

Alfred Sisley

Alfred Sisley was born in Paris as the son of rich English parents on October 30, 1839. His father William Sisley was a successful exporter to the United States of America. After his basic education, Alfred Sisley was sent back to England to enhance his knowledge of the English language and to become a successful businessman like his father. Alfred Sisley however took the opportunity to study the works of John Constable and William Turner.

Sisley wasn't attracted to the business-world and returned to Paris at age 23. His father supported him and decided to send him to the École des Beaux-Arts, where he studied under Charles Gleyre. Charles Gleyre encouraged him to paint in open air and to be original.

Following his return to Paris, Alfred Sisley spent some time painting in Fontainebleau, at Chailly with Monet, Bazille and Renoir, and later at Marlotte with Renoir. His style at this time was deeply influenced by Courbet and Daubigny, and when he first exhibited at the Salon in 1867 it was as the pupil of Corot. By this time, however, he had started to frequent the Café Guerbois, and was becoming more deeply influenced by the notions which were creating Impressionism. During the Franco-Prussian war and the period of the Commune, he spent some time in London and was introduced to Durand-Ruel by Pissarro, becoming part of that dealer's stable.

In the mean time, his father had lost all his money as a result of the war, and Sisley, with a family to support, was reduced to a state of penury, in which he was to stay until virtually the end of his life. He now saw himself as a full-time professional painter and part of the Impressionist group, exhibiting with them in 1874, 1876, 1877 and 1882.

His work had by this time achieved complete independence from the early influences that had affected him. In the 1870s he produced a remarkable series of landscapes of Argenteuil, where he was living, one of which, The Bridge at Argenteuil was bought by Manet. Towards the end of the decade Monet was beginning to have a considerable influence on him, and a series of landscape paintings of the area around Paris, including Marly, Bougival and Louveciennes, shows the way in which his dominant and evident lyricism still respects the demands of the subject-matter.

From his early admiration for Corot he retained a passionate interest in the sky, which nearly always dominates his paintings, and also in the effects of snow, the two interests often combining to create a strangely dramatic effect (1880; Snow at Véneux; Musée d'Orsay). Naturally different, he did not promote himself in the way that some of his fellow Impressionists did.

At the end of his life, Sisley was heavily sick due to cancer. It was only then that he started to get some recognition for the work he had done. Alfred Sisley died at the age of 59, January 29, 1899 in Moret-sur-Loing.

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