

# *The Essential Encyclopaedic Guide to **Modern Art***

AMY DEMPSEY

# STYLES, SCHOOLS AND MOVEMENTS



Impressionism + Arts and Crafts + Chicago School + Les Vingt + Neo-Impressionism + Decadent Movement + Art Nouveau + Modernisme  
Symbolism + Post-Impressionism + Cloisonnism + Nabis + Synthetism + Salon de la Rose+Croix + Jugendstil + Vienna Secession + World of Art +  
Fauvism + Expressionism + Die Brücke + Ashcan School + Deutscher Werkbund + Cubism + Futurism + Jack of Diamonds + Der Blaue Reiter +  
Synchronism + Orphism + Rayonism + Suprematism + Constructivism + Pittura Metafisica + Vorticism + Hungarian Activism + School of  
Amsterdam + Dada + Purism + De Stijl + Arbeitsrat für Kunst + Novembergruppe + Bauhaus + Precisionism + Art Deco + Ecole de Paris +  
International Style + Novecento Italiano + Der Ring + Neue Sachlichkeit + Surrealism + Elementarism + Gruppo 7 + M.I.A.R. + Concrete Art +  
Magic Realism + American Scene + Social Realism + Socialist Realism + Neo-Romanticism + Art Brut + Existential Art + Outsider Art + Organic  
Abstraction + Art Informel + Abstract Expressionism + Lettrism + CoBrA + Beat Art + Kinetic Art + Kitchen Sink School + Neo-Dada + Combines +  
New Brutalism + Funk Art + Nouveau Réalisme + Situationist International + Assemblage + Pop Art + Performance Art + GRAV + Fluxus + Op Art +  
Post-painterly Abstraction + Minimalism + Conceptual Art + Body Art + Installation + Super-realism + Anti-Design + Supports-Surfaces + Video Art  
+ Earth Art + Site Works + Arte Povera + Postmodernism + High-Tech + Neo-Expressionism + Neo-Pop + Transavanguardia + Sound Art + Internet Art

**Thames & Hudson**



applied art were all given equal status. The first exhibition included work by the English \*Arts and Crafts practitioners, William Morris, Walter Crane, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson and C. R. Ashbee and book illustrations by the \*Decadent artist Aubrey Beardsley, along with paintings by Toulouse-Lautrec and Seurat. Even music was represented, Claude Debussy playing at the opening.

As a result of this experimentation and exchange of ideas, Continental Art Nouveau emerged first in Brussels, particularly in the work of the architect Victor Horta (1861–1947) and the former Vingteste, Van de Velde. The new movement was enthusiastically supported by *L'Art Moderne*, and the editors, Maus and Picard, declared themselves 'the Art Nouveau faithful'.

### Key Collections

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, California  
Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium  
Petit Palais, Geneva, Switzerland  
Kunsthaus, Zurich, Switzerland

### Key Books

*Belgian Art, 1880–1914*  
(exh. cat., Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1980)  
*Impressionism to Symbolism: The Belgian Avant-garde, 1880–1900* (exh. cat., Royal Academy of Art, London, 1994)  
C. Brown, *James Ensor* (1997)

## Neo-Impressionism

*The Neo-Impressionist does not dot, he divides.*

PAUL SIGNAC, 1899

At the suggestion of Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), one of the founders of the \*Impressionist group, works by his son, Lucien (1863–1944), and two other young French painters, Paul Signac (1863–1935) and Georges Seurat (1859–91), were included in the last Impressionist exhibition held in 1886. The Pissarros had already met Seurat and Signac the year before, and all four were working in the style

that would soon be labelled Neo-Impressionism (New Impressionism) by the critic Félix Fénéon.

The new pictures were hung separately from the main exhibition, inviting critics to compare the old and the new styles of Impressionism. The strategy was a success and critical reaction was favourable. Fénéon's review, highlighting both the origin of the Impressionist style and the reaction to

Above: **Fernand Khnopff, *Les XX***, Poster for the 1891 exhibition Khnopff, who designed the logo for Les Vingts, was a book illustrator as well as a painter. His sister's likeness appears in many of his pictures of women, her entranced features suggesting a transcendental, or perhaps sexual, realm.

Opposite: **Georges Seurat, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, 1883–86** Carefully constructed, with an all-over composition in which no single aspect of the painting takes precedence over another, Seurat's masterpiece creates extraordinary optical effects.



Impressionist techniques, was positive. Another critic, Paul Adam, ended his review with the assertion that 'this exhibition initiates [us] into a new art.' By the early 1880s, many of the Impressionists felt that Impressionism had gone too far in dematerializing the object and had become too ephemeral. This concern was shared by younger artists such as Seurat. In his early work, *The Bathers at Asnières* (1884), he tries to retain Impressionist luminosity while reconstituting the object. Although choosing a typical Impressionist subject – urban leisure – Seurat's carefully composed design and working method are far removed from the spontaneity associated with Impressionist paintings. In fact, Seurat made at least fourteen oil sketches for this work before coming to the final selection, which he painted, not in the open air, but in his studio.

In 1884, Signac sought out Seurat after seeing *The Bathers*, and they discovered a shared interest in colour theory and optics. They began to work together on their theory of 'divisionism'. Their research led them to scientific studies on the transmission and perception of light and colour, such as *Students' Text-book of Colour: or, Modern Chromatics, with Applications to Art and Industry* (1881) by the American physicist Ogden Rood and, most importantly, *Principle of Harmony and Contrast of Colours and Their*

*Application to the Arts* (1839) by Michel-Eugène Chevreul. Signac even tracked down the ninety-eight-year-old Chevreul to interview him about his discoveries. Chevreul had been the chief chemist at a tapestry factory, where he developed his 'principle of simultaneous contrasts', based on his observations of weaving. He stated that when the retinal area is stimulated by a colour, it produces an afterimage of its complementary colour, and that contrasting colours stimulate each other. Seurat and Signac seized on this. What the original Impressionists had discovered intuitively – that greater luminosity and brilliance of colour can be achieved by placing unmixed pigment directly onto the canvas – the two Neo-Impressionists now developed scientifically.

Drawing on the premise that colour is mixed in the eye, not on the palette, they perfected a technique for applying dots of colour on the canvas so that they blended when viewed at an appropriate distance. Fénéon invented the term 'pointillism' to describe this technique, though Seurat and Signac named it divisionism. Today, divisionism is used to refer to the theory and pointillism to the technique.

Seurat's seminal canvas, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884–86), was included in the 1886 exhibition. In it one can trace Seurat's affinities with Impressionism, his critique of its limitations and his own





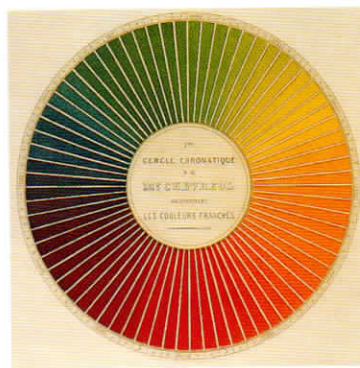


way forward. The monumental scene is a combination of familiar Impressionist subjects – landscape and contemporary Parisians at play – but it captures not so much the fleeting moment, as a feeling of eternity. That this tension between the timely and timeless aura was intentional is confirmed in Seurat's comments about the painting: 'Phidias' Panathenaea was a procession. I want to show the moderns moving about on friezes in the same way, stripped to their essentials.' Some viewers were discomfited by the stylization of the figures, others read it as a criticism of the rigidity of the fashions and social postures of the day. Seurat himself defined painting as 'the art of hollowing out a surface', and in *La Grande Jatte* he created a deep, continuous space contrasting with the sense of flatness and shifting perspective. The work unites classic Renaissance perspective and modern

Above left: **Georges Seurat, *Final Study for 'Le Chahut'*, 1889** Seurat's exploration of the affective possibilities of line is evident in this work: the warm colours and the upward position of the dancers' legs are intended to convey happiness.

Above right: **Michel-Eugène Chevreul, *Premier cercle chromatique*, from his study entitled *Des Couleurs et de leurs applications aux arts industriels*, 1864** Chevreul's 'chromatic circle' proved for the first time that all colours tint neighbouring colours with their own complementary colours.

Opposite: **Paul Signac, *Portrait of Félix Fénéon against a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones and Colours*, 1890** The anarchist and critic Félix Fénéon was the Neo-Impressionists' first great champion and patron. It was he who coined the term 'pointillism' – though the artists themselves preferred a term of their own: 'divisionism'.



interest in light, colour and surface pattern.

As *La Grande Jatte* illustrates, the majority of Neo-Impressionist paintings are evenly composed, and the divisionist technique produces extraordinary optical effects. Since the eye is constantly

moving, the dots never completely meld together, but produce a shimmering, hazy effect, like that experienced in bright sunlight. The after-effect is such that the image seems to float in time and space. This illusion is often heightened by another of Seurat's innovations: a pointillist border painted on the canvas itself, and sometimes extended to include the frame.

The group surrounding Seurat and Signac quickly expanded to include Charles Angrand (1854–1926), Henri-Edmond Cross (1856–1910), Albert Dubois-Pillet (1845–1890), Léo Gausson (1860–1942), Maximilien Luce (1858–1941) and Hippolyte Petitjean (1854–1929). Signac was also close to a number of Symbolist writers, including Fénéon, Gustave Kahn and Henri de Régnier, who admired Neo-Impressionist work for its symbolic and expressive nature. Many Symbolists and Neo-Impressionists, such as Cross, the Pissarros and Signac, sympathized with anarchists and illustrated various anarchist publications such as *La Révolte* and *Les Temps Nouveaux*. The Neo-Impressionist painters were not, however, as militant as Fénéon, who was imprisoned for his suspected participation in the anarchist bombings in Paris in the early 1890s. They expressed their radical sympathies through their art, picturing the realities of the day – workers, peasants, factories and social inequality – and creating visions of a harmonious future, achieved through politics and the democratization of art.

Neo-Impressionist imagery was also influenced by progressive aesthetic theories of the day, such as those of Charles Henry and others, which dealt with physiological responses to lines and colours. According to their theories, horizontal lines induced calm; upward-sloping lines, happiness; downward-sloping lines, sadness. Exploration of the affective possibilities of line is evident in a work such as Seurat's *Le Chahut* (1889–90). In 1890 Seurat wrote:

Art is Harmony. Harmony is the analogy of contrary and of similar elements of tone, of colour, and of line, considered according to their dominants and under the influence of light in gay, calm, or sad combinations.

Seurat died only a year later, at the age of thirty-one. His



friendship with Signac and Pissarro had been under strain, and there had been arguments about who invented Neo-Impressionist techniques. In the last year of his life Seurat became a recluse, and the critics seemed to lose interest in his work. His influence on future currents in art was, however, profound. His new pictorial language proved seductive, and by the time of his death, though the original practitioners were moving in different directions, his style had begun to travel beyond France.

Works by both Seurat and Pissarro were included in an exhibition organized by \*Les Vingt in Brussels in 1887. Signac and Dubois-Pillet exhibited there in 1888, and Seurat again in 1889, 1891 and 1892 (a memorial exhibition). Some members of Les Vingt – Alfred William Finch (1854–1930), Anna Boch (1848–1926), Jan Toorop (1858–1928), Georges Lemmen (1865–1916), Théo Van Rysselberghe (1862–1926) and, briefly, Henry Van de Velde (1863–1957, see \*Art Nouveau) – experimented with Neo-

Impressionist techniques. Divisionism also flourished in Italy, through the works of Giovanni Segantini (1858–99) and Gaetano Previati (1852–1920), where it provided a source for \*Futurism.

In 1899, Neo-Impressionism was given a new lease of life in France with the publication of Signac's *From Eugène Delacroix to Neoimpressionism*. In the book he explained the Neo-Impressionists' working practice for a new generation of artists:

Now, to divide is:

To assure oneself of all the benefits of luminosity, of colouring and of harmony, by:

1. The optical mixture of solely pure pigments...
2. The separation of local colours from the colour of the light, reflections, etc...
3. The equilibrium of these elements and their proportions (according to the laws of contrast, of gradation, and of irradiation);
4. The choice of a brushstroke commensurate with the dimensions of the painting.

