

01

REALISM

From the late 1840s onwards

Inspired by the large-scale canvases of 17th-century Dutch painters such as Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), French artist Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) began in 1849 to paint his first monumental work, *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–1850), also titled *A Painting of Human Figures: The History of a Burial at Ornans*. The location was Courbet's own village of Ornans, in eastern France. The painting depicted a large gathering of ordinary members of the community, including the clergy and the artist's mother and sister, attending the funeral of Courbet's great-uncle. It was a factual representation of contemporary life in rural France, which Courbet painted with life-size figures.

Those who viewed the painting on display at the annual Salon in Paris in 1850 disliked what they saw, finding it trivial and ugly – a critical reaction to the aggrandisement in scale and subject of ordinary people in a genre reserved for royalty or history painting. The people's uprising in the revolution of 1848 was still fresh in the minds of the establishment. It had triggered the same reaction to the realism of Courbet's *The Stone Breakers* (1849), which depicted a young man and an older man in servitude, breaking rocks along the roadside, the reality of the lives of members of the poorer class. Both works brought notoriety to Courbet and prompted younger artists to shift away from idealised romanticism towards painting contemporary life. Courbet called it 'the debut of my principles'. *The Bathers*, shown at the 1853 Paris Salon, was shocking, for Courbet's nude bathers were real, not mythical, women. His pavilion outside the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1855 was called The Pavilion of Realism, showing 40 of his paintings, including *The Artist's Studio* (1854–1855), subtitled *A Real Allegory*. Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), exhibiting at the same time as Courbet, used realism in his works of peasant life – *The Sower* (1850), *The Gleaners* (1857), *The Angelus* (1859) – but these are emotional depictions of poverty, unlike Courbet's matter-of-fact realism.

Exhibited in 1865, French artist Édouard Manet (1832–1883) interpreted the realism of contemporary life in *Olympia* (1863), creating a scandal with his version of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538). Manet's 'Venus' was a naked Parisian prostitute staring directly at bourgeois spectators. It earned Manet the title of the 'first modern painter'.



Gustave Courbet, *A Burial at Ornans*, 1849–1850, oil on canvas, 315 x 668 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France

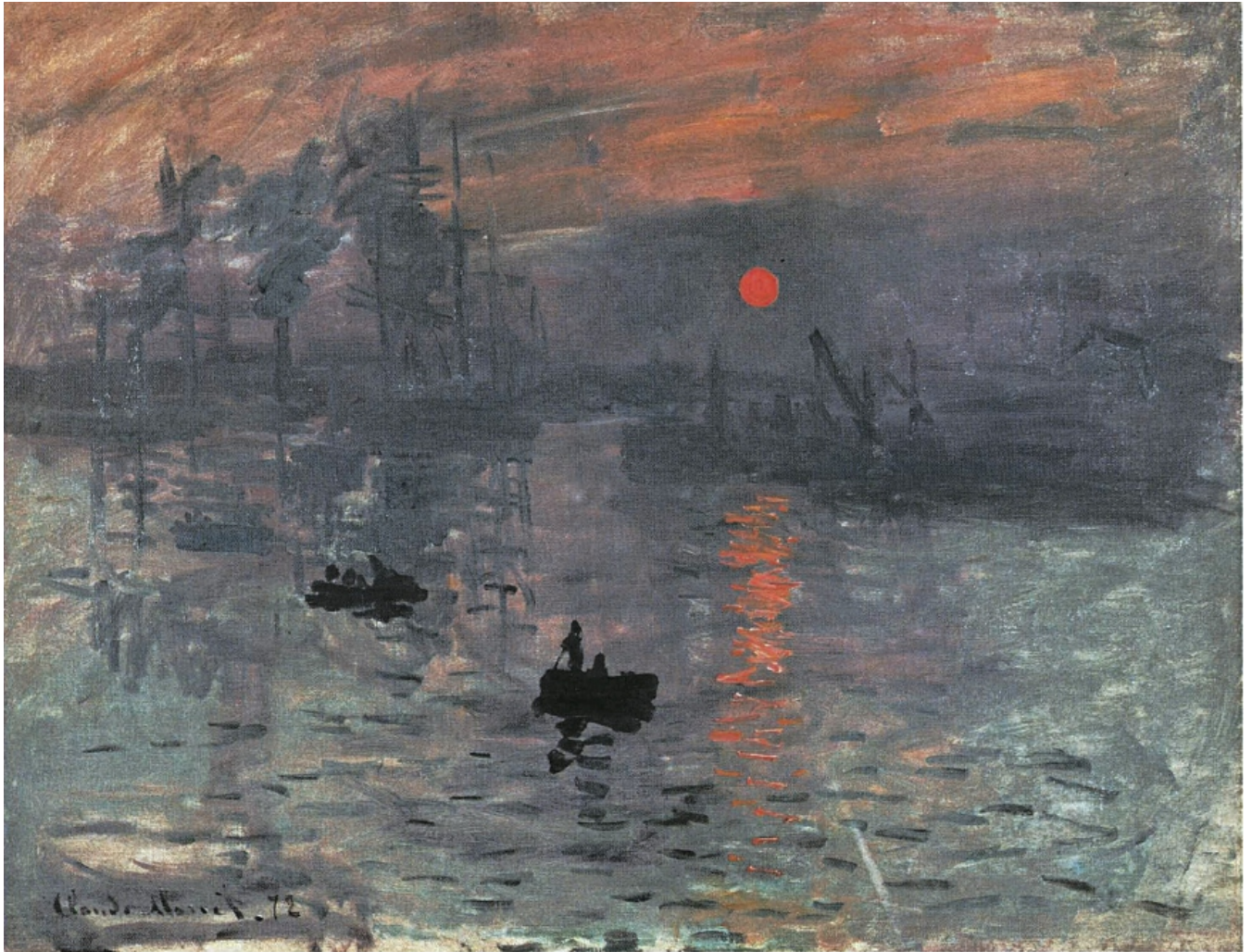
02

IMPRESSIONISM

Last third of the 19th century

Gustave Courbet's break with art genre tradition inspired artists to free themselves from academic tradition, experiment with new ideas and put on their own exhibitions independent of the official Paris Salon. In Paris the modernisation of the city in the 1850s, instigated by Napoleon III (1808–1873) and carried out under the direction of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891), saw the sweeping away of medieval parts of the city to create new public parks, wider boulevards, and new architecture – inspiring painters to capture the modernity of city life both in its effervescence and loneliness. The extension of railway lines to the Parisian suburbs allowed day trips to the city's outskirts. Both Édouard Manet's *Monet Working on His Boat* (1874) and *Summer's Day* (1879) by Berthe Morisot capture the spontaneity of the artists' lives through painting, *en plein air*, outdoor impressions of what they saw and experienced. New, industrially manufactured paints in vivid colours such as chrome yellow and emerald widened the creative span of colour and allowed freedom of movement; the small metal tubes were portable and long-lasting, enabling artists to paint on location. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, who displayed his art at the first 'Impressionist' exhibition (not a name the group had used), stated that without paint in tubes there would have been no 'impressionist' painters.

The first Impressionist exhibition – held at 35 Boulevard des Capucines, Paris, the former studio of the photographer Nadar, from 15 April to 15 May 1874 – was an independent art show by 30 artists putting up 165 works for sale. The group included Claude Monet (1840–1926), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), Berthe Morisot (1841–1895), Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Alfred Sisley (1839–1899), Edgar Degas (1834–1917) and Camille Pissarro (1830–1903). They called their collective 'The Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, etc.' The term 'impressionists' was coined by a French art critic, Louis Leroy. In a scathing review ('The Exhibition of the Impressionists') published in the satirical newspaper *Le Charivari* on 25 April 1874, he used the term to disparage the style of the paintings on show. Having borrowed the word from the title of one of the works, *Impression: Sunrise* (1872) by Claude Monet, Leroy attacked the artists as 'painters of mere impressions'. Eight Impressionist exhibitions were held between 1874 and 1886.



Claude Monet, *Impression: Sunrise*, 1872, oil on canvas, 48 x 63 cm
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, France



Berthe Morisot, *Summer's Day*, 1879, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 75.2 cm
National Gallery, London, England



03

POINTILLISM

c.1886–1910

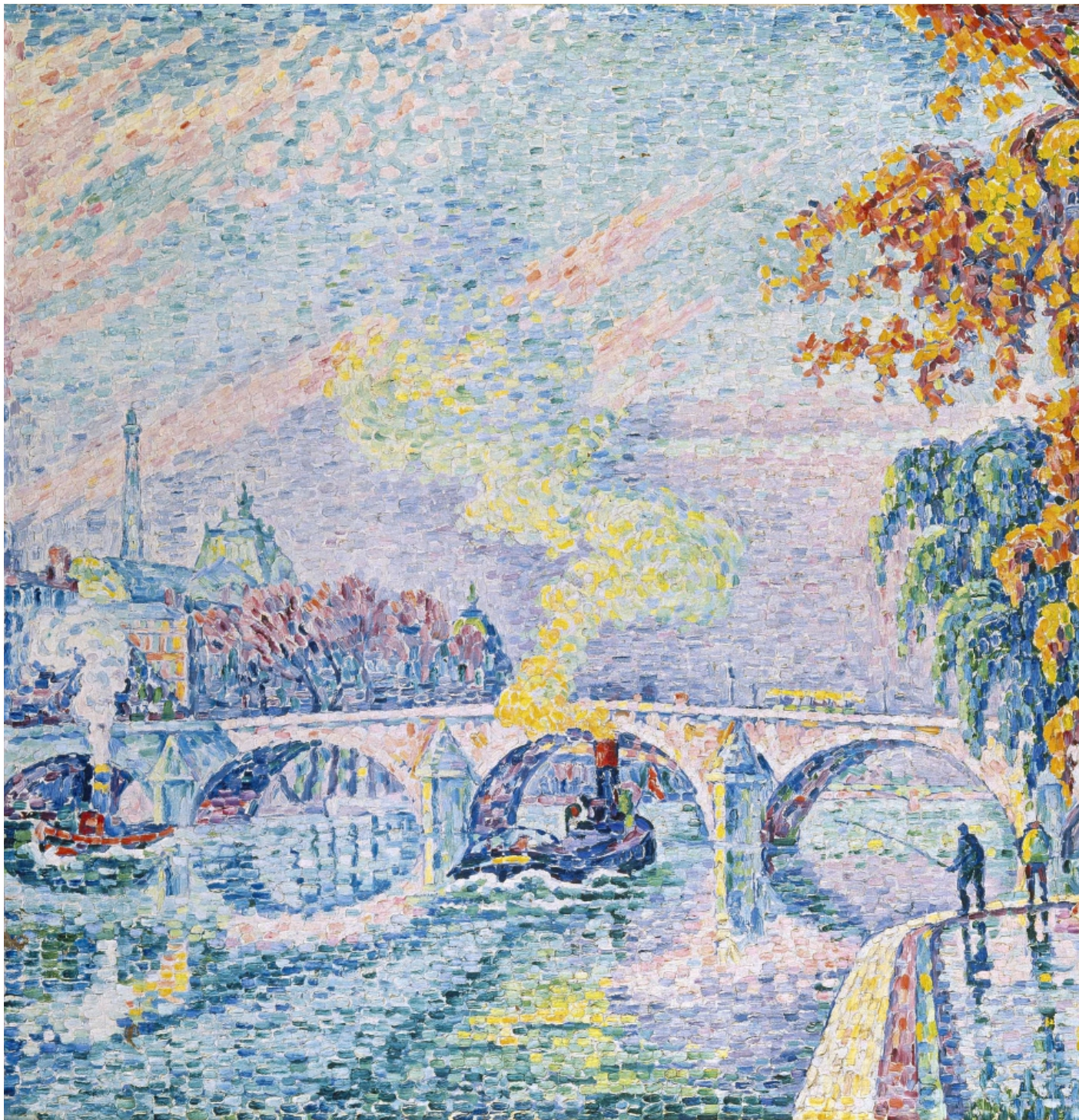
Pointillism is dated to the creation of a large-scale oil-on-canvas painting, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884–1886), which the French artist Georges Seurat (1859–1891) exhibited in 1886 at the final Impressionist exhibition in Paris. The painting depicts the Parisian bourgeoisie enjoying a pleasant afternoon on the banks of the Seine. The scene was typical of the 'Impressionist' painters, capturing the essence of a moment in time through colour and light. What set this painting apart was Seurat's use of a different technique, one based on a scientific approach to colour theory.

Drawing on the colour theory expounded by the French chemist Michel-Eugène Chevreul (1786–1889), Seurat applied simultaneous contrasts and complementary colours in his work, juxtaposing thousands of tiny dots of pure paint pigment. When viewed from a distance, these blurred in the spectator's eye into a harmonious blend of light, shade and colour harmony. The same effect can be seen in another Seurat masterpiece, *The Circus* (1890–1891). The science of colour theory was popular among artists and included reading American physicist Ogden Rood (1831–1902), whose *Modern Chromatics, with Applications to Art and Industry* (1879) divided colour into purity, luminosity and hue; the work was translated into French and German in the 1880s. Seurat's method was defined by the art critic Félix Fénélon as 'peinture au point' – effectively Pointillism.

Discussion of complementary colour separation, using line and colour to create emotional expression, was published in *Cercle Chromatique* (1889) by Charles Henry (1859–1926). Paintings using this theory were referred to by art critics as chromo-luminarism, 'Divisionism' and 'Neo-Impressionism'. Artist Paul Signac (1863–1935) embraced Seurat's methodology and worked with him to develop it, as seen in *Cassis. Cap Cànaille* (1889; private collection). Both Seurat and Signac preferred the term 'Divisionism'. Exhibition of *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* at the Salon des XX in Brussels in 1887 spread interest in Pointillism, notably in the art of Théo van Rysselberghe (1862–1926). In 1899 Signac published *From Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism*. Seurat's use of complementary colour led to the expressive art of Fauvism.



Georges Seurat, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, 1884–1886, oil on canvas, 207.5 x 308 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, USA





Paul Signac, *Pont Royal in Autumn, Paris*, 1920, Oil on canvas,
Christie's Images Ltd

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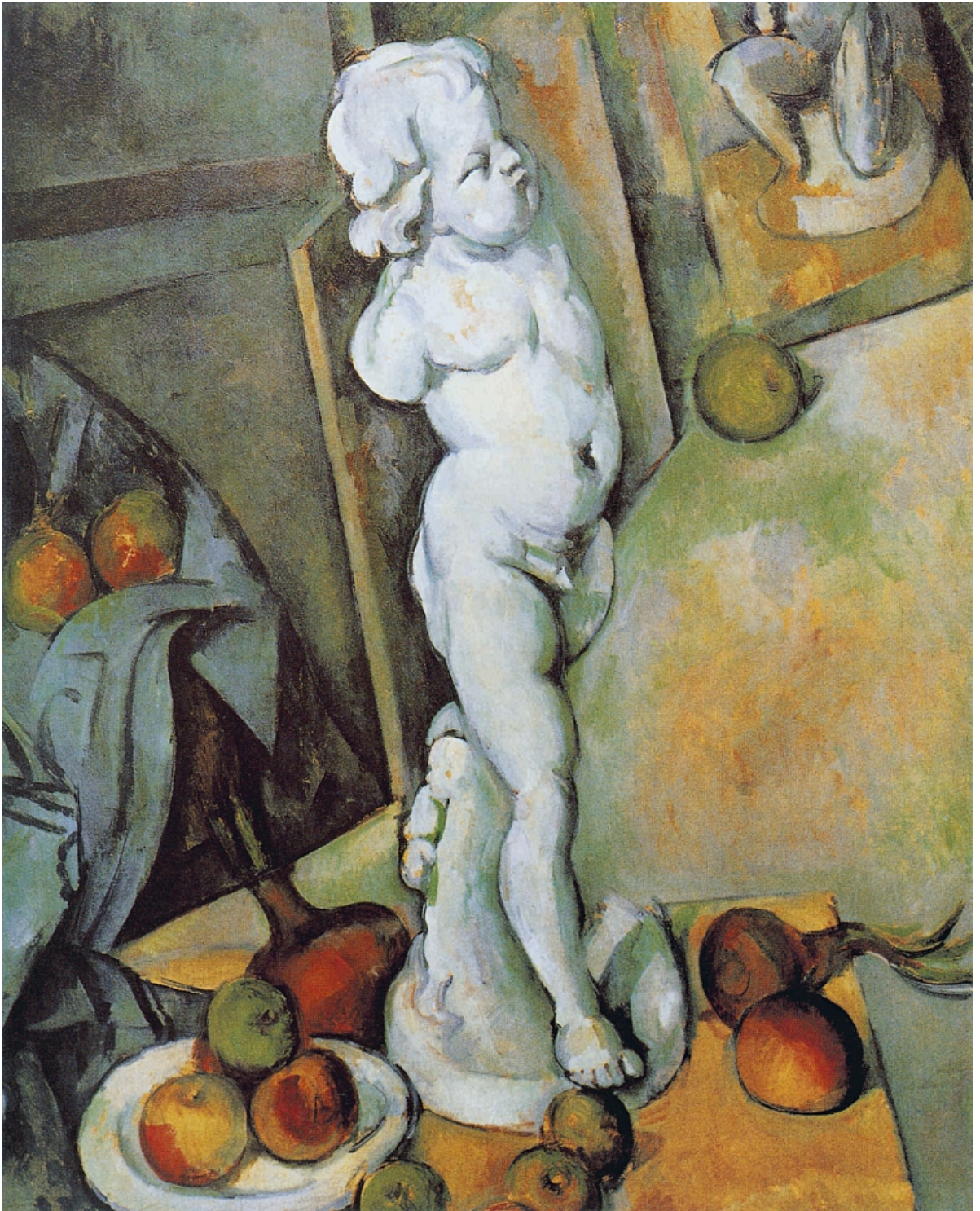
POST-IMPRESSIONISM

c.1880–1905

The term 'Post-Impressionism' was invented by English artist and art critic Roger Fry (1866–1934) for the title of an exhibition, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, held at the Grafton Galleries in London from 8 November 1910 until 15 January 1911. It resulted from his search for an expression to define the work of a group of artists who had moved on from Impressionism in about 1888. Fry had travelled to Paris to visit art dealers, to persuade them to lend artworks for the show; French dealers wanted to sell to the British market, and many of the artists Fry chose had not been exhibited in England. On display were paintings by 27 artists and sculptors showing 155 paintings – 41 by Paul Gauguin; 22 by Vincent van Gogh, including *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890); and 21 by Paul Cézanne, including *Bathers* (1898–1905) – plus 50 drawings, and more than 20 bronze or ceramic objects. Artists represented included Édouard Manet, Gauguin, Cézanne, van Gogh, Othon Friesz, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Paul Signac, Odilon Redon and Georges Seurat.

In the 38-page, unillustrated catalogue, Fry explained his views: 'The pictures collected together in the present exhibition are the work of a group of artists who cannot be defined by any single term ... Yet their own connection with Impressionism is extremely close.' He added that the 'Post-Impressionists' were concerned not with painting the impression of light, but in expressing emotion through colour. The exhibition received very harsh reviews from art critics but created interest among British art collectors, who embraced Post-Impressionist art at a time when many of the artists on display were dead. In his retrospective analysis Fry highlighted the changes that had taken place in French art from circa 1888 to 1905, a period in which artists such as Cézanne developed their own style. His *Still Life with Plaster Cupid* (1894), with its variation of perspective, pointed to forthcoming radical changes in art.

In the catalogue to the second Post-Impressionism exhibition, held in 1912, Fry stated that the artists' work showed that they wanted to create form, not imitate it. Since that time, the term 'Post-Impressionism' has been adopted to represent the paintings of artists after the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886 up until 1905.



Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Plaster Cupid*, 1894, oil on paper on board, 70.6 x 57.3 cm
The Courtauld Gallery, London, England