

Romantic painting

The focus on **nature** is one of the main features of Romantic painting. Plein air painting became popular and landscape painting emerged as a well established and respected genre. Artists committed to the close observation of the **landscape** and the **sky**. The human figure was emphasized as one with and a part of nature. By depicting nature's power and unpredictability, Romantic painters wanted to evoke a feeling of the **sublime**, a combination of terror and awe, in the viewer.

Born in the valley of the river Stour, **John Constable** (1776-1837) studied at the Royal Academy, London, but was essentially self-taught: he learnt by copying the great landscapists of the past, the 17th century Dutch in particular. Gradually he developed a highly personal approach to nature, aiming at communicating the feelings he felt in front of nature. His paintings, based on numerous **studies of the clouds**, try to capture the changing skies and effects of light. His method consisted in making en plein air preparatory sketches on the same subject (e.g. Salisbury Cathedral), in different seasons, hours of the day or weather conditions, which were then elaborated in his studio.

To many contemporaries his work looked unfinished, but in fact his method was nearest to that of **Impressionism**.

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) was a precociously talented artist. He entered the Royal Academy at 15, and travelled around Britain and on the continent making regular sketches and taking inspiration from what he saw (mountains and lakes in Switzerland, the Alps, Venice, etc.). His art is versatile: he excelled in water colours and oils, drawing, etching and topographical picturesque.

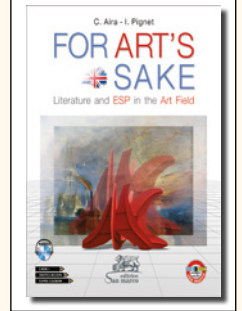
Turner developed **his own technique** and used **a variety of devices**: different coloured grounds, washes floated over wet paper, touches of body colour; sometimes he even scraped out light details with the handle of his brush or a knife. His paintings became more and more evanescent, full of luminous effects and ethereal delicacies of lemon, rose and blue, made the more effective by sharp touches of dark grey and red.

ACTIVITIES

Reading comprehension

1 Answer the following questions.

- | | |
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| 1 Who was Constable influenced by? | 5 What did Turner use to paint? |
| 2 What did he try to communicate? | 6 What techniques did he use? |
| 3 Where did he prefer painting? | 7 What are the characteristics of his paintings? |
| 4 How do the critics consider his method? | |



2 Look at Turner's painting and choose the correct alternative.

- 1 The subject of the painting is a **seascape/landscape**.
- 2 The objects present in the painting are a ship and a **boat/two ships**.
- 3 The colours used by Turner are **warm/cool**.
- 4 The two vessels painted are **well defined/not well defined**.
- 5 To convey the idea of the ships Turner uses **colours/precise lines**.
- 6 The two vessels are inscribed in a **circle/triangle**.
- 7 The scene takes place at **sunset/dawn**.
- 8 The brush-strokes are **light and loose/strong and precise**.
- 9 The viewer's eye is attracted by **white and yellow/blue and dark tones**.
- 10 This way of painting is used to convey **nostalgic and elusive/harsh and resentful feelings**.

3 Complete the text with the missing words given below in scrambled order.

colours – conditions – critic – distance – light – open – painting – palette – short – success

IMPRESSIONISM

The label 'Impressionism' was at first derisive and was attributed by a **1** in 1874 when Claude Monet exhibited his **2** Impression: Rising Sun. The Impressionists (Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, Camille Pissarro, Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas) worked in the **3** air, but they did not represent nature faithfully: they captured the effects of **4** on the surface in different light **5** They applied pure **6** directly on the canvas without mixing them on the **7** Their brush-strokes were **8** and without limits so that the colours seemed to mix together at a **9** giving a more truthful impression. Impressionist painters began to have substantial **10** in the 1880s thanks to the promotion of the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel and had an enormous impact on late 19th century and early 20th century painting.

Vocabulary

4 Match each of the following expressions with its definition.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Plein air painting 2 Topographical picturesque 3 Coloured ground 4 Body colour 5 Etching 6 To scrape out | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A A painting technique using opaque water-colour paint in which the pigments are bound with glue and the lighter tones contain white (gouache) B Primary coat of paint applied to the canvas prior to painting C Painting outside the studio, in the open D Strikingly vivid depiction of a place E To draw forcefully over a surface F The process of making pictures on a metal plate by the corrosive action of an acid, and then impressing it on paper |
|---|--|