

# The Impressionist Revolution

by Anthony DiMichele

*of Cloud Shadow Studio, Wakonda, SD*

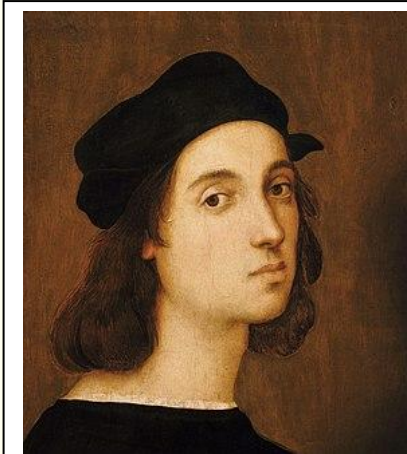
Transcript, with illustrations, of a presentation  
given, by Anthony, at Yankton Area Arts, Yankton, SD  
August 25th, 2023

# The Impressionist Revolution

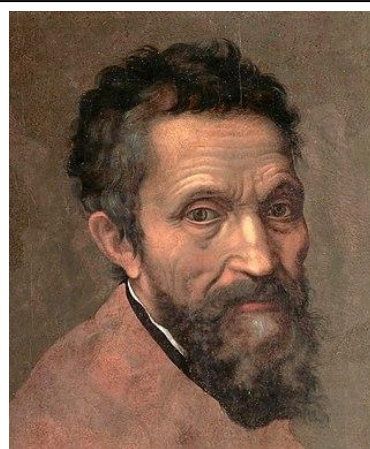
Adapted from a presentation given by Anthony DiMichele, August 2023, at Yankton Area Arts

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Let's begin by looking at the state of art, before the Impressionists, in the mid-19th century:



RAFAEL



MICHAELANGELO



DA VINCI



REMBRANDT

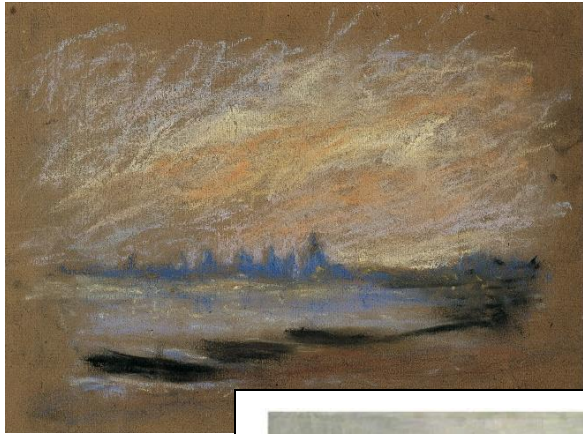


CARAVAGGIO

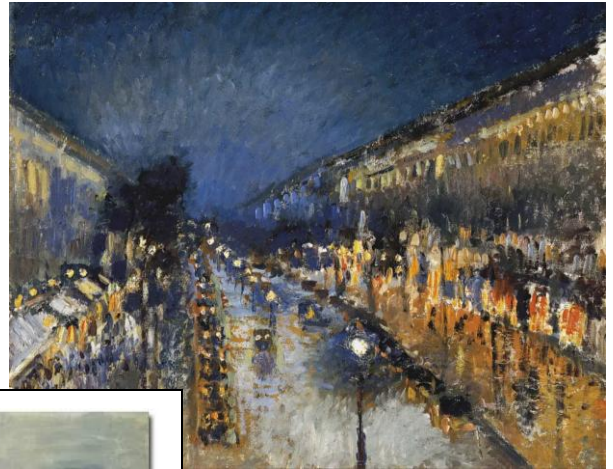
***These works exemplify the old school painting techniques used by the Renaissance and Baroque masters:***

- They were executed by adding layer over layer of glazed (transparent) colors. Each layer had to dry thoroughly before the next layer was applied. This was time consuming and laborious.
- These were 'Studio' works and they left not a trace of brushwork. No impasto or texture, but rather a smooth, translucent film.
- Also, the subjects had to be placed in an historical or religious context, which was considered proper for 'High Art'.

Now, let's take a look at some Impressionist paintings, and look for the differences:



MONET



PISSARRO



BERTHE MORISOT



SISLEY



MARY CASSETT

***You can see that these paintings were done differently – 'Alla Prima' (first impression):***

- Vigorous, bold brushstrokes visible on the surface; vivid colors and brilliant light. These paintings were done outside, not in the artist's studio.
- Even more striking is the difference in subject matter. These are not historical or biblical. They look at common people, urban city life – revelers at a picnic, or luncheon, dancers, etc.
- Such subjects were frowned upon, to put it mildly, by the Academy of Fine Art and the Jury that chose work for the great Annual Salon, in Paris.

## The Salon des Paris:

- Organized by the prestigious Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture (“**Royal Academy of Painting and of Sculpture**”) and led by a jury with the power to pick and choose what work was worth showing (*i.e. to determine the value of the artwork*), this annual event could make or break artists' careers.
- Most importantly, it had a profound influence on European art as a whole, as it enabled an elite organization to dictate the definition of art – what it is, and how it is made.

### **Examples of art traditionally deemed acceptable by the salon jury:**



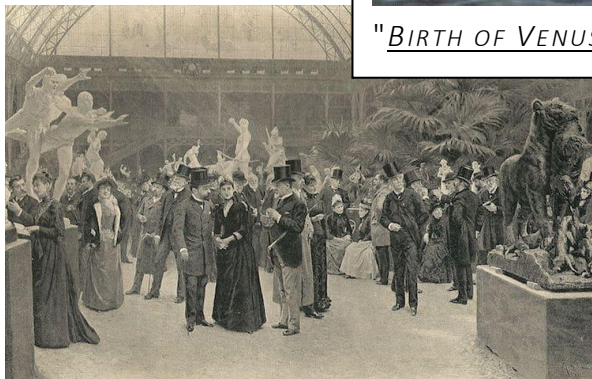
"NAPOLEON"  
– ERNEST MEISSONIER



"OATH OF THE HORATII"  
– JEAN LOUIS DAVI



"BIRTH OF VENUS" – ALEXANDRE CABANAL



"PARIS SALON HISTORY" – (ANONYMOUS)



"PARIS SALON" – F.J. HEIM

**The government-sponsored 'Salon' served as Paris' premier art exhibition:**

- Every year, the government sponsored an exhibition, or 'Salon', for which over 1000 pieces of work would be juried, by a group consisting solely of academy painters and government officials.
- The jury was very strict in its judging, rejecting anything that did not conform to the traditional glazing system of painting, or whose subject matter was not historical or biblical.
- If a piece of art was rejected, it was stamped on the back of the canvas, "Refused", in indelible red ink, immediately devaluing the painting, if not rendering it, altogether unsalable.

**Paintings we, today, call masterpieces were rejected by The Salon and/or viciously mocked by the critics of the day:**



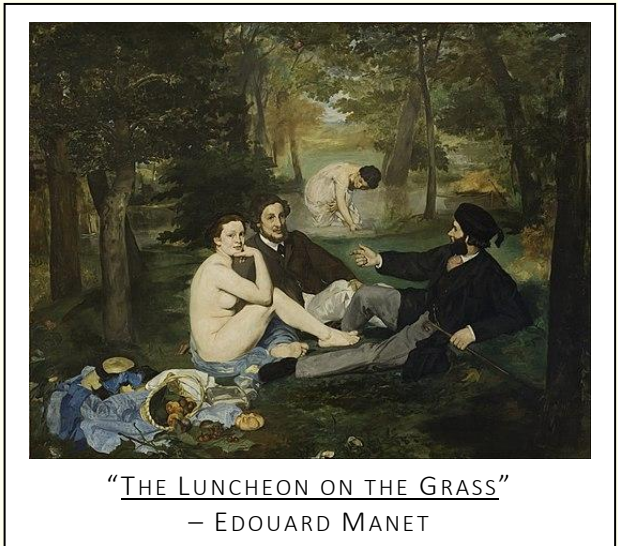
*Rejected by the Salon de Paris, this painting, which made a bold departure from the established rules of painting & portraiture, met much criticism, and even mockery, when first exhibited in the infamous 'Salon de Refuses' of 1863.*



*When Manet revealed this piece at Paris' prestigious Salon, both its subject matter and style caused an unprecedented stir.*

*The scandalous elements included: the model's direct gaze at the viewer; her accessories which 'accentuated her nudity'; and the black cat at her feet, along with other objects, identifying her as a prostitute. The modern, non-classical subject matter was considered vulgar, not the nudity in and of itself.*

*Additionally, the painting's large size – traditionally reserved for important historic or mythological subjects – along with Manet's bold, visible brushstrokes (which disregarded basic rules of traditional painting), lent to the painting's general disapproval.*



*This painting was rejected by The Salon, not so much because of the female nudes, a classical subject, but by their presence in a modern setting and accompanied by clothed, bourgeois men. This combination suggested that the women were not goddesses, but models, or possibly even prostitutes – again, an unseemly subject matter.*

## 1863 Salon des Refuses:

- In 1863, a group of “the Refused”, angered and frustrated with the selection committee (*always comprised of academicians who maintained the status quo*), began talking about finding a space to launch their own exhibition.
- When word got back to emperor, Napoleon III, of the unrest with the artists and their plans to launch their own exhibition, he decided, rather than directly oppose them, he would offer them a space in the Palace of Industry for a ‘**Salon des Refuses**’ (*Salon of the Refused*), in hopes of controlling the situation.
- This show – of the rejected artists – was a great sensation and drew many thousands of viewers. Most viewers had never seen the Avant Garde paintings of these artists. Some people liked them. Some hated them. Not many were indifferent.
- After the groundbreaking ‘*Salon des Refuses*’ of 1863, the artists tried to get another ‘*Show of the Rejected*’, but this time were refused! After the sensation the first exhibition had caused, the government didn't want to take the chance that the people might adopt this new, Avant Garde, art over the traditional, Academic, art of the day, and so, they were not to be given the choice again!

## In 1874, several artists based in Paris banded together to hold an independent art show:

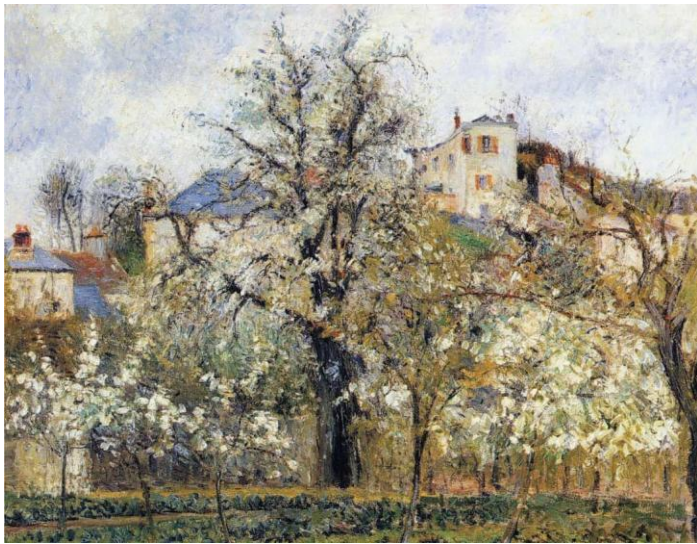
- Later known as ‘**The Impressionists**’, these artists took it upon themselves to present their own paintings, prints and sculptures, bypassing any external selection process.
- Today, this may seem like standard practice, but in 19th-century France, it was considered a radical move, as it subverted the Salon.
- Unlike the former ‘*Salon des Refuses*’, which featured works rejected by the official Paris Salon, this group skipped submission, altogether, and instead showed works created and curated by the Impressionists, themselves.
- Set in the studio of Felix **Nadar**, a contemporary French photographer, this exhibition comprised paintings by 30 artists, including Claude **Monet**, Pierre-Auguste **Renoir**, Edgar **Degas**, and Camille **Pissarro**.
- Among these works was Monet’s “**Impression, Sunrise**”, the landmark, landscape painting which inspired the movement's name.



"IMPRESSION, SUNRISE"  
– CLAUDE MONET

*Monet's painting was famously mocked by a prominent art critic, stating "...Wallpaper in an embryonic state is more finished than that seascape."*

**Key participating artists, in the Impressionist's show, and examples of their work:**



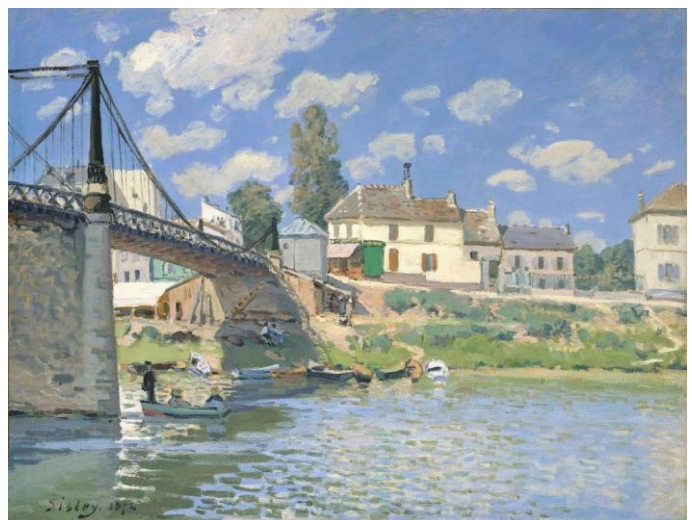
**"ORCHARD" – CAMILLE PISSARRO**



**"LA LOGE" – PIERRE AUGUSTE RENOIR**



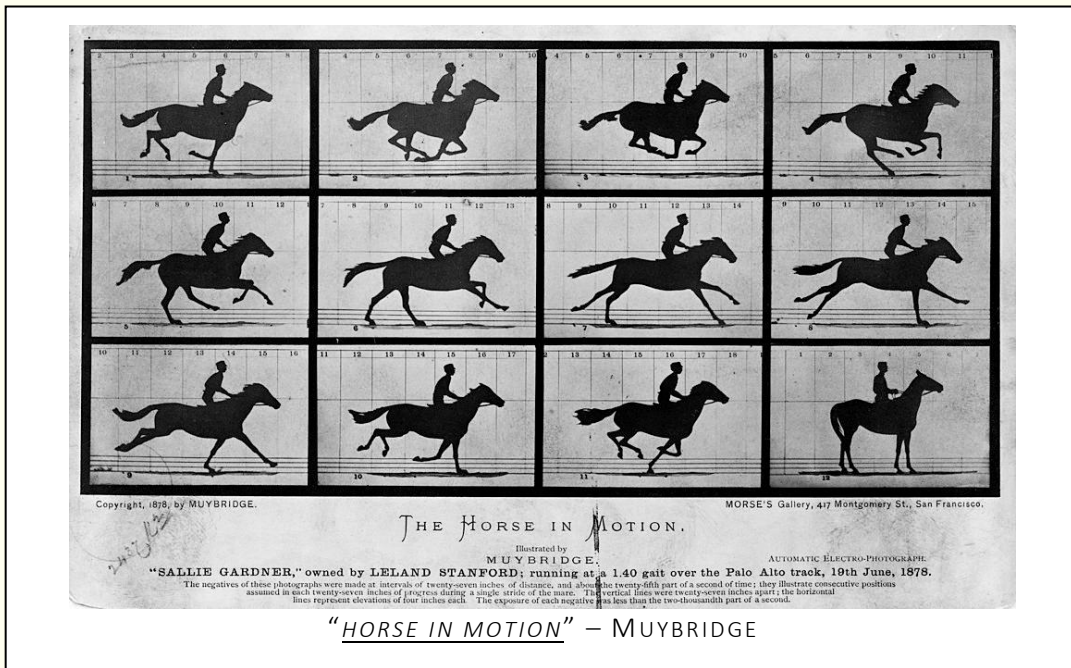
**"THE STAR" – EDGAR DEGAS**



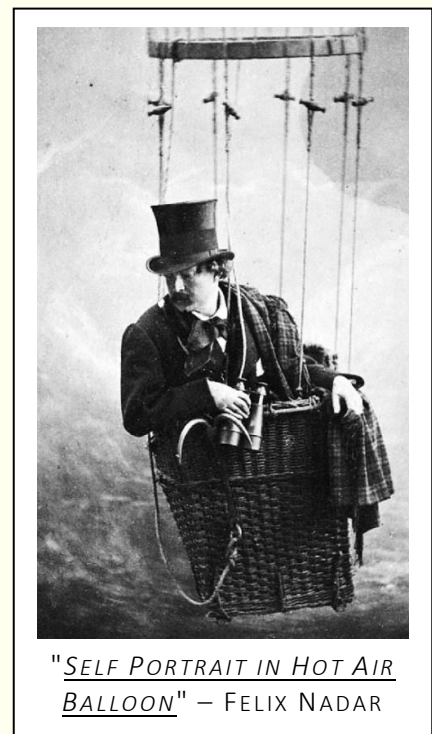
**"BRIDGE" – SISLEY**

## Photography was the parallel revolution to Impressionist painting:

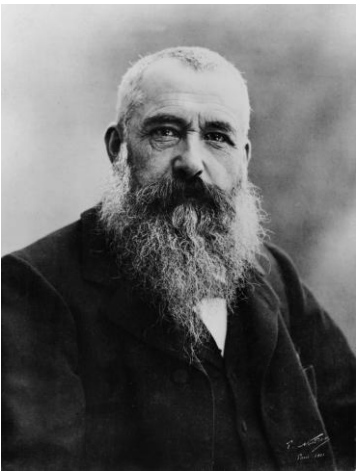
- Many of the painters learned how to paint certain subjects via photography. For example, Muybridge's motion studies, like the one below, allowed artists to see that a horse did not, as traditionally represented in paintings, keep two feet always on the ground as it galloped.



- Reflections on water and the movement of waves, or ripples on the surface, were held still and made visible to the artist, making it easier to paint these subjects realistically, when painting out of doors (*'in the action', so to speak*).
- Photography made portrait art possible without all the posing and sitting for an artist, and it took a fraction of the time.
- It also allowed artists to take photos to use as references for painting, to study shadow and light with precision. (*This became of prime importance in the 20th century.*)
- Even though still in black and white, photography became the gold standard of REALITY. This is what something, or someone, REALLY looked like.
- Some artists despised it because it was a machine that made the art, not a human hand and eye. Others reveled in it, as it freed them to pursue imaginative and interpretive expression, rather than chasing REALITY which could now be accomplished by the photographer.



Portraits by photographer Felix Nadar:



MONET



Nadar

PARIS

SARAH BERNHARDT



CLAUDE DEBUSSY



RIMBAUD



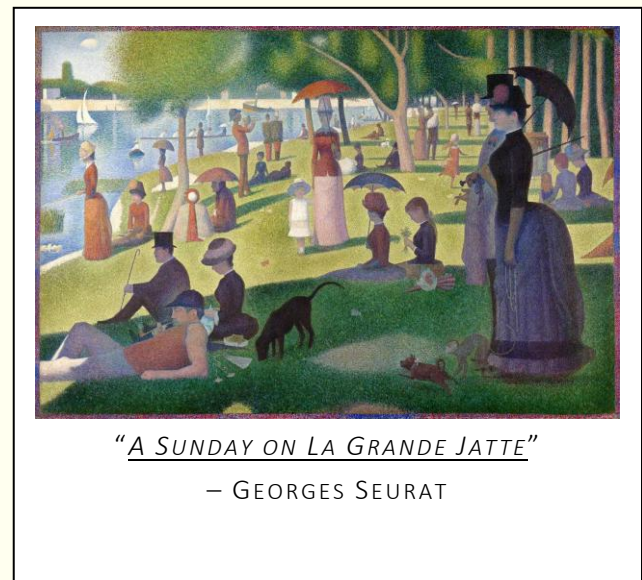
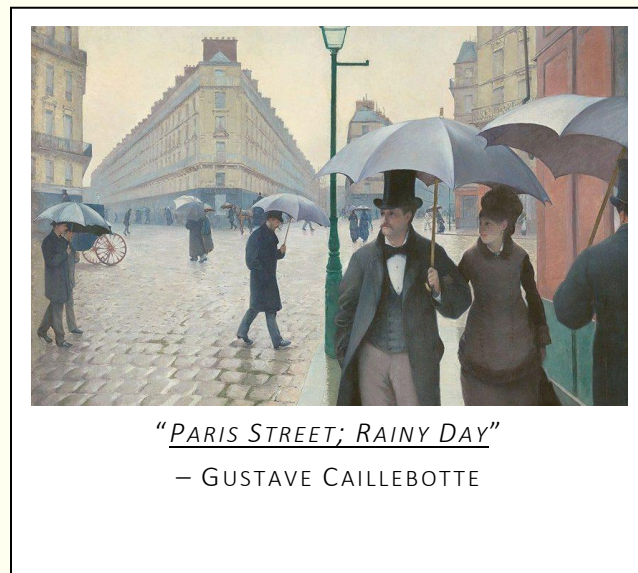
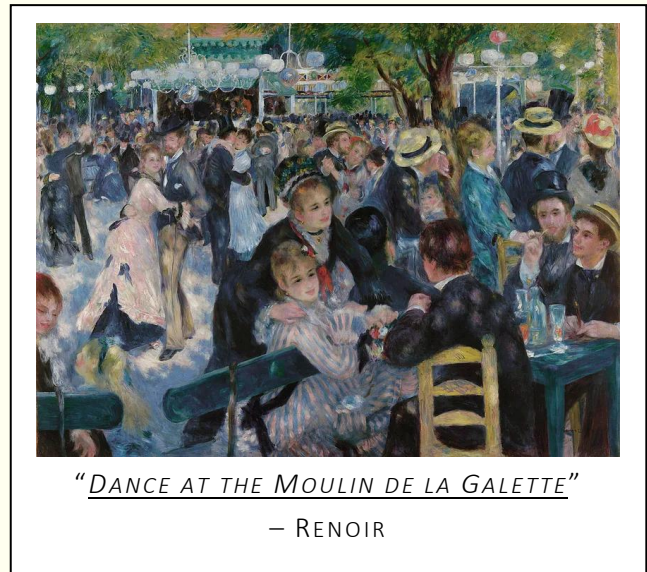
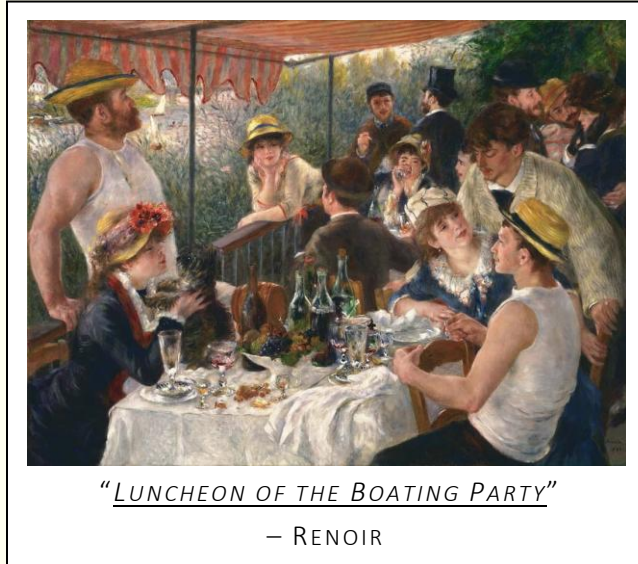
BAUDELAIRE



GEORGE SAND

The Impressionists continued with their annual and biennial exhibitions until 1886, when the group dissolved:

*Key pieces exhibited in this string of shows included:*



## Salon Des Indépendants:

***In 1884, two years before 'The Impressionists' would conclude their 12-year run, the 'Salon des Indépendants' (Salon of Independents) made its grand debut, (and it remains active to this day).***

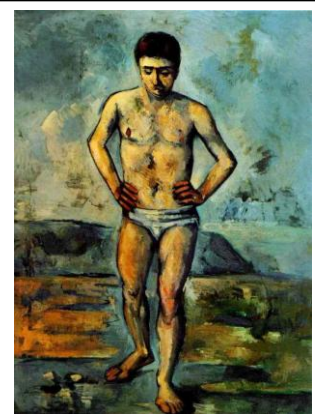
- Founded by Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Signac and other leading 'Modernists', this salon promised to be held "sans jury ni récompense" (without jury nor reward).
- Even without a financial incentive, artists flocked to have their work featured in this radical show. In its inaugural event alone, 5,000 works from over 400 creatives were exhibited.
- Over the course of its 134-year history, the 'Salon des Indépendants' has featured highlights ranging from Henri Matisse's "*Le Bonheur de Vivre*" (*The Joy of Life*), to Paul Signac's "*Opus 217. Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones and Tints, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890*".



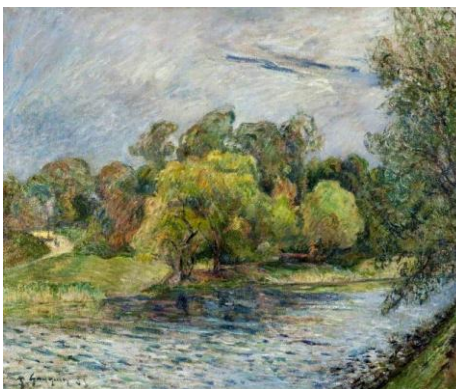
*"JOY OF LIFE 40"*  
– HENRI MATISSE



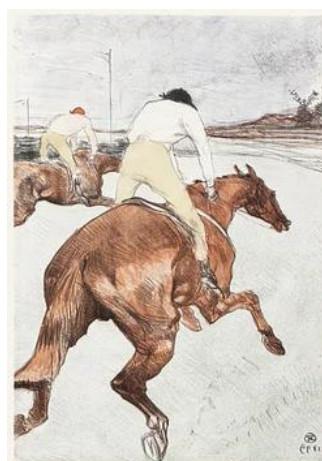
*"LANDSCAPE WITH FENCE"*  
– ALFRED SISLEY



*"BATHER"* – PAUL  
CEZANNE



*"LANDSCAPE"*  
– PAUL GAUGUIN



*"HORSE & RIDER"*  
– HENRI TOULOUSE-  
LAUTREC



*"PORTRAIT OF FÉNEON"*  
– SIGNAC

## The Impressionist movement did – and did not – succeed:

- They made very little money off the sales of their works. Their primary backer, Durand-Ruel, lost a great deal of money trying to sell their work.
- Nonetheless, they succeeded in changing art in core ways that led to 'Post-Impressionism' and 'Modernism'. They managed to change the rules for how art was made and what it could depict. They were revolutionary individualists!
- The freedom of subject and technique was carried on by artists everywhere, and movements like Fauvism, Cubism and even Expressionism owed their experimental attitudes to Impressionism.

***I will end my presentation with more examples of Impressionist works, some well-known and some not so well-known.***



PAUL CEZANNE



BERTHE MORISOT



ARMAND GUILLAUMIN



BERTHE MORISOT



ARTHUR STREETON



CHARLES CONDER



CLAUDE MONET



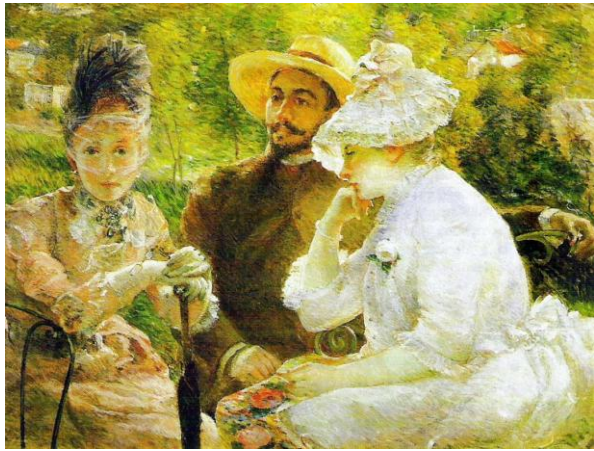
CHILDE HASSAM



CLAUDE MONET



CLAUDE MONET



MARIE BRACQUEMOND



EVA GONZONALES



KONSTANTIN KOROVIN



EVA GONZONALES



EDOUARD MANET



CLAUDE MONET



CLAUDE MONET



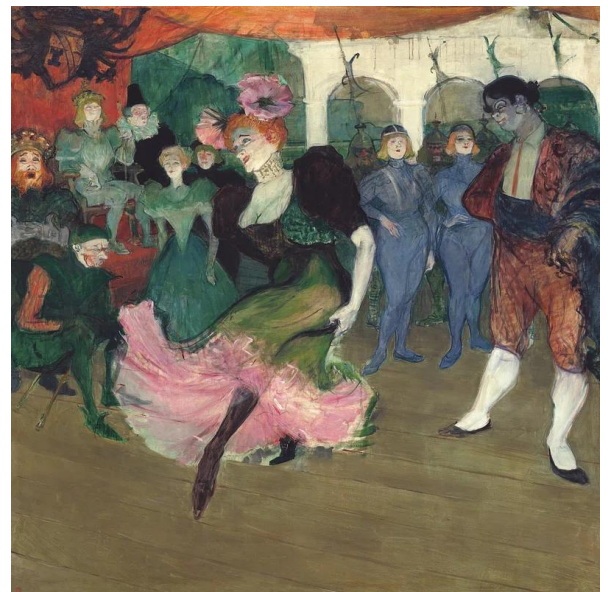
PAUL CEZANNE



PEDER SEVERIN KROYER



THEODORE ROBINSON



TOULOUSE LAUTREC



EDOUARD CORTES



EDOUARD CORTES



VALENIN SEROV



EDOUARD CORTES



WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE



CLAUDE MONET