Chapter 6 - Themes and Variations

Théodore Rousseau: “Nature yields herself to those who trouble to explore her, but she demands an exclusive love. The works of art we love, we love only because they are derived from her. The rest are merely works of empty pedantry.”

One of the main factors behind artists working for extended periods in the countryside, and therefore away from the constraints of academic tradition, was that it gave them a sense of liberation and, at the same time, freedom to experiment. This they did with new themes, variations and compositions. There was also a freshness of technique, a lightness and pictorial movement. By-and-large, the pioneers were realists, who simply painted what they found. They wished to distance themselves from the previous style of Neo-classicism, with its ideals and notions of the Sublime. Their travels into the countryside caused them to engage subjects more closely, not only in detail but under ever-changing, even challenging, atmospheric conditions. In other words, they developed a heightened sense of light, time and place. The time element is important, for working in a village over many seasons, years, often decades, allowed them first to record the traditional aspects of the landscape and village life. Then, they witnessed the changes, which provided further themes. The sandy coasts, in particular, underwent some remarkable transformations; neglect was replaced by a huge social focus spurred on by sudden improvements in communication and accessibility. Instead of being a place of nature in the raw and hard labours the beach quickly became a playground for middle-class leisure, health, sport and mass-tourism. What was an artist to do? In fact, the better artists’ colonies turned tragedy into a triumph.

The iconography of artists’ colonies is the most common focus in the literature yet few authors seem knowledgeable about more than one location or have a thorough international perspective. Some of the most recent publications on international artists’ colonies, on the other hand, while having much merit, suffer from being too generalised or prone to making rash hypotheses based on insufficient evident. It is, of course, impossible to be conversant with all the artists and their works produced in any one location or country, although with a small nation such as Denmark, which had very few official outlets for paintings, there are certain advantages in the ability to access all that period’s exhibition catalogues, from the salons, the auction houses and the private dealers, as this present study has done. Many artists’ colony villages have museums today, but their in-house collections and archives vary enormously in quality and quantity. For example, even in Barbizon, the museums in Millet’s cottage, Rousseau’s house and Auberge Ganne own pitifully few pictures. Similarly, at Domburg’s museum they have no permanent collection, nor does the Zeeuws Museum, and one would be lucky to find any paintings at all, on display today, in St. Ives from its pioneers or any artists prior to 1910.

There is no doubt that these artists were serious and enthusiastic about working on location. They worked full days, which in the summer months and in the far north resulted in very long day-light working hours. This coast-line, being west-facing, inspired many paintings of enigmatic sunsets, from Skagen to Domburg. Marianne Zenius describes J.J. Exner’s summer lodgings at Sønderho with the floors piled high with drawings and sketchbooks, so much so that

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the house-maids complained. Plein-air painting was enormously popular yet most peripatetic artists continued to work up from sketches, watercolour studies and drawings. Only the resident artists had the advantage of a permanent studio which, because of the improvements to materials and tools, meant that even in a remote village they could have a well-equipped atelier enough to tackle a wide variety of compositions and commissions.

The art-work produced in these villages was initially topographical and may be divided into two broad categories: physical and cultural landscapes. However, many rural artists’ colonies were not static in their choice of subjects, or styles for that matter, although some came to be closely associated with specific elements, such as folk-costume, which accounts for most of the early interest in villages such as Volendam and Fanø. The decision to extend this study period into the 1910s was made to emphasize the importance of new themes and fashions in these artists’ groups, particularly, yet not exclusively, at Domburg, which by then had Mondriaan, amongst others, producing some of the most advanced expressionist canvases to be seen anywhere. It is also necessary to describe, here, other anomalies, omissions and paradoxes that occur in the iconography, often overlooked but which needed to be confronted if they chose to paint contemporary life, or even unspoilt landscapes, *natura naturans*.

The move to the countryside caused a pictorial reinvigoration and was manifest not only in what the artists chose to paint but how they captured their response to it. This fresh creativity took many forms and involved different methods, often simultaneously. There were, for instance, over a dozen major styles practised over the decade in the artists’ colony at Domburg. While progress for some colonists was a succession of evolutionary steps, others followed what proved to be dead-ends and some artists hardly changed at all. Mondriaan’s oeuvre progressed through many stages during his time in the Domburg and Laren artists’ colonies, yet one colleague in both villages, the pointillist Hart-Nibbrig, remained content to produce “bone-dry” landscapes. Also, alongside both of these avant-garde painters in Domburg was W.J. Schütz who continued to produced his standard Hague School marine canvases. One may further sub-divide artists into those who were inspired by what they discovered in and around the villages and those who were more interested in the processes of how we see. At Skagen, Michael Ancher, for example, found exactly what he was looking for in the solid, close-knit, fishermen’s community, yet his colleague Christian Krogh used the same situation to experiment with the his newly found colour and compositional theories. Here also, Peder Krøyer abandoned the fishing community almost altogether to make elegant commentaries about middle-class leisure and civilised beauty.

Nature had long been claimed as a main source of inspiration for artists, but there was a noticeable shift in the geography of art in the nineteenth century. Previously, the notion of the

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853 Vloten, 1994, p. 43.
854 Seuphor, 1956, p. 73. Mondriaan’s terse notebooks document his evolution from his empirical grounding in the Dutch Masters through to Abstract Expressionism. According to Seuphor, his first change was with colour itself, as he “forsook” natural tones for more pure or primary colour. Friedman, 1982 maintained “nature was his point of departure,” at least until c. 1916. His colleague Mies Eloute-Drabbe, commenting on his 1914 sketchbook said "during a late evening walk along the sea at Domburg, he took out a little sketchbook from his pocket and made a hasty scribble…day after day he kept working on that suggestive scribble – each day a step further from reality and a step nearer to its spiritualisation,” cited in Joosten & Welsh, 1998, vol.2, p. 251.
855 Colen & Willemstein, 1996, p. 143. Hart-Nibbrig lived and worked in Laren and Zouteland, near Domburg. His reputation was based on producing landscapes, a “poet of bone-dry sunny days”, done with a light palette using pointillist techniques throughout.
‘Sublime’ in art, popular in the eighteenth century, was closely associated with ideas of awe and vastness, so that alpine areas, in particular, were pictured and visited. It is widely recognised that Claude and Poussin were leaders in producing these ideal landscape paintings. Their enormous popularity lead to many imitators of these Italianate schools, almost on an industrial scale. For example, gentlemen on their Grand Tour bought them by the dozens, such as the Earl of Leicester, who bought so many Poussins, or ‘School of Poussin’, back from Rome that he purpose-built a huge country residence, Holkam Hall in Norfolk, just to house the vast collection. By the first half of the nineteenth century more and more artists began to question this rather ‘formulaic’ manner of painting. An artist such as the Danish marine painter C.F. Sørensen, continued to produce calm, neo-classical scenes, such as View of Nordby Harbour, Fanø, 1849, but he was already searching further and further for new locations, including Skagen, Helgoland and Scheveningen, as the more dramatic Düsseldorf School of painting gained in popularity. In countries where there are mountains, such as Germany, it was easier to continue the ‘sublime’ model of landscape painting, as the Bremen artist and Worpswede critic Arthur Fitger did in the late 1890s. It was more tempting to carry on these traditions in mountaineous locations, such as the colony at Lake Chiemsee, in the Bavarian foothills of the Alps, whose artists continued using the same three-tiered structure made famous by Claude and Poussin, replacing the previous gods and mythological figures in the foreground with peasants, hunters and herdsmen.

The search for more realistic landscapes with recognisable topographies closer to home was the next step, and it was this drive that lead to a new appraisal of the countryside generally. Areas that had previously been neglected, such as moorlands, wildernesses, wetlands and the lines of sand-dunes along the North Sea, were deemed to hold special qualities, in part because they had not changed. By mid-century the success of the School of Barbizon, amongst other rural centres, high-lighted the beauty to be found in more modest habitats. Along the coast artists found a blend of land forms and constantly changing atmospheres, a battleground of elemental forces and people still clinging to pre-industrial ways of life. The rocky coast had an obvious appeal, yet one may clearly see that the less extreme environment of the broad sandy beaches, the dunes and marshes hit just the right note with the artists and the public. Proof of this assertion may be seen by the large number of artists’ communities on these low flood-plains and gentle shores around the North Sea, the Baltic and the Zuiderzee; from Blakeney to Dedham; Ekensund to Ahrenshoop to Nidden; and, from Skagen to Domburg.

Over the century artists had been seeking to find new themes or variations of the eternal verities that better fitted the age in which they lived. The gap between officially-sanctioned themes and the realities of independent artistic inquiry widened irrevocably after 1850s. Well-lighted, realistic landscape painting had gradually found acceptance but in a rather random manner, blossoming in different countries at different times, through the efforts of eccentric individuals, such as: J.M.W. Turner and John Constable in England; C.W. Eckersberg and J.C. Dahl from Scandinavia; and, Caspar David Friedrich in Germany. At the same time, genre

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856 The outstanding work on the concept of the Sublime in English was Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757.

857 Typically, criticism of French art academy teaching came from many quarters. The following polemic was from a Professor of Drawing and later Director of the École de Dessin, 1841-69, who condemned the curriculum as a “stumbling block to the development of originality....It is much to be desired that the state, instead of adopting only one particular method at a time, should adopt several, and should thus encourage private enterprise. For then we should see teaching gain new life from the healthy rivalry stimulated between pupils and masters working with different methods.” H. Lecoq de Boisbaudron, *Education de la mémaure pittoresque Application aux arts du dessin*, (Paris: Bance, 1862) p. 104, quoted in Constantin, 2001, pp. 49- 61.
paintings were no less hotly debated as a suitable vehicle for fine art, however its overwhelming popularity with the public only served to further isolate the salon committees. Portraiture, surprisingly, never quite lost favour with collectors, yet, narrative paintings were required to be more searching and dramatic to achieve their successes. The polished neo-classicism, the _dessin et finis_, of paintings by such masters as Meissonier, Bourgereau, Alma Tadema and Exner maintained official prominence but they became gradually isolated from the new art markets, as ever looser and more immediate _alla prima_ treatments gave new life to the canvases. Whereas traditional art academy training had concentrated on producing monumental, morally-uplifting works using literary, historical, royal and religious themes, the _nouveaux riches_ collectors also demanded something different, something more akin with the age they lived in. In artists’ colonies, monumental paintings were still produced yet the majority of pictures were seemingly more simple, included fewer people or figures and had easily recognisable settings or atmospheres. They did not, significantly, require a Classics education to interpret their purpose or the meaning of the title.

With so many painters and pictures produced in these colonies, there is a danger in over-generalising about their artistic focus. The longer artists stayed in these villages the more insights they got into the environment, the communities and the home-life. For example, a friendship developed between Christian Krohg and the Gaihede family, at Skagen, that inspired many of his more compassionate studies of human nature. However, one may also find contradictory actions in any one location and even within individual artist’s _oeuvre_. Jan Toorop’s work is a perfect example of this mix as he often followed different styles and subjects simultaneously, continuing, say, a pointillist landscape work, which takes time, alongside quick crayon figure studies, decorative symbolist prints and, as he was such a fine natural draftsman, he produced a constant stream of portraits, of peasants, of friends and family, of clerics, of musicians and the famous, including Monsignor Antonius Hubertus Leonardus Hensen, Pablo Cassals and the young Benito Mussolini.

Interestingly, Gerald Reitlinger has pointed out that portrait paintings still achieved some of the highest prices at auctions between 1870s – 1920s. Reitlinger, 1961, pp. 182-197. There was a decided swing to pure landscape painting before 1900, yet photographs of artists’ studios clearly show most professional painters still produced portraits, as opposed to figure compositions, accepted such commissions and kept stock canvases to gain such contracts. Reitlinger also points out that contemporary portraiture often became “bravura performances” showing the “virtuosity of [the] working surface”, as seen in the characterful portrayals by painters such as Giovanni Boldini, Anders Zorn, John Singer Sargent, Laurids Tuxen and Peder S. Kroyer, often influenced by the manner of Velázquez or El Greco. They became famed ‘society painters’ yet still benefitted from joining rural artists’ colonies, at least for a period.

The results of working in a rural artists’ colony were soon seen to give a freshness of approach, especially in the heightened sensivity to light and colour. An enhanced quality of light was often to be found along this North Sea coast, resulting from a combination of refracted light

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858 Reitlinger, 1961, pp. 182-197. The high prices were not for European Renaissance or Baroque works but for eighteenth century English Romantics such as Gainsborough, Romney, Reynolds, even Raeburn and Hoppner. He suggests that this extraordinary interest in portraiture was “insatiable”, closely linked to certain new rich Americans wishing to buy an ancestry or history.

859 Mørstad, 1989, pp. 186-218. He compared many artists’ ateliers between 1848-93. Most of the painters had trained in Paris or Munich. Paintings and photographs reveal a broad-based subject matter, wherever the location. In Barrett, 1994, p. 60, a photograph of Wilckens, c.1913, in his new atelier in Sønderho, Fanø, also shows the wide range of work he produced in the village, still-lives, landscapes, portraits, genre and figure compositions.
off the water and vast open areas of salty beach sand. At the same time as their palettes were enriched by the new non-organic pigments, colourists found the countryside inspirational. The portrayal of the sky and the surface of water were key areas of attention. The lengthened painting experience in the countryside caused artists to observe the atmosphere more acutely, and by doing so, they documented the subtle differences hourly, daily and seasonally. The purity, the elemental or the essence of a place, what the Worpswede pioneers called *Urform*, was seen as highly important in their work and the choice of the location. This may be seen equally in the damp earthiness of a place such as the Worpswede moors or in the shimmering atmosphere over the sands at the end of Skagen peninsula.

**Physical Landscapes**

It has been noted by art historians, such as Knud Voss in his many books on Skagen artists’ colony, that painters went to this shore because of its special atmosphere, in particular the quality of light. This light intensity was brought about by a combination of refractions off the vast areas of clean beach sand, sea and salty air that surrounds that tip of the peninsula. This is not uncommon wherever there are extensive areas of sands, all down this coast at Løkken, Blokhus, Klitmøller, Agger, Nynindegab and Fano, in Denmark; on the islands of Sylt and Norderney, in Germany; and Terschelling, Egmond, Katwijk and Domburg, in The Netherlands, which all attracted landscape painters. In part, they were attempting to recapture the classic Mediterranean atmosphere, so well-recorded in many art academy paintings of Rome and the Campagna. The clear atmosphere combined with the arabesque line of the dunes attracted many landscape painters, yet the realists, namely followers of The Hague School, continued to paint the mists, rainy days and even blizzards. The more familiar they became with the coast the more they found inspiration in portaying the physical nature of these settings.

This sandy coastline has few cliffs and those it does possess are not spectacular, yet, with only some slight shifts in perspective, more dramatic landscapes were achieved and proved successful, such as those by Hans Peter Feddersen, the Younger (1848-1941) and Hinrich Wrage (1843-1912) on the island of Sylt, North Friesland (1:6). Later, at Domburg, Piet Mondriaan and Ferdinand Hart-Nibbrig found further inspiration amongst the dunes. On Fanø, the artist Johan Rohde enjoyed the simple pleasure of painting *en plein-air* out in the Vadehavet, or Wattensee, the vast open tidal wetlands between islands and mainland. Towards the end of his life, he became singularly fascinated with the ethereal form of the clouds over these sands. He typifies the romantic switch from aspirational classicism to the personal discoveries of painting nature as found.

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860 Selz, 1974, p. 78. *Urform* combines notions of “original form or shape” with its “essence” and “pure being”.

861 See Voss, 1989, one of many more commercial publications he made for Skagens Museum.
The pictorial horizon often became unusually low in shoreline pictures, as seen in many Hague School compositions, and this emphasised the sky and the weather conditions. The English countryside painter John Constable is often cited as being influential in encouraging this observational trend, especially in France after the successful exhibition of his pictures in 1824. However, in most countries there were observant artists who, quite independently, paid great attention to atmospheric verisimilitude, such as, in the 1830s, Martinus Rørbye, the first professional painter to work at Skagen and northern Jutland (2:6). Many of the new generation of artists took care to record the exact weather conditions, rather than imagining them under ideal circumstances. The same can be said for the representation of trees and the surface of water, previous stumbling blocks for many painters of landscapes. In this, Rørbye, Constable, Feddersen and many others, promoted a realism based on painting landscapes as found, as experienced personally by the artist, under whatever skies happened that day. They also included the untidy but real aspects of shore-life, the wrecks, the detritus, the flotsam and the jetsam, to give more authenticity.

Marine painters were often the first to explore the edges of these countries and in a maritime nation, such as Denmark, they were often allowed travel onboard ‘ships of the line’ as far as the Mediterranean, for example, as kinds of pictorial diarists. Orthodox maritime themes, such as historic battles, voyages of discovery and full-rigged sailing ships, remained popular, but the new school of thought, centred on the Düsseldorf Art Academy, was for more dramatic realism. One noticeable new area of interest was maritime rescue, in part because it was newsworthy. The monumental picture by Theodore Gericault, The Raft of the Medusa, 1819, created a major scandal, in part because it was a depiction of a recent tragedy but also the stark treatment of the emaciated bodies, the neglect and the despair. Maritime nations, embarrassed by the scant organisation of safety at sea, began to promote the more honourable side to trade in the form of heroic rescues, with navigation beacons, lightships and light-houses appearing in paintings. There are not many light-houses along this sandy North sea coast but traditionally any tower near the shore was painted white to help navigation, such as Katwijk’s old church on the seafront. Brave fishermen, there were no professional rescue services then, rowing through the surf to the rescue became enduring new subjects for marine painters. Most of the earliest painters at Skagen, a notorious place for wrecks even in calm weather, painted this theme, such as Rørbye, Drachmann, Neumann, Melbye and C.F. Sørensen. One of Skagen’s earliest pictures to appear in print was a full page spread in Illustreret Tidende by Laurits Tuxen of such a heroic rescue, in 1877.862 There is no doubt that shoreline scenes of marine rescue in storms was a popular new theme, as Michael Ancher’s monumental painting Will She Clear the Point, 1880, proved, as it was purchased immediately for the Royal collection, thereby making his name and sealing Skagen’s reputation as a spirited artists’colony.863

862 Laurids Tuxen’s En Skagbobaad, or A Skagen Boat, in Illustreret Tidende, May 13th, 1877, shows no land but men in an open rowboat attempting to master the surf in a storm, just as in Rørbye’s Sloop rescue painting of 1847. 863 Several of Rørbye’s Skagen paintings showed wreck-related subjects, such as The Commissioner of wrecks for the West Coast of Jutland and Beach scene from Højen [West Skagen] with a gathering Storm, 1834. Jacobs, 1985, p. 93, raises the interesting question of whether some men looking out to sea, in places as impoverished as Skagen, were, perhaps, trying to guess the cargo, in terms of salvage rather than salvation.
One might have thought that steamships would have provided marine painters with a wealth of new material, but the evidence does not confirm this as a major trend, outside the larger ports. Steam never quite replaced sail, in the eyes of most romantic artists and collectors, although there were a few graceful attempts, such as Eugen Dücker’s portrayals of the Flensburg steam-packet at Eke sund, the artists’ colony, in 1893. C.F. Sørensen painted several paddlesteamers, in supporting roles rather than the central feature, as early as the late 1840s, including *A Prussian ship entering Rheden*, 1846 and *A Swedish royal ship in the sound infront of Kronborg*, 1847, both including a brace of steam-powered tugs. The first paddlesteamer reached The Netherlands in 1818, and was commemorated with a fine, neo-classical painting the same year, yet such innovations were very slow to be pictured in Holland, surprisingly, and technology is noticeable by its absence, even amongst the successful Hague School masters. There is no equivalent, in this study area, to Turner’s masterpiece, *The Fighting Téméraire*, 1839, which includes a steamer-tugboat and has long been considered a national icon, combining elements of a patriotic past with the proud present and a portent of modernism. This maritime composition is a fine example of the gulf between merely documenting an event and the production of an inspirational work of fine art.

By the 1870s, one can see that the focus had changed, for marine painters, to include more and more shoreline. In the case of Carl Locher at Skagen, he often pictured the bay-shore to the south of the village with the mail-coach precariously picking its way along the wreck-strewn beach. Without this horse-drawn vehicle there would have been no focal point, no sign of life, for one sees no ships or boats otherwise. Other maritime painters gave up the struggle rather than compromise their efforts. Locher’s friend and colleague, Holger Drachmann, another early Skagen pioneer, abandoned the profession for a literary career, despite producing some fine traditional compositions of the island of Bornholm and some early purely impressionistic oil paintings of breakers at Skagen in the 1870s. Many earlier attempts that romanticised these isolated fishing communities were often too fanciful, sentimental and theatrical to advance the genre, such as Rudolf Jordan’s *Marriage proposal on Helgoland*, 1834, which suggests he had never visited this Frisian island. Nevertheless, increasing acceptance of realism in art combined with this interest in peasant genre generally encouraged painters to explore likely fishing communities, whether there was an harbour or not. In Denmark, the village of Hornbæk became the first fishing community to attract a wave of interest from Copenhagen-based marine painters. It is of no surprise to find that many of these artists, such as Locher, Kroyer and Drachmann, later reassembled at Skagen. Skagen had no harbour only sandy foreshores. In this, it resembled the Dutch fishing villages of Scheveningen and Katwijk, that were the old traditional models for this genre, but the focus of artistic attention, here as elsewhere, was less on the boats themselves as on the character of the fishermen, their wives and finally on their children.

The marked trend towards realism did not normally extend to deaths at sea or drowned bodies, as seen starkly in the *Raft of the Medusa*, by Géricault. Death is more usually reffered to indirectly, by a funeral procession or mourning back in the family home. One striking exception is a 1915 work by the Fanø painter August Wilckens, *Mother with her Drowned Child*, now in the North Frielsand Museum at Husum. More typical treatments used symbolism to distance the viewers, as with coffins, graveyards and distant processions, as in Jozef Israëls’ *The Shipwrecked*

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864 The paddlesteamer ‘Defiance’ crossed from Margate to Veere in the Spring of 1818 before proceeding on to Amsterdam, where the owners attempted to sell more boats.

865 A nation-wide B.B.C. survey in 2006 polled this picture as the U.K.’s favourite painting.

866 See Møller & Olsen, 1996.
Mariner, 1861. This theme, the expectation of tragedy at sea, became more common, as seen at Katwijk with the Düsseldorf artist Morgenstjerne Munthe, amongst many others, who painted dramatic, powerful and realistic scenes of the fishermen’s families reacting to the news of their father’s death, during or soon after storms. First at Zandvoort and then at Scheveningen, Jozef Israëls popularized many sombre scenes surrounding such maritime tragedies, set on the sands and in the dunes, such as Passing Mother’s Grave, 1856. Interestingly, his Shipwrecked Mariner, 1861 was bought up immediately by the London art dealer Ernst Gambart for mass print reproduction. Israëls went on to paint a number of identical but smaller copies of this picture and subsequently built a whole career from such sombre maritime tragedies. Israëls most recent biographer, Dieuwetje Dekkers, points out that such funereal scenes were already common in France by the 1850s, and that one engraving after the painting, The Morning after the Storm by Louis Duveau, appeared in the popular and influential magazine L’Illustration as early as 1846.

In David Sellin’s recent book on the earliest American artists in northern France, he promotes the notion that the marine painter Alexander Harrison (1853-1930) painted the first monumental marine piece that focussed entirely on the surf, without human, animal or shipping interest. His picture, The Wave, 1884-85 (3:6), won acclaim at the Paris Salon and spawned many imitations, but, in actual fact, purely surf pictures were already fast becoming a common theme, at least in artists’ villages wherever there was a sandy beach. His compatriot J.M. Whistler had, for example, been on the same Breton coast in 1861 and his resultant picture, Seule, was also exhibited in Paris. What is also of interest is that they, Whistler and Harrison, and another Pont-Aven painter H.R. Butler had all worked, in their youth, for the US. Coastal Survey, thereby gaining an early appreciation for salt-water, although, in a sense, all American painters in Europe had experienced the power of the open ocean, having crossed the Atlantic.

Soon after the marine painters came to this North Sea coast, landscape artists followed and found a wider variety of physical features to interest them, both broad sweeping vistas and more intimate settings. The vast open areas of tidal sands, Vadehavet and Waddenzee, extend north and south paralleling the long ranges of dune-hills, stretching almost continuously for one thousand kilometres in all and offer a geographical unity, immensity and splendour, all on its own. These form strong lines in the landscape, the high-tide mark, the shore-line and the edges of the dunes offered powerful natural angles for perspective as well as contrasting textures.

These sand dune ranges were common lands and pastures, where sheep and cattle were still shepherded to and from the villages daily. Here, clever painters managed to combine the familiar with the unusual, fenceless landscapes with a marine navigation beacon or shepherds on top of dunes overlooking the sea-shore, as at Domburg, by such painters as Jan Toorop, Jan Heyse and Ferdinand Hart-Nibbrig. Views from hill-tops were unusual in traditional Dutch landscape paintings, so that these artists exploited the natural elevations as much as possible to gain an advantage. Piet Mondriaan went to further extremes amongst the same dunes, when he produced his dazzling expressionist series called *Dune I, II, III, IV*, etc. (48:2). He also made clever use of one almost unique feature of this sandy coast, or at least found most commonly in the sands around the North Sea coast, called piers or groynes. These wooden shore fences differ from the *fascine* of the Frisian tidal wetlands in that they were erected to stop erosion, or long-shore drift, rather than create polderland. Mondriaan’s Domburg series *Pier and Ocean*, c.1914, is one of his last to take the landscape as a starting point. This series was directly inspired by the shoreline and these perpendicular palisades, that symbolised well his more esoteric meditations, “...he was strongly smitten with the charm of the Domburg milieu. His palette suddenly became brighter; like Toorop, like Thorn Prikker before him...Some of his canvases, done with just a few strokes, are drenched with sunshine – real baths of light (the sea, the dunes); others are variations on a theme, with very extreme differences in technique and treatment (Westkapelle lighthouse and the tree series); still others are delicate studies by an artists in love with simplicity (the flowers).”

Rather than offering a single environment for landscapists, as seen in other locations for artists’ colonies, this coast presented a useful variety of environments that included different stretches of water, sands, marshes, sheltered patches of woodland, peat-moors and different kinds of cultivated land, all within walking distance of the village. In Holland, the farmland was not only for domesticated animals and vegetables, but orchards and extraordinary colourful crops of flowers. Behind Domburg, Heyse, Toorop and Elout-Drabbe, for example, all took advantage of these colourful strips of cultivation in the otherwise flat Walcheren plains. The poor natural drainage of these coastal plains caused peat-bogs to form and extensive areas of unspoilt moorland to be left aside. These heaths and moors may be seen behind Skagen and all down the sandy west coast of Jutland, on the archipelago, across the Frieslands and on down through Holland to Belgium. It was only a matter of time before an artists’ colony would blossom in one of these peaty, earthier habitats. The Worpswede painters captured the special spirit of this dank landscape at a time of peculiar national regeneration, involving folk art and *Völkisch* ideology. Rather than use the

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868 The Napoleonic maps made of this Dutch North Sea coast, surveyed c.1800, show the presence of groups of wooden piers or groynes along the shores of Zeeland and Holland. They were also found at this time along the physically similar East Anglian coast and may be seen in Norwich School paintings, such as James Stark’s *Cromer*, 1835.
869 Seuphor, 1956, p. 73.
muted tones of Wilhelm Leibl and his circle of Bavarian Realists, or imitate the already popular artwork inspired by the open Dachau ‘Moos’, the Worpswede pioneers promoted a richly-hued style (4:6), often using *chiaroscuro* to gain an extra dramatic tension in an otherwise gentle landscape. Worpswedes use of canals and drainage ditches are reminiscent of paintings by old Dutch Masters, yet they struck the right chord by including solitary specimens or modest lines of trees on the grassy banks; their ubiquitous use of the Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*).

This was an age when artists often became closely identified with specific botanical and geographical features, Cézanne’s obsession with Mont Sainte-Victoire being an extreme example. Similarly, artists’ colonies gained specific reputations for their treatments of a natural environment, such as a type of river (the meandering Loing at Grez or the lower Seine at Giverny) or ‘ancient’ woodlands (Oosterbeek and Tervueren). Yet, one may fine-tune that further, just in the natural world, with particular species of tree: the elms (*Ulmus procera*) of Constable’s esturine landscapes; many old oaks (*Quercus robur*) were associated with certain Barbizon painters and weeping willows (*Salix babylonica*) at Argenteuil and Pontoise. The silver birch is closely associated with Worpsweden iconography and their pictures found a resonance and popularity wherever it grew, which is across most of Germany and northern Europe.

By contrast, at Skagen there were no natural trees at all, with the windswept sand-dunes barely supporting maram-grasses. With the exception of the few mostly hunting scenes set around these heaths, the focus of artistic attention remained largely on the sandy beaches or back in amongst the sheltering houses with their sunken kitchen gardens. Skagen has a special and evocative atmosphere because of its extreme geographical position, being at the end of a long peninsula and at the far edge of the country. Cornwall and Brittany share this remote characteristic, with additional ancient Celtic fringe overtones, and developed similarly powerful place-myths that affected those that worked in its earliest artists’ colonies. Their physical remoteness made the venture exciting and the creative tension was increased even further with the knowledge that powerful atmospheric forces affected all aspects of life at the exposed end of these peninsulas. The elemental forces come through in the paintings, whether it is the dynamics of a storm or the blistering heat of the sands. The peculiar nature of the coastal also lent itself to more metaphysical contemplation and inspired a wide variety of other artists, such as poets, writers, philosophers and composers, such as Toorop’s friends in Nordwijk, a group known as the *De Tachtigers*. For young romantics, such as Heinrich Vogel, it became easy to summon up mythological legends, as he populated Worpswede’s gentle birchwood glades with knights in armour, gothic royalty, hand-maidens and other fairy-tales, even though their were no castle or abbey ruins.

**Innovation and Consolidation**

Few artists’ colonies survived by producing marine or landscape paintings alone and the most obvious subject to portray was the character of the people who lived close to nature. Peasants had been treated as picturesque before, adjuncts to the star roles and decorative accessories rather than real people leading real lives. While the connoisseurs continued to argue whether the peasant genres were suitable subjects for monumental painting, the buying-public developed a thirst for images of “national stoic virtue”\(^{870}\), and so, by 1860s, artists poured out of the cities to examine almost every aspect of traditional rustic life. Births, deaths, marriages, traditional working practises, seasonal customs and costumes were all examined as never before, as

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\(^{870}\) McConkey, in Newton, 2005, p. 18.
narratives in themselves rather than as an extension of some mythological fable. The cycle of life and the rhythms of the working seasons were pictured, but so, too, were the ordinary daily chores. Everyday domestic routines of food preparation, such as pickling or plucking, cooking, kitchen-gardening, sewing, repairing, doing the laundry, white-washing walls, beaching and building boats, digging up potatoes, net mending, rope making or just knitting, all became common subjects in genre pictures. Working outdoors, in the fresh air, especially along the coast, was thought of as healthy, in contrast to the dark, dirty conditions found in the industrial, overcrowded and polluted new cities.

Simple egalitarian narratives came to be popular in the second half of the century. Traditional working groups were pictured, such as harvesting, pulling in the nets together or groups waiting for the return of the fishing fleet. There was the community spirit and the shared reality common to family life. The grieving widow, occasionally grieving men, (see Israëls’ *Passing Mother’s Grave*, 1856, 21:4) and enduring destitution seem to fit the peculiar sentimentiality of the day. Engaging closer with the subject was a natural result of the artists’ longer sojourns in the countryside and, as with the case of many Laren artists, they often made arrangements to work inside the family homes, farmhouses and barns.\(^{871}\) Unusual themes of domestic life were pictured, from grim wakes to the soft, sentimental side of rural domesticity, such as the children’s bath-night, a subject tackled in Skagen by Viggo Johansen and Christian Krohg, and early village schooling (see Julius Exner, Oscar Björck and Anna Ancher). Village festivals and celebrations were popular, such as Volendam children at play on the frozen canals and candle-lighted carnivals in Worpswede. Traditional architecture was popular, both secular and ecclesiastical, featured for its harmonious beauty. While an artist such as Johannes Bosboom carried on the fine Dutch tradition of church interiors, the younger generation got much closer and painted the congregation in their pews, captured most famously, but far from uniquely, in Leibl’s *Three Women in Church*, 1882. Michael Ancher’s *Christening in Skagen’s Church*, 1888, was especially iconic as it also celebrated the artists’ colony’s only birth, his daughter Helga.

However, in Domburg, Worpswede, Laren, Scheveningen, Katwijk, Volendam and even Skagen the exterior of the church, if at all, attracted most artistic attention. There is a general absence of religious pictures in artists’ colonies, not necessarily anti-religious but a glorifying of nature. Katwijk’s old church had been de-consecrated although it was a prominent landmark on the beach front. The villages that maintained a pre-industrial appearance were examined in detail and imbued with special timeless qualities deemed to have been lost by modern development. Inland, farming was slowly changing into agri-culture, where old meadows were less common as intensive crop rotation replaced open pastures. The sea alone remained timeless, endless, unpredictable and unconquerable; a balance to man’s insatiable conquest of the earth.

Artists were first attracted to fishing villages, such as Scheveningen, Katwijk and Hornbaek, that were closest to the cities yet had remained largely traditional. It was the architecture of fishing that was attractive, as they maintained the use of sailing boats, seen by the enduring appeal of the Dutch ‘pinks’, the huge, flat-bottomed wooden ships used along this coast. These behemoths were most commonly pictured hauled up on the beach, a major undertaking combining many men and horses. Even in Toorop’s *Fishing Boat at Katwijk*, c.1890 (6:6), one sees this theme carried on by the Post-Impressionists, although the avant-garde were ever trying to distance themselves from the Hague School. With this powerful piece he “seems to have broken radically with the world of Maris or Mauve.\(^{872}\)” Similarly, in 1894, the critic

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\(^{871}\) In Laren it was usual for artists to hire or negociate the sole use of particular farms for a time or by the season.

Bremmer compared Toorop and Mesdag thus: “If you have to compare a painting by Mesdag with it, you realise 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…” Although he was commenting on a pastel of another fishing boat, the analogy holds true for many of Toorop’s works from the period. “The symbolic content has sharply increased; the boat is no longer a piece of equipment with which the fishermen work, but a sacrificial deity against which man struggles. The picturesque composition has been replaced by a rigid symmetry.”873 As one of the pioneers of modern art in The Netherlands, Toorop yet saw further potential in these traditional themes but beyond the standard representations. The date, too, is significant. It was only his second year in Katwijk and already he was producing exotic, experimental and symbolist works alongside his pointillist confections and portraits, a range in contrast to his older colleagues in this artists’ colony, who tended to specialise, such as B.J. Blommers and his church interiors, or D.A.C. Artz’s genre compositions.

Boat-types, with their specific shapes and characteristic sail configurations, remained a major signifier of coastal waters, yet the overall focus shifted away from detailing their form to picturing the fishermen, their families and community. The tensions of maritime life proved to be a rich source of human emotions. Deep-sea fishermen, and all sailors, were risk-takers and this affected traditional family life here, with its high expectation of tragedy. They provided a particularly rich source of emotions, strong on grief, pathos, piety, hope and even nostalgia. Almost all of Walter Langley’s work at Newlyn shared this attitude, with perhaps Frank Bramley’s *Hopeless Dawn*, 1888, being one of the bleakest from that colony, yet gaining instant critical fame, winning the Chantrey Prize and thereby entering the national collection.

The primitive state of traditional fishing villages such as Skagen, which was truly isolated and far from city life, finally qualified it for artistic inquiry, even though it did not maintain a distinctive costume, have a strong regional architectural character, did not have a harbour front, or customs, nor even use sailing-ships. It was, however, a place with a special atmosphere; a place of heroism and determination, exactly the qualities a painter such as Michael Ancher was searching for when he left Copenhagen in 1874 and which kept him there for the remainder of his life. Whereas, Scheveningen had attracted many artists for centuries, Skagen took decades from mid-century to develop anything approaching a group of painters at any one time. By contrast, the ‘vogue for Holland’ gained yet another boost through the sudden artistic ‘discovery’ of Volendam, an old, traditional, isolated, fishing village community remarkably close to Amsterdam. Volendam, along with the then-islet of Marken, were only accessible by boat before 1880. Both had an abundance of distinctive visible qualifications for artistic inspiration, almost

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873 *Ibidem.*
too much, for their costumes were bold and the architecture distinctive. Fishing communities were normally close-knit societies. These communities were particularly delicately balanced, being right on the edge of the Zuiderzee. They were also physically compact and, curiously for the region, mostly built of wood, another attractive peculiarity. Consequently there was a rush to picture all aspects of the life in these colourful, traditional, self-contained, fishing village communities.

Cottage interior scenes invited the viewer closer into domestic life. The sparsity of these kitchens evoked a simplicity and a primitiveness that presages the development of Symbolism. They recall many calm interiors by earlier Dutch Masters, often cited as influential in most biographical works of this study area. Vermeer’s interiors are an obvious example here, with their tonal treatments of bare walls and careful illumination. Most of the Skagen’s famous domestic interior scenes, by Anna Ancher, Viggo Johansen and Christian Krogh, for example, owe a debt of gratitude to such Dutch models. It is interesting to note here that although there are many scenes of farms, barns, cottages, lanes and streets one hardly ever sees a village shop pictured, or bar-parlours. They were absent altogether from some artists’ villages, such as Cernay and Barbizon, yet they were present in more well-organised rural communities at Katwijk, Scheveningen and Domburg. One exception of note is P.S. Krøyer’s In the Grocer’s shop, 1882 (6:5), a Skagen scene that was later imitated by Michael Ancher. It is typical of a village general store, a combination of a sweet-shop, haberdashery and café. It is surprising to find this theme was not more popular with artists and a useful contrast with the formality of church congregations. The morality of village life was emphasised, so that paintings of dances or wedding feasts down-played any drunkeness, for example, although many caricatures, drawings and sketches indicate a very human range of humours, especially towards the turn of the century.  

Harvest-time has a long tradition in paintings of rural life. This theme was expanded to include more unusual personal perspectives on farming and other working practices, such as stone-breaking (Courbet, Guthrie and Toorop), collecting kindling (Clausen, La Thangue and most Barbizon artists), swan or goose plucking (Anna Ancher and Max Liebermann), white-washing walls (L.A. Ring) and the more-relaxed tending of cottage gardens (Larsson, Nordström, Guthrie and Lavery). The glorification of the simple peasant life is epitomised by the sudden international popularity of the subject, style and painting methods of Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-84), amongst others, whereby a central character, often a single child, is set in relief against meagre arable land. In this way, Johan Krouthen’s portrait of A Sleeping Boy under a haystack at Skagen, in 1883, (7:6), is closely mirrored by H.P. Feddersen’s own treatment of the same subject in North Friesland; George Hitchcock’s scenes in the dunes at Egmond; George Clausen and many early British Impressionists; and even Carl Larsson’s fine watercolour series at Grez-sur-Loing. In this way the ordinary workers of the soil continued to be promoted, as Millet had done before,
and as Jozef Israëls was doing at the same time with fisherfolk. Lepage’s compositions were light in tone, a reflection of the dusty and bleached limestone soils of his native France. Some painters transposed this style with its muted colours to other artists’ colonies, such as Guthrie in Cockburnspath, Scotland, Krouthen in Skagen and Hitchcock in Egmond-aan-zee, seen in his *Maternity*, c.1897 (22:5). However, most colours in this temperate maritime zone and on the coastal plains are moistly rich, all the year round, as seen in all Worpswede paintings. The peat moors naturally encouraged richer and darker treatments, present in all the earthy works of Fritz Mackensen, such as his *Village Madonna*, 1892 and his breakthrough piece *Prayers on the Moor*, 1892-5 (25:2, 27:2). His most successful pupil, Paula Becker, imitated his use of strong chiaroscuro and profiles in her figure compositions of peasants, seen in such works as *Woman at her Spinning-Wheel*, 1899 and *Old ‘Three-legs’*, 1906.

One of the few who approached the topic of country life from a more socially-conscious, realistic and less-decorative manner was Christian Krohg at Skagen. Krohg’s social realism draws the viewer towards the grinding poverty of the peasants; not for him the gentle snooze in an arm-chair but the unguarded sleep of the totally exhausted. Typical of the regular artists’ colonists, he managed to become particularly close to one fisher family, so that his series of paintings of the Gaihede at Skagen has the air of snap-shots taken by a concerned friend. He captures them at their labours and also in their more quiet moments, poignantly at the cradle-side and fast asleep, as if one had come across them suddenly, unguardedly, as he included little pieces of real life, such as a tobacco pipe still smouldering on the table and the spotted fly-paper hanging from a roof-beam. In a similar effort to gain the same authenticity Michael Ancher went into Lars Gaihede’s squalid Skagen cottage, in order to paint his portrait, but left after a few minutes, having caught not only his likeness but his fleas too. Undeterred, he also made a fine series of paintings focussing on another poor fisherman, ‘Old Christian’, alone or being comforted by friends and neighbours as he succumbed to total blindness.

Unlike Israëls’ waifs and pious mothers, so often pictured around the dark and empty hearth, Ancher, Krohg and their Skagen colleagues tended to detail the lives of the villagers in a less-sentimental manner. On the other hand, the Volendamer’s life would appear to be constantly cheerful by comparison, seen in the majority of light-hearted pictures made of them. Much of this picturesqueness, in such villages as Volendam and Katwijk, was the result of two major changes in the art market by 1900, the growth of commissioned works directly for publishers for use in illustrated magazine and books, together with the brighter and more colourful palettes the artists used. The Volendam works by artists George Hering and Hans von Bartels, the latter also closely associated with Katwijk, show this trend towards simplification, abbreviation and thus stylisation. By contrast, the first wave of interest in Laren, in the 1860s, coincided with the Hague School impressionists, ‘the greys’ as they were called, artists such as Anton Mauve and Albert Neuhuys, who continued to paint dingy interiors.

By 1900, several art movements became interested in colour representation, so that images became more fractured, broken up into zones, blocks, dabs, points and swirls. The themes may be the same but the technique of applying the paint became of interest. Jan Toorop was a major force in promoting first pointillism and neo-impressionism then post-impressionism, based on works he had seen by colleagues in Brussels. Landscape pictures predominated in these styles, yet some extraordinary new scenes and variations resulted, whose purpose was to shock or stimulate through the use of strong colours. In Katwijk and Domburg, Toorop and his expressionist colleagues made some remarkable works. In his *Watching on the Threshold of the...*  

874 Jacobs, 1985, p. 93.
Sea, c.1890 (8:6) he uses theories first developed by Seurat and Signac, yet it also has a direct link to his earlier art nouveau composition Calvinists at Katwijk.

Few young painters actually painted their experiences onboard ship, in the manner of Turner’s famous storm scenes, for example, when he is said to have been lashed to the mast in order to get the appropriate atmospheric effect. A few attempts at realistic onboard theme, of note, in this coastal area were made by Christian Krohg, who often sailed over from Oslo to Skagen after 1879. He painted several of his personal ship experiences, although he was not a marine painter, including Port the Helm, on Gaihede’s boat, and On the Look-out for the Pilot, all in rough weather. Interestingly, these paintings also show signs of influence by the newly-fashionable Japanese graphic forms. For example, in both the above cases he used the perspective device called the ‘truncated lozenge’ which built up an unusual optical illusion. In Newlyn, Stanhope Forbes’ Off to the Fishing Grounds, 1866, used the same angle of incidence and foreshortening, drawing the viewer into the experience while cleverly extending the pictorial experience beyond the frame. The lack of any genuine English regional folk costume forced many of its genre painters to explore France and The Netherlands, in particular, from the 1860s. They joined the increasing numbers of artists recording regional identity, as colourful costumes were a major visible part of the general resurgence of interest in what may be called folk-art. Regions had different secular architecture; different plants, geographies and geologies; even different boat and sailing-ship designs. Along this coast costumes differed from island to island, and even on an island as small as Fanø, there were clear identifiable differences that had evolved in the two villages. They had been pictured first around mid-century by F.C. Lund (1826-1901) as he made the first systematic survey of Denmark’s klædedragt. He completed a series of watercolours made between 1854-60 which he reprinted lithographically in 1861. They look rather awkward and stiff but they pointed the way to a growing number of artists to improve their pictorial quality, chief amongst whom were Dalsgaard, Exner and Vermehren. They all had the training and technical ability to detail textiles, patterns, interiors and materials, but their paintings often lacked the new visual unity and fluidity of Millet or Daumier. Nevertheless, interest in folk-art and costumes continued to rise just as they were being abandoned for modern city design and clothes in villages such as Dragør and Hedeboegnen, two of Exner’s study communities, both places with distinctive costumes that soon became absorbed into Greater Copenhagen.

In the present study area the more inaccessible villages and islands, such as Volendam, Walcheren, Terschelling, Föhr and Fanø, generally maintained their folk costumes and customs longer, thereby attracting painters. Volendam offered not only a set of female folk costumes but also a distinctive male garb, much more uncommon, which included huge klopmen. Sabot, træsko or clogs were traditionally worn many peasants across western Europe and which appear in many late nineteenth-century pictures. On their own, they came to represent rural life in general and were useful shapes for expressing mood and humour. As the century came to a close such images were reworked until they became stereotypical and symbolic, with Volendam’s distinctive costumes and accessories coming to represent, in graphic design at least, all the Dutch
regional costumes in one, or van Gogh’s famous worker’
boots, c.1885, coming to represent the whole body or even the
state of the peasantry.

The theme of clothing also extended to the traditions
involved in washing, dyeing and making textiles. Holland had a
reputation as a centre for lace-making, so that groups of
women and girls sewing remained popular, such as at Katwijk,
although lace-making was practised and pictured as far north
as Mogeltonder in Denmark.875 The industriousness of
villagers, particularly the women, was emphasized in Holland,
where pride was taken in keeping their humble cottages
scrupulously clean. Women scrubbing the front door or
polishing copper pans became a feature of some pictures.876 In
Volendam, this simplified image was popularized in a portfolio of “types” produced by the
American I.M. Andrews, for Century Magazine, called Always Knitting. These compositions had
all the desireable elements of traditional costume, self-security, self-confidence and
picturesqueness that the public had begun to expect and be reassured by. Commendable social
cohesion was also seen in the courtyard scenes of typically Dutch almshouses and gasthuizen,
and more generally through pictures of simple village schools, which promoted notions of
community spirit, compassion and impoverished yet civilised conduct.

As part of the general reappraisal of traditional art academy values, many members of artists’
colonies experimented with compositional informality, interchangeable atmospheres and
especially unusual lighting effects, all, as John House has recently postulated, as a “conscious
repudiation of social norms.”877 The heightened colouring added to the sensory experience, as
seen in many landscapes, and, in this mood of the refreshingly unexpected, a conscious refusal
was made not to repeat the now stock images of village life. Some artists began to focus trying to
capture the atmosphere of different times of the day. Instead of high-noon they painted ethereal
dawns, morning mists, moonlighted nights or, at Skagen, the ‘blue hour’ after sunset. Anna
Ancher’s series of quiet sun-lighted rooms, where nothing is going on, are a fine example (9:6).
She parallels the more polished work of another gifted Danish artist, Vilhelm Hammershoi
(1864-1916), who completed a large series of still interior scenes in muted colours, although his
were done in Copenhagen apartments.

At Domburg, more light-conscious distortions were applied to normal subjects, at first
to the landscape then to architectural features such as church facades, water-towers and wind-
mills, by artists such as Piet Mondriaan, Leo Gestel and Charley Toorop, amongst many others.
A shift of perception also occured as the viewer was encouraged to see through the eyes of the
artist, rather than just seeing a tableau in a frame. It was not so much what they were looking at
but how they perceive images, moods, emotions, tensions, etc.

875 The North Frisian painter, Hans Peter Feddersen, the Younger, pictured one old woman lace maker in her
from Møgeltonder are also documented regularly as lodging in Hotel Brøndum, Skagen from 1875.
876 Max Liebermann’s Hanging out Clothes to dry - Laren, 1884 was bought by the Berlin dealers Cassirer (28:2).
There was a critical point in the progress of painting the village cultural landscape when the artist was confronted with the dilemma of picturing the full reality of contemporary rural life, rather than perpetuating previous imagery. The contrast between ‘ancient and modern’ was not entirely ignored but it seems to have formed a line which they preferred to pass over rather than dwell upon. In Exner’s *Visit of a Stranger to a Fanø home*, c.1900, he pictures a traditional cottage interior with one lady dressed in a fine period outfit opposite a mother and daughter in the village folk costume. This is a snap-shot of a particular moment, when the past catches up with the present, or vise versa. At Skagen, Michael Ancher made one half-hearted attempt to paint this culture-clash, in 1879, with *At Shoemaker Bonatzi’s house*. Here a smartly dressed modern young women is conducting business with the old village cobbler, in the doorway of his primitive cluttered wooden cottage. Later, the same culturally contrasting issues were pictured more amusingly in caricatures and cartoons made for books and magazine by Willy Sluiter and Phil May, in Volendam.

In many cases these artists employed their spouses, family and friends as models for models of contemporary figures. This is not much of a departure from traditional studio-craft, yet, here, in this rustic context, they combined to up-date the images. Ancher went on to paint his wife and his village in-laws many times, never as peasants, but as fully buttoned-up members of the modern middle-classes, to which they aspired. This shift in clothing is a sign of the times and a pictorial swing away from the rustic image of rural dwellers. P.S. Krøyer, soon after his arrival in Skagen, in 1882, and after completing fine studies of the fishermen, soon switched his focus to his fellow artists and to those who aspired to the middle-classes. In doing so he immediately changed the character of this village artists’ colony forever. He started by painting his fellow artists in their city clothes on the beach, but the real shock came in the 1890s when he pictured his beautiful new wife, elegantly-gowned, parading along the South Strand, the same beach where the fishermen had previously enjoyed exclusive possession. Krøyer’s series of Marie, always in fashionable dress, was a social statement, (10:6), one that also announced that the colonists now felt utterly at home, in what had been an alien environment. These events are separate from the standard pictures of tourists promenading, strolling along on holiday. Krøyer’s ladies are taking an evening walk, in all their finery, not subordinate but at home and secure in the immensity of nature. This theme serves as a fine example of interchangeable atmospheres, purposely juxtaposed to jolt the observer. There are also hints of *art nouveau*, in the colouring of the atmosphere and the asymmetry of the Reform gowns. Some recent authors, including Saabye and Svandholm, have recognised in Krøyer’s late works Early Italian, Renaissance and Japanese influences, along with known links to Velasquez and Rembrandt. His personal eclecticism was boosted by his restlessness and love of foreign travel. He is typical of the new mix of international styles and techniques found in most artists’ colonies. It caused him to be seen as audacious, yet he
combined sharp observation skills with a quick talent and astute compositional skills. His presence at Skagen raised the colony from being of provincial or regional importance to one of the best examples of rural yet cosmopolitan art centres anywhere.

Painters’ families and friends were pictured informally and casually in most rural artists’ colonies. At Grez, Carl Larsson is known for his series of tonal watercolours, mostly made in the gardens sloping down to the river and featuring villagers. He also completed another delicate scene in amongst the weeping willows of the Hotel Chevillon, in 1887, called Grez-sur-Loing. Peeping out from its rickety boathouse we see an elegantly dressed young woman, in a bright-red skirt. She is the newly-wed Mrs. Bruno Lillefors, wife of the talented Swedish animal painter. Well-dressed middle-class city women pictured in rural settings fast became a favourite new theme with artists and collectors. They offered certain artists an opportunity to show off their talents, not only as fine portraitists but by using more expressive brushwork in showing the intricacies of textiles and foliage, such as in Krøyer’s Summer Evening, 1892 (10:6) and Roses, 1898. Similarly, at Domburg, Katwijk and Noordwijk, Jan Toorop, ever the sharp portraitist, painted many colleagues, literary figures, composers and musicians. However, in situations such as Volendam’s hardly any villagers were ever painted out of costume, in smart contemporary clothes. This made something of a thematic rut and thus shaded its artistic development, unlike the seaside colonies of Katwijk or Domburg, where the painters were inclined to picture modern life, traditional and modern apparel and employ modern painting techniques and styles.

The most socially sensational trend of all in rural painting was related to a matter of dress, or more precisely un-dress. The practise of painting nudity en plein-air is said to have started in the 1880s, and became closely associated with certain coastal artists’ colonies. T.Alexander Harrison, an American who worked in several artists’ colonies including Pont-Aven, Concarneau, Grez and Giverney, was commonly rumoured to have “started the habit of painting the nude out of doors. At first he simply had boys posing for him on the beach. Then, as one journalist described it, ‘he had the audacity to pose girls in the landscape sunshine... and all the real artists including Bastien-Lepage patted him on the back.’” His In Arcadia, 1885, was done while he was working on the coast of Brittany although the poor treatment of the adult female figures involved points, understandably, to the inadequacies of the ‘Life-classes’ at the art academies at that time. A colleague of T.A. Harrison, Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), later a teacher at Philadelphia Academy, at about the same time was experimenting with nude photography and became famous for painting nude youths at the water’s edge, as in The Swimming Hole, 1883. Henry Scott Tuke (1858-1929) also specialised in such nudes swimming off the Cornish coast at Newlyn and Falmouth. In Denmark, Krøyer, ever the pioneer, painted an amusing series of naked boys playing in the surf between 1884-1892, such as Summers-day, Skagen Strand, with Children Bathing, 1884. These early nude were invariably young boys at play, but Harrison’s figures were more shocking as they were adult females disporting themselves around a forest glade.

878 Jacobs, 1985, p. 68.
Painting nudes, either children, youths or adults, was less apparent in most rural localities within this study area, at that time, with one exception. In Worpswede, a scandal first erupted over the actions of Otto Modersohn, painting his second wife, Paula, naked in the woods. She was not conventionally pretty but then he was not good at painting figures, with or without their clothes. After 1900, Paula Modersohn-Becker made a series of nudes, including herself during pregnancy, that are quite outstanding and post-impressionist, for example *Self-portrait with Amber necklace*, 1906 (11:6). Later still, the painting of nude females *en plein-air* was also a notorious feature of the radical *Die Brücke* group, first practised around the Mauritsburg Lake and later along the North Sea coast, on the sands of Sylt, such as Otto Mueller’s *Two Girls in the Dunes, Sylt*, 1919. From around this date, painting female nudes on a sandy beach became almost *de rigueur*, as seen in works by Magnus Weidemann on Sylt from 1921, along with August Wilckens and Heinrich Dohm on Fanø, at about the same time.

**New Motifs**

There are few entirely new motifs in representational painting, yet what is noticeable along this coast is the picturing of the enormous social changes in those communities, particularly as the result of improved accessibility and tourism. If one takes the simple subject of children, for example, one finds the basis of some interesting developments. Jozef Israëls, D.A.C. Artz and Julius Exner, amongst many others, found a ready market for simple, pious, narrative pictures of fishing village children, usually sentimental yet with a kind of new realism. Their social class and status are easily identifiable, for these ‘urchins’, particularly the girls, wore a village or regional costume. Outside, the days always seem to be sunny, although there are some gloomy interiors, yet this is not social realism. These artists became early specialists in the genre by the 1880s and readily identifiable with specific locations: Israëls with Scheveningen, Artz with Katwijk and Exner with Fanø. With time all the details become blurred, what Dekkers called “muddiness”, and the clothes become amorphous and loose, with the exception of simple scarves, lace caps or aprons for the girls. The children play on the beach, but in works by the next generation of painters, such as Israëls’ son, Isaac, Blommer’s son-in-law, Jan Zoetelief-Tromp, and Exner’s successor August Wilckens,

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879 Rilke, 1935-36, vol. 6, pp. 649-50. This image was immortalised by Rilke in his *Requiem für eine Freundin*, just two years later. Perry, 1979, p. 43. points out that these are all “unself-conscious nudes”, where awkwardness and even ugliness maintain their place and dignity, “even solemnity.”


881 Dekkers, 1999, p. 122. Muddiness is used as a sub-heading. Interestingly, chapter 5 is entitled “Israëls’ Children in their Sunday Best” which was also a comment or criticism directed at Exner’s pleasant genre imagess.
those children now are not necessarily from the villages. These children playing on the same sands and in the shallows have the look of middle-class holiday-makers. The earlier simply-carved wooden boat that the boy played with in the puddles by Israëls and Artz is replaced by a bought toy-boat. The children now have swimming costumes and play with special little buckets and spades. In Tromp’s painting *Children Playing on Katwijk Strand*, c.1910, he records the girls in light, bright modern frocks, with neat buckled sandals and making sand-castles. Earlier, H.W. Jansen (1855-1908) in *Summer-guests on Katwijk Strand* (12:6) shows more children playing with their buckets and spades, but here they are in amongst the beached old fishing boats, another example of a theme of transition, towards showing all contemporary life and activities.

These new children on the beach are unlikely to be from the village nor are they painted to look as if they are. Some of them wear the new bathing costumes and even go into the water to wade and splash, if not yet quite to swim. Much new beach paraphernalia appeared: bathing wagons, beach huts, wind-breaks, donkey-rides and deck-chairs. The new users of the sands are no longer exclusively poor locals or the idle rich. It is interesting to compare Isaac Israëls’ *Boy and Girl Donkey-riding*, c.1890 (2:1), with another simple statement on the theme of leisure, Mauve’s elegant earlier composition *Riders on the Beach at Scheveningen*, 1876 (14:6). Mauve’s work shows suitably fashionable equestrians, with top-hats, descending gracefully to the dazzling immensity of the vast open sands. Several white bathing-machines can already be seen. The two paintings illustrate the shift in the social, political and economic realities of the coastal situation, especially anywhere there were safe sandy beaches.

The middle-classes were expanding their territory and soon everyone was able to enjoy the sands whenever and however they liked. Tourism, recreation, health, sport or just promenading now presented artists with challenging new themes and social situations. The resort artists’ colonies illustrate that the difference between rural and urban art was closing, seen by the picturing of many fashionable activities that had great appeal to the buying public. Leisure and sport amongst the middle-classes were new socially acceptable themes. Typical of the switch from rustic to middle-class life was John Lavery. He worked at Grez and Paris from 1882, then at Cockburnspath, east of Edinburgh, just before producing a remarkable and popular set called *The Tennis Party*, c.1885, in oils and watercolours. Initially criticized the following year by London’s Royal Academy, it nevertheless gained much acclaim and fame when shown in Paris and in Munich. Lavery’s works were much admired in Germany and seen by the Worpswede pioneers. He was one of the successful ‘Glasgow Boys’, who were responsible for promoting

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882 Some sports seem to appear rather late in art. Horses were traditional but not horse racing, outside of England, yet golf, for instance, although an ancient game, appearing for example on eighteenth century Delft tiles, apparently
the name of one coastal artists’ colony, at Cockburnspath. It was very short-lived, yet, because of the Glaspalast acclaim and subsequent museum exhibitions, the group’s name and their radical compositions gained widespread publicity. Sport and leisure were also themes taken up by the influential German, Max Liebermann, but by a different route. He had started his career in imitation of the Barbizon masters, then Monet, before finally settling for a Manet-style treatment of bourgeois society. His early oeuvre included genre subjects, but later he turned to the middle-classes, such as promenaders in parks in Amsterdam or along the Dutch coast. In his Strand by Nordwijk, 1908 one sees a combination of typical beach activities, including horse-riding, building sand-castles and the appearance of the peculiar wicker beach-chairs, known all along this North Sea sandy coast, that offer protection from the wind. Another of Liebermann’s earlier compositions pictures a polo-match in progress, c.1902, location unknown, but with the same blustery weather as found in all his coastal works from Holland.

In contrast to the voluminous crinolines seen on Empress Eugènie and her courtiers at Trouville, in earlier coastal pictures by Boudin or Manet’s heavily-clothed holiday makers, these beaches are now populated by people in white, light, loosely-fitting garments and straw hats. Women are pictured in the fashionable Reform clothes and in several self-portraits Krøyer is seen wearing knickerbockers, fob-watch, homburg hat, cummerbund and linen suits. This reinforces the notion that at least some of the colonists considered themselves as in tune with the modern life and part of fashionable society.

With the exception of a few delicate parasols, no holiday paraphernalia was pictured at Skagen, although Fanø, further down the coast, had formal bathing wagons at least as early as 1880. People in deck-chairs and peculiar bathing costumes, though not yet quite sun-bathing, are all new subjects in pictures at Domburg, Scheveningen and Katwijk, such as Maurice Góth’s Bathing Pavilion, Domburg, 1919 (37:2), a scene that was fast becoming common-place in most sea-side resorts across Europe. Directly across the North Sea, at Walberswick, Wilson Steer won early fame, in the 1880s, with this theme of light, frivolous, beach activities. He captures a liesured, sun-drenched and colourful world, where security is represented by nanny sitting under a big beach umbrella keeping a watchful eye on her minions and the pleasure craft gently sail out beyond the protective, low, harbour walls. A far cry from struggling fishermen.

Miesdag’s extraordinary Panorama of 1881, a view over Scheveningen from a pavilion on top of the highest dune, Seinposten, presages many of these changes. In it one may see ‘bathing-machines’, a long red-brick promenade halfway up the dunes, various grand hotels and their clients, a kurhaus, many gaily-decorated villas and, out at sea, small pleasure yatchs. It has been called “one of the most remarkable products of the period.” The addition of recreational and leisure elements in this work was significant and predictable, especially when one considers the Belgian businessmen who commissioned it, for it was in their interests to promote tourism. Miesdag knew that this beach was about to change, as that area was already planned for demolition, but he did not predict the almost entire destruction of Scheveningen’s traditional fishing fleet, in a winter storm, which completely altered the village as an attraction for painters. The tragic loss of this old traditional site of artistic inspiration only served to hasten the development of alternatives.

makes its pictorial debut on this coastal quite late. Robert Leepin’s Golfer on Fano, 1935 is possibly the first, see Barrett, 1993, pp. 75, 81.

883 Thomas Schmidt, Badevogne på Fano Vesterhavssstrand, 1880, pencil drawing of the west beach showing six horse-drawn wagons (pictured in Sørensen, 1983).

It is interesting to note, of Mesdag’s Panorama, that contemporary artists and critics at first found fault then favour with this all-encompassing, realistic tour-de-force.885 Johannes Bosboom’s comment was typical: “A massive, shining leaf has been added to the laurels of the Dutch school of painting and it is your true and powerful talent that we have to thank for this, Hendrik Willem Mesdag.”886 More surprising, perhaps, was Vincent van Gogh’s fervent praise and repeated visits.887 One of his earliest attempts at oil painting was inspired by this same location, *The Beach at Scheveningen in Stormy Weather*, 1882, soon after the panorama was inaugurated. It is also interesting to note that he bought his first tubes of oil paint in The Hague, after Theo had left him money for materials. He complained about the expense for he had to scrape off the oils several times from his pasteboards because the wind deposited layers of sand on the pictures. “However, I tried to get it fixed by going to a little inn behind the dunes, and there scraped it off and immediately painted it on again, returning to the beach now and then for a fresh impression.”888

Many signs of modern life and technology are present in Mesdag’s Panorama, but they are distant: the holiday makers are far away, the little train and the pumping-station are small, the lamp-post is solitary and there is smoke on the seaward horizon; no steamships are pictured. Soon enough, after 1880, they all come to the foreground in paintings. In amongst the massive bulk of fishing-boats, almost fifty in number, one may also see a lone woman artist, under a parasol, painting *en plein-air*. It is his wife, Sientje Houten-Mesdag. The presence of women painters, un-chaparoned, was also a sign of the times, particularly in artists’ colonies. She represents a new theme, that might be called ‘painters painting painters painting, on location.’ There are many previous examples of painters drawing their colleagues, out of doors, such as Købke’s study of Eckersberg in the 1832. There are also paintings of colleagues at their easels. These new paintings were fresh, informal and exciting. They are common in all rural artists’ colonies. Toorop painted many of his colleagues at Domburg, but as most were pointillist portraits, they took time and were completed back in his atelier. Willy Sluiter made many sketches of his fellow artists at Volendam, Katwijk and Laren. It is commonly said Krøyer discovered the habit of painting his fellow colonists in a group at Cernay-la-Ville, in France, and repeated this theme at Skagen, right from his first visit in 1882. His enthusiasm for painting his colleagues spread to Brondum’s dining room decorations and continued until his last big work,

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885 The Panorama measures 14 x 120 metres and was completed in only five months. He had assistance from a group of specially invited artists but the exact extent of their contribution is not fully documented. Mesdag’s wife, Sientje, is said to have painted the townscape but G.H. Breitner also appears to have contributed greatly to it and certainly made extensive technical drawings, four out of five of which are now part of the Kroller-Müller Collection. The 29-year old George Breitner, an early photography enthusiast, is known to have painted the cavalry, a favourite theme of his and Isaac Israëls at that time. Artists B.J. Bloomers, Adrien Nijberck and Theophile van Bock also contributed.


887 Fruitema, 1981, p. 108. In a letter of August (?) 1881, nr.149, to Theo, Vincent alludes to a well known judgement of Rembrandt’s works, that “This picture’s only fault is that it has no faults.”

888 Van Gogh’s letter dated 19th August, 1882, describes his frustrations painting on a windy Scheveningen beach: “One of them is slightly sprinkled with sand – but the second, made during a real storm, during which the sea came quite close to the dunes, was so covered with a thick layer of sand that I was obliged to scrape it off twice.”
Sct. Hans blus på Skagens Strand, 1906, that typically commemorates the Scandinavian mid-summer festival, a bon-fire on the beach.

Most of the Skagen pioneers painted each other at work en plein-air. Krøyer made two major works that pictured their social life, both iconic and celebratory, *The Artists’ Luncheon*, 1883 (32:5) and *Hip hip hurra*, 1884-88 (1:1). One more-formal group composition of fellow artists at Skagen was completed by Michael Ancher, *The Art Critics*, 1906, but in reality it is less representative of the contributions each made to the development of this artists’ colony. Many examples of this theme of the process of painting out of doors were made and became popular, whether on a beach, in the dunes, in woodland glades, on river banks, in canoes and punts, and, in at least one case, of a floating studio. There are many photographs of the pioneers painting in these villages, in groups and solitary or with their models, although some look posed, as for publicity purposes, such as Liebermann’s portrait in the dunes at Katwijk.

As the artists documented the countryside realistically, as found, then eventually they had to confront the question of modern life, for even the remotest villages showed some evidence of new technology by the 1880s. For example, most of the earliest Skagen painters typically excluded subjects such as steam-ships and the new lighthouse from their marine landscapes. However, Viggo Johansen, at the same time, included road-side telegraph poles in his many Skagen landscapes, such as *The Lane to the Plantation*, 1880. Artistically, telegraph poles held much potential as perspective devices, yet most painters delayed including them in rural scenes. The same may be said for the presence of railway lines, locomotives, trams, viaducts, factory chimneys and stations, that were all common sights in the countryside and increasingly built in the village artists’ colonies by 1990, yet failed to inspire most painters.

Some Anomalies:

The first easily recogniseable pictorial anomaly is geographical in nature. Painters had explored along the whole of this sandy coastline by 1920, from Skagen to Domburg, seeking out all its most interesting vistas, traditional architecture, costumes and customs. All the way down the western shore of Jutland, including its islands, almost every village seemed to host an artists’ community, at least for the summer months. West of the River Elbe to the Zuiderzee this pattern is strangely absent. There were very few active artists on this polderland or, perhaps more-understandably, on its, sometimes intensely-touristic, islands. In East Friesland, the only breaks in the protective sea-dykes are the ‘siel’ or sluice harbours, which are not unattractive. A small number of regional painters were inspired by these fishing villages, namely Carolinensiel, Greetsiel and Norden, but few painters settled to form groups or colonies until after 1918. Further west again, and even more surprisingly, there was even less artistic inquiry at that time on the other unspoilt islands. Despite the Dutch Frisian islands having all the desired traditional characteristics and possibly the only truly natural landscape in the whole country, few painters visited this north-facing coast. Transport was not a limiting factor, for the island of Texel, typically, was easily accessible and within a day’s journey from Amsterdam. Baedeker’s guide printed details of the steam-ship service to the even-more unspoilt Schiermonikoog. The more gentle shores of the Zuiderzee and the sandy west coast of Holland again resumed the Jutland

889 Michael Ancher, *The Art Critics*, 1906, includes four Skagen painters: Tuxen, Krøyer himself, Drachmann and Jens Ferdinand Willumsen. Unfortunately, their names were incorrectly attributed in the prestigious exhibition organised by the National Germanisches Museum in 2000-01.
pattern of concentrated artistic colonisation. Almost every village and gap in the coastal range of sand-dunes attracted painters and inspired them to return. Why the north Dutch coast, during the peak of ‘Holland Mania’, attracted barely a handful of genre or topographical artists remains something of a mystery.

The second major anomaly concerns the selectivity of subjects and how and what was meant by nature, or natural. In Mesdag’s extraordinary and comprehensive coverage of life around Scheveningen, in his Panorama, c.1880, there is rarely a recognisable sea-gull, not a wild-flower or even a rabbit to be seen. Considering the initial purpose of working in the countryside was to paint nature, or risk “empty pedantry”, they all had a rather restricted interpretation of it. Their view of nature, judging from their works, took the form of painting landscapes, although that focus might be fore-shortened to a single tree. Wild life, here, usually meant dead game birds hanging from a nail, being plucked, or occasionally a rabbit or hare. In fact, the North Sea coast teems with bird-life yet there were very few artists who rose to this challenge, as Thomas Bewick (1752-1828) had done with his pioneeringly realistic woodcuts, a generation or two before. It is not that there weren’t talented draughtsmen or interested collectors, for J.J. Audobon’s works, from the 1820s, won him almost instant fame and fortune. In addition, there were many fine ornithological illustrators spurred on by the new generation of publishers, many from Germany and The Netherlands, such as the artists J.G. Keulemanns (1842-1912) and Joseph Smits (1836-1929), who both trained in Leyden, just upstream from Katwijk, and the Prussian Joseph Wolff (1820-99). There were few who managed to combine precision with artistry. Two worthy exceptions are of note, both of whom worked in artists’ colonies but, sadly, not ones along this sandy coast. They are the Swede Bruno Liljefors (1860-1939), at Grez in the 1880s, and the Danish watercolourist Johannes Larsen (1867-1961) who settled in Kerteminde, Fyn, yet maintained a small ‘summer-house’ at Filsø, a lake just inland from Blâvands Huk, from the 1920s.

At Walberswick, another ‘Glasgow Boy’, architect and artist, Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928), did begin a stylish wild flower, watercolour series, from 1914. However, the “hoped-for botanical book was ruled out by the war.” It was left to later generations of artists to paint the flora and fauna of this coast in more detail, but not in the pioneering stages of these coastal artists’ colonies. However, the most surprising omission of all in nature paintings from the sea and coast are sea-creatures. Where are the fish or the seals? There are paintings of fishing nets being pulled ashore at Skagen, shrimpers and mussel gatherers along the Dutch beaches, but no major compositions featured molluscs, crustacea or fish. Stanhope-Forbes came close to painting fish realistically with his first Newlyn triumph, A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach, 1885, but few appear thereafter. Still-lives of fish on a plate, for example, were proportionately few at that time, before 1910, but later generations took this up as a symbol or stereotype. Most artists painted the waves, the shore, the dunes but at a distance; not close-ups of the special flora of the dunes or heaths; no sea-shells, skeletons or carapaces. Huge whale bones were commonly used as fences, arches and gateways on certain islands, such as Föhr, Rømø and Fanø, but they were not even included as curiosities in any major village pictures.

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890 See Stott, 1998; and, Kraan ‘The Vogue for Holland’ in Leeuw et al., 1983, pp. 115- 25. Such titles indicate that the Dutch countryside was seen by many artists and collectors as an especially attractive, traditional and generally free from the harmful affects of industrialisation.
891 See, Rousseau’s comments at the start of this chapter.
892 Skipwith, 1979, pp. 104- 23; 124- 29, 130- 152.
The wild-life along this coast is not that difficult to observe and it is neither small nor rare, yet it was almost entirely disregarded by these artists. There are, for instance, huge migrations of birds all along the Waddenzee/Vadehavet, with Skagen being a major assembly point for those migrating together, in characteristic flying formations, over to Norway and their Arctic breeding grounds. Eider ducks are common and collect together in sheltered bays, for example, along with huge groups of geese and swans. All were hunted by villagers and several artists pictured them being plucked, such as Anna Ancher, Christian Krohg and Max Liebermann. Pictures of dead game-birds remained common. The wild North Sea coast is also host to a variety of other large birds: eagle-owls, herons, peregrine falcons, ospreys, buzzards, gulls and gannets, but they were not pictured at that time. Michael Ancher was an enthusiastic hunter, yet he produced no major composition that included wild-life of any sort, although in his own Skagen home, on many wooden doors, for example, he did paint accurate portraits of hawks, plovers, ducks, wild-geese and whimbrel as decorative panels. This period saw artists begin to specialise, but it would be the next generation to find a wider market for detailed observations of such nature.

Artists had found some success through exploring new angles, closer proximity and different perspectives in these coastal areas, in nature and in the village societies. Yet there was still much more to find, to contemplate and be inspired by. They all painted the sailing boats, for example, but they rarely went out to sea on them or stepped inside them. Realism and Naturalism had brought artists closer to the countryside and the sea-shore, but soon after 1900 other styles and techniques emerged that competed with them and deflected many painters from detailing what they found along the coast. There was never to be an artists’ colony devoted to painting the exact natural history of the shore and dunes, only individual ornithological painters, such as Johannes Larsen at Kerteminde; or isolated wild-life illustrators, such as Thomas Bewick; or solitary painters of domestic animals, such as the Frisian artist Jan Mankes. Nature, for most painters in Europe, would remain distant, a largely domesticated product, farmyard animals rather than a wild stag; the symbol of a swan rather than the observable distinguishing markings; and fishermen rather than the fish.

**Conclusion:**

The radicals that settled in rural artists’ colonies experimented in many ways: in what they pictured, then how they pictured it. Although they did not entirely abandon classic models and composition, they also wanted to look afresh. They rediscovered nature through close observation of unspoilt landscapes and those deemed to have a special atmosphere. First, they detailed the differing forms of water, shore, dunes and the textures of the hinterlands. The longer the artists stayed the more its diversity was revealed to them. Technically, they explored new perspectives, tones and colour relationships. Second, they also witnessed the many changes to

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894 In 1871, Liebermann shared an atelier in Düsseldorf with Mihály von Munkácsy (1844-1900) who won a Gold Medal at the Paris Salon in 1870 for his *The Last Day of a Condemned man*, but he also submitted *The Pluckers*, which gained a certain acclaim. In 1871, Liebermann first visited Holland and produced his first major success, *The Goose-pluckers*. 

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the countryside; the sudden encroachment of modern technology, architecture and social values.

Third, rural artists’ colonies were in a perfect position to benefit from the general Romantic movement that elevated peasant genres, as a suitable subjects for fine art. They formed part of the ongoing debate on whether fine art had to have a moral purpose.

The natural patterns of daily life were examined more closely and in relation to the seasonal rhythms. These artists developed a heightened sense of time and place. Many themes and subjects had precedents in art history, yet these painters pictured the drama, tragedy and comedy more realistically within these coastal communities. As pleinairism implied painting what was found, unadorned, then eventually modern contemporary life and technology provided new themes and situations, especially seen along the coast with tourism and leisure activities. Gradually a tendency to simplification developed, which coincided with an interest in symbolism, so that a single birch tree came to represent a whole environment, or a single boat an accumulation of form and function. Yet others were interested in applying the new colour theories and the optical lessons learnt from early photography, seen in the followers of Paul Seurat and Bastien-Lepage, amongst others. Rather than simply concentrating only on the picturesque past, the more progressive coastal artists’ colonies provided ample opportunity to apply the latest theories and fashions. The strong horizontal planes, the special light and arabesque lines of this sandy west coast inspired considerable meditation and experimentation, seen at their best in Mondriaan’s continued abstractions at Domburg.

17:6 - Piet Mondriaan, *Pier and Ocean*, 1915. Oil on Canvas, 85 x 108 cm. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo. This was the culmination of an extraordinary series of paintings, which experimented with form and colour, ranging from flowers, dunes, churches, people and the sandy shore, all done at Domburg.