critic Felix Feneon which characterised late 19th century art movement led by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac who first exhibited their work in 1884 at the Societe des Artistes Independants exhibition in Paris
- Based on colour theories by Chevreul and Charles Blanc
- Use of chromoluminarism or Divisionism, breaking colour into basic elements, and painting in very small, gradual dots
- Famous artists include Georges Seurat, Paul Signac, Maximilien Luce, Jan Toorop, Anne Boch, Willy Finch, Albert Dubois-Pillet, and Georges Lemmen

Colour Theory

- Scientist-writers such as Michel Eugene Chevreul, Nicholas Ogden Rood and David Sutter wrote treatises on colour, optical effects and perception – they translated scientific research of Helmboltz and Netwon into written form undertandable by non-scientists
- Chevreul's contribution was producing the colour wheel of primary and secondary colours. His theories are based on Isaac Newton's thoughts on mixing of light.
    - Primary: Yellow, Blue, Red
    - Secondary: Orange, Green, Violet
    - Intermediary: Red-Orange, Yellow Orange, etc
- Nicholas Ogden Rood studied colour and optical effects. Like Chevreul, he stated that if two colors are placed next to each other, from a distance they look like a third distinctive color. Two primary colours next to each other was pleasing and intense to the eye and mind, his work is based on the ideas on Helmholtz
- Charles Blanc's book Grammaire des arts du dessin (1867), which cited Chevreul's works had an impact on Neo-Impressionists – colour had an emotional significance for him and he made recommendations to artists based on his ideas
- David Sutter's work *Phenomena of Vision* (1880) influenced Seurat: "the laws of harmony can be learned as one learns the laws of harmony and music."

Chromoluminarism/Divisionism/Pointillism

- Technique used by Neo-Impressionists to break colour into its basic elements
- Painting in very small and regular dots
- From a distance, the multiple dots form an optical mixture of colour
- Best known example is Seurat's Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte (1884-1886)

Georges Seurat

- 1859-1891
- Founder of Neo-Impressionism
- Embraced the colour theorists' notion of a scientific approach to painting
- Believed that a painter could use colour to create harmony and emotion in art in the same way a musician uses variation in sound and tempo to create harmony in music
- Happy emotions can best be expressed in luminous hutes and warm colours, lines directed upwards
- Sad emotions can best be expressed by using dark, cold colours and by lines pointing downwards
- His most famous work is *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-1886)

Bathers in Asnières, 1884
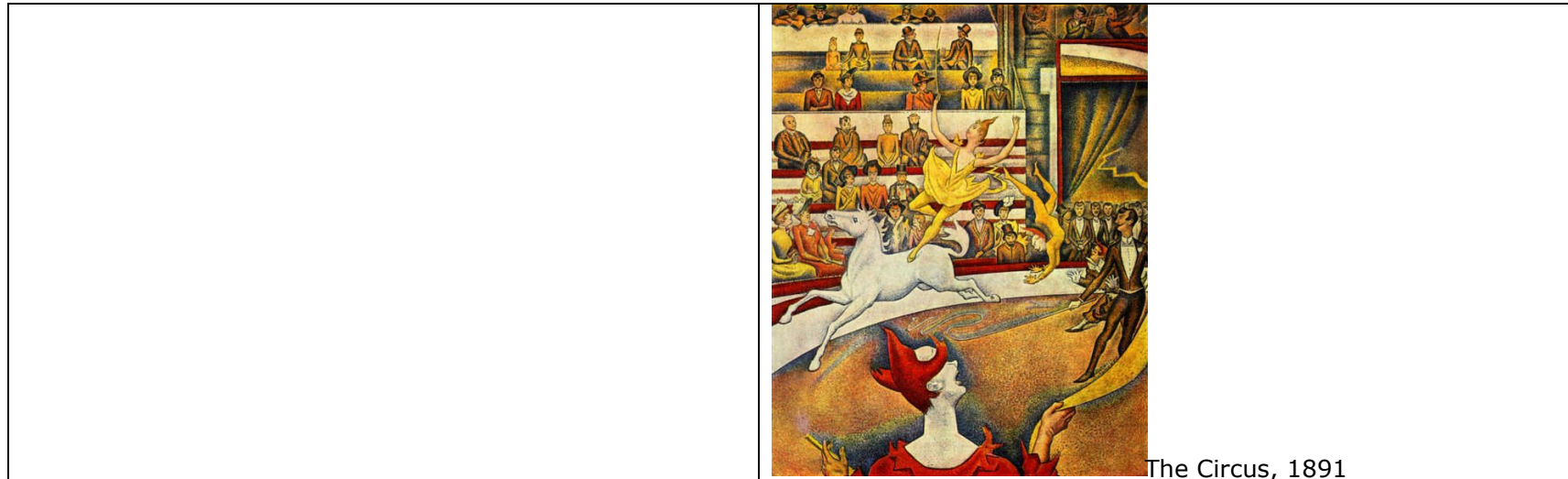
The Circus, 1891

Post-Impressionism

- Paris was centre of art in Europe
- Development of art since Manet, term coined by British artist and art critic Roger Fry
- Characterised by different precepts for use of colour, pattern, form, and line
- Extension of Impressionism and a rejection of its limitations
- Emphasis on geometric forms, to distort form for expressive effect, use of unnatural or arbitrary colour
- Famous artists include Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Vincent Van Gogh

- Forefather of Expressionism
- Famous works include The Potato Eaters (1885), The Night Café (1888), Starry Night (1889)
- Subject matter – objects from his own life, painting as a form of diary
- Treats everything as if it has a life: "man becomes sacred when they are part of nature and nature becomes passionate when they are seen as possessing the emotions of humans…"
- Used colour symbolically, e.g. yellow represents the Sun, hence hope and warmth, express his feelings and state of mind through vibrant swirling brushstrokes
- Art as mission: "Well, my own works, I'm risking my life for it and half my reasons has gone…"

Influenced by

- humanistic worldview of Rembrandt
- Realist painter Millet's empathy with peasants
- Japanese woodcut prints
- Impressionism brightened up his palette, however, Post-Impressionists went beyond superficial appearances in search of deeper truths
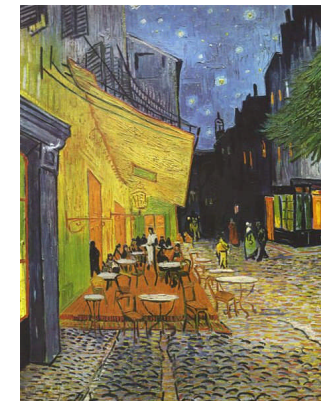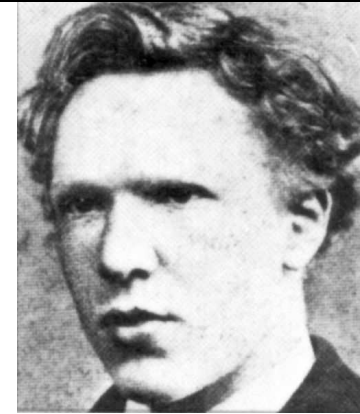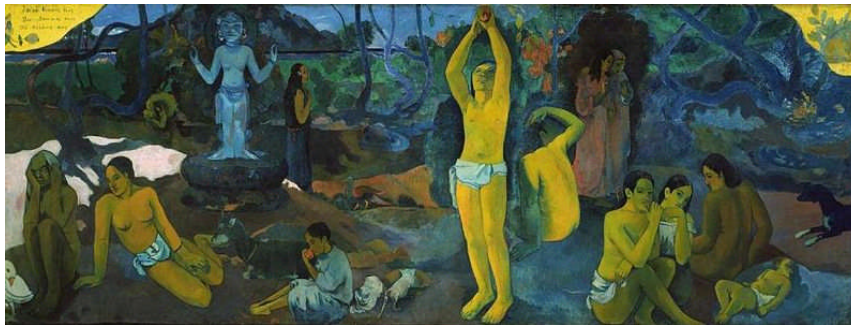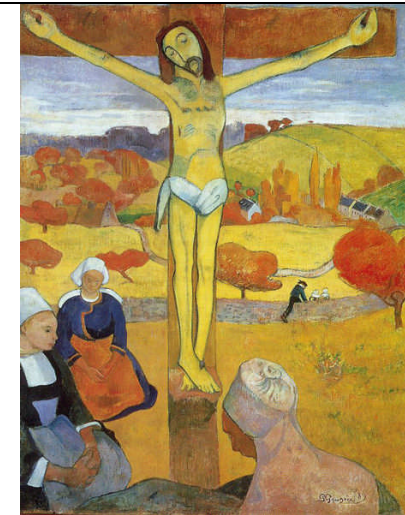

The Night Café, 1888

Starry Night, 1889

Blooming Plumtree, 1887

Paul Gauguin

- Forefather of Expressionism
- Also inspired by Japanese woodcut prints
- His philosophy was influenced by symbolism (co-existence of real and allegorical elements); "to find peace, to rid myself of the influence of civilisation."
- His paintings are characterised by thin layers of paint which often reveal canvas texture
- Restored a sense of order and structure to painting by reducing objects to their basic shapes while retaining bright fresh colours of Impressionism; stylist, semi-abstract
- Monotonous, simultaneous contrasts of colours with the same value
- Subject matter – exotic cultures (Tahiti)
- Famous works include The Yellow Christ (1889), The Spirit of the Dead keeps Watch (1892), Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? (1897)

The Yellow Christ, 1889

Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? 1897
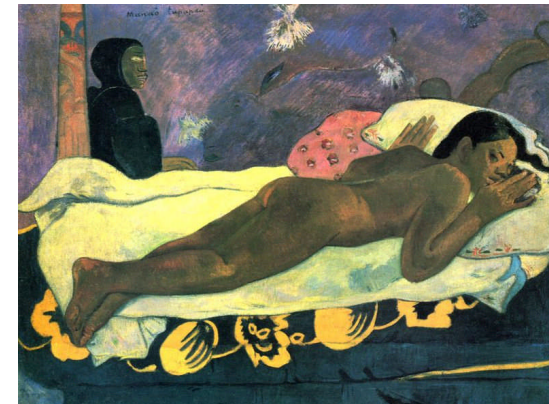
The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch, 1892

Paul Cezanne

- Pissarro was father figure to Cezanne
- Interested in timeless (permanent) aspects of nature: "to see in nature the cube, the cone and the sphere…"
- Aimed to achieve classical balance in spite of subject matter – therefore combined different viewpoints on a single plane to compensate for one another (e.g. still life with plaster cherub)
- His paintings show multiple viewpoints – process of painting visible
- Forefather of Cubism

1861

The Cardplayers, 1892
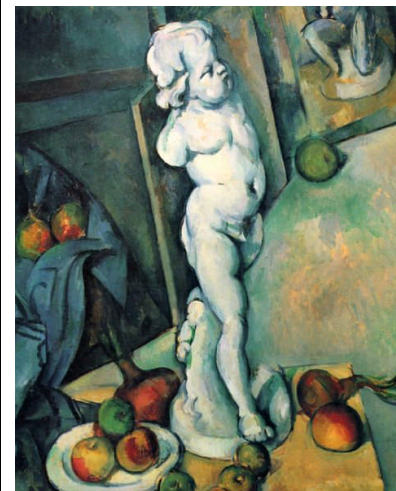
Still Life with Cherub, 1895

Symbolist Movement

- Late 19th century movement of French and Belgium origin in poetry and other arts
- Reaction against Naturalism and Realism, anti-idealistic movements which attempted to capture reality in its humble and ordinary form
- In favour of spirituality, imagination and dreams
- Inspired by Schopenhauer's aesthetics

Arthur Schopenhauer's aesthetics

- The Will as 'the thing in itself', foundation of life and all being is evil
- Art offered a way for people to temporarily escape servititude to the Will and from the suffering that such servitude entails
- Art is more important than philosophy and logic – the more intellectually-inclined person suffers most
- For Schopenhauer, the Will is an aimless desire to perpetuate itself, the basis of life
- Desire engendered by the Will is the source of all sorrow in the world
- He believed that aesthetic experiences temporarily allowed the viewer to experience relief from the strife of desire, and allow the viewer to enter a realm of purely mental enjoyment
- Analyse art from its effects on both personality of artist and personality of viewer
- Elevated art from artisanry or decoration into a temporary deliverance from aimless strife of the Will in nature – art as a substitute for religion by offering a salvation through aesthetic experiences
- Artists were not only skills hands, but also priests or prophets of this doctrine – justified artistic work as a matter of highest importance in human society
- His aesthetics remain influential today, responsible for rise of the Symbolists and their movements; general development of the concept of art for art's sake
- Deeply influenced the aesthetics of Friedrich Nietzsche, contributed to contemporary beliefs that artistic creation should not be affected by financial gains or demands of patrons or customers
- Believed that the greatest artists are those who create new and entirely unprecedented forms of expression, rather than those who develop already existing forms.