

Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt

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The French Impressionists group was active about 1870-1885. There were four women members who are often overlooked - **BERTHE MORISOT, MARY CASSATT, MARIE BRACQUEMOND and EVA GONZALEZ**

BERTHE MORISOT (1841 – 1895)

Berthe Morisot was a French painter and a member of the Paris based circle of painters known as the Impressionists.

In 1864, Morisot exhibited for the first time in the highly esteemed *Salon de Paris*. Sponsored by the government and judged by Academicians, the Salon was the official, annual exhibition of the Académie des beaux-arts in Paris. Her work was selected for exhibition in six subsequent Salons until, in 1874, she joined the "rejected" Impressionists in the first of their own exhibitions, which included Mary Cassatt, Marie Braquemond, Eva Gonzalez, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Alfred Sisley. Morisot went on to participate in all but one of the following eight impressionist exhibitions, between 1874 and 1886. Morisot was married to Eugène Manet, the brother of her friend and colleague Édouard Manet.



VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mupxAAjAiWM> Berthe Morisot Founder of the Impressionists?

- *View of Paris from the Trocadero* by Berthe Morisot 1872
- This early work is one of the few fully realized landscape works Morisot painted. Completed just after the end of the Franco-Prussian War, the work depicts a view of Paris as a city finally at peace.



- The view is painted from the top of a hill locally known as the Trocadero. Beyond it stretches the Champ-de-Mars, site of the 1867 Exposition Universelle just five years before, which Manet had painted, famously, from nearly the same spot as Morisot does in this work.
- Édouard Manet *View of the 1867 Exposition Universelle*



By 1872 the site had been cleared of the massive exhibition buildings and the Champ-de-Mars appears barren and brown, as if its grass has died during the winter. This once-bustling portion of the city, whose fecund fields that showcased industry now lie fallow in Morisot's depictions, mirrors the sort of windswept silence of the larger panorama. The gray sky, opening slightly to a splash of blue at the very top of the canvas, hints at the tumult of the events of the previous five years - the exposition, the war, the fall of Napoleon III's Second Empire, and the Paris Commune - and the notion that the proverbial smoke is, perhaps, finally clearing from Paris in their collective aftermath.

In Berthe Morisot's painting, the three figures in the foreground are probably Morisot's sisters Yves and Edma, accompanied by Yves' daughter. They are separated from the cityscape beyond by a dark but porous fence, and the road on which they stand is a dusty beige, likely indicative of the way in which Morisot and her sisters, as bourgeois women, were excluded from the everyday life of the city and from many professional opportunities as artists. As the empty ground on the women's side of the fence suggests, this was not an appealing prospect. The painting gives no suggestion that the very ground of the Trocadero that the women stand on would be massively redeveloped just six years later for the 1878 Exposition Universelle, intended to demonstrate that France, and especially Paris, had recovered from the recent traumatic events.

Berthe Morisot *The Cradle* 1872

The Cradle is arguably Berthe Morisot's most famous painting. It depicts Morisot's sister Edma gazing down at her daughter Blanche, who is asleep in a cradle behind a gauzy veil. This relatively early work is the first example of Morisot's treatment of the theme of motherhood, which would become a recurring subject in her work, in part due to the era's social limitations placed on women and their ability to explore public places without chaperones. Although the painting was generally admired by critics when it was shown in the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874, Morisot failed to sell it and eventually decided to keep it within her family.



- Morisot's painting relies on two interlocking triangles, one encompassing the visible part of Edma's body and the other, slightly taller, formed from the veil, thereby creating a balanced composition which implies a

harmony and subconscious link between parent and child. Edma is drawing the translucent curtain closed around the cradle, protecting her daughter from the viewer and emphasizing the private nature of their relationship. The close cropping of the scene (the edges of the cradle itself are eliminated by Morisot's choice of framing) both suggests the privileged nature of the view we have to the scene and invites a comparison with photography, a medium which was familiar to the Impressionists.

- It is difficult to read Edma's expression, however, as there is no direct rapport between her and Blanche, whose eyes are closed. It has been suggested that Edma, who like Berthe painted extensively before her marriage to a naval officer in 1864, appears wistful, seemingly yearning for the time she spent as an artist before settling into the traditional, stable role of motherhood. Thus, just as the veil screens her daughter's form from our clear view, our impressions of her own thoughts remain shrouded in mystery.

VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=na05-xCZR8s> The Cradle Khan Academy

In the Wheatfield 1875 by Berthe Morisot

This painting depicts a scene in the village of Gennevilliers, just outside Paris, now a suburb of the French capital, where Morisot's husband's family, the Manets, owned property. The location is typical of that chosen by many Impressionist artists, such as Monet, both as a place to work and for their paintings' subject matter. The painting presents us with a comfortable visual composition of three horizontal zones of colour, punctuated by the figure of the young boy to the right of center. The wheat hints at the traditional farming character of the area, and immediately catches one's attention as it occupies the prime central space on the canvas.



- The ears of wheat, however, remain rather indistinct in keeping with Morisot's loose brushwork. Instead, Morisot renders the buildings in the background in slightly sharper detail, revealing in particular the smokestacks of the dirty, sooty factories on the horizon. They act as a reminder of the changing nature of the landscape from agrarian to increasingly industrial, a reminder of the growing city and the disappearance of the virginal rural past in the face of an increasingly modern future.
- The homely figure with his belongings slung over his shoulder who is emerging in the foreground from the edge of the wheat field, opposite the factories, arguably represents the archetypal rural villager attempting to escape this inevitable march of industrialization. We might therefore read Morisot's painting as a seductive representation of the countryside and a quiet protest against the transformation of modern life, a theme that is extremely popular among French painters from the Realists to the post-Impressionists.

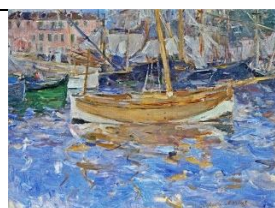
VIDEO https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ws4iEg_TeO0&t=55s Berthe Morisot – a love of nature

Young Girl in a Ball Gown by Berthe Morisot 1879

This depiction of an unknown young woman in a ball dress demonstrates the range of Morisot's work. It is highly dynamic, a sense created through the loosely defined floral background that is echoed in the trimmings of the woman's dress. This background is a key element of the work - the dense vegetation shuts out the external world and protects the young woman's youthful beauty and innocence. It also provides the viewer with a more intimate connection with the sitter, implying that most other viewers are excluded by the painting's enclosed background and tight angle. The lengthy, unkempt brushwork is typical of Morisot's work from the late 1870s, which created a "vibration of colour and light" previously unseen in her paintings.



- Morisot's work invites comparison with her fellow Impressionist Mary Cassatt's *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*, also painted in 1879. In Cassatt's painting, a similarly formally dressed woman is positioned in an upper-level box at the Paris Opera, a prime social venue for observing others and simultaneously being seen. Cassatt's work explores the liminal nature of public vs. private space and the opportunity for 19th-century women to command a public persona.
- The women in both of these paintings are seated, but while Cassatt's subject appears self-confident and relaxed in a clearly identified setting, Morisot's figure appears somewhat apprehensive and distracted, as if she is waiting for someone before departing the unknown event she is attending. The dynamic brushwork here arguably underscores the unclear nature of both her thoughts and the overall scene.



The Harbour at Nice by Berthe Morisot 1882

Although Morisot is frequently associated with interior or domestic scenes, her work spans a great variety of genres, like the other members of the Impressionist circle. This painting, from the height of the Impressionist era, depicts a cluster of boats docked in the port in Nice where Morisot and her family were wintering in 1881-82. It uses an unusually bright palette, and begs comparison with other seminal Impressionist works, including the movement's foundational work, Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (1872), which similarly takes a harbor scene as its subject matter.

- Like Monet, Morisot is concerned with the effects of natural light as it falls on the surfaces of the boats and the water. She has shifted the field of vision down from the predictable snapshot that would include more of the sky, the rooftops, and the pinnacles of the ships' masts. Instead, Morisot crops most of these elements out of the frame to concentrate on the contrast between the brown and white hull of the boat at the center and the water - which, through its reflection, cleverly reveals the fair weather in the blue sky that has been omitted from the opposite edge of the painting.
- Morisot's work here is also innovative as it forecasts that of the Post-Impressionists such as Cézanne and especially Seurat and van Gogh by its emphasis on the juxtaposition of the different regions of colour using abbreviated, loose brushwork to achieve a more luminous effect. As a result, the regions of strong colour - the water, the hulls, the masts, and even the pink building at the back left - appear as more brilliant, prominent elements within the work than they might with a smoother, more homogenous application of colour.

Reclining Nude Shepherdess by Berthe Morisot 1891

This painting is typical of Berthe Morisot's later work, which uses a bright color palette, marked by contrasts between orange, violet and green hues, in contrast to the muted range of colors that she preferred during the 1870s. This is one of several compositions from the early 1890s, which feature a reclining shepherdess, modeled on a young girl from a local village outside Paris. She posed her model nude except for a characteristic headdress, an unusual choice for a female artist at the time.








- The landscape behind the figure is depicted in a very loose, semi-representational style, which echoes contemporary work by artists such as Monet. Morisot's treatment of the nude figure, however, owes much more to the style of Renoir, whose female nudes Morisot admired and who visited Morisot and her family during this period, which might account for his influence here.
- The lines of the subject's body are compact and clearly defined, both through the use of flesh tones and in the shadows, which follow the figure's contours. This can particularly be seen in the curve of the back and the definition of the limbs. However, as some scholars have noted, there no parallel pose of the nude in either Renoir's own work nor in that of Degas, whose nudes Morisot was also known to have admired. Instead, it is a key example of the way that Morisot continuously remained in dialogue with current trends, producing her own style that did not merely develop in imitation of other artists.


Was Berthe Morisot a (or the) leading light with the Impressionists? Was she Manet's protégé or he her protégé?

Berthe Morisot (1841-1895) was a key member of the Impressionists (with paintings in all eight exhibitions) but could never persuade Manet to exhibit with them. She was the great-niece of the eminent Rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard (d. 1806) and had painting lessons from Corot (d.1875). From 1864 on she regularly exhibited landscapes at the Salon. Morisot was held in high regard many other painters - Renoir, Degas, Monet and Puvis de Chavannes, as well as such writers as the poet Mallarmé.

Berthe Morisot preferred light, tender colours, had a precise eye, and took an interest in the psychological state expressed by her models. A particularly fine use of colour distinguishes *At the Ball*, with its slightly asymmetrical structure and the young woman's attentive sideways look.


The Lake in the Bois de Boulogne was in the fifth Impressionist exhibition 1880. Intentionally sketchy in execution, it depicts two fashionable young women in a boat floating placidly on a lake. The sense of a visual impression that has been quickly captured on canvas is reinforced by the tiny detail of a horse-drawn carriage moving swiftly along the far shore. The women are professional models who appear in other works by Morisot.


				
<i>The Artist's Mother and Sister</i> 1870.	<i>At the Ball</i> 1875	<i>The Lake in the Bois de Boulogne</i> 1879 (NG)	<i>Girl on a Divan</i> 1885 (NG)	<i>Child Amongst the Roses</i> 1881

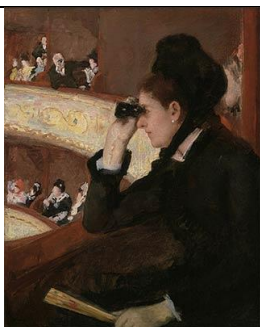
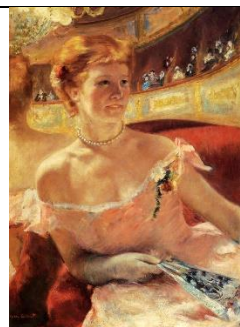
				
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<i>L'Enfant au Tablier Rouge</i>	<i>Grain field</i> 1870	<i>The Cheval-Glass</i> 1879 (a full-length mirror)	<i>The Children of Gabriel Thomas*</i> 1894	<i>Portrait of Madame Pontillon.</i> 1871
*Gabriel-Jules Thomas (1824-1905) was a French sculptor (of public buildings).				

MARY CASSATT (1844 - 1926)

<p>Mary Cassatt was an American painter and printmaker. She was born Pennsylvania but lived much of her adult life in France where she befriended Edgar Degas and exhibited with the Impressionists. Cassatt often created images of the social and private lives of women, with particular emphasis on the intimate bonds between mothers and children.</p>	
<p>She was one of "les quatre trois grandes dames" (the four three great ladies) of Impressionism alongside Marie Bracquemond, Berthe Morisot and Eva Gonzalez. Her work was in a similar to Edgar Degas, as they both sought to depict movement, light, and design in the most modern sense.</p>	

<p><i>Little Girl in Blue Armchair</i> by Mary Cassatt 1878</p> <p>In this important work of her mature career, Cassatt chose to portray a young girl alone in a domestic interior. The visible brushwork and the figure's informal pose are hallmarks of Impressionism; the asymmetrical composition, raised viewpoint, shallow space, and abrupt cropping of the scene all indicate the influence of Japanese art (?). Cassatt also brings her own astute observations to the construction of this image. The girl, who was a child of a friend of Degas, is seated in a sprawling, unselfconscious manner that reminds the viewer of her young age, and the way that she is dwarfed by the adult furniture around her evokes the awkwardness and isolation of certain stages of childhood.</p>	
<p>VIDEO https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CylE08nZ3a8 Mary Cassatt: An American Impressionist in Paris</p>	

<p><i>In the Loge</i> by Mary Cassatt 1878</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This canvas shows a stylish woman attending a daytime performance at the Comedie-Francaise, a famous theater in Paris. The woman's profile is set off against the red velvet and gilt decoration of the box seats behind her as she raises a pair of opera glasses to her eyes. The black of her dress is echoed in the clothing of other figures in the background, including a man several boxes down who regards her through his own glasses. Cassatt has perceptively illustrated the fact that the members of the well-dressed audience are putting on their own performances for one another. The main figure may be watching the stage or observing her fellow theatergoers while she herself becomes the subject of the man's gaze; meanwhile, the viewer, who is placed just beside the woman, takes in the entire scene. 		
<p>When Cassatt exhibited <i>In the Loge</i> in Boston in 1878, one critic praised it by writing that Cassatt's work "surpassed the strength of most men."</p> <p>The main figure may be watching the stage or observing her fellow theatergoers while she herself becomes the subject of the man's gaze; meanwhile, the viewer, who is placed just beside the woman, takes in the entire scene. When Cassatt exhibited <i>In the Loge</i> in Boston in 1878, one critic praised it by writing that Cassatt's work "surpassed the strength of most men."</p> <p><i>Woman with a Pearl Necklace</i> by Mary Cassatt 1879</p>		

Lydia Reading the Morning Paper 1879 by Mary Cassatt

Cassatt's older sister, Lydia, was one of the artist's favorite models. In this painting, Lydia is seated in profile, with her gown and her face painted in the same loose, feathery brushstrokes as the background and the armchair that locks her diagonally posed figure into the asymmetrical composition. The typically Impressionist palette of white, rose, light blues, and fresh green evokes a light-hearted mood, yet this is also a serious moment: in showing her subject reading a newspaper, Cassatt alludes to the importance of women's growing literacy in the 19th century, to their increasing involvement in society beyond the home, and to their awareness of current events as they began to fight for voting rights.

*A Woman and a Girl Driving* 1881 by Mary Cassatt

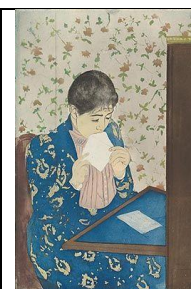
In addition to capturing the life of domestic interiors, theaters, and opera houses, Cassatt also trained her gaze on figures in Paris's parks and gardens, some of the few public spaces where respectable women could move freely in society. The models for this painting were Cassatt's sister, Lydia, and Degas's young niece. The setting is the Bois de Boulogne, a large, verdant park that was a popular meeting place and a scenic destination for pleasure rides. Cassatt homed in tightly on her subject, cropping the horse at the left side of the composition and the carriage at the right side and bottom.



The small girl, dressed in pale pink, sits quietly beside the woman who holds the reins; this contrast between youth and adulthood, experience and learning, is one of Cassatt's many moments of psychological observation. This work was also unusual for its time in its depiction of a well-bred woman performing a physically active (if still genteel) task.

The Letter 1891 by Mary Cassatt

- In April 1890, Cassatt attended an exhibition of Japanese colored woodcuts at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Following this event, she decided to create a series of ten prints showing the life of a modern-day woman. The completed series included scenes of women performing their toilettes, washing their children, having tea, and so on; this example shows a woman sealing a letter she has just written at her desk.
- The composition balances patterns (the wallpaper, the woman's dress) against solid areas of color (the vertical back of the desk, the paper of the letter and envelope) and brings the viewer close to the room's shallow space, where forced perspective is evident in the oddly skewed writing panel of the desk. These stylistic choices were influenced by traditional Japanese printmaking, yet the woman's garments and the other objects are all contemporary details of Cassatt's world.

*The Child's Bath* 1893 by Mary Cassatt

- In this intimately observed vignette of a woman bathing her young daughter, Cassatt again combines certain stylistic influences of Japanese art with the subject matter of her own milieu. The variety of patterns in this composition, including several floral designs and the bold stripes of the woman's dress, is united by a restrained palette of grays and mauves; the soft coloration allows the viewer to concentrate on the subject of the scene, the close relationship between mother and child.
- Their intimacy is demonstrated by their closely positioned faces and by the circle of touch that extends from the woman's hand on the child's foot to the child's hand on the woman's knee. In their shared absorption in their task, they are as closely related as the pitcher and bowl that they are using for this domestic ritual. In works such as this one, Cassatt evoked the traditional artistic subject matter of the Madonna and Child, making her imagery secular rather than religious.



Picture from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago by Mary Cassatt
Cassatt's largest work, a 20m by 4m mural, was painted for the "Women's Building" of the exposition.

- It was comprised of three panels: *Young Girls Pursuing Fame*; *Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge or Science*; and *Arts, Music, Dancing*. Unfortunately, the entire mural was destroyed at the close of the exposition and is only recorded in a few black-and-white photographs and one colored print of the central panel. This detail of *Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge or Science* provides a glimpse into Cassatt's influences and themes for this monumental work.
- The mural borrowed from sources as diverse as Italian Renaissance frescoes, Japanese prints, and Les Nabis (a Paris based "modern" art group) but once again Cassatt transformed these materials into something that was hers alone. By showing a community of women assisting



and supporting one another, she presented the audience of the Columbian Exposition with a very modern scene that symbolized female independence and progress on the verge of a new century in America.

The surviving canvas was part of the central panel in the mural below.



MARIE BRACQUEMOND (1840-1916)

Marie Bracquemond was a French Impressionist artist, who was described as one of "les quatre grandes dames" of Impressionism alongside Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt and Eva Gonzalez. Her frequent omission from books on artists is sometimes attributed to the efforts of her husband, Félix Bracquemond. Félix was a "traditional" artist. He respected his wife's talents as an artist but disagreed fervently with her adaptation of Impressionist techniques. She was born in Brittany.



At the young age of 17, she had a family portrait accepted at the Salon – the prestigious art exhibition which opened the door to becoming an "established" artist. She was guided by the "big name" Jacques Ingres whom she found some overwhelming. She wrote that "The severity of Monsieur Ingres frightened me... because he doubted the courage and perseverance of a woman in the field of painting... He would assign to them only the painting of flowers, of fruits, of still lifes, portraits and genre scenes" but she described by more friendly observers as "one of the most intelligent pupils in Ingres' studio". In 1869 she married Félix Bracquemond and they had one son.

				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marie Bracquemond at work • On the Terrace at Sèvres 1880 • Woman with an Umbrella 1880 • Artist's Son and Sister in the Garden at Sèvres 1890 • Under the Lamp 1887 				

VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqyzPDCvbJY> The work of Marie Bracquemond 1

VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3A6CQEvqfEs> The work of Marie Bracquemond 2

EVA GONZALÈS (1849-1883)

Eva Gonzalès was a French Impressionist painter. She was born in Paris and became introduced to sophisticated literary and art circles at an early age by her father, writer Emmanuel Gonzalès. In 1865, at age sixteen, Eva Gonzales began her professional training and art lessons in drawing from the society portraitist Charles Chaplin (not the famous one). Through her father's connections as a founding president of the Société des Gens de Lettres, she met a variety of members of the Parisian cultural elite, and from a young age was exposed to the new ideas surrounding art and literature at the time.

**Portrait of Eva Gonzalès by Edouard Manet 1870**

Eva Gonzalès was a pupil of the artist Édouard Manet. His portrait of her was well-received, but it led to her own work being over-shadowed and not judged fairly by the Paris art elite. In the portrait Manet depicts her working at an easel, yet her stiff posture and expensive dress are clearly unfit for creating artwork. This depiction of her likely caused some critics to perceive her simply as a young, decorative model who was working with an older established male painter.

VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-gG7X6Md3U>

Eva Gonzales compared with other artists. It is an art student's final year video



			
<i>Reading in the Forest</i> Eva Gonzalès 1880	<i>Afternoon Tea, or On the Terrace</i> Eva Gonzalès 1875	<i>La jeune élève (Portrait of Sister as Artist)</i> Eva Gonzalès 1872	<i>L'Indolence</i> Eva Gonzalès 1871
			
<i>Lady with a Fan</i> Eva Gonzalès 1869	<i>Morning Awakening</i> Eva Gonzalès 1876	<i>Le petit lever</i> Eva Gonzalès 1875	<i>Nounou avec enfant (Nanny with a child)</i> Eva Gonzalès 1877