ART EDUCATION SERIES

A Canvas and a Brush

An introduction to major art movements and styles

Art Movements & Styles

There are many art movements and styles throughout history. Here we explore four important ones:

Abstract

Early 20th c. onward

Focus on color, form & emotion rather than realistic representation

Renaissance

14th–17th century

Revival of classical ideals, perspective, humanism & realism

Impressionism

1860s–1880s

Capturing light, atmosphere & fleeting moments of modern life

Expressionism

Early 20th century

Subjective emotion through distortion, bold color & intense feeling

1

Abstract Art

Early 20th century onward

Key Characteristics

- Does not attempt to represent reality accurately
- Uses color, shape, line, and texture as the main subject
- Can be partially abstract (based on real forms) or completely non-objective
- Emphasizes emotion, formal beauty, or pure visual experience
- Includes many approaches: geometric, gestural, lyrical, and more
- Often prioritizes the act of painting itself

Notable Artists

Wassily Kandinsky
Piet Mondrian
Kazimir Malevich
Jackson Pollock
Mark Rothko

Why It Matters

Freed art from the need to copy the visible world and opened the door to modern and contemporary art.





2

Renaissance

c. 1400–1600 (Italy & Europe)

Key Characteristics

- Revival of classical Greek and Roman ideals
- Emphasis on humanism, realism, and the individual
- Mastery of linear perspective and anatomical accuracy
- Balanced composition, harmony, and idealized beauty
- Religious and mythological subjects treated with new naturalism
- Rise of the artist as a celebrated genius

Notable Artists

Leonardo da Vinci
Michelangelo
Raphael
Botticelli
Titian
Jan van Eyck

Why It Matters

Laid the foundation for Western art for centuries and redefined the role of the artist in society.





3

Impressionism

1860s–1880s (France)

Key Characteristics

- Focus on capturing the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere
- Visible, broken brushstrokes and pure, unmixed colors
- Everyday modern subjects: landscapes, city life, leisure
- Painted outdoors (en plein air) to observe natural light
- Rejected academic rules and dark studio painting
- Emphasis on the artist’s visual impression rather than detail

Notable Artists

Claude Monet
Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Edgar Degas
Berthe Morisot
Camille Pissarro
Mary Cassatt

Why It Matters

Broke with academic tradition and paved the way for modern art movements that followed.





4

Expressionism

Early 20th century (mainly Germany & Austria)

Key Characteristics

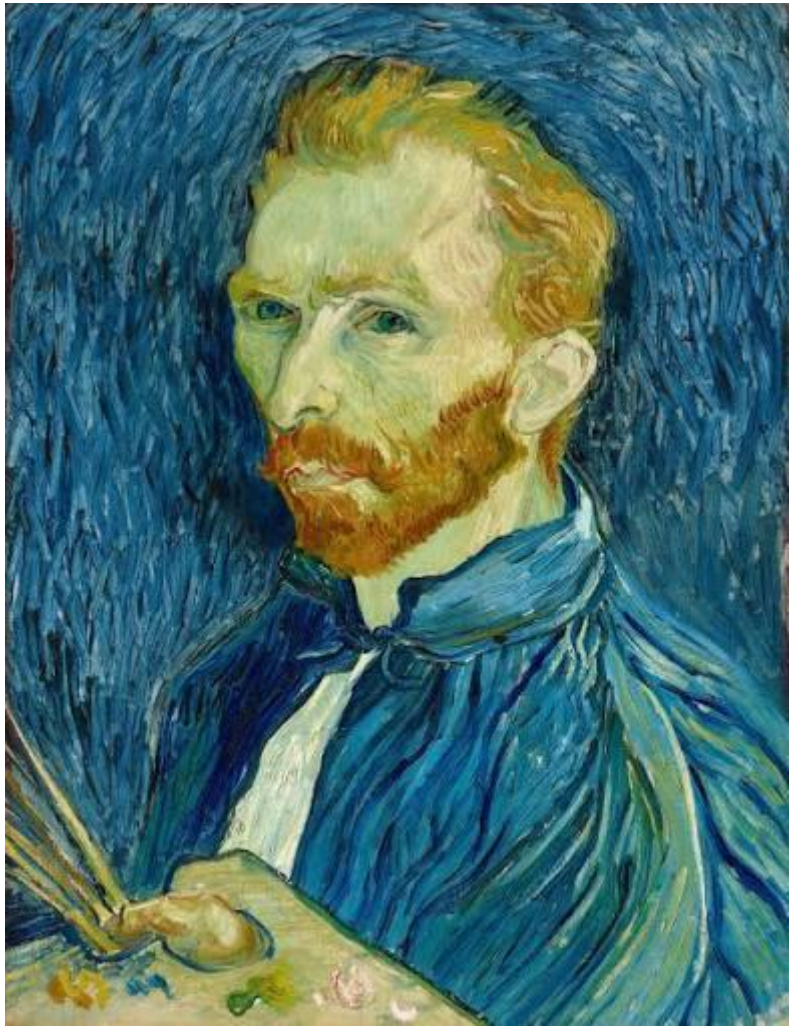
- Prioritizes subjective emotion over objective reality
- Distorted forms, exaggerated colors, and intense brushwork
- Often expresses anxiety, alienation, or spiritual intensity
- Influenced by earlier artists like Van Gogh and Munch
- Key groups: Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter
- Sought to convey inner experience rather than outer appearance

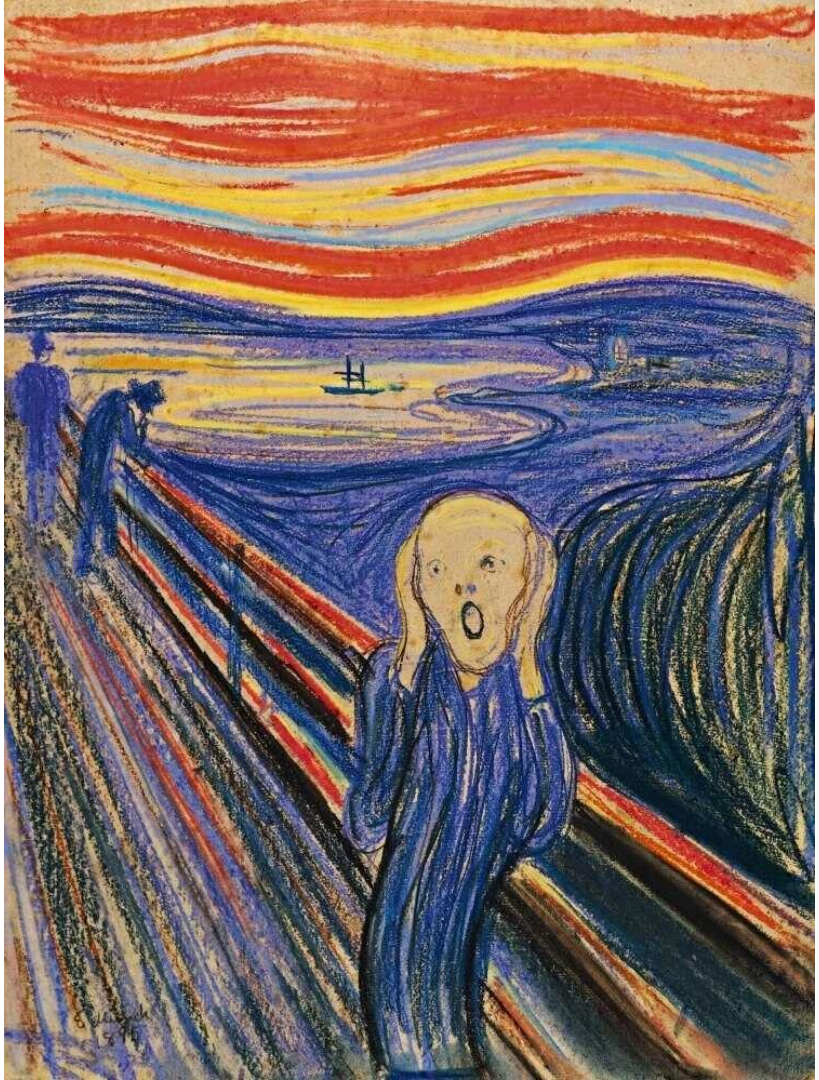
Notable Artists

Edvard Munch
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner
Wassily Kandinsky
Egon Schiele
Franz Marc
Emil Nolde

Why It Matters

Showed that art could be a powerful vehicle for personal and collective emotion, influencing later movements.





At a Glance

Movement	Focus	Key Technique	Mood
Abstract	Form, color, pure expression	Non-representational marks	Varied / experimental
Renaissance	Human form & ideal beauty	Perspective & realism	Harmonious, balanced
Impressionism	Light & fleeting moments	Broken color, outdoor light	Bright, atmospheric
Expressionism	Inner emotion & psyche	Distortion & bold color	Intense, emotional

Key Takeaways

Art evolves with ideas

Each movement reacted to what came before and to the society of its time.

Different goals, different looks

Realism, light, emotion, or pure form — the purpose shapes the style.

Technique serves meaning

Perspective, broken color, distortion, or abstraction are tools for expression.

The viewer matters

Impressionists and abstract artists especially invited personal interpretation.

Legacy continues

These movements still influence how artists and audiences think about art today.

Keep Looking

Every painting is a conversation between the artist, the materials, and the viewer. The more movements you know, the richer that conversation becomes.

Thank you