

# Modernism

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**19C painting - things are never the  
same afterwards**

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*Prussians unite, Italians Unite*

*Civil wars in: U.S., Switzerland, France (5), Greece, Spain, Russia, Serbia, Belgium, Poland, Austria, Bosnia, Bulgaria, China*

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## **Socially**

*The industrial revolution stood society on its head*

*a middle class developed with no tradition - they bought art.*

*Suffrage and unionizing was stabilizing (or destabilizing?)*

*Socialism and Marxism were in essence invented during this period*

*In Paris, the city had been transformed by Napoleon III*

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## **Scientifically**

*Physics didn't reflect this disruption...until after 1870, when it had its own set of issues*

*But how could art not reflect this sort of churning?*

**after ~1880: total transformation**



# after ~1880: total transformation

## In Physics, 2 revolutions away from the “apparent world” of Newton:

the unseen, non-objective world of the invisible field of Faraday and Maxwell

a statistical representation of nature due to Maxwell and Boltzmann

Before, **objects themselves** stood for the **apparent phenomena**:

*planet, block, etc*

*the mathematics describes motion, size, quantity*

After, **mathematical symbols** stand for the **unapparent phenomena**:

*$E(x,y,z,t)$ ,  $B(x,y,z,t)$ ,  $q$ , etc*

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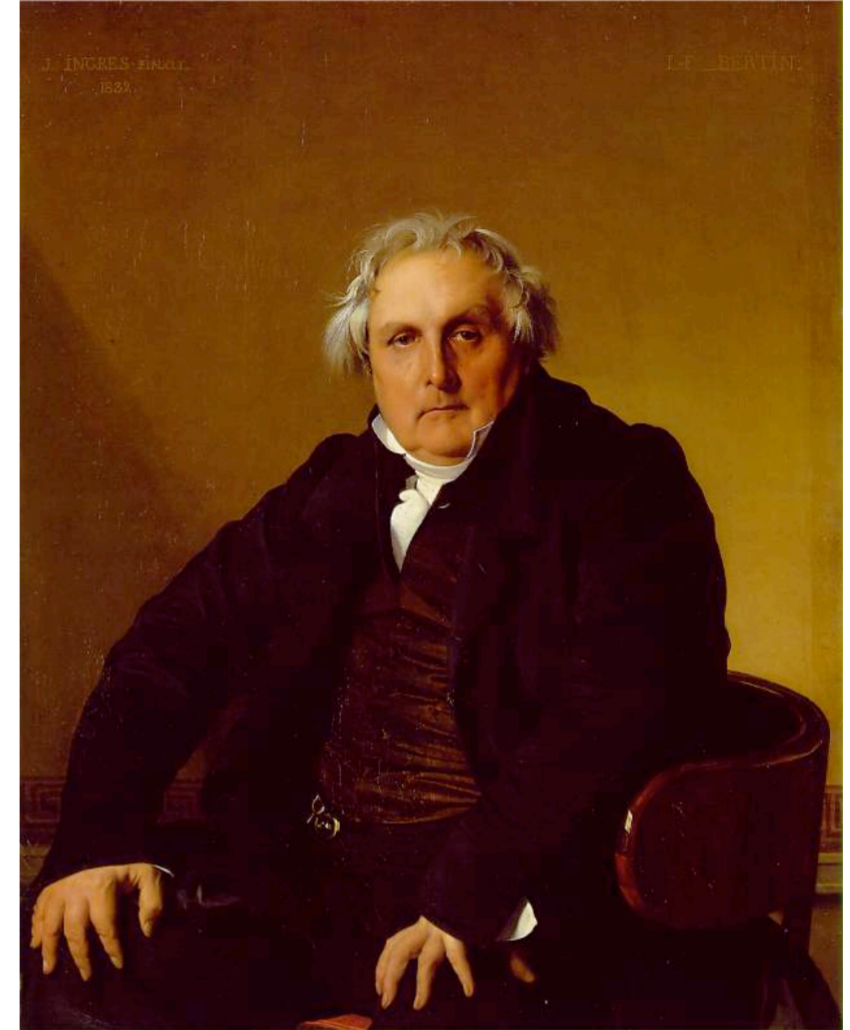
## **In Art, from about 1860, Paris was The Place**

where there were at least 3 different views of how best to represent reality

# There were the two giants: Ingres and Delacroix



Eugene Delacroix, *Lion Hunt*, 1834, Louvre, Paris



Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Louis-Francois Bertin*, 1833.

## The Romantic and the Classical

- each with its own attention to detail  
neoclassical, with its emphasis of LINE  
romantic, with its emphasis of COLOR
- each with its own “finish” and invisibility



Charles Baudelaire

1821 - 1867

# Modernity: Charles Baudelaire



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...beauty is always of a double composition...Beauty is made up of an eternal, invariable element, whose quality it is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions...

“By ‘modernity’ I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable...”

Baudelaire, The Painter of Modern Life

# Modern Life

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**His call: become aware of what is always changing**

...the “heroism of modern life”

to record the momentary and to do so in terms which retain the timeless features of beauty

*He extolled those in modern society who would fashion themselves - be unique and beautiful (the Dandy) - be heroes in an environment which is not always heroic*



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**By all accounts, one painter reluctantly, and somewhat involuntarily stepped forward**

Edouard Manet

to start the job that Paul Cezanne finishes

# the Paris Academy

Typical mid- 19C Salon entries



Friday, July 30, 2010

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sponsored annual or biannual judged "Salons"

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**Only about the “Eternal Element” that Baudelaire said should be only 1/2 of art.**



# **Reaction 1: a new look at Realism in subject matter**

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Everything “Academic” is real-looking...but in a Greek  
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Everything “Academic” is real-looking...but in a Greek sort of way

## One man struck out and began to paint what he saw

regardless of subject matter

Artists began to think of themselves

*as “other”...from the bourgeois & Academy*

Political activism became a part of some of the artistic community life after  
Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) - on the doorstep of modernism & socialism

*He’s remembered for much, but significantly for three large paintings*



Courbet, *The Stone Breakers*, 1849, Dresden (destroyed)

“I am a Courbetist, that’s all.”

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This caused a storm when it was exhibited.

It was an everyday life scene (“genre”) which was treated as seriously as a History painting and on the scale of History Painting

Furthermore, it demonstrated a Wrong: an old man and a young boy doing work not suited to either of them.

**It was done with Attitude** - the paint is applied with heavy impasto, thick and rough dabs of oil, so the finish was cloth-like.

The models were really railroad workers and the painting was BIG: 5’x8’, so it was in the face of the polite society art appreciation community. And, their backs are to the audience with a defiance, or worse, ignoring of that society.

# everyday occurrence



Courbet, *The Burial at Omans*, 1849.

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# everyday occurrence

## An un-noble death...opposite of the Academic

even an anonymous one: no indication of who is being buried- not uplifting

Notice that even many of the mourners have their faces partly hidden

Reviewer: "Great God! How ugly!"

Courbet: "The burial of Romanticism." - **the victory of real people, over mythology**



Courbet, *The Burial at Omans*, 1849.



“I cannot paint an angel because I have never seen one.”

Courbet



Courbet, *Studio of a Painter, A Real Allegory Summarizing my Seven Years of Life as an Artist*, 1854, Musee d'Orsay.

What the artist creates, not just portrays, imitates, or replicates—will now be the center of attention.

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The people in the left group are not real personages - they are types. The group on the right are real - maybe patrons or admirers (Baudelaire is reading the book).

They are not present to witness a holy event - they are there to celebrate the center of attention, even though passively they don't look at him: the artist himself. Two watch: the child (innocence) and the nude (nature, who has just revealed her "truth")

“

in our so very civilized society it is necessary for me to live the life of a savage. I must be free even of governments. The people have my sympathies, I must address myself to them directly.

Courbet, 1854 correspondence

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1855: really irritated at the Salon judges...he set up his own, competing “Salon” in a shack on an adjacent property.

# a famous Realist: Millet

a simple subject, done in near-classical form



Jean Francois  
Millet, *The  
Gleaners*, 1857.

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# Reaction 2: and a new look at Realism in...looking

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## Classical/renaissance standards were absolute

Remember, the research program of renaissance art was:

- to create a “window” on the world **using illusion** (a modernist would say)

*1. single and two point perspective*

*2. atmospheric perspective*

*3. chiaroscuro with delicate modeling in light and shade*

*4. celebration of presumed Classical forms of beauty and heroism*

- requiring the elimination of the two dimensional surface of a canvas



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## Interpreted for 300 years as a program of

Taking current subjects, dressed up in classical garb,  
to renaissance standards

**Finish them**

# Illusion

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Mimicking the world is no longer acceptable or  
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Mimicking the world is no longer acceptable or interesting

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## The **painting *itself*** is the object of interest

It can no longer be an invisible medium



# Bouguereau, popular Salon painter



"The pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present is due not to the beauty with which it can be invested, but **also to its essential quality of being present.**" Baudelaire

The modernists would say that, while sweet, you have to ask whether the world really looks like this!

Modernists say, 'no'. The modeling presented is not real—that especially in sunlight, contrasts are more striking, motion is not so frozen

**no. that's not real.**

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**Even looking was new to the pioneers**

...if you just look, without prejudice  
you see contrasts, not always light-shadow modeling

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**This...was seeing new and it was (is) hard to do**

# Manet

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“Manet was greater than us; he was able to make light out of black.”

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**Ambroise Vollard, 1924**

# Manet: a most unlikely revolutionary



Édouard Manet  
1832-1883



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## **The real revolution was sparked by Edouard Manet**

Dapper, well-healed, well-educated

Certainly marched in his own direction, without hesitation

In need of acceptance

## **A realist, but not like Courbet**

The leader of the impressionists, but never exhibited with them or acknowledged the title

Sometimes a distinction:

“objective realist” (Courbet) and “subjective realist” (Manet)

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Gleyre, *Evening or Lost Illusions*, 1843, Louvre, Paris.



Couture, *Horace and Lydia (A Roman Feast)*, 1843.

Remember, young man, that...one must always think of antiquity. Nature, my friend, is good as a tool for study, but it is of no interest. Style, you see, is the thing that matters.

Gleyre, after Manet painted a model's big feet...big

teachers

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My friend, if you have the pretension of being the leader of a school, go and find it elsewhere.

Couture, after Manet ordered a model to pose with clothes on...to applause from students

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Amateur critic—a classical model: “M. Manet, thanks to me more than one young man has painted compositions that led him to Rome”

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Amateur critic—a classical model: “M. Manet, thanks to me more than one young man has painted compositions that led him to Rome”

Manet: “We are not in Rome and we don’t want to go there. We are in Paris, let’s stay here.”

# his first efforts were...pleasing, if not curious

*His first Salon acceptance, the  
Guitar Player:*

- In concert with a Parisian love-affair with all things Spain

Here are the beginnings of trademark Manet tools:

- The perspective is not obvious...the tight composition does not suggest this very strongly
- The colors are idiosyncratic and applied in broad areas - "color patches" will be the term for this later on...



Manet, *The Absinthe Drinker*, 1858.



Manet, *The Guitar Player*, 1860.



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## His original, and enduring mark, was simplicity

A trend which will culminate with Cezanne

His first Salon submission (failed) (“The only drunkard is you.” his teacher, Couture.)

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His pictures are splattered palettes. Never has anyone made lines grimace and colors shriek more horribly.”

“His acid color penetrates the eye like a steel saw.

a professional critic:

# Manet starts to become difficult to understand

There are real Parisian personalities in this:  
Manet, his brother, Baudelaire, Offenbach



Manet, *Concert in the Tuileries*, 1860.

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There are nearly no straight lines in this scene...in reality, the trees are vertical  
There is no linear perspective, nor any suggestion of depth beyond darker and darker planes  
indeed, the evidence of hundreds of people is only hinted at

Black...is a color for Manet – often employed for frock coats and top hats.

The women execute the Manet Stare  
and the colors are increasingly flat.

There is effectively no modeling here, another Manet trademark.



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That the Emperor decreed a second, parallel show for the public to decide

The *Salon des Refuses* opened 2 weeks after the primary Salon  
*and 4000 visited the first day*

“People entered it as they would the horror chamber at Madame Tussaud’s in London. They laughed as soon as they had passed the door.”

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**This was not the same as Courbet’s setting up his own parallel show in a shack**

— *he was pretty much ignored*

**a riot**

# a riot

**Manet entered 3 paintings**

which required the stationing armed guards

painting changed from that point on...

# Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe



Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, 1863, Louvre, Paris.



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Very familiar with the Classics, he just modernized



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Raphael, *The Judgment of Paris*, 1510



Giorgione, *The Pastoral Concert*, 1508, Louvre



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There is a delicate still-life, but even though a classical scene, he's put it into modern setting...caused the woman to pointedly grab the observer's attention with the Manet Stare - and uncomfortably, bring the viewer into the forest with the participants (Manet's long-time model, his brother, and brother in law).



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Here, he has broken out of a series of traditions: He's playing with light, mass, and the instant.

What do objects look like in the light? They are often stark, bright, with sharp distinction. Previously, studio light and the teaching of drawing from plaster and marble statues encouraged the soft, shadows of Chiaroscuro

He abandons it, in favor of shadow using color. He abandons conventional perspective, as an experiment in spatial representation by color.

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**He knew what was proper**

and what he liked

so he bought Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* also exhibited at the same Salon

*Said a reviewer: "It is the ideal of childlike, charming grace"*

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**Emperor Napoleon himself was scandalized**

by Manet's nude - called it "indecent"

**He knew what was proper**

and what he liked

so he bought Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* also exhibited at the same Salon

*Said a reviewer: "It is the ideal of childlike, charming grace"*





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This prompted Emile Zola, critic up-and-coming realist novelist to observe:

"Take an antique venus, the body of any woman whatsoever drawn according to the sacred rules, and, lightly, with a powder puff, dab color and powder on the body; there you have Monsieur Cabanel's ideal... This goddess, drowned in a sea of milk, looks like a delicious dance-hall girl, but not of flesh and blood - that would be indecent - but made of a sort of pink and white marzipan"

"When other artists correct nature by painting Venus they lie. Manet asked himself why he should lie? Why not tell the truth?"

Zola was a boyhood friend of Cezanne and a later-friend and public supporter of Manet

He wrote extensively on the whole modernist art movement during the time, picking up where Baudelaire left off after his death in 1867.



**tell the truth.**

**tell the truth.**

**the 1865 submission...it only got  
more outrageous: Olympia**

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Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

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Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, Uffizi, Florence.



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Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, Uffizi, Florence.



Okay...The lack of a classical title and the modern setting caused the audience to react with loathing. The more important elements in renaissance-enlightenment art - subject and composition - could not stand up to the rendering and frankness that Manet deployed. His experiments were with the lesser elements of color and form.



**the public took it well, I think:**

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A multitude of scathing cartoons resulted

Friday, July 30, 2010

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**Flash:**



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“Harlot”; “female gorilla”; “the ultimate in ugliness”; “vulgar virgin”; “yellow-bellied odalisque”, “color of the flesh is dirty, grotesque”



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Or was he trying to do something serious...

He certainly was dumbfounded by the reception and scarred by the experience.



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“I would like to have you here, my dear Baudelaire, the insults rain down on my like hail...I should have wished to have your sound opinion of my work.” Manet, in a famous letter to Baudelaire, who sent back a stern half-time speech of tough-love support.



A multitude of scathing cartoons resulted

I maintain that this canvas is truly the painter's flesh and blood. It is all his and his alone. It will endure as the characteristic expression of his talent, as the highest mark of his power. ..Olympia, reclining on the white sheets is a large pale spot on the black background...at the first glance you distinguish only two tones in the painting...played off against each other. Moreover details have disappeared. Look at the head of the young girl. The lips are two narrow pink lines, the eyes are reduced to a few black strokes... If you wish to reconstruct reality you must step back a bit. Then a curious thing happens. Each object falls into its proper plane. Olympia's head projects from the background in astonishing relief...An accurate eye and a direct hand performed this miracle.

Zola

Zola gets it.

**that's En-ter-taaaaiiii-nment!**

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**Art had become decorative...**

just entertainment or affectation

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**Art had become decorative...**

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**The artistic community was irrevocably split...the  
moderns were those:**

who wanted to explore & experiment with the human-  
world connection, for whom

nothing less than new techniques & new standards would work

# Flatness.



# Flatness.

## **Modernism is a difficult period - a huge literature**

Any of you who will take art history or beyond will become familiar with

Clement Greenberg's ideas (esp. essay: "Modernist Painting" 1965)

a pre-eminent late 20C modern art critic/theorist (with Fry, Bell, Fried, Gombrich, and Clark)

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## **Flatness is the key for Greenberg:**

"Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else."

**my slice:**

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**In order to avoid entertainment & explore what's "of the now"**

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the previously invisible painting surface had to to  
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In contrast with renaissance - where the illusion is foremost

**painting had to be evident *first* as a two dimensional surface with lines and pigments...only *then*, as subject or content**

**the unique purity of the medium**



# the unique purity of the medium

**I think you experience this naturally yourself every day**

If you read a book...is there ever a point at which you lose track of the fact that you are holding a book?

A book does not try to leave its medium

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The 2 dimensional surface

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## The goal, then, was to embrace that fact and build on it

The result: the explicit effort to forget all that came before

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“

Manet

creating the impressionists,  
Cezanne...and ultimately, abstraction

“

I render as simply as can be the things that I see...  
Come and see sincere work.

Manet

creating the impressionists,  
Cezanne...and ultimately, abstraction

**like it?**

# like it?

## Whether you accept Greenberg or not

this much is the case:

telling the “truth” →

high contrast →

lack of modeling →

loss of 3rd dimension →

flat.

*and then the canvas is apparent*





Manet, *The Fifer*, 1866, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

# with this, my favorite Manet:



Manet, *The Fifer*, 1866, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

# with this, my favorite Manet:

## experimenting with contradictions

explicitly 2 & 3 dimensional,  
simultaneously

precisely the opposite of the  
renaissance program of looking  
through a window



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## It declares itself FLAT at first glance

then, **your brain takes over** and in  
collaboration with Manet, you make it a  
3d little boy

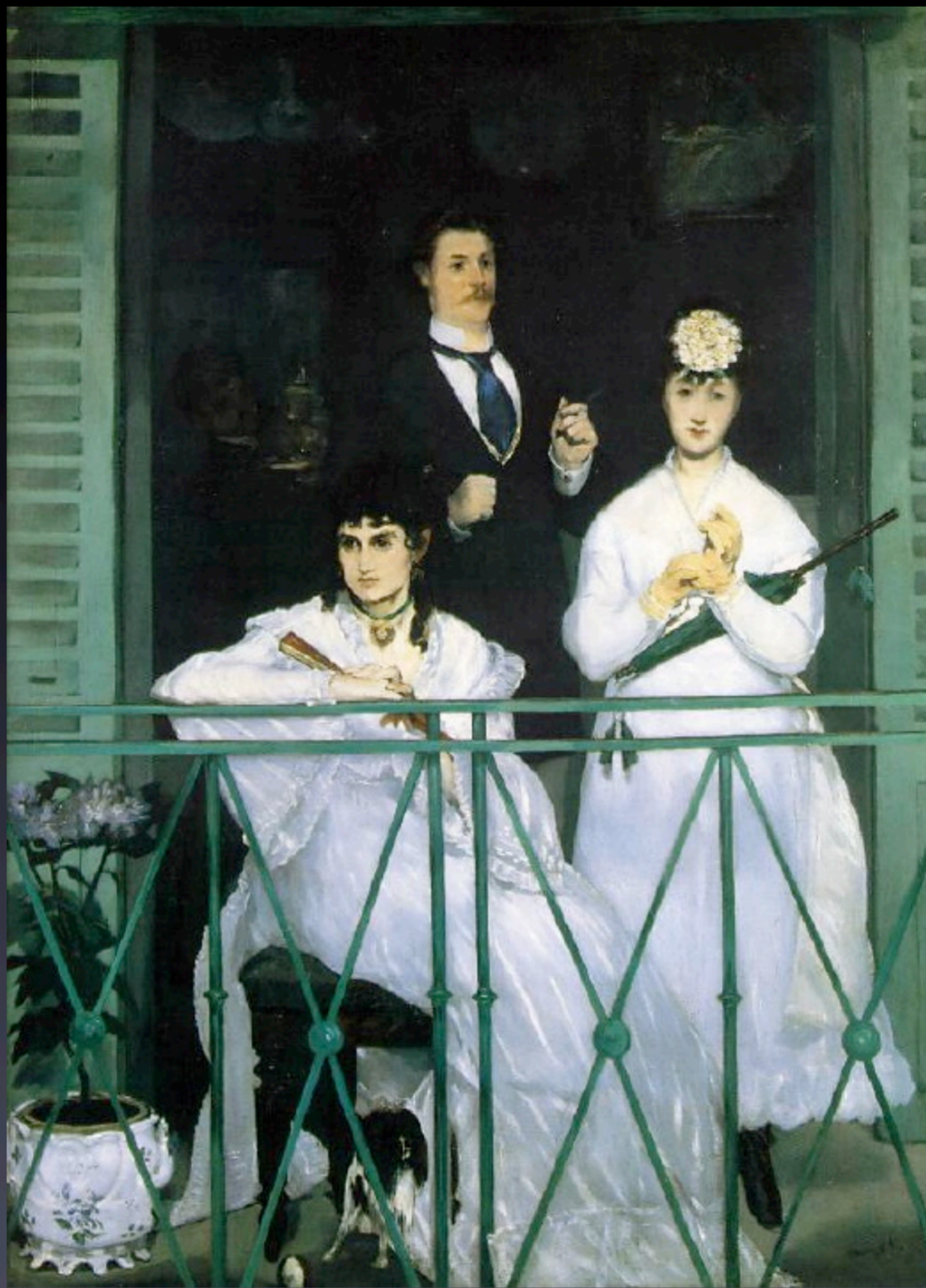
at least that's my story, and I'm sticking to it...



Manet, *The Fifer*, 1866, Musée d'Orsay,  
Paris



Manet, *The Fifer*, 1866, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Manet, *The Balcony*, 1868-9, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

# experimenting with flatness

Notice how flat the faces are



*The Balcony*, the **green**, wrought iron railing is all that creates the depth, contrary to conventional coloring schemes. In all, the Manet Stare dominates.

Manet is playing with your brain.

Again, his learned background shows through, as he's borrowed another scene from a master.



Manet, *The Balcony*, 1868-9, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

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Goya, *Majas on a Balcony*, 1808-12



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Manet, *The Luncheon*, 1868, Neue Pinakothek, Munchen

# Kuhn

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## While not always applicable to science

I'm struck by how different the Academic and modernist communities were

"I was tortured by the teacher...his corrections were vehement to the point that his very approach to my easel upset my comrades. All was in vain. He recommended that I enclose in an outline a form that I saw palpitating..." Redon

"Everything we are given to look at is ridiculous. The light is false, the shadows are false. When I arrive at the studio, I feel as if I were entering a tomb." Manet

A teacher of Van Gogh at Ecole des Beaux-Arts: "First, you make a contour; your contour isn't right; I won't correct it if you do your modeling before having seriously fixed your contour...Color and modeling aren't much, one can learn that very quickly, it's the contour that is essential and most difficult."

Van Gogh to Theo, "and now you ought to see how flat, how lifeless and how insipid the results of that system are...like David, or even worse..."

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These people are not speaking the same language. A revolution is occurring.

# impressionism

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# the impressionists

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## The gang of the Refused met regularly

Manet, Monet, Degas, Pissarro, Renoir, Cezanne, and Whistler

All intrigued and altered by Manet's project of picturing the **Now**.

Monet and Manet were friends and worked and socialized together

Monet declared Manet to be a critical inspiration to the Impressionists, but Manet never used the title, nor exhibited in explicitly Impressionist exhibits

*Monet who engineered the acquisition of Olympia for the Louvre in 1890.*



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*Monet who engineered the acquisition of Olympia for the Louvre in 1890.*

## Theirs was an explicit (research) program:

To capture the momentary impression of, primarily light's, impact on vision

An explicit intention, and pictorial elements were sacrificed to this end.

– *Monet is the most typical and persistent of all of the impressionists, which included Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Degas, Sisley, Caillebotte, Whistler, Morisot (a friend of Manet's, eventually his sister-in-law...the lady on the left of the Balcony), and Cassatt.*

In part, an explicit collaboration between Monet and Renoir



Monet, *On the Bank of the Seine, Bennecourt*, 1868, Art Institute of Chicago



Monet, *The Studio Boat*, 1874, Kroller-Muller Museum

# the color patch

It begins with Manet's technique of broad, monochrome strokes

“Monet is only an eye...but what an eye.” Cezanne



Monet, *On the Bank of the Seine, Bennecourt*, 1868, Art Institute of Chicago

In 1874, having been refused a showing at the Salon, Monet and other like-minded set up their own show in a photographer's studio. The catalog listed a painting *Impressions: Sunrise*...and that stuck as a derogatory remark by a reviewer.

Notice that the finished feel of the Academic painters is totally lacking.

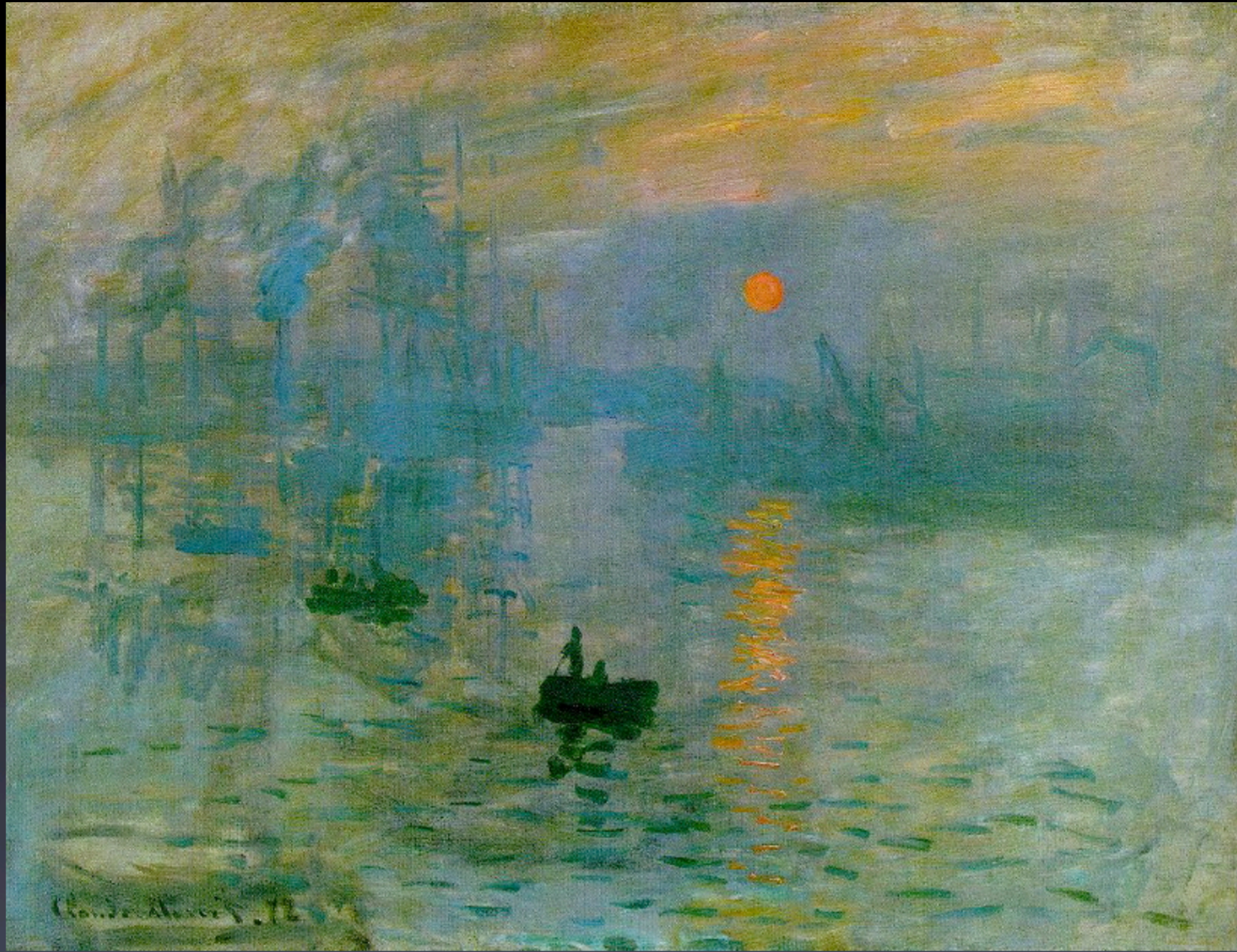


Monet, *The Studio Boat*, 1874, Kroller-Muller Museum

The rule was: the painting had to be done in place, out of doors - No Studio. **Drawing (line) was not the first action: color was.**

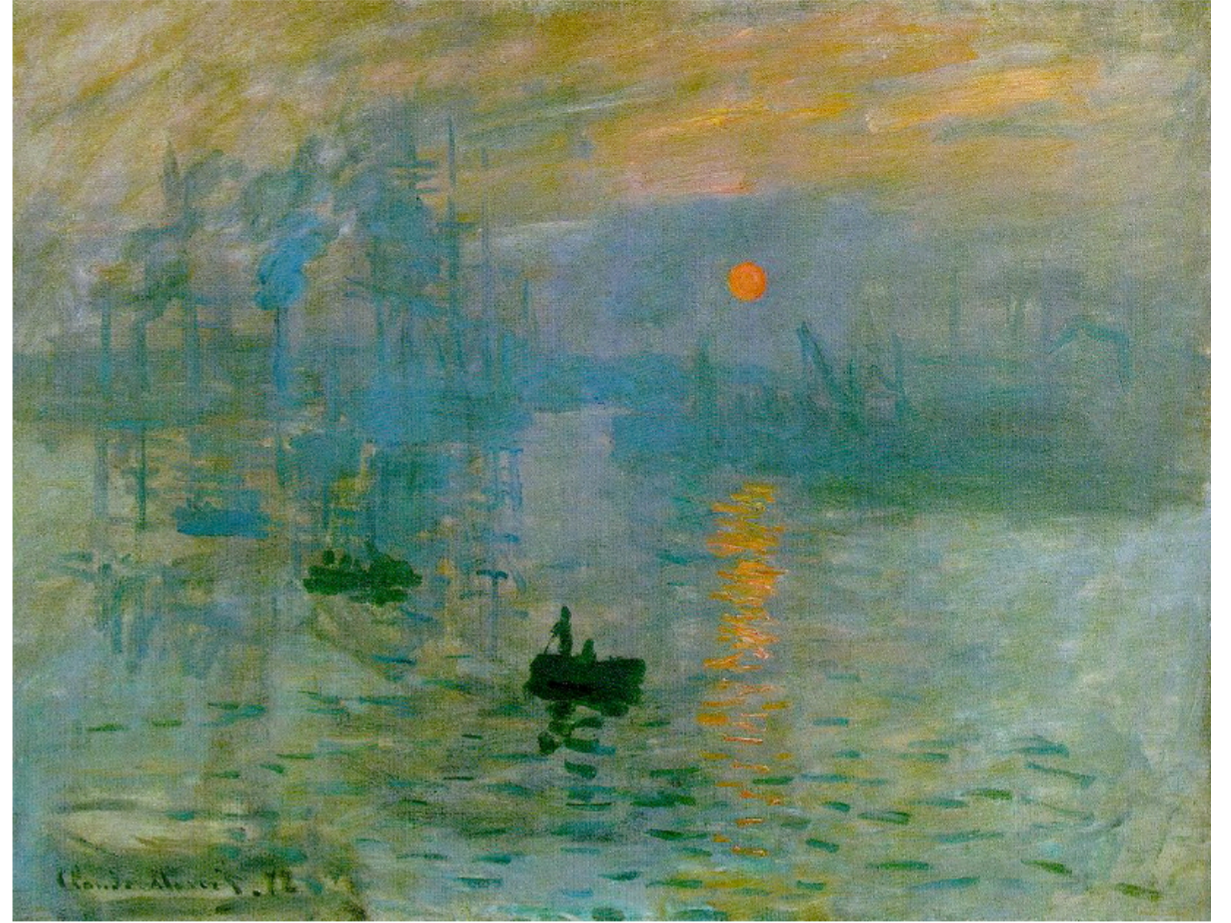
This was instantaneous art: the Now had to be captured in nearly real time, so it is as if a snapshot in time.

This led to his later famous series of paintings of the same place at different times of the year (haystacks, Roen Cathedral, etc)



Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*, 1872, Musee Marmottan, Paris

# impressions



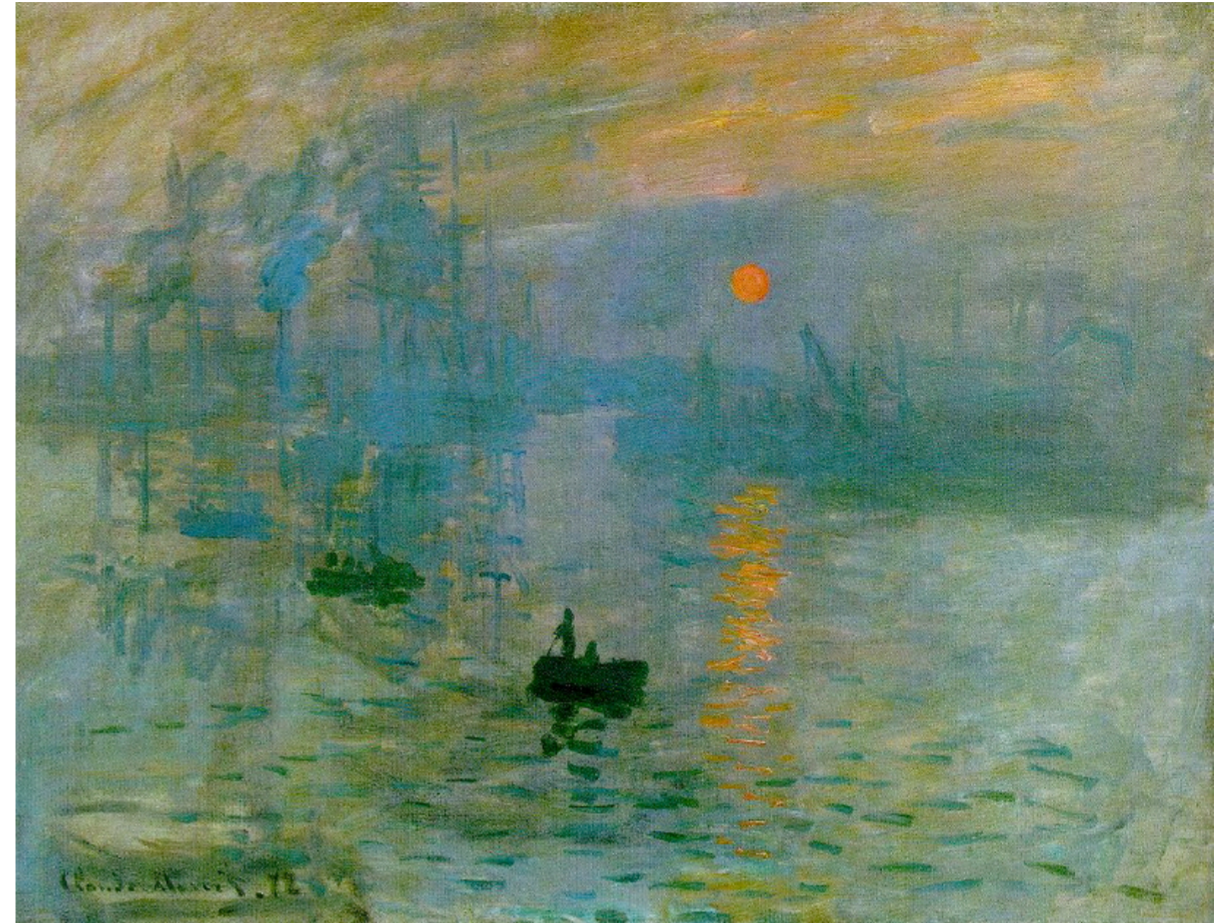
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# impressions

## Not well received:

*“The rue le Peltier is a road of disasters. After the fire at the Opera, there is now yet another disaster here. An exhibition has just been opened at the Durand-Ruel which allegedly contains paintings. I enter and my horrified eyes behold something terrible. Five or six lunatics, among them a woman, have joined together and exhibited their works. I have seen people rock with laughter in front of these pictures, but my heart bled when I saw them...They take a piece of canvas, color, and brush, daub a few patches of paint on it at random, and sign the whole thing with their name. It is a delusion of the same kind as if the inmates of Bedlam picked up stones from the wayside and imagined they had found diamonds.”*

People looked hard at the canvasses, saw daubs and unintelligible marks and scorned the whole affair.



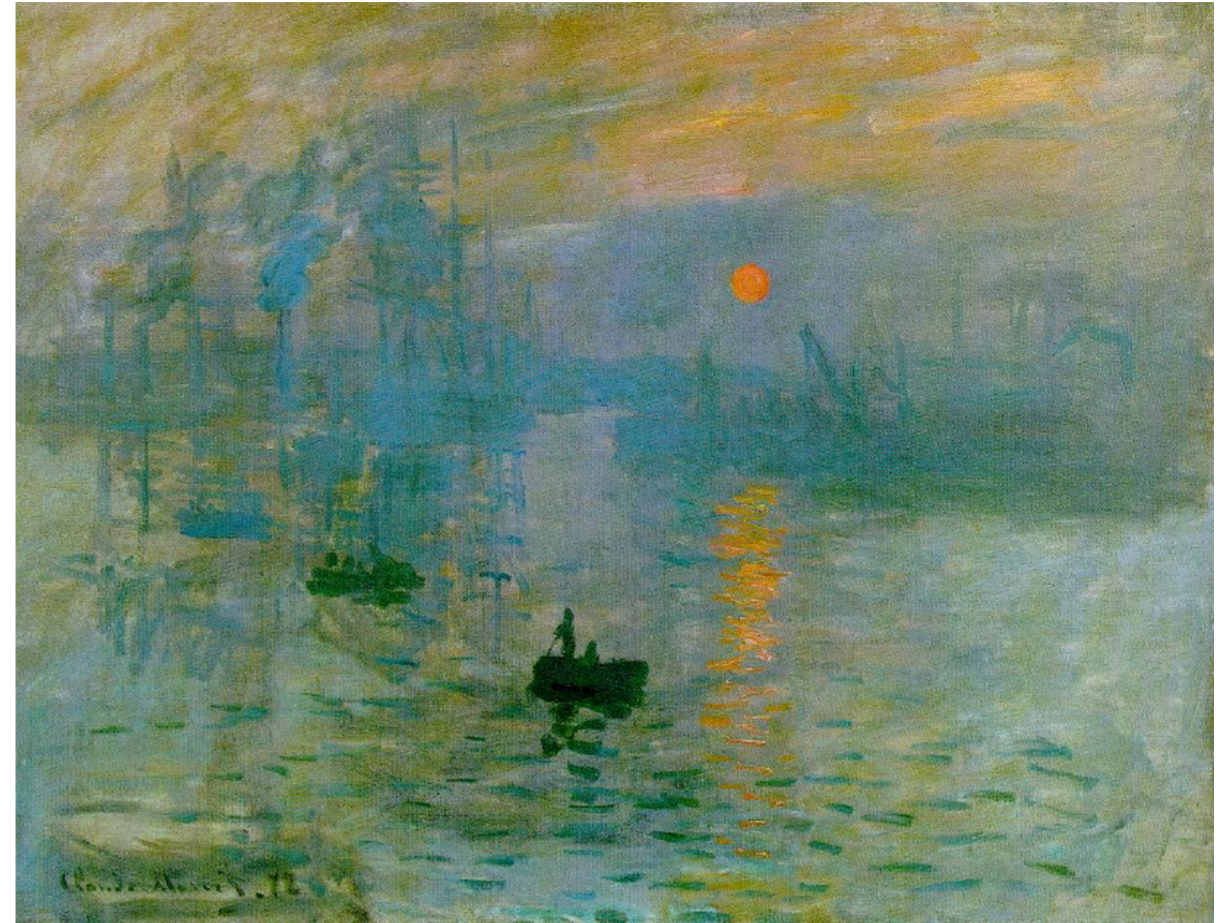
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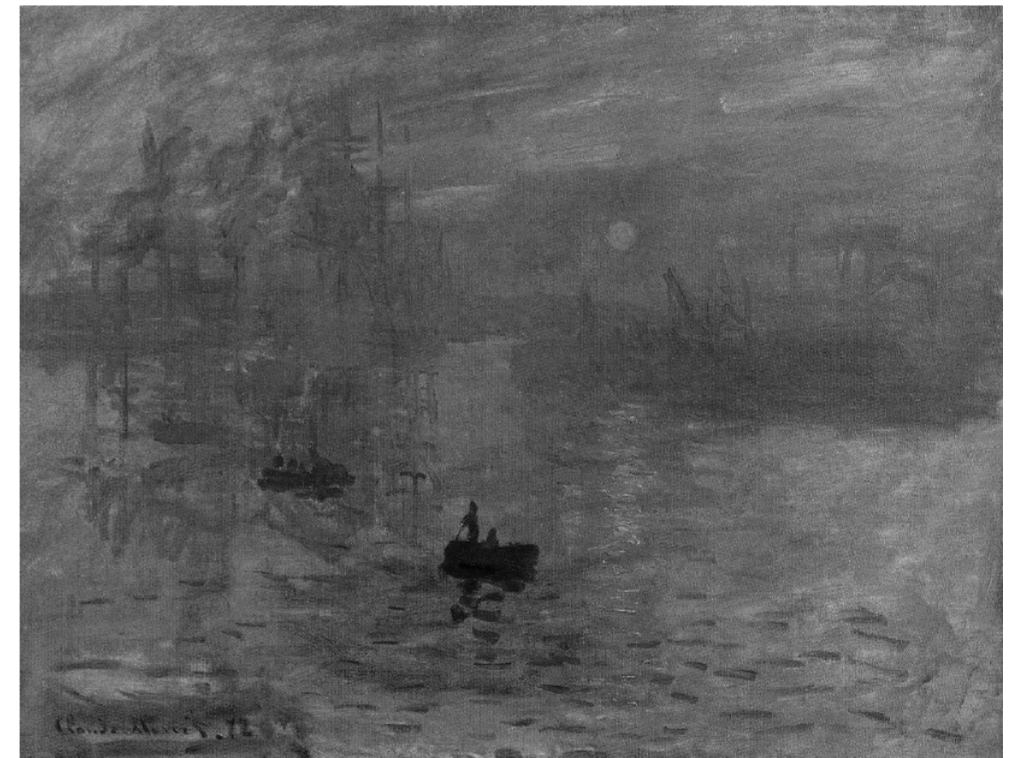
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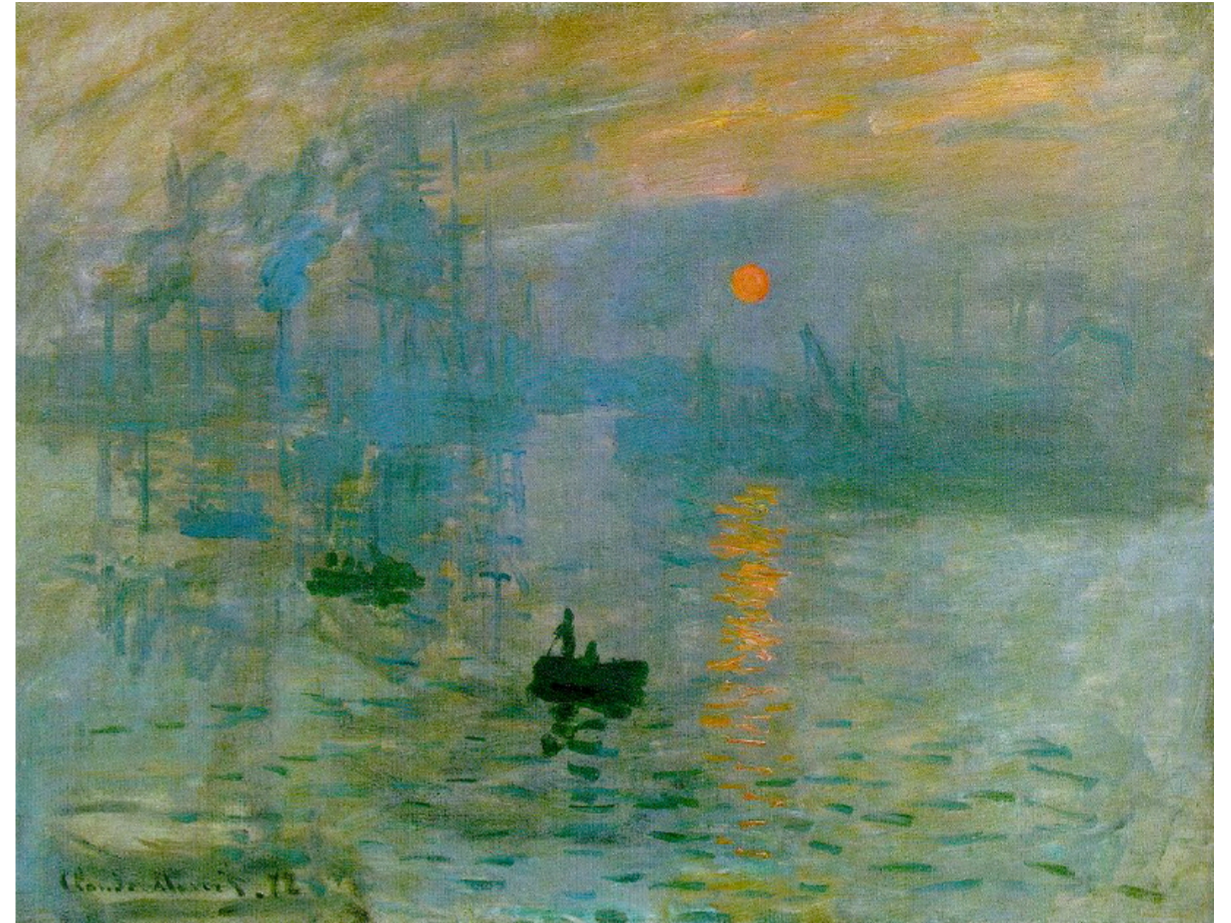


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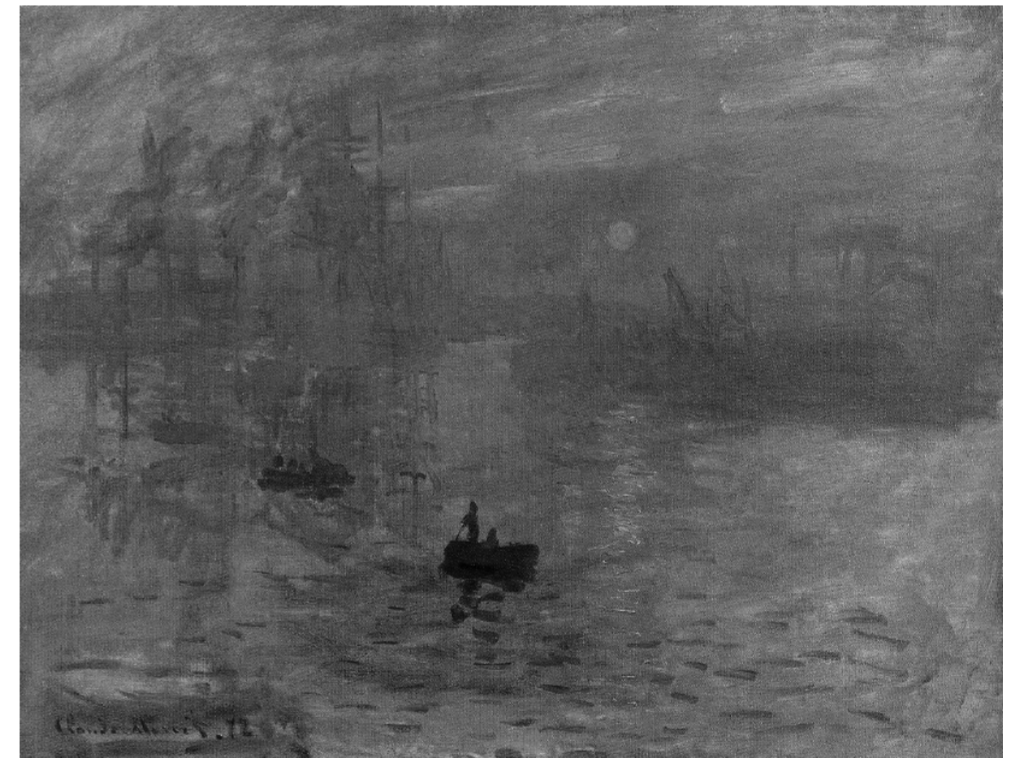
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**Luminance** - the amount of light perceived by an eye (“radiance” is the actual amount of light from a surface)

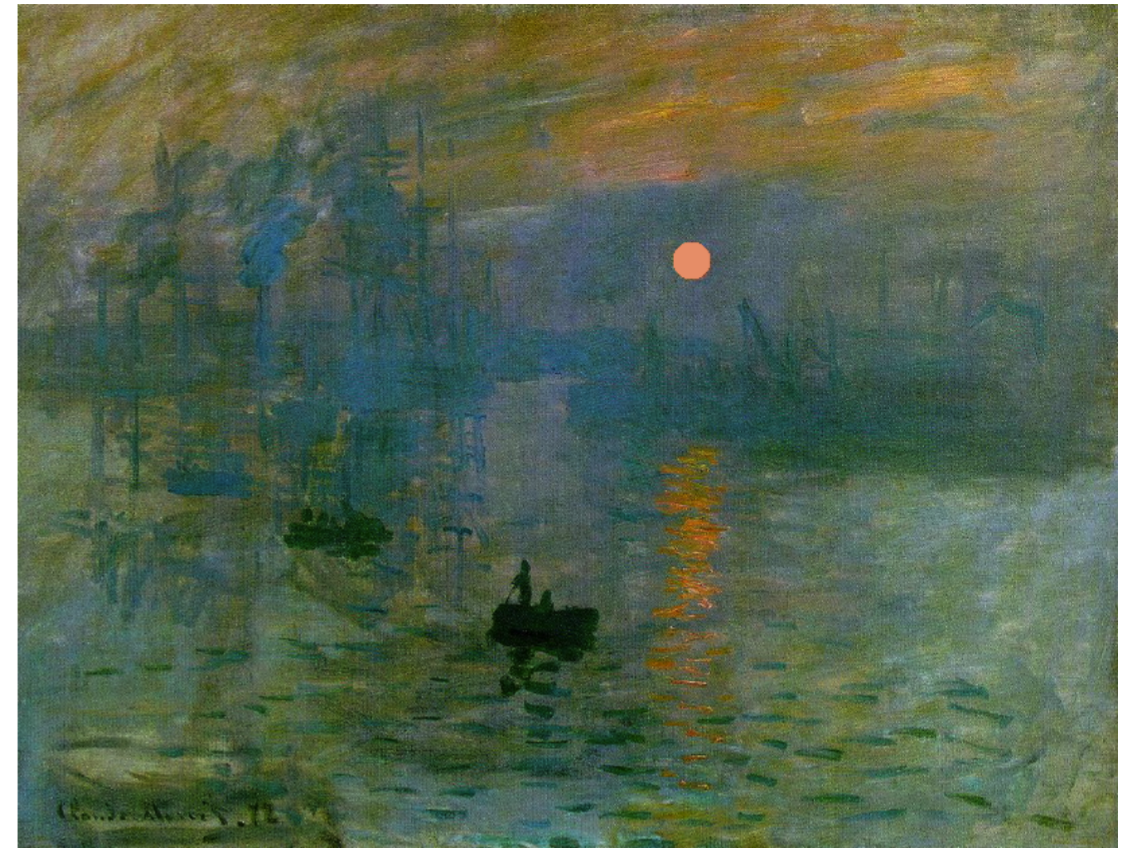
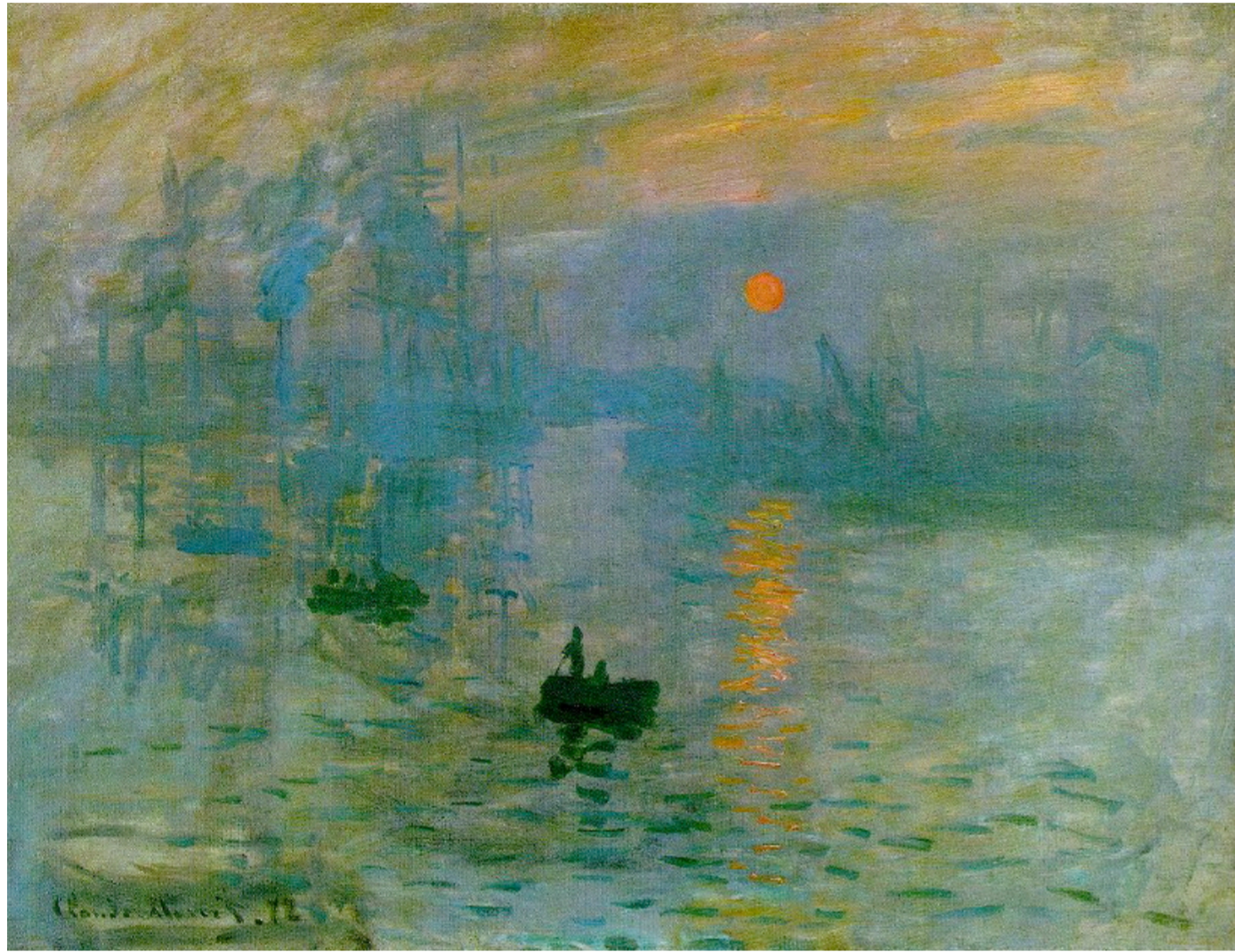
Luminance is evolutionarily and anatomically a different process from color.

Only Primates have the latter, the former is much more developed - it's basic.

Artists can play with colors to simulate and emphasize brightness - Monet has done this



# Monet is playing with your aviarian brain



Read about these matters in:

*Vision and Art, the biology of seeing*, Margaret Livingstone

*Inner Vision*, Semir Zeki

*Cognition and the Visual Arts*, Robert L. Solso

Friday, July 30, 2010

## The impressionists discovered:

if given just enough information, that the brain would piece the bits together into a coherent idea.

**These paintings mean nothing without the observer.**

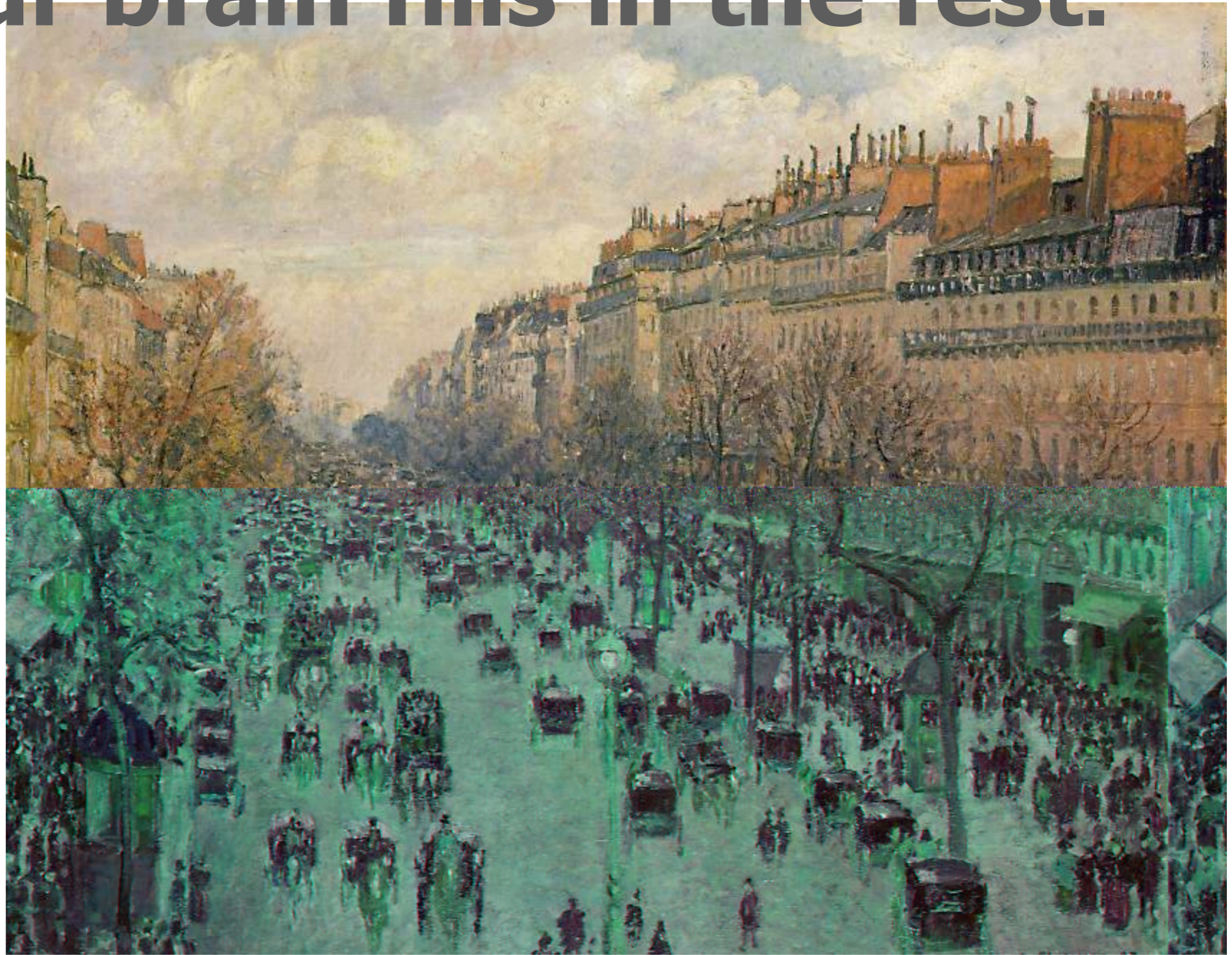
Remember how I defined the electric field? I explicitly imagined a point “test charge”, determined the force, and then took the charge away: what was left was the field.

**The electric/magnetic fields mean nothing without something to act on.**



Here, what are the specs...mistakes?

# your brain fills in the rest.



Pissarro, *Boulevard Montmartre: Afternoon, Sunshine*Le Boulevard Montmartre, 1897, Hermitage, St Petersburg

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Pissarro, *Boulevard Montmartre: Afternoon, Sunshine*Le Boulevard Montmartre, 1897, Hermitage, St Petersburg



# post impressionism



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## A variety of projects spawned by Impressionism:

Seurat, Van Gogh, Gaughin...and Cezanne, Matisse, and secondarily, Picasso

These guys all knew or knew of and commented on one another - not always politely.

# the point...the Ferris Buehler moment



Seurat, *La Grande Jatte*, 1884, Art Institute of Chicago

# the point...the Ferris Buehler moment

Perhaps a natural path was to pointillism  
("Divisionism," Seurat)

a carefully calculated, precise, nesting of colors  
together designed to create an overall sensation of a  
different color



Seurat, *La Grande Jatte*, 1884, Art Institute of Chicago

# the point...the Ferris Buehler moment

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("Divisionism," Seurat)

a carefully calculated, precise, nesting of colors  
together designed to create an overall sensation of a  
different color

This is a highly, almost over-thought, technique  
- Seurat spent more than a year on each large  
painting (so much for instantaneous  
impressions?).



Seurat, *La Grande Jatte*, 1884, Art Institute of Chicago

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Grass is yellow and blue pigment dots  
which your brain processes as green  
("subtractive color mixing), etc. The shade  
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If you stand back from one of these, the dots almost converge, but it is more like a mosaic.



Friday, July 30, 2010