

Moving into Modern

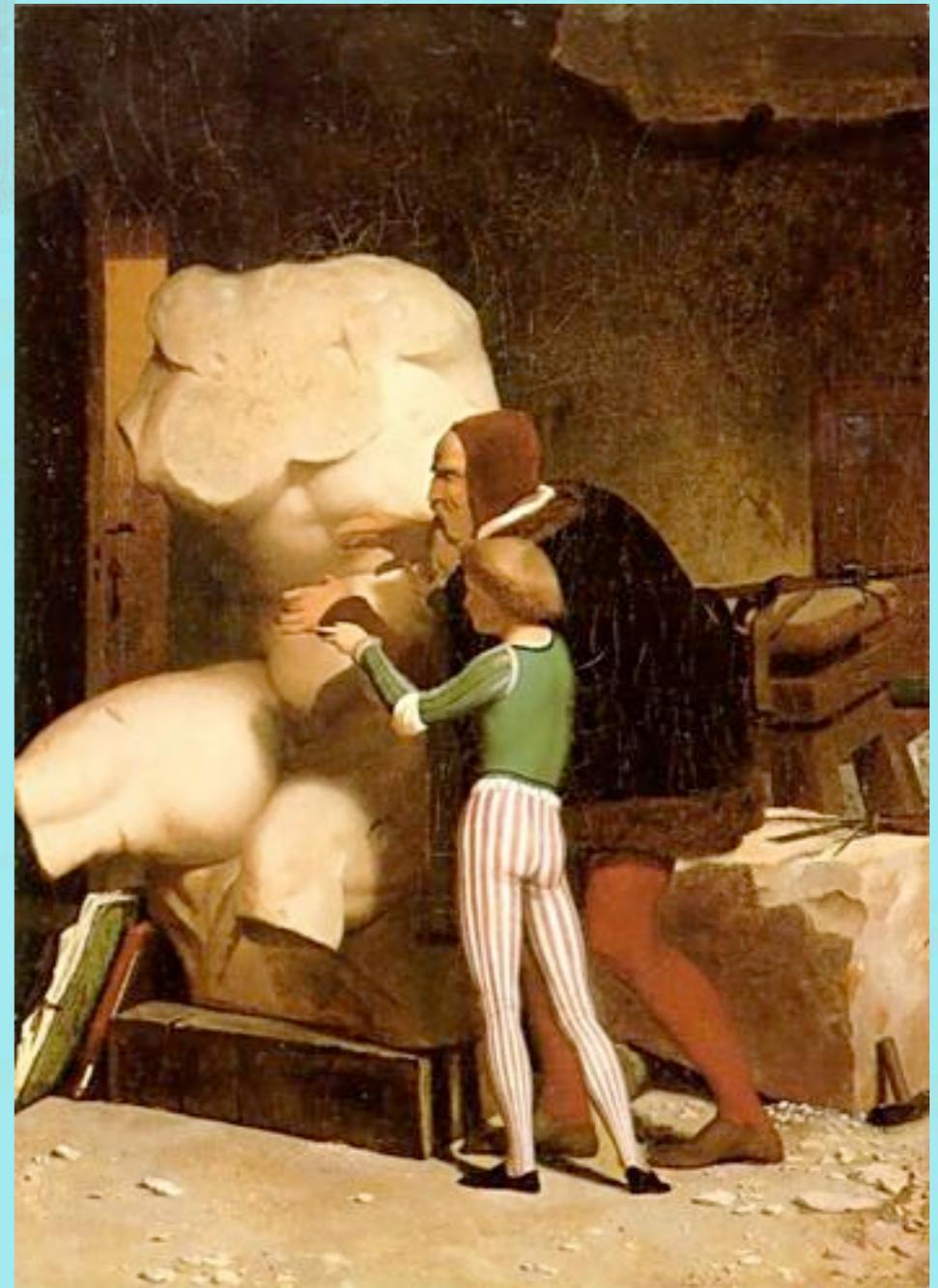
A Brief Explanation on the Beginning of Non-Objective Art

In the grade eleven course, we looked at the art of the Italian Renaissance. During the years of our study, we watched as the painters became more and more able to capture realistic human forms and emotions using their mediums. They became so adept at these creating figures that instead of realism, the artists began using idealism, trying to create the human form that was BETTER than realistically possible. They altered proportions and scale in order to achieve what they considered was better than perfection.



Michelangelo Buonarroti, David, c. 1501-1504 C.E. Marble, 17'

Artists throughout history got their start as apprentices, beginning at a very early age. They would sometimes live in the workshop or studio or with the artist themselves. Master artists would train their apprentices in their craft, often having them paint backgrounds or fill in areas of lesser importance. As you can imagine the skills that the young apprentices developed were great as they devoted their lives to art. Often times, the apprentices would eventually outshine the skills of their masters.

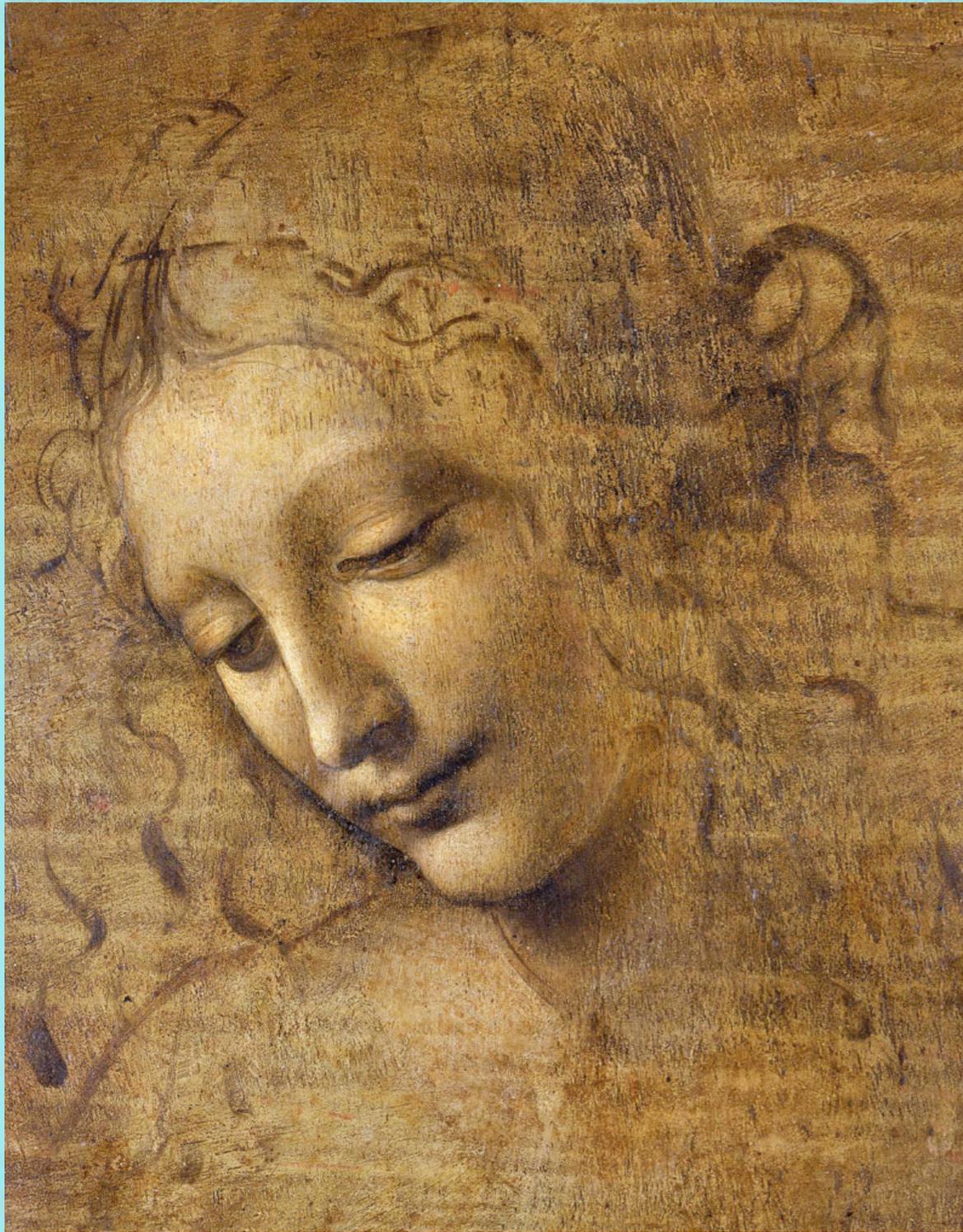


Jean-Léon Gérôme. Michelangelo In His Studio. c. 1890.
Oil on canvas.

Another thing to remember is that Artists of the past were commissioned by people to create their work. People who gave money to artists or supported them were called Patrons.

Patrons would tell artists what subject matter they wanted painted, how large it should be and where it would be placed. The artist did his best to create a work of art that would please his patron because if he didn't, the patron would withhold payment until the art suited his needs.

Very successful artists would have patrons who could fully support them, paying for their shelter, food and anything else. Some of the best patrons were wealthy business families and Clergy of the Catholic Church. The Pope being one of the most powerful patron of the arts.

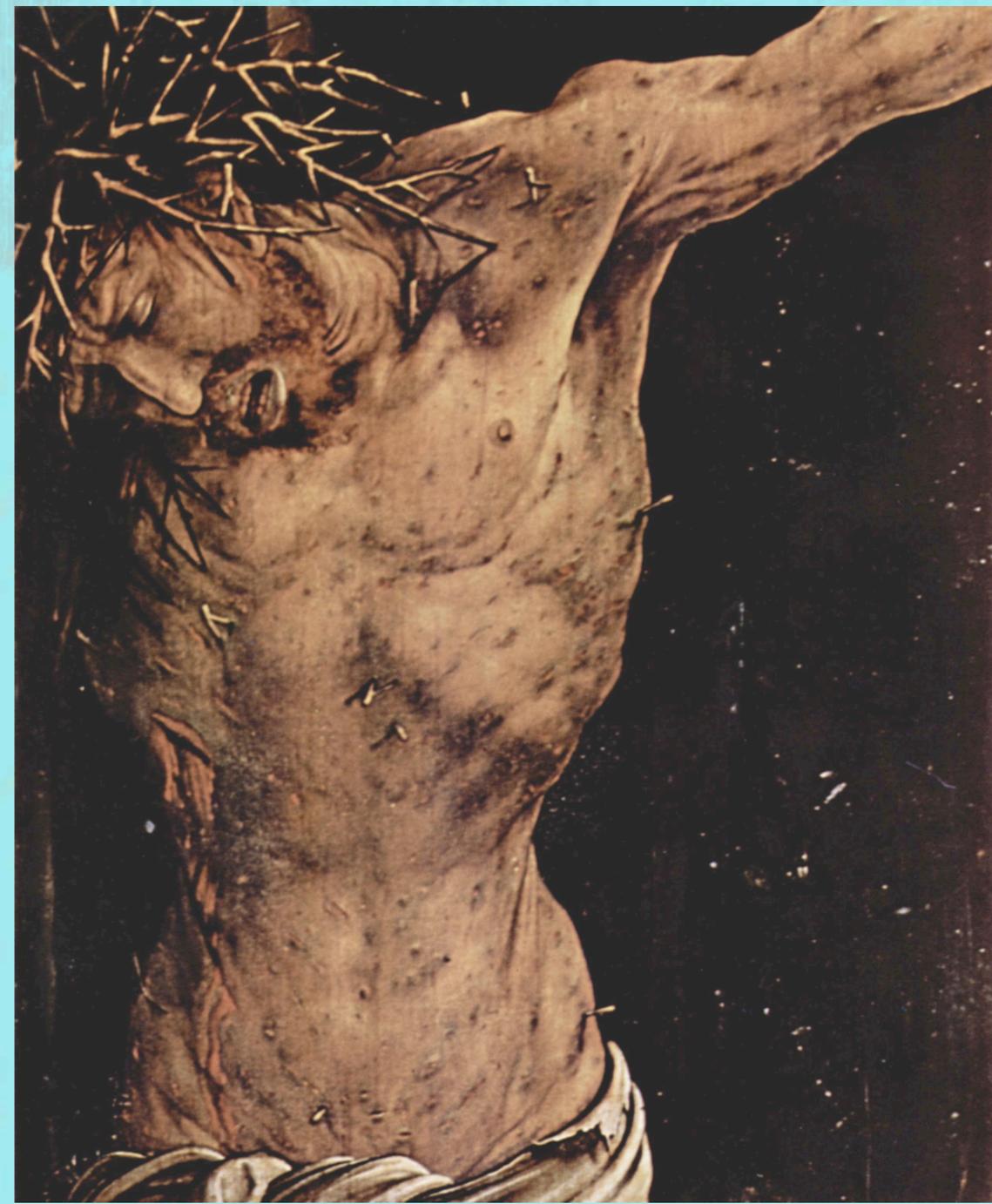


Leonardo Da Vinci. La Scapigliata (The Female Head). c. 1519. Sketch on paper.
21cm x 27cm.

As you can imagine, with all of these highly trained artists around, it was increasingly difficult to impress people with originality in art. Once Michelangelo created his David, every other rendition of David paled in comparison. What is an artist to do? With realistic and idealized figures no longer a 'tour de force', artists had to come up with new and different techniques to impress viewers and gain patronage. This is how art begins to grow and change in technique and style.

So throughout the next five hundred years, art undergoes many changes. Each different movement starts with a group of artists trying to do something unique, different and to move beyond the limit of what had been done or was the accepted standard. The Renaissance was the time of idealized figures, the Baroque period focused on strong use of light and emotion. In Northern Europe, the art became realistic to the point of the grotesque.

Eventually the twentieth century emerges and the very first glimpses of modern art are seen. As you will learn, they are very different than anything that had been done in the past



Matthias Grunewald. Crucifixion Detail. c. 1515. Oil on Wood.
269 x 307 cm

From the Renaissance (c.1400-1500's) until the dawn of the Twentieth Century (late 1800's) the subject matter of the artist could be classified under one of the following areas:

Religious subject matter- telling the stories of the Bible and church.

Portraiture- immortalizing a person or family

Historical subjects- art capturing events in history to pass along to future generations

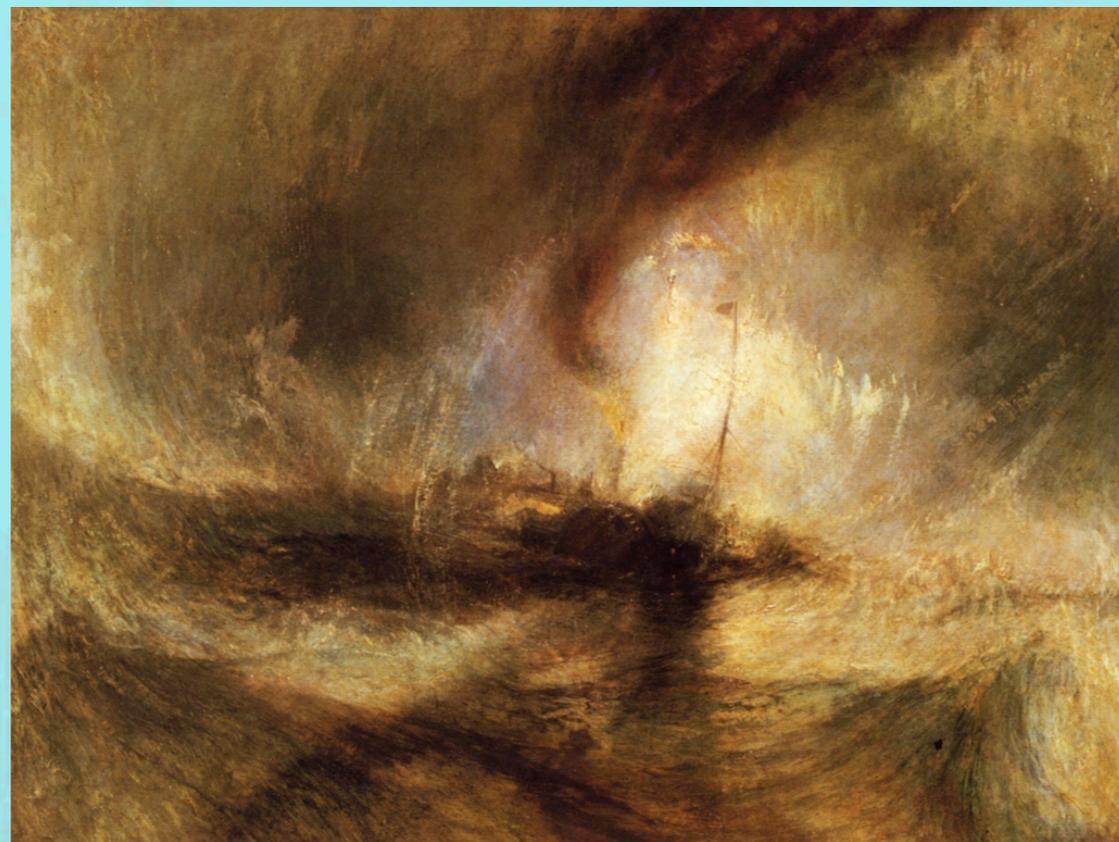
Myths, Folklore or Legend- passing on mythical stories of the past

Landscapes & Still-Life- capturing the beauty of nature



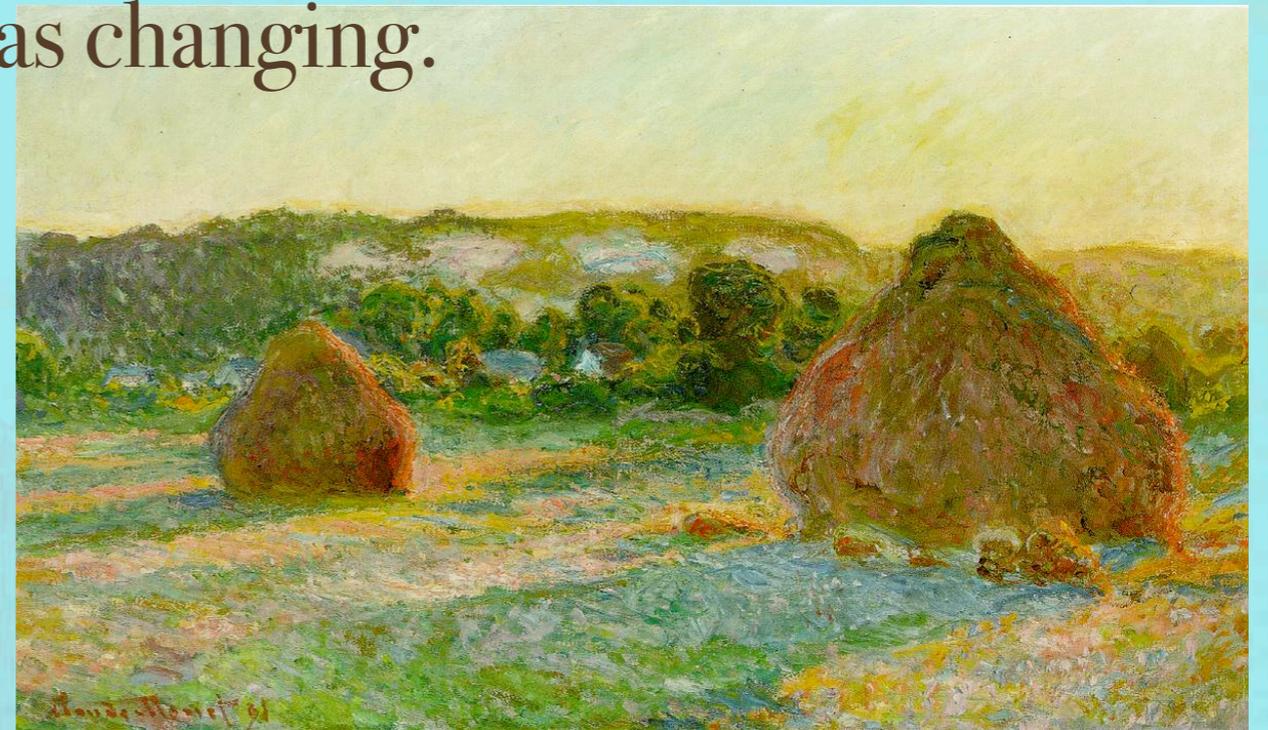
Albrecht Durer. Knight, Death, and the Devil. c.1513. Engraving.
95/8"x71/2"

At the very end of the 1800's a new style of art begins to emerge that tests the boundaries of traditional painting styles and blurs the subject matter. These new artists are more concerned with depicting the effects of light and atmosphere of landscapes and nature than capturing the subject itself. In doing so, they paved the way for modern artists, abstractions and non-objective art. Although Joseph M. W. Turner was one of the first to explore these themes around 1842, the Impressionists came on the scene in the 1880's and 90s and really became the focus of authors of a totally new style.



Joseph M.W. Turner, Snow Storm: Steamboat off a Harbor's Mouth. 1842.
Oil on canvas 36"x48"

The Impressionists are fairly well-known by name, if not by their work. Monet, Renoir, Degas, Rodin and more. They helped develop a new style of art where artists were no longer employed by Patrons. Another impact on the art was the introduction of modern photography. Since much of art was used to capture a moment in time and now there was a more accurate and inexpensive way to do that through photography, the purpose and role of art, itself, was changing.



Claude Monet. The Haystack, End of Summer, Giverny. 1891.
Oil on canvas



Franklin Carmichael. Mirror Lake, 1929. Watercolour on paper.

The Impressionists changed art because their focus was not on the subject matter of what they were painting. They focussed instead on the effects of light and atmosphere on the subject matter. In order to achieve this, Impressionists moved outside of the studio and into the landscapes themselves, painting outdoors (en plein air). To achieve their desired effects, impressionists had to use short, quick, brushstrokes, and myriad colours. In Canada, the Group of Seven, created the same type of art, capturing the rugged landscapes of our nation, while employing the same spontaneous, energetic technique.

The Impressionists were the first to drift away from traditional forms. Once they changed their focus to the light and atmosphere it freed up later artists to switch their focus as well. Art work became more and more personal, charged with expression and emotion. No longer answering to commissions and patrons, artists were free to communicate through their work. That very reason behind creating art drastically impacted the techniques used to create it and what was created. Post-Impressionists (the artists who emerged directly after Impressionism) had varied approaches to their art- some, such as Paul Cezanne, perfected a technique in which he used small flat patches of colour to represent his still-lives and landscapes. Vincent Van Gogh is renown for his short thick brush strokes of paint that expressed energy and emotion in his work.

Until the nineteenth century, artists used recognizable images in their works. This approach changed when artists began changing the appearance of the objects they were painting or drawing.

By the beginning of the twentieth century more and more artists were moving away from literal realism and putting their own stamp on their works by putting more emphasis on the elements and principles of art. (the formal qualities of what makes art, art.) Eventually some of these artists decided to completely remove the figures and other objects as subject matter and focus solely on the elements and principles creating work that has no distinguishable subject matter other than the elements and principles themselves.

This is the birth of modern art.



Wassily Kandinsky. Several Circles. 1926. Oil on Canvas. 140.3 x 140.7 cm