

HISTORY IN ART

Berthe Morisot, Marie Bracquemond and Mary Cassatt – the three *grandes dames* of Impressionism

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1840 – Marie Bracquemond *née* Quivoron is born in Brittany, France. As a child she enjoys drawing and painting, and is soon taking lessons.

1841 – Berthe Morisot is born in Bourges in central France, the daughter of the prefect of the Cher region. Her mother encourages her and her elder sister Edma to experiment with drawing and painting from an early age.

1844 – Mary Cassatt is born in Pennsylvania, United States, into a wealthy family.

1857 – Marie Quivoron enters a painting of her mother, sister and old teacher into the Salon and it is accepted – a great accolade for a 17-year-old girl. After this, the great Neo-Classical artist Ingres offers help to her and informal advice.

1858 – Berthe and Edma Morisot are taken to the Louvre to copy paintings. They work together for a number of years. Some of their copies are sold to visitors to the Louvre.

1859 – Mary Cassatt begins her studies at one of the most liberal-minded art academies in America, in Philadelphia. Here she develops her feminist beliefs and often speaks up in future in favour of the equal treatment of women by the art establishment.

1861 – Berthe Morisot meets Camille Corot at the Louvre and Corot encourages her to think about painting from nature in the open air.

1864 – Berthe Morisot exhibits her first paintings in the Salon and becomes a regular exhibitor there.

1866 – Mary Cassatt moves to Paris despite her father's initial objections and resolves to pursue a career in art. She begins work as a copyist at the Louvre.

1868 – Cassatt has a painting accepted by the Salon. In future years, she is contemptuous of the Salon jury for regularly rejecting works by female artists.

1869 – Edma Morisot gets married and decides not to continue painting. Marie Quivoron gets married the same year, to the artist Félix Bracquemond.

1870 – Berthe Morisot experiments with oil painting but prefers watercolours. Marie Bracquemond has a child and suffers from ill-health from then on.

1874 – Morisot becomes more comfortable with oils and begins to work as an Impressionist. She has already met some of the Impressionists, including Claude Monet, and exhibits with him and other Impressionists in their first exhibition that year. She encourages her friend and now brother-

in-law Edouard Manet to paint in an Impressionist style too. Morisot exhibits in all the Impressionist exhibitions except one.

1877 – Edgar Degas invites Mary Cassatt to exhibit with him and other Impressionists. She meets Berthe Morisot and they become good friends. Cassatt is great admirer of Degas's pastel works and resolves to work in pastel too. Both Morisot and Cassatt have success in selling their paintings, unlike some of the other Impressionists. Both paint domestic subjects, which the art-buying public find very appealing.

1887 – Marie Bracquemond angers her traditionalist husband by becoming an Impressionist and taking the advice of Degas and Monet. This resentment from her husband forces her to give up painting three years later.

1895 – Berthe Morisot dies at the relatively young age of 54.

1914 – Mary Cassatt continues painting until ill-health, particularly eye-sight problems due to cataracts, means that has to bring her artistic career to an end. She dies in 1926.

1916 – Marie Bracquemond dies having only painted privately since her husband had essentially brought her career to an end. But she continues to speak out in favour of Impressionism despite his views, and says that the style is like opening a window and allowing “the sun and the air to cascade into your house”.