A Fresh View

PROGRAMME SEVEN:  REALISM, IMPRESSIONISM AND POST-IMPRESSIONISM

Part 1:  Painting the Modern World

INT. SOTHEBY'S AUCTION ROOMS DURING SALE

NYMPHÉAS, MONET

Lot 42, the Claude Monet *Nympheas* of 1908. Three million pounds is bid for this lot, three million. I've a bid of three million pounds. Three million two hundred, three million five hundred thousand, three million eight hundred thousand, four million. At four million pounds now, at four million pounds. Four million two hundred thousand, four million four hundred thousand, four million five hundred thousand. At four million five hundred thousand pounds then on the telephone, four million six hundred thousand, four million eight hundred thousand, the bid's still on the telephone at four million eight hundred thousand.

Five million pounds now. Five million two hundred thousand on the telephone. Five million two hundred thousand pounds then. It's yours.
MANETTE (cartoon)
OLYMPIA, MANET (Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

LADY IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO ENTER, LE CHARIVAIL
OLYMPIA, MANET A/B

MICHAEL WOOD VOICE-OVER
The paintings of this period are among the most familiar images in art. The greatness of the artists is a commonplace of Western culture. But the impressionists started out as radicals. When it was first exhibited their art was rejected as disturbing, inept, incomprehensible, even immoral.
Why were people so hostile?
What was the accepted art of the period?

MICHAEL WOOD TO CAMERA, INT. OPÉRA, PARIS

In mid 19th century France, as so often in the story the art of the West, art was a serious business loaded with political significance. It was used by the rulers not only to embody their ideals of beauty but to enshrine the values which in their eyes underpinned a civilised and stable society. And art which didn't do that could be the object of contempt, of fear, and even of repression. There could hardly be a better example of what the official establishment art of the time looked like than this building, the Paris Opera House. It was constructed at vast cost, ten lives were lost in building it, 500 houses destroyed to make way for it. All to celebrate
the values of French bourgeois metropolitan culture, and the stability and continuity of its political life.

In fact this stability had been undermined by the Franco-Prussian war and the siege of Paris in 1870. Then in the following year, 1871, the people of Paris seized control of the city, but the Commune was overthrown with terrible brutality.

Thousands of people were executed and the centre of the city was left partially wrecked.

The Opéra was begun before the Franco-Prussian war but only completed and opened after the crushing of the Commune.

But while the finishing touches were being applied here, just across the city an artist lay in prison. Gustave Courbet had been a member of the Commune.

He'd been accused of helping to destroy the Vendôme column, symbol of French Imperialism.
MICHAEL WOOD TO CAMERA, INT. Opéra, Paris

BONJOUR M. COURBET, COURBET, 1854
(Montpellicier, Musée Fabre)

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SALON

CRUSADERS ENTERING CONSTANTINOPE, DELACROIX (Paris, Louvre)

ROMANS OF THE DEcadence, 1847 COUTURE
(Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

Tepidarium, Chassériau, (Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

An artist showing his work, Meissonier (The Wallace Collection)

Halt at an Inn, Meissonier (The Wallace Collection)

Burial at Ornans, Courbet (Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

Courbet came from the country, he came from the Jura near the Swiss border, and he saw himself as a wild man from the backwoods. He was a notorious rebel against establishment values in art.

The Parisian art world was dominated by the Salon, a vast state-sponsored exhibition. Here large scale religious or historical subjects showing dramatic or heroic deeds or moralising themes like Couture's Romans of the Decadence.

Highly popular, too, were images of beautiful women presented in settings remote in time or place - in Classical Antiquity or an imaginary Orient. There were also trivial anecdotal pictures of everyday life

- but these were regarded as inferior by official taste.

Courbet called his art realist.

Rejecting the idealised vision and false rhetoric of academic Art, he
Painted the mourners attending a funeral in his own small town. Courbet said, "It was not my intention to attain the trivial goal of art for art's sake. No, my aim is to translate the customs, the ideas and the appearance of my own epoch as I see them."

We're not told who's being buried but it's clearly no one of national significance. But Courbet called his vast picture 'A History of a Burial at Ornans'. And by its size and by its title he was claiming that the everyday customs of his own provincial society were just as worthy subjects of serious historical art as any other.

Modern landscape and modern people were now the raw material for a serious form of painting.

Courbet intended his picture to be seen at the Paris salon, and it was clearly meant to shock. Particularly in the political circumstances of 1850 when it was exhibited.
In the elections of May 1849 about a third of the votes in the countryside had been polled for radical Republican candidates who opposed the presidency of Louis Napoleon.

And to this urban bourgeoisie these rural republicans seemed a threat to the whole social order.

Courbet was born here in Ornans, the son of a prosperous farmer, a member of the class which the Parisiens had found so puzzling when they saw it depicted in the burial.

Courbet presented himself as a man of the country, a sort of natural being with untamed appetites. Courbet was also an anarchist, a follower of Pierre Joseph Proudhon, who wanted to do away with central government and create a classless society of free individuals. Individualism and realism were closely connected for Courbet, who felt that the artist could only realise himself through an immersion in the physical world. "I believe
that painting is an essentially concrete art and can only consist in the representation of real and existing things. An abstract object does not belong in the domain of painting."

Courbet's technique, with its loose brushwork and sweeps of the palette knife producing very simple, very physical surfaces of thick oil paint tangibly records his engagement with the physical stuff of this world.

Courbet's landscapes - with their simple natural elements ... trees ... crags ... waterfalls ... emphasise the primacy of the eye over the conventions of academic Art.

Placing himself and his art at the centre of his political allegory The Painter's Studio, he asserted the importance of the painter's individuality and his independence from the demands of the State and the artistic establishment.
COURBET's attack on the values of academic art and the Salon was not a sign of indifference to it. His Bathers is a parody of the rhetorical poses of the classical tradition, with its blatantly unidealized women.

The nude, too, that most traditional of subjects, had become part of the realist project.

Courbret's egalitarian ideas, his rejection of academic art, his insistence on being true to the appearance of the modern world as he saw it, all had a great influence on Manet and the Impressionists. But the modernity which they thought they should confront and portray in their art was not that of the country, but of the city, with its new classes, its parks, its suburbs and its fashionable life. Baudelaire himself made a pioneer plea for a new art of the city when he said that: "The true artist will be he who snatches from the life of today its epic quality, who makes us see and understand how great, how poetic we are in our cravats and our patent leather boots."

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Edouard Manet outlived Courbet by only a decade, but his work seems to belong to a different era. His own position as a fashionable man in the demi-monde was not unusual, but this world had not hitherto been regarded as suitable raw material for art.

**John House Voice Over**

In 1862 he painted a fashionable gathering listening to music in the Tuileries gardens.

His technique was harshly criticised by his contemporaries. It was emphatically unlike the manual dexterity of academic training. He was criticised for treating everything alike - clothes, umbrellas, chairs, are given as much significance as a face. The picture was contrived to seem artless - a personal response to his optical experience. And this in itself was an attack on academic hierarchies, of the face over the body, of the hero over the ordinary person in the street.

**Déjeuner sur l'Herbe**, MANET, 1863 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

But the first major scandal of Manet's career was provoked when he submitted the Déjeuner sur l'Herbe to the Salon in 1863. It was
FÊTE CHAMPETRE,
GIORGIONE (Paris, Louvre)

DÉJEUNER SUR L'HERBE,
MANET (Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

rejected. The Déjeuner was a parody of earlier artistic traditions. Manet said, "I'm going to re-do Giorgione's picture in the transparency of the atmosphere, with figures like you see over there by the river."

The Déjeuner is an attempt, like Courbet's Bathers, to paint the nude in a modern way. But these are clearly city people, people you might know. And in bringing the scene up to date Manet too has subverted the meaning of the earlier tradition. The situation is hard to fathom. Gestures and expressions make no obvious sense. And yet the directness of the woman's gaze invites us to participate in this equivocal situation..

OLYMPIA, MANET, 1863
(Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

Undeterred by the reception of the Déjeuner sur l'Herbe, Manet submitted Olympia to the Salon in 1865. It was accepted but it provoked great derision.

CARTOON FEATURING
"OLYMPIA"

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OLYMPIA, MANET, 1863
(Paris, Musée d'Orsay)

The model was thought hideous and her surroundings degraded. Olympia with her black servant was identified by some critics as a Parisien prostitute. The treatment of the painting also shocked the viewers. The paint is applied with a calculated simplicity, and the lighting is harsh and frontal leaving a ribbon of dark shadow round her body. Her presence is quite at odds with the finesse of academic painting.

BIRTH OF VENUS,
CABANEL, 1863
(Paris, Louvre)

OLYMPIA, MANET A/B

Olympia exposes the conventions which structured the display of sexuality in the nudes which were successful at the Salon. Nudes such as Cabanel's Birth of Venus, which won the medal of honour in 1863. Violating the principle that nudes in art must be remote and passive, this modern Venus challenges the viewer to respond to her gaze. Olympia is silenced but not rendered powerless by her position. And in the heavily censored regime of Napoleon III, she brought through the gates of the Salon a disturbing suggestion that there were elements in modern life that might not be under control.
MICHAEL WOOD VOICE OVER
The industrial revolution was bringng profound social changes to France. Paris itself was transformed by Baron Haussmann, the prefect of Paris, whose great boulevards were crashing through the old neighbourhoods. An elegant, impersonal, modern city was being created. New classes were emerging and asserting their right to enjoy themselves.

Taking their cue from Manet, younger artists began to paint aspects of modern city life. But the city they observed was often an uncertain, anonymous place. It offered alienation as well as adventure. The café concerts of popular entertainment where people from different classes could mingle and their identities could be masked. Edgar Degas in particular explored places like these with an extraordinary variety of techniques, increasingly using pastel as a means of combining colour with drawing.
In the way he arranged his compositions, Degas looked to the example of the Japanese colour print, whose customary viewpoints and cut-off compositions suggested ways of presenting his vision of the modern world.

Pierre Auguste Renoir painted a far more involved and festive vision of the era. The forms of the figures are dissolved into a play of patches of warm and cool colour which suggest the fall of sunlight through the trees. By this focus on the surface of appearances Renoir treats the modern world as a spectacle rather than creating the sort of moral narrative favoured by the academic artists.

Of this study, Nude in Sunlight, a newspaper critic said, "Would someone kindly explain to Monsieur Renoir that a woman's torso is not a mass of decomposing flesh with the
green and purplish blotches that indicate a state of complete putrefaction in a corpse".

His La Loge was shown at the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874. This exhibition was an explicit rejection of the Salon because it was jury-free. All subscribers had a right to display their work.

The show was dominated by outdoor scenes, mostly small informal pictures which the artists painted in the open air in front of their subjects. Most critics welcomed the initiative of the exhibition. But many also complained that the works were unfinished, with their visible brushwork and their imprecise definition of form.
THE POPPY FIELD, MONET, 1873 (Paris, Musée d'Orsay)
IMPRESSION, SUNRISE, MONET (Musée Marmottan, Paris)

The artists themselves distinguished between their more elaborate and tidily-executed canvases and their sketches, rapid notations of subjects or natural effects. One of Claude Monet's sketches, Impression, Sunrise, precipitated the naming of the group as 'Impressionists'.

PORTRAIT OF JAMES McNEIL WHISTLER,
BOLDINI (Brooklyn Museum, New York)
CREMORNE LIGHTS,
WHISTLER (Tate Gallery, London)

The expatriate American James McNeil Whistler was also invited to join the first exhibition, but he preferred to continue showing his work in London, although his very simple, freely-brushed Nocturnes had much in common with the Impressionists' atmospheric sketches. It was this lack of finish which led the celebrated English critic Ruskin to accuse Whistler of "flinging a pot of paint in the face of the public".

EXT. RIVER SEINE

The Impressionists' interest in open air painting led them to the landscape on the outskirts of Paris and the expanding villages along the River Seine.

VIEW FROM LOUVESCIENNES,
PISSARRO (National Gallery, London)

Such areas were meeting places of several different worlds. Camille Pissarro made out of the least prepossessing parts of his
surroundings. Even the drab road in Louveciennes where he lived could provide the raw material of art.
Pissarro generally peopled the streets of Louveciennes with peasant figures, showing it as a country village. But when Renoir painted the same stretch of road he transformed it into a cheerful pleasure ground with fashionably dressed strollers from the city.
Monet lived for five years at Argenteuil on the River Seine. He painted it over and over again, in all weathers and all seasons.

He was becoming increasingly concerned with the problems of translating fleeting light effects into paint. But he continued to explore the many different facets of the place.

Industry itself, the cause of urban expansion, was largely ignored or evaded. Although the chimneys of a local factory made a discreet appearance.

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But all these landscapes show his surroundings very much in a process of change, of transformation.

And this went right against the conventions of contemporary French landscape painting, which presented the countryside of France as a sort of timeless, historical world.

Pissarro, who was an anarchist and a socialist, was one of the few impressionists who tried to come to terms with the industrial landscape itself. By the early 1880's, in part because of commercial failure, the project of painting modern life began to be abandoned. Most of the group, by now in middle age, were in retreat from explicitly modern subjects and they began to leave the city. Renoir became preoccupied with the nude in an increasingly timeless traditional way.

Pissarro began to express his utopian anarchism in paintings of
peasant life, adopting the techniques of younger artists who applied their paint in small points of colour.

Light became Monet's central preoccupation. He was less interested in the substance of the objects that he painted than in the ways that their appearance was modified by the light and atmosphere which played across and around them, and he treated his subjects in long series of paintings showing the same motif in different lights.

He said, "The further I go the better I see that it takes a great deal of work to succeed in rendering what I want to render: instantancy - above all the envelope - the same light spread over everything, and I'm more than ever disgusted at things that come easily, at the first attempt."

This rejection of the sketch together with his pursuit of the most transitory light effects forced Monet to work up his increasingly elaborate paint surfaces in the
Eventually he solved this predicament with his retreat into a world that he made for himself, a world in which nature was brought within a few yards of his front door and regularly weeded by his six gardeners.

In the 1890's Monet began to build his water garden at Giverny. And this garden, periodically enlarged, soon became his principle subject. Nature here was organised according to his exact specifications and the light played across a world all of his own design. He could work out of doors summer after summer when the weather was right, but also work close by in his studio where his memory would be at its freshest and bring the pictures to the degree of finish that he sought.

He spent his final decade working on these huge canvases of the lily pond. And they remain, an old man's celebration of the world of light.
NYMPHÉAS, MONET (Paris, Orangerie) and colour.

MICHAEL WOOD TO CAMERA, INT. MONET'S STUDIO AT GIVERNY

This is Monet's old studio at Giverny, now the gift shop, restored with lavish donations from foreign sponsors, especially Americans. Rockefeller, Ford, Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon. And here you can buy the age of the Impressionists in reproduction. It's ironic that having started out as radicals the Impressionists should end up being the art of the establishment, the most sought after, the most well known and the most reproduced art in history.

The familiarity of Impressionism deprives us of the disquiet the works provoked when they were first exhibited. The very modernity they tried to paint is now bathed in easy nostalgia. Painting and rituals and pleasures of an expanding middle class world, the Impressionists hold up a flattering mirror to our own desires and aspirations.

END OF PART ONE
Luncheon of the Boating Party, Renoir
(Phillips Collection, Washington DC)

Exterior Restaurant Fournaise, Chatou

Michel Wood to Camera
Exterior Restaurant Fournaise

Distanced Creations

In 1881 Renoir had painted a defining image of his time. Here at the Restaurant Fournaise at Chatou by the River Seine a group of people sit on a sunlit balcony, surrounded by the trappings of material well being, food, drink, nice clothes, easy friendship, happy in themselves, confident in their world.

But in the 1880's a number of young ambitious artists felt that the Impressionist technique had taken them as far as it could and in their turn they tried to push beyond that in a whole variety of ways. We call them Post Impressionists and many have detected in their work a subtle shift in the relationship between painting and the world it portrayed - as if perhaps modern life itself had become a problem for artists.
SUNDAY AFTERNOON ON THE
ISLAND OF THE GRANDE
JATTE, SEURAT (Art
Institute of Chicago)

Five years later, Georges Seurat exhibited his monumental work Sunday
Afternoon on the Island of the
Grande Jatte. This is one of the
most influential pictures of the
1880's and it signals a radical
departure from the Renoir.

The picture depicts another island
on the River Seine - also used by
the Parisians for Sunday outings.
The same kind of place as the
Renoir.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON ON THE
ISLAND OF THE GRANDE
JATTE, SEURAT (Art
Institute of Chicago)

But Seurat painted people from a
variety of classes - strangers to
one another. And he painted them in
a way which expresses a radically
different experience of such
places. Its hard to identify with
the stiff figures. The style
distances us.

LUNCHEON OF THE BOATING
PARTY, RENOIR
(Phillips Collection,
Washington DC)

TITLE: DISTANCED CREATIONS

GRISELDA POLLOCK TO
CAMERA

THE BRIDGE AT
COURBEVOIE, 1886-7,
SEURAT (Courtauld
Institute of Art)

The Grande Jatte was a watershed for
the avant-garde of the 1880's. No
ambitious artist could paint without
acknowledging what Seurat had done
to typical Impressionist subject
matter.
Seurat's innovation was also his style. His compositions are rigorously formal. He replaced Impressionism's casual spontaneity with a discipline and order. He used current scientific theories of colour and developed a systematic method of painting called pointillism. He applied his paint by means of small dots and thereby achieved what he called optical mixture and greater luminosity.

For this reason, the artists who adopted Seurat's technique became known as neo-Impressionists.

By the 1880s, there was a new generation of the avant-garde who lived and worked in an area north of the recently modernised centre of Paris. Seurat had his studio on the corner of the Boulevard Clichy. Paul Signac lived around the corner. Vincent Van Gogh joined them when he arrived from Holland in 1886.

There was still general agreement that aspects of modern Paris were the proper subjects for advanced,
ambitious painting. What was new was the variety of competing styles with which artists responded to both Impressionism and Seurat's neo-Impressionism. Emil Bernard turned to Japanese and mediaeval art to find his answer: flattened colours and simplified forms which sometimes verged on caricature. Henri de Toulouse Lautrec studied popular art forms especially posters, to bring out the seamier side of places of popular entertainment. Living in a less prosperous district of the city, Van Gogh followed several artists to paint in Paris' industrial outskirts.

There were undoubtedly political commitments involved in this interest in the working class quarters of Paris - particularly for Signac and other neo-Impressionists who aligned themselves with the Anarchist Movement.

Signac wrote in the Anarchist journal 'La Revolte' that the
neo-Impressionists were bringing "their witness to the great struggle which is taking place between the workers and capital".

But across the political spectrum from left to right key artists of the 1880's became intrigued by the hybrid terrains on the outskirts of modern Paris. It was here that the economic and social forces which were remaking the modern city lay momentarily exposed. But in the images they produced we can see the difficulties they encountered in making a modern art in this landscape.

In a series of watercolours, Van Gogh tried to represent these ragged edges of the city, where working class people came to take a breath of fresh air amidst the random elements of poicemeal industrial and urban development.

The most telling peculiarity of these drawings is the literalness with which the scene is set down. Yet the artist and hence the viewer are kept at a distance by the yawning empty foreground.
In Signac's painting of the **Road to Gennevilliers**, the artist looks across an open space to the line of factories in the industrial township of Asnières. Marked out for future development, awaiting houses and factories, this sheer expanse of empty terrain is disturbing. We have to wonder why any painter could conceive of painting a scene apparently so devoid of incident and meaning.

It was in this marginal territory it was felt that the modern could almost be grasped. Could painting make visual sense out of such a landscape and its meaning? Perhaps only by keeping at a distance or making your paintings a purely formal or stylistic exercise.

For instance, in Seurat's **View over the Field of Luzerne** to the distant factory town of St. Denis we see very little in the vast empty foreground except a lot of brushwork.

Characterising what was then called the New Art was a growing concern with questions of style, of technique and form.
MICHAEL WOOD VOICE OVER

Groups of artists formed around different styles and tendencies and they began to compete intensely with each other. One critic wrote: "All these tendencies make me think of moving kaleidoscopic patterns which clash at one moment only to reunite at another."

Undoubtedly this was a period of immense innovation and diversity. Yet contemporary critics such as Félix Fénéon recognised an underlying similarity. Comparing the work of Seurat and Paul Gauguin, Fénéon argued that they both maintained a distance from their subjects. Seurat, he said, applied science. Gauguin used reality only as a pretext for what Fénéon called distanced creations.
By the late 1880s those artists started to abandon the attempt to engage with modernity in the uncertain form of the City. They left Paris for regions and cultures in which they were tourists.

Tourists travel to places where the customs of the people can be absorbed as sights, as experiences of the different and the new. The avant-garde artists went to a prosperous, developing Brittany but imagined it as primitive, mystic and strange.

In August 1888, Bernard painted Breton Women in a Meadow. It depicts the display and leisure of a Breton Sunday outing and it is clearly a direct response to Seurat's Grande Jatte.
But it is very different. Bernard emphasises the flatness of the picture surface. He does not use traditional perspective and he makes no attempt at naturalism. Instead he used the example of Japanese prints and mediaeval stained glass to compose a picture that is only held together by its own invented order of marks and colours on a flat surface. As a result of such stylisation we have no access to or empathy with the Breton people depicted.

We need to think carefully about what it means to medievalise a nineteenth century Breton peasant - or to transform Brittany into Japan?

A SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN THE MEADOW, VAN GOGH
(Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan)

When Van Gogh saw the painting he made a copy of it and he called it A Sunday Afternoon in the Meadow, thus directly recalling Seurat's title.

VISION AFTER THE SERMON, GAUGUIN
(National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh)

Within a few weeks of seeing Bernard's painting Gauguin produced his bid for leadership of the avant-garde.

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In *Vision after the Sermon* Gauguin painted a red field in which pious women vividly imagine a scene described to them in a sermon they have just heard about Jacob wrestling with an Angel.

It is another 'distanced creation'. In his invention of the subject-matter, Gauguin draws on contemporary tourist myths of a mediaeval and mystical Brittany. And the painting relives for its meaning on a city-dweller's fantasy of the superstitious piety of peasant women.

**EXT. PROVENCE**

**MICHAEL WOOD VOICE OVER**

Van Gogh also left Paris after only two years in the capital and settled in Provence in the South of France. He had come to believe that the renaissance of modern art would only take place away from the city - symbol of a decadent and diseased society.

But he also wanted to keep in touch with developments in the avant-garde. He invited Gauguin to visit him and both artists painted from the same subjects.
Gauguin painted the scene in Arles as a tapestry of saturated, flat colour and shapes. He encouraged Van Gogh to move away from naturalism and Impressionism and to radically experiment with colour and perspective.

Van Gogh was brought up in the country in Holland - the landscape of the South of France was unfamiliar to him. He was a stranger, a tourist down here and this was another country. Like many Northern Europeans he imagined the Mediterranean to be an exotic fiery world and that's what he made it. He painted his people and its agriculture in landscapes drawn not only from what he saw around him but from Japanese prints and even from etchings by Rembrandt.

Here, he said, he was seeking his Japan. In other words, a world of the imagination. And here he found it.
In his collection of Japanese prints, Van Gogh saw a beautiful, sun-filled, harmonious world which he imposed on the landscapes of Provence. The prints themselves gave him confidence to use colour more brilliantly and in a more arbitrary way. Yet unlike Gauguin and Bernard, he never really understood the implications of prints in terms of surface and flatness. His surfaces are thick encrustations of paint but they always refer, often vividly, to the quality and texture, shape and perspective of what he painted.

He painted himself at this time as a workmanly Japanese painter. He wrote to Gauguin, "I have aimed at the character of a simple monk worshipping the eternal Buddha."
Eventually, suffering from epilepsy and considered mad by many of the people who came into contact with him, Van Gogh was confined to the sanatorium here at St. Rémy near Arles. And here he spent the last phase of his life painting before he returned north, where he committed suicide. From his window he could look out on a view with a backdrop of the weird rocky outcrops of the Alpilles mountains. And in June 1889 that view inspired one of his most famous paintings. The picture is Starry Night.

GRISELDA POLLOK VOICE OVER

Starry Night was an attempt to make a modern religious art. Van Gogh was suspicious, however, of the Catholic undertones of Bernard's and Gauguin's religious themes. Here he uses typically Protestant nature symbolism - suns and stars, and trees striving upwards towards the heavens.

Incorporating a cypress tree so characteristic of Provence, the painting nevertheless has a Dutch church and Dutch cottages.
Van Gogh painted *Starry Night* using modern colour theory. The complementary pair of yellow for light and blue for darkness translated the black and white opposition of religious pictures of divine illumination such as Rembrandt's print of *The Annunciation to the Shepherds* and it was also typical of Dutch 17th century woodcuts of celestial revelations.

Unfortunately for Van Gogh neither Bernard nor Gauguin recognised this work as a reply to theirs. It was seen simply as a village in the moonlight.

Paul Cézanne also lived and worked in Provence. With Seurat Cézanne was the most influential figure of this generation. He had had a decisive contact with the Impressionists in the 1870's. But he left Paris and went home to the family estate in Provence. There for the rest of his life he painted and repainted the landscapes where he had spent his boyhood. Cézanne was not a tourist. He was, therefore, quite different from all the other artists we have discussed so far.
Cézanne alone remained faithful to the Impressionist programme of open air painting - an art based on direct observation of the physical world.

Day after day, for almost thirty years, he set himself to find and answer to this question: could he make a new art based entirely on what he called his 'petit sensation'?

'Petit sensation' was one of Cézanne's key concepts. 'Sensation' in French has two meanings. It refers both to physical perception and also to human feelings.

Cézanne was never a distanced observer. The countryside was the living proof of the people who had used it, shaped it, marked it. But it seems that he felt that it was only by a careful study of the precise physical forms of nature, the actual colours that he saw, that
he could reach through to the full implications of its human meaning. He was later to write, "I am its consciousness; the landscape thinks itself in me".

When Cézanne painted the people of the region he produced monumental portraits of people he neither sentimentalised nor patronised. If there is a distance between himself and his subjects it is one of respect - for the difference between himself a middle class man, and those of another class and culture.

He submitted people to the same discipline as the mountain, while he patiently analysed the field of coloured light for which his paintbrush had to find an adequate sign on canvas.

It was his honesty about the status of art as representation which led him to his preoccupation with technique.

He said, "I wished to copy nature but I could not. But I was satisfied when I discovered that though the sun could not be
In the 1880s, like Seurat, Cézanne rejected the disorder of Impressionism and evolved what has been called his constructive brushstroke, carefully building up his pictures by small facets of finely modulated colour. This makes his pictures dense and at times claustrophobic. But Cézanne always tried to recreate through colour a sense of space and solidity of forms.

Women artists of the avant-garde painted another equally vivid aspect of modernity. Unable to frequent the brothels, bars and cafes, artists like Mary Cassatt represented the world they knew intimately. Her subjects were drawn from the rituals and disciplines of middle class womanhood.

Cassatt joined the Impressionists in 1879 but her work of the 1880s and 90s exhibits many features of post-Impressionism in its move towards greater solidity and more organised surface. Yet her pictures are not distanced from their subjects. They balance a
self-conscious exploration of medium and form with a concern to convey a known social and psychological reality.

In The Bath, Cassatt made use of the example of Japanese art but she used it to achieve intensity and monumentality. The tilted perspective, the play of patterns, all testify to formal experimentation. But the effect is to concentrate the viewer's attention on the solidly placed woman and child and what they are doing. The mundane act of bathing is thereby invested with dignity and meaning.

Suzanne Valadon, a one time milliner and circus performer, became an artist's model. Renoir painted her, but she also began to paint for herself.

The contrast between the images painted by women and the representations of women produced by men alerts us to the sexual politics in the formation of modernism. A persistent factor in the paintings of this era was a kind of sexual tourism.
In 1891, Gauguin left both Brittany and Paris and travelled to the South Pacific - in search of a distant mythic paradise.

As a European man in the French colony of Tahiti, Gauguin found it easy to take a wife from among the young Tahitian women, and to use her as his model.

He wrote to his European wife about this painting, called *Manao Tupapau*, of his 13 year old bride in terms redolent of the coloniser's complacency and racism.

"I painted a nude of a young girl. In that position a trifle can make it indecent. And yet I wanted her that way. The lines and the action interested me...... I gave her a somewhat frightened expression."

Gauguin added the figure of the Spirit of the Dead, he said, to account for the girl's frightened expression, "These people are very
much afraid of the Spirits of the Dead."

Gauguin uses colour, patterns and simplified form as well as invented mythologies to create an image of the exotic. Yet the painting nonetheless recalls Olympia on her white bed. The displayed body and the watching figure all tie this image back into European concerns.

From Manet to Picasso, from Olympia to the Demoiselles d'Avignon.

male avant-garde artists have staked their claim as ambitious modernists on the bodies of women.

The major paintings of European modernism are surprisingly often paintings of the female nude. The power men enjoy make women available for artistic experimentation and colonisation. In many ways modern art rejected the humanist traditions of western art but it never abandoned the female nude. Instead it used women's bodies for its most extreme innovations and fantasies.

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On their bodies the implication of 'distanced creation' is there for all to see.

MICHAEL WOOD VOICE OVER
There is no such thing as objective art history. There are only the interpretations of art historians. The work of these artists has been assessed in different ways.

From Courbet's country peasants to Manet's new classes in the cities, from Monet's realism of light to the visions of Van Gogh, the painters we have been looking at seem to progressively move away from the real world rejecting external appearances in favour of an inner, personal, imaginative truth.

What we have seen is a crisis about how to handle the modern in its immediate form of the City. And the importance of the artists of the 1880s and 90s is a kind of hinge.

Artists still felt themselves responsible to the world - its social as well as its natural orders. On the other hand, they had opened up a realm of hitherto
A CORNFIELD WITH CYPRESSES, VAN GOGH
(National Gallery, London)
MOUNT SAINT VICTOIRE,
CÉZANNE 1904-06,
(Bührle Foundation, Zurich)

unimagined freedom for art. The artists saw in the imaginative colours of Gauguin, in the exhilaration of Van Gogh's energetic brushwork and above all in the inventiveness of Cézanne's later work, resources which were to inspire the whole array of 20th century 'isms' - from Purism to Expressionism, from Fauvism to Cubism.

*** THE END ***