

My eyes are very bad. The oculist wanted me to have a fortnight's complete rest. He has allowed me to work just a little until I send in my pictures. I do so with much difficulty and the greatest sadness.

Ever your,
Degas

I have not yet written to Legros. Try and see him and stir up his enthusiasm for the matter. We are counting firmly on him. He has only another 60 francs to deposit. The bulk of the money is all but collected.

The general feeling is that it is a good, fair thing, done simply, almost boldly.

It is quite possible that we wipe the floor with it as they say. But the beauty of it will be ours.

Hurry up and send.

12 Jules-Antoine Castagnary (1830–1888) 'The Exhibition on the Boulevard des Capucines'

The Independent exhibition has often been represented in modern art history as a founding manifestation of the avant-garde tradition. It should be borne in mind, however, that exhibitions independent of the Salon were not entirely unusual by 1874, and that though this particular one attracted a degree of hostility and ridicule from conservative figures like Leroy, it also received a measure of support from those already sympathetic to the search for modern forms of Naturalism. Castagnary was by now a senior figure in the latter category. He was also well enough versed in the critical issues at stake to pick out from among the thirty exhibitors the five painters by whose work the original character of the new movement was principally established and its early direction decided. The identification of these painters as 'Impressionists' was well prepared, given that an association between spontaneity of response and objectivity of representation had already been proposed in positivist theories of perception (see IIIb11), and had been fully accepted by Naturalists such as Castagnary. Yet even in Castagnary's case, when he asks himself whether what he is faced with is a new 'school' or a new 'manner', the apparent informality of the painting leads him to conclude that it is only the latter. For those who had once defended the work of the Realists against the 'subjectivism' of the Romantics, the work of Cézanne in particular presented an absolute sticking-point. The review was originally published as 'Exposition du boulevard des Capucines – Les Impressionistes', in *Le Siècle*, Paris, 29 April 1874. A translated version was published in John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946; our text is taken from the fourth edition of this work, London: Secker and Warburg, 1973, pp. 329–30. For other texts by Castagnary, see IIIb14 and 15.

[...] In order to bar the road to those four young men [Pissarro, Monet, Sisley, Renoir] and that young lady [Berthe Morisot], the jury has for four or five years accumulated stupidities, piled up abuses of power, and compromised itself so extensively that today there is not a single person in France daring to speak in its favour. Here is talent, and even much talent. These youths have a way of understanding nature which is neither boring nor banal. It is lively, sharp, light; it is delightful. What quick intelligence of the object and what amusing brushwork! True, it is summary, but how just the indications are!

The common concept which unites them as a group and gives them a collective strength in the midst of our disaggregate epoch is the determination not to search for a smooth execution, but to be satisfied with a certain general aspect. Once the impression is captured, they declare their role terminated... If one wants to characterize them with a single word that explains their efforts, one would have to create the new term of *Impressionists*. They are impressionists in the sense that they render not a landscape but the sensation produced by a landscape.

What is the value of this novelty? Does it constitute a real revolution? No, because the principle and – to a large extent – the forms of art remain unchanged. Does it prepare the emergence of a [new] school? No, because a school lives on ideas and not on material means, distinguishes itself by its doctrines and execution. But if it does not constitute a revolution and does not found any school, what then is it? It is a manner and nothing else [...]. The artists who today have grouped themselves on the boulevard are divided. The strongest among them... will have recognized the subjects which lend themselves to a rapid 'impression', to the exclusion of others and in much greater numbers that demand a slow execution [...]. Those painters who, continuing their course, will remain draftsmanship, will abandon *impressionism* as an art really too far removed from the others who – neglecting to ponder and to learn – pursue their excess, the example of M. Cézanne can reveal to them as of itself the error of their way. Starting with idealization, they will arrive at that degree of idealism where nature is merely a pretext for dreams and where they are powerless to formulate anything but personal, subjective fantasies. The general reason, because they are without control and without connection with reality.

13 Louis Leroy (1812–1885) 'The Exhibition of the Impressionists'

Louis Leroy was a painter of landscapes who had exhibited in the Salon between 1835 and 1861, and an occasional critic whose hostility to Manet had already been established. His review was first published in *Charivari* on 25 April 1874, ten days after the opening of the exhibition. Since the following translation was first included in John Rewald's pioneering study of Impressionism it has served vividly to represent an element of derision and hostility in response to the work of the Impressionists. It should be borne in mind, however, that *Charivari* was a satirical magazine and that its contributors were expected to amuse. Leroy's 'M. Joseph Vincent' makes an entertaining commentator, but this is partly because he is himself a caricature of the beribboned conservative. It is significant that Leroy, like Castagnary, devoted his principal attention to the more advanced painters and their works. Renoir's *Dancer* is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Pissarro's 'Ploughed Field' refers to his *Hoar-frost: the Old Road to Ennery*, which is now in the Musée d'Orsay, as are Cézanne's *Maison du Pendu* and *Modern Olympia*. Monet's *Impression-Sunrise* is the painting now in the Musée Marmottan, Paris. It is not known which of his two paintings of the Boulevard du Capucines is the one shown in 1874. (They are now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, and the Pushkin Museum, Moscow, respectively.) This version of the review was originally published in Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*,

New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946; our text is taken from the fourth edition of this work, London: Secker and Warburg, 1973, pp. 318–24. The ellipses are in the original.

Oh, it was indeed a strenuous day when I ventured into the first exhibition on the boulevard des Capucines in the company of M. Joseph Vincent, landscape painter, pupil of Bertin, recipient of medals and decorations under several governments! The rash man had come there without suspecting anything; he thought that he would see the kind of painting one sees everywhere, good and bad, rather bad than good, but not hostile to good artistic manners, to devotion to form, and respect for the masters. Oh, form! Oh, the masters! We don't want them any more, my poor fellow! We've changed all that.

Upon entering the first room, Joseph Vincent received an initial shock in front of the *Dancer* by M. Renoir.

"What a pity," he said to me, "that the painter, who has a certain understanding of colour, doesn't draw better; his dancer's legs are as cottony as the gauze of her skirts."

"I find you hard on him," I replied. "On the contrary, the drawing is very tight."

Bertin's pupil, believing that I was being ironical, contented himself with shrugging his shoulders, not taking the trouble to answer. Then, very quietly, with my most naive air, I led him before the *Ploughed Field* of M. Pissarro. At the sight of this astounding landscape, the good man thought that the lenses of his spectacles were dirty. He wiped them carefully and replaced them on his nose.

"By Michalon!" he cried. "What on earth is that?"

"You see . . . a hoar-frost on deeply ploughed furrows."

"Those furrows? That frost? But they are palette-scrappings placed uniformly on a dirty canvas. It has neither head nor tail, top nor bottom, front nor back."

"Perhaps . . . but the impression is there."

"Well, it's a funny impression! Oh . . . and this?"

"*An Orchard* by M. Sisley. I'd like to point out the small tree on the right; it's gay, but the impression . . ."

"Leave me alone, now, with your impression . . . it's neither here nor there. But here we have a *View of Melun* by M. Rouart, in which there's something to the water. The shadow in the foreground, for instance, is really peculiar."

"It's the vibration of tone which astonishes you."

"Call it the sloppiness of tone and I'd understand you better—Oh, Corot, Corot, what crimes are committed in your name! It was you who brought into fashion this messy composition, these thin washes, these mud-splashes against which the art lover has been rebelling for thirty years and which he has accepted only because constrained and forced to it by your tranquil stubbornness. Once again a drop of water has worn away the stone!"

The poor man rambled on this way quite peacefully, and nothing led me to anticipate the unfortunate accident which was to be the result of his visit to this hair-raising exhibition. He even sustained, without major injury, viewing the *Fishing Boats Leaving the Harbor* by M. Claude Monet, perhaps because I tore him away from dangerous contemplation of this work before the small, noxious figures in the foreground could produce their effect.

Unfortunately, I was imprudent enough to leave him too long in front of the *Boulevard des Capucines*, by the same painter.

"Ah-ha!" he sneered in Mephistophelian manner. "Is that brilliant enough, now! There's impression, or I don't know what it means. Only, be so good as to tell me what those innumerable black tongue-lickings in the lower part of the picture represent?"

"Why, those are people walking along," I replied.

"Then do I look like that when I'm walking along the boulevard des Capucines? Blood and thunder! So you're making fun of me at last?"

"I assure you, M. Vincent. . . ."

"But those spots were obtained by the same method as that used to imitate marble: a bit here, a bit there, slap-dash, any old way. It's unheard-of, appalling! I'll get a stroke from it, for sure."

I attempted to calm him by showing him the *St. Denis Canal* by M. Lépine and the *Butte Montmartre* by M. Ottin, both quite delicate in tone; but fate was strongest of all: the *Cabbages* of M. Pissarro stopped him as he was passing by and from red he became scarlet.

"Those are cabbages," I told him in a gently persuasive voice.

"Oh, the poor wretches, aren't they caricatured! I swear not to eat any more as long as I live!"

"Yet it's not their fault if the painter . . ."

"Be quiet, or I'll do something terrible."

Suddenly he gave a loud cry upon catching sight of the *Maison du pendu* by M. Paul Cézanne. The stupendous impasto of this little jewel accomplished the work begun by the *Boulevard des Capucines*: père Vincent became delirious.

At first his madness was fairly mild. Taking the point of view of the impressionists, he let himself go along their lines:

"Boudin has some talent," he remarked to me before a beach scene by that artist; "but why does he fiddle so with his marines?"

"Oh, you consider his painting too finished?"

"Unquestionably. Now take Mlle Morisot! That young lady is not interested in reproducing trifling details. When she has a hand to paint, she makes exactly as many brushstrokes lengthwise as there are fingers, and the business is done. Stupid people who are finicky about the drawing of a hand don't understand a thing about impressionism, and great Manet would chase them out of his republic."

"Then M. Renoir is following the proper path; there is nothing superfluous in his *Harvesters*. I might almost say that his figures. . . ."

" . . . are even too finished."

"Oh, M. Vincent! But do look at those three strips of colour, which are supposed to represent a man in the midst of the wheat!"

"There are two too many; one would be enough."

I glanced at Bertin's pupil; his countenance was turning a deep red. A catastrophe seemed to me imminent, and it was reserved for M. Monet to contribute the last straw.

"Ah, there he is, there he is!" he cried, in front of No. 98. "I recognize him, *papa* Vincent's favourite! What does that canvas depict? Look at the catalogue."

"*Impression, Sunrise.*"

"*Impression* – I was certain of it. I was just telling myself that, since I was impressed, there had to be some impression in it . . . and what freedom, what ease of workmanship! Wallpaper in its embryonic state is more finished than that seascape."

In vain I sought to revive his expiring reason . . . but the horrible fascinated him. *The Laundress*, so badly laundered, of M. Degas drove him to cries of admiration. Sisley himself appeared to him affected and precious. To indulge his insanity and out of fear of irritating him, I looked for what was tolerable among the impressionist pictures, and I acknowledged without too much difficulty that the bread, grapes and chair of *Breakfast*, by M. Monet, were good bits of painting. But he rejected these concessions.

"No, no!" he cried. "Monet is weakening there. He is sacrificing to the false gods of Meissonier. Too finished, too finished! Talk to me of the *Modern Olympia*! That's something well done."

Alas, go and look at it! A woman folded in two, from whom a Negro girl is removing the last veil in order to offer her in all her ugliness to the charmed gaze of a brown puppet. Do you remember the *Olympia* of M. Manet? Well, that was a masterpiece of drawing, accuracy, finish, compared with the one by M. Cézanne.

Finally the pitcher ran over. The classic skull of *père Vincent*, assailed from too many sides, went completely to pieces. He paused before the municipal guard who watches over all these treasures and, taking him to be a portrait, began for my benefit a very emphatic criticism:

"Is he ugly enough?" he remarked, shrugging his shoulders. "From the front, he has two eyes . . . and a nose . . . and a mouth! Impressionists wouldn't have thus sacrificed to detail. With what the painter has expended in the way of useless things, Monet would have done twenty municipal guards!"

"Keep moving, will you!" said the 'portrait'.

"You hear him – he even talks! The poor fool who daubed at him must have spent a lot of time at it!"

And in order to give the appropriate seriousness to his theory of aesthetics, *père Vincent* began to dance the scalp dance in front of the bewildered guard, crying in a strangled voice:

"Hi-ho! I am impression on the march, the avenging palette knife, the *Boulevard des Capucines* of Monet, the *Maison du pendu* and the *Modern Olympia* of Cézanne. Hi-ho! Hi-ho!"

14 Edmond Duranty (1833–1880) from *The New Painting*

At the first exhibition of the Independent artists, it had been the work in landscape that had drawn most attention, in part no doubt because the effects of light and colour in the *plein-air* scenes had indeed been distinctive, but also perhaps because it was in the genre of landscape that technical adventurism was looked for by experienced commentators. From these early responses to Impressionism, we get little sense of its complementary aspect: the engagement with an urban and Baudelairean sense of modernity that was particularly evident in the work of Degas, of Renoir and of Caillebotte. This aspect of the movement was to be more clearly pronounced in the third group exhibition in 1877 (see IVA16). It is

also this second aspect of Impressionism that forms the principal concern of Duranty's text. He was a member of the group that frequented the Café Guerbois and Café de la Nouvelle Athènes, but in 1856–7 he had edited the short-lived literary journal *Réalisme* and he was a close friend of Zola, sharing his commitment to the principle of 'social naturalism'. He was also interested in current theories of science and perception. His inclination was thus on the one hand to stress the connection of Impressionism to the legacy of Realism and Naturalism, and on the other to justify its novelty by reference to advances in social and scientific theory. Of all the Impressionists he was closest to Degas, whose portrait of him is now in Edinburgh. The article was originally published in the form of a separate pamphlet under the title *La Nouvelle peinture (à propos du groupe d'artistes qui expose dans les Galeries Durand-Ruel)*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1876. This version is taken from the translation by Charles S. Moffat, 'The New Painting: Concerning the Group of Artists Exhibiting at the Durand-Ruel Galleries', in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874–1886*, exhibition catalogue, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986, pp. 37–46. The names of artists in square brackets are those Duranty marked in a copy of the pamphlet given to the writer Diego Martelli.

[...] Do the[se] artists of the Ecole really believe that they have created great art because they have rendered helmets, footstools, polychrome columns, boats, and bordered robes according to the latest archaeological decrees? Do they believe they succeed because in their figures they scrupulously respect the most recently accepted prototype of the Ionian, Dorian, or Phrygian race? Finally, do they think they are successful because they have hunted down, overwhelmed, and consigned to hell the monster 'Anachronism'? They forget that every thirty years this same archaeology sheds its skin, and that the latest word in erudite fashion – the Boeotian skullcap with its nose and cheekguards, for example – will end up on the scrap heap along with David's great helmet of Léonidas, in its day the ultimate expression of an erudite familiarity with antiquities.

They do not realize that it is by the flame of contemporary life that great artists and learned men illuminate these ancient things. [...]

[...] What is it, then, this world of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, even taken at its best? One sees reflected in it the melancholy of those who sit without appetite at a table laden with wonderful things. Deprived of the capacity for pleasure themselves, they do not enjoy the banquet, but find fault with those who do.

Well! Gentlemen! As artists you have nothing to be proud of in receiving an education that only turns out a race of sheep . . .

Nevertheless, it would appear that you are disdainful of the endeavours of an art that tries to capture life and the modern spirit, an art that reacts viscerally to the spectacle of reality and of contemporary life. Instead, you cling to the knees of Prometheus and the wings of the Sphinx.

And do you know why you do it? Without suspecting it, what you really want is to ask the Sphinx for the secret of our time and Prometheus for the sacred fire of the present age. No, you are not as disdainful as you appear.

You are made uneasy by this artistic movement that already has lasted for a long time, which perseveres despite the obstacles and despite the little sympathy shown it.

But despite all that you know, ultimately you would like to be individuals. You begin to be disgusted by this mummification, this sickening embalming of the spirit.