

PLACE DU THEATRE FRANCAIS - Rain 1898
CAMILLE PISSARRO 18.19
G351

LIFE OF PISSARRO

Born Abraham Jacob Pizzarro in 1830 in St Thomas – now US Virgin Islands then a Danish colony – of Jewish Family but with an alternative French name – Camille.

Pissarro family from long line of Spanish and Portuguese conversos - Grandfather went from Portugal to Bordequx and his son Frederic went to Trading Center in St Thomas –People in St Thomas were known to allow free practice of Faith – home to small jewish trading community-

Fun Factoid :

. In 1826, Frederic married Rachel, his uncle's widow. The announcement in the St. Thomas Times declared the union "by license from His Most Gracious Majesty King Frederick VI, and according to the Israelitish ritual." But the editors had not checked their facts. The next day, the rabbis of St. Thomas sent a letter to the paper declaring that the wedding transpired "without the knowledge of the Rulers and Wardens of the synagogue, nor was the Ceremony performed according to the usual custom," since the Book of Leviticus prohibits sexual relations between a man and his aunt. In 1830, when Camille was born to this religiously-suspect union, he was officially registered at the town's synagogue, but it took three years after Camille's birth for the rabbis to accept his parents' marriage. This might explain why Frederic and Rachel sent Camille to a school that was part of the Moravian Church. When Frederic died, his will granted large and equal parts of his fortune to the local synagogue and church, no doubt a slap in the face of the rabbis.

In early 20s went to Venezuela where he took up painting with a friend.

Representational work – attempts at Photo realism.

Went to France in 1855 where he painted until his death in 1903. (73 years old)

Attended Academy Suisse. Trained in conservative style but in early 1870s rejects training and conventions to form new group and movement.

Married Julie Vellay the non Jewish helper to his mother's cook -

More than An IMpressionnist - considered Dean of the Impressionists

Only one to exhibit in all eight of the IMpressionnist exhibitions from 1874 to 1886. Quote from Cezanne : “As for old Pissarro , he was a father to me , a man to consult and something like the good Lord”

Most of Pissarro's paintings are of landscapes – but also laborers - making statement that Simple People are worthy of being painted – in keeping with his anarchist and libertarian views -

Politically involved in the Dreyfus affair which divided France between Antisemitic right wing and the liberal Left.

Impressionists dispersed during the Franco Prussian War of 1870 – Monet, Sisley and Pissarro both went to England to escape the war. Pissarro left 1500 paintings in his house which was occupied by the Germans – only 40 survived. (trampled under feet and destroyed) – In London they meet the Dealer Durand Ruel who becomes the greatest promoter of the Impressionists. Also discovered the work of Constable and Turner – which hastened the evolution of their technique.

1874 formation of the Society Anonyme des Artistes et Sculpteurs independants (Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Cezanne, Degas, Baziile, Guillaumin and Berthe Morisot)

Name of Impressionists given in article on April 25th in Le Charivari – Critic Leroy – after Monet painting of Impression Sunrise.

Renewal of vision – whole modern sensibility – but different visions of very dissimilar artists.

Theory of on the spot plein air – observation and reflection of sunlight - Pissarro remained close to Corot (Like Sisley) whereas Cezanne (younger) influenced by Romanticism and Degas by Classicism.

Influence of Corot on Pissarro – transitional greys and browns. Teacher and mentor. Plein air painting – love of painting country side

Some characteristics of Impressionism (apply in this painting)

Small brushstrokes, applied to reflections on water – extended to trees, houses, sky, hills and all elements of a landscape.

Colors becoming lighter, shadows coloured. In all colors of the spectrum – black banished. Harmonization and contrasts, according to law of complementary colors.

Coherence of vision – exaltation and vibration of contour, vigour of sketch, Pissarro described by critic Armand Silvestre as the “*most true and naïve of the Impressionists*” (*Monet = most skillful and most daring – Sisley the most harmonious and timid.*)

George Riviere : critic wrote in a little periodical called the *Impressions* “ *treating a subject for its colours and not for its subject itself is what distinguishes impressionists from other painters*”.

1876 Duranty : “ *Going from intuition to intuition they have gradually come to the decomposition of sunlight into its rays, its elements and to reconstructing its unity*”

by the general harmony of the iridescent colours which they spread on their canvases “

1877 peak year of Impressionism.

From 1883 onwards, after a decade of enduring contempt and producing masterpieces - at very moment that Impressionism was gaining recognition – it ceased to exist as a spontaneous ideal. Each of the Founders, each having reached maturity went his own way – only retaining founding cult of Nature and Liberty. Death of Manet (Father of Impressionism) in 1883. New Generation arising (Post Impressionists - Seurat, Van Gogh , Gauguin and Lautrec with colorism and symbolism) complete break up of the original group despite efforts of Durand Ruel to keep them together. Geographical dispersion in addition . Pissarro at Eragny, Monet at Giverny Cezanne at Aix) divergence in their aesthetic principles. Pissarro attracted to pointillism, After 1895 Pissarro regains creative vigour and returns to earlier concepts of Impressionism.

Notes on Our painting -

Great Ability of Pissarro to capture like Monet a specific scene at a particular moment

Painted in 1898 after Pissarro returns to earlier method of Impressionism after experimentation with Pointillism and Colorism.

View of a crowded Paris square seen from above from the second floor of a hotel . High viewpoint flattens the scene – Very photographic.

Shows Haussmanisation of Paris - Baron Haussmann (prefect of Paris between 18453 and 1870 during the reign of Napoleon III - His work destroyed much of the **medieval** city. It is estimated that he transformed 60% of Paris's buildings through planning reform . Notably, he redesigned the **Place de l'Étoile**, and created long avenues giving perspectives on monuments such as the **Arc de Triomphe** and the **Opera Garnier**. As seen at end of the Avenue)

Sense of spontaneity from random arrangement of figures. Arbitrary cutting off of figures at frame's also very photographic.

Subtle tonal values give strong sense of the atmosphere in Paris. Grey skies, very common in Paris from October to April .

Contrast between blurred schematic individuals and precision of the architectural details of the buildings.**Buildings Looks just like that nowadays**. But of course now there are cars and different fashions.

Very 2D despite the perspective of the Avenue leading up to the Opera (the building at the end of the Avenue to the left of the painting) general flatness

Very soft tonal colors

One of a series of paintings of the streets of Paris (more than 25 many of the same place in different weather) not painted outside but inside – Pissarro suffered from recurrent eye infection from 1895 to 1897 with caused him to stay inside to protect his eyesight.

<http://www.artilim.com/artist/pissarro-camille/place-du-theatre-francais-2/> (if working with the Ipad – put a copy of this in your file!)

What is weather in this painting ?

Emphasis on flickering light on the pavement, umbrellas , people hurrying in the rain, grey sky – water in the fountain – we can feel the weather and the dampness outside

What is the time of year? We don't know but if you look at the branch of the trees they are green no leaves but hint of new leaf in the colour? Lets say early spring – people are still bundled up.

Make sure viewers look close up at people – just sketch of shape – like the Renoir of the Piazza San Marco – pigeons are just dabs of colour –but we know they are pigeons – People in this are just sketched but we can see them moving...our brain interprets this – contrast with geometric strength and uniformity of buildings.

How does this painting make you feel? Nostalgia for Paris for me Love of the City ... intimate snapshot of people dashing around...

What do you hear when you look at this painting ? rain, horsedrawn carts, people , general bustle of a city .

Contrast this painting with the Notre Dame two paintings along by Maximilien Luce – more of a colourist but also an anarchist – social awareness very developed in both painters.

Early days friendship with Degas very close – but later after the Dreyfus affair – Degas sided (as did Cezanne) with the anti-Semitic movement – never spoke to Pissarro after that - didn't come to his funeral.

Interesting factoids

During his lifetime sold few paintings – by 2005 – selling for 2 to 4 million Dollars.

Camille Pissarro 's great grandson , Joachim Pissarro is currently Head Curator of Drawing and Painting at MOMA (NY). Great grand daughter is successful Painter in London (Lelia)