

# REALISM

AVI 4M1

**KEY ARTISTS:** Rosa Bonheur (France)  
Honoré Daumier (France)

Gustave Courbet (France)  
Jean-François Millet (France)

Edouard Manet (France)

**WHEN:** c. 1845 - 1880

- Realist art and literature originated in mid-nineteenth century France.
- In its original, nineteenth century sense, *realism* implied not just an accurate depiction of nature as the term now implies, but rather an interest in everyday, down-to-earth subjects shown in a detached, matter-of-fact manner without any symbolism or added meaning. What you see is what you get, so to speak.
- They wished to record “the heroism of modern life”
- Realist Gustave Courbet once said that having never seen an angel he could not paint one.
- There is no definite recognizable Realist ‘style’. Each artist worked in their own style but its characteristics are mainly defined by the content as outlined above.
- Realism arose from the revolutionary uprisings throughout Europe in 1848; political power of ordinary people went hand in hand with depictions of the power of ordinary people
- There was also a marked increase in population of the middle class due to the spread of the Industrial Revolution. Middle class taste leaned toward photography and scientifically verifiable fact. The middle class did not appreciate the mythological content of Neoclassical art and the overly emotional, sentimental subjects of Romanticism.
- The Realists marked the break between the artist / patron relationship that had previously existed. Their art was not commissioned by the Church, the wealthy or the government but rather was, for the first time in Europe, purely personal expression. This was the beginning of the solitary-genius-bohemian-starving artist stereotype that still prevails today. When art is not commissioned it is referred to as “ART FOR ART’S SAKE”.
- Realists were influential on younger artists who were excited by the prospect of doing ‘modern’ art that recorded their lives, world and interests. Manet in particular influenced a younger group of artists whose art became known as Impressionism.



# IMPRESSIONISM

**KEY ARTISTS:** Claude Monet (France)  
Mary Cassatt (France)

Edgar Degas (France)  
Pierre-Auguste Renoir (France)

**WHEN:** 1872 – c. 1900

- Impressionism grew out of the Realist Movement, particularly due to the influence and mentorship of Manet.
- **The Impressionists continued the work of the Realists:**
  - scenes of contemporary life without romantic sentiment;
  - personal views and subjects; “*art for art’s sake*”;
  - avant garde attitude: the artist is separate from and ahead of mainstream culture.
- **The Impressionists were mainly concerned with:**
  - the play of light on surfaces (optical realism)
  - intensity of colour (canvases primed white; no black used)
  - informal compositions, inspired by the invention of the camera
- The movement’s name came from a painting by Monet called “Impression, Sunrise”. An art critic was shocked by the loose, painterly brushwork, thinking it looked like an unfinished painting, and dubbed the group “Impressionists”. It was meant as an insult.
- The group often painted *en plein air*, outdoors, on-site. This was a radical departure from established painting methods of the day, which involved laborious glazing of layer upon layer of thin oil paint applied in the artist’s studio.
- Claude Monet would often have a number of canvases on hand to paint the same subject numerous times as the light shifted and changed.
- Their innovations paved the way for more experimental uses of colour for expressive purposes in art!

