**POST-IMPRESSIONISM**

This movement has been highly influential to the broad range of expressive modernist artworks of the 20th century.

*The Principal Post-Impressionists*

Paul Cézanne, Georges Seurat, Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin

By 1900, Impressionism was no longer considered the new direction in art.
These artists began as Impressionist painters.

How were they similar?
- They would maintain the Impressionist focus on bright colours and some of the techniques.

How were they different?
- They rejected the Impressionist’s emphasis on capturing the spontaneous record of light and colour.
- They wanted their compositions to have formal order and structure from traditional painting.

What was the result?

They developed a range of unique abstract styles, instead of focusing on naturalism.

There were two directions:
Cézanne & Seurat ➔ Permanence of form and concentration on design
Van Gogh & Gauguin ➔ emotional and sensuous expression

**Paul Cézanne (1839-1906)**

- Cézanne was the most influential artist on the next generation of modernist painters
- He was the leading painter of the late 19th century.
- He began as a romanticist, modelling his style after Delacroix.
- In the 1870s he met the Impressionist Pissarro and adopted the Impressionist’s high-keyed colour palette, broken brushwork, and everyday subject matter.
- His aim was to “make of Impressionism something solid and durable, like the art of the museums.” (Stokstad 1031)
- He wanted to create “something other than reality”. Rather, “a construction after nature”. (Stokstad 1032)
Characteristics:

- He wanted his paintings to remain visually flat like the canvases, on which they were painted. The only components that would create a sense of three-dimensionality would be the placement of objects. He did this by:
  - Lack of linear perspective: objects are observed from multiple angles, instead of the scientific mandate to view all objects from a fixed position, with one vanishing point.
  - Lack of aerial perspective: painting the entire canvas with the same vibrant colour intensity and attention, thus ridding the composition of foreground, middle ground and background.
  - Representing light everywhere in the painting to make its effect permanent, rather than fleeting.
  - Distorting objects, moving them around and changing their colour to create the best design.
  - Painted using flat planes of colour to create form.

Cezanne, Mont Sainte-Victoire, 1904

Mont Sainte-Victoire, located near Cézanne’s hometown of Aix, became one of his common subjects (painted approx. 30 times) used to explore his different painting techniques.

In this version, he applies the paint in square, flat patches of colour.

Which characteristics are visible?

Cezanne, Still Life with Apples and Peaches, 1905

Cézanne chose to paint still lifes as an alternative to portraits due to their “patient” nature. Cézanne spent hours observing his subjects to try to find the best composition. As a result, his models became restless and so he turned to still lifes.

Even still, his fruit would go rotten, so he began using wax fruit!

Cézanne’s style is apparent in this painting:

- Colours are rich
- Warm colour of the fruit contrasts the cool colour of the background.
- Flat patches of gradually changing colour are used to round the peaches, while maintaining the flat quality of the canvas.
- Line is used to break up value and colour.
- Distortion is used to balance the composition:
  - The lines of the cloths produce an upward and backward thrust. This is balanced by the pitcher and bowl that unnaturally tilt forward. The vertical cloths, which move from left to right, are balanced by the horizontal table, which moves diagonally from right to left.
Georges Seurat (1859-1891)
- Seurat based his pointillist style on the emerging photographic technique (pointillism looks similar to film grains) and the physics of colour.
- He made multiple preliminary sketches to determine the placement of the figures, colour and light.

Characteristics:
- Focus on colour and light
- Permanence of design: highly calculated geometry of composition, creating an abstract effect (figures are almost reduced to shapes)
- Meticulous technique of Pointillism: the variety of hues and values are created by placing different coloured dots (the size of pencil erasers) side by side.
- Figures are rigid and statuesque, referencing Ancient Egypt.

Seurat, A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, 1884-86
This is Seurat’s largest and best-known painting.
He created 40 preliminary works for this painting, rearranging the figures!
Contemporary reports of the island state that it was noisy, littered, and chaotic on Sundays.
There are conflicting interpretations of the meaning behind this painting:
1. Seurat was criticizing the Parisian middle class
2. Seurat was trying to establish a more civilized way of modern life in the city.
The second is more readily recognized due to the following:
- The placement of the mother and child who stand in the centre of the composition, while all other figures move around them.
- The child demonstrates restraint unnatural to a child her age and wears white, which may represent the progress of human evolution.
- The pet monkey in the bottom-right corner of the painting my also allude to the theme of human evolution.

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<th>Differences</th>
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<td>The theme of the painting is Parisians leisurely enjoying a Sunday in the park</td>
<td>Rigid &amp; meticulous pointillist technique</td>
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<td>Focus on colour and light</td>
<td>Placement of figures and landscape elements are carefully calculated according to geometry</td>
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Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)
- Van Gogh is considered the first great Dutch painter since the Northern Renaissance.
- In today’s terms, van Gogh would have been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. His mood would swing from exuberant to depressed and melancholy. During the last year and a half of his life, van Gogh experienced recurring psychological crises and admitted himself to a mental asylum, where he ultimately committed suicide in July 1890.
- While in the asylum, van Gogh recorded his emotional state through paintings, such as The Starry Night, 1889, which contributed to the emergence of the expressionist movement (the intensity of the artist’s feelings override the need to represent the actual appearance of things).

Characteristics:
- He adapted Seurat’s pointillist technique to use impasto, multi-directional dashes instead of methodical dots.
- Great sense of energy
- Textured surface (never seen before!)
- Used vibrant and vibrating colour, by applying complementary colours next to each other. In portraits he wanted to give the sitter “something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize,”
- Van Gogh wanted to express something about the people or scenes he painted and his emotional relationship to them.

Van Gogh, The Starry Night, 1889
Painted from his window in the asylum.
Throughout van Gogh’s life he wrote letters to his brother Theo that described his mental state and the meaning behind many of his paintings.
Van Gogh had written in a letter to Theo, as he considered immortality, “Just as we take the train to get to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to reach a star” (Stokstad 1034). This was based on a contemporary theory that after death people travel to a star, where they continue their immortal life.
This may be depicted in the way in which Van Gogh painted the scene:
- The cypress tree represents death and eternal life. It dramatically rises, connecting the earthly and celestial worlds.
- The brightest star in the sky is actually Venus, possibly alluding to his hope of finally finding love in the afterlife.
- The movement in the sky could represent him travelling through the sky to his star.

Van Gogh, Portrait of a Peasant, 1888.
Van Gogh, Van Gogh’s Bedroom in Arles. Saint-Rémy, 1889
How does this painting depict van Gogh’s style?
Paul Gauguin (1848-1903)

- Gauguin was a successful stockbroker, who started to paint in his late twenties. He met the Impressionists and began to study and paint with Pissarro.
- 1883 - he quit his job to paint full time. After a few years, he couldn’t support his family, so his wife left him and moved herself and their children to Denmark.
- Gauguin did not like the city life in Paris. He was in search of a simple and more meaningful life. He moved to different remote areas in France. He lived with van Gogh for a while in Arles. He ultimately left for Martinique and Tahiti where he produced his famed paintings. This departure severely affected van Gogh.

His influences:
Stained glass, folk art and Japanese prints

Characteristics:
- Primitive style of art
- Simplified forms
- Flattened space
- Decorative
- Shapes are outlined like Egyptian, Medieval and Oriental art
- Form is flattened into decorative shapes
- Bright colours, which are intended to express his feelings.
- The search for religious experience
- Native Tahitians and their island setting

Gauguin, *The Vision after the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*, 1888
This painting demonstrates Gauguin's search for religious meaning and experience. He depicts the simple, unflustering faith of the peasants of Brittany, France.
*Which characteristics can you see in this painting?*

Gauguin, *Day of the Gods*, 1894
This painting was painted from memory in France. He decided to ignore the colonization of Tahiti, and instead depicted the Eden-like ideal of his imagination. The painting is divided into three horizontal zones:
1. The most realistic area. The composition is centred on the statue of a Tahitian god. A beach landscape occupied by Tahitians is composed around and behind him.
2. Three figures occupy a beach divided into three bands of unnatural colours. The figure on the left in the fetal position may symbolize birth. The figure in the middle, who sits and looks at the viewer, may symbolize life. The figure in the fetal position to the right lies with its back toward us possibly symbolizing death.
3. An abstract pool of water. The surface does not reflect the figures above, but instead creates a colourful abstract composition.
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901)
For homework read pp. 434-435 and answer the following questions:

1. What occurred in Toulouse-Lautrec’s life that influenced his career?

2. Who was one of his biggest influences?

3. How may his influence be seen in Toulouse- Lautrec’s paintings?

4. What are his characteristics?

5. List and explain the artworks discussed in the reading.