

Impressionism Across Fields (Paris, 16–17 May 24)

Musée d'Orsay & Fondation de l'Université Paris Nanterre, Paris, May 16–17, 2024

Deadline: Sep 30, 2023

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Impressionism Across Fields: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives.

The Musée d'Orsay and the Fondation de l'Université Paris Nanterre, as part of the Arts-Cultures-Patrimoines department's research program on Impressionism, will co-organize an international interdisciplinary conference in spring 2024. The event coincides with the exhibition Paris 1874: The Impressionist Moment, which will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first Impressionist exhibition, scheduled to take place first at the Musée d'Orsay then the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and follows the earlier symposium Impressionism(s) nouveaux chantiers, organized by the Musée d'Orsay in 2009.

The fruit of an ongoing collaboration between a university associated with debates in the humanities and social sciences since the 1970s, and a museum with research at the heart of its missions, this conference postulates that new interpretations of Impressionism, which have flourished in book form, have also been shaped by exhibitions, thus bringing together "the two histories of art." Envisioned as a reappraisal of the current state of research on Impressionism, its history, and historiography, this conference aims to present past developments, current trends, and future perspectives, using an inter- and trans-disciplinary approach. From environmental issues to a dialogue between the arts, from monographic studies to the integration of digital humanities, current research on the movement often takes place at the junction of various disciplines, where a history of art is practiced that intersects a multitude of fields (climate, literary, and musical history, narratology, etc.). This conference aims to reflect upon and stimulate this diversity in research on Impressionism and will be organised around the following axes.

- Writing the History of Impressionism/Historiography of Impressionism in the Humanities and Social Sciences

In recent years, both in France and abroad, much research has been devoted to the critical reception of the Impressionists and how the history and theory of art reacted to the movement. This research has been aided by the development of digital resources that have facilitated access to an increasing number of sources, leading to new practices in research. Not only does this approach confirm the history of the history of art as an autonomous field of research, but it also spurs a large-scale self-reflexive intellectual enterprise leading art historians to question the categories forged by their predecessors and to question their own approaches.

Here, we suggest to follow the thread of this historiography to examine the definitions and redefinitions of the movement across time, how it has been reshaped and reappropriated. We also propose reflecting on its individual and collective form and on the currents that have shaped, and

then enriched, the history of Impressionism, ranging from the earliest studies published by the painters' entourage to contemporary approaches, and including the foundational texts by Pierre Francastel and John Rewald. Papers submitted could encompass social and cultural history, cultural and visual studies, anthropology of the gaze and the image, global art history, and also gender studies, but this list is far from exhaustive.

Proposals might also borrow from the history of ideas, from sociology, or from discourse analysis to enlighten the contribution of these various movements to the historiography of Impressionism.

- Impressionism through the Arts

Impressionism developed within a web of interactions with other artists and the other arts, which we propose to explore from different points of views: reflection on the various -isms and their circulation among painting, literature, and criticism, such as the study of the relationships among Impressionism, Naturalism, and Symbolism; the dialogue between different artistic media; the generation and exchange of objects and networks; and artists' libraries, etc.

What friendships connected the Impressionists to contemporary sculptors, writers, and musicians? What are the "literary", "musical", or "cinematographic" qualities of Impressionist paintings? Conversely, can the adjective "Impressionist" accurately describe other artistic manifestations of the time? Can the term literary (poetic, theatrical or critical) "Impressionism" be used, for instance? What is the relationship between the "new painting" and the other major cultural movements of the time?

While this was once a key issue during the movement's historical development, it is only now making a comeback in scholarship. There have been multiple projects organized by French museums on the dialogue between Impressionist painters and the contemporary arts, including painting, video, and dance, where the widespread use of the term "Impressionist" in highly diverse forms of artistic expression (painting, installations, cartoons, and video games) needs rigorous analysis.

Papers could take the form of interdisciplinary dialogues between historians of art, literature, photography, or cinema, or even with contemporary artists.

- Ecology, Territory, Environment

Impressionism coincided with the Industrial Revolution and the advent of ecological thinking in the form of a "science of the conditions of existence" and a growing environmental awareness. Today, the emergence of an "environmental history of art" asks questions of the "new painting," of landscapes which oscillate between urban and rural, the industrial and natural worlds, the wild and anthropogenic, rural sites and "planetary gardens," to use the garden designer Gilles Clément's terms.

Proposals should question artists' and their works' positioning within the nascent environmental debates: does Impressionist painting reveal a "poetics of pollution" or an "ecological vision," for instance? By intermingling meteorological phenomena and pollution, do the Impressionists' atmospheric landscapes communicate a fascination with the industrial world, or did they express an early form of environmental consciousness? This same ambivalence can be found in the relation between the artist and their motifs. Impressionist landscapes express varying attitudes towards the world around them, ranging from protection to appropriation, from the quest for natural preservation to the desire to reshape the natural world, and from a harmonious to an anthropocentric vision of the relationship between humanity and nature.

Ecological awareness as expressed by Impressionism thus questions our relationship with the environment, with the land and even with the living itself. These notions, often confused with

those of nature, are nonetheless useful for analysing Impressionist landscape paintings, which, in turn, can contribute to understanding the long history of environmentalism, from its earliest beginnings to the more recent developments, when activists protesting the engines of climate change have at times chosen Impressionist works as their targets.

These are the questions we seek to raise, through dialogues between art historians and historians of the environment, the climate and botany, and also with geographers and anthropologists.

- Plural Identities

Categories of “gender,” “sexuality,” “class,” and “race,” to which much scholarship was devoted during the 1980s and 1990s, have returned to the center of debate with the rise of post-colonial studies and, more recently, the emergence of a movement promoting a “queer (and trans) history of art.”

This foregrounding of identity poses new questions: what is “Black” (with its semantic plurality) introduced into the study of “light” painting? What social, political, and racial tensions flow both overtly and surreptitiously through the history of the movement, given the centrality of a Jewish and anarchist Pissarro, a stateless Sisley, and an antisemitic Renoir? How does a consideration of representations of masculinity and femininity illuminate the study of Impressionist portraits? How about age and the “stages of life” in Impressionist art?

This section concerns what precisely these approaches have contributed in the past and what they can still add to our understanding of Impressionism, both from the point of view of the works themselves as well as the various power struggles and identity conflicts that played out within the movement itself.

- Materiality(ies)

The revolution of Impressionist art was made possible by adopting tubes of paint and synthetic pigments that were also used in various domains of decorative arts and in industry, from textiles to posters. It can also be associated with Fresnel’s theories about light as well as the progress in physiological optics. Such connections among art, science, and industry specific to the period can be productively broached especially withing the context of a material history of painting.

Numerous conservation projects have focused on Impressionist paintings, wich have been the subject of thorough material analysis in recent years. X-rayed paintings have shown underlying compositions, and the examination of stretchers and the backs of canvases has equally contributed information to the provenance of works and their histories, while the study of the pigments used by painters can often question preconceived wisdom about the making of Impressionist art. Despite its immaterial appearance, the digital revolution has in reality given a new materiality to Impressionist paintings. High-definition scans and imaging technologies that traverse layers of pigment influence our ways of looking at paintings and induce a play of scale reminiscent of what contemporary critics emphasized when they spoke of the jumble of scale within the pictures that made sense to them only when one took a few steps back.

What projects are in progress in this regard, and what domains remain to be explored? What can the material study of works of art teach us about artists’ varied painterly practices, or about their period more generally? What might the contributions made by new image technologies be to scholarship? By allowing us to see paintings differently, do digital tools change our relationship with the materiality of the works themselves? These are some of the questions which a dialogue among conservators, physicists, chemists, data scientists, and art historians can answer, and which broad-ranging conversations between the arts and sciences can productively address.

- From Exhibiting to the Exhibition Medium

Paris 1874: The Impressionist Moment raises the question of exhibitions upfront, using an approach that is not only historical and historiographical but also sociological and economic. New tools, in particular those offered by the digital humanities – in transforming sources for art history into data viewable in the form of curves and graphs – allow more contextualized, large-scale analyses of the Impressionist movement and of painters' careers more broadly. Lastly, exhibitions can also be studied from the point of view of display and the aesthetic discourses they convey, and thus as a resource for a visual history of art.

In the context of the profound upheavals of the “art worlds,” during which Impressionism developed, what part did the eight exhibitions play in the development of the movement, in its critical reception, and in later art historical narratives? Can the “Impressionist” identity of these eight exhibitions be questioned? What place should be given to other (international, individual, etc.) exhibitions in the history of the movement? Who are the personalities and networks mobilized around these events?

The characteristics specific to the exhibition medium—the choice of works, overall display, exhibition design, and the catalogue (title, writing of entries, references to owners, etc.)—could also be studied. How did the exhibitions enable the Impressionists, and first of all Monet, to present the idea of the series to the public? How have exhibitions about Impressionism, ranging from blockbusters to dossier exhibitions, allowed (or limited) the development of new approaches, or aided in (or hindered) the broadening of audiences? Finally, how about exhibitions in the digital age and their new formats? To what extent do immersive and virtual exhibitions contribute to creating spectacles; do they allow the history of the Impressionist exhibitions to be reconstituted; or do they open new avenues of exploration or questioning of artistic production?

These avenues are neither exhaustive nor exclusive, and all proposals will be examined with keen interest. Irrespective of the subject, the theme or the approach used in proposals (monographic, transdisciplinary, thematic, iconographic, etc.), the academic committee will pay close attention to their contextual and historiographical scope, their interdisciplinary dimensions, and how well they reflect on Impressionist scholarship today. Accepted papers, which will be accessible to both a broad audience and specialists in the field, will be published.

The research program Impressionism is run in partnership with the contract Normandie Paris Île-de-France: Destination impressionniste and supported by the Contrat de Plan Interrégional au développement de la Vallée de la Seine (CPIER). It has already organized an international conference on collectors of Impressionist art in association with the Labex [laboratory for excellence, a French university structure] Les passés dans le présent and the Histoire des arts et des représentations laboratory of Paris Nanterre University as well as the University of Rouen. In the context of the fourth Impressionist Normandy festival, this conference was in dialogue with an exhibition held at the Rouen Musée des Beaux-Arts about its donor-collector, François Depeaux, who was involved in the development of Monet's Cathedral series. Those papers were just published in the form of a collective book in English and French.

Preceding the conference, the organizers are planning a preparatory workshop in autumn 2023, on interdisciplinarity as a tool and method for revitalizing Impressionist studies.

Proposals for papers (1,500-2,000 characters), with a short bio-bibliography (500-700 characters),

and if possible any suggestion for the specific panels into which they can be integrated, should be sent as a Word-file to the email address impressionnisme2024@gmail.com

Calendar

Deadline for submission of proposals 30 September 2023

Date of response from the committee Late October 2023

Deadline for sending texts for publication 15 September 2024

The conference will be held in Paris and will be broadcast online. Speeches can be done in English or in French.

Academic committee: Andre Dombrowski ; Félicie Faizand de Maupeou; Kimberly Jones; Ségolène Le Men; Mary Morton; Natacha Pernac; Sylvie Patry; Paul Perrin; Scarlett Reliquet; Anne Robbins; Olivier Schuwer

Organizing committee: Alessandra Cava; Félicie Faizand de Maupeou; Yannick Gnanou; Ségolène Le Men; Natacha Pernac; Scarlett Reliquet; Olivier Schuwe

Reference:

CFP: Impressionism Across Fields (Paris, 16-17 May 24). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 27, 2023 (accessed May 1, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/39648>>.