Leggi e ascolta.

Monet and the Impressionists

On a misty morning in 1872 in Le Havre, France, a young Frenchman called Claude Monet was painting the boats in the harbour. Monet used big brushes because he wanted to paint the sunrise quickly before the light changed. Monet didn’t use many brush strokes to paint the boats and the water, but his painting shows us what the harbour looked like at that moment. Forty minutes later, Monet finished the painting. He called it ‘Impression, Sunrise’, and it changed the history of art.

Ten years earlier, when Monet arrived in Paris in 1862, most artists didn’t paint outside. They often painted famous people from history or literature. But Monet wanted to paint ordinary people in ordinary places – like cafés, fields and streets. He soon met other young artists with the same ideas, like Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro and Alfred Sisley.
The Impressionist movement started in 1874, when Monet and a group of 29 other artists had their first exhibition in Paris. They didn’t sell many paintings because most visitors didn’t understand them. When a reporter saw Monet’s painting of Le Havre, he hated it. The reporter used the title of Monet’s painting in his newspaper article. He called the painters ‘Impressionists’ because their paintings didn’t have any details in them. But Monet and his friends loved the name. They soon began to use it.

The Impressionists had different styles, but they all wanted to go out and paint real life. Degas drew dancers as they practised for the ballet. Pissarro painted people on the busy streets of Paris. Monet stood in the deep snow by the River Seine. Painting like this wasn’t easy. People often stood and watched them – and sometimes they laughed!

Life was difficult for the Impressionists. At first, important galleries didn’t want to show their work. For a long time, they couldn’t sell many paintings, and they were very poor. Later, more people began to like Impressionist art. There were shows in London and New York, and some Impressionists became very successful. When Claude Monet died in 1926, he was one of the most famous painters in the world.

Today, thousands of artists all over the world still paint outside – and they have all learnt a lot from the Impressionists. When you work outside, you have to paint fast because the light changes quickly. Because of this, many artists use big brushes, just like Monet. They try to paint light, weather and movement – an impression.

Impressionist style

- The Impressionists didn’t like to put many details in their pictures.
- They painted with bright colours, and they didn’t use black.
- They used big brush strokes.
• Changing light was important for them. Monet painted this cathedral more than 30 times – at different times of day, and in different weather.