

The stylistic innovation in painting known as Impressionism began in the 1870's.

The Impressionists wanted to depict what they saw in nature, but they were inspired to portray fragmentary moments by the increasingly fast pace of modern life.

They concentrated on the play of light over objects, people, and nature, breaking up seemingly solid surfaces, stressing vivid contrast between colors in sunlight and shade, and depicting reflected light in all of its possibilities.

Unlike earlier artists, they did not want to observe the world from indoors.

They abandoned the studio, painting in the open air and recording spontaneous Impressions of their subjects instead of making outside sketches and then moving indoors to complete the work from memory.

Some of the Impressionists' painting methods were affected by technological advances.

For example, the shift from the studio to the open air was made possible in part by the advent of cheap rail travel, which permitted easy and quick access to the countryside or seashore, as well as by newly developed chemical dyes and oils that led to collapsible paint tubes, which enabled artists to finish their paintings on the spot.

Impressionism acquired its name not from supporters but from angry art lovers who felt threatened by the new painting.

The term "Impressionism" was born in 1874, when a group of artists who had been working together organized an exhibition of their paintings in order to draw public attention to their work.

Reaction from the public and press was immediate, and derisive.

Among the 165 paintings exhibited was one called Impression: Sunrise, by Claude Monet(1840-1926), Viewed through hostile eyes, Monet's painting of a rising sun over a misty, watery scene seemed messy, slapdash, and an affront to good taste.

Borrowing Monet's title, art critics extended the term "Impressionism" to the entire exhibit.

In response, Monet and his 29 fellow artists in the exhibit adopted the same name as a badge of their unity, despite individual differences.

From then until 1886 Impressionism had all the zeal of a "church", as the painter Renoir put it.

Monet was faithful to the Impressionist creed until his death, although many of the others moved on to new styles.