

## What is Impressionism?

It began in the 1860s in France. The first impressionistic exhibition was held on the 5th of April 1874 and the final group exhibition was held in 1886. A group of artists who worked together in Paris in the 1860s often met at the *Café Geurbois* to discuss art and to air their opinions. They all worked on their own styles and subject matter, but agreed on a number of points which are known as the 'Principles of Impressionism'. Artists painted outdoors (also known as 'en plein air'), which allowed them to work from observation. It also helped them depict real life so their subjects are not historical or emotional and capture a fleeting moment so their painting resembled a camera snapshot. Painting outdoors gave artists the opportunity to paint the changing effects of light and atmosphere. Their brushwork was free and descriptive as pure colours were applied directly and mixed on the canvas. No black was used so they used colour to shade instead.

The Academy des Beaux-Arts was a powerful state constitution that governed French art at the time. Many artists attended the *École des Beaux Arts*, which was a state sponsored school supervised by the Academy. The Salon was an annual public exhibition organised by the Academy and was held in the Salon Carre in the Louvre, Paris, exhibiting new and well-known artists' pieces. However, the Academy were very specific about the kind of paintings they allowed into the exhibition and so set up the Salon des Refuses for artists who were refused entry to the Salon in 1863, so they could exhibit their rejected works here. Social, economic and technological changes in society in the 1860s also led to the birth of the camera and the *Bourgeoisie* (merchant class). These brought changes to the artistic life, as did rejection of and by 'The Salon', and of the 'formulas' imposed on artists by the Academy des Beaux-Arts.