

# Colour in your reading

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## Publications and Promotions

The popular misconception that artists are temperamental, unconventional and lead bohemian lives make them appealing to include as colourful secondary characters in works of fiction such as Claude Monet in Jane Jakeman's **In the kingdom of mists**. Biographical novels based on the lives of artists such as the story of Vincent van Gogh in the well-known **Lust for life** by Irving Stone bring insight into their lives and times and introduce their contemporaries and influences on their work. Works of fiction with plots in which art, forgery and crime feature, for example, **Circles of deceit** by Nina Bawden, also include references to art and artists. Titles referring to artists and their work, as well as biographical titles such as **Monet by himself: paintings, drawings, pastels, letters** edited by Richard Kendall explores the visual art and creators of the rich legacy of masterpieces housed in a variety of museums and private collections across the globe.

The reader interested in art and inspired to improve his knowledge of artists and their work after finishing a book referring to a specific artist or period, will find the audiovisual medium suitable for this purpose. Viewing a video not only enables the library patron to see the actual artwork or visual material of a particular artist, but he might also find a discussion or analysis of individual works of art fascinating and enlightening.

The Central Film and Video Collection of the Library Service boasts an interesting collection of videos featuring the visual arts and their creators from a variety of periods, styles and movements.

## Impressionists

Impressionism was the major movement in nineteenth century art and has remained as the main starting-point for modern artistic theory. There have been few, if any, schools

of European art since the Impressionists that have not owed them a debt of one sort or another and as it remains one of the most popular period styles, a selection of interesting titles featuring Impressionist artists and their work is highlighted here.

The term impressionism is derived from a painting by Claude Monet in 1874, catalogued as **Impression sunrise**. The term is applied most frequently to paintings where the artist has aimed to capture the visual impression made by a scene. Impressionist painters are absorbed by the play of light on a scene they wish to portray.

Many artists can strictly speaking be called Impressionists during certain periods of their careers only, and some abandoned Impressionism for a time and later returned to it. The following selection includes videos featuring Impressionist painters and contemporaries whose work was influenced by Impressionism.

**Cézanne: the man and the mountain/** producer, Jakob Hausmann; director, Jochen Richter.

There are few modern masters who would not acknowledge their debt to the great French painter Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), yet during his lifetime he received little acclaim. Much of his later life was spent in his native Aix-en-Provence, to which he withdrew to concentrate on painting the landscape of the region, especially the mountain of Sainte-Victoire, of which he made over sixty studies. This film, written and narrated by Edwin Mullins, takes a special look at this important phase of his work. Shot on location in the south of France, with an actor representing Cézanne as he wanders about the countryside, it intercuts documentary footage and archival stills with a representative selection of the artist's paintings. As the commentary has it, besides being the culmination of Cézanne's achievement, these works can be regarded as the genesis of the art of the 20th century.

**Degas /** producer and director, Harry Rasky.

Though Edgar Degas (1834-1917) is usually regarded as one of the first and greatest of the Impressionists, he differed from his colleagues in the stress he laid on composition and drawing, and in the fact that he seldom worked out of doors. In his early years he painted many portraits, especially of members of his family, but later his main subject was contemporary Parisian life. Throughout his long career, he developed various themes, including racecourses, women ironing or bathing, the opera and, of course, his famous ballet dancers, all of which reveal his preoccupation with catching a definitive gesture. For the last twenty years of his life he was almost blind and, living a solitary existence, worked on wax sculptures that were posthumously cast in bronze. This programme presents an overview of the artist's fifty-two years of creative life, including his visits to Italy and the United States, and his friendships with Eduard Manet and Mary Cassatt.

**The irises /** producers Yves Leduc and Eric Michel; directors, Suzanne Gervais and Jacques Giraldeau.

In 1889, while hospitalised in an asylum in Provence, Vincent van Gogh painted one of his most famous works, **The irises**. A year later, penniless and virtually unknown, he committed suicide, having sold only one painting in his lifetime. One hundred years later, on 11 November, 1989, **The irises** was sold by auction at Sotheby's in New York for \$49 000 000, plus a commission of 10%, making it the highest market price in the history of art up to that time. In this film Van Gogh's painting is recreated in fast forward against an impressionistic soundscape that combines the natural sounds of rural Provence with the tension of the New York auction room, where a work created out of love and necessity became just another commodity. This short was originally part of Jacques Giraldeau's 1989 film **Le tableau noir**.

**Matisse, voyages /** director, Didier Baussey.

Henri Matisse (1869-1954) was one of the greatest and most influential artists of the twentieth century. For him colour and light consistently controlled all other components of his work and he stated that his primary aim was to explore the relationship between things. This film draws upon a wide range of works, including those from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in



New York, to trace the development of his art in various media and to illustrate how his travels to Tangiers, Tahiti and the United States were ultimately reflected in his work. Extracts from his **Notes of a painter** are incorporated into the commentary and the programme includes footage from Jean Vigo's **A propos de Nice**, Murnau and Flaherty's **Tabu** and from an early film on the artist by Francois Campaux. This work won an award at the International Art Film Festival in Paris.

**Pierre Bonnard: in search of pure colour** / director, Didier Baussy.

'The French painter Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) was one of the greatest colourists of modern art, famed for his interiors, landscapes and female nudes. In following Bonnard's lifelong search for 'pure colour', this film develops several themes. Taking a cue from a small collection of paintings and photographs that Bonnard had pinned to the wall of his attic studio, it examines the friendship and influence of fellow artists Gauguin, Cézanne, Seurat, Renoir and Matisse. Other sources of inspiration, in particular Japanese art and the intense light and colours of the Mediterranean, are also explored, while the personal and intimate side of the artist's life is reflected in his self-portraits, in his correspondence with Matisse, and in his private sketchbooks. Women played a major role in Bonnard's life and the programme shows a series of beautiful nudes that are among his greatest paintings. Shot largely on location in the south of France in the houses and landscape that are represented in his paintings, the film shows the way in which these elements were reflected in Bonnard's art, and charts the development of the artist's painting towards an almost abstract tribute to colour itself'.

**Point counterpoint: the life and work of George Seurat 1859-1891** / producer, Ann Turner.

This programme, written and narrated by David Thompson, explores the art of the French painter Georges Seurat (1859-1891), often regarded as the founder of Neo-impressionism. It discusses the environment into which he was born, describes his training at L'École des Beaux-Arts, talks about the influences on his work and, above all, illustrates the development of his unique style of painting in relation to his highly intellectual approach to his art. In the process it discusses the technique that became known as pointillism and spends considerable time analysing a number of key works, all of them carefully-structured studies that have a conscious grandeur and had a great influence on

other artists. Additional observations come from Henry Moore and Bridget Riley.

**The shock of the new. Part 3, The landscape of pleasure** / series producer and producer Lorna Pegram.

The third in a series of eight programmes in which Robert Hughes presents a survey of the art of the 20th century and evokes its spirit by showing how it interacted with the society from which it sprang. During the first half of the century, many French artists attempted, through their work, to reconcile man with his world and, especially, the pleasures accessible to his senses. Their art challenged that of the Impressionists and Hughes discusses the accomplishments of painters as diverse as Seurat, Monet, Cézanne, Gauguin and Braque. Some artists sought a kind of paradise on the Cote d'Azur, where Bonnard, Picasso and especially Matisse found inspiration for some of their best work. The emphasis on physical sensation was reflected in the sensuousness of their art, but their search for harmony between mind and body is a far cry from the image presented by the Mediterranean coast today.

**Tom Keating on Impressionism. Volume 1-3** / producer Richard Beighton; director, Richard Fawkes.

In 1976 Tom Keating was involved in a court case during which it transpired that he had painted over 2 000 pictures in the style of more than 150 artists. He did them, so he claimed, to express his opinion of the art establishment. Obviously a skilled copyist and restorer, he subsequently hosted a television series in which he explained and demonstrated the styles of Titian, Rembrandt, Turner, Constable and Degas. This was followed by another series on some of the Impressionists, in this case Monet and Renoir. He illustrates how these artists achieved their very recognisable effects, providing information about their lives and working methods as he goes along. In this series he presents the work of Monet and Renoir in the first volume, followed by one on Rousseau, Boudin, Pissarro and Manet, and another on Van Gogh and Cézanne.

**Vincent: the life and death of Vincent van Gogh** / producer, Tony Llewellyn-Jones; director, Paul Cox.

A look at the life, love

and heartbreaks of this talented genius who became the single most influential artist of modern history.

**The wolf at the door** / producer, and director, Henning Carlsen.

An account of the life and times of Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) who gave up his occupation as successful stockbroker to paint full time. He exhibited his works in the Impressionist exhibitions of 1880-1886.

Promote fiction as well as non-fiction titles and videos on artists and art in your library's collection in a display to entice readers to discover the great visual creations of the old masters, Impressionist or otherwise, that contribute to the canvass of civilization.

**References**

Osborne, H. **The Oxford companion to art.**- Oxford UP, 1970 (1993 printing).  
**The Thames and Hudson dictionary of art and artists.** -Rev ed. Thames, 1994.

*Note: Reviews by Freddy Ogterop, Film/Videol DVD Selector of the Western Cape Provincial Library Service.*

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