



Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society

By Robert L. Herbert

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“Long-awaited, this full-scale revision of Impressionism immediately supersedes all other studies in the field. Herbert rejuvenates even the most famous paintings by seeing them in a dense and flexible context touching on everything from the hierarchy of theater boxes to the role of beer-hall waitresses. His mind and eye are as supple as his lucid prose, and his command of sociological data is staggering. In this classic of art history, both art and history are triumphantly reborn.”—Robert Rosenblum, New York University

This remarkable book will transform the way we look at Impressionist art. The culmination of twenty years of research by a preeminent scholar in the field, it fundamentally revises the conventional view of the Impressionist movement and shows for the first time how it was fully integrated into the social and cultural life of the times.

Robert L. Herbert explores the themes of leisure and entertainment that dominated the great years of Impressionist painting between 1865 and 1885. Cafes, opera houses, dance halls, theaters, racetracks, and vacations by the sea were the central subjects of the majority of these paintings, and Herbert relates these pursuits to the transformation of Paris under the Second Empire.

Sumptuously illustrated with many of the most beautiful Impressionist images, both familiar and unfamiliar, this book presents provocative new interpretations of a wide range of famous masterpieces. Artists are seen to be active participants in, as well as objective witnesses to, contemporary life, and there are many profound insights into the social and cultural upheaval of the times.

“A social history of Impressionist art that is truly about the art, informed by a penetrating analysis of the ways in which its pictorial structure and qualities communicate its social content. Herbert brings that society to life, but above all he makes some of the most familiar and frequently discussed works in the history of art come wonderfully and vividly to life again.”—Theodore Reff, Columbia University

Robert L. Herbert is Robert Lehman Professor of the History of Art at Yale University. He is the author or editor of numerous books and articles on nineteenth-century French art.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this "provocative study," Herbert explains how Paris's architecture became raw material for the impressionists and analyzes the social forces that shaped individual painters. According to PW, "Picture after picture is given a fresh, often unexpected reading, and the more than 300 plates (two-thirds in color) are deftly interwoven with the sprightly narrative."

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About the Author

Robert L. Herbert is professor of art at Mount Holyoke College.

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