



3 A New Generation

The World Fair and the Courbet exhibition naturally attracted the attention of the artists who were later to be the Impressionists, or at least those who were old enough to take an interest. Over the next few years, all of them were to embark on a life in art; they met and established their own creeds as artists.

Pissarro was the eldest. Subsequently the most unwavering of them all in his advocacy of the original principles of Impressionism, he was also the only one to show work at every one of their group exhibitions. He was the son of pious Jewish parents who had moved from southern France to the West Indies. There Camille was born at Charlotte Amalie on Saint Thomas, an island in the Antilles, then a Danish colony. His father intended the lad to go into business too, and sent him to school in the Paris suburb of Passy from 1842 to 1847, where Camille drew from nature and visited museums. Back on Saint Thomas, he became the friend of Fritz Melbye, a Danish painter, and in 1852 together with him he fled his father's business world to lead an artist's life in Caracas. Pissarro senior finally acceded to his son's professional wishes, and in 1855 sent him to receive proper training in Paris, where he was supported by another branch of the family. Pissarro did not embark on serious art study, though, preferring to make occasional use of the facilities of the Académie Suisse on the Quai des Orfèvres, from about 1859 on. Charles Suisse had himself modelled for artists, and now earned a living by putting a studio and nude models at the disposal of artists for a modest fee. No tuition was offered; but painters who proposed to do figural work needed to study the nude in various positions, and hiring models for one's own use was expensive, so a fair number of artists did make use of Suisse's facilities. By doing so they also met other artists and benefitted from advice. At the Académie Suisse, Pissarro presently met Monet, Guillaumin and Cézanne.

He painted landscapes at a number of villages outside Paris, preferring the banks of the Seine, Marne and Oise. In his style he followed Corot, whose work he had admired at the 1855 World Fair and with whom he had sought personal contact. Courbet influenced him too, in his colouration. In 1859 he submitted work to the Salon for the first time, and was accepted. In the early 1860s he moved in with Julie Vellay, the daughter of a winegrower in Burgundy who was working as a maid for his parents. Their first son,

Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Alfred Sisy and his Wife
 1868
Le ménage Sisy
 Oil on canvas, 125 x 75 cm
 Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-
 Museum & Fondation
 Corboud





Edgar Degas
The Dancing Class
 c. 1870
La classe de danse
 Oil on panel, 19.7 x 27 cm
 New York, The Metropolitan
 Museum of Art, H.O.
 Havemeyer Collection

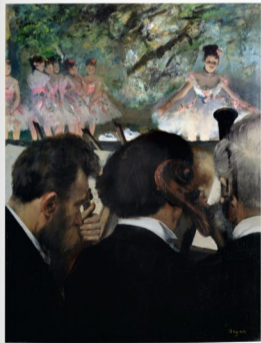
sometimes used it as a base when he went to the Café Guerbois evenings. On several occasions he joined Monet to work on the same view. The motifs he chose and his treatment of them show how systematically he was working on presenting spatial depth while retaining a firm structure in the visual surface, and how carefully he aimed to record gradations of colour under the influence of changing light. Apart from 1867, he was regularly accepted by the Salon, though he sold little as a result. Only one unimportant dealer took an interest in his work. In 1868, together with Guillaumin, he tried to make a little money painting shop signs and doing other work of a similar kind.

He had more experience as a painter, compared with Monet, Renoir or Sisley, and in consequence his pictures possessed a greater maturity (pp. 62, 86, 87). His colours became visibly brighter, though Pissarro also had a penchant for muted shades beneath an overcast sky. He was particularly adept at nuancing shades of green and using the modulations to suggest depth without impairing the unity of impact. In the main he chose and handled his subjects so that the linear and the physical, plastic qualities would abet the marriage of spatiality and surface structure. Straight roads, often

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lined with trees, plunging into the depths at an angle and inscribing a dynamic sense of movement into a tranquil landscape, as well as *routes tourmantes* twisting a gentle way through undulating country, are characteristic features in his work. The colouring and construction create a sense of structural interaction that looks almost Cubist – with hindsight. This quality, which was even more strikingly present in the work of his sometime follower Cézanne, has led to a higher valuation now being placed on Pissarro's work than was once the case.⁸⁰

Renoir's aims were broader in scope, though his aesthetics were less secure than Pissarro's. Trying to carve out a place for himself in the Paris art scene, and at the same time having to sell pictures to make a living, he was not always clear in his own mind about the direction he was moving in. He was close to his Café Guerbois



Edgar Degas
Musicians in the Orchestra
 1872
Musiciens à l'orchestre
 Oil on canvas, 69 x 49 cm
 Frankfurt am Main,
 Städel Museum