

Camille Pissaro

Camille Pissaro (July 10, 1830 – November 13, 1903) was a French Impressionist painter. His importance resides not only in his visual contributions to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, but also in his patriarchal standing among his colleagues, particularly Paul Cézanne.

Camille Jacob Pissaro was born in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas to Abraham Gabriel Pissarro, a Portuguese Sephardic Jew, and Rachel Manzana-Pomié, from the Dominican Republic. Pissarro lived in St. Thomas until age 12, when he went to a boarding school in Paris. He returned to St. Thomas where he drew in his free time. Pissarro was attracted to political Anarchy, an attraction that may have originated during his years in St. Thomas. In 1852, he travelled to Venezuela with the Danish artist Fritz Melbye. In 1855, Pissarro left for Paris, where he studied at various academic institutions (including the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and Académie Suisse) and under a succession of masters, such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Gustave Courbet, and Charles-François Daubigny. Corot is sometimes considered Pissarro's most important early influence; Pissarro listed himself as Corot's pupil in the catalogues to the 1864 and 1865 Paris Salons.

His finest early works (See *Jalais Hill, Pontoise*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) are characterized by a broadly painted (sometimes with palette knife) naturalism derived from Courbet, but with an incipient Impressionist palette.

While residing in London, Pissarro lived at Westow Hill and Palace Road, Upper Norwood 1870-1. He painted local views including the new Dulwich College, Lordship Lane Station and St Stephen's Church. In 1890 he returned to England and painted some ten scenes of central London. He came back again in 1892, painting in Kew Gardens and Kew Green, and also in 1897, when he produced several oils of Bedford Park, Chiswick. For more details of his British visits, see Nicholas Reed, "Camille Pissarro at Crystal Palace" and "Pissarro in West London", published by Lilburne Press.

Pissarro married Julie Vellay, a maid in his mother's household. Of their eight children, one died at birth and one daughter died aged nine. The surviving children all painted, and Lucien, the oldest son, became a follower of William Morris. Camille Pissarro: *Lettres à son fils Lucien*, 1943 edited by Art historian John Rewald reveals insights into the life of an artist, for both father and son.

Known as the "Father of Impressionism", Pissarro painted rural and urban French life, particularly landscapes in and around Pontoise, as well as scenes from Montmartre. His mature work displays an empathy for peasants and laborers, and sometimes evidences his radical political leanings. He was a mentor to Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin and his example inspired many younger artists, including Californian Impressionist Lucy Bacon.

Pissarro's influence on his fellow Impressionists is probably still underestimated; not only did he offer substantial contributions to Impressionist theory, but he also managed to remain on friendly, mutually respectful terms with such difficult personalities as Edgar Degas, Cézanne and Gauguin. Pissarro exhibited at all eight of the Impressionist exhibitions. Moreover, whereas Monet was the most prolific and emblematic practitioner of the Impressionist style, Pissarro was nonetheless a primary developer of Impressionist technique.

Pissarro experimented with Neo-Impressionist ideas between 1885 and 1890. Discontented with what he referred to as "Romantic Impressionism", he investigated Pointillism which he called "Scientific Impressionism" before returning to a purer Impressionism in the last decade of his life.

In March 1893, Paris Gallery Durand-Ruel organized a major exhibition of 46 of Pissarro's works along with 55 others by Antonio de La Gandara. But while the critics acclaimed Gandara, their appraisal of Pissarro's art was less enthusiastic.

Pissarro died in Éragny-sur-Epte on either November 12 or November 13, 1903 and was buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. On his tomb it reads 12 November 1903.

During his lifetime, Camille Pissarro sold few of his paintings. By 2005, however, some of his works were selling for over U.S. \$4 million.

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