

Photography influence on impressionism

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Explain how the invention of photography affected painting in the 19th century, specifically Impressionism. Present examples from Impressionism to support your answer.

Impressionism is a movement in European art that began in France. It coincides with the invention of photography and the two phenomena are linked because they both have to do with the way that light is captured in art. In literature during the 19th century the people's taste had shifted towards more realistic stories about everyday people. Photographs also began to capture the instances that occurred in the streets and during informal gatherings of working people as well as the rich and famous. Art was becoming available to a wider range of the population.

We can see an increasing concern with mood, and the capturing of light and shade in the impressionist painters. A photographer like the inventor Daguerre could arrive in an indoor or outdoor location, set up his equipment, and capture the essence of a single event very quickly. The surroundings could be staged, as in traditional portrait paintings, or it could be “live”. Pictures of fleeting moments were at first shocking to the Parisian public but they soon grew to appreciate them. (Thompson, 2000, pp. 121-125) The café scenes of Renoir or the play of light on water of Manet was a different kind of image than the studio still life, or the idealized landscape of Romantic painters. The impressionists competed with the photographic form to portray authentic images, which captured the truth of human experience. What they looked for was modernity, and freshness, rather than stuffy tradition.

Reference.

Thomson, Belinda. *Impressionism: Origins, Practice, Reception*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000.