Impressionism
Prof. Kevin D. Murphy

Overview:

Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Cassatt, Morisot, and the other members of the French Impressionist group pioneered a painting style that emphasized changing atmospheric effects. They focused much of their efforts on capturing the transformation of Paris in the 1860s and ’70s under the influence of the Emperor Napoleon III, as well as on the suburbs and rural landscapes. Impressionists stressed the qualities of "modernity"—especially its fleetingness and ephemerality—as defined by poet Charles Baudelaire in the 1860s. This course will examine the work of the French Impressionists from formal, social, political, and intellectual perspectives. In addition, the seminar will consider the international impact of French Impressionism elsewhere in Europe and in North America. Writing assignments will address descriptive, analytic, critical, and historical modes.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the seminar you will have gained:

--Knowledge of the Impressionist group of artists, particularly as their practice arose in Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century, but also as it had an impact in Great Britain and North America.

--The ability to identify formal aspects of Impressionist painting and printmaking.

--Experience writing and revising essays of 5-7 pages.

Electronics Policy: No electronics of any kind may be used during class. Cell phones and other devices must be turned off before the start of class. Notes should be taken long-hand, on paper.

Attendance Policy: Attendance and class participation are required. Absences for legitimate reasons, such as illness, will be excused. More than two unexcused absences will result in the course grade being lowered by one full letter grade.

Grade Scale:

94-100: A
90-93: A-
86-89: B+
83-85: B
80-82: B-
76-79: C+
Evaluation:

The evaluation of a student’s performance and the determination of her/his grade will be determined as follows:

Class attendance and participation: 25%
Three papers: 75% (25% each)

Honor Code:

The instructor vigorously upholds the Vanderbilt Honor System, as described in the student handbook: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/chapter2.html. Please take special note of “The Honor Code Applied to Preparation of Papers,” in particular the following statement: “Failure to indicate any outside source of ideas, expressions, phrases, or sentences constitutes plagiarism.” In other words, on papers and exams, doing your own work is essential. In all papers, you must cite the sources of any information, quotations, or ideas that are not your own, using standard citation methods (Chicago Style or MLA).

In this course we support the free exchange of ideas among creative, well-informed, rigorous, honest thinkers. To make this possible—and to maintain integrity and credibility within a community of scholars—it is crucial to acknowledge the sources of our ideas, both in conversation and in writing. I encourage you to share and engage with each others’ ideas while talking inside and outside of class. For group work in class, you may represent the group as a whole without crediting individuals. All writing submitted under your individual name must be your distinctive and original work; as you engage with others’ words or ideas, always credit them through appropriate methods of citation. Plagiarism or any other violation of Vanderbilt’s Honor Code in this course will be subject to disciplinary action.

Readings:

Readings will generally be available on the Blackboard site. In a few cases, readings are available online and I have provided the link below. We will be reading extensively in Robert Herbert, Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society (Yale UP, 1988). I would encourage you to buy a copy of this book but I will also put a copy on reserve in the library.

Assignments:

Three papers will be required for the course. They will be of three different types:
--formal analysis paper
--critical essay
--short historical essay

In class we will talk about each type of paper and read examples of them in preparation for the writing assignment. We will also spend time in class on peer evaluations of papers. You will be given the opportunity to revise your paper prior to submission. The final paper will build on the skills you develop in the first two writing assignments.

**Course Outline:**

Week I: Introduction: Impressionist Paris


Week II: “The Painter of Modern Life,” held at Bandy Center, Heard Library, led by Yvonne Boyer.


Introduction of formal analysis writing assignment.

Week III: Guest Lecture: Prof. Sean Weiss, City College of New York, “Paris: Photographic City.”


Due: Writing Assignment #1, Formal Analysis. In-class peer evaluation.

Week IV: The Flâneur and the Streets of Paris

Due: Writing Assignment #1, Final Version

Week V: Private Spaces


Week VI: Personalities Public and Private


Week VII: Spaces of Entertainment

Read: Herbert, Chapter Three, pp. 55-91; Chapter Four, pp. 92-107, 115-39.

Week IX, Oct. 22: Visit to Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery


Due: Writing Assignment #2, Critical Essay

In-class peer evaluation of Writing Assignment #2

Week IX, Oct. 29: Impressionism, City and Country


Due: Writing Assignment #2, Final Version

Week X, Nov. 5: American Spaces and American Impressionism


Week XI, Nov. 12: Historical Writing on Impressionism and 19th-Century French Art

Read: A selection of historians of French art, demonstrating the development of the literature and the variety of methodological perspectives.

Week XII, Nov. 19: Impressionism and Art Teaching in American Artists’ Colonies


Week XIII, Dec. 3: Impressionism in Great Britain

Week XIV: Post-Impressionism

Read: Robert Herbert and Martha Ward on Seurat’s *Grande Jatte*

Due: Writing Assignment #3, Short historical essay.