Chapter 2 - The Geo-politics of Pleinairism

The aim of this chapter is to show the cumulative dissatisfactions that were arising in the art profession by the late nineteenth century. In most countries, artists had already found good reasons to paint topographical character only to find official indifference or even hostility. Their keenness to engage closer with nature went along with the gradually evolving philosophical ideologies that were emblematic of late Romanticism, where the personal response of the individual to given situations was valued. There were close parallels in contemporary literature and music, so that one saw writers, poets and composers joining in the exploration of the countryside, Claude Debussy’s The Sea (1905) and Edward Edgar’s orchestral works inspired by the Malvern Hills come to mind. Reforms did take place in the state art institutions and salons, yet the pace of change never quite reflected the changing socio-political realities of the day. There are many ways in which to illustrate the widening gap between repressive governments and the consequences of free inquiry amongst its intelligentsia. Painting realism was controversial, epitomized by the career of Gustave Courbet (1819-77). Painting outdoors, out of the city and closer to rural life, came to represent a raft of ideas that embraced more democratic notions that were radical in themselves, exemplified by the popularity of Millet’s series of peasants labouring. The slow official acceptance of plein-air landscape painting also came to illustrate many of the problems that resulted from ignorance of the rural environment, despite the greater authenticity and sincerity that resulted from close observation, as opposed to the idealism and classicism of much academic training.

One of the first difficulties, when dealing with the term ‘pleinairism’, is the question of what it entails, for it gradually became associated with slightly different activities in different countries and at different times. Is it a painting done entirely out of doors or a realistic picture that gives that appearance? Curiously, plein-air painting was greeted with horror by some authorities, as a method and for exhibiting the ugly realities of poverty in the countryside. For example, Wilhelm Lübke criticized “the latest fashionable French disease” after viewing Liebermann’s works in the 1888 Glaspalast International Exposition, works that included The Flax-scourers of Laren, and continued “quite apart from their thoroughly ugly subjects, in such a grubby, blotchy, unfinished, and fidgety manner that they appear merely sketched out and in no sense complete.” Nevertheless, this ‘umbrella word’, pleinairism, became part of the central methodology behind the drive to Modernism. Why then was this process seen as radical? What was so frightening about painting what you saw or picturing ordinary daily life?

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41 Foster-Hahn, 1996, p. 63, cites Wilhelm Lübke, *Altes und Neues: Studien und Kritiken* (Breslau, 1891), pp. 11-12, who criticizes Liebermann’s canvases as unfinished, such as Garden of the Amsterdam Old Man’s Home. This rejection of the traditional polished and transparent layering was not peculiar to Germany. For example, it formed a part of Ruskin’s criticism of J.M. Whistler’s *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, 1877, in the subsequent court case.
In hindsight, pleinairism may be perceived as a transitional movement, in a similar way to the achievements of the Barbizon masters, who, although they worked out-of-doors, still ‘finished’ their paintings back in their ateliers. In many ways it was a grass-roots response to the idealism and mannerism of previous neoclassical styles. The notion of a painter getting closer to his subject matter held much appeal at the time, as it complemented other areas of artistic interest, such as topographical and meteorological verisimilitude, peasant genre, regionalism and the nature of light itself. However, such free expression was not officially welcomed in many countries, where censorship was still prevalent and reactionary state politics curbed the thirst for free inquiry, most famously, in the tirades of Kaiser Wilhelm II, “sworn enemy of plein-air painting and naturalistic drama,”42 which were directed against French cultural hegemony.

Such protests were an extreme form of national chauvinism, yet the Kaiser was not alone in rejecting modernism in general and impressionist methods in particular. For example, an unofficial yet common division of Danish painters into nationalists or ‘blondes’ and the internationalists or ‘auburns’ and the ‘Jews’ occurred at roughly the same time.43 In addition, after 1851, it became the custom for nations to invest huge amounts of capital into erecting ever larger international expositions to show off their cultural identities and modernity, which inevitably included a pavilion dedicated to Art. Choosing suitable contemporary art and design became an official nightmare for governments, who were required to appear progressive, so that painting became yet another battleground in the complex politics of the period. This chapter will try to separate the different threads of international pleinairism that acted together to influence the evolution of representational paintings, and eventually modernism, illustrated by actions that led to the formation of so many artists’ colonies.

**Plein-air painting or études**

One might be forgiven for thinking that there was a clear distinction drawn between a preliminary sketch and a painting, but in practice these lines often became blurred or overlapped.44 In the Italian-French nomenclature adopted by most art academies there were many subtle designations to be learnt, such as schizzi or esquisse, abozzo or ebauche, étude, première pensée, disegno or dessin, croquis and tableau.45 Detailed preparatory studies were compulsory in all art academy curricula, although, curiously, not painting so much as drawing. The degree of exactitude varied, nature was far less important than, for example, armour, costumes, church and monumental architecture. There were academy professors of perspective and anatomy, but not of natural sciences.46 Training might include sketching on location, but these plein-air studies were aids to the construction of the final composition.

Professor Pierre-Henri Valenciennes (1750-1819) was one of the first, in France, to push for the official acceptance of landscape painting in 1800,47 by petitioning for it to have its own distinct academy class, worthy of its own competition, the Prix de paysage historique. The

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43 Svandholm, 2001, p. 32.
44 Later in their careers, for example, what had been plein-air studies for some painters were undoubtedly signed and sold as finished works, see Barrett, 1995.
45 For a fuller explanation see Boime, 1971, pp. 79-89.
46 Meldahl & Johansen, 1904, p. 131. There were professors of perspective, mathematics, anatomy, art history and mythology only in Copenhagen Art Academy, until 1904.
47 Valenciennes, Élémens de perspective pratique..., 1800, the first of many publications that promoted landscape painting and plein-air techniques.
landscape prize was officially recognised only in 1817 and even then it was not awarded annually or even offered every fourth year, as was normal. Théodore Rousseau (1812-67) competed for this award as early as 1829. The French academic objections seem as much to do with the subject matter as with the execution, “as artists began to ignore the classically composed landscape and to concentrate upon the qualities of a natural site, their works assumed more and more an unfinished appearance in the traditional sense. Emphasis upon originality and pictorial effect contributed to the evolution of new techniques, and a preoccupation with the general ensemble invested the landscapes of the independents with a sketchy look.”

By contrast, outdoor watercolour painting in England had long been admired and practiced for the fresh qualities it achieved. Many of the leading English artists of the day were eccentric individuals, such as Constable, Turner and Cotman, all of whom benefited from topographical tours rather than sticking to academy dogmas. Watercolour painting in the English countryside was immensely popular after 1800 and, being a socially acceptable activity, the demand served to boost the numbers of quality artists’ colourmen. Companies, such as George Rowney, James Newman, Charles Roberson and Winsor & Newton, all produced portable, compact, boxed sets of colours, the likes of which Turner found so useful, fitting easily into his overcoat pockets with his sketchbooks. From c.1810 onwards, Turner’s output of landscapes of the coasts of England, then Wales and Scotland, and finally of Holland, Belgium and France, was substantial and served to raise the popularity of topographical painting even further. Fully, one third of his output was sea-scapes. He was also in an advantageous position to observe and record the changing state of these nations, as seen from his many sailing tours. Napoleon Bonaparte’s armies may have changed the face of continental Europe but all along the coastal margins military defences caused major physical alterations. Huge government investment went into the building and refurbishment of fortifications, piers, dock-yards, highways, castles and ports, together with mapping and picturing these landscapes. This kind of action did not cause a major increase in pleinairism, but it did bring to attention the value of truthful rendition of landscape to some state authorities.

In 1824, the first substantial international art exhibition after the Napoleonic Wars took place in Paris. A sensation was caused by the naturalistic landscape paintings of the English, although they in their turn owed a debt to the old Dutch Masters. Realistic landscapes (2:2) by John Constable (1776-1837) and Richard Bonington (1802-28) are usually mentioned in this regard in the standard texts of the period. However, London’s Royal Academy did little to support this project.

48 Raoul-Rochette, 1830.
49 Boime, 1986, p. 133. According to Rosen and Zerner, 1986, p. 229, Ingres is quoted as saying that ”The brush stroke, as accomplished as it may be, should not be visible: otherwise it prevents the illusion, immobilizes everything. Instead of the object represented, it calls attention to the process: instead of the thought it betrays the hand.”
Presaging events that would happen half a century later, it was left to a perceptive English art dealer, John Arrowsmith, to organise the section called the ‘English Salon’, that included Constable’s *The Hay Wain*, 1824, a large impressive example of an artist confident with his technique; Copley Fielding (1787-1855), another accomplished *plein-air* landscape painter; and Bonington, who showed considerable talent for coastal scenes. Corot was a great admirer of Bonington’s watercolours, since first viewing his *Fishing village on the Somme Estuary*, 1821. Bonington was born in Nottingham yet lived in Calais for most of his short life. He was contacted by another Parisian art dealer, J.F. Ostervald, who commissioned him for an ambitious series of antiquarian lithographs for Baron Taylor’s *Voyage Pittoresque et Romantiques dans l’ancienne France*, 1823. This mirrors Turner’s print albums of his many travels and exploited the general public’s growing interest in landscape painting.

The painters at Barbizon, around mid-century are famed as the first group to promote *pleinairism*, but, there were other groups that had already practiced these techniques, with commendable results. Two notable examples lay either side of the North Sea: the Norwich School in England, 1805-25 and the Copenhagen School, 1830-50. These two cities contrast in character yet had long histories connecting them to broader artistic influences. In the case of Norwich, the Dutch influence is particularly strong because of the large number of maritime and landscape paintings in the region’s leading collections by masters such as Jakob van Ruisdael, Meindert Hobbema and Jan van Goyen. The Danes, however, looked much more towards Italy and Germany for its traditional models in art. The Roman experiences of academy professors C.W. Eckersberg and J.L. Lund showed the value of landscape painting based on clear illumination and sharp observation.

The provenance of the Barbizon artists is astonishing, for the pioneers were from all over France and Europe, and as far away as the USA. Yet, they were all united by their interest in realism. The *Barbizonniers* are usually said to be anti-academic yet, they never totally broke free from the official institutions, continuing to use, for example, the state salons and award system. These artists certainly enjoyed painting in oils out of doors, but these works were not usually finished there and, as in the case of Millet’s *Angelus*, 1857-59, they sometimes took years to complete. Artists are nothing if not inconsistent. As early as 1828 Corot, another painter influenced by his travels to Rome, wrote: “Do not lose sight of that first impression which moved you” and “...Something finished in one go is fresher, better drawn, and gains from many fortunate accidents, whereas when one retouches one looses this initial harmonious glow.”

However, this Barbizon ‘master’ constantly reworked his landscapes, before finally developing his *cliché verve* technique, in 1851. More honesty seems to come from his Barbizon friend Rousseau, who boasted intimate knowledge

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of the same forest nearby with “minute accuracy”, yet still made copious detailed sketches. Most of his colleagues imitated him, painted *en plein-air* and enjoyed refreshingly realistic results.

Ganne’s Hotel register in Barbizon, which begins only in May, 1848, records the wide geographical base of this pioneering group and already hints at how word of this Mecca spread world-wide in a relatively short space of time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Origin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>Hamilton Wild</td>
<td>from Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richard Hearn</td>
<td>from Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Thomas Seddon</td>
<td>from London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Florent and Auguste Willems</td>
<td>from Belgium, who also returned the following year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jules Adfen and Victor Müller</td>
<td>from Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anna and Alexander Kolbs</td>
<td>from Russia, a mother and son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>Christian Carl Magnussen</td>
<td>from North Friesland, Schleswig, amongst many Dutch and Belgian artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>Lorenz Frølich</td>
<td>an early Danish landscapist, amongst the many British and American artist lodgers</td>
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<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>H. Balling</td>
<td>from Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karl Bodmer</td>
<td>an influential Austro-German and early resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilhelm Füssli</td>
<td>from Switzerland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alfred Woolner and Henri Wallis</td>
<td>from Great Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Willem Roelofs</td>
<td>from “Amsterdam”, a highly influential promoter of <em>pleinairism</em> in Belgium and The Netherlands</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles Michals</td>
<td>from Brussels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enoch W. Perry</td>
<td>from New Orleans</td>
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</tbody>
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Official French academy attitudes to landscape painting seem to remain entrenched, judging by the continued rejections of Rousseau’s works by successive salon committees, although, after mid-century, a few art teachers such as Charles Gleyre (1806-74), Thomas Couture (1815-79) and Corot urged their pupils to paint *en plein-air* and visit the Forest of Fontainebleau. Corot’s landscapes retained a refined Italianate component, especially his *sfumato* greenery technique, so that he was the acceptable face of landscape painting to many, with a foot in both camps, but Rousseau was regarded as an “outlaw and heretic.”

His first painting was accepted by the Salon in 1831 but the next, after a long series of rejections, not until 1848, and only then because of the revolutionary decision that year to abolish the usual jury system.

Part of the attraction of Paris for painters was that it was such an international melting pot of radicalism. The undercurrent of revolution was apparent in these creative tensions with official prejudices. They were also present in other countries but the progressives could receive much more publicity in France. One of the major mechanisms for change came about when new printing technologies found a champion in the drawing skills of Honoré Daumier (1808-79), whose “premeditated spontaneity revolutionised illustration for books and especially magazines

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54 The 1848 Salon jury and hanging committee were chosen by the artists, all 801 electors, and they were obliged to accept 5,180 works for show. It was an organisational disaster and was never repeated. In addition, from 1849, they introduced free entry, except on certain days, which caused huge overcrowding, see Zola, 1850, p. 302, who estimated 50,000 visitors on one Sunday.
of humour.”\textsuperscript{55} His satirical lithographs, first for \textit{La Caricature} then \textit{Le Charivari},\textsuperscript{56} in particular, lampooned the failures of the authorities, especially King Louis-Philippe, the legal system, the church and the Academy-Salon system’s many absurdities. Not only were his lithographs entertaining, they also showed the pictorial importance of eliminating the inessentials (3:2).

A more surprising criticism of \textit{plein-air} practice came from a general supporter of the French Impressionists and a writer much given to keen observation of social life. Emile Zola’s comments on the 1880 Paris Salon raised more questions about when exactly a painting was finished: “Monet’s \textit{ébauches} have emerged from his studio in difficult times, and this is worth nothing, it pushes a painter down the slippery slope. When one is too easily satisfied, when one delivers an \textit{esquisse} that is scarcely dry…. M. Monet is today suffering for his haste, for his need to sell….He must resolutely devote himself to important canvases, worked at over a period of time.” Zola was a close friend of Monet and knew his studio well enough, and was aware of his predicament, particularly his financial straights, “his need to sell.” Zola was knowledgeable about the stages of production necessary to reach the official standard of a Salon painting, yet in this quote he is neither questioning the style nor the content (4:2). His objection was that they were unfinished, seen by the frequent use of the term \textit{ébauche}. Contemporary commentators were of the opinion that impressionist paintings were merely the preliminary stages only of the traditionally constructed, polished and layered composition, as seen the works of Ernst Meissonier and A.-W. Bougereau, amongst others. This is said to result from the overcrowded conditions in the art academy and the consequent lowering of the quality-time spent between teacher and pupil. Impressionism, pleinairism and \textit{alla prima} techniques concentrated on the immediate response to a scene and not the slow crafted detailing of a view. Millet, Rousseau, Monet and Pissaro each had slightly different intentions for promoting their \textit{plein-air} works, although the trend is clearly toward better representation of natural light, \textit{valeur} colour harmonies and more everyday scenes. Part of the shock effect all \textit{alla prima} techniques had for traditionalists was that they demystified the artistic process, making it open to all, and, just as subversively, it now meant that all subjects might be suitable for fine art, not only the few fixed themes and styles promoted by the state academies.

The question of Monet’s personal, as opposed to the collective, motivation in continuing to offer signed \textit{ébauches} to the Salon raises other issues, generally ignored. Traditional scenarios on the rise of French Impressionism follow the broad lines taken by Meier-Graefe, Rewald and others that focus largely the ideology or iconography, but more pragmatic opinions now suggest additional financial reasons account for some of his unusual behaviour.\textsuperscript{57} Monet’s poverty was persistent and sometimes it drove him to try every possible subterfuge to raise revenue in the fledgling independent art market. Only in the 1880s, were there many viable alternatives to the powerful Paris Salon and the official, state-run, auction house, \textit{Hôtel Drouôt}. The virtual monopoly they held on the sale of art work in France had been weakening since the

\textsuperscript{55} Hyatt Mayor, 1971.
\textsuperscript{56} The proprietor of both these new illustrated magazines was Charles Philipon. \textit{Le Charivari} was much less political and more social satire.
\textsuperscript{57} House, 2000, pp. 45-46.
1860s. It is easy to imagine a penurious Monet hawking all the works he could around the various sale-rooms, galleries, cafés, stationers, print shops, antiquaries and artists’ materials suppliers that the city had to offer. He was one of many such artists. Part of that desperation drove Monet to submit the rough *plein-air* works to the Salon, which was allowed but not encouraged by the jury, and even if accepted were placed in minor rooms or poor positions. These acts of official refusal, of works by Monet, Rousseau, Whistler and other high-profile *avant-gardistes*, helped create one of the earliest modern art myths, an image of the long-suffering bohemian artist as misunderstood genius, popularised by novels such as *Trilby*, a central character in which was a pastiche of Whistler, whom the author, George du Maurier, knew when together they attended Gleyre’s art academy in Paris in the 1850s.

Academies were originally organised by states to regulate the training and development of artists. In the broadest sense, they wrestled the production of art away from a guild-controlled, Church-sanctioned mechanism to an academic system sponsored by the state. “This transition coincided with both a social and conceptual change in pedagogy, wherein art instruction shifted from the private to the public domain, and from the practical to the theoretical.” Plein-air methodology, in effect, helped open up the process of creativity to anyone, particularly when combined with an organised independent sector, the Dealer-Critic System, and innovative equipment. It was not out of control, as the state feared, nor decadent, but absorbed and complemented both tradition and experimentation. However, this process came at a price, for it opened the door forever to such things as fraud, speculators and the fickleness of fashion. Nevertheless, the grass-roots development of pleinairism, as seen in the growth of many rural artists’ colonies, implied a fresh, open and more democratic movement that took a healthy view about innovation, no matter where or whom it came from.

Part of the appeal of *plein-air* paintings was their modest, intimate format. They tend to be small simply for practical reasons. The wind limited the dimensions of any outdoor canvas, but it was made common through the use of ‘travellers’ paint-boxes’ and the practice of pinning a board or canvas cut to fit inside the lid, sometimes designed to take several canvases at a time. So frequent was the demand for this size that, one specific range of small canvas was called ‘Impressionist’. There are, nevertheless, many notable exceptions, in terms of canvas dimension, including, amusingly, Stanhope Forbe’s first major picture at Newlyn, *A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach*, 1885, (121.5 x 155 cm.) which was painted with much difficulty on the windy foreshore of Mounts Bay. Many Hague School works owe their origin to *plein-air* methods, but gradually its artists, such as Mesdag and Israëls, returned to their studios and seem to rely more and more on painting up from sketches and *plein-air* studies, the traditional method.

The single most famous Barbizon work is undoubtedly Millet’s *The Angelus*, 1857-9. It measures only 55 x 66 cm., yet took him two years to complete and was largely painted in his studio (25:4). Yet, it was admired: “The figures of a peasant and a labourer began as ‘genre’, but at present, with Millet the great master as a leader, this is the very core of modern art, and will remain so.” Barbizon pleinairism is regarded as representing an interim stage to impressionism,

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58 It is interesting to note that Paul Gauguin, one of the figureheads of the avant-garde and anti-establishmentism, still used the services of the state auction house, Hôtel Drouot, several times in the 1890s.
59 Maurier, 1895; see also, Zemel, 1977.
61 Dunstan, 1976, p. 43. The ‘Impressionist Size’ was approximately 20 x 25 inches (52 x 66 cm.).
yet many fascinating practices started in this school. For example, much effort was made to capture specific times of day and atmospheric affects. The title *Angelus* denotes a very specific time of day, in this case, six o’clock in the evening, but other works detail precise yet ephemeral events as rainbows, mists, sub-zero light, different clouds and, of course, sunsets, rather than traditional, classical illumination. The Hague School painters emphasized a huge variety of natural atmospheres, not just clear-blue skies. John Sillevis, amongst others, has traced many links to Barbizon *plein-air* works, such as Millet’s *Spring* and Roelof’s *The Rainbow*, c.1875, and with genre compositions, such as Millet’s *The Angelus* and Israëls’ *The Shepherd*, 1864.63

Naturally, pictures of sunsets were particularly common all along this North Sea coast (5:2), as it faces west, but such care and attention to atmospheric detail may also be seen out on the broad open plains and on farmed land. There was a new tendency, in landscape paintings, to dramatically move the pictorial horizon, especially lowering the line to emphasize the sky and its clouds, or raising it to concentrate on water and waves. Both now needed to be more realistic to maintain the illusion or else the whole subject was diminished. This emphasis on the sky is common to many Scheveningen and Katwijk pictures but also at Worpswede, for example, in Otto Modersohn’s *Dark Clouds over the Dunes*, 1890; at Skagen, with Vilhelm Kyhn’s *Kandestederne Strand*; and from Fanø, in Johan Rohde’s *Sønderho Harbour*, c.1920.

The fascination with the process of painting *en plein-air* was not only captured in photographs, but also reproduced as postcards and became the subject of many paintings themselves, painters painting painters painting outdoors. However, it is difficult to know how ‘staged’ these photographs were. If we take the example of Liebermann in Katwijk, we see him in front of a large canvas in the dunes, a place notorious for the constancy of its winds and yet he barely secures it down. A photograph also exists of Fritz Mackensen adding finishing touches to his vast canvas, *Prayer-meeting*, 1895, in the moor near Worpswede, although his earlier sketches survive, from 1887, and show considerable preparation. Many paintings of colleagues at work in the open-air reveal the camaraderie of the process, its humours and its fashionable side, such as C-F. Daubigny on a boat, *The studio on the water*, 1861 (Auvers-sur-Oise); John Singer Sargent’s *Claude Monet Painting at the Edge*, 1887 (Giverny) and Paul Helleu sketching his wife Alice, 1889; John Lavery, *A pupil of mine*, 1883 (Grez); Jacob Nöbbe, *Wilhelm Dreesen painting plein-air*, 1893, (Ekensund); Max Müller on Fanø, *Portrait of Johan Rohde*, c.1922; and, Willem Roelof’s, *Victor Bauffe at work in Noorden, Nieuwkoop*, 1883.

Most, early, pure, *plein-air* paintings were landscapes, of one variety or another. As artists stayed longer on location, and especially in mutually supportive groups in villages, they soon gained in confidence and explored other aspects of the location, not static subjects but customs, costumes, work and traditional festivals. The wish to engage closer with these events caused a shift from not just documenting the activities but capturing the mood and motivations. Pictures of outdoor village dances, for example, by Anders Zorn at Morkarlby or Carl Bantz at Willinghausen, brought the viewer into the swirling crowd. Experiments were made with new angles and perspectives, thus Daubigny’s famous floating studio and, pictured here, August Wilckens painting in Sønderho harbour (6:2).

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63 Sillevis & Kraan, 1985, p. 179.
Over the course of the century more artists saw the benefits from painting en plein-air, which opened up a wealth of subject matter for fresh inspection. The academies approved of making meticulous studies, of course, but the general movement to the countryside was seen to bring back a new range of methods, techniques and insights they had not expected. Free-inquiry and free-expression often had only slightly different results in each country, yet the paths to full alla prima painting varied according to the structure of the art establishment from which pleinairism grew.

Friluftsmalerier

Scandinavian countries founded their art academies remarkably early, yet relied heavily on imported talent to produce the necessary monumental art governments’ demanded. Sweden established its Academy of Drawing in 1735. The Copenhagen Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1754, fourteen years earlier than London’s. The curriculum was traditionally organised to produce examples of solid patriotic subjects, such as wars, royalty, religious- and historic-figure compositions, influenced by many European models. However, once trained, there was precious little work in the home countries, few official posts and lucrative commissions for the professional painter. Norway was in a particularly poor position, for it had no academy at all. It was not then an independent nation but an impoverished dominion of Denmark, then ceded to Sweden in 1814. However, this did not stop them producing talented landscape painters, such as Johan Christian Dahl (1788-1857) who trained in Copenhagen’s Art Academy, then travelled and settled in Dresden, as an art professor, from 1825. He was known for his dramatic landscapes, although neither in the clear neoclassical manner of Eckersberg nor of the introspective type, promoted by Casper David Friederich, both of whom he knew well.

By the 1880s, a new generation of Scandinavian artists, bolstered by their experiences in French artists’ colonies, felt bold enough to tackle the general conservatism of the academies, in their use of new techniques and in their focus on contemporary issues. Courbet was an obvious influence, “I am not a socialist, but a democrat and a republican as well, in a word a partisan of all revolution and above all a Realist...for a Realist means a sincere lover of the honest truth.” Typically, almost all official factions claimed a strong affinity to the land and, therefore, to be the true arbiters of culture. Something similar to these political tensions, between neoclassical ideals and grim reality, may be found across most of Europe at this time, not helped by the rapidly growing demographic differences between town and country. Opinions were often polarised: traditional agrarian economies versus new industrial development, or unrestrained capitalism versus socialist equality. While painters would not resolve these problems, they did, despite strong censorship, gradually illustrate the realities of the changing social order.

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64 Exh. Cat. Amsterdam, 2001, points out the influences on Danish nineteenth century painting of Italian models and the seventeenth century Dutch Masters. Half of the Danish Royal Collection of paintings, c. 1,000 works, opened to the public in 1827, were Dutch. Count Moltke, a Danish connoisseur, also owned many Dutch Old Masters, which were made available to painters, such as Exner. Engraved copies of Dutch Old Masters were also widely available.

65 Eisenman, 1994, p. 206, citing a newspaper article of 1851.
Pleinairism was one of the tools of the new realism, although in itself painting out of doors simply encouraged artists to leave their ateliers, the better to observe the world around them.

The gentle nature of the Danish topography rarely produced the powerful pictorial statements possible in Swedish and Norwegian landscape painting, such as those by J.C. Dahl and Hans Gude (1825-1903), both of whom became influential in German landscape art from mid-century. However, outside events arose and conspired to produce many changes in Denmark. It had tried hard to avoid being dragged into The Napoleonic Wars, but political dithering had resulted in the devastating bombardment of its capital city and the burning of its fleets by 1807. It was out of a need to restore national pride, typically, that the country’s cultural and artistic renaissance became officially endorsed. Part of this was achieved through the actions of state institutions, namely the Academy of Art and the Copenhagen Society for Fine Art. The academy’s training reforms started only when the leader of the ‘old guard’, Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard (1743-1809), was replaced by Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg (1783-1853), newly back from Rome. Eckersberg rejected the idealizing of the previous century by replacing it with a realism based on nature studies, yet retaining some classical principles of composition. He had won the top academy prize in 1809 and, unusual for a Dane at that time, went to Paris first, studying under J.-L. David until 1813. This was followed by three more years in Rome, when he is said to have fully matured. It was here that he took up plein-air painting, seen in a series of small masterpieces of architectural and urban views, which were exhibited back in Copenhagen and remained a continual reference point for art students thereafter. In some ways, he justifies the title of ‘the father of Danish painting’, but in spite of producing an exemplary body of work, schooling some excellent students and leading the ‘Danish Golden Age’, 1830-50, he failed to fully reform the academy, which did not officially apply his recommendations until the end of the century.

The state academy might claim that his rise was a good example of their stewardship, for he had emerged from their ranks, worked well, learnt under the best available professors, won a travel scholarship and benefited from his classic experience. However, a counter-argument can be built that explains his new approach, which combines some radically new international elements, namely the simplification of David’s neo-classicism, the clarity of Italian light and the youthful romanticism of The Nazarenes. There were some typical institutional failures, for example, the Danish academy rarely awarded its ‘Greater Gold Medal’, or Prix de Rome, to painters during its first two centuries, in contrast to its sculptors and architects, a source of increasing irritation to many. This situation is indicative of institutional conservatism, that even C.W. Eckersberg at the height of his powers was unable to reform.

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66 Denmark declined economically after loosing two further conflicts with resurgent Prussia, in 1848-9 and 1864, resulting in the loss of much of Jylland, Slesvig, Holsten and Mecklenborg. Danish overseas territories still included The Faroe islands and Greenland, but the national psyche was at a low.

67 In a letter dates 23rd July 1814 he wrote that all his Rome pictures were finished on the spot, from Nature, or “Malte faerdige paa stedet efter Naturen.”


69 Monrad, 1994, pp. 11-19.

70 Meldahl & Johansen, 1904, pp. 145-49. Architects were granted the topmost prize, the ‘Store Guldmedaille’ almost annually from 1755-1900, sculptors about half the time, but painters only 20 times in 150 years.

71 Eckersberg’s award came only after the death of N.A. Abildgaard (1743-1809), the Danish Art Academy’s powerful director and a staunch classicist/conservative.
Eckersberg, was thirty years old when he finally reached Rome and there he met the most successful and richest Danish artist ever, the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844). Thorvaldsen holds a special position in Danish art history for he was the first artist to achieve high international status and was, at that time, fast replacing Antonio Canova as the top sculptor in Europe. Thorvaldsen and Eckersberg became close friends. They lodged at the same villa, Pensione Casa Butti, with another talented painter, a young German called Wilhelm von Schadow (1788-1862), who later taught at the Berlin Academy and, from 1826, became director of the progressive Düsseldorf Academy. At that time Schadow was an enthusiastic follower of the Nazarenes, a brotherhood of youthful, idealistic, German Romantic painters who believed in the high moral purpose of art. They attached an importance to scenes of everyday life, detailed it in an exact light and high tone. Eckersberg’s artistic attitudes matured in Rome, (7:2), not untypically, for, at that time, it was a hot-house of international artistic talents. The pleinairism practised here predates the School of Barbizon. It can clearly be seen in all Eckersberg’s landscapes of the Campagna and later in those of his students, such as Købke and Rørbye.

The literature on the Danish Golden Age generally focuses on C.W. Eckersberg as its main artistic motivator, yet he had considerable peer group support from J.L. Lund (1777-1867), as a confidant and ally. They both came from mid-Jutland, graduated about the same time, went to Paris and Italy, and became professors at the Copenhagen Art Academy in the same year, 1818. Before they were bogged down with the burden of administration, they managed to bring about some reforms to the curriculum and teaching methods in the early 1820s. They replaced drawing-only classes with some painting instruction by 1842, but the live-model classes they wanted were suppressed. Eckersberg encouraged the students to go out further ‘beyond the citadel’ (8:2). Christen Købke (1810-48) and J.T. Lundbye (1818-48) found interest in nearby north Zeeland. Only three friluftsmalere ever reached the distant North Sea coast of Jutland, all separately, but it is interesting to note that their very atmospheric canvases were all accepted for exhibition in the annual salons, although their reception was predictably low-key. Of those three pleinairists Martinus Rørbye (1803-48) was the only one to reach the northern tip of Jutland, in 1833, and is regarded as the first painter to picture the peculiar atmosphere of the fishing village of Skagen, later to host the largest and most famous Nordic artists’ colony.

What also distinguishes the treatment of these Copenhagen School painters was that their landscapes hold a unity that often transforms them as simple statements of reality, seen in Dankvart Dreyer’s rather matter-of-fact paintings under the windswept cliffs of Bovbjerg in the summer of 1843. Kasper Monrad comments:” Even though painters inspired by national romanticism idealized nature, they rooted their art so firmly in close observation of nature that they based their paintings on what they could actually see; Dreyer would never have invented a picture of the North Sea completely different from what he had seen.” In other words, he painted what he saw, as he found it and on the spot. Such was the advanced state of Danish, plein-air, oil painting in the 1840s, but the significance of it here was that it was also officially

72 It is often overlooked in the literature that Lund, too, studied under David in Paris and met Thorvaldsen in Rome, although, in his works and in the quality of his pupils, Lund cannot compare to those of his colleague, Eckersberg.
73 Monrad, 1994, p. 79.
recognised by the art academy, unlike in France. Unfortunately, despite Dreyer and his colleagues having overcome the problems of producing and showing *plein-air* work, they failed to succeed in convincing the buying public or attracting patrons. By 1850 most of the group had died, given up painting as a career or moved south. There was a legacy, but no continuity.

Denmark’s official art, at this time, also offers a clear example of overriding political issues, a patriotic movement common in most countries and usually labelled National Romanticism. In a small country, such as Denmark, it is clear that a few activists can have major impact, more than in larger more complex societies. Besides Eckersberg and Lund encouraging their students to go to the countryside, the art historian Niels Lauritz Høyen actively encouraged this exploration, under the guise of architectural restoration. He saw topographical painting as integral to the national struggle: “there was a widespread feeling that the Danish national character was formed by the country’s natural geographical features.”74 He was in a sufficiently high professional position, curator of the royal art collection, to encourage the authorities to take some action and a competition resulted, organised through the auspices of the Copenhagen Fine Art Society after 1835. Prizes were on offer to paint the national heritage, for it was his aim to draw attention to the poor state of the national heritage, mainly its ancient and medieval buildings. By raising their political profile he wished to raise revenue for architectural renovation, bringing attention to the regions and documenting the folk-art of the country. His art competitions were, in effect, a kind of cultural Keynesianism.

The first winner of Høyen’s competition was Jørgen Roed (1808-1880) in 1836. Roed had travelled across to the west coast and the historic city of Ribe, with its, then, dilapidated cathedral. He painted a number of views of it, both inside and out,75 although his most monumental work of the cathedral’s chancel, the one that won the competition, owes more to wishful thinking than reality. Nevertheless, artists had now been officially sanctioned to explore the countryside. Consequently, under the guise of National Romanticism, during the second half of the nineteenth century, genre painters came to record the countryside, typified by Christen Dalsgaard (1825-1907), Johan Julius Exner (1825-1910) and Frederik Vermehren (1823-1910), although, ultimately, they “failed to achieve significant results for the reason that its devotees were lacking in technical proficiency.”76 Their picturesque representations pale by comparison with the new realism and Naturalism, that came from Skagen and that was soon to upstage them.

C.W.Eckersberg, was a fine portraitist and then marine painter, in a classical Beidermeier fashion, but there is one well-documented landscape painting that shows his *plein-air* credentials. *View of the Tile Works at Renbjerg*, 1830, (9:2), has more than his usual calm clarity, for it shows a fine breezy day over on the South Jutland coast. Much is known of his procedures from his academy monographs on methodology, but also, as a diligent professional artist, Eckersberg kept detailed diaries, that noted the exact temperature and other meteorological details. The Renbjerg landscape was completed over two sessions, in cool, windy weather, on a hilltop overlooking Flensborg Fjord, on two successive mornings, 31st May and 1st April, 1830.77 However, it is known that he added very slight, finishing touches to it back in his studio. More of of him painting, made by his his *plein-air* working method may also be deduced from an 1832

74 Monrad, 1994, p. 17.
75 Barrett, 1995. Many artists imitated Roed’s experience and compositions. For example, N.P.Mols (1859-1921) and Johan Rohde (1856-1935), made many landscapes from almost identical positions, prospects of Ribe and its inland harbour-side, *Skibbroen*.
pencil sketch, star pupil Christen Købke (8:2). In it, Eckersberg appears in sturdy, woollen tailcoat, wearing a top that, not unlike the stocky J.M.W. Turner in appearance, seated on a three-legged camp-stool, a mill-board pinned into the lid of his portable paint-box, which rests on his knees; a professional artist already comfortable with painting en plein-air, who had never heard of Barbizon.78

The Rendbjerg canvas is small yet offers a simple cohesive statement. Interestingly, this Rendbjerg tile factory, Teglværk, the kilns, sheds and harbour were familiar to him from childhood, a fact often overlooked in the discourse. He was born only twelve kilometres north of this bay, around the small peninsula at Blåkrog, in the parish of Varnaes, on the shore of the neighbouring inlet, the Als Fjord. It is, perhaps, too much to state it was the fashion to paint nostalgic scenes from one’s childhood, but it is curious how many other major, modern plein-air artists, across Europe, also drew on landscapes they knew intimately from their youth, such as John Constable around the River Stour; Gustave Courbet at Ornans; J.-F. Millet at Gruchy; Jules Bastien-Lepage at Damvillers; and, Emil Nolde around Seebüll.

This same bay on the northern shore of Flensburg Fjord formed the site of a later artists’ colony, at Ekensund.79 That was made up almost exclusively of German painters who lived in the border-town of Flensburg, at the head of the fjord.80 This region has suffered many major regime-changes, coming under the jurisdiction of Denmark, Prussia or Germany several times, being part of Sønder Jylland, Slesvig or Nord Schleswig, during that one hundred-year period and, as a consequence, all actions, including painting, were given, or acquired, political overtones. There were many artists of note who either originated or worked in this turbulent zone during the nineteenth century, including Eckersberg’s colleague J.L. Lund, Ditlev Conrad Blunck (1799-1843) and the sculptor H.W. Bissen (1798-1868); Louis Gurlitt (1812-97); and later impressionists Fritz Stoltenberg (Fanø, Skagen and Ekensund artists’ colonies); C.C. Magnussen (a Frisian painter who visited Barbizon early on, in May, 1852); Ludwig Dettmann (an art teacher of Paula Becker); Jakob Nöbbe (Ekensund and Fanø); August Wilckens (Dresden and Fanø); and, most famously of all, a pupil of Nöbbe and Wilckens, the ‘degenerate’ Antartiste and expressionist Emile Nolde).81 Being aware of the hotly disputed nature of one’s own home-region from an early age sharpened the senses, no doubt, and helped to understand the passions people have for their native environment, customs and traditions. 

The Danish picture that was most pivotal in the early development of Skagen as an artists’ colony is not a particularly fine example of plein-air work, although the artist, Michael Ancher (1849-1927), certainly had travelled the breadth of the land, from Denmark’s easternmost island, Bornholm, searching for an authentic mise en scene for his series on the subject of

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78 Christen Købke, C.W.Eckersberg painting during a study tour, 1832, pencil on paper, Statens museum for Kunst.
79 Danish: Egernsund.
80 Schulte-Wülwer, 2000².
81 Feddersen, 1984. He was christened Hans Emil Hansen in the village of Nolde, near Tønder, Denmark, and adopted this new name, Nolde, later in life.
stoic fishermen. In this he was not alone. Eckersberg had inspired a fine school of marine painters, as well as landscape painters, many of whom found something in the unique atmosphere around Skagen, such as C.F. Sorensen, Carl Neumann and especially Carl Locher, the latter renting a villa on the bay-shore. Skagen even attracted one young Greek marine-painter as early as 1876, Jean X. Altamura (1852-78), who was sent to study marine-painting in ‘neutral’ Denmark.

Ancher’s breakthrough came with his composition *Will she clear the point*, 1880. (10:2)

It was not painted on the beach, but made up from many studies. It was quite an investment and a gamble, for it measured 109 x 140 cms, not enormous, but nevertheless costly for such a young, struggling painter. Not including any payment to the models, the cost of canvas, paint, stretchers, frame and transport, it was at least four times the cost of the majority of Skagen *plein-air* works, in terms of materials and, of course, time. It was still an age when one might live for years from the proceeds of a single painting. It was standard practice for most Danish painters to produce at least one, large, monumental piece for the annual Salon. It was still the best method to gain recognition. That same year, 1880, Ancher also made another fine Skagen canvas, not a brown soup this time but what is regarded as the first Danish painting done in full sunlight, *Figures in a landscape*. This dazzlingly clear canvas set the tone for the Nordic artists that followed, although he was never at his best with either small, *plein-air* paintings or pure landscapes, even though his Skagen colleagues produced plenty of both.

The earliest paintings done by the Skagen pioneers were relatively small, c. 30 x 40 cm., and made by marine painters of the coast, such as Vilhelm Melbye’s *View over Skagen from the dunes Northwest of the Old Church*, 1848, (26 x 37 cm.) one of two early, undistinguished vistas; Holger Drachmann’s *Seascape*, c.1870, a “masterly” *plein-air* study of waves breaking; Viggo Johansen’s *The Strand by Høyen on a gloomy day*, 1875 (30 x 40 cm.); Wilhelm von Gegerfelt *Østerby after rain*, 1979 (25 x 38 cm.); Anna Ancher’s *Street in Østerby*, c.1884 (31 x 40 cm.); Oscar Björck’s *Boat on the Beach*, (36 x 49 cm.) c.1881, (11:2); and, the equally dazzling *Two fishermen having a talk outside Brøndum’s Inn*, c.1880 (35 x 44 cm.) by Christian Krohg.

Michael Ancher’s most outstanding early *plein-air* pieces, done in the full glare of the sun, used his most regular model at that time, the impoverished and simple-minded ‘Blind’ Kristian. Interestingly, Ancher’s *Figures in a landscape*, 1880 (13:2) was first shown on exhibition the following summer, but not in Copenhagen. It was shown in Gothenburg, the major, Swedish, North Sea port that lies just across the straights of Skagerak from Skagen and is considerably closer than the Danish capital. It is not surprising that its city art museum was sympathetic to modern art and the burgeoning artists’ colony. It would soon own one of the biggest icons of the Skagen artists’ colony and contemporary Scandinavian artistic life, *Hip, hip, hurra*, 1884-88. (1:1), Skagen paintings are well-documented and traceable, compared with many other artists’ colonies in this study, precisely because they have had a more narrowly-defined geographical

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82 Voss, 1985, p. 13. One of the most prolific writers on Skagen’s artists. Drachmann commonly used this size sketchbook, 15 x 21 cm., as seen in the Fanø Kunstmuseum’s example.

83 The oil sketch for *Hip, hip, hurra!*, 1888, now in Skagen Museum, measures 32 x 40 cm. but the finished work, which took from 1884-88 to complete, at Gothenburg Art Museum, measures 134.5 x 165.5 cm. It is based on a true event that took place in the Anchers’ cottage garden. Two photographs of the event survive, taken by Stoltenberg, in 1884.
distribution, staying in a relatively, limited number of Danish collections and auction houses. The majority of early canvases produced in Skagen, were generally *plein-air* and a small size, in part, because of the difficulties of transport, there being no railway, harbour or even a jetty until 1890.

Pleinairism emphasizes natural light values. The portrayal of light and colour were already issues amongst the Skagen group before P.S. Krøyer’s arrival, but his natural flair, confidence and experience brought a breath of fresh air to the group’s technique. Before him Christian Krohg had influenced the fledgling colony with his brand of stark realism, but Krøyer brought movement and a gentler narrative to his compositions, seen almost immediately in an outdoor painting of a young colleague, done on the sands, *Oscar Björck painting on the Beach*, and also *Artists on Skagen’s South Beach*, both from August and September 1882.84 His rapidity and brilliance could, however, create tensions in the not so naturally gifted. Jacobs suggest that finishing canvases more quickly gave Krøyer increased opportunity to be “disruptive” and at the end of the season while he had just as many works completed as the others, his had, aggravatingly, taken far less time.85 If it were not for his constant good humour and charm this might have caused considerable social problems. Krøyer’s general restlessness also, with time, caused him to focus less on the fishing community, unlike his comrades, and to look for other narratives that included his own class of people, where he seems to have felt more comfortable. Even in his first Skagen picture, Brøndum’s grocery interior, evidence is claimed of this social division, seen in the expressions of the fishermen, the unusual cropping and placement of the shop-counter.86

In Swedish art, there were stronger ties to France, especially when the court was ruled by King Karl XV, a relative of Emperor Napoleon III. The rise of the Düsseldorf School of painting, with its emphasis on the dramatic, was more apparent in Danish art circles than amongst the more eclectic Swedes. This ceased when hostilities broke out with Prussia over southern Jutland in 1863. In Copenhagen Art Academy, for example, the majority of foreign members were of German origin before 1860, but a marked decline afterwards.87 More Danish painters now joined the Swedes in France. Scandinavian artists migrated to Paris in increasing numbers from mid-century, not so much to the official *Ecole des Beaux Arts* as to the many new, private, satellite, art ‘academies’ or studios set up to accommodate the influx of such foreigners. It was here in the popular Academy Julian or at Léon Bonnat’s studio (himself a member of the Danish Art Academy from 1884) that young Scandinavian art students learnt more of modern pleinairism,

84 Krøyer arrived in Skagen on 1st June 1882 and his enthusiasm immediately caused a stir with his controversial study for *In the grocer’s shop during a pause in fishing*. It so annoyed Michael Ancher, and it may have influenced Krøyer to seek safer subjects elsewhere in the village, out-doors and amongst his other fellow artists.
85 Jacobs, 1985, p. 100.
86 Varnedoe, 1988, p. 156.
87 Meldahl & Johansen, 1904, pp. 85-87. Only two German members of the Danish academy remained after the 1864, until the end of that century.
including works by masters such as Courbet, Corot, Millet and Bastien-Lepage.

There were enough Scandinavian painters in Paris to constitute their own urban artists’ colony, finely portrayed in several works by Hugo Birger (1854-87), dining at their favourite bistro, (14:2). Here, the gentlemen artists from the far north are shown all looking successful, robust and extremely well-dressed. This is a far cry from the common fashionable bohemian image of impoverished genius. Yet, they represent, in their own way, a generation in revolt, a shift away from German to lighter French influences. The impressionism of Jules Bastien-Lepage was more influential to them than Dahl, Gude or Leibl, seen in many works by the Scandinavians at the artists’ colony at Grez-sur-Loing, and again, after their return to their homelands, in the artists’ colonies they formed at Fleskum, Modum, Varberg, Åland and Skagen. Tensions were raised another notch, in Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen, from the early 1880s, as their plein-air works were repeatedly omitted from official salon exhibitions.

Remarkably, one of the first written references to French Impressionism anywhere was reported by a Finnish artist, Berndt Lindholm, in a series of articles for a Nordic newspaper in 1870, four years before their first group exhibition at Nadar’s studio. He had been in Paris since 1867, remaining long after the Great Exposition of that year as he was particularly impressed by the plein-air realism of Rousseau and Daubigny. Lindholm, and Swedes Alfred Wahlberg and, later, Albert Edelfeldt constitute some of the earliest practitioners of this new technique in the north. Edelfeldt also wrote back to Finland of his enthusiasm for Bastien-Lepage as early as the summer of 1875. This was also the year that the Dane Laurits Tuxen (1843-1927) entered Léon Bonnat’s studio, together with the most constant of the Danish impressionists, the landscapist Theodore Philipsen (1840-1920). It was the colourist Tuxen who later encouraged his friend Krøyer to follow his example by entering Bonnat’s Studio in 1877. He also encouraged Krøyer to visit a number of rural French artists’ colonies, where pleinairism was almost compulsory. Krøyer worked in Cernay-la-Ville, just outside Paris, then in Brittany, at Pont-Aven and Concarneau. He befriended a number of leading figures in these artists’ colonies, including the Frenchmen L.G. Pelouse and Alfred Guillou; the Scots R.L. and R.A.M. Stevenson; the Englishman Adrian Stokes, who later visited him in Skagen; and, another innovative American pleinairist, Alexander Harrison. One can see from this how one painter’s experience of just a few artists’ villages, by 1880, had put him in touch with some leaders of the modern movement on an international scale.

Krøyer was not as interested in landscape painting as in light and composition. His admiration for late Manet, Renoir and Degas class-leisure themes contrasts with most of his Skagen colleagues and their “folk-oriented tenor of traditional imagery”, and, as some commentators have observed, he eventually managed to bring into his compositions subtle echoes of Whistlerian harmonies and the colouring of the French Synthesists, as seen in his popular ‘blue note paintings.” It is interesting to speculate what might have happened if Alex

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14:2 - Hugo Birger, Scandinavian Artists’ Luncheon in the Café Ledoyen, 1886. Göteborgs Konstmuseum.

One of the many expatriate art groups who were drawn to and enjoyed fin-de-siècle Paris.

88 Lindholm, 1870.
Harrison had accepted Krøyer’s invitation to Skagen, for he would have been the first modern American painter to work north of Holland, along this coast. Nevertheless, artists’ colonies were a blend of styles and interests, yet grounded by a shared enthusiasm for greater authenticity gained by working closer to contemporary rural life.

One image of painting outdoors suggests it was youthful, frivolous, carefree and fun. To balance this view, many modernists tried hard to show there was a serious side to these rural experiments. For Scandinavians, this often meant working under physical extremes, up mountains and especially in the snow and ice. Christian Krohg, Fritz Thaulow and Carl Larsson all produced impressive examples of snow scenes, all benefiting from being painted *en plein-air*. Many Scandinavian artists who returned from France, with the latest ideas, clashed over official teaching methods. The Swedes, for example, criticized the curriculum of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. They formed a protest group known as the ‘Opponents’, lead by Ernst Josephson (1851-1906), Larsson and another French-trained pleinairist Karl Nordström (1855-1923). King Oscar II was conservative, as was the new director of the Academy, who also controlled the Salon and National Museum. The Opponents organised a protest exhibition in 1885, called ‘From the Banks of the Seine.’ This was a huge success and lead directly to the establishment of a more permanent alternative organisation, the Artists’ Association, *Konstnärsförbundet*, in 1886. In this way, they forced the authorities and the Swedish public to accept the new results of *plein-air* techniques, with its a new realistic subject matter. Something of this revolutionary stance may be seen in many other countries, particularly after artists had gained experience of the radical Parisian studios and were confronted by frustrations and official intransigence on their return.

Another ex-Grez enthusiast of importance was the Norwegian ‘Fritz’ Thaulow, who was possibly the keenest, lifelong supporter of pleinairism. His career was also dogged by controversy and well-illustrates the surprising problems early modernists encountered on returning to their homelands. He was a Francophile and had family connections to Paul Gauguin. Gauguin’s presence in Copenhagen, albeit brief, was encouraging for the avant-garde. Perhaps, of more importance was the presence of a large collection of Gauguin’s paintings, early pictures, sculptures and ceramics, kept by his Danish wife, Mette-Sophie. This Post-

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92 Johan Frederik ‘Fritz’ Thaulow (1847-1906), was born in Kristiania (N) and died in Volendam (NL).
93 Thaulow married Ingeborg Charlotte Gad (1852-1908) in 1874, the younger sister of Mrs. Mette Sophie Gauguin, née Gad, both born on Læsø, a small, sandy island between North Jutland and Gothenburg.
94 Mette-Sophie Gauguin, née Gad, (1850-1920) lived above a konditori, later called Café Bernina, at Vimmelskaftet 47, see *København Vejviser*, 1892 and 1895. Sweetman, 1995, calculates she amassed c. 47 works in all, including paintings, sculptures and ceramics.
Impressionist art collection distinguishes Copenhagen from most other northern European art circles at that time, who were still trying to come to terms with movements such as Realism, Naturalism and Impressionism. This collection acted as a focal point for young progressives, although when Gauguin showed his works at the official Kunstforeningen in May 1885 they were greeted with indifference and were “totally ignored by the press”. After Gauguin’s departure, his wife allowed access to this extraordinary art collection to artists, in her mezzanine apartment above the Café Bernina, where she and the children lived, and to a wider public in select shows, such as in the first exhibition of the secessionists, Den Frie Udstilling, in Copenhagen’s Town Hall Square, in 1892.

Thaulow, together with his colleagues Christian Krohg (1852-1925), a robust social-realist who blossomed at Skagen, and Erik Werenskjold (1855-1938), also one of the central artists at Grez, began to make demands on their return to Oslo. There was no state art academy in Norway at that time, only a few privately-funded art societies. Events first came to a head for them in 1880, when impressionist works by N.G. Wentzel (1859-1927) and Werenskjold, both French-trained, were rejected from a state-sponsored art exhibition. Journalist friends managed to generate a campaign, that soon polarised public opinion and resulted in a battle of words that lasted for years. Thaulow, Krohg and friends formed a new circle of disaffected artists, social reformers and modernisers called The Christiania Art Society. This pattern repeats the Swedish experiences of the Opponents, whose manifesto was formalised at a meeting, significantly not in Stockholm but Gothenburg, in 1886; and, in Denmark, amongst the ‘Europeans’, who organised a number of events that culminated in Den Frie Udstilling, from 1892 (17:2). These new artists’ societies were mostly lead by French-trained pleinairists, Realists and Naturalists.

As often happens in these circumstances, the various factions of an avant-garde are only held together because of their shared frustrations at their lack of advancement and are only united by their general contempt for the state authorities, usually an entrenched establishment with slow-moving, bureaucratic institutions. Unlike Paris or London, these Nordic capital cities, crucially, developed few practical alternatives, especially before 1890. Out of the economic and political hardships that were apparent in Norway, for example, came a wave of literary and painterly talent, yet not holding together in the form of a single group. “It would of course be misleading to suggest the younger rebellious artists of the period presented a united front.”

Yet there were attempts, Thaulow’s Plein-air Academy at Modum and another short-lived artists’ colony at Fleskum, both villages just outside Oslo. Fleskum’s artist community was lead by Werenskjold, but the physical centre of the group was a farm, owned by his friend, the artist Christian Skredsvig (1854-1924). Skredsvig had already experienced the joys of working in a colony, at Skagen from 1873, when he was only 19 years old. The Fleskum pleinairists also included: Eilif Peterssen, another Skagen colonist, who also appears in

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95 Gunnarsson, 1989, p. 192.
96 Jacobs, 1985, p. 90.
Krøyer’s famous group picture *Artists’ Luncheon*, 1883 (32:5). The Fleskum artists’ colony included Kitty Kjelland (1843-1914), another plainairist with experience of Grez, Cernay, Pont-Aven and St.Ives; and, Harriet Backer (1845-1932), who was also at Grez and Pont-Aven, and, briefly, a pupil of Bastien-Lepage. Typically, these groups only held together for a short time, 1886-88, indicating that shared idealism on its own was not sufficient cause. Werenskjold is also famed for his portrait of Henrik Ibsen, whose towering figure loomed large over all attempts at social realism in the arts in Norway from the 1880s. However, he did not succeed in uniting either the bourgeoisie or the radicals for long.

Evidence of the link between pleinairism and the search for social justice may be seen in the career of Christian Krohg (1852-1925). He first graduated in law but also studied painting under Hans Gude and Karl Gussow, whom he followed to Berlin in 1875. He shared quarters with the radical artist Max Klinger and met the prominent Danish critic Georg Brandes. In 1881-82 he was in Paris and Grez, and, typically, assimilated the early methods of Manet and Bastien-Lepage. Between 1879-88 he spent five long summers working at Skagen yet was increasingly active back in Oslo, editing the review *Impressionisten* and writing a notorious novel *Albertine*, 1886, about prostitution, which was immediately banned. It is beyond the scope of this study to describe fully the complexities and factions of the Norwegian modern movement in the 1880s, but one group, the *Christiania Bohemians*, are easily identifiable from 1886, that included the artists Krohg, Hans Jaeger and Hans Werenskjold. Jaeger was eventually jailed for his book *Christiania Bohemia* in 1888, but this was not the end of the story or the scandals, for these two friends also shared the same young mistress, ‘Oda’ Lasson. They went to Skagen for the honeymoon, where the artistic community, not entirely free from affairs of passion itself, experienced Krohg’s ‘blood-red paradoxes.’ However, Jaeger was released early and sailed directly over to Jutland to physically confront the couple. They had fled, beforehand, south to Kandesterderne, just down the coast. This complex set of affairs reduced Krohg’s high standing in the artists’ community, for he had produced some outstanding canvases and influenced most other Skagen pioneers by his robust attitude to work and his stark use of colour harmonies. As R.A.M. Stevenson astutely observed “any writer could tell you that they found those colonies more suited for the study of the human heart than for that of trees or rocks.”

The politics of pleinairism was also manifest in a raft of ideas and characteristics under the category of National Romanticism, which was not to do with the landscape, but regional folk-art. At government level this was seen in the formation of many folk museums, such as the *Danske Folkemuseum*, in 1885, and the first open-air museum for regional folk architecture, opened in 1891, at Skansen, outside Stockholm. F.C. Lund completed his survey of folk costumes in 1860 but the illustrations have little artistic merit. Artists such as Vilhelm Kyhn (Anna Ancher’s teacher), Vermehren, Dalsgaard and Exner fueled that interest and provided

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97 Jaeger, 1885.
99 4th October, 1888.
100 The Finnish portraitist Hanna Rönnenberg, visiting Skagen for the only time in the Autumn of 1888, pointed out in her diary that the radical social critic, Krohg, paradoxically loved the luxuries of life, particularly fine cuisine and drink, and his house contained many luxurious, exotic antiques. See Jacobs, 1985, p.105.
101 Jacobs, 1985, p. 16.
102 Hannover, 1922, in two sub-chapters he describes ‘The Europeans,’ pp. 280-93, who followed Danish painters such as Vilhelm Marstrand, the Melbye brothers and Lorens Frolich, who had visited Barbizon as early as 1852; and ‘The Nationalists,’ pp. 293-315, who followed the political line of the reactionary Danish art historian N.L. Høyen.
polished and detailed genre pieces set in authentic looking interiors, full of traditional bric-a-brac. They were pleinairists in the sense that they travelled around villages in search of material, traditional costumes and settings, from which they made meticulous studies ready for later compositions. There is little to separate these Danish genre painters but Exner is more useful as his searches took him ever further from Copenhagen and closer to the North Sea coast.

Johan Julius Exner (1825-1910) had already changed the focus of his output from classic historical dramas to peasant genre by the 1850s, seen in his Amagerkone, 1852, a fine portrait of a women in her colourful Sunday costume, purchased immediately by Dowager Queen Caroline Amalie. Amager is an island suburb of Copenhagen and its folk costumes were still a common sight in villages such as St. Magelby and Dragør, however there were two major problems for him. This costume was not Danish but Dutch, for these peasant farmers had been invited over for their market-gardening skills, providing fruit and vegetables for the city. The second was more general in nature, as traditional costumes were being abandoned everywhere in favour of new textiles and fashions. Exner went to the village of Hedeboegnen, north of Copenhagen, but its costume was not so characterful. Out of frustration, he travelled to Leksand and Dalarne, in Sweden, in 1863-64, following his mentor Vilhelm Marstrand, who had made a monumental costume piece of a wedding-day flotilla on Lake Siljan, in 1853. So desperate was he to find costumes that in 1867 he went to Skagen but had a wretched journey and found little in the way of characteristic clothing. Eventually, Exner he found the historic village he was looking for on the island of Fanø, further down the North Sea coast. He spent the next thirty summers in Sønderho and was responsible for advertising its character to generations of artists thereafter (see 18:2; 19:2). It was a kind of patriotic pleinairism; a desire to record an authentic village way of life, its unique costumes and domestic interiors; and, one he knew to be dying out forever.

Exner’s technique may be said to be traditional, for his major canvases were composites of many sketches and studies made on location, although the narratives were often based on his own experiences in the villages, sketching at dances, observing domestic scenes and sentimental moments. He did complete many small paintings on location, almost all of which are portraits. The results Exner, Dalgaard and Vermehren achieved were undoubtedly popularly picturesque, part of the heimatkunst common over much of Europe, what Exner’s first biographer P.V. Ørsted called Neu Rippen. They were detailed and polished, but too mannered in comparison with the dramatic new styles that appeared in the last quarter of the century. There is little or no political content in Exner’s images and it was not social realism that fuelled his exploration, but the simple and common desire to illustrate indigenous character. This makes Brendekilde’s picture Worn Out, 1890, (1:2), so astonishing, for the majority of the Danish genre painters made a comfortable living from works with simple narratives. These National Romantics had followed the entreaties of revisionist N.L. Høyen and were nick-named ‘Blondes’ or the Nordiske. None of them joined artists’ colonies. The modernists looked on them as part of the old guard. Høyen had championed ‘Artistic Nationalists’ as early as 1844 in his address to the University of Copenhagen, entitled “On the requirements for the development of a Scandinavian National Art.” In a sometimes turgid prose, he nevertheless points out, in amongst the stock calls for rejuvenated national unity, where to explore for the true, almost lost, character of the country: “...fishing villages...still throw an illuminating gleam on those bygone days. ...but to him who looks beneath, whose sympathy does not merely skim the surface, to the real artist, there is here a

103 Ørsted, 1903.
104 Ørsted, 1903, p. 22.
Typical of his compositions, based on real events and built up from many separate studies done in Sonderhø, on Fanø. These canvases offered simple yet decorous narratives of traditional country life that avoid controversy and usually any hint of modernity, so that the example on the right is quite extraordinary for such a conservative artist.

rich vein of pure precious metal. Lay bare that treasure and it will shine in the eyes of all.”

National Romanticism was undoubtedly popular at all levels of society and similar themes are to be found in most countries, especially where traditions were being endangered, particularly by the spread of industry, urban sprawl and agriculture. Many of Exner’s paintings were in the Royal collection, Den kongelige Malerisamling later the Statens museum for Kunst, many on curator Høyen’s recommendation, as early as 1849. Today Exner’s works are not so prominent as Skagen’s naturalists and colourists, but a measure of his popularity at the time may be seen from the many paintings bought by the largest collector in the country of contemporary art, Heinrich Hirschsprung. Exner came to prominence despite a temperament not given to extremes, as with some of his contemporaries, such as Zahrtmann and Marstrand. He rose slowly and diligently through the ranks of the establishment and was duly recognised by being honoured with the Kommandør af Dannebrog, in 1893. He was considered highly enough to be offered the post of Academy Treasurer, from 1884, and Chairman of the Exhibition Committee, from 1890.

The son of a refugee from Bohemia, he had every reason to be thankful to the Kingdom of Denmark and, consequently, he was deeply patriotic. However, he became closely associated with the reactionary conservative elements, against which the more cosmopolitan artists, typified by the Skagen artists, rallied in opposition. They were variously named the Europeans, Jøderne or Brunetterne, many of whom Exner regularly clashed with in the Academy and exhibited alongside in the annual salons and bigger expositions.

Curiously, another artist closely associated with Sonderhø was an active leader of that opposition, although there is no record of them meeting on Fanø. However, they did correspond and clash in committee. Johan Rohde (1856-1935) was a multi-talented, widely travelled and well-connected modern artist. He was an enthusiastic outdoor painter. Whereas Exner lodged at the inn, Rohde bought a cottage near Sonderhø’s harbour and made a permanent studio. Rohde painted en plein-air in the marshes and out on the sands. This was in contrast to his crowded professional life, which spanned Scandinavia and much of Europe. He not only travelled but wrote about his many new contacts with avant-garde artists, such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Maurice Denis, Félix Vallotton and other members of the Nabis, pictures from whom decorated his Copenhagen apartment. He was friends with Valdemar Kleis, in whose gallery started the

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105 Hannover, 1922, p. 293.
106 Exh. Cat. Copenhagen, 1849, nr. 76, J.J. Exner: Thyra Danebod forsøger at formilde Gorm den gamle i sin vrede med nogle fange Kristne, was bought along with Marsk Stigs Døttre.
independent modern art society, *Den Frie Udstilling*. Rohde had visited the Dutch artists’ club *Arti et Amicitiae* and C.M. van Gogh’s Gallery amongst other art venues and wrote about the Hague School impressionists, the old Dutch landscape masters, the Barbizon School, Impressionists and post-Impressionists.\(^{108}\)

The application of Rohde’s wealth of knowledge of international art trends and movements came in several forms: writing, lecturing, organising exhibitions, painting influence of his Nabis friends. This and designs for silver, furniture and books. Rohde’s painting *The Harbour at Hoorn* (21:2), is probably his best known work, although his painting technique was variable in quality, at best a mixture of traditional Dutch tone and modern French simplification.\(^{109}\) *Hoorn Harbour* was one of a number of works he painted while on a momentous study tour of Belgium and Holland. He recounted his findings in his talks and writings to an enthusiastic audience on his return.\(^ {110}\) He understood the general frustration felt by many younger Scandinavian artists who gathered in his circle and who wished to imitate new French, Belgian and Dutch movements, but were unable to gain any visibility for their works in Copenhagen. Out of the growing frustration emerged several initiatives, including *Den Frie Udstilling*, an exhibition centre, and an independent art school, *Den Frie Skole*. These were both greatly assisted by the success of Skagen as an artists’ colony, which acted as a show-case of Nordic pleinairism. Most of the Skagen painters exhibited in the new art centre and the school proved so popular that Laurids Tuxen first added Krøyer then Rohde to the teaching staff. It had been in 1882 that Rohde and Frans Schwartz (1850-1917) agitated for a more prominent place for modern artists to exhibit their works and to lessen the traditional censorship at the annual state shows.\(^ {111}\) The first protest-exhibition was held in Rohde’s studio in 1887 and the second in 1890 at the Gallery Kleis.\(^ {112}\) It was from this that Rohde, in collaboration with the young painters Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916) and J.F. Willumsen (1863-1958), amongst others, founded the society *Den Frie Udstilling* more formally in 1891. They organised another exhibition the following year on March 26\(^{th}\) at Gallery Kleis. From 1893-98 they were based in Copenhagen’s central square, *Rådhuspladsen*, in a stylish, temporary, wooden exhibition building, designed by the architect Thorvald Bindesbøll, the same artist who redesigned Brøndum’s famous dining-room at Skagen. This protest initiative finally settled in a permanent hall designed by Willumsen, and continued its open policy on exhibiting. Of all the protest movements in Scandinavia, *Den

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\(^{108}\) Rohde’s first study tour was in 1887, but an extensive diary was published in 1955 of his special 1892 tour which included Holland, Belgium, France and Italy. Rohde, 1955.

\(^{109}\) Hannover, 1922, p. 374.

\(^{110}\) Rohde, 1955, p. 112, he lodged in Hoorn, the prosperous provincial capital of West Friesland (today part of North Holland) from May to July 1892.


\(^{112}\) Gallery Kleis, Vesterbrogaade 58, was one of the few private dealers in Copenhagen at that time. He specialised in Scandinavian art, regularly selling works by Exner amongst others. He was adventurous enough to support initiatives such as *Den Frie Udstilling* and later the Dutch symbolist, Jan Toorop.
Frie Udstilling, achieved the greatest changes and heralded the new open era for artistic production and distribution.

Jens Ferdinand Willumsen is an interesting example of the younger progressives. He was more of a Symbolist, well-connected personally with Gauguin and the Nabis group, as he worked with them at Pont Aven, in 1890. He had initially been trained as an architect at the academy, switched to painting, but found the curriculum stifling and left to study under Krøyer and Tuxen, at their Studie Skole in 1883. Unlike the academy, the school promoted the use of live models and the importance of pleinairism. Rejected again in 1888 by the Charlottenborg exhibition committee, which included Exner, its chairman, he never again offered entries to this Salon. He was so impressed by an exhibition of French paintings at Copenhagen that year he decided to relocate to Paris in 1890, where the avant-garde were more colourful and decorative, but no less scandalous. However, by contrast, his colleague Vilhelm Hammershøi employed a more subdued idiom, “neurasthenically coloured”113, the rejection of which, by the Salon jury, sparked the revolution of Den Frie Udstilling.114 Known today for his highly sensitive treatment of quiet interiors and serene portraiture, he actually painted many more pure landscapes, that are both plein-air and yet show a symbolist tenor that is frequently compared to Whistler. The practice of plein-air painting contributed to the many changes that Danish art underwent during the nineteenth century.

In Sweden and Norway the pleinairism of Bastien-Lepage was common at the time, as it was in Britain. Activists, such as Krohg admired Lepage’s socialist content as much as his technique. Lepage’s methods also impressed the apolitical Krøyer, who was respectful enough to head the Scandinavian subscription committee which helped raise funds for a monument to Lepage in his hometown, Damvilliers, in 1885. Lepage actively promoted pleinairism and his influence can be seen in the tone and composition of all Grez colonists, particularly in Larsson’s early works. It was a relatively quiet revolution compared to the other countries of this study, but the simplicity of its appeal invigorated artists to get out into the furthest rural areas, engage nature more closely and take note of all manner of human activities not previously considered appropriate subjects. In Denmark, an innate modesty already existed in pictures since its Golden Age, so the simplicity of portraying the peasantry was less of a radical statement. The bulk of early art work done at Skagen illustrates this combination of qualities, a blend of Lepagistes and Dutch tonalism, yet all calmly show ordinary life. Anna Ancher’s masterpiece, a portrait of Lars Gaihede, is a fine example. It evades the issues of his abject poverty, his underdeveloped mental abilities, his personal hygiene and dire circumstances, even though, being a villager herself, she knew well of his chronic situation since childhood. One of her mentors was undoubtedly Krohg, who influenced her painting technique and sharpened her political awareness, as he was “more than any other amongst us, who proclaimed the dogma of the social mission of art. With pencil not less than with pen he published his convictions.”115 He treated Skagen artists’ colony as a sounding board for his artistic theories and a convenient bolt hole from the consequences of his

113 Poulsen, 1955, p. 140.
114 Hammershøi’s painting, Girl Sewing, 1887, was rejection by the Charlottenborg exhibition jury in 1888.
personal and political actions. His rural and urban social comments were in contrast to P.S. Krøyer, who recognised their ideological differences early on in their relationship. Yet, they painted alongside each other on Skagen beach. The first time Krohg and Krøyer met, in 1877, it was in Gothenburg Museum, where Krøyer proclaimed “I don’t think much of the paintings you have on show, but I think we personally can be friends.”

Realism or Naturalism, Socialism or Romanticism all came under the parasol of pleinairism, at Skagen.

Rather than criticising society, Krøyer found his forte portraying aspirational life-styles, whether out on the beach or in his garden. He brought to Scandinavian pleinairism a special lightness, humour and a maturity in the comity of nations, not unlike Anders Zorn’s portraits and the domestic warmth of Carl Larsson. The portraits of Krøyer painting out of doors at Skagen, including many self-portraits, show him to be dapper in his white-linen suit, knickerbockers, Homburg, cummerbund and jewelled fob-watch, a complete contrast to the fishermen who used the same beach.

Krøyer confirmed his divergence from the fishermen genre with a series of dazzling, plein-air canvases such as *Summer day on Skagen’s Strand*, 1884, depicting a limpid and simple scene with astonishing “lyricism and monumental character.” He brings in a touch of pathos and humour to the situation of children bathing, more realistically than Israëls’ Scheveningen. Another plein-air scene from 1892 Skagen, *Bathing Children* (23:2), captures not only the dynamic of their play but also of the fleeting brilliance of the water’s surface.

By the late 1890s, Krøyer turned his attention to another class of society altogether. This series was initiated by painting his beautiful wife, Marie, always fashionably-dressed, was decidedly not of peasants or fisher-wives. It extended the village setting to one of middle-classes elegance, as never before in Denmark. These were not set in the blistering heat of the Mid-day sun, but at Skagen’s ‘blue-hour’, that special atmosphere of lingering, luminous, northern, summer twilight. Marianne Saabye has pointed out the remarkable use of Mauve in these flowing compositions, and comparing them with the tonal works of Whistler and the French Synthetists. Where Exner and the National Romantics limited their motifs to the traditional genre; impressionists such as Theodor Philipsen (1840-1920) focused on pure landscapes; Krohg and Brendekilde blended in stark reality; but, Krøyer managed to find new potential, even amongst the poverty at Skagen, with the new theme of leisure, first with the village children and then with adults at their ease. New, that is, for Denmark and Scandinavia. Yet, by advertising the charms of the countryside, more thoroughly and realistically, they were collectively responsible for taming it, demystifying it and making it more attractive as a place of recreation and tourism.

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118 Voss, 1976, p. 146.
120 Lindwall, 1872, p. 112, points out this rare combination of a powerful political statement and Bastien-Lepage’s methods seen in Brendekilde’s ‘*Worn Out*’ of 1890.
Freilichtmalerei

There are a number of elements that are present in the German situation which mark it out for special attention. By contrast with other countries covered in this study, it was more socially complex and extreme, so that it comes as little surprise that artistic secessions began to accelerate around the end of the century. The years leading up to the declaration of the new German Empire, in 1871, seem to be ones of growing conflict and animosity, affecting everyone under the ‘Iron Chancellor’, Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck (1815-89). German confederation had first caused internal consolidations, directly affecting its borders, of the kind inflicted on Denmark, 1863-64; Austria, 1866; and, France, 1870-71. The old states, thirty-nine in all, were a hotchpotch of governments, which became increasingly conservative autocracies yet grew because of modern industrial wealth. Industrialisation only served to emphasize the differences between cities as well as rural and urban cultures. Lacking the central authority of countries, such as England, France and Denmark, German plurality caused deep splits between political and cultural thinking, and especially between official and independent creativity.

Rivalries remained between cities, as elsewhere in Europe, but nowhere were they more poignantly contrasted than between old, Mittel-Europa’s power-house of Munich and the northern, Prussian capital of Berlin. “When, as a result of the Napoleonic invasion, a wave of national feeling swept over Germany, the art that emerged was in its Protestant manifestations introspective and in its Catholic expression retrospective.”¹²¹ German Romanticism is difficult to define as there were many influential writers and philosophers scattered across the country, aggravating so that “within a few years [they] changed from republicans to monarchists and [from] cosmopolitans to patriots.”¹²² This resulted in major splits between political and cultural thinking, and between official and independent creativity. Plein-air painting became bound up with the political posturing of rival states and their attitudes to the working classes, fuelled by the government’s increasing chauvinism and constant antipathy toward French artistic dominance.

One consequence of prosperity was that cultural institutions had gradually benefited from investment. Düsseldorf Art Academy, founded 1767, gained particular prominence during the first half of the nineteenth century. It enjoyed a good reputation for teaching history and mythology painting, then marine and landscape painting. German Romanticism had been dominated by sentimental ‘brown sauce’ narrative pictures that were richly decorative but stolid. In an attempt to reinvigorate their training programmes some academies tried hard to adapt to the new values of romanticism. Dresden Academy, founded 1705, was regarded as a bastion of royalist conservatism, yet went so far as to employ the young Scandinavian landscapist J.C. Dahl. He brought more drama to scenes, based on plein-air studies, typically emphasizing rocky landscapes, waterfalls and torrential mill-races. Düsseldorf academy attracted fresh talents such as Adolf Tidemand (1814-76) in 1845 and the more lyrical Hans Gude (1825-1903) in 1854. Their techniques and subject matter remained largely traditional, complementing German sensitivities and sentimentality, yet paving the way for a growing interest in naturalistic landscape painting.

Foreign influence on German culture and art remained a very prickly issue, especially around the time of confederation, with the religious and political shuffling in royal courts. Scandinavians were Lutheran, whereas France and southern Germany was largely Roman Catholic. There was an open state of hostility towards French cultural hegemony and, in

particular, French Impressionism. This cultural xenophobia accounts for the acute provincialism of most German artists’ communities, instead of the healthy international mix seen in most other artists’ colonies. Inappropriate, bombastic statements by prominent German public figures, including the Kaiser, Wilhelm II, against all French influences, were extraordinary. Friedrich Jahn’s cry that “teaching one’s daughter French was tantamount to sending her whoring” was typical of the white heat of opinion in the first half of the nineteenth century.123 The first skirmishes subsided by 1815 only to be revived again, periodically every twenty years, or so, culminating in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Pleinairism and Impressionism were caught up in these farcical, point-scoring politics as nowhere else, although it was easy to raise government fears in most countries after the excesses of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars.

The position of painters in German society altered enormously during the course of the nineteenth century. The huge growth in the art market fuelled criticisms and divisions that were even more contradictory and hypocritical than before. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Wilhelmine Germany’s most notorious demonstration of artistic patriotism, Carl Vinnen’s 1911 tract entitled A German Artist’s Protest.124 The circumstances surrounding its publication are worth examining for they illustrate the complexities the German art world found itself in by the early 1900s.

This polemic hit out at art collectors and curators who were far less interested in traditional German history painting, “brown sauce,” collectors much preferring the lighter, more colourful imported styles, epitomised by French Impressionism. Vinnen advocated protectionism and found surprising nation-wide support from both the Munich and Berlin Secessions, including Käthe Kollowitz, one of the few truly radical, political, German artists of the day. Vinnen was a mediocre landscape painter, a less-outstanding product of the Düsseldorf Art Academy, yet it was here he met Fritz Mackensen and Otto Modersohn in 1885. Mackensen and his friends were in the process of founding a rural artists’ colony, at Worpswede, near Vinnen’s hometown of Bremen. The idealism on which this group was founded included the freshness of plein-air landscape painting combined with a kind of spiritual bonding with their native soil, seen in the richly-toned earthiness of many of their best canvases (see 24:2; 25:2). Vinnen was not one of initial five pioneers of this colony and neither is he mentioned in Rilke’s early monograph, in 1903, yet his early association with this group helped centre his work and career.

123 Lenman, 1997, p. 51. Frederick Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852) ‘the father of Gymnastics,’ was also a teacher and political pamphleteer
124 Vinnen, 1911.
Vinnen’s polemic was initially ignited by the Bremen curator Gustav Pauli’s acquisition for the Kunsthalle of Poppy-field, 1890, by Vincent van Gogh. This canvas is typical of his late work and thus may easily be defined more as Post-Impressionist than Impressionist, yet it remains a fine example of his passionate, plein-air technique. It is interesting to note here that relatively few German artists were yet impressionists, so that the artistic jump to van Gogh was more difficult to understand for many collectors, let alone politicians, at that time. Vinnen’s objection was not directed towards the general technique, for he painted outdoors himself in Worpswede, nor was it necessarily about the purchase price or the artistic value, but he seems to fear for the future of the nation: “a nation can only attain the height of its powers through artists of its own flesh and blood.” This is a curious statement, not least because he was a member of Bremen Museum’s organising committee, and was therefore fully acquainted with all the discussions behind its collection policy and, presumably, helped formulate them in the first place. He had even been on the same committee a few years previously, in 1909, when they purchased Manet’s Portrait of Camille in a striped dress, dated 1866. Bremen, like all expanding German cities, was attempting to build up a worthy civic art collection. The museum already owned typical examples of altdeutsch pictures and, to his credit, Pauli had obtained many early works from the Worpswede pioneers, but he was publicly funded and had to be duly cautious and fully accountable. 1909 was also the year another progressive curator, Hugo von Tsuchdi, was sacked for being too modern and international. He was ousted by Kaiser Wilhelm II from the directorship of the National Gallery in Berlin. Worpswede art was thought of as revolutionary within Germany, but, with the exception of Paula Modersohn-Becker’s oeuvre, which was mostly hidden away, they were, in fact, internationally mainstream.

It would not be that long before an artistic group of much more extreme cosmopolitan views, the Die Brücke Expressionists, would relocate to another village, on the opposite side of Bremen, at Dangast. The region was even less prepared for their raw work than with the moor-land vistas of the Worpswedans, which clearly owes a debt to Dutch traditions. One of the problems that generated the confusion in official attitudes to Modern Art, not only in Germany but also in Great Britain, was that these waves of new plein-air methods now arrived in quick succession, the School of Barbizon, different impressionist and post-impressionist styles. There were precious few German impressionists of note, so that it is hardly surprising to find a lack of understanding of the earliest expressionist tendencies, of say Max Slevogt, Lovis Corinth or Max Liebermann. They were insufficiently prepared to understand the extreme views of Emil Nolde, Ernst Kirchner and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, amongst many others. The German art authorities and public were not fully prepared for modernism, despite good media coverage in the new illustrated art magazines. However, the richest German art collectors had a penchant for this new pleinairism, especially the uncomplicated, sun-dappled scenes of the countryside.

Vinnen, like most of his colleagues, had invested in short working tours to Paris, Belgium and Holland, which, from Düsseldorf, were not difficult to reach. He was the son of shipping agents in the port of Bremen, just fifteen kilometres from Worpswede. He was a mediocre artist, yet presumably experienced something of the exuberance that lay behind van Gogh’s passion and acute sense of place. He had, after all, felt the same way about Worpswede and ‘the essential mood’ of its surroundings, common to all its pioneers. According to Paula Modersohn-Becker: “The young artists saw themselves as a close-knit group with a mission to paint their local countryside.”

126 Busch & Reinken, 1979, Modersohn-Becker’s letter of 12th Dec. 1898.
her. This opinion is supported by Heinrich Vogeler: “We were all then politically illiterate. We were dreamers who lived in a house of cards.” However, Fritz Mackensen and Hans am Ende became increasingly reactionary, nationalistic and eventually volunteered to join the army reserves. Am Ende died in the war in 1918. Vogeler also enlisted, but soon became totally disillusioned with it, even going so far as to write a letter complaining to the Kaiser. His fame saved him from imprisonment. He returned to Worpswede and became interested in communism, digging up his ornamental gardens at the Villa Barkenhoff for crops and inviting a succession of radicals and anarchists to his commune. Mackensen only stopped reporting him to the police for his political activities when Vogeler left for Moscow in 1927, where he soon became politically disillusioned and eventually died in miserable circumstances in Siberia, in 1942.

Traditionally the German speaking people were rather polycentric and culturally divisive. Munich, for example, dominated the southern principalities and much of the Alps, and had long been recognised as the artistic capital of Central Europe. It was more international in scope than most other German cities. It had fine art museums and an art academy, but few new modern art galleries as might now be expected for such a large, cosmopolitan city. It made up for this by building a vast exhibition centre for the arts and crafts, the Glaspalast, erected in 1854. This was host to both regular national and international art exhibitions. Munich also had a thriving publishing industry and printed one of the most popular illustrated art magazines, Die Kunst für Alle, the editor of which, Friederich Pecht, was a conservative and a Vinnen sympathiser. Pecht was famous for his opposition to the dry Realism of Wilhelm Leibl, who had nonetheless built up an international circle of admirers and followers by the 1880s. Leibl (1844-1900) had met and become friends with the elder Gustave Courbet (1819-77), as early as 1869, with whom he travelled back to Paris, only to leave almost immediately because of the Prussian military invasion. It was this kind of political disruption that repeatedly punctuated the smooth development of modernism in the newly federated Germany.

In 1883 and 1888, Munich’s Glaspalast did manage to show, to much critical acclaim, Bastien-Lepage’s two most famous works, The Beggar and Poor Fauvette. This could have been the spring-board to a progressive school of modern art, involving pleinairism, but Pecht roused a powerful and united front of nationalistic art critics, including Friedrich Eggers, Ludwig Pfau, Ludwig Pietsch and Adolf Rosenberg. The cultural atmosphere around Munich’s art circles soured so much Leibl soon left, first retreating to a Bavarian village before finally escaping north to Berlin, which was fast becoming the more exciting cultural capital. There was no formal group to oppose Pecht’s brand of cultural revisionism, yet there were some individual, young, independent writers, such as Otto Julius Bierbaum, Adolf Dresdener, Cornelius Gurlitt and, the most internationally known and pro-impressionist, art critic, Julius Meier-Graefe.

It is worth examining the new art journal Die Kunst für Alle a little more closely, for it was one of the first successfully to reach the entire German-speaking world and, therefore, acts as a useful barometer of political and public taste. It was first published in Munich in 1886 and from the beginning it was unashamedly patriotic and conservative. It was well-illustrated and contained many pages of exhibition news and biographies of leading contemporary painters. It is not that someone as famous as the German impressionist Max Liebermann is not mentioned, for he appeared in so many public art exhibitions that it was difficult for him to be omitted from its reviews, but he and his fellow pleinairists do not appear to warrant much description, explanation and very few illustrations. The major Hague School impressionists are named, with H.W.Mesdag

and Jacob Maris appearing regularly, but not Israëls, at least in any edition from the first five years. There is some obvious anti-Semitism and, at least, one caricature blatantly aimed at Liebermann.\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Die Kunst für Alle} was neither really satirical nor humorous, but a few cartoons do appear.\textsuperscript{130} Soon the tone attempted to be lighter by including certain features, such as children, women and the troubles painters encountered when working out in the fields. It is nostalgia-ridden, even in 1900, when it radically changed its format to appear yet more modern, in order to compete with some new rivals, whose layout was more stylishly \textit{Jugend}, such as \textit{Die Cicerone}, \textit{Pan}, \textit{Die Jugend} and the avant-garde \textit{Simplicissimus}. To celebrate this modernisation, Pecht lead off the year with a weighty article, at the astonishing length of fifty pages, on Fr. August von Kaulbach, not one of the new young Turks but a well-established, well-heelled, court painter of flossy portraits for the rich. The illustrations show off his grand atelier, containing huge gilt-framed pieces of the conventionally polished variety. This article indicates nothing of the changes in taste by 1900, only the traditional studio array of old Flemish tapestries and antique accessories. Later that year, Pecht changed tack by including the first article about a French impressionist, Manet. Even more surprisingly, this was written by Pecht’s young opponent, Meier-Graefe, who also managed to bring in references to the aestheticism of Whistler. A curious article indeed, for Meier-Graefe, at least at the beginning of the article, concentrates more on modern art as an investment, mentioning prices frequently, as Pecht often did, than on aesthetics.

Although there is a short piece on the central German artists’ colony at Willingshausen, in the March 1900 issue of \textit{Kunst für Alle}, the major feature was on Worpswede.\textsuperscript{131} There had been a previous, shorter article in 1896, by P. Schulte-Naumberg, which reported on the group’s triumphs at the Glaspalast, the previous year. The 1900 piece had better illustrations that, almost grudgingly, show the quality of the new topographical works and the benefits of \textit{plein-air} realism. The article represented another major nationwide advertisement for the five colonists, who all had sufficient copy and illustrations, although neither of the two best known works at that time are mentioned, nor are Worpswede’s many talented women artists. The author, Andreas Gildemeister, describes their \textit{plein-air} techniques, earthy colour treatments and, naturally, compares them with the Dutch Masters, even connecting, \textit{verwandtschaft}, Worpswede with Rembrandt. In the July edition of \textit{Kunst für Alle} 1900 its major article covered the activities of the Berlin Secession, where, at last, some broader modernism entered the publication, with photographs of the airy, exhibition galleries (28:2) and mention of the new generation of impressionists, not only Liebermann but Lovis Corinth, Max Slevogt, Anders Zorn, Whistler, Hans Thoma and Walter Leistikow. This magazine shows how out of touch Munich had become by 1900. Munich’s contemporary art circles were even less well prepared for the waves of Expressionism that were about to engulf their media and galleries forever.

The political motivation of the internationalists, pro-pleinairist and impressionist supporters was regularly called into question, from the Kaiser on down. The Berlin art curator Tschudi, a close friend of Meier-Graefe, was accused erroneously of “conspiring to capture the German market for French pictures.”\textsuperscript{132} Vinnen was also aided by a lawyer, Theodor Alt, who published another tract, \textit{Die Herbewertung der deutscher Kunst durch die Parteigänge des Impressionismus}. Yet, endorsements of Vinnen’s whinging came from a broad swathe of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[130] \textit{Die Kunst für Alle}, 1900, pp. 262-63.
\end{footnotes}
German artists, 118 in all, including respected artists J. Diaz, F. Erler, A. von Koller, H. Rosenbergen and F. von Struck. They were not against something as benign as pleinairism, as such, but wary of the full effects of foreign influences. By 1912, Vinnen’s Protest was still reverberating, seen in a series of public debates, even attended by the liberal Meier-Graefe, who was still drawing flak the following year in yet another tract, Der Kunstapostel Meier-Graefe und der Bremer Kunststreit by August Piening. By 1914 other forces were mobilized to attempt a solution to French cultural hegemony.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Munich’s status in the art world was maintained in part because of the positive effects produced by prestigious state exhibitions in the impressive ultra-modern halls of the Glaspalast. Two are of interest in context of the rise of international pleinairism and rural artists’ colonies. The impetus given to the formation of new, rural, artists’ communities in Germany, and in Worpswede in particular, is directly connected to the success, in the 1890 Glaspalast International, of a group of young Scottish painters, who went under the title of ‘The Glasgow Boys.’ Their fame soon spread across the length of the country, through many more exhibitions and subsequent journalism. This relatively obscure and ephemeral group of painters were, in fact, only loosely associated, but all united in their belief in the benefits of pleinairism, and mostly followers of Bastien-Lepage. A remarkable seventeen Scottish painters were invited to exhibit, although, in fact, the works presented spanned the whole of the previous decade. They had been working, en plein-air, at a number of sites in Glasgow and across the Highlands: at Brig o’ Turk in the Trossach Hills, an earlier, favourite haunt of John Ruskin and John Everett Millais; and at Rosneath; but, it was the tiny, coastal village of Cockburnspath, on the shores of the North Sea, that seemed to capture the German imagination. Here, there was not a settled colony of artists, just a few summer visitors from the city, over two or three years, yet, the quality of the work produced was refreshing and colourful. It is thus that the name of this nondescript hamlet was taken up in German art literature as an example of a flourishing British artists’ colony and promoted in encyclopaedia references, such as Brockhaus’ 1910 Konversations-Lexikon.133

These lexicon entries were well-meaning but the underlying truth is at odds with the text. The young art student James Guthrie (1859-1930) visited Cockburnspath from 1882, (26:2), where he was joined by a succession of his Glaswegian colleagues, neither all at the same time nor displaying the mutuality implicit in any definition of an artists’ colony. It was not so much a colony as a summer sketching ground for the young, city pleinairists. Their influence was arguably greater in Germany than in Britain, for their Munich triumph was followed by nation-wide tours and purchases by civic museums and galleries.134 Technically, this ‘school’ promoted a rustic naturalism that used a personal, often vivid, use of colour and decoration that is

more suggestive than descriptive. It was largely derivative, being, at best, a form of the
pleinairism practiced by Bastien-Lepage, often employing his composition and ‘square-brush’
technique. It is not that Germany, and Munich in particular, had no direct contact with the new
French Realism, for works by Bastien-Lepage had been shown on exhibition before in Munich
and Courbet even accompanied his own works to the Bavarian capital in 1883 and 1888, but no
further. 1888 was also the year the stridently anti-French Kaiser Wilhelm II ascended the throne.
Curiously, by 1890, the Glasgow Boys had dispersed or had moved on to other, often more
decorative, styles. But the impact on the Worpswede pioneers of this show of Franco-Scottish
pleinairism was marked, first, because it further encouraged their ideas for a utopian artists’
society; and second, because it seemed to support their völkisch subject matter, predominantly
landscapes and the peasants who worked the land; and third, the highland landscapes shared the
same rich tones as the Worpswedes peaty form of impressionism.

However, unlike all other countries in this survey, in Germany Bastien-Lepage’s
techniques were not readily adopted by many artists across the country, despite being close in
treatment to the sparse, bleak, German Realism of Wilhelm Leibl and Frits von Uhde (1848-
1911). It is important to stress, here, that this situation vis-à-vis the acceptance of pleinairism-
realism-impressionism was not reflected in the burgeoning new German art market, which
promoted it. According to Lenman, by 1914, “Imperial Germany had become the most important
foreign market for French Impressionism, after the U.S.”137 Previously Munich was the main
conduit for art sales in Germany, but the centre for this trade moved to Berlin. What Munich
lacked was a sufficiently flexible private sector that responded quickly to changing
circumstances, for the Glaspalast, although admirable, was an institutional behemoth. It is not
ture to say that Munich was isolationist before that period, for in 1879, the Glaspalast had shown
other works from the Barbizon School, including Troyon, Rousseau and Millet, alongside most
of the Hague School masters, such as Blommers, Israëls, Maris, Mauve and Mesdag, then at the
height of their powers. Yet, the overall Munich art market was in decline during and after the
1880s. The policy initiative to include more foreign works of art in state exhibitions had led
directly to The Glasgow Boys’ invitation of 1890. Agents from Munich had seen their works on
show in London earlier that year, at the fashionable Grosvenor Gallery, and reported back how
much positive publicity the event received in the press. Unfortunately, these Munich agents had
misinterpreted events, for the stylish Grosvenor Gallery was, in effect, having a closing-down
sale, which in part was responsible for that extra publicity.138

Yet, the Worpswede youngsters were impressed by the Glasgow Boys, as a group and in
the results they achieved. Fritz Mackensen, like most of his colleagues, was a recent graduate of
Düsseldorf Art Academy and a member of its new radical arts club, Tartarus, founded c.1882. It
was not so much revolutionary as anti-establishment. That year Mackensen spent in Munich,

135 Billcliffe, 1993, pp. 15-100, cites at least two well-documented plein-air works by Guthrie: one sketched in rain,
dated 1878, an ink caricature entitled “When Autumn winds do softly Breathe” also mentioned in a letter dated
Cockburnspath, October 25th, 1883; and a 31 x 46 cm. oil painting from 1883, “Hard at it” (26:2).
136 Leibl was eventually disheartened with the conservatism of Munich but it was host to a regionalist group, Der
Scholle, that was strongly influenced by his Realism, although unsatisfied with the “sincere modesty of Leibl’s
small paintings and with his objectivity of observation” Selz, 1974, p. 39.
137 Lenman, 1997, p. 171.
138 The Grosvenor Gallery was active in the 1880s but was in decline by 1890, so that Sir Coutts Lindsay, its
owner, invited these Scottish painters to what was to be the last exhibition. The event subsequently received
special attention in the press.
attending the master classes of Wilhelm von Diez. By 1890, he had visited Worpswede three times and his friends were becoming interested in his results. Like most Germans, they had heard of artists’ colonies. For example, Dachau was well-known to all artists in Munich, for it was a popular sketching ground. Few Germans had extensive experience of any of the famous French artists’ villages, although they naturally went to Paris. This was the big difference between, say, the Americans, British and Scandinavian artists compared with their Teutonic counterparts.

The Glasgow Boys seem to have been the final encouragement needed for the Worpswede group to overcome their apprehensions and permanently settle down to work in their own moor-land village. By 1895 they achieved their own series of triumphs that culminated in the Glaspalast, Munich. In that exhibition Mackensen’s *The Suckling Child*, (25:2), also called the *Worpswede Madonna*, a stark earthy portrait, was expected to win critical favour, as it had already done in Berlin in 1893, and was, it turns out, already purchased by Gustav Pauli for Bremen Kunsthalle. But the acclaim, and a Gold Medal, went to Mackensen’s *Sermon on the Moor* (27:2). This huge canvas has the atmosphere of a plein-air work, but he had laboured on it from 1892-95. Photographs of him at work on it record that at least part of this huge canvas was done out of doors, although the event looks stage-managed. Comparisons have been made to another contemporary, large, out-door treatment of a moor-land sermon that Mackensen may well have seen, in the Glasgow Boys exhibition at the Glaspalast, Guthrie’s *Funeral Service in the Highlands*, 1881-82, although it was a common enough motif.

Worpswede pictures were generally an earthy, blend of plein-air landscapes and Neo-Romantic sentiment, with the exception of Vogeler’s fantasies, that bring in elements of medieval Symbolism and Jugendstil. The response of local art critics was predictably negative, not so much political as parochial. Yet nearby Bremen was an historic, international port with a cosmopolitan outlook and the authorities had appointed a progressive curator in charge of their art museum, Gustav Pauli. He championed his local artists’ colony in two early exhibitions and, to his credit, greatly encouraged the two most exceptional modernists in the group Paula Modersohn-Becker and Clara Westhoff. Initially, it was the figure painter Mackensen who drew all the critical acclaim, yet the vast majority of the pioneers, and most subsequent colonists, were harmless plein-air landscapists. Mackensen started an art school in Worpswede that included many female students, all predominantly interested in figure painting, such as Ottilie Reylaender, Westhoff and Becker. The emphasis on landscape and regional identity lay at the heart of their pleinairism and this remains the general pattern for most other

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139 Busch, 1970, p. 71, “Der Säugling”, 1892, also went by two other titles: “Frau auf dem Torfkarren” and “Madonna im Moor”.
140 Cumming, 1993, p. 16.
141 The Bremen artist Arthur Fitger criticized the Worpswede group, calling them ‘Apostles of Hate’ and the chamber in Bremen Art Museum where they first exhibited ‘the Laughter-Room.’
German artists’ colonies, whether by the sea, as at Ahrenshoop, Ekenlund, Hiddensee and Nidden, or situated inland, at Goppeln, Grötzingen, Kronberg and Willingshausen.

The best market for *plein-air* and impressionist works shifted from Munich to Berlin, not because of state approval but because of private enterprise. Berlin now led the cosmopolitan trade in art and culture. It is not surprising to find that Paula Becker began her art training in the new Prussian capital and that her teachers were *plein-air* enthusiasts. Interestingly, two of them were from the North Frisian coasts, Jacob Alberts (1860-1941) and Ludwig Dettmann (1865-1944), both of whom benefited from early travels to Holland and Paris from 1889 and, alongside Liebermann, participated in the Berlin Secession. Berlin was, in effect, more cosmopolitan than Munich, when one compares the international network of their respective art dealers. The Berlin galleries of Franz Gurlitt, the Cassirer brothers and Keller & Reiner all exhibited works by the French Impressionists. Becker’s diary for the Spring of 1898 records visits to the Gallery Gurlitt, in particular, while across town, at the same time, in the Hotel Kaiserhof, the public could see works by Monet, Corot, Pissaro and Degas, organised by the enterprising French dealer Durand-Ruel. Before April of that year, she also visited the *Berliner Gewerbemuseum*, close to her school, where she saw prints and lithographs by Post-impressionists such as Puvis de Chavannes, Odilon Redon, Manet, Pissaro, Lautrec, Signac, Serusier and Felix Valloton.

The gap was widening between what the public accessed in Berlin galleries and the government’s stated aim to “assert the Prussian primacy.” Kaiser Wilhelm II following the usual patriotic line concerning art, sternly promised to give Berlin pleinairists a “hard life.” The state’s recognised champion was the court painter Anton von Werner (1843-1915), who “effectively controlled the ‘Prussian Academy’ [from 1875], the Berlin Kunstverein and acted as agent for the Kaiser.” Von Werner was a conservative, with a taste for sentimental, patriotic, highly polished, ‘finished’ paintings, as opposed to Modernism with its new subject matter, social-political sympathies, airy interiors and dusty landscapes. But, he could only exert his pressure and influence amongst certain state-supported institutions. Some cities were more independent and could just about follow their own interests, e.g. the ports Hamburg and Bremen. For the *Kunsthalle* in Hamburg, Alfred Lichtwark was a tireless, working curator, “no dinner too boring for him if it produced funds...” His dedication was recognised early on in 1896 by one of the nation’s more liberal, art magazines, *Pan*: “In seeking support for his aims Lichtwark had to contend both with opposition from conservative local artists [echoes of Vinnen] and the Art Union and with Hamburg’s workaholic commercial culture, with its disdain for leisure and retirement and suspicion of aesthetic pursuits.” By dint of his own hard efforts, Lichtwark managed to raise the quality of the museum’s collection, with the acquisition of stunning Romantic works by Caspar David Friedrich, such as *The Polar Sea*, and Leibl’s famed *Three

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142 Busch & Reinken, 1979. Her diaries reveal that from 1897 she visited the fashionable Schulte Gallery, which promoted many contemporary German masters. In 1898 Vogeler had an exhibition there which she visited several times, once at least with their mutual friend Rilke. Becker’s indulgent parents had allowed her to enter a number of art schools and travel widely before, in 1896, she entered the Verein der Berliner Künstlerinnen, or the Berlin Art School for Women, at Potsdamerstrasse 38. This address was convenient for the museum and art gallery district. In fact, the dealers Keller & Reiner had impressive showrooms at Potsdamerstrasse 122, which she visited regularly, and even those of Eduard Schulte at number one, Unter den Linden.

143 Busch & Werner, 1998.

144 Lenman, 1997, p. 55.


146 Jensen, 1994, p. 72.


women in a Church, 1881, and he accumulated the largest collection of works by the most prominent and controversial of all German Impressionists, Max Liebermann.

Many of Germany’s wealthiest collectors had a penchant for this international *juste milieu* that was impressionism, as they saw it as uncomplicated, uncontroversial and un-political. Just as in other countries of this study, the *nouveau riche* actually preferred art work devoid of social comment. Many collectors “preferred subjects free from ideas or social tensions”149 and, one might add, subjects distant from their own source of wealth or capitalist exploitation. German patrons seem to have skipped the modesty apparent in the Barbizon School and gone straight to the bourgeois comforts of late Impressionism, exemplified by Manet. “The painted countryside, moreover, was not that of Courbet, Millet or even Bastien-Lepage, with their dominant foreground figures of toiling peasants, but a ‘leisure zone’ in which nature combined with modern amenities to create a setting for boat-trips, beach promenades or parties *de campagne*.150 This summary is more a reference to the art of Max Liebermann than to Fritz Mackensen. If one uses Worpswede as the period model of a successful German centre for rural art production, then it is no surprise to find that the vast majority of its artists produced purely uncontroversial landscape paintings devoid of any social comment. Initially the young painters were not so much politically driven as motivated by a strong idealism, mixed with notions of a utopian community. Of the Worpswede pioneers, only Mackensen concentrated on figure compositions, most of which were mundane reportage. Vogeler, more of a graphic artist than painter, was not so interested in painting *plein-air* but he enjoyed the ‘essential mood’ of the setting for it stirred in him the Romantic fantasy world of a pre-industrial world. He soon developed an eclectic, *Jugend*, graphic style and typically, populated his fairy-tale landscapes with figures influenced by the *Nazarenes*, the Pre-Raphaelites and Aubrey Beardsley.

There were only a handful of German Impressionists towards the end of the century and only one of those regularly attracted international attention, Max Liebermann (1847-1935). He was not a typical struggling artist, but came from a very wealthy Berlin family. He managed to rise above the complexities of the German art world, for a while, holding together the various strands of modernists. Liebermann was a *plein-air* artist who drew attention to country-life, then raised questions about the middle-class subjects of leisure, urban life and, eventually, anti-Semitism in German art circles. His career is full of contradictions. Closely identified with Berlin, he spent his formative years in Paris, then after 1878 in Munich yet is most closely identified with traditional Dutch themes. He developed his own individual, cool, detached, un-idealised style yet led the Berlin Secession. He embodied the artistic shift to the countryside, yet was an urban dweller. He enjoyed travel, visiting France and Holland many times, yet he was patriotic. He visited many, foreign, artists’ colonies, but not Worpswede. He claimed not to be interested in politics, but successfully managed to steer around the cultural minefields of the Prussian capital and the puritanical *völkisch* movement. Liebermann discovered Barbizon quite late in his life, in 1873, but early by comparison with his fellow countrymen. His early social realism was influenced by the Barbizon painters, although his own privileged upbringing was in complete contrast to Millet’s peasant background. It is interesting to note here Liebermann’s friendship with another urban, Jewish, impressionistic painter of peasants, Jozeph Israëls.

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149 Lenman, 1997, p. 171.  
150 Herbert, 1988, pp. 303-306.
Unlike most of his German contemporaries, Liebermann was not trying to continue the Heimatkunst, romanticising peasant life and their picturesque habitats. He took to pleinairism while in France. His aesthetic “avoided the philosophical and sensational, though it revealed his love of nature together with his sympathetic understanding of rural peasant life.”  

However, his legacy is ambiguous, for during the following decade, it can be seen that his mentors changed from Rousseau and Monet to Renoir and then Manet. He built up the largest collection of Manets in the whole of Germany. His focus shifted from pure nature to middle-class, social situations, which made it difficult for the German Bourgeoisie to criticise him. He had enough respect and confidence to lead and accept the presidency of the Berliner Secession, in 1899 (28:2). By 1900, Impressionism, even in Germany, was no longer at the cutting edge of the avant-garde. Rich Liebermann, who lived apart in his grand Villa Wannsee, with his huge art collection, which included many Manets, Cézannes, Degas, Monet, Renoir, Lautrecs and eventually a Picasso. Yet, he failed to keep pace with further changes in German modern art, so that a Neuer Secession formed almost immediately, lead by some of the Die Brücke Expressionists, such as Max Pechstein, and, interestingly, Carl Vinnen.

Liebermann was highly important in bringing modernism to German art, but he also tended to polarize official opinion. As an organiser, his professional attitude and knowledge was manifest in arranging exhibitions. Although he is quoted as saying “I never involved myself in politics,”152 he was, in fact, such a celebrity that it was impossible to keep out of the lime-light. Wilhelm Lübke was vociferous in his criticism of Liebermann’s work after an exhibition in Munich in 1888, deriding it as “the latest fashionable French disease.”153 The political mood came to the boil the following year, in the context of the German exhibits at the Paris World’s Fair of 1889, a particularly important event as it commemorated the centennial of the French Revolution. Liebermann’s international status was sufficiently high for the French government to ask him personally to be a juror on the selection committee, besides wishing to give prominence to his impressionist works. Chancellor Bismarck appears to have been unimpressed and made a pre-emptive edict forbidding all Prussian civil servants to participate in the Paris exhibition and demanded that all true German artists were to withdraw their works.154 This dictat managed to offend artists all across the country, from the old, die-hard, landscapist Andreas Achenbach to the celebrated dry realist Wilhelm Leibl and young thrusting impressionists, such as the new Dresden Academy professor Gotthardt Kuehl.

There is clear evidence to confirm that Liebermann enjoyed painting out of doors throughout his career. In this, he was most closely associated neither with Germany nor France, but with the Dutch countryside. His first long holiday in The Netherlands was in 1872 which resulted in many scenes of market places, farm labourers and peasants in their landscape, yet he

152 Norden, 1902, p. 35.
153 Lenman, 1997, p. 63. Liebermann exhibited “Flax-scourers in Laren” and “Garden of the Amsterdam Old Men’s Home.”
155 Kuehl (1850-1915) organised a special plein-air impressionist group in what was regarded as one of the most conservative art institutions in the country from 1890s.
Max Liebermann, ‘The Old Finch’ Restaurant, Leiden, 1905, 29:2; and, 30:2 - In the Dunes, 1909. Always a keen atmospheric plein-air painter, his focus shifted in later years from the poor to the rich, from work to leisure, and from Millet to Manet.

also expanded this range later to include examples of how the civic-minded Dutch organised themselves, for example, by developing hospices, sewing schools and almshouses. In later years he followed the mood of Manet in his subject matter, yet he continued to paint landscapes in his characteristic, muted, tonal range. He now painted the bourgeoisie at leisure: in resorts, such as Katwijk and Noordwijk, promenading through the dunes, in parks, terrace-cafés, swimming, riding, playing lawn tennis and even polo (29:2; 30:2). Liebermann visited and revisited many Dutch artists’ colonies, such as Laren, Scheveningen, Katwijk and Noordwijk, places where it was not unusual to see painters from all over the world working at easels on the sands, in the dunes or village streets. “He was married to Berlin but in love with Holland.”156

The notion behind this remark raises the intriguing question as to why his portrayal of traditional Dutch folk life became so emblematic of German modernism. The answer is a complex blend of political and social prejudices, arising out of the cultural divide that otherwise was the late nineteenth century German economic success. Historians have commonly identified a Nietzchian desire for strong leadership in the new Germany, seen by the success of Also sprach Zarathustra (1883-85), Wagnerian operas and the state-crafting of certain images. For example, a mythic cult arose around the genius of Rembrandt van Rijn. Mackensen, Modersohn, Overbeck and Westhoff all travelled to Amsterdam in 1898, specifically to see the huge Rembrandt exhibition, that is believed to be the first ‘block-buster’ museum exhibition of its kind, accompanied by much media coverage and merchandising. The widest manifestation of this cult was an extraordinary publishing phenomenon, Julius Langbehn’s Rembrandt as a Teacher, of 1890, a book that ran to 39 editions in just two years and was so widely read by German art academy students that Worpswede’s Fritz Overbeck called it the ”Bible of Art.”157 This polemic was a rambling rant against foreign cultural influences in Germany, including “vulgar naturalism.” It had its sinister side, being anti-liberal, anti-Semitic and puritanical. It extolled the virtues of primitive simplicity, one of the central tenets of the growing völkisch movement. The first sentence of the book reads: “It has now become an open secret that the spiritual life of the German people finds itself at present in a condition of slow, some would say rapid, decline.” Its fanaticism was precisely what German impressionists, especially Liebermann, tried to avoid.158

Seeking alternative cultural models to the French, German artists therefore focused on The Netherlands, which could provide a solid pedigree of Old Masters, traditional settings and a wealth of non-literary, genre subjects.

With so much anti-French feeling in the German government and official art circles, it might be assumed that their artists did not wish to travel to Paris. After the war of 1870-71, it naturally took some years to reconcile Gallic influence on Prussian art. In Paris, the central state Academy reinstated the rule that all art students had to speak fluent French. Thus, as late as

156 Elias, 1918, p. 11.
157 Jacobs, 1985, p. 121.
1884, Lovis Corinth found himself forced to enrol at a private studio, the Academy Julian, where fist-fights often broke out with German students, although, in his case he managed to avoid physical confrontation as he was a robust heavy-weight. One of the few rallying points for German art students was the Café du Dôme, on the Boulevard Montparnasse, though this was really only after 1900. Generally speaking, what was France’s loss was Holland’s gain, judging by the large number of German painters who travelled to The Netherlands, and who focused almost entirely on the coastal provinces of North and South Holland. Here, they found comfort in the friendly international artists’ colonies, where they produced “visually pleasing and unproblematical images of airy interiors, serene landscapes and healthy sun-dappled nudes.”

With the major exception of Dachau, generally, most German rural artists’ colonies were not international. This is precisely opposite to the demographic pattern shown elsewhere in Scandinavia, France, Belgium and Holland. Yet, art students were encouraged to travel and work further afield, directly and indirectly, by dint of example, imitating the early achievements of the Achenbach brothers or those of non-academics such as Max Liebermann. Such action often only required the dedication of one academy professor, as happened with Eckersberg in Copenhagen and Allebé in Amsterdam. In German modern art history of this period the name of one professor recurs frequently in the context of plein-air painting, that of Eugen G. Dücker (1841-1916). From 1872, he and his Düsseldorf art students fanned out in search of traditional coastal landscapes and especially old fishing communities along the sandy shores of the Baltic and North Sea. They were to be found at Ahenshoop, Hiddensee, Rügen, Nissen, Ekensund, Amrum, Föhr, Sylt, Werpswede and Norderney, but also formed sizeable groups within Dutch artists’ colonies, particularly at Katwijk-aan-zee and Volendam. In J.P. van Brakel’s systematic analysis of artist visitors to Katwijk, one finds that 145 of the 440 registered, foreign painters were German, which Dücker himself, between 1903-08, and many his students and colleagues.

Liebermann’s careful muted tones, although not as grey as some Hague School painters, were quickly challenged by colourists, symbolists and other German avant-garde groups, but the rewards of working out of doors were still apparent. “Mixed with the wish to be close to nature was, frequently, a nationalistic desire for a typically German art, which found its best expression in a fairly narrow regionalism. This move to set up rural communities continued into the period of expressionism, when Die Brücke painters worked in the Mauritzburg Lake region near Dresden and the Blaue Reiter moved to Sindelsdorf and Murnau in Upper Bavaria.” Dresden had a conservative image because of its traditional court history, witnessed by the fact that its dominant Royal Gallery did not acquire its first French Impressionist work until 1909, a Manet landscape. Yet, some changes had occurred earlier in the Art Academy, when the traditionalist, genre professor, Leon Pohle (1841-1908), was replaced by Gotthardt Kuehl (1850-1915). Kuehl, ‘The Saxon Monet’, was only a little younger than Liebermann but such were the rapid changes in society that he saw himself as a representative of a different generation of German painters, in that he saw his country as a whole and not only from the loftiness of the new, northern, Prussian capital. He was born in Lübeck, the old Hanse port on the Baltic coast, studied in Dresden and Munich, then lived in Paris before returning to a professorship at Dresden in

159 Corinth, 1908, pp. 50-52.
160 Gautherie-Kampka, 1996. This group centred around the dealer Wilhelm Uhde (1879-1947) and the painter Rudolf Levy but included satellite Dutch artists Lodewijk Schelfhout and Conrad Kickert.
1895. In his first year as a teacher, Kuehl encouraged the formation of a student group, Die Elbier, who were predominantly pleinairist, landscape impressionists.\textsuperscript{165} However, despite the enlargement of it to fifteen members by 1902 the group had less impact on the events that were about to explode on the other side of the city, not at the state academy of art but in the technical institute, Technische Hochschule, in 1905, amongst some frustrated architecture students.

Die Brücke represented a more extreme and anti-academic philosophy, whereby technical skills were subordinate to the immediacy of plein-air improvisation. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Erich Heckel, Ernst Kirchner and friends formed one of the two, major, German expressionist groups, in 1905, entirely independent of any institutional formalism. Part of their purpose was to shock with the power of their raw, primitive art, so it comes as no surprise that the reception of their work, officially and unofficially, was entirely dismissive and, of course, hardly commercial.

What they represent is a major step towards complete artistic independence, a break with training, tradition and authority. However, it can be seen that German Expressionists enjoyed a wide variety the working mediums, some old as well as new adaptations. This is best seen in their enthusiasm for print, where they employed various, old intaglio techniques, such as etching and dry-point; the relatively-new lithography; and, cheap but effective, lino- and wood-cut monotypes.\textsuperscript{166} It might be assumed that one cannot print out of doors, which is normally true, but what this group did attempt to do was to reduce the distance and time elements, by, for example, taking their lithographic stones to their rural retreats, which is precisely what Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff did at Dangast in 1907. Similarly to Gauguin in Brittany, they experimented with different intaglio materials, scratched on location into various metal sheets, done in the street, in the countryside and even while attending cabarets in Hamburg.\textsuperscript{167}

Self-consciously radical, Die Brücke still found inspiration from conventional themes, such as street scenes, architecture, social gatherings and topography, yet, all involving a raw response to scenes. “They looked to nature in an attempt to fix its most essential characteristics in terms of their own immediate reactions.”\textsuperscript{168} This took the form of trips to the lakes just north of Dresden. There, sensationally, they also painted nudes en plein-air. “Their purpose was to study nature at first hand and the human body moving in natural surroundings…” especially “the free human body.”\textsuperscript{169} The group fell apart because of personality clashes, but they all continued

\begin{itemize}
\item 31:2 - Erich Heckel, Dangast Moor, 1908; Woodcut.
\item 32:2 - Emil Nolde, Late Summer, Seebüll (North Friesland), c.1910; Watercolour.
\end{itemize}

Expressionists employed a wide variety of mediums to achieve their spontaneous response to nature and events, all along the North Sea coast.

\textsuperscript{165} Barrett, 1994, pp. 20-21. The group ‘Die Elbier’ included early German impressionist painters such as August Wilckens (1870-1939), Fritz Beckert (1877-1962), Arthus Bendrat (1872-1914), Ferdinand Dorsch (1875-1938), George Erler (1871-1951) and J.P. Ufer (1874-1942). Five of these became professors in their turn.

\textsuperscript{166} Carey & Griffiths, 1984.

\textsuperscript{167} Kirchner, 1974, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{168} Selz, 1974, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibidem.
their plein-air experiments, individually or in smaller groups. Schmidt-Rottluf, Heckel and Max Pechstein travelled to the North Sea coast, (31:2). Pechstein also spent summers in the dunes near Nissen, on the Baltic coast. It was almost inevitable that he would become active in the politics of culture in that city and soon formed another break-away movement, this time against Liebermann and his fellow Secessionists. This Neuer Secession formed in 1910, just five years after the foundation of Die Brücke. In effect, the newest secessionists wanted no constraints at all on artistic expression and exhibition, a policy intentionally anathema to government authority, and therefore the banner of each successive avant-garde movement. After 1900, most German cities had modern art galleries that showed the latest novelties from Paris and radicals, such as Die Brücke in Dresden. Yet, these expressionists still looked for that immediate response to the world around them, and continued to seek out nature in ever more unlikely corners and primitive locations: Pechstein and Nolde followed Gauguin to the South Pacific, for instance. They were a mixed group politically, Nolde notoriously joining the Nazi party before being designated ‘degenerate’, entartete, and banned from painting. Soon after the first World War many German artists naturally sought refuge away from the urban squalor and towards the coast, following the refreshing plein-air trends of decades. Again, they were also motivated by deep frustrations with the art institutions and with the professional dogma that had been imposed on them for over half a century. Artists from far away now joined local topographical painters on the island of Norderney, for example, Hans Trimborn (1871-1979) and Julian Klein von Diepold (1868-1947) joined with the East Frisian painter Poppe Folkerts (1875-1949). They were not political, as such, although they saw themselves as quietly revolutionary, regionally orientated rather than patriotic, as their pleinairism had its basis in a simple enjoyment of topography.

**Openluchtschilderij**

Unlike all the other countries in this survey, the Low Countries have had a long, continuous, historical association with pure landscape painting, so that any new developments in plein-air practices were much less divisive. The region had both well-organised historic art academies and a solid reputation as a centre of the international art market. In Amsterdam, the Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunst, combined well, by the 1850s, to produce large triennial exhibitions, Tentoonstellingen van Levende Meesters, based on the French model. However, having set up this Academy-Salon system the state proceeded to withdraw from financing it. Semi-official societies were formed to further stimulate the exhibition and sale of contemporary art, starting with Arti et Amicitiae, founded in 1839 in Amsterdam, and followed by, amongst others, Pulchri Studio in The Hague in 1847. The popularity of northern impressionism, in the form later called ‘The Hague School’, altered the entire balance of the art market, raising the prices, stimulating demand and supply. Enterprising new art dealers flourished\(^{170}\) and soon all regions were awash with pleinairists painting the countryside. However, as Stolwijk amongst others, has pointed out, most of the Hague School works were exported and its best painters

\(^{170}\) Exhs. Cat. Paris, 1905, Répertoire des Catalogs, shows that the majority of major art auctions were based in Paris and London but, by the end of the century, Amsterdam had at least nine large establishments: Bom, Gijselmann, Groemann, Roos, Muller, Schulmann, Preyer, Voskuil and De Vries; and, The Hague had four: van Berge, van Doom, van Gelder and van Stockum. Stolwijk, 1998, pp. 301-35, offers more accurate figures: over 100 firms by 1900 but far fewer before 1880 and less than a dozen major houses.
often felt ‘under-appreciated’ in their own fatherland.\textsuperscript{171} Officially, the state did surprisingly little to collect or purchase contemporary artwork.\textsuperscript{172} Brussels seems to have been the defining place for most Hague School masters, not only to exhibit and sell their work but to see and discuss the newest theories, including the early \textit{plein-air} achievements inspired by Barbizon and villages around Fontainebleau and the coast of Brittany.\textsuperscript{173}

The Netherlands geographical position and its man-made landscape helped mould its national character, as much as its politics and religions. The abundance of navigable waterways meant that the countryside was easily and cheaply accessible, and artists still had easy access to landscapes that had barely altered since the days when Hobbema and Ruisdael painted the cow pastures or sandy coastal fishing villages. The quality of light and moisture gave the landscapes a special depth and clarity. Paul Gabriël, the Hague School master much admired by Piet Mondriaan, wrote in a letter to the art critic A.C. Loffelt:”...I really love it when the sun shines on the water; and, quite apart from that, I think my country is colourful. One thing in particular struck me when I returned from my time abroad was the colour, luscious and richness of our countryside; hence our beautifully coloured and well-proportioned cattle....I have often heard foreigners say that those Dutch painters paint everything grey, yet their country is green: when you’re young, you’re sent out of doors to study in a colourful landscape and then you’re obliged to paint grey pictures, cardboard concoctions with the odd bit of colour here and there;...Let me say it again, just one more time, this country is not grey, not even in grey weather; neither are the dunes grey...”\textsuperscript{174} But, in many ways the extraordinary success of the ‘Greys’, the common nickname for the Hague School, seems to have discouraged the authorities from interfering in the development of art in the country and allowed market forces to dictate opinion.

The lack of a clear manifesto leaves any precise definition of ‘The Hague School’ difficult to qualify with accuracy, but \textit{plein-air} methods and working closer to the subject matter, \textit{in situ}, was fundamental to most of its members, at least initially. Even the geographical identification is unsatisfactory, for active members such Roelofs and Gabriël lived mostly in Brussels for much of their careers, although they returned to paint in the Summers. They did not paint exclusively in the city but across a broad swathe of land, spreading up from the coast and sand dunes, through the estuarine water-meadows to the woodlands of Oosterbeek, one hundred kilometres inland.

Ronald de Leeuw divides this school into an older generation, the ‘Greys’, from a younger generation, the ‘Tonalists’, who were more experimental and were more influenced by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{171} Wolffram, 1997, pp. 30-60.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Mus. Cat. Amsterdam, 1960. This \textit{Rijksmuseum} catalogue reveals just how few Hague School paintings were in the national collection before 1900. See also Wright, 1980.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Bodt, 1995\textsuperscript{1}.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Letter quoted by Gabriël to A.C. Loffelt, 29\textsuperscript{th} May 1901, in Leeuw \textit{et al.}, 1983, p. 183.
\end{itemize}
the Barbizon Realists.\textsuperscript{175} Bearing in mind that, to many painters, grey was considered ‘anti-colour’, anathema to many of the French Impressionists, critics commented on the sombre atmosphere their collective works could generate: “Coming out of a room full of impressionist paintings, back in God’s free, clear nature, one is relieved to get a fresh breath of air again and congratulate oneself on having overcome the tempting thought of committing suicide.”\textsuperscript{176} However, the true picture of the Dutch climate is often of leaden skies and a low light, in much the same way that the French countryside, painted by pleinairists, such as Courbet, Corot or Bastien-Lepage, appears bleached and dusty. Calm, aquatic landscapes became the order of the day for most Hague School masters such as Anton Mauve (1838-88), Willem Roelofs (1822-97) and Willem Maris (1844-1910). Roelofs’ pupil Smissaert commented: “Not a summer passes without him packing up his paint-box, chair, easel and umbrellas and setting off for Noorden, for Abcoude or for Voorschoten [the district West of Utrecht where he grew up] in order to study nature once again, as if he still did not know her. If you saw him walking through the countryside armed with his painting equipment, you would never think this vigorous man will celebrate his seventieth birthday next Spring.”\textsuperscript{177} This is clear evidence of both the continuance and the importance of \textit{plein-air} activity to the development of the Hague School.

The production of \textit{grand machines}, large compositions reworked or repainted up from studies for the annual Salon, was not as necessary for building up a reputation in The Netherlands, as in France and England. By contrast, Dutch ‘Cabinet’ pictures had a long history and the small canvases had wide appeal, to painter and patron alike. Artists were largely left to fend for themselves to build up professional connections. Even if they joined one of the new art associations, there were restrictive rules, where the concerns were more about selling than technique. What seemed to attract the international market was the balanced naturalism, the attention to light and colour as much as the subject matter. It is difficult to say precisely who started this trend, or where, for the Dutch landscape tradition is so lengthy, but a revival occurred by mid-nineteenth century. In Henrikus van de Sande Bakhuyzen’s \textit{Self-portrait: the Artist Painting a Cow in a Meadow Landscape} of 1850, one sees a typical scene of a \textit{plein-air} painter in action. Roelofs’ practice was identical to this, for it is known he made studies on sheets of prepared paper and canvases, commonly measuring 25 x 40 cm. Most of these show the regular marks, holes, where drawing pins were used to attach them inside the portable paint-box lid. These \textit{plein-air} works he glued onto panels, as in \textit{Beaufort}, a small (27 x 44 cm.) landscape he made in Luxembourg, first exhibited in 1889 in Rotterdam. Roelofs is generally thought of as

\begin{itemize}
\item[175] Leeuw, 1980, (no pagination).
\item[176] Leeuw, 1980, cites this letter by Prof. J.A. Alberdingk Thijm, c.1881.
\end{itemize}
being the first major Dutch painter to fall under the spell of the Barbizon landscape painters, which he visited as early as 1851 (33:2; 34:2). By then he had already moved permanently to Brussels, where he found the artistic climate much more open to new developments in landscape painting.\textsuperscript{178} It has been noted that the most Barbizon-influenced works by Roelofs are \textit{Meadow Landscape with Cows} which has been linked closely to Diaz’s \textit{Les Hauteurs du Jean de Paris}, while his \textit{Forêt de Fontainebleau} has been likened to Rousseau’s \textit{Le Curé} (1:3).\textsuperscript{179} Roelofs’ tour-de-force \textit{The Rainbow}, (34:2), which was accepted for inclusion in The Hague’s 1875 \textit{Tentoonstelling van Levende Meesters}, illustrates the fascination pleinairists had with capturing specific atmospheric effects and, by doing so, bring the viewer into the experience.

Roelofs was not alone in finding Brussels more attractive than Holland. He lived there from the age of 25 until 65. The old academies at Antwerp and Brussels continued to have solid reputations, especially after the reorganisation of the whole education system in the second half of the century. One contemporary view by a touring aristocrat called Brussels “a paradise of painters.”\textsuperscript{180} Unlike Amsterdam, its economy was expanding and vigorous. Saskia de Bodt has written extensively about the healthy state of this city, particularly for Dutch painters, who were there in proportionately large numbers.\textsuperscript{181} Brussels was popular with all Hague School painters, to study, to live, to visit, to exhibit and especially to sell. It was an extraordinary cultural mix of French, Dutch, German and British influences, a cultural crossroads for new styles and ideas, what Gerard Bilders called a “centre-point of the art-world.”\textsuperscript{182}

1866 saw the first use of the term ‘School of Tervueren’ to represent the burgeoning artists’ colony in the woodlands, just outside the city,\textsuperscript{183} interestingly, decades before the collective noun ‘school’ was ever applied to Barbizon, of which it was in imitation. In fact, such was the acceptance of this rural work that at least six other village artists’ colonies blossomed before the end of the century, in Belgium, each differing in mood and style but all using pleinairist methodology.\textsuperscript{184}

The lead in nineteenth century Dutch pleinairism came as much from Brussels as it did from Amsterdam or The Hague. The importance of this exciting, new, capital city’s contribution towards rural, artists’ colonies cannot be underestimated, as seen in the experience of the Dutch painters, Johannes Warnardus Bilders (1811-90) and his son Gerard Bilders (1838-65). Brussels had better French connections than any city in Holland, and it felt the Barbizon influence earlier and more thoroughly, but also it appeared to hold contemporary artists in higher esteem, as reflected in the sheer numbers of galleries, societies, exhibitions and sales. From 1848 J.W. Bilders had exhibited regularly at the \textit{Exposition nationale des Beaux-Arts}, but in 1860 he took his son for the first time, who found it a revelation. Gerard Bilders saw \textit{plein-air}, Barbizon School, works by Corot, Courbet, Diaz de la Peña, Millet, Rousseau and Troyon, un-accessible at that time in The Netherlands. It comes as no surprise that these landscape painters, who all worked in and around the Forest of Fontainebleau, inspired the Bilders to seek the same intimacy with ancient woodlands, in dense old forests around Oosterbeek, west of Arnhem. There, they

\textsuperscript{178} Roelofs moved to Brussels in 1847. The following year two of his paintings were accepted by the Brussels Salon. One was awarded the Gold medal while the other was bought by the king.

\textsuperscript{179} Leeuw \textit{et al.}, 1983, p. 268.

\textsuperscript{180} Lord Gower, 1875, cited in Bodt, 1995¹, p.6.

\textsuperscript{181} Bodt¹, 1995, c.50 artists’ works appeared in this exhibition but the catalogue includes additional names.

\textsuperscript{182} Bilders, 1876, pp. 263-64.

\textsuperscript{183} Wynants & Vilder, 2000, pp. 87-91.

\textsuperscript{184} The main nineteenth century, Belgian, rural, artists’ colonies included: Dendermonde, Kalmthout, Kempen, Knokke, St.Martens-Latem, Tervueren and Wechelderzonde.

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formed the nucleus of the first, truly rural, artists’ community in The Netherlands, with Anton Mauve and the Maris brothers, amongst many others.185

As important in Belgium’s new art market, but lacking often elsewhere, were the mature back-up mechanisms to inform the public, attract exciting artists and organise major international exhibitions. There was a fascinating array of venues, schools, specialist societies and state art academies, primarily in Brussels, but also in the old centres of Antwerp and Ghent. They were all influenced by the French Academy-Salon system, with French text and terms until late in the century, but were nonetheless very international, attracting Dutch, British, German and American art students, many of whom later went on to participate in artists’ colonies. The Newlyn painters Stanhope Forbes and Frank Bramley, for example, favoured the training gained at Charles Verlat’s studio in Antwerp. The progressive state-run Brussels’ Salon helped launch Roelofs’ career, amongst others, as early as 1847, interestingly, the same year he helped found Holland’s second major, art society, Pulchri Studio in The Hague. One of the best, early examples of Brussels’ position as a radical, cultural centre came in 1851 when prominence was given to the exhibition of Courbet’s The Stone Breakers, 1850, an epic, plein-air picture and a major pioneer of Realism. This was an age when a single painting could cause an enormous scandal, as Courbet found to his cost in the Paris Salon that same year. His Realism was a reaction against the previous art styles and was charged with political purpose. Courbet’s ground-breaking treatments had a distinct, social message, whose strong, political stance was confirmed when he collaborated on a later book with the anarchist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, entitled On Art and its Social Significance, 1863. His paintings typify the moody pleinairism of the time: being “concerned with the present, not the past; with the momentary, not the permanent; with bodies, not souls; and, with the material, not the spiritual.”186 One may see direct influences his The Stone Breakers had on later generations, by comparing, for example, it to Toorop’s Respect for the Dead, of 1884, which also shows dusty road repairers, and the Dutchman’s political awakening in After the Strike, of 1887.

1852 saw the opening, in Brussels, of the pioneering Museum voor Moderne Kunst. There was no such equivalent in The Netherlands at that time, nor in many other countries. It indicates the attitude of the new Belgian state and its endorsement of contemporary art. It paved the way for other cultural initiatives. The same year in Antwerp, the Musée des Académiciens à Anvers opened its doors, but it was not until 1905 that the city had a Museum voor Moderne Meesters.187 Sensing this cultural momentum, Roelofs, the central figure amongst the Dutch contingent, now joined with other progressives to help start a series of alternative exhibition clubs that supported modernist principles, which included pleinairism, landscape and genre painting. La Société belge des Aquarellistes formed in 1856, giving recognition to watercolour as a distinct medium for fine art and promoting its significance as a technique for gaining truthful results. This organisation was followed by the Cercle Artistique and the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts in 1868, later renamed as the art societies La Chrysalide and L’Essor. These all combined to promote an atmosphere of appreciation of new developments in the arts, broader in scope, more liberal in practice, more politically tolerant than the comparable Arti et Amicitae and Pulchri Studio back in The Netherlands.

Dutch painters benefited from their contact with Brussels, both the older generation of the Hague School, such as W. Roelofs, W. Maris, H.W. Mesdag and J. Israëls, together with the

187 Mus. Cat. Antwerp 1977, p. 3.
younger generation, including M. Maris, G.H. Breitner and Isaac Isaëls. Brussels can easily be seen to have acted as a useful spring-board for Dutch pleinairism and impressionism, but it also contributed heavily to many post-impressionist styles that otherwise would not have developed, or not have developed so rapidly, without this catalyst. The prime example of this is with the young, enthusiastic, painter, designer and graphic artist Jan Theodore Toorop. He undoubtedly played a crucial part in bringing Modernism to The Netherlands. Following Roelofs’ example, he moved to Brussels in 1883. He revelled in its many progressive exhibition societies, for it offered him direct contact with a host of international avant-garde ideas in painting, literature and music. Brussels had the largest Belgian art academy and hosted the large Triennial art exhibitions, alternating with the Flemish cities of Ghent and Antwerp, but whereas the latter were slightly more traditional in outlook, it was the capital that was more avant-garde and distinctly Francophile. Unlike any city in The Netherlands, Brussels had strong, reciprocal, artistic ties with Paris, and it often served as a useful bolt-hole for French dissidents, namely Gustave Courbet and Charles Baudelaire, both of whom exerted an influence on the development of pleinairism, impressionism and rural artists’ colonies, one by his use of paint and the other by his use of words.

Jan Toorop has a reputation for experimenting with the newest styles, or, more problematically, practicing realism, pleinairism, impressionism, post-impressionism, cubism, pointillism, art nouveau and symbolism, almost all at the same time. His enthusiasm for the latest developments in the arts can be traced directly to his membership of the Brussels art forum Les Vingt (‘Les XX’) in the first year of his stay, 1883. During that first period he painted in a kind of elegant naturalism, after the manner of his friends James Ensor and Alfred Stevens. Many of Belgium’s artistic radicals were members and fellow exhibitors in Les XX, including Fernand Khnopff, Henry van de Velde and Félicien Rops, elements of whose Symbolism show in Toorop’s graphic works. In addition, during the first decade of the club’s existence works by an astonishing 126 foreign ‘invités’ were unveiled, of which 57 were French painters, all with strong plein-air experience, including Caillebotte, Cézanne, Degas, Manet, Monet, Morisot, Pissaro, Renoir, Redon, Seurat, Signac and Sisley. Nowhere else, out side of France, was there such variety of modern art on show, under one roof.

The Paris art dealer Durand-Ruel saw the significance, early on, of this society as a vehicle for further promoting his impressionist stock, and by implication pleinairism, bringing twenty works to Brussels in 1885. Other notable progressive artists, and pleinairists, illustrate both the breadth, depth and reach of Les XX’s international network: the American, James McNeill Whistler; the Germans, Max Liebermann and Max Klinger; the Norwegians Christian Krogh and Edvard Munch; the British, Edward Burne Jones, Walter Crane and Aubrey Beardsley; and the Dutch, H.W. Mesdag, G.H. Breitner and J. Thorn Prikker. There was no equivalent avant-garde art forum of this magnitude in The Netherlands, neither in the public nor

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188 Block, 1984, p. xiii.
189 Block, 1984, p. xv. “Brussels, under the liberal policies of Kings Léopold I and II, had served as a refuge for political exiles from France...artists and writers such as Victor Hugo, Charles Baudelaire, Gustave Courbet and Jules Valle’s had fled Paris for Brussels.”
190 Block, 1984, p. 20. The society formed in 1883. Toorop was present at that first meeting, but he did not sign up as a member until the following year. This society was started by Fernand Khnopff, Octave Maus and Edmond Picard, amongst others, to bring together avant-garde literary and painterly arts.
191 Ensor’s influence may be seen in Toorop’s use of a freer brush-style and colourful palette, while Alfred Stevens guided him towards the subject of elegant ladies in domestic surroundings.
in the private art sector at that time. The huge triennial exhibitions were rather conservative by nature, but were open to all. *Pulchri Studio* and *Arti et Amicitiae* art societies did not develop sufficiently to keep pace with the growing avant-garde. Museum and private collectors were surprisingly few, in The Netherlands, at that time and had not even invested in the Hague School. Mesdag’s famous painting collection was accessible to colleagues and offered the only access to examples of the Barbizon and The Hague Schools. More modern works were only gradually seen by the general public in The Netherlands from the 1880s, helped by the emergence of rural artists’ colonies and provincial art societies, but surprisingly few art galleries.

Post-impressionism also saw the continued practice of *plein-air* methods. One of the pictures that had the most impact on the public at the time was George Seurat’s masterpiece *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of Grande Jatte*, 1886. It was soon shown at *Les XX*, in Brussels, just one year after its completion in Paris. This huge canvas, 206 x 305 cm., is a compilation of many *plein-air* sketches and took two years to complete. Toorop saw Seurat’s painting at the *Les XX* show of 1887, in which he was also an exhibitor, and was impressed so much he took up Pointillism, although exhibition catalogues show he continued to favoured the Ensorian broad-brush style for at least one year longer. He painted pointillist works in Katwijk and Domburg artists’ colonies and invited, in addition, some of the leading ‘dotists’ and ‘spotists’ of the day to paint with him along this coast, namely van Rijsselbergh, Paul Signac and Leo Gestel. Toorop’s earliest Divisionist work, using these broken-colour techniques, is more Gauguin-like than Seurat-like, as seen in *Old Oaks in Surrey*, 1890-91. In 1892, Toorop was involved in another exhibition initiative, *L’Association pour l’Art*, this time in Antwerp, involving an international array of Neo-impressionists including Paul Signac, Théodore van Rijsselbergh, Henry van de Velde, Toulouse-Lautrec, Seurat and Vincent van Gogh. He brought their works to Holland for the first time, as part of the first *Haagsche Kunstkring* show he organised with Thorn-Prikker. This was the same exhibition seen and reported on by the pivotal Danish artist and writer Johan Rohde, who, in turn, informed fellow Scandinavian modernists who were attempting to update their own art circles with their initiative, *Den Frie Udstilling*. The speed of artistic change was not only increasing but spreading internationally, now that private clubs, societies and galleries were forming.

In many ways pointillism is the logical, even mathematical, conclusion of impressionistic colour theories. However, not only were there many new pigments, there were many new colour theories from which to choose in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mondriaan’s biographer, Tim Trelfall, recognises that Charles Henry’s theories were a strong influence while other authors point to Marie-Eugène Chevreul as a major theoretical stimulus. Henry published monographs on the science of colour proximity that formed the basis of pointillist theories, what Seurat called by the term “Divisionism” and Mondriaan renamed “Luminism.” Toorop’s biographer, Victorine Hefting, also recognises the influence of Ogden

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194 Terpstra, 1958, pp. 4-12.
195 Block, 1984, p. 57. The 1892 *Haagsche Kunstkring* exhibition also included Redon, Pissaro and Mondriaan works, and a lecture by Henry van de Velde entitled ‘The peasant in painting.’
196 Trelfall, 1988, pp. 128-33.
197 Marie-Eugène Chevreul (1786-1889) was the director of the Gobelin tapestry factory and then curator at the Paris Natural History Museum, 1864-79.
199 Trelfall, 1988, pp. 128-33.
Road’s treatise of 1879, *Modern Chromatics*, as another force behind his Divisionism and the optical effects of Signac-pointille and other graphically inspired, abbreviated, brush strokes (cf. V. van Gogh). These colouring methods usually complemented pleinairism, for the processes brought some fascinating results by quickly translating the visual experience.

Toorop’s enthusiasm for post-impressionism brought about the formation of special modern art societies, such as the Hague’s *Kunstkring* in 1892. He imported modern art work and occasionally managed to encourage progressive artists to visit, lecture and explain their methods at meetings. These artists friends painted with him on location and their names pop up in various coastal artists’ colonies, as a consequence, such as the Belgian Theo van Rijselberghe in 1893 and 1894; Paul Signac in 1894 and Whistler in 1900. In this way Toorop managed to entice them later to Domburg, where, for example, van Rijselberghe seems to have enjoyed painting the landscape in and around Veere. After 1900, Toorop managed to influence almost all his fellow colonists to experiment further, mixing pleinairism with these new colour theories. Domburg artists such as Mies Elout-Drabbe, Jan Heyse, Ferdinand Hart-Nibbrig, Otto van Rees and Piet Mondriaan, all tried pointillism, at one time or another. Mondriaan produced the most extraordinary results, inspired by the beach, the groynes, the dunes, trees, bushes and the towers.

Mondriaan continued to develop his own theories and push back the boundaries even further towards Abstract Expressionism, yet he too still communed with nature at Domburg, usually in the form of long, meditative, solitary walks along the beach. His surviving notebooks, as well as the canvases, testify to his continued outdoor meditations along the coast to Westkapelle, with its high water-tower, which he painted many times using different colour combinations. The small church at Domburg also came in for the same treatment, mostly its tower facade. His long *Dune* series, together with the towers, reveal a passion for colour and form simplification, while the beach, especially his *Pier and Ocean* series (17:6), concentrate on tangential geometric relationships. The Domburg experience shows that, although they all used *plein-air* methods and new colour theories, there was still a great degree of individual expression, seen when one contrasts the works of Toorop with Mondriaan’s abstractions (38:2); Hart Nibbrig, the painter of ‘bone-dry’ scenes; Heyse’s geometry; Heemskerck’s dark, masculine solidity; Groth’s beach watercolours (37:2); Mies Elout-Drabbe’s flower gardens, and also Leo Gestel and Lodewijk Sheltndhout’s powerful tessellated landscapes.

Toorop’s pleinairism adapted itself to all manner of styles and subject matter, yet he never lost his skill as a draughtsman, in particular his enjoyment of painting portraits. In Domburg, and to a lesser extent Katwijk, he produced some of his finest portraits using the pointillist technique, such as those of Mrs. M.J. de Lange, 1900, and Aegidius Timmerman, 1898-1900. His quick skills at drawing proved to be an extremely useful tool for developing friendships with a wide range of artists, musicians, composers, poets, etc. Few of them could

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201 Van Rijselberghe and Signac also lodged at Hotel Spaander, Volendam, in 1893 and 1894 respectively.
203 Mondriaan’s surviving sketchbooks are not considered chronological, as books or pages, and they are rarely dated, although some studies from Paris can be dated more accurately.
At Domburg there was the standard watercolour pleinairism of artists such as, 37:2 - the Hungarian Maurice Góth (1873-1944), Pavilion, 1919, alongside the outstanding, increasingly abstract works of Piet Mondriaan, 38:2 - as seen with his series based on the Watertower at Westkapelle, 1909/1910. The Hague Gemeetemuseum.

resist a caricature of themselves, in pencil or crayon, even though some of them were less kind to him on other occasions. His present of a small double-portrait crayon sketch to Colonel Johan Drabbe cemented their long friendship at Domburg in 1898. The double and single portraits of poets Albert Verwey and Stefan George from 1901, in contrast, helped smooth clashing temperaments at Noordwijk. Less controversial was the long series of ecclesiastical drawings and paintings he made, especially after his conversion to Catholicism in 1905. Toorop enthusiastically employed a wide range of techniques and mediums out of doors. He not only used oil paints, pen and ink, but showed the effectiveness of modest materials such as pastels, crayon, charcoal and coloured pencils. He did not develop any new plein-air methods but he did blend in some exotic elements, such as symbolism from his native Java, seen in his prints done at Katwijk. His experiments typify the period well, for they represent a breaking with tradition. Bionda recognises that the Tachtigers, the Dutch artists of the 1880s, were important to eradicate hierarchical thinking with regards to genres and techniques… that cleared the way for Jan Toorop and Thorn-Prikker. 205

Pleinairism also gained ground in The Netherlands as a result of the changing attitude to graphic art generally. Sketches, drawings and etchings were considered to hold qualities of sincerity and truthfulness because of the immediacy of their techniques. This was partly spurred on by technological invention, such as lithography, but the market for them proved surprisingly slow in The Netherlands. There was the conservative Hague Etching Club, which sold albums of prints by Israëls, Mauve and the Maris brothers but in 1885 a new society formed, De Nederlandse Etsclub, with a more youthful image. The art critic H.P. Bremmer, an early champion of Toorop, wrote the following comments contrasting Mesdag’s typical oeuvre and a new pastel by the, then, Katwijk resident: “If you just compare a painting by Mesdag with it, you will realize that Mesdag is someone who records things coldly like an automaton, showing only what is observable and that Toorop, by contrast, penetrates more deeply into the matter and makes of that drawing a very piece of the character of that fisherman’s life, with a great and sharp power of observation.” 206

Despite the formation of the art club Pulchri Studio in The Hague, there was little exposure of any graphic mediums in the country, and few collectors of drawings or etchings. Discussion sessions offered fellow members, amateurs and collectors a small chance to see watercolours but it was an inadequate response compared to Brussels and London. Not surprisingly Brussels founded its Société Royale Belge des Aquarellistes, as early as 1855, which had exhibited Roelofs early plein-air works. London already had a well established Watercolour Society half a century early but it was less influential outside the British Isles. The Hollandsche Teeken-Maatschappij, or Dutch Drawing Society, was set up only in 1876, mostly to promote watercolours. J.H. Weissenbruch, Mauve, Mesdag and Jacob Maris all served on the original

205 Bionda & Blotkamp, 1990-91, p. 64.
committee, as one might expect, although the membership tried intentionally to be international, by inviting Italian masters, Mosè Bianchi and Vincenzo Cabianca; and Belgians, such as Paul Clays, Edouard Huberti and J.P. Madou. Max Liebermann’s membership from 1892-1907, with the help of Israëls, did much for the development of such art in Germany. The art critic Loffelt was originally enthusiastic, “successful almost without exception” but after a decade he had reversed his opinion, writing about the “monotony”, “uninspired” and “hackneyed works... submitted by the older generation” in the society.\(^{207}\) The narrow range in style however did not excite much interest and by the late 1880s, once again, the younger artists became more vociferous in their criticisms. Artists such as Jan Veth, Willem Witsen and Antonius Derkinderen demanded a greater degree of self-expression and individuality in their work and how it was displayed. Taken together with the increased interest shown in other graphic media by younger artists, it was only a matter of time before another society formed to promote their skills and fresh ideas.

In 1891, in The Hague, \textit{Pulchri Studio} was finally joined by another artists’ society, the \textit{Haagsche Kunstkring}, which was progressive in the manner of Brussels’ \textit{Les XX}. There was an obvious link with Toorop here yet, surprisingly, its first president was a second generation Hague School moderate, Théophile de Bock (1851-1904). Politically his term proved solid rather than dynamic. It was the inclusion of Toorop, inevitably, as the chairman of the painting section, which gave it the deserved reputation as a successful \textit{avant-garde} society. His contacts in Paris and Brussels resulted in many new exciting exhibitions and performances, which featured: Georges Seurat, Paul Signac, Vincent van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec and Odilon Redon; lectures by his symbolist friends such as Henry van de Velde, Sèr Péladan and Paul Verlaine; music by Ernest Chausson and Vincent d’Indy; and theatre pieces by Henrik Ibsen and Maurice Maeterlinck. Modernism had finally found a firm footing in Holland. However, Dutch painting is not seen as inspired traditionally by literature, as much as English or German art. Dutch modern art was concerned more with freedom of expression, including pleinairism as a means to observe nature, and exploration of materials, with little or no social comment or direct political confrontation.

The English speaking countries warrant inclusion in this study not only as so many of its artists were involved in this movement but also because of the economic pressure they brought to bare on the development of art increasingly throughout the century. There were numerous direct and indirect factors that influenced the rise of \textit{plein-air} landscape painting, yet it is curious that having such a sound early start, with major English artists such as Turner and Constable, amongst others, Realism, Naturalism and Impressionism failed to make significant inroads into the vast Victorian art world, despite the persistence of many individual patrons who amassed huge collections of works by Hague School masters in England, Scotland, Canada and the USA.

\(^{207}\) Loffelt, 1889.
Open air painting

The late Victorian world of painting was one of unprecedented wealth, variety and complexity. Pleinairism was practiced at the beginning and at the end of the era. It did not change much, in itself, but attitudes towards it wavered. Debates continued in English art circles that revolved around both content and technique. Specialisation occurred in painting, more than in most other countries, each in competition yet often overlapping. By the third quarter of the century, there were many distinct areas of artistic interest each with its own market and practitioners, apart from the standard divisions of portraiture, religious, historical, maritime and animal painting. Pre-Raphaelitism lingered on, almost as popular pastiche, with J.E. Millais (1829-96) finally being voted president of the Royal Academy in 1885. There was a slow drive towards Arts & Crafts’ naturalism lead by William Morris. Classicism was championed by gentlemen artists, such as Albert Moore (1841-93), George Frederick Watts (1817-1904) and Lord Leighton (1830-96). There was the Aesthetic Movement, around Whistler and Wilde, and archaeological anecdotal settings by Laurens Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) and Edward Poynter (1836-1919). Aubrey Beardsley (1972-98) and J.F. Lewis (1805-76) satisfied broader exotic interests. Spiritualist and fairy paintings were popular, by luminaries as divergent as Richard Dadd (1817-86) and Joseph Noël Paton (1821-1901). Herbert von Herkomer (1849-1914) and Luke Fildes (1844-1927) provided what little social realism there was, surprisingly tame, bearing in mind the enormous popularity of the class-ridden literature of Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy. By the 1880s photography and fine-art prints were strengthening their position country-wide, with photographers, such as Peter Henry Emmerson (1856-1936), documenting the same traditional scenes and activities as the painters in the Norfolk Broads and on the coast at Southwold-Walberswick.

In reality, before 1870 few British artists trained abroad and few foreigners came to study in England. Thus interest in Impressionism developed late and is regarded as adapting to it in a second-hand form, Lepage-ism. Images representing Barbizon Realism were largely absent although genre narratives were hugely popular. The artists of Victorian Britain seem less interested in the changes in technique and colour theories, which their continental counterparts had found by experimenting in their rural retreats, as much as promoting a high moral purpose to painting nature and the countryside generally.

One pointer to the problems facing this progress is well-illustrated by the contrasting careers of fellow Newlyn colonists Walter Langley (1852-1922) and Stanhope Forbes (1857-1947). Both were meticulous in their preparations and showed an equal commitment to the truthful portrayal of village life, but the tendency for the Victorians to maintain social distinctions and class prejudices resulted in the humble watercolourist constantly loosing ground to the well-to-do, oil painter. Both were pleinairists and gained early experience in France, where they may have met. Langley was a working-class lithographer from the industrial Midlands, while Forbes trained in the fashionable studios of Antwerp and Paris. Langley’s experiences of the harsh realities of poverty resulted in his socialist politics and, unsurprisingly, he was a follower of the pamphleteer and radical politician Charles Bradlaugh (1833-91). By contrast, Forbes gained from all the aspirations, support mechanisms and confidence of his superior class, together with the constant encouragement of his cultured French mother, Juliette de Guise. Both

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208 Stanhope Forbes was educated in Brussels, trained under Charles Verlat in Antwerp and then in Paris at the private art academies of Julian, Bonnat and J.P. Laurens, while Langley was apprenticed as a child, aged 13, in 1865, to an immigrant lithographer, August H. Biermann, in the industrial heartland of Britain, Birmingham.
artists any positive outcome at Newlyn and “coldly friendly”\textsuperscript{209} is the best the two seem ever to have achieved monumentalised working-class people in their village environments and both contributed to the on-going academy debate over what constituted suitable subjects for fine art. However, Langley, despite producing some stunning works, was the more marginalised, in part because of the lowly status of watercolours as a secondary, supportive medium. It took Langley many years to gain limited recognition while Forbes was honoured with membership of the Royal Academy almost with his first submission. Unlike the coupling of Millet and Rousseau at Barbizon, or Ancher and Krøyer at Skagen, the English Victorian social divisions prejudiced the advancement of much modernism in art.

Much may also be extrapolated from this clash that is indicative of British attitudes to modern art. Before Forbes arrived at this small Cornish fishing village, there were a small number of artists working there, including Langley. He had just succeeded in bringing some initial fame to Newlyn, when he exhibited two pictures at the Dudley Gallery, London, in 1883. From 1865 this venue in Piccadilly had built a good reputation by promoting unknown or emerging British artists. One of the awkward elements in his work was the strong content of period morality seen in his titles: *Time moveth not, our being ‘tis that moves* and *But men must work and women must weep*. Such titles appear overblown by modern standards, but Victorian Britain adored the high moral tone (40:2). The talented Swedish artist Anders Zorn, then working in St.Ives, commented on this “nauseating English habit...of sticking trite little phrases onto the frame.”\textsuperscript{210} Yet, these homilies fitted in well with official attitudes of many European governments, and are not unlike Kaiser Wilhelm II’s pronouncement that “Art’s duty was to distract attention from the grimmer aspects of reality and encourage the contemplation of the Ideal.”\textsuperscript{211} Although they are set in tragic circumstances, these pictures, in fact, follow traditional narratives of Christian piety and ethics. If the peasants were in costume, then one might mistake them for Pre-Raphaelite homilies, but they are sharply focused variations of Jozeph Israëls’ popular theatricals, such as *Ida the Fisherman’s Daughter* and *Cottage Madonna*, both much reproduced after 1860. However, Langley’s closely observed narratives are in total contrast to the simplicity and fluidity of his continental counterparts Millet and Daumier.

\textsuperscript{209} Langley, 1997, p. 69 cites this passage from a Forbes letter of 1884 sent to his mother.

\textsuperscript{210} Jacobs, 1985, p. 161 and Brummer, 1994, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{211} Roters, *Kunst im Widerpruch*, quoted by Lenman, 1997, p. 3. Cites this in a speech made in December 1900.
The French Impressionists’ concern with capturing transient light effects was too advanced for late Victorian Britain and went almost completely unregarded even though Monet had worked in London on the Thames and exhibited at Durand-Ruel’s gallery from 1870. This was an astonishing missed-opportunity for the progress of *plein-air* painting and impressionism in Britain.\(^{212}\) Highly-polished, narrative art continued to dominate sales, in part, because of the success of the technicians. The detail and brilliance achieved by painters was matched by etchers and line-block engravers, so that fine works by artists such as Edwin Landseer (1802-73) and William Powell Frith (1819-1909) were reproduced so well and in such numbers as to influence the whole art market and the public’s taste for imagery. Their sentimental compositions were overwhelmingly popular primarily because they pandered to existing tastes, rather than making demands on the intellect. Prints, for example, of Landseer’s famous *Monarch of the Glen*, 1850, now flooded the market. Similarly, Frith’s career was based on reproductions of three huge figure compositions, *Life at the Seaside*, 1854, (also called *Ramsgate Sands*); *Derby Day*, 1858; and, *The Railway Station*, 1862. The earlier albums of Turner’s topographical watercolours were now superseded by prints, at least half-imperial in size, promoted by mass-marketing methods of dealers such as Ernest Gambart, ‘Prince of the Victorian art world.’ His biographer, Jeremy Maas, is of the opinion that Gambart fashioned not only the new art market but also the English taste for fine art at the expense of more modern methods and styles.\(^{213}\)

For specialist watercolour painters, such as Langley, there were few options stylistically, fewer than if he had concentrated on oil painting. In many ways watercolour painting was so popular and easy that it was not taken seriously by the art authorities. The popularity of Turner’s watercolour landscapes combined with cheap, portable, painting-boxes made painting out of doors possible and socially acceptable. Opinion was divided in London society between ‘high art’, the ideal, classical, historical, costume pieces showing improving morality, and ‘genre’ scenes, that implied notions on the importance of reality and authenticity. However, for Langley, the major constraint on his career, as it was for most young hopefuls, was financial. He had only one source of income and so, if he was to remain self-employed, he was compelled to produce a constant stream of saleable watercolours. When he managed, in 1883, to sell one canvas\(^{214}\) to a Manchester businessman for £420, it was the equivalent of four of his watercolours. This event was reported in the local newspaper and was the first recognition in print of Newlyn as an artists’ village, but in its four lines, *The Cornishman* managed to make four mistakes: the wrong title, the wrong place, the wrong price and the wrong gender of the buyer. It seems to confirm the secondary rank of watercolour painting in the Victorian art market.

Langley was a diligent artist, but to achieve the level of financial reward, equivalent to that of an oil painter, he was compelled to sell more pictures on paper and therefore put in even more hours painting. Although one can see now that Turner made simple, atmospheric, *plein-air* works that stand by themselves as complete images, at the time such ‘short-hand’ methods were not generally accepted for exhibition. For watercolour work to attract any serious sort of price in Britain, one was to show serious purpose, a fine technique and traditional composition. This explains Langley’s detailed approach and choice of titles. Prices for watercolours were generally

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\(^{212}\) Graves, 1918. This study of nineteenth century auction sales is by no means complete but it is indicative of the British art market. By 1910, the sale of works by Monet in British amounted to only £504, precious little considering his long associated with London. By contrast, Alma Tadema sold one painting in 1873 for 1,000 guineas, and many Hague School works were regularly sold for considerable sums, even being bought back by Dutch art dealers.

\(^{213}\) Maas, 1975.

\(^{214}\) Langley, 1997, p. 72. “Among the Missing” 1882 was exhibited at the Royal Institute but not the Royal Academy.
moderate, in part, this situation may be explained simply by the laws of standard economics, for there was such a large supply of topographical watercolours. Britain had a long tradition of landscape watercolour painting, as a separate art form in itself. The Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours was founded as early as 1804. The wholesale popularity of watercolour as a medium and a past-time is difficult to explain, in the context of national politics, yet it was recognised as an acceptable activity for professionals and amateurs, for ladies, for the gentry, for all kinds of travellers and all those who wanted to respond to the nature of their surroundings.

In the development of watercolour painting in England some artists found a surprising depth of expression early on. For example, in the landscapes of Alexander Cozens (c.1717-86) one may already see the benefits of *plein-air* work. He became a drawing master at Eton School, then at the spa town of Bath and finally instructor to the royal princes, from 1781. “A candidate for Associateship of the Royal Academy, he was unsuccessful, probably because he painted little in oil”\(^{215}\) not unlike Langley’s problematic situation, 100 years later. He was also known for his inventiveness, in a ‘blot drawing’ technique, similar to Gainsborough’s ‘moppings’, and the use of a Chinese monochrome style, both propounded in his book, *A New Method for Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*, 1785-86. His son, John Robert Cozens (1752-1799) continued this interest in topographical watercolours and he, typical of the age, was commissioned to accompany the connoisseurs Richard Payne Knight and William Beckford on their Grand Tour. This was an early example of *plein-air* watercolour painting as reportage, which was done with a freshness and lightness that anticipates French impressionism.

Between 1803-33, around the North Sea coast of Norfolk, arose an influential art school, the Norwich Society of Artists, based in the county-town, which achieved an outstandingly high quality of landscape painting. It was the first independent art society to be founded outside of London after the inauguration the Royal Academy in 1768.\(^{216}\) It carried on the tradition, directly and indirectly, from the Flemish and Dutch Masters, works of which there were in extraordinary high numbers in major collections across the region. The long history of trade directly between Norwich, Kings Lynn, Great Yarmouth and the Low Countries had resulted in the presence of landscape paintings by, amongst others, Meindart Hobbema, Jan Frans van Bloemen, Jan van Goyen and Jacob van Ruisdael. The presence of such a wealth of Old Masters, accessible and in the vicinity of Norwich, acted together to encourage their natural affinity to portray their own countryside.\(^{217}\)

The rise of the Norwich School of painters is an excellent example of how it was possible for major artistic influences to cross national and physical boundaries without the interference of the dominant capital city. This autonomous, urban artists’ colony flourished because of its peculiar isolation, unchanged landscape and the healthy state of the county’s squirearchy. There were a large number of country estates, seats of the landed gentry, which possessed impressive art collections, the cultural and artistic products of the ‘Grand Tour.’ For example, at Holkam Hall, the Earl of Leicester had a famous collection of Clauuds and Rubens. At Houghton Hall, a neighbouring estate along the North Sea coast, England’s Prime Minister, Robert Walpole (1675-1745) accumulated over 400 Old Masters, most of which were at this Norfolk house.\(^{218}\)

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\(^{215}\) Gaunt, 1964, pp. 112-14.

\(^{216}\) Other city art societies were founded, following the success of the Norwich School in 19th. Feb.1803; Edinburgh and Bath, both in 1808; Leeds, the Northern Society, in 1809; and Liverpool, 1810.

\(^{217}\) Moore, 1985, pp. 13-15. Sir Robert Walpole amassed 421 paintings by 1737, housed "predominantly" in his Norfolk estate, but also in his Arlington Street house, Chelsea and his rooms at the Treasury in London. However, most of the non-portraits, including Dutch Old Masters, were sold to Catherine The Great of Russia in the 1790s.
Norwich, at Narford Hall, Sir Andrew Fountaine (1676-1753) also owned a handsome collection of Dutch Masters and a considerable number of print folios. What distinguishes this region further was that it had a new interested mercantile class who also invested in collecting new marine and landscape paintings. Chief among these new businessman was Thomas Harvey (1748-1819) of Catton, the earliest patron of the leading Norwich artist John Crome (1768-1821). Harvey had purchased Dutch Masters himself, as well as through agents and from personal contacts in Rotterdam and Antwerp. These collectors set the stage for the rise of Crome and John Sell Cotman (1782-1842), the two most-outstanding artists of the Norwich School, and encouraged them to concentrate on landscape painting rather than portraiture. These painters were not academy trained, unlike their Copenhagen or Hague equivalents. The Norwich School painters managed to achieve a marked maturity, especially in their *plein-air* watercolours, whose fame spawned imitation in other provincial cities, and made them the best example of a successful regional art group. Joseph Stannard’s *Yarmouth Beach and Jetty*, 1828, (41:2); John Bulwer’s *Beeston Regis Church*, of 1840; Cotman’s *Cader Idris*, of 1833; James Stark’s *Cromer*, c.1835; and, Crome’s *View of Carrow Abbey, Norwich*, 1805, all show a confidence and tonal unity. This healthy situation has no real counterpart around the North Sea, at that time, and although the Norwich School was a superb point of reference for all subsequent rural English painters, it is surprising there were not more major artists’ colonies located around this sandy coastline, apart from at Southwold-Walberswick.

The emergence of this provincial school of art in such an unexpected location raises a number of interesting questions to do with accessibility to major art collections as suitable material for teaching, which is also applicable to situations found on the other side of the North Sea. The visibility of fine art outside the capital cities was traditionally very limited. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were few public art museums, and the major collections were usually private and generally inaccessible. Many of the first public museums were displays of captured treasure or booty, as is the case with the Louvre, which was reorganised to show off looted works from 1793. Art Academies usually relied heavily on fine prints and sculpture. In Amsterdam, the ‘Great Royal Museum’, forerunner of the Rijksmuseum, was established in 1808 “for the collection of pictures, drawings, sculptures, chased work, gems, antiquities, works of art and curiosities of all kinds” but was haphazardly assembled in the Town Hall, until some investment finally came for a new building as late as 1885. In England, the first major art museums were in London, but as the nation’s two most prestigious universities were outside the capital, so scholarly collections were accumulated in Oxford, which founded the Ashmolean Museum in 1683, and in Cambridge, whose Fitzwilliam Museum opened in 1816.

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219 Moore, 1985, p. 13. There were travelling art dealers around the provinces at that time. Moore describes one, Daniel Boulter (1740-1802), a Quaker, who worked out of Great Yarmouth. He was also a collector and even opened a museum in the ‘Markett Place’.

How much Norfolk artists had access to these Old Masters is also an interesting question. There is enough material to suggest access was probable, in at least three ways: illustrated guides were published by the proud owners of such fine art, such as William Kent’s designs for Houghton Hall and then Robert Walpole’s *Aedes Walpolinae* of 1747, together with Holkam Hall’s *A Stranger’s Guide*, 1817, by J. Dawson. These publications also suggest an occasional viewing public. House auctions were standard on the deaths of the owners and the doors were opened to the general public. John Crome is known to have relished and promoted such visits to colleagues, and is known to have traded in antiques and restored paintings. Crome drew considerable benefit from his dealings with the local businessman Thomas Harvey of Catton, who gave him access to his own Dutch Masters collection and bought Crome’s works. John Sell Cotman is also known to have copied from works belonging to the local politician, William Smith (1756-1835), another enthusiastic collector. Cotman made a study in 1815 of his Ruisdael landscape, *Bentheim Castle* of 1653. Therefore, these painters had suitable models for landscape painting nearby that were accessible and served well to further their own natural enthusiasm for picturing their home region, done the more realistically by working outdoors.

British landscape painting was ‘refreshed’ by mid-century through the action of individuals rather than the art academy. The wild mountains of North Wales attracted many topographical artists, such as David Cox and George Popkin. The Pre-Raphaelite liked detailing the countryside, especially John Everett Millais (1829-96) who made trips to Scotland, accompanying the most influential art critic of the day John Ruskin (1819-1900), who was also an enthusiastic pleinairist. Ruskin’s promotion of the works of contemporary artists, in, for example, his five-volume masterpiece *Modern Painters* (1843-60), was undoubtedly helpful to their careers, yet his selection of favourites was highly subjective, even wayward. The later art critic Kenneth Clarke was not alone in pointing out that *Academy Notes* (1855-59) “are his least distinguished pieces of writings.” He continues: “It is perhaps understandable that he never mentions Ingres and Delacroix; but almost incredible that the prophet of naturalistic landscape seems to have been unaware of Rousseau or Corot, and that the author of *Fors Clavigera* ignored Jean-François Millet.” Not untypical of many Victorian commentators, Ruskin was often contradictory: “The extended practice of water-colour painting, as a separate skill, is in every way harmful to the arts: its pleasant slightness and plausible dexterity divert the genius of the painter from its proper aims, and withdraw the attention of the public from the excellence of higher claim.” This is curious coming from the champion of J.M.W. Turner and, subsequently, of the Pre-Raphaelites.

If Langley represented one branch of pleinairism, in that the content was still subordinate to the moral message, then Stanhope Forbes and his chums are identified with the new lighter and more colourful response to the countryside. Forbes applied Bastien-Lepage’s simple methods, who in turn had responded to the discoveries of the fast improving photography. Such factors as unusual cropping, sharp central focus, an airiness and use of broad brushstrokes are apparent. Bastien Lepage’s main subject matter, peasants working in the fields, was not new and had been one of the signature themes of Courbet, Corot and the Barbizon School. Alfred Sensier

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221 Moore, 1988, pp. 11-23.
222 Moore, 1988, p. 49.
224 Clark, 1964, p. 127. *Fors Clavigera*, was a monthly series of letters by Ruskin, published between 1871-84.
226 Hartrick, 1939, p. 28. identifies Stanhope Forbes as the first British follower of Bastien-Lepage’s methods, although there were, in fact, many in the early 1880s.
further helped to promote this genre internationally by quickly producing the first biography of Millet in both French- and English-language versions. Also in 1881, London’s Fine Art Society produced a folio of twenty Millet etchings and woodcuts, all from his mature, peasant phase. Millet’s *The Sower* and *The Angelus* went on show in Durand-Ruel’s London gallery as early as 1872, but remained unsold, though one group of keen, young, art students is known to have visited that gallery especially to study them. This group of art students included future organisers of a club that was to be highly influential in the growth of British Impressionism. George Clausen (1852-1944), Frederick Brown (1851-1941), and the sculptor Havard J. Thomas, were all founder members, with Stanhope Forbes, of the NEAC (the New English Art Club), in April 1886.

Once again, a new society of artists was founded out of frustration with the conservative and complacent attitudes of the art academy, in this case the Royal Academy. There were c.50 original members of the NEAC, most of whom visited France and painted *en plein-air*. They included Clausen, La Thangue, Sargent, Steer, Stanhope-Forbes and Tuke. Most had experience of one or more French artists’ colonies. NEAC members dominated the artists’ colonies at Walberswick, St. Ives and Newlyn. It fulfilled a number of roles for the discontented, for many of its members were anti-academic and anti-establishment. Yet, most art produced in England remained largely traditional, decorative and steeped in class prejudices. The attitude of the English contrasts remarkably to that on the Continent, seen thus: “The painting of peasants engaged in field work was regarded as intellectually inferior” according to Jeremy Maas, and this bias had its parallel in contemporary literature: “Rustics when they appeared in the novel were colourful characters who acted either as a faint foil to the sophistication of middle-class gentility, or were subservient and industrious like [George] Eliot’s *Adam Bede.*” According to watercolourists, such as Helen Allingham (1848-1926) and especially the popular Myles Birket Foster (1825-99), the countryside continued to be populated by unthreatened and docile peasants, seemingly as innocuous as in Constable’s earlier Suffolk arcadia. The more vigorous treatment of rural reality, the rawness, drudge and constant labour, came in only with Realism and Naturalism, seen gradually in exhibitions and emphasised in teaching by individuals, such as Alphonse Legros (1837-91), an Anglo-French professor at the Slade School of Art, 1876-92.

Bastien-Lepage’s influence on Scandinavian painting came about because of the Swedish artists who saw his work in Paris and applied his techniques at Grez. His influence on British painting also came about from trips to France, but, in addition, his late works, such as *The Haymakers*, 1878, (42:2), began to be displayed in London at the fashionable Grosvenor Gallery. This work brought together various new modernist strands, including pleinairism, into one composition. Controversy was guaranteed as it appeared to be an “aggressive record of actual circumstances.” Typically, it combines his loose impressionistic treatment of the background with a more detailed naturalistic treatment of the foreground, centred on a realistic main figure. Genre was usually ‘sugar-coated’ for Victorian consumption, cf. Birket Foster, and this composition was similar to the Holman Hunt picture, *Hireling Shepherd*, 1851, a picture Bastien-

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227 Sensier, 1881.
228 McConkey, 1989, p. 23.
229 McConkey, 1989, p. 25.
Lepage could have seen on one of his trips to London. Lepage’s methodology was a resounding hit with younger British artists, which resolved certain pictorial problems which had arisen because of photography. He not only stressed a more naturalistic approach, but he actively promoted, in his lectures, the importance of living closer to one’s subject matter, a crucial statement that many youthful artists interpreted as meaning living in the countryside and in villages.

The NEAC attracted a range of dissidents: some, such as Walter Sickert, wanted to develop the new art theories, while others, such as Forbes, were more interested in it as an instrument of protest and took an anti-academy stance. This, however, did not stop Forbes exhibiting regularly at the Royal Academy and accepting the honours that were offered. Hypocrisy is no less apparent amongst the English painters than their French counterparts. One of the earliest NEAC members to produce a new *plein-air* work was Arthur Hacker (1858-1919). His *The Turnip Field*, of 1880, is a typical Lepagist construct and also employs his pale unifying light. He painted it on a journey to Northern France, a field trip he made with Stanhope Forbes. Forbes began to mature in France and especially in Brittany. Forbes’ first salon success came the following year, with *A Street in Brittany*, 1881. This led him directly to search for an English equivalent to Brittany. This he found at Newlyn, Cornwall and his first major work there, *A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach*, 1885, (43:2), was accepted in the Royal Academy show, received immediate critical acclaim and did more than any other British work to promote pleinairism. *Fish Sale* was done almost entirely out of doors. His diary records, for example, on 11\textsuperscript{th} December, 1883, “I sallied forth to have another go at the large picture. I got blown about and rained upon, my model fainted...” Because of this success, it is not surprising that many artists’ friends of Forbes, mostly from similar middle-class backgrounds, then followed him to Newlyn, most of whom were NEAC members, such as Frank Bramley (1857-1915), Norman Garstin (1855-1926) and Henry Scott Tuke (1858-1929).

Forbes was peculiarly ambitious and often courted danger, at least early in his career, in a way people of his class did later in racing cars and aeroplanes. His next salon piece involved an element of risk-taking, *Off to the Fishing Ground*, 1886, for to realize this theme, according to him, it meant sailing in an open boat out in the ocean. This action has similarities to other contemporary painters who suffered physically for their art; Winslow Homer in a cod boat on the Grand Banks, Holman Hunt’s trips into Palestine or the Scandinavians who painted in sub-zero temperatures. “Forbes admitted that what drew him to these scenes was the sheer practical difficulty.” What he wanted, or what he said he wanted, was not the highly fashionable Chelsea and Knightsbridge studio addresses of his well-to-do colleagues, but a rural playground or personal territory, fully identified with him. He is quoted as saying: “It may seem somewhat of

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230 Holman Hunt’s *Hireling Shepherd*, 1851 is similar in view and composition. Bastien Lepage visited London three times in 1882. His Salon entries *Le Mendiant* in 1881 and *Le Père Jacque* in 1882 were shown in London between 1879-82, together with three others, including his most popular *Pauvre Fauvette*.

paradox but I have often found the success of a picture to be in inverse ratio to the degree of comfort in which it has been produced. I scarcely like to advance the theory that painting is more successful when carried on in discomfort, and with everything conspiring to wreck it, for fear of rendering tenantless those comfortable studios the luxury of which my good friends in the Melbury Road and St. John’s Wood so much enjoy.”

His smaller, plein-air paintings make simple, authentic statements but the larger, monumental, self-consciously important, naturalistic narratives had a different purpose. These block-busters were not unlike Langley’s works in the end, being constructed so as to appeal to popular taste, or like Michael Ancher’s large, honest canvases at Skagen. They were designed to appeal to the new democratic patrons, heads of industry, town councillors, chairmen and committees.

The early 1880s were crucial to the development of British impressionism, but its evolution had much to do with the coast of Brittany and Normandy. In 1882, a large group, consisting of British, Americans and Scandinavians congregated around Bastien-Lepage at Concarneau, who was taking what was to be his last, full, summer tour. His winning strategy, coupling the peasant genre with an equally honest and democratic naturalism, proved irresistible to many English artists including Walter Osborne (later in Walberswick), Blandford Fletcher and George Clausen (Volendam); the Scot James Guthrie (Cockburnspath and Grez); the Irishman Frank O’Meara (Cernay and Grez); and, William Stott of Oldham (Grez), most of whom experienced balmy days at one or more of the French artists’ colonies. How sympathetic they all were with the actual plight of the poor is debatable, for few of them were overly political or engaged in social issues, as William Morris was or as Langley had tried to be.

One cannot describe the state of art in late Victorian Britain without reference to one highly public and divisive act, not directly political, but much debated throughout the nation. Vinnen’s polemic in Germany is comparable, although the increasingly charged atmosphere of the international art world fuelled many such controversies. This show-down in London is surprising for it featured the leading art critic of the era, the dour, puritanical John Ruskin, a man who, nevertheless, had previously fashioned public opinion to elevate the works of Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites. He had been at the vanguard of artistic and architectural criticism in Britain for decades. His opinion was eloquent and highly influential. However, in May 1877, he pitted his wits against the younger, wily and equally cosmopolitan, American artist, James McNeill Abbott Whistler. Ruskin had denounced Whistler’s painting Nocturne in Black and Gold, on show at the Grosvenor Gallery. In his publication Fors Clavigera, letter 79 (1877), Ruskin wrote that he “never expected to hear [of] a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face.” Conservative Victorian Britain was not ready for Whistler’s advanced views on modern art. The country seemed to have lost its artistic momentum over the previous decades, reverting to traditional imagery and verisimilitude. Whistler certainly painted en plein-air, yet his work is more about mood than accuracy, not unlike the Japanese aesthetic he also promoted so fervently. His personality often polarized opinion and this sensational court-case delayed any hope of a smooth transition to modern art in England, and to modernist trends evolving on the Continent. Whistler won the libel case, received one farthing (a quarter of one
penny) in damages, but was not awarded costs by the judge, who, astonishingly, was the Attorney-General, Sir John Holker. This pyrrhic victory, actually bankrupted Whistler, who was forced to sell his newly-finished house on Tite Street, Chelsea and move to Venice, where he largely abandoned oil painting for graphic mediums. To his credit, his career was far from over, unlike Ruskin’s, for Whistler’s travels had always stimulated him, causing him to search out ever-more unspoilt locations, some of which later became artists’ colonies, such as in Brittany and Cornwall. He was in Pont Aven, fully twenty years before Gauguin cashed in on its reputation²³³ and also at Domburg, in 1900, before Toorop organised the colony, and was active in St. Ives long before its ‘gold-rush.’

In the early 1880s Whistler had two interesting acolytes: Mortimer Menpes (1860-1938) and Walter Sickert (1860-1942). The Australian-born Menpes wrote an early biography of his mentor, published in 1904, which included the story of their winter spent painting en plain-air at St.Ives, 1883-84. It was not then much visited by painters, but neither did this curious group venture to the neighbouring artists’ colony at Newlyn, of which they must have been aware.²³⁴ Sickert was to become one of the two most well-known British Impressionists of the period and had, in fact, been to St.Ives previously. Sickert spent much of his career in Dieppe and then in London, as part of the urban Camden Town Group. However, the other leading British Impressionist, Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942), Sickert’s friend and exact contemporary, much preferred the English countryside, especially in his youth. Steer had, typically, trained in Paris, under Cabanel and at the Academy Julian, and was thus in a position to bring more working knowledge of continental plein-air ideology back to England. On Steer’s return in 1884 he headed almost immediately to Walberswick, on the sandy North Sea coast, and proceeded to paint a series of dazzlingly colourful, fresh, beach scenes. These works were more post-impressionistic in their use of bold, thick, colour treatment, often showing signs of pentimento. They also featured children at leisure on the sands. These village children’s names are recorded, but they appear in the pictures neither as poor, local urchins that Lepagists’ employed, nor the drab ones that Joseph Israëls preferred, nor even the naked striplings of Krøyer at Skagen or Tuke’s bathers in Cornwall.²³⁵ Steer’s motley children are mostly girls, suitably frocked and hatted for their holidays in the acceptable bourgeois manner. He made at least one sad attempt at a Salon nude on the same Walberswick beach, but this is as unsatisfactory as it is awkward. It needed a few more decades before the English came to terms with outdoor nudity.

It appears unclear why Steer first travelled directly to Walberswick, although many artists had preceded him to neighbouring Southwold, such as the illustrator, Charles Keene (1823-91), and, of course, J.M.W. Turner. Undoubtedly, Steer was the ‘pivotal figure’²³⁶ in the development of this village artists’ colony, but he was never resident. In the wider context,

²³³ Sellin, 1982, p. 4. Whistler’s coastal painting, variously titled Seule, Alone in the Tide and On the coast of Brittany, was accepted by the Paris Salon of 1861.
²³⁴ Menpes, 1908, pp. 135-53.
²³⁵ MacColl, 1943, p. 188, documents four Walberswick paintings, but others have since emerged. The names of some of the children are known. They were usually from the village or area, but in the manner of their appearance do not look like children of peasants, as with Israels and Bastien-Lepage.
Steers’s early dazzling, plein-air canvases, the product of time usefully spent in France, typically, could not help but gain attention when exhibited because of their unusual colourfulness. He became an influential teacher at the new Slade Art School in London, the only serious rival to the Royal Academy, and a central figure of the NEAC, one of whose stated aims was to further pleinairism. Of the original 106 members of the NEAC, one quarter followed him to Walberswick before 1890, its zenith as an artists’ community. Steer later found inspiration at other coastal locations, namely Swanage and Cowes on the South coast, but he continued to return to this North Sea resort. In later life, he gradually favoured the use of watercolours, as the rapidity of the technique best captured his response to landscapes. He remained the best example of an home-grown impressionist for the English. A simple, lucid example of his fusion of influences is Boats at Anchor, (46:2), done at Harwich later in 1913, one of a series of ten, signed, plein-air, oil studies that look more like watercolours. It shows how Turner, Whistler and Monet were still his mentors; he once claimed “no original style could be forged without reference to them.”

In Britain, Cornwall attracted the most painters. Irrespective of subject matter, they were vociferous in their praise of pleinairism: “that quality of freshness, most difficult of attainment by any other means and which one is apt to lose when the work is brought into the studio for completion” and “I must do pleinair or nothing. It is the only way to achieve success.”238 Norman Garstin, a Newlyn colonist and NEAC member, also mimicked certain Scandinavian plein-air pioneers in his statement: ”your work could not be any good unless you caught a cold doing it.”239 However, he also revealed some early difficulties for the outdoor painter: “To plant one’s easel down in the full view of all and work away in the midst of a large congregation needs a good deal of courage, but it takes even more to boldly ask some perfect stranger to pose for one under such very trying conditions.”240 The weather was a distinct disadvantage to British pleinairists, as Forbes also encountered. Having started his monumental piece, Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach (1884-85), on an overcast day he had to continue in that light and to find those same weather conditions over the following year. Authenticity, for him, came at a price. The wind was a problem for his large canvas. The availability of models was also affected by the weather and the fish in the foreground needed to be refreshed every sitting and the fees began to rise accordingly. Last but not least, local religious politics was a force to be reckoned with, and not negotiable. Celtic fishing communities, in particular, kept the Sabbath faithfully, so that much fuss was made in these villages if any artist was ever seen working on the Lord’s Day.

Conclusion

Pleinairism is more of a methodology than an ideology. Its practice appears as a leitmotiv behind most artistic styles of the period, whether Realist, Naturalist, Impressionist or in the various

237 McConkey, 1989, p. 139.
238 Fox, 1993, p. 23.
239 Ibidem.
240 Ibidem.
strands of Expressionism. Pleinairism implies a closer proximity, an attempt at greater authenticity and a truth to nature, qualities not so apparent in other styles during the late nineteenth century. The mood for change amongst young artists reflected the advances seen in the world around them, in science and technology, in commerce and in geographical discovery. Working out of doors meant a new evaluation of techniques, colour relations and tonal values. It encouraged a freedom to explore new avenues of interest personally, away from the narrow confines of the academic curriculum and lays at the heart of artists’ colony development.

The countries around the North Sea present a good cross-section of reasons for the development of pleinairism, a creative process often present before the rise of more formal movements. No two countries absorbed the lessons of landscape painting at the same speed, yet the same collective response may be seen in the formation of all rural artists’ colonies irrespective of their individual interests. The actions of individuals are seen to make a difference, individual artists, academy professors, philosophers and political commentators. Pleinairism is closely associated with the rise of Realism in France because of Courbet, yet valuable working experience came from many artists who worked in and around Rome, often independent eccentrics who found clarity under a southern light. There were, in fact, many artistic reasons to go into the countryside to paint, ranging from well-intentioned nationalistic purposes to the individual’s fascination with nature.

Individual countries responded differently to the results pleinairism afforded landscape and genre painters, and at different paces. There were many individual eccentric painters inspired by their travels, such as Turner, Constable, Friedrich, Leibl, Corot and Courbet. There were also some worthy but isolated schools of landscape painting, in Copenhagen and Norwich, but it was not until developments in the cultured city of The Hague and the tiny village of Barbizon that modern landscape painting matured. The 1880s saw the coming together of a number of long artistic threads, some in protest and some more creatively. Rousseau had died in 1867, Millet in 1875 and Courbet in 1877, but for many it was Bastien-Lepage’s demise in 1884 that was crucial “The death of Bastien-Lepage, at the fatal age, for artists, of 36, together with the posthumous exhibition of his work in Paris, had profoundly affected most of the younger painters in Europe. In every country the most promising youths were frankly imitating his work, with its ideals of exact representation of nature as seen out of doors, everything being painted on the spot.” 241 Yet, there was never just one leader that inspired pleinairism, for the study of the countryside inspired a rich variety of responses to technical problems.

Reforms did take place in the academies but in practice the gap widened and never again caught up with the results of open inquiry. In an age when censorship was still powerful, authorities felt challenged by such freedoms, within their own societies and by the growth of internationalism. In spite of overblown statements by such authorities as the new Kaiser, Paris became the international melting-pot for all the disaffected painters and Barbizon the ‘Mecca of Realism’. German artists’ colonies were not truly international with many of its brightest talents migrating to the coast to find inspiration and fellowship.

More ideological than political, the painters who pioneered rural artists’ colonies sought alternatives to the constraints of established artistic hierarchies. Their experiments also took the form of re-evaluating traditional methods and blending in new ideas. All kinds of graphic works were re-appraised in the context of working in the field, including various drawing materials, such as pencils, pastels, crayon and watercolours, along with invention in gouache and lithography. Pleinairism brought about a greater sincerity in art, an immediacy and a much closer

241 Hartrick, 1939, p. 28.
engagement with the country. Observational skills were sharpened, seen in the treatment of light and atmospheric detail of most coastal Hague School paintings. This coincided with a rise in interest in colour itself and the application of those colour theories. Pleinairism encouraged a re-examination of how weather was portrayed and the representation of fleeting events, such as rainbows and sunsets, along with picturing specific times of the day or year. Working outdoors under difficult conditions also became a kind of badge of honour, suffering for one’s art; trying to achieve greater authenticity out on an open boat, in a storm and in sub-zero temperatures.

Working out of doors, as opposed to staying in their urban ateliers, made the artists confront the landscapes of the moment, rather than imagined idealistic vistas. Pleinairism put them in a position to paint more than the picturesque and the traditional. It gave the artists the opportunity to picture the changes in the countryside, the farming, although rarely industry, the technological advances, the growth of new transport systems and especially the consequences of leisure and tourism along the sandy coast.

Pleinair painters found an interest in the ordinary and daily routines of life in the countryside. This meant the new art did not necessarily have to pump itself up, grandly, but also be simple and modest statements of fact, as found. Working quickly was important, in order to get consistent illumination. This coincided with the abbreviations of *alla prima* techniques or, as critics of impressionism pointed out, the promotion of *esquisse* and *ébauche* stages of traditional layered painting, the only main areas of paint handling actually taught in the art academies, as the classes were so overcrowded. As pleinairism was not style-specific, it was easily adapted and adopted by those interested in the new colour theories and expressionist exaggerations for reasons of emotional effect, so that one can find on the same sandy beach impressionists, symbolists, realists, naturalists, cubists, colourists and abstract expressionists, at different times, as at Skagen, or all at once, as at Domburg, and all in the context of rural artists’ colonies.


A stunning expansive composition from an artist confident with his technique and his surroundings.

48:2 - Piet Mondriaan, *Dune V*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 65.5x 96 cm. Haags Gemeentemuseum. The pattern of increasing simplification is clear here and soon in Pier and Ocean, 1915, (17:6), he left behind representational art altogether.