

Mary Cassatt is a noticeable figure in the impressionist circle because she stood out as the only American member in the group. She started to study painting in her home town of Pennsylvania and shifted around various places in Europe before she decided to make a life for herself in Paris in 1875. Her actions were peculiar for the time she and other impressionist women lived in as women were not encouraged to leave home without assistance or provide for herself without a husband or family. However, Cassatt became friends with Edgar Degas, a Paris-based Impressionist painter, where she began her career in painting. She went on to submit work to several impressionist exhibitions. Cassatt, unlike most women in the era, would not accept the idea of wedding and starting a family of her own, in everything she did, she would stray from the normal and socially acceptable standards of living as a woman – although many of her paintings depict a mother and child. The lack of motivation to become a mother and wife was disturbing to most people in the French community as it was a custom of sorts to raise a family with your husband.

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The third woman of the main impressionist painters was Eva Gonzales who died at a young age of 34. She was well-known for the style of which she would paint portraits, unlike even the impressionist who were already unlike anything else. She would show emotion in her paintings with the rich detail in her work. An example of these works would be *Loge in the Theatre des Italiens, 1874*. This painting was said to be the most provocative in its day, largely influenced by Manet, who chose her as his private pupil. She and Manet were both considered members of the impressionist circle, despite not having submitted anything to an exhibition.

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Marie Bracquemond differed from the other 3 women impressionist painters because of her social status and upbringing. She, unlike her fellow 3 women, was not granted the supreme gift of being taught how to paint, she quite simply learned and taught herself. Growing up her family never introduced her to the arts, until she crushed wildflower petals to use as paints and present her mother with a painting as a birthday gift. When her ingenuity was noticed by a family friend, they kindly gave her a set of oil paints – this is where it all started. The challenge she faced most was the unkind disapproval her husband showed her interest in painting. Being a successful painter himself. He refused to condone the idea of her becoming an impressionist painter. In spite of her husband's disapproval, she attempted to continue to paint for as long as she possibly could. Bracquemond wrote that she has "decided to overcome any obstacle; instead of painting flowers I want to work on painting and express whatever feelings the work could inspire in me." This is a true impressionistic statement. However her efforts were useless in the end, and she stopped painting because of her husband's hard headiness' in 1890.

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Different parts of different societies view the women impressionists in their own ways. No two people are the same in all their opinions- however there was a strong sense of approval and even encouragement for women impressionist painters in the French painting community. In saying this, many of the critics were sceptical as to how acceptable this was for a woman to become a painter and form a living out of it. But there was an incredible amount of people outside of the art community who shunned the idea completely and immediately formed an opinion about these four women. Life was supposed to be set in stone for them and they were supposed to follow the path that had been laid out for them with generations gone by. Although it is important to remember that everywhere you go, people will be rebelling against the socially unacceptable lifestyles and impressionist art is no exception as clearly displayed by the four brave women who took that step into a new light. As Berthe Morisot stated once before: "I don't think there has ever been a man who treated a woman as an equal and that's all I would have asked, for I know I'm worth as much as they." These women would open the artistic world to a new light, showing that women could paint just as well as any man could, and also be famous and make a living out of it.

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