The conflict of sensibility that became evident when, in the last chapter, we compared the architecture of Bernini to that of his contemporary Borromini—the one enormous in scale but classical in principle, the other extravagant in form and so inventive that it seems intentionally anticlassical—dominates the history of European art in the eighteenth century. In France, especially, anticlassical developments in Italian art were rejected. As early as 1665, Jean-Baptiste Colbert had invited Bernini to Paris to complete construction of the Louvre, the palace of King Louis XIV. But Louis considered Bernini’s plans too elaborate, and the Louvre’s new east facade finally was built in a highly classical style, based on the plan of a Roman temple (Fig. 651).

The classicism of Bernini’s colonnade for St. Peter’s in Rome has been fully developed here. All vestiges of Baroque sensuality have been banished in favor of a strict and linear classical line. At the center of the facade is a Roman temple from which wings of paired columns extend outward, each culminating in a form reminiscent of the Roman triumphal arch.

![Image of the Louvre, Paris](Fig. 651 Claude Perrault, with Louis Le Vau and Charles Lebrun, east facade of the Louvre, Paris, 1667–70. Photo: © Achim Bednorz, Koln.)
One of the architects of this new Louvre was Charles Lebrun, a court painter who had studied in Rome with the classical painter Nicolas Poussin. Poussin believed that the aim of painting was to represent the noblest human actions with absolute clarity. To this end, distracting elements—particularly color, but anything that appeals primarily to the senses—had to be suppressed. In Poussin’s *Landscape with St. John on Patmos* (Fig. 652), the small figure of St. John is depicted writing the *Revelations*. Not only do the architecture and the architectural ruins lend a sense of classical geometry to the scene, but even nature has been submitted to Poussin’s classicizing order. Notice, for instance, how the tree on the left bends just enough as it crosses the horizon to form a right angle with the slope of the distant mountain.

As head of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, Lebrun installed Poussin’s views as an official, royal style. By Lebrun’s standards, the greatest artists were the ancient Greeks and Romans, followed closely by Raphael and Poussin; the worst painters were the Flemish and Dutch, who not only “overemphasized” color and appealed to the senses, but also favored “lesser” genres, such as landscape and still life.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Lebrun’s hold on the French Academy was questioned by a large number of painters who championed the work of the great Flemish Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens over that of Poussin. Rubens, who had painted a cycle of 21 paintings celebrating the life of Marie de’ Medici, Louis XIV’s grandmother, was a painter of extravagant Baroque tastes. Where the design of Poussin’s *Landscape with St. John on Patmos* (see Fig. 652) is based on horizontal and vertical elements arranged parallel to the picture plane, Rubens’s forms in *The Disembarkation of Marie de’ Medici* (Fig. 653) are dispersed across a pair of receding diagonals. In this painting, which
depicts Marie’s arrival in France as the new wife of the French king, Henry IV, our point of view is not frontal and secure, as it is in the Poussin, but curiously low, perhaps even in the water. Poussin, in his design, focuses on his subject, St. John, who occupies the center of the painting, whereas Rubens creates a multiplicity of competing areas of interest. Most of all, Poussin’s style is defined by its linear clarity. Rubens’s work is painterly, dominated by a play of color, dramatic contrasts of light and dark, and sensuous, rising forms. Poussin is restrained, Rubens exuberant.

THE ROCOCO

With the death of Louis XIV in 1715, French life itself became exuberant. This was an age whose taste was formed by society women with real, if covert, political power, especially Louis XV’s mistress, Madame de Pompadour. The salons, gatherings held by particular hostesses on particular days of the week, were the social events of the day. A famous musician might appear at one salon, while artists and art lovers would always gather at Mme. Geoffrin’s on Mondays. A highly developed sense of wit, irony, and gossip was necessary to succeed in this society. So skilled was the repartee in the salons, that the most biting insult could be made to sound like the highest compliment. Sexual intrigue was not merely commonplace but expected. The age was obsessed with sensuality, and one can easily trace the origins of Fragonard’s Bathers (Fig. 654) back to the mermaids at the bottom of Rubens’s painting (see Fig. 653). Fragonard was Madame de Pompadour’s favorite painter, and the Bathers was designed to appeal to the tastes of the eighteenth-century French court.

It is the age of the Rococo, a word derived from the French rocaille, referring to the small stones and shells that decorate the interiors of grottos, the artificial caves popular in landscape design at the time. The Rococo was deeply indebted to the Baroque sensibility of Rubens, as Fragonard’s Bathers demonstrates. It was, in some sense, the Baroque eroticized, conceived to
lend an erotic tone to its environment. Vigée-Lebrun’s portrait of The Duchess of Polignac (Fig. 655) combines in exquisite fashion all of the tools of the Baroque sensibility, from Rembrandt’s dramatic lighting to Rubens’s sensual curves and, given the musical score in the Duchess’s hand, even Bernini’s sense of the theatrical moment.

CHINA AND EUROPE: CROSS-CULTURAL CONTACT

Ever since the first Portuguese trading vessels had arrived in China in 1514, Chinese goods—porcelain, wallpapers, carved ivory fans, boxes, lacquerware, and patterned silks—flooded European markets. By 1715, every major European trading nation had an office in Canton, and Europeans themselves developed a taste for a style of art that became known as chinoiserie (meaning “all things Chinese”). Blue-and-white porcelain ware—“china,” as it came to be known in the West—was especially desirable, and before long ceramists at Meissen, near Dresden, Germany, had learned to make their own porcelain. This allowed for almost unbounded imitation and sale of Chinese designs on European-manufactured ceramic wares. Even a Rococo painter like François Boucher imitated the blue-on-white Chinese style in oil paint (Fig. 656). The scene depicts a Chinese man bending to kiss the hand of his lady, who sits with her parasol beneath a statue, not of Venus (as might be appropriate in a European setting), but of Buddha. A blue-on-white Chinese vase of the kind Boucher is imitating rests on a small platform behind the lady, and the whole scene is set in an elaborate Rococo frame.

Since 1644, China had been ruled by Qing (“clear” or “pure”) Manchus, or Manchurians, who had invaded China from the north and captured Beijing. By 1680, the Qing rulers had summoned

Fig. 655 Marie-Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, The Duchess of Polignac, 1783. Oil on canvas, 38 7/8 × 28 in. © The National Trust Waddesdon Manor, England. Bridgeman-Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 656 François Boucher, Le Chinois galant, 1742. Oil on canvas, 41 × 57 in. The David Collection, inv. B275. Photo: Pernille Klemp.
many Chinese artists to the Beijing court, and the imperial collection of art grew to enormous size. (Today the collection is divided between the National Palace Museum in Taipei and the Palace Museum in Beijing.) While many court artists modeled their work on the earlier masterpieces collected by the Qing emperors, others turned to the study of Western techniques. In the port cities of Yangzhou and Guangzhou, Chinese artists, creating images to meet the demand of European traders, mastered the art of perspective. Especially popular were aerial views of cities (Fig. 657).

Perspectival space appealed to the Chinese audience because it was both novel and exotic. The Western audience, used to perspective, found the views of urban China exotic in themselves.

### NEOCLASSICISM

Despite the Rococo sensibility of the age, the seventeenth-century French taste for the classical style that Lebrun had championed did not disappear. When Herculaneum and Pompeii were rediscovered, in 1738 and 1748, respectively, interest in Greek and Roman antiquity revived as well. The discovery fueled an increasing tendency among the French to view the Rococo style as symptomatic of a widespread cultural decadence, epitomized by the luxurious lifestyle of the aristocracy. The discovery also caused people to identify instead with the public-minded values of Greek and Roman heroes, who placed moral virtue, patriotic self-sacrifice, and “right action” above all else. A new classicism—a Neoclassicism—soon supplanted the Rococo.

Virtue is, in fact, the subject of much Neoclassical art—a subject matter distinctly at odds with the early Rococo sensibility. Women are no longer seen cavorting like mermaids, or even luxuriously dressed like the Duchess of Polignac. In Angelica Kauffmann’s *Cornelia, Pointing to Her Children as Her Treasures* (Fig. 658), Cornelia demonstrates her Neoclassical virtue by declaring her absolute devotion to her family, and, by extension, to the state. Her virtue is reinforced by her clothing, particularly the simple lines of her bodice.
The most accomplished of the Neoclassical painters was Jacques Louis David, whose Death of Socrates was discussed in Chapter 4 (see Figs. 84 and 85). David took an active role in the French Revolution in 1789, recognizing as an expression of true civic duty and virtue the desire to overthrow the irresponsible monarchy that had, for two centuries at least, squandered France’s wealth. His Death of Marat (Fig. 659) celebrates a fallen hero of the Revolution. Slain in his bath by a Monarchist—a sympathizer with the overthrown king—Marat is posed by David as Christ is traditionally posed in the Deposition (compare, for instance, Rogier’s Deposition, see Fig. 618), his arm draping over the edge of the tub. A dramatic Caravaggesque light falls over the revolutionary hero, his virtue embodied in the Neoclassical simplicity of David’s design.

The same sensibility informs the Neoclassical architecture of Thomas Jefferson. For Jefferson, the Greek orders embodied democratic ideals, possessing not only a sense of order and harmony but also a moral perfection deriving from measure and proportion. He utilized these themes in the facade of his own home at Monticello (Fig. 660). The colonnade thus came to be associated with the ideal state, and, in the United States, Jefferson’s Neoclassical architecture became an almost official Federal style.

Neoclassicism found official favor in France with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1799, Napoleon brought the uncertain years that followed the French Revolution to an end when he was declared First Consul of the French Republic. As this title suggests, Napoleon’s government was modeled on Roman precedents. He established a centralized government and instituted a uniform legal system. He invaded Italy and brought home with him many examples of classical sculpture, including the Laocoön (see Fig. 574) and the Apollo Belvedere (see Fig. 35). In Paris itself, he built triumphal Roman arches, including the famous Arc de Triomphe, a column modeled on Trajan’s in Rome, and a church, La Madeleine, modeled after the temples of the first Roman emperors. In 1804, Napoleon was himself crowned emperor...
of the largest European empire since Charlemagne’s in the ninth century.

Neoclassical art was used to legitimate this empire. David saw Napoleon as the salvation of France (so chaotic had Revolutionary France been that David himself had been imprisoned, a sure sign, he thought, of the confusion of the day), and he received important commissions from the new emperor. But it was David’s finest pupil, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, who became the champion of Neoclassical ideals in the nineteenth century. In 1806, he was awarded the Prix de Rome. He then departed for Italy, where he remained for 18 years, studying Raphael in particular and periodically sending new work back to France.

Ingres’s Neoclassicism was “looser” than his master’s. Looking at a painting such as the Grande Odalisque (Fig. 661), with its long, gently curving limbs, we are more clearly in the world of Mannerist painting than that of the Greek nude. Ingres’s color is as rich as Bronzino’s in The Exposure of Luxury (see Fig. 640), and, in fact, his theme is much the same. His odalisque—an “odalisque” is a harem slave—seems more decadent than not, deeply involved in a world of satins, peacock feathers, and, at the right, hashish. Certainly, it is not easy to detect much of the high moral tone of earlier Neoclassical art.

Beside Eugène Delacroix’s own Odalisque (Fig. 662), Ingres’s classicism becomes more readily apparent. To Ingres, Delacroix, who was a generation younger, represented a dangerous and barbaric Neo-Baroque sensibility in contrast to his own Neoclassicism.

Ingres and Delacroix became rivals. Each had his critical champions, each his students and fol-
lowers. For Ingres, drawing was everything. Therefore, his painting was, above all, linear in style. Delacroix, however, was fascinated by the texture of paint itself, and in his painterly attack upon the canvas, we begin to sense the artist’s own passionate temperament. Viewed beside the Delacroix, the pose of the odalisque in Ingres’s painting is positively conservative. In fact, Ingres felt he was upholding traditional values in the face of the onslaught represented by the uncontrolled individualism of his rival.

ROMANTICISM

We have come to call the kind of art exemplified by Delacroix Romanticism. At the heart of this style is the belief that reality is a function of each individual’s singular point of view, and that the artist’s task is to reveal that point of view. Individualism reigned supreme in Romantic art. For this reason, Romanticism sometimes seems to have as many styles as it has artists. What unifies the movement is more a philosophical affirmation of the power of the individual mind than a set of formal principles.

One of the most individual of the Romantics was the Spanish painter Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. After a serious illness in 1792, Goya turned away from a late Rococo style and began to produce a series of paintings depicting inmates of a lunatic asylum and a hospital for wounded soldiers. When Napoleon invaded Spain in 1808, Goya recorded the atrocities both in paintings and in a series of etchings, The Disasters of War, which remained unpublished until long after his death. His last, so-called “Black Paintings” were brutal interpretations of mythological scenes that revealed a universe operating outside the bounds of reason, a world of imagination unchecked by a moral force of any kind. In one of these, Saturn Devouring One of His Sons (Fig. 663), which was painted originally on the wall of the dining room in
Goya’s home, Saturn is allegorically a figure for Time, which consumes us all. But it is the incestuous cannibalism of the scene, the terrible monstrosity of the vision itself, that tells us of Goya’s own despair. The inevitable conclusion is that, for Goya, the world was a place full of terror, violence, and horror.

This sense of the terrible is by no means unique to Goya. Compare, for instance, Théodore Géricault’s *Raft of the Medusa* (Fig. 664). On July 2, 1816, the French frigate *Medusa* was wrecked on a reef off the African coast. The overloaded ship had been carrying soldiers and settlers to Senegal. The captain and other senior officers escaped in lifeboats, leaving 150 behind to fend for themselves on a makeshift wooden raft. After 12 harrowing days on the raft, only 15 survived. The incident infuriated Géricault. The captain’s appointment had depended on his connections with the French monarchy, which had been restored after Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo. Here, therefore, was clear evidence of the nobility’s decadence. To illustrate his beliefs and feelings, Géricault planned a giant canvas, showing the raft just at the moment that the rescue ship, the *Argus*, was spotted on the horizon. He went to the Normandy coast to study the movement of water. He visited hospitals and morgues to study the effects of illness and death on the human body. He had a model of the raft constructed in his studio and arranged wax figures upon it. His student, Delacroix, posed face down for the central nude. The final painting positions the raft on a diagonal axis, creating two contradictory pyramidal points of tension. On the left, the mast not only suggests the crucifix but also reveals that the raft is sailing away from its rescuers, while on the right, the survivors climb desperately in their attempt to be seen. Géricault’s horrifying picture, exhibited only a few months after it was conceived, fueled the Romantic movement with the passion of its feelings.

In his own journal, Delacroix wrote, “[The poet] Baudelaire ... says that I bring back to painting ... the feeling which delights in the terrible. He is right.” It was in the face of the sublime that this enjoyment of the terrible was most often experienced. Theories of the *sublime* had first appeared in the seventeenth century, most notably in Edmund Burke’s *Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756). For Burke, the sublime was a feeling of awe experienced before things that escaped the ability of the human mind to comprehend them—mountains,
chasms, storms, and catastrophes. The sublime exceeded reason; it presented viewers with something vaster than themselves, thereby making them realize their smallness, even their insignificance, in the face of the infinite. The sublime evokes the awe-inspiring forces of Nature, as opposed to the Beautiful, which is associated with Nature at her most harmonious and tranquil. A pastoral landscape may be beautiful; a vast mountain range, sublime.

No painting of the period more fully captures the terrifying prospect of the sublime than Caspar David Friedrich’s Monk by the Sea (Fig. 665). It indicates just how thoroughly the experience of the infinite—that is, the experience of God—can be found in Nature. But the God faced by this solitary monk is by no means benign. The infinite becomes, in this painting, a vast, dark, and lonely space—so ominous that it must surely test the monk’s faith. The real terror of this painting lies in its sense that the eternal space stretching before this man of faith may not be salvation but, instead, a meaningless void.

American landscape painters such as Albert Bierstadt (see Fig. 30), Thomas Moran (see Fig. 258), and Frederic Church continually sought to capture the sublime in their paintings of the vast spaces of the American West. Church even traveled to South America to bring evidence of its exotic and remarkable landscapes to viewers in America and Europe. His painting The Heart of the Andes (Fig. 666) was first exhibited in 1859 in New York in a one-picture, paid-admission showing. The dramatic appeal of the piece was heightened by brightly

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**Fig. 665** Caspar David Friedrich, Monk by the Sea, 1809–10.
Oil on canvas, 42 1/2 x 67 in. Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin.
Joerg P. Anders / Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

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lighting the picture and leaving the remainder of the room dark, and by framing it so that it seemed to be a window in a grand house looking out upon this very scene. Deemed by critics “a truly religious work of art,” it was a stunning success. The insignificance of humanity can be felt in the minuteness of the two figures, barely visible in this reproduction, praying at the cross in the lower left, but the scene is by no means merely sublime. It is also beautiful and pastoral in feeling, and, in the careful rendering of plant life, it is almost scientific in its fidelity to nature.

The Romantic painter was, in fact, interested in much more than the sublime. A Romantic artist might render a beautiful scene as well as a sublime one, or one so pastoral in feeling that it recalls, often deliberately, Claude’s soft Italian landscapes (see Fig. 649). It was the love of Nature itself that the artist sought to convey. In Nature, the American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson believed, one could read eternity. It was a literal “sign” for the divine spirit.

The painter, then, had to decide whether to depict the world with absolute fidelity or to reconstruct imaginatively a more perfect reality out of a series of accurate observations. As one writer put it at the time, “A distinction must be made . . . between the elements generated by . . . direct observation, and those which spring from the boundless depth of feeling and from the force of idealizing mental power.” As we have seen in our discussion of painting in Chapter 11, the idealizing force of the imagination in painting distinguished it from mere copywork. Nevertheless, and though Church’s The Heart of the Andes is an idealist compilation of diverse scenes, in many of its details—in, for instance, the accuracy with which the foliage has been rendered—it depends on direct observation.

Fig. 666 Frederic Edwin Church, The Heart of the Andes, 1859.
Photo © 1979 Metropolitan Museum of Art.
REALISM

Church’s accurate rendering of foliage reflects the importance of scientific, empirical observation to the nineteenth century as a whole, an urge for realism that runs counter to, and exists alongside, the imaginative and idealist tendencies of the Romantic sensibility. If we compare two history paintings from the first half of the nineteenth century, we can see how the idealizing tendency of the Romantic sensibility gradually faded away. Faced with the reality of war, idealism seemed absurd. Eugène Delacroix’s _Liberty Leading the People_ (Fig. 667) represents Liberty as an idealized allegorical figure, but the battle itself, which took place during the July Revolution of 1830, is depicted in a highly realistic manner, with figures lying dead on the barricades beneath Liberty’s feet and Notre Dame Cathedral at the distant right shrouded in smoke. In Ernest Meissonier’s _Memory of Civil War (The Barricades)_ (Fig. 668), all the nobility of war has been drained from the picture. The blue, white, and red of the French flag have been reduced to piles of tattered clothing and blood, what one contemporary gruesomely described as an “omelette of men.”

So thoroughly did the painter Gustave Courbet come to believe in recording the actual facts of the world around him that he declared, in 1861, “Painting is an essentially concrete art and can only consist of the presentation of real and existing things. It is a completely physical language, the words of which consist of all visible objects.” Courbet and others ascribing to realism believed artists should confine their representation to accurate observation and notation of the phenomena of daily life. No longer was there necessarily any “greater” reality beyond or behind the facts that lay before their eyes. Courbet’s gigantic painting _Burial at Ornans_ (Fig. 669) seems, at first glance, to hold enormous potential for symbolic and allegorical meaning, but just the opposite is the case. In the foreground is a hole in the ground, the only “eternal reward” Courbet’s scene appears to promise. No one, not even the dog, seems to be focused on the event itself. Courbet offers us a panorama of distrac-
tion, of common people performing their everyday duties, in a landscape whose horizontality reads like an unwavering line of monotony. If the crucifix rises into the sky over the scene, it does so without deep spiritual significance. In fact, its curious position, as if it were set on the horizon line, lends it a certain comic dimension, a comedy that the bulbous faces of the red-cloaked officers of the parish also underscore. The painting was rejected by the jury of the Universal Exposition of 1855. To emphasize his disdain for the values of the establishment, Courbet opened a one-person exhibition outside the Exposition grounds, calling it the Pavilion of Realism. The cartoonist Honoré Daumier immediately responded with a cartoon depicting the Fight between Schools, Idealism and Realism (Fig. 670). The Courbet-like realist, with his square palette, house painter’s brush, and wooden shoes, battles the aged, classically nude idealist, who wears the helmet of a Greek warrior.

It was, at least in part, the realist impulse that led to the invention of photography in the 1830s (see Figs. 319 and 320). And it was also in this spirit that Karl Marx, in The Communist Manifesto, declared: “All that was solid and established crumbles away, all that was holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to look with open eyes upon his conditions of life and true social relations.” Marx’s sentiments, written in response to the wave of revolutions that swept Europe
in 1848, are part and parcel of the realist enterprise. Rosa Bonheur’s *Plowing in the Nivernais* (Fig. 671) was commissioned in response to the French Revolution of 1848. It reveals her belief in the virtue of toil and the common life of the French peasant. But it is her realism, her extraordinary ability to depict animals, that made her the most famous female artist of her day. Suddenly, it was socially and aesthetically important, even imperative, to paint neither the sublime nor the beautiful nor the picturesque, but the everyday, the commonplace, the low, and the ugly. Painters, it was felt, must represent the reality of their time and place, whatever it might look like.

As Daumier’s cartoon makes clear, the art of the past, exemplified by the Classical model, was felt to be worn out, incapable of expressing the realities of contemporary life. As the poet Charles Baudelaire put it, “Il faut être de son temps”—“it is necessary to be of one’s own time.” He looked everywhere for a “painter of modern life.” The modern world was marked by change, by the uniqueness of every moment, each instant, like a photograph, different from the last. Painting had to accommodate itself to this change. There were no longer any permanent, eternal truths.

Baudelaire’s painter of modern life was Edouard Manet. As we have already seen in Chapter 3, Manet’s *Luncheon on the Grass* (see Fig. 47), more commonly known by its French name *Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, caused an outcry when it was first exhibited in 1863. Two years later, at the Salon of 1865, Manet exhibited another picture that caused perhaps an even greater scandal. *Olympia* (Fig. 672) was a depiction of a common prostitute posed in the manner of the traditional odalisque. Though it was not widely recognized at the time, Manet had, in this painting, by no means abandoned tradition completely in favor of the depiction of everyday life in all its sordid detail. *Olympia* was directly indebted to Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (compare Fig. 625), just as the *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* had been based on a composition by Raphael (see Fig. 48). Manet’s sources were classical. His treatment, however, was anything but. What most irritated both critics and public was the apparently “slipshod” nature of his painting technique. Olympia’s body is virtually flat. Manet painted with large strokes of thick paint. If he distorted perspective in *Le Déjeuner*—the bather in the background seems about to spill forward into the picnic—then he eliminated perspective altogether in the shallow space of the *Olympia*, where the bed appears to be no wider than a foot or two.

Manet’s rejection of traditional painting techniques was intentional. He was drawing attention to his very modernity, to the fact that he was breaking with the past. His manipulation of his traditional sources supported the same intentions. In Marx’s words, Manet is looking “with open eyes upon his
conditions of life and true social relations.” Olympia’s eyes directly confront us. The visitor, who is implicitly male, becomes a voyeur, as the female body is subjected to the male gaze. It is as if the visitor, who occupies our own position in front of the scene, has brought the flowers, and the cat, barely discernible at Olympia’s feet, has arched its back to hiss at his approach. The Venus that once strode the heights of Mt. Olympus, home of the gods, is now the common courtesan. “Love” is now a commodity, something to be bought and sold.

In his brushwork, particularly, Manet pointed painting in a new direction. His friend, the novelist Emile Zola, who was the first to defend Olympia, described it this way: “He catches his figures vividly, is not afraid of the brusqueness of nature, and renders in all their vigor the different objects which stand out against each other. His whole being causes him to see things in splotches, in simple and forceful pieces.” Manet was something of a professional observer—a famous flâneur, a Parisian of impeccable dress and perfect manners who strolled the city, observing its habits and commenting on it with the greatest subtlety, wit, and savoir-faire. The type can be seen strolling toward the viewer in Gustave Caillebotte’s Place de l’Europe on a Rainy Day (see Fig. 104). Wrote Manet’s friend Antonin Proust: “With Manet, the eye played such a big role that Paris has never known a flâneur like him nor a flâneur strolling more usefully.”

Edgar Degas’s The Glass of Absinthe (Fig. 673) was painted a decade after Manet’s Olympia, but it was directly influenced by Manet’s example. Degas’s wandering eye has caught the underside of Parisian café society. Absinthe was an alcoholic drink that attacked the nerve centers, eventually causing severe cerebral damage. Especially popular among the working classes, it was finally banned in France in 1915. In the dazed, absent look of this young woman, Degas reveals the consequences of absinthe consumption with a shockingly direct realism worthy of Courbet.

**Fig. 672** Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863.
Oil on canvas, 51 × 74 3/4 in. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

**Fig. 673** Edgar Degas, *The Glass of Absinthe*, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 36 × 27 in. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Scala / Art Resource, NY.
IMPRESSIONISM

In the late 1860s, the young painter Claude Monet began to employ the same rich, thick brushstrokes Manet was already using, but with an even looser hand. Combining two or more pigments on a single wide brush, he allowed them to blend as they were brushed onto the canvas. He would paint “wet on wet”—with wet pigment over and through an already-painted surface that had not yet dried. Most of all, he painted with the intense hues made possible by the development of synthetic pigments.

Others followed his lead, and together, in April 1874, they held a group exhibition. They called themselves “Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, etc. Inc.,” but before long they were known as the Impressionists. The painting that gave them their name was Monet’s Impression-Sunrise (Fig. 674). Monet, the critic Théodore Duret wrote in 1878, “is the Impressionist painter par excellence. . . . [He] has succeeded in setting down the fleeting impression which his predecessors had neglected or considered impossible to render with the brush . . . the fleeting appearances which the accidents of atmosphere present to him . . . a singularly lively and striking sensation of the observed scene. His canvases really do communicate impressions.” The paintings, in fact, have the feel of sketches, as if they were executed spontaneously, even instantaneously, in the manner of photographic snapshots.

The Impressionists’ subject matter sets them apart from their predecessors at least as much as their technique does. Unlike the Realist painters of a generation earlier, the Impressionists were less interested in social criticism than in depicting in their work the pleasures of life, including the pleasures of simply seeing. If Impressionism is characterized by a way of seeing—by the attempt to capture the fleeting effects of light by applying paint in small, quick strokes of color—it is also defined by an intense interest in images of leisure. The Realists would have rejected these images as unworthy of their high moral purposes. The Impressionists painted life in the Parisian theaters and cafés, the grand boulevards teeming with shoppers, country gardens bursting with flowers, the racetrack and seaside, the suburban pleasures of boating and swimming on the Seine. Auguste Renoir’s La Moulin de la
Galette (Fig. 675) is typical. All of the figures in the painting are Renoir’s friends. One of his closest, Georges Rivière, seated at the table at the far right, described the painting soon after it was shown at the third Impressionist exhibition in 1877: “It is a page of history, a precious monument to Parisian life, done with rigorous exactitude. No one before Renoir had thought of portraying an event in ordinary life on a canvas of such big dimensions.”

The distance of Impressionist painting from its Realist predecessors is summed up in Berthe Morisot’s Reading (Fig. 676), probably one of four paintings Morisot exhibited at the first Independents Exhibition in 1874. In the background, a farmer’s cart heads down the road, the proper subject matter of the Realist. But Morisot’s sister, depicted in the painting, has no interest in what passes behind her, and neither, really, does the painter herself. The cart is rendered in a few loose, rapid brushstrokes, as is the entire landscape. Leisure is Morisot’s subject.

Increasingly, this urge to observe the world in its most minute particulars led to the investigation of optical reality in and for itself. As early as the 1870s, in his paintings of boats on the river at Argenteuil (see Fig. 215), or his series of studies of the Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris (see Fig. 7), Monet began to paint the same subject over and over again, studying the ways in which the changing light transformed his impressions. This working method led to his later serial studies of the grain stacks (see Fig. 152), Rouen Cathedral, and his garden at Giverny (Fig. 677), where he moved in 1883. By the turn of the century, he had given up painting “modern life” altogether, concentrating instead on capturing the “presentness” of his garden, the panoramic views that would be installed in the Orangerie in Paris in 1927 (see Fig. 170).

For many artists, painting began to be an end in itself, a medium whose relation to the actual world was at best only incidental. In England, the American expatriate James McNeill Whistler equated his paintings to musical compositions by titling them “nocturnes” and “symphonies.” He painted, he said, “as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he brings forth from chaos glorious harmony.” Painting was, for Whistler, primarily an abstract
arrangement of shapes and colors; only incidentally did it refer to the world. Believing that art should possess strong moral content, the English essayist John Ruskin was blind to Whistler’s abstraction. After viewing *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket* (Fig. 678), an image of fireworks falling over the Thames, Ruskin wrote that Whistler was “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face.” Whistler, in turn, sued Ruskin for libel. A lengthy trial followed, and in 1878 Whistler finally won his case, but he was awarded damages of only a farthing, approximately half a U.S. cent. If artists were free to paint anything they wanted, they also had to accept whatever criticism came their way.

**THE IMPACT OF WESTERN CULTURE**

In the last half of the nineteenth century, Western culture increasingly imposed itself upon other cultures whose values were often diametrically opposed to its values, particularly the sense of centeredness that had defined indigenous cultures for hundreds, even thousands of years. Worldwide, non-Western cultures faced fundamental challenges to their cultural identities. In China, what had been the world’s richest economy became increasingly dependent on manufacturing goods for export to the West. India’s manufacturing economy had also been overwhelmed by British exploitation of its resources, coupled with an increased emphasis on low-cost exports that offered little profit. Soon, millions of people from both China and India accepted indentured servitude in foreign lands. Japan, which had been closed to trade with the West and to almost all international contact since the 1630s, was forced to open its ports in 1854 when the U.S. Navy arranged a treaty between the two countries.

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**Fig. 678** James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket*, c. 1875. Oil on oak panel, 23 3/4 × 18 3/8 in. Detroit Institute of Arts. Gift of Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., 46.309.

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**Fig. 679** Buffalo Kachina, Zuni culture, c. 1875. Wood, cloth, hide, fur, shell, feathers, horsehair, pinecones. © Millicent Rogers Museum, Taos, New Mexico.
threatened military action. Japan subsequently underwent a rapid process of industrialization, and, in Europe, Japanese prints found a ready market (see Chapter 5). In Africa, European countries vied with one another for control of the continent, motivated by both a sense of their own superiority to African peoples and competition for the region’s vast natural resources.

By the 1870s, in the American West, the United States military was pursuing an unofficial but effective policy of Native American extermination, and it encouraged the slaughter of the buffalo as a shortcut to this end. By the late 1880s, almost all the buffalo were dead. A buffalo kachina—a likeness of a supernatural character endowed with powers that can be evoked when the figure is danced—from the Zuni culture in the American Southwest (Fig. 679) is testament to this wholesale destruction of the Native American way of life. Derived from a Plains Indian ritual dance, this kachina doll represents a dancer who, in dancing the kachina, would be imbued with the power to increase the population of fur-bearing animals in the arid environment of the Southwest.

By 1889, the crisis had come to a head. A Paiute holy man by the name of Wavoka declared that if the Indian peoples lived peaceably, and if they performed a new circle dance called the Ghost Dance, the world would be transformed into what it once had been, populated by great herds of buffalo and the ancestral dead. White people would disappear, and with them alcohol, disease, and hunger. Across the West, the message was adopted by various tribes, and the costumes associated with the dance were particularly beautiful. An Arapaho Ghost Dance dress (Fig. 680) is decorated with five-pointed stars, no doubt derived, in their design, from the American flag, but also a long-standing symbol in Native American culture of the cosmos. The yoke is decorated with a woman and two eagles, one on each side of her. She holds a peace pipe in one hand and a branch in the other. The turtle above the hem refers to a myth of origin, in which the turtle brings soil for the world’s creation out of the primal waters. The birds on the skirt, magpies in this case, represent messengers to the spirit world. Many Plains Indians also believed that the Ghost Dance costumes had the power to protect them from harm, and thus left them immune to gunfire or other attack.

That belief would come to an end at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, on December 29, 1890. The white population, paying little attention to the fact that their presumed “disappearance” was predicted to be wholly nonviolent, soon reacted with fear and hostility. More than 200 participants in the Ghost Dance were massacred by the Seventh Cavalry of the U.S. Army at Wounded Knee that day, despite their dress, and, at least symbolically, Native American culture on the Great Plains came to an end.
POST-IMPRESSIONISM

Although by the 1880s, many artists had come to see Impressionism’s subject matter as trivial, they were still interested in investigating and extending its formal innovations and in reexamining the symbolic possibilities of painting. Monet’s work at Giverny can be seen as an example of just such an ongoing formal exploration. A number of other painters—among them Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, and Paul Cézanne—embarked on a similar brand of Post-Impressionism, each dedicated to redirecting the Impressionist enterprise.

Paul Gauguin criticized the conditions of modern life, but he did so by leaving Europe and seeking out a new life in the South Seas. There, in paintings such as The Day of the Gods (Mahana no Atua) (Fig. 681), he tried to capture the mystery and magic of the “primitive” culture, a world of unity, peace, and naked innocence far removed from the turmoil of civilized life. The perfect balance of the painting’s composition and the brilliant color of the scene are structural realizations of paradise on earth.

In paintings such as La Chahut (The Can-Can) (see Fig. 147), Georges Seurat sought to impose a formal order upon the world, and in the process, he revealed its rigidity, its lack of vitality. Though Seurat’s subject matter in The Bathers (Fig. 682) is Impressionist, his composition is not. It is architectural, intentionally returning to the seventeenth-century compositional principles of Poussin (see Fig. 652). And it subtly critiques the image of Impressionist leisure. These are not well-to-do middle-class Parisians, but workers (their costume gives them away) swimming in the Seine just downriver from the factory town of Asnières. Smokestacks belch soot in the distance. The spot, as observant Parisians knew, was directly across from the outlet of the great collective sewer from Paris. In the summer of 1884, according to the local press, “more than 120,000 cubic feet of solids had accumulated at the sewer’s mouth; several hundred square meters of which are covered with a bizarre vegetation, which gives off a disgusting smell.” Suddenly, the green material floating in the water is transformed.

Of all the Post-Impressionist painters, Paul Cézanne, working alone in the south of France, most
that established for the picture an independent existence, to be judged in terms of the purely formal interrelationships of line, color, and plane. In his Still Life with Cherries and Peaches (Fig. 683), he emphasizes the act of composition itself, the process of seeing. It is as if he has rendered two entirely different views of the same still life simultaneously. The peaches on the right are seen from a point several feet in front of the table, while the cherries on the left have been painted from directly above. As a consequence, the table itself seems to broaden out behind the cherries.

Similarly, Mont Sainte-Victoire and the Viaduct of the Arc River Valley (Fig. 684) collapses the space between foreground and background by making a series of formal correspondences between them, by the repetition of the shape of the lower right-hand branch of the tree, for instance, the road below it, and the shape of the mountain itself. Finally, in The Large Bathers (Fig. 685), the pyramidal structure of the composition draws attention to the geometry that dominates even the individual faceting of the wide brushstrokes, which he laid down as horizontals, verticals, and diagonals. The simplification of the human body evident here, as well as Cézanne’s overall emphasis on form, had a profound effect on painting in the twentieth century. It is in Cézanne that the art of the twentieth century dawns.