
The Difference between Realists, Impressionists and Postimpressionists

What were the principal subjects and themes of 19th-century Realists?

The main theme of the 19th century Realists overall was to simply show life at the time. The subjects were often “men and women in actual, everyday life, and often demoralizing situations” (Fiero 364). Both literature and the arts showed this as during this period, photography was born. This became a way to really show and document life of the period. Still, there was a need for the arts. However, Gauve Corbet may have said it best to understand the time period with the statement “A painter, ...”should paint only what he can see” (Fiero 369). In his *Burial at Ornans*, the focus is on what is tangibly visible rather than the spirituality of the deceased.

In what specific ways were these themes shared by both writers and visual artists?

The theme of actuality was alive and well with both writers and visual artists. They both seem to often pull from the poorer life. This is shown no better through Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*, and Daumier’s *The Third-Class Carriage*. Rather than highlighting the happier upper and middle classes, both chose to really bring to reality the existence of the lower class as individuals and express them in their respective disciplines. *Oliver Twist* portrays with words, a very dark time and the life of an orphan. Similarly, *The Third-Class Carriage* shows the “mood of cheerless resignation” (Fiero 370).

How did these subjects and themes differ from those favored by the Impressionists and Postimpressionists?

The biggest differentiation that separates the Realist artists from the Impressionist and Postimpressionist, is the shift back to painting through via the mind. Realists wanted to depict exactly what they were able to visibly see. There appeared to be a removal of the spiritual aspect, in favor of depressing and compromising imagery with Realism. The Impressionists by contrast, shifted to a much more abstract painting style. Van Gogh’s *The Starry Night*, shows this in it’s full essence with almost swirly waves used as stars. The Postimpressionists sort of combined the ideology of both into a whole separate genre, where the brush strokes are similar to those used by the Impressionists. At the same time there is a bit of a shift back to depicting things that can be physically seen like we saw with the Realists. That said, a massive difference here is that there is once again, spirituality and the removal of the generally depressing depictions. Vibrant colors are used once again, where the Realists used very subdued coloration in their paintings. We see this depicted beautifully within Cézanne’s *Mont Sainte-Victoire* with very abstract brush strokes combined with the aforementioned vibrance to create a stunning work of art.