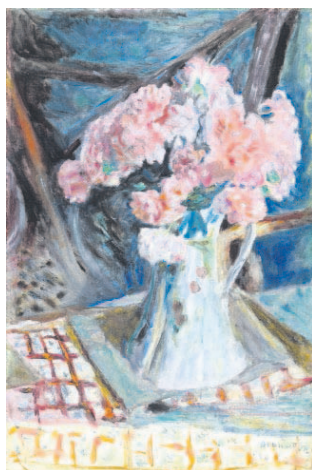




"Argenteuil," c. 1872, Claude Monet, French, 1840-1926, oil on canvas, 19 13/16 x 25 11/16 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection.



"Bouquet of Flowers," ca. 1926, Pierre Bonnard, French, 1867-1947, oil on canvas, 27 5/8 x 18 9/16 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection.



"Yacht Basin at Trouville-Deauville," probably 1895/1896, Louis Eugene Boudin, French, 1824-1898, oil on wood, 18 1/16 x 14 5/8 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection.



"Madame Monet and Her Son," 1874, Auguste Renoir, French, 1841-1919, oil on canvas, 19 13/16 x 26 3/4 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection.

'INTIMATE IMPRESSIONISM' ON DISPLAY AT THE SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

Story by DAVID CAMPICHE

The skies over Le Havre, France, may as well reflect our own Columbia-Pacific landscape: frequently pewter and Heron gray, and then, like a hot ember rising, the brilliant morning sun, a sun highlighting beach, ocean and headland. Is this not an artist's paradise?

Sometime around his 16th birthday, Claude Monet had just met the maverick painter Eugene Boudin, and Boudin would slowly persuade the young caricaturist to join him on painting exhibitions, en plein air. Monet was not particularly enthusiastic. He was clever and skilled at drawing and content to draw caricatures of the town's favorite citizens. But after Monet dabbed oil paint on a canvas for the first time, he became possessed. And the world of art can be forever thankful.

In a few years, the young Monet would spearhead a movement called Impressionism. In those two decades near the end of the 19th century, he would often rise hungry and then go to bed hungry. He suffered insults. Brought on by malnutrition, his first wife died of tuberculosis. Miraculously, in the next century, he would

spring like a fiery ember to international acclaim. He would subjectively buy and develop a huge garden at Giverny, and then paint that landscape over and over in bold passionate colors until the canvases became coveted for their daring brushstrokes and shimmering reflections. We know these paintings as the Water Lilies, and you can see a fine example at the Portland Art Museum.

Gathered in Montmartre, high on a hill overlooking Paris, in small smoky cafes, Monet plotted and talked non-stop painting and techniques with other sympathetic upstarts: Pierre Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, Edgar Degas and a few lesser-known painters. The group frequently included a woman, Berthe Morisot, influenced perhaps by her brother-in-law, Edouard Manet, another master of the Impressionistic brush stroke. But, say what you want, she stood on her own. Another comrade, Mary Cassatt, a woman and dear friend of Degas, established a distinction as one of the first female artists of the 20th century. The world of painting and an equal place for women would

forever be changed.

Even Vincent Van Gogh joined in. Have you ever wondered where Vincent's rich primary color originated? Where much of his genius was birthed? A great deal of that vision germinated in the small intimate cafes in Montmartre. There, talents were unleashed like freed prancing tigers.

Back at the seashore, Boudin insisted on painting out of doors. He painted what he saw. He painted with bright, rich color, and for the most part, without much black oil paint. That color quickly became verboten by his colleagues. Boudin painted life as he saw life, painted with his own two eyes. Years later, another misfit, Paul Cezanne, defined Monet as "just an eye." After finishing a glass of red wine, he expanded his assessment. "But what an eye," he declared.

Colors were richer than ever before. The brushstrokes were short, quick and jabby. Colors now came in tubes. Unlike the strenuous and arduous exercise of crushing lapis stone, or pounding out minerals or clay, paint was squeezed into rainbows of

color: Cadmium reds and yellow, orange, vermilion, Prussian and cerulean blues, crimson and ultramarine, often mixed, sometimes not, into spangles of bright brilliant hues.

Degas painted the dancers, horses and bathers; Toulouse Lautrec prostitutes and street waifs. Gustave Caillebotte was a young architect and painted strange new perspectives. He died in the Franco-Prussian War, and the world lost a genius. He was just 30 years old.

This assortment of artistic revolutionary artists are represented now through Jan. 10 at the Seattle Art Museum in the exhibit "Intimate Impressionism." We in the Pacific Northwest won't be offered many chances to see art like this until the next blood moon, only once every few decades.

Here in this handsome building on First Avenue just south of the Pike Street Market, 71 paintings enliven a rich history of modern art. Like Monet, feast your eyes on the miracles of creation, on nature. Imagine being shamed, as was Mary Cassatt, that "woman painter," disparagingly, words and thoughts

hurled at "such deviant behavior." Imagine local papers flinging insults at the Exhibition of Rejects (Salon des Refuses), the art exhibit offered by the reject Impressionists when their paintings were denied by the official Paris Salon. Imagine, like Van Gogh and others (Vincent sold one painting) yearning for some — any — recognition. Recognition that your art was vital and important, and true to nature — sometimes serene, sometimes dramatic, sometimes both. Even the trumpet of the word, "Impressionism" began as a slur.

Monet had traveled to London, and there, in deep penetrating fog, he painted the sun rising over the River Thames. Just an impression, like snapping a camera shutter. Remember, the camera imposed a new perspective on these artists. And of course, they imposed new standards on the artists of the 20th century. Even the Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollack admitted to being influenced by Monet's late (abstract?) paintings.

You must travel to Seattle and catch this show, catch it before the fleeting moment disappears.