

# Post Impressionists

The term '**Post-Impressionist**' was coined by the English art critic **Roger Fry**, looking back at the work once it had been gathered together and exhibited a number of times e.g. the 1910 exhibition at London's Grafton Galleries.

The name means, simply, '**after impressionism**' and does not really describe any one particular style. It is more a variety of developments, mainly in painting in France, **from around 1880 – 1905**.

Confusingly, Post-Impressionism is also a term applied to the later work of Impressionist painters such as Monet, Degas Renoir and Pissaro.

The important post impressionist artists we'll concentrate on are: **Paul Cezanne; Paul Gauguin; Vincent Van Gogh; Georges Seurat and the early works of Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso.**

## **Paul Cezanne (1880 – 1906) Still Life**

**Still Life with Petunias, 1885**

**Vase of Flowers and Apples, 1890**

Concerned with **balancing vertical and horizontal elements** of the image. Simplifying the everyday object by reducing them to **geometric shapes** (early cubism?). Also, Cezanne mixes rich colours with muted greys and tones to balance colour element across his compositions, (means that no one section **dominates** the painting, but the whole image is quite balanced).

## **Paul Gauguin (1848 – 1903) Portraiture**

Came to painting quite late in life, making a major change from former profession as a banker! Work contains a lot of **spiritualism** and it was this, (and perhaps guilt – see Van Gogh) that drove him to abandon Paris, France, his wife and children and leave for the **Polynesian island of Tahiti**. Here he indulged his passions for **simple painting style, rich colour and religious symbolism**. He also indulged one or two other passions.

**Self Portrait with Halo / The Yellow Christ, 1889**

Clear evidence of the Christian nature of Gauguin's spiritualism, (and arrogance!) while still living in Paris.

## **Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890) Still Lives & Portraits**

Arguably the most famous of all in this, or any other period of painting.

**Colour, Texture' Line and composition** are the strongest **visual elements** in Van Gogh's work.

Early work displays his admiration for **Gauguin** and the influence of Gauguin's wild **colour** runs through the dutchman's entire life's work. A victim of **mental health problems**, Van Gogh cut off his ear and sent it to Gauguin as a symbol of the depth of his love for the man. When this love was not returned, it deepened Van Gogh's **depressions and manic behaviour**. Despite finding some peace in the countryside of rural France, captured stunningly in his last flurry of activity, Van Gogh **shot himself** in the chest and died at the age of 37.

### **The Potato Eaters, 1879**

A Figure composition from the very young Van Gogh, this depicts the crop pickers in their modest lodgings eating the poorest meal of all – potatoes. The energetic style is already in evidence and the dense colour and tone creating the atmospheric lighting is the main feature.

### **Sunflowers, 1889**

### **Iris, 1890**

**Colour** screams out of this canvas. The blue- purple of the flowers wrestles with the searing yellow of the background. This has to be the least 'still' **still-life** ever! It looks as if the blooms are jostling and jockeying for prime position to be admired by the viewer. The flowers cascade downwards and the thrusting green leaves rocket upwards forcing your eye around and around the canvas. It can never settle on one petal or stalk. Meant to be **decorative**, to grace a living room or dining room wall, this image is far from restful and gives us a small insight into the raging turmoil and unrest in the **painters own mind**, (Maybe?!). The **texture** is brutal. Iris petals are incredibly delicate things, like the wings of a butterfly. Yet Van Gogh has rendered them in thick, **impasto** paint, thickly outlined in black like a child's colouring-in book. The **brushstrokes** are visible and luscious, as if the painter has only just completed his final sweep. The **energy** that bursts out of this painting, as with so many Van Gogh canvases, indicates that which went in to it. This is not a painter who gently tickles his paint until it does what he wants. Van Gogh must have **attacked** the canvas and beat it furiously until it gave him what he wanted. The Dutchman must have virtually jumped the easel, like a skilled mugger, diving in with **palette knife** gleaming to slash and grab before hurrying off, the image captured, to wipe the blade clean of pigment. He must have painted with such demonic **pace** to have produced the amount of work he did in such a short lifetime.

### **Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, 1888**

## Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear, 1889

## Bedroom at Arles, 1888

### Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891) Landscape & Figure Composition

The main pioneer of the “**Pointillist**” style – using small areas of **pure colours placed immediately next to one another on the canvas which visually mix given a small distance**. Seurat **died** at the very young age of 31, an age when many of history’s finest artists were still struggling to find a style or technique that suited them. This makes the Frenchman’s achievement all the more **extraordinary**.

Contrasting, **opposite colours** are used to create **tone** and or **luminosity**. This was a kind of logical, disciplined, scientific Impressionism. This technique is also sometimes called “**Divisionism**”. Extremely time-consuming, the initial effect, from a distance is, “so what?”, however, the closer you get to a canvas, the more you realize quite how remarkable Seurat’s work really is.

Dots of colour approximately the size of the end of a pencil are carefully placed side by side in an incredibly controlled manner, visible only from a distance of less than maybe two feet. This is truly remarkable when you realize that many of Seurat’s paintings measure twelve and fourteen feet in length, six to eight feet in height. The man must have been possessed of **incredible patience**. Many of the dates of the paintings have start and finish dates in **different years**.

## Bouquet in a Vase, 1878/9