

mechanically glassy rendering indistinguishable from a photograph, Gérôme, no less than a highly individual photographer, inevitably imposes his own aesthetic temperament. His colors, for one, are as characteristic as Manet's, revealing here, in the narrow range of salmon pinks and silky blues on a beige-gray ground, a familiar preference for exquisitely tinted hues chilled by marmoreal textures and mirror-like paint surfaces. And Gérôme's subtle networks of axial movement in open, multi-directional spaces, akin to Degas's, also reveal his ability to stamp his aesthetic contours upon a quasi-photographic style too easily assumed to suppress artistic freedom.

The growing parallelism between the rebellious view of Manet and the Impressionists and that of a whole group of artists who shared many of their concerns beneath painted surfaces of glossy finish and immaculate detail can again be seen in a painting by the Anglo-French artist James-Jacques-Joseph Tissot (1836–1902). Born in Nantes and a resident of Paris until 1871, Tissot absorbed not only the miniaturist techniques of the Belgian Leys (see fig. 252), but was totally conversant with the Realist directions taken by his friends and contemporaries Whistler, Degas, and Manet. In 1871, fearing the repercussions of his ardent participation in the Commune, he moved to London, where he continued to exhibit at the Royal Academy as he had at the Paris Salon. There, in 1874, he showed *London Visitors* (fig. 349), a fusion of the overtly antagonistic but ultimately complementary styles of, on the one hand, Degas and Manet and, on the other, Gérôme and Meissonier. Here we are instantly asked to extend the painting's fiction to our own real world, which appears for the instant to be a tourist's casual ascent up the steps of London's National Gallery, from which we can view, in surprisingly cropped segments, the sober Greek Revival portico of the museum, and, in the distance, an even more surprisingly bisected vista of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, whose steeple is just lost from sight. At the top, a fashionably dressed lady just catches our eye, in a more discreet variation of Victorine Meurent's penetrating gaze outward. Within this roving tourist's context, which turns noble architecture into picturesque fragments, ostensibly random groupings of visitors take their momentary places to observe the London scene. Two schoolboys, wearing the uniform of Christ's Hospital School, act as tourist guides, mingling, front and back, with expensively dressed adults; but their loose-jointed disposition makes it impossible to discern whether their relationships are those of friends, family, or total strangers. To add to the agreeable flux of an urban world, this disparate quintet seems to be temporarily distracted by the to us invisible spectacle of Trafalgar Square at the right, to which a pair of eyes, an outstretched hand, and the sharpest of umbrella tips are for the moment directed. Even city litter—the thin cigar butt on the steps at the left—contributes to Tissot's refined sense of the attenuated and the

accidental in a well-heeled social world whose haughty posturing and aristocratic demeanor belong in a Henry James novel.

Tissot shares with Gérôme a preference for high-gloss finish, whose relationship to photography is further borne out here by the almost total restriction to cool gray tones that can create both stony solidity in the near steps and columns and a mirage-like phantom in the far vista of the church. But again, as with Gérôme, the ostensible objectivity of camera vision can be the vehicle of a strong personal temperament. Tissot's chromatic preference is even icier and more understated than Gérôme's, prompting a critic to complain here of an "arctic frigidity." Within these grisaille tonalities, which capture the look of an overcast London day, only the mustard yellow stockings of the boys' uniforms provide a tart color accent, the counterpart to the effect Manet often achieved by placing a lemon in the midst of a dominance of black-and-white patterns. And Tissot's sensibility to human behavior is no less apparent here, revealing, despite his French origins, an Anglo-Saxon reserve and decorum that could and did make itself quickly at home in the art world of London, where he was to remain a vital force.

The 1870s: From Realism to Aestheticism

In the 1870s, whether in the rebellious domain of Manet and the Impressionists or in the more officially acceptable style of Tissot and Gérôme, the sense that painting could seize a prosaic instant of time and fragment of space was intensified to split-second precision. In this search, no artist was more probing than the American Thomas Eakins (1844–1916), who insisted on fusing the art of painting with a scrupulous study of anatomy, light, mathematics, and perspective, and who believed, with so many of his contemporaries, that the medium of photography, which he had also mastered and often used as a blueprint for his paintings, provided objective truths to support the artist's painstaking reconstructions of the visible world. In 1866, Eakins temporarily left his native Philadelphia for Paris, where he began his studies with Gérôme at the École des Beaux-Arts. After returning home in 1870, he translated some of the would-be poetry of the French master's historical scenes or exotic travelogues into a down-to-earth prose that can still produce, more than a century later, the effect of unedited truth to observed experience. Back in Philadelphia, Eakins looked at and recorded, among other things, the sporting events on the Schuylkill River, as it flowed through Fairmount Park, and even sent one of these works to Gérôme for criticism. An oarsman himself, Eakins was drawn to the sculls which animated the water in clement weather, offering an American counterpart to those Impressionist scenes of Seine-side boating which Manet, Monet,



Fig. 350 **Thomas Eakins**, *The Biglen Brothers Turning the Stake*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 40¼ × 60¼". The Cleveland Museum of Art.

and Renoir so often painted at the Paris suburb of Argenteuil. But Eakins's version of this leisurely motif conveys not the casual, relaxed mood of urban vacationers at rest, but rather a sober, almost scientific intensity of visual research aimed at nothing less than the absolutely truthful documentation of the seen world.

For a painting like *The Biglen Brothers Turning the Stake* of 1873 (fig. 350), even the light-shot surface of Philadelphia's river was studied as a mathematical problem in perspective rather than as a freely pulsating screen of Impressionist light. In the phrase of Eakins's own advice to his students, the brain should be strained more than the eye. Of course, a painting by Monet always implies that the specific space-time co-ordinates of the recorded observation are knowable beneath the more intuitive, spontaneous application of paint; but in Eakins's case, his scientific accuracy was so refined that in an earlier version of the Biglen brothers sculling it has been possible to determine from the angle of the sun's rays the very day and minute of 1872 at which the scene was viewed. In the painting of 1873, we see the same men, John and Barney Biglen, maneuvering their oars to turn the foreground stake marked by a blue flag. In the left background, near the distant red flag, Eakins himself, diminished to near invisibility by the

swift recession of the perspective grid that determines the precise size of every object on the river, holds up the starter's pistol in his right hand. On the right, an anonymous pair of scullers row by in the opposite direction. The water itself is a marvel of optical truth, including even the incisive splash that follows the cut of the oar's blade into the water. And on the distant riverbank, which most painters would have slurred over, scrupulous looking can discern a minute inventory of casual waterside activity—riverboats, rows of spectators—beneath the shrubbery, whose filmy greens, dulled by the distant atmosphere, contrast to the intense blues of the foreground flag and scullers' caps.

Yet what purports to be total objectivity ends up as revealing not only a particular artist's temperament, but even a particular national tradition. The all-encompassing intensity of Eakins's own concentration on truth to the minutiae of the seen world is reflected even in the facial expressions and bodies of the scullers, whose display of stern mental and physical control distills in a frozen moment an image of rigorous discipline. The mood, in fact, is not one of weekend pleasure but of a solemn, clockwork ticking of the orderly rules that unite the men with nature and that make the tiniest details of Eakins's painting an

essential part of his overall vision. Beyond that, this view of the Schuylkill conveys again a look of luminously barren, open spaces akin to the river environment of even the jolliest of Bingham's Mississippi boatmen (see fig. 177) or to the coastal meditations of Heade (see fig. 267). For all their paired athletic prowess, John and Barney Biglen, one looking up, the other down, seem separated both from each other and from the world around them. They project an aura of strange stillness and loneliness in the most empty of spaces that pervades not only many of Eakins's own figure paintings, but a tradition of American art that persists well into the twentieth century, beyond Hopper and Wyeth.

Despite its American inflection, *The Biglen Brothers* could find many counterparts across the Atlantic, especially in the growing number of paintings that documented, as with a camera lens, tandem pairs of figures caught in the midst of a variety of occupational movements, whether that of building construction or of ballet practice. One of the most remarkable contributions to this type was *The Floorscrapers* of 1875 (fig. 351), by a painter of Eakins's generation, the short-lived Gustave Caillebotte (1848–94). Wealthy and generous enough to support his Impressionist

friends by buying their work (and ultimately bequeathing his great collection to the state), Caillebotte also exhibited his own paintings with them. In 1875, wishing to make his public debut, he submitted a painting to the Salon jury, which rejected it. That work was probably *The Floorscrapers*, which Caillebotte then decided to exhibit in a more hospitable environment, that of the second Impressionist group exhibition of 1876, which was to open in April at the Durand-Ruel Gallery and which was to lose, among its original members, many artists who now felt it too risky to be exposed to the public with the likes of Monet, Degas, or Renoir. Caillebotte hardly shared this fear, and his *Floorscrapers*, in fact, was no less audacious in its modern subject and in its tilted, fragmented spaces than many works of Degas. But, unlike most Impressionist paintings, it was executed with a tight brushwork which Zola, Manet's great champion and a novelist who himself described the lives of Parisian workers, found "bourgeois" in character, that is, photographic in its tidy, conventional description of rounded volumes and sharp details and therefore anti-artistic in its suppression of the painter's individual touch. Zola might have leveled the same complaint against Tissot or Eakins.



Fig. 351 **Gustave Caillebotte**, *The Floorscrapers*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 57 $\frac{5}{8}$ ". Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Like those painters, Caillebotte also pursues an instant of vision, recording it with a fullness of truthful detail that here includes the close anatomical study of bare-chested workers, a one-point perspective rendering of the corner of a room whose floor is lucidly defined by the insistent parallels of wooden stripes, and a strewing of wood shavings whose seemingly accidental distribution counters the razor-sharp ordering of everything else, from the contrast between rectilinear and curvilinear patterns in the wall paneling and balcony grill to the tense placement of the three workers on a floor which rises so steeply at the right that their wine bottle and glass seem to hover above the ground plane. Within an ostensibly objective, Realist framework of vision, Caillebotte's eccentric sensibility to mechanically repetitive patterns and to oddly angled spaces, at once deep and shallow, begins to assert itself.

As a subject, *The Floorscrapers* belongs to a Realist tradition which would yield center stage to workers, whether in city or country. In fact, Caillebotte's trio of laborers can be seen as a modern translation of the back-breaking toil ennobled by Millet in his *Gleaners* of 1857 (see fig. 223), whose agricultural theme, by the mid-1870s, had become almost mythically remote by comparison with the topic of Paris workers putting the finishing touches on the artist's new studio. The grand, rhyming movements of Millet's three peasant women are now updated in contemporary urban terms, which here focus upon the specifics of this communal labor, while preserving Millet's idea of keeping the workers' heads facing downward below the horizon, at the bottom of a human hierarchy in which an upright standing posture would evoke individuality and freedom. In other ways, however, Caillebotte's approach to manual labor shares the more objective, detached attitude of his contemporary Eakins, who would also have been fascinated with the documentary inventory here of specialized tools for floorscraping, a carpenter's still life of files, planes, and blades. Moreover, both artists are attracted to figures paired in rhyming motions that virtually diagram a sequence of highly disciplined physical activities associated with a particular skill. The sense is close to the step-by-step, scientific explorations of modern photography, which Eakins himself had begun to investigate with such professional skill that in 1879 he was able to recommend his own techniques to the most famous practitioner of this new field, Eadweard Muybridge.

In the 1870s, Degas, too, began to explore and diagram what appear to be the clockwork mechanisms of human motion, creating an odd psychological distance from human subjects who are viewed as automatons. When Edmond de Goncourt visited Degas's studio in 1874, he was intrigued to find him working on two subjects of modern life, laundresses and ballet dancers, aggressively Realist subjects which, however, Degas could also aestheticize into his personal world of the strictest abstract order.

Himself a photographer, he would pinpoint in a pictorial flash the highly disciplined motion of young dancers' bodies, singly or in unison, as they revealed, like robots, the ability to manipulate their limbs, heads, and torsos in patterns of sharply regimented artifice. *The Rehearsal* of c. 1878 (fig. 352), a work shown at the fourth Impressionist exhibition of 1879, is typical of his many variations of behind-the-scenes views of ballet dancers practicing in studios or moving on or off stage at actual performances. Cropped to a triangular pattern in the left corner, the violinist, his bow a taut vertical axis, seems totally detached from the tense interlocking of four dancers, who have sacrificed their individuality to create rigid patterns of right-angled anatomies practicing difficult variations within the classical ballet's "second position" of outstretched arms. Everything clicks into place, from the triple beat of the light-flooded windows (which almost obey an imaginary $\frac{3}{4}$ -time signature of the musician) to the trio of visible heads which, despite individual variations, share blankly impersonal expressions. Characteristically, what we see is only an angled corner of a room which spills over in every direction to the real space of the spectator. Most disconcerting is the appearance of nothing more than one extended leg and arched foot at the right, which rhymes grotesquely with the leg of her partner (the foot having been amputated, as it were, by the frame) and which identifies not only a fourth dancer, but implies perhaps many more dancers continuing these exercises outside our field of vision. As in Caillebotte's *Floorscrapers*, the floor plane shoots up and back at a vertiginous speed, fixing the viewer's vision at an odd, but absolutely specific angle, which appears as arbitrary as what might be seen by quickly turning one's head upward or downward, left or right.

What Degas and many of his colleagues were doing was, in fact, articulated clearly by his friend Edmond Duranty, who in 1876 published a pamphlet, *La Nouvelle Peinture* (The New Painting), which tried to define the goals of the Impressionists who showed at that year's group exhibition. He not only indicated that these painters extended the premises of those Realists like Courbet, Millet, and Manet whom he had earlier defended, but explained clearly how "views of people and things have a thousand ways of being unexpected in reality," how our viewpoint is "not always in the center of a room with the side walls receding toward the rear wall," or how "from inside, we communicate with the outside through a window"; and how "that window is the frame that endlessly accompanies us . . . cutting off the external view in the most unexpected, changing ways, achieving the endless variety and surprise that is one of reality's great pleasures." As for how people appeared within this constantly shifting window of vision we each carry about, Duranty vividly described Degas's special penchant for cropping a figure, which "is never in the center of the canvas, or of the setting . . . not always seen



Fig. 352 **Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas**, *The Rehearsal*, c. 1878. Oil on canvas, 18¾ × 24". The Frick Collection, New York.

as a whole, and sometimes appears cut off at mid-leg, half-length, or longitudinally." So closely did these remarks correspond to Degas's art that it has even been proposed, incorrectly, that Degas, not Duranty, was the author. In fact, Duranty's explanation of how Impressionist painters insisted on recording the often surprising fragmentary images that momentarily met their shifting fields of vision could well apply not only to Renoir and Monet, but to Eakins, Tissot, or Caillebotte, whose tightly painted surfaces, however, parted company with the more brushy facture of the Impressionists.

For instance, Duranty's emphasis upon the window of vision through which each of us sees the outside world with surprisingly fluid variety was made no less explicit at the time of his writing in the work of Monet, who in 1876–77 painted a series of ten views both inside and outside Paris's Gare St.-Lazare, the terminus for the train that puffed through Manet's *Railroad* (see fig. 346), leaving only smoke behind. At the third Impressionist exhibition, that of 1877, Monet showed eight of these paintings that documented, from as many different vantage points, not the social and psychological drama that Daumier had found in railway travel, but rather the station's constantly changing

spectacle of locomotives coming and going, of the blurred movement of faceless passengers and workers on and around the tracks. By renting a nearby apartment and obtaining official permission to work inside the station, Monet was more easily able to ascertain the kind of truth to immediate experience that he before had so often pursued in landscape or coastal settings. In a typical view, dated 1877 (fig. 353), a railroad worker is seen abruptly cut off at mid-leg in front of a pulsating spectacle in which we can begin to sort out, in a billowing sea of vaporous blue paint, the half-enclosed foreground spaces of the train shed and a more distant, open vista of apartment houses and railroad bridge. Usurping the domain of Romantic cloud studies, such as Constable's (see fig. 142), Monet here examines how the smoke from the engines condenses in rounded puffs under the pointed roof of the glass-and-iron shed. Like Les Halles, the vast new marketplace built during the Second Empire, the train station would become for many mid-nineteenth-century Parisians a thrilling symbol of modernity, a secularized Gothic cathedral whose vast luminous spaces, supported by the thinnest of umbrella-like skeletons, seemed to dissolve into the ambient atmosphere of the sky and streets of an industrialized city.



Fig. 353 **Claude Monet**, *Gare St.-Lazare, Paris*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 32¾ × 40½".
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

For Monet, this nucleus of modern urban life, a world of constant flux created by the dynamic rhythms of mechanical power and the rapid movement of thousands of people by public transportation, presented to him an environment so charged with multiple, changing energies that one painting alone could barely encompass it. What he needed to do, rather, was to make a series of paintings of the diverse spectacles provided by the station, each one of which could offer only a partial glimpse of an infinitely complex continuum. Instead of using each of these studies as an idea later to be recomposed as a grand pictorial synthesis that would be larger than the sum of its parts, he let the component parts speak for themselves, offering as they did a greater intensity of truth to immediate perceptions. In attempting to seize the realities of the perceived world through a series of views of the same motif, Monet paralleled the contemporary investigations of stop-action photography, in which the movement of humans or animals would be documented in stepwise, second-by-second series as in Marey's photography (see page 419). Yet Monet's art, at times describable

as quasi-scientific in approach, keeps crossing the threshold between extremes of objectivity and subjectivity. For finally, by intensifying the uniqueness of the artist-observer as the only source of visual truth about the external world, Monet tells us as much about the growingly refined nuances of his own perceptions, so attuned to the dissolution of the material world in a vibrant fabric of colored atmosphere, as he does about the documentable facts of a bustling railroad station. What begins here as public reportorial truth can end up almost as a private visual fantasy, a judgment more easily weighed by comparison with other paintings of railway stations, such as one by Angelo Morbelli (1853–1919), a painter who often depicted modern life in Milan, the most industrialized of Italian cities. In 1889, he recorded the inside of the train shed of the new Central Station, including, as did Monet, a cross-section of locomotives, carriages, passengers, workers, and indoor and outdoor spaces filled with smoke and daylight (fig. 354). Yet Morbelli's view, with its running figure, its lateral croppings of engine and porters, appears to be a plausibly

impersonal, split-second document of a public fact, detailed enough in its description of distant passengers to define their period costume and objective enough in the description of this vast interior space to employ a one-point perspective system that literally demonstrates the diagrammatic phenomenon of parallel railway tracks converging on the horizon. Next to this, Monet's on-the-spot view seems a pre-rational mirage, a filmy vision captured before shapes and spaces can be sorted out and categorized by the learned constructs of the mind.

When described abstractly, such a passionate dedication to the instant perception of moving light and color implies both a denial of interest in the motif depicted and a refusal to alter the data of vision to accommodate purely aesthetic preferences. But in fact, revised interpretations of Monet have indicated that even he, the archetypal Impressionist, could never attain the theoretical purity of an art that was completely subservient to the seen moment. It has become perfectly clear, for instance, that his choice of subject matter was anything but arbitrary; and the very fact that in the 1870s he was drawn to themes like the new Paris boulevards, railroad stations, and growing suburbs indicates his intense awareness of the changing world around him and his willingness to turn his back temporarily on the timeless phenomena of landscape that would later preoccupy him more fully. Moreover, we now know that even his rapid, shorthand technique and narrowed

field of vision are pictorial devices partly inspired by popular illustrations in contemporary magazines, just as we now know, too, that far from executing all of his paintings entirely on the spot, he was quite capable of reworking them in his studio in order to create more satisfying aesthetic wholes, even at the expense of an impersonal snapshot veracity. In short, Cézanne's famous quip about Monet's genius and its limitations—"He was only an eye, but what an eye"—no longer corresponds to our understanding of the complexities of his painting. Especially in the 1870s, when he worked with a group of artists with related goals, he could pursue simultaneously the world of modern life, in documentary records of the here and now, and the world of art, in subjective structures of beauty and coherence that replaced familiar concepts of order and clarity.

The equation of Realism and aestheticism was a precarious one, and many of Monet's contemporaries stressed more emphatically one or the other of these possibilities. In the case of the Anglo-American Whistler, who in the 1860s in Paris espoused the Realist cause with Courbet and Manet, the aesthetic component became intensified in the 1870s in London, where he painted many views of the Thames veiled in mysterious gray-blue fogs that would transform the grimy facts of industrial pollution into muted fantasies of Japanese refinement, and that would soon inspire no less nuanced poems by the young Oscar Wilde.

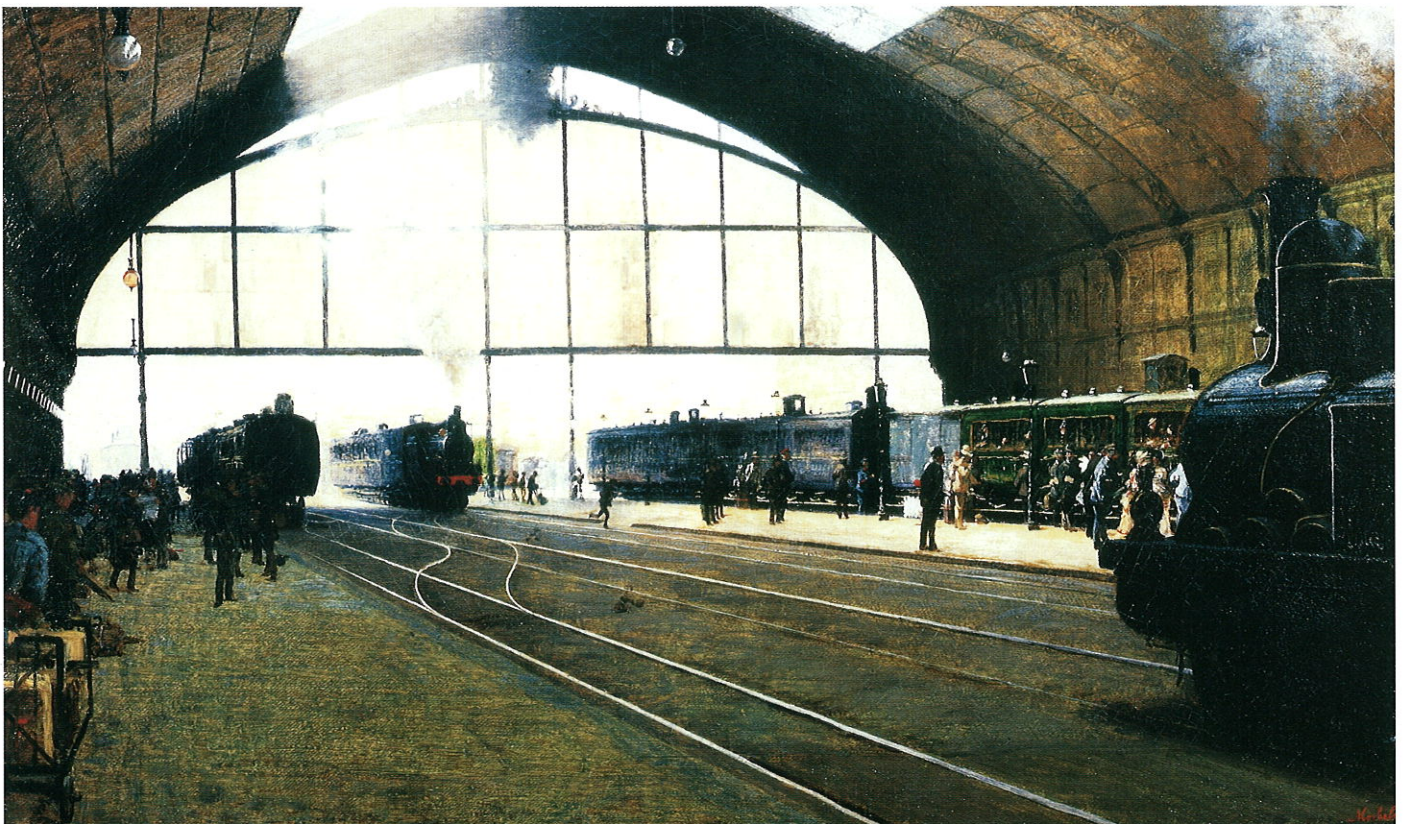


Fig. 354 **Angelo Morbelli**, *Central Station, Milan*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 23¼ × 40". Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan.