

Camille Pissarro (1830 -- 1903) is a Grand Master of Impressionism, who, along with Monet and Sisley is the purest of the adherents to the famed movement. Of all those in the school of Impressionism, it is these three legends who most closely adhered to the Impressionist canon of always painting the fleeting effects of light and weather, in the outdoors (*en plein air*), with loose, painterly brushwork, approximating to the condition of impasto painting.

Pissarro's position in the art world has continued to climb, as have his auction prices. Once thought to be a second-tier painter, along with Sisley, vis-à-vis the pre-eminent Monet, today's museum curators are more apt to exhibit Pissarro's work alongside Monet's -- the two, now considered co-equals. In his 50s, Pissarro would also join the neo-Impressionists Signac and Seurat, evidence of a startling flexibility and willingness to learn for such an old and accomplished Impressionist master.

Art historian John Rewald called Pissarro the "dean of the Impressionist painters," not only because he was the oldest of the group, but also "by virtue of his wisdom and his balanced, kind, and warmhearted personality." Cézanne said, "He was a father for me. A man to consult and a little like the good Lord," and he was also one of Gauguin's masters. Renoir referred to his work as "revolutionary" through his artistic portrayals of the "common man" -- as Pissarro insisted on painting individuals in natural settings without "artifice or grandeur." Pissarro is the only artist to have shown his work at all eight Impressionist exhibitions in Paris -- from 1874 to 1886. He "acted as a father figure not only to the Impressionists," but also to all four of the major Post- Impressionists, including Georges Seurat, Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Gauguin.

Lifetime output of prints: 206 (etchings, drypoints, aquatints, lithos, etc.).

"Pissarro is the most important of the Impressionist printmakers. He experimented extensively with graphic techniques and often attended to the printing himself; unlike most printmakers of that day and even of ours, he was reluctant to depend on printers for the proofing of his states and for his small editions of the final state. He came at first under the influence of Corot and the graphic artists of the Barbizon School, Millet and Daubigny, in particular. Looking through the 17th volume of Delteil's *Le peintre-graveur illustré*, one realizes how strong these influences were on Pissarro's early prints. His first two prints are very close to Corot, the third to Daubigny, and the fourth to Millet. As a printmaker, Pissarro worked in a broad array of media: etching, aquatint, and drypoint on copper, lithography, and woodcut. Quite soon, his painter's temperament led him to try aquatint, and it was in this medium that he produced his finest prints."

"Vegetable Market at Pontoise," c. 1891 etching with aquatint, is one of Pissarro's most famous etchings. The earlier states of the print were restricted to only 49 impressions. As a result, this exemplar printed extremely well for the publisher Delteil in his *Le peintre-gravure illustré*, Tome 17, (1923). The theme of peasant women buying and selling in the vegetable market is in keeping with Pissarro's longheld attachment to depicting the lives of the common classes. He was regarded by all as a gentle, generous, spiritual man -- a sort of grandfather of the Impressionists. Note the extraordinary foreshortening of the picture plane, with an assemblage of multiple figures, receding into the background and creating a rhythm and excitement, typical of marketplace energy.

Only the most adept of etching masters could handle the depiction of such a large crowd, while still maintaining balance, flow, and movement to and fro on the picture plane.

History of 19th-Century Master Prints

Starting in 1860, and coming into full force by 1890, there was a revival in printmaking in both London and Paris, an artform that had fallen out of favor since the glory days of Rembrandt. By 1890, the print revival was sweeping Paris and London by storm, supported by the newly widespread popularity of poster art and the invention of new lithographic inks, which made drawing on stones produce works of vivid color -- something the Impressionists required in the re-established medium. As for B&W prints, so many new techniques were being advanced that prints became a kind of nuanced and refined multiple 'ink drawing,' if you will. Furthermore, art dealers, notably Ambrose Vollard (publisher of *The Album of Painter-Engravers*) and Durand Ruel, began pressing their stables to create works in print media like etching and lithography that were more affordable to entry-level collectors. Ruel went so far as to underwrite print-only exhibitions at his famed gallery. Finally, enough cannot be said about the influence of the art patron Dr. Paul Gachet, M.D. -- who, being an amateur etcher himself, practically forced each artist who visited him to try their hands at printmaking! Gachet is ever famous for having cared for van Gogh in the last months of his life, and for van Gogh's famous painting of Gachet.*

**Portrait of Dr. Gachet* is one of the most revered paintings by the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh. It depicts Dr. Paul Gachet who took care of Van Gogh during the final months of his life. There are two authenticated versions of the portrait, both painted in June 1890 at Auvers-sur-Oise, Gachet's country hometown. One is in a private collection and the other, at the Orsay Museum in Paris. Both show Gachet sitting at a table and leaning his head on his right arm, but they are easily differentiated in color and style. In 1990, the first version fetched a record price of \$82.5 million (\$75 million, plus a 10 percent buyer's commission) when sold at auction in New York. When accounting for inflation, this is still the *highest price* paid for art at a public auction!

Here is a summary of the major shows dealing with the 1890 print revival in Paris:

General Exhibition of Lithography, École de Beaux Arts, Paris, 1891, a thousand prints on view

*Centenary Exhibition of Lithography, Champs de Mars, Paris, 1895***

**Lithography was invented in 1796 by German author and actor Alois Senefelder, as a thrifty method of publishing theatrical works. Thus, 1895 would be the centenary of the medium