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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Why the Impressionists did not create Impressionism

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Abstract

The Impressionist painters are often believed to have formed the first coherent avant-garde group to break with the establishment both stylistically and institutionally. Recent scholarship has, however, emphasized that they were not interested in collective recognition. We empirically analyze exhibition patterns and contemporary reception of the eight alternative exhibitions traditionally associated with Impressionism to demonstrate that there was no consistent group of artists who contributed to these exhibitions, and that the exhibitions were not predominantly understood as Impressionist exhibitions in contemporary reviews. To the extent that the painters were perceived as a collective there existed various competing labels of which Impressionists, Independents and Intransigents were the most important ones. We then provide a theoretical interpretation to suggest why the alternative exhibitions were organized: they contested the monopoly of the Paris Academy and the associated official Salon and provided more, and different opportunities to exhibit. But the development of a collective identity and market category of Impressionism would have required overlap of interests and collective action. This did not take place because few artists were willing to promote a collective identity at the expense of their individual reputation, and subgroups among the artists pursued different goals through the alternative exhibitions. Finally, we consider some third-party actors who had an incentive to promote Impressionism as a market category. We demonstrate that they had limited success and provide some preliminary evidence that the collective identity of Impressionism was only firmly established decades after the exhibitions were organized.

Keywords Impressionism · Market categories · Collective action · Art market · Innovation

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1 Introduction

Impressionism is undoubtedly one of the most well-known and celebrated brands in the visual arts. Artists like Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Edgar Degas all have strong reputations as individuals, but are generally recognized and perhaps even predominantly known as members of the Impressionists. Recent books call Camille Pissarro the 'Father of Impressionism' (Whiteley & Harrison, 2022) and associate Monet with 'The Birth of Impressionism' (Krämer, 2015). In this popular imagination the Impressionists are a self-conscious group of artists who broke with the status-quo and collectively invented Impressionism. Starting with the seminal study of White and White (1965) Impressionism has also been associated with institutional innovation in the art world. This line of research has been continued by various scholars who argue that the Impressionist broke open the Salon system and brought about the rise of the dealer-critic system (Delacour & Leca, 2011; Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000), which opened the path to more innovation (Delacour & Leca, 2017; Etro et al., 2020; Galenson, 2011; Galenson & Weinberg, 2001). Consequently, the Impressionists have come to be understood as an exemplary movement which inspired later avant-gardes (Armstrong, 2013; Ray, 1994).

Some scholars have, however, drawn attention to the fact that the painters associated with Impressionism were a loose collective of artists, who shared some but certainly not all (artistic) goals. A major contribution to this approach was made by the retrospective exhibition "The New Painting. *Impressionism*: 1874–1886" and the accompanying catalogue in which the eight exhibitions commonly associated with Impressionism were discussed separately (Moffett, 1986). This made clear that there was significant heterogeneity between these exhibitions and the artists who exhibited together at them. Several studies have pointed out that there is little stylistic unity between the artists involved in these exhibitions and—by association—with Impressionism (Harrison, 1993; Schapiro, 1997). Others have analyzed the divergent economic and social intentions between the various artists associated with Impressionism (Galenson & Jensen, 2007; Roos, 1996). This work has, anecdotally, identified sub-groups among the artists based on artistic goals and social affiliations.

In this paper, we provide the first quantitative analysis of the exhibition patterns of the artists who exhibited at these eight exhibitions. This enables us to make two contributions to the existing literature on Impressionism. First, we show through an empirical examination of the exhibition patterns who contributed most regularly to the exhibitions. We combine these patterns with the contemporary reception of the exhibitions in the Parisian press to demonstrate that the painters were at the time not pre-dominantly as Impressionists. Based on the combination of exhibition patterns and the contemporary reception we identify various sub-groups with heterogenous aspirations, both artistically and institutionally.

The existing literature does not provide a convincing explanation of why the painters could successfully coordinate to organize joint exhibitions but did not develop a collective identity or market category of Impressionism. Our second

contribution is to use the economic logic of collective action to suggest why there was sufficient overlap of interests to organize alternative exhibitions, but no shared incentive to invest in the collective identity or market category. Some of the painters actively hindered this collective identity because they believed it would hurt their individual reputation. We show how the logic of collective action could explain the exhibition patterns as well as the lack of coherence and stability between them. Finally, we identify some actors who had more incentives to invest in collective identities or new market categories and suggest that the popular use of Impressionism is of later origin, possibly quite recent.

It is customary in econometric studies of the market for visual art to assume that categories are persistent over time and their meaning is stable (Agnello & Pierce, 1996; Renneboog & Spaenjers, 2013). This assumption is, however, not warranted if certain market categories are post-hoc constructions, or when the meaning and breadth of categories fluctuates substantially over time. Studies of art prices often include Impressionist art and have (implicitly) assumed that this collective identity has been prominent and stable over time (e.g., Buelens & Ginsburgh, 1993; Etro et al., 2020; Mei & Moses, 2002). Our analysis questions the viability of this assumption. We also contribute to the analysis of the emergence of market categories which are of great importance in the arts (DiMaggio, 1987; Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010; Lena & Peterson, 2008). It has been demonstrated repeatedly that market categories have important effects on prices (Zuckerman, 1999) and the valuation of companies (Haans, 2019).

But for these effects to occur the market category must be established. Market categories in the arts, sometimes called collective brands, are mostly associated with the avant-garde movements of early modernism, from the Cubists to the Futurists (R. Jensen, 1994; Perloff, 2003; Sgourev, 2013). Scholars of market categories have, however, pointed out that such (market) categories are sometimes constructed ex-post by critics or other external parties (Durand & Khaire, 2017). When they are created contemporaneously they require significant investment by actors who believe they can benefit from a new market category (Jones et al., 2012). Economically speaking categories can help overcome persistent information asymmetries and uncertainty (Beckert & Rössel, 2013; Dempster, 2014; M. Jensen, 2010), and facilitate market coordination (Dekker, 2016; Karpik, 2010). This is likely to benefit not only those who invest, but also other parties who can compete within this new category (Lee et al., 2018). Our study contributes to the identification of economic reasons why collective identities and market categories (do not) emerge or are (not) actively established by studying the formation of Impressionism.

Some economic theories of innovation emphasize the role of collectives and ask the relevant question why they are an efficient solution. Caves (2000) suggests that it requires the organization of the project or production into a (project-based) firm, which is not directly relevant to these painters who were not (necessarily) dependent on others for their production. Potts (2019) argues that collaboration might be self-interested in the initial stages of the innovation process, which is characterized by high uncertainty, but would break down once there are clear market opportunities. The eight exhibitions organized between 1874 and 1886 are an attempt to capitalize on identified opportunities, rather than to explore them and his theory can therefore

explain what precedes the exhibitions, but not the actions of the painters during the years of the exhibitions.

The article proceeds as follows. Section one introduces our theoretical framework for the formation of collective identities and the economic motivations for this formation. Section two presents our data and methodology, for studying the exhibitions between 1874 and 1886. Section three presents the quantitative patterns about the exhibitions by the Impressionists and their critical reception. In section four, we interpret these patterns to analyze to which actors and factions did and did not have an incentive to invest in the market category of Impressionism.

2 Theoretical framework

Even among those who have questioned the idea of Impressionism as the first avant-garde group, artistically and institutionally, it is common to treat the Impressionists as a somewhat coherent whole (e.g., Moffett, 1986; Schapiro, 1997). To be a coherent whole requires internal coordination within the group, or by an entrepreneur, who directs efforts toward the establishment of a collective identity and possibly a new market category. It demands that individuals devote some of their time and resources to a collective cause which diverges from their personal aims. Whether it is worthwhile to invest in a new market category rather than an individual reputation depends on the institutional context, the existing position of the actors (established or newcomer), as well as the individual goals of the actors. The latter two will be part of our empirical analysis, but for the institutional context we can rely on existing studies.

The key period in the history of Impressionism is typically believed to lie between the Spring of 1874, when the first exhibition was organized on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, and 1886 when the eighth exhibition took place. At that time exhibitions were a key tool in the marketing of art, but there was one such exhibition which exceeded all others in importance: the annual official state-sponsored Salon. The Salon was the public arm of the *Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture* (hereafter the Academy), the institution which controlled every aspect of an artist's career path from the training to the building of professional reputations both commercially and artistically (Boime, 1986; Green, 1989; Mainardi, 1993). The Academy also decided which artists got accepted and which were rejected for the Salon. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this system had come under increased scrutiny for being too arbitrary, and this criticism resulted in the organization of a separate exhibition for the work of the rejected artists in 1863, the first *Salon des Refusés* (Boime, 1969; Delacour & Leca, 2011; Lobstein, 2006). This alternative Salon, which ran simultaneous and right next door to the official one, created a good deal of attention and controversy, but it also gave rise to significant mockery and found little follow-up. However, it did highlight the need for an alternative for the Salon for those artists who were not yet established but also did not fit in the official exhibition. While the Salon was not a primarily commercial space, it was the place to build a reputation, and for most visual artists in Paris the only way to the market (Green, 1989).

Several studies have suggested that what changed in Paris was that the Academy and its associated institutions had grown stagnant and inefficient (Mainardi, 1993; White & White, 1965). These scholars argued that the stale system created scope for a new (artist-)dealer-critic system which challenged the position of the Academy. This thesis has lived on and scholars have claimed that a traditional system of peer selection was replaced by an artist-dealer system or expert selection during the rise of Impressionism (Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000). But as Galenson and Jensen (2007) have demonstrated, this is more mythology than reality about a challenge to the establishment by a group of avant-garde innovators. The organization of the alternative exhibitions was primarily an attempt to establish an alternative route to market, and it did not upset the broader system in Paris. It is useful to compare the Academy to a guild institution, while the alternative exhibitions were an attempt to break open its monopoly. But to the extent that this succeeded the system became an oligopoly and did not change fundamentally until later.

Within this institutional context the alternative exhibitions were organized. To tell a full history of the emergence of the group exhibitions would require an analysis of the period of collaboration and exchange preceding these exhibitions, which has been theorized as the innovation commons phase (Dekker, 2020; Potts, 2019). This happened in the cafés and other gathering spaces in Paris, for instance among the circle of artists who gathered in Café Guerbois (Duret, 1919, pp. 7–10; Rewald, 1973, pp. 197–235). In Potts theory, the innovation commons break up when a viable innovation or product has emerged, and this is clearly the case in 1874 when the first exhibition is organized, as a new path to market. We focus on the period after the innovation commons, when the artists sought to market their art.

It is important to note that many of the artists who participated in the 1874 exhibition had already established individual reputations. When the artists organized their first alternative exhibition that year, they wanted to avoid the fate of the Salon des Refusés and ensure people understood their event was something entirely different: it should be respectable. They partially succeeded, but their effort was still widely mocked, and it was in the reviews of this first exhibition that the name Impressionists was first coined as a negative characterization of the unfinished style seen in some of the paintings.

While the term Impressionists was used to refer to the group of artists by the press from the start, we call the shows alternative exhibitions rather than Impressionist exhibitions for a reason. Only one of the eight exhibitions could be called truly Impressionist: the third show in 1877, which was a self-consciously Impressionist show including the label above the door, and the publication of a little newspaper under the same name (Brettell, 1986; Tucker, 1984). This labelling was, however, not followed-up and reviews of later alternative exhibitions even speak of ex-Impressionists as if it was a thing from the past.

In our analysis we differentiate between the label and the collective identity of Impressionism. The label Impressionism refers to the use of the concept in the popular press of the time to point collectively to the artists (Heckert, 1989; Jones et al., 2012). But in order to develop a collective identity and establish a new market category, the artists would have to actively market themselves, or be marketed by others as Impressionists (Schroeder, 2005). The creation of a collective identity requires

sustained concerted effort, something which in the economy is typically organized in a firm. The development of a collective identity was occasionally attempted, but failed, and with the exception of Gustave Caillebotte, none of the 'Impressionist' painters invested time and material resources. We demonstrate below that the organization of the exhibitions was mostly an ad-hoc affair and was not organized by a stable core-group or single entrepreneur who brought the artists together to work toward a common goal.

The economic perspective on the failure to develop a collective Impressionist identity during the period 1874–1886, suggests that it was a collective action problem in the context of the Academy-Salon system of Paris. This perspective leads to three expected patterns. First, it suggests that the more established painters and risk-averse among those who exhibited at the alternative shows were less willing to contribute to the collective identity. Second-tier artists and more risk-seeking artists were more likely to contribute. Second, it suggests that heterogenous goals should be visible among the different painters associated with Impressionism, which might lead to sub-groups with divergent interests. Third, it helps to identify a different group of actors who might have had a more direct interest in promoting a collective identity, including dealers and other intermediaries.

3 Data

For this study, we rely on empirical material related to the eight alternative exhibitions. For the analysis of the exhibitions, we use the exhibition catalogues as reproduced in Moffett (1986). These provide the most comprehensive overview of the exhibitions, although we know that they contain some omissions. In at least seven cases artists are known to have participated without being mentioned in the catalogue (*hors catalogue*): Comtesse de Luchaire in 1874, Paul Gauguin and Ludovic Piette in 1879, Adolphe-Félix Cals in 1881, and Comtesse Charles-Antoine de la Roche-Fontenilles de Rambures (née Louise Marie de Bouillé) in 1886.[1] Similarly, the number of works mentioned in the catalogues differs from the actual number exhibited during the shows. Every year, artists were late in deciding how many works and which ones they wanted to exhibit, or changed or added works while the exhibition ran. Such inconsistencies are unavoidable and to the extent we know about them, relatively small compared to the scale of the exhibitions. To maintain consistency, we decided to base our analysis exclusively on the artists and works listed in the catalogues. When exhibition numbers occasionally comprised several works, we counted the different works rather than exhibition numbers.

For the reception of these eight group exhibitions in the press we have used Berson (1996), who published the source material about the exhibitions in two volumes. In volume 1, a total of 515 contemporary commentaries and reviews are reproduced, from mostly French newspapers and magazines over the period 1874–1886. These

[1] De Rambures also participated twice under a different name: Jacques François in 1876, and Jacques-François in 1877 (Reff, 2020, p. 207).

entries consist of four types: 'announcements', which are short notices preceding the opening of the exhibition, mostly containing basic information ($N=84$); 'reviews', transcriptions of the original reviews published while the exhibition ran ($N=378$), 'illustrations' which accompanied the reviews, but were counted as separate entries by Berson ($N=41$), and 'other', a category including both lengthy essays written *post factum*, and the contributions under the directions of the group ($N=12$). We use only the reviews which provide the best contemporary source to assess how the exhibitions were perceived.

In the reviews we have analyzed which artists received attention, and which labels were used to refer to the group or collective exhibiting at the exhibition. We rely on both the number of mentions of artists and groups as well as the number of lines devoted to them. To calculate the number of lines devoted exclusively to each individual artist we excluded lists of participants which were sometimes part of the review.

4 Results

4.1 Exhibitions

Over the course of the eight exhibitions, 57 individual artists participated but the frequency by which they exhibited varies greatly. If participation can be understood as an indication or signal for loyalty to 'the cause'—whatever that cause may be—then there was relatively little loyalty to it. As is evident from Table 1, the only artist to participate in all eight alternative shows was Pissarro. Only six artists participated six or more times, and three of these are by historical standards rather minor figures—i.e., Rouart, Guillaumin, and Tillot. Furthermore, some of the names we now immediately associate with the Impressionist label only participated a limited number of times: Monet joined five times, and Renoir and Sisley only participated in four of the group exhibitions, Cézanne exhibited only twice.

It is well established, but still important to remark, that many of the artists we today regard as Impressionists did not reject the Salon and the Academy nearly as completely as the popular narrative of Impressionism suggests, nor were they systematically rejected. The sole exception was Cézanne, who attempted at least fifteen times, and was only accepted once, in 1882 (Rewald, 1973, p. 475). In Table 1 we see that only a limited number of artists broke completely with the Salon after they joined an alternative exhibition. During the early years of the alternative exhibitions many kept exhibiting with the Salon and they regarded the alternative shows more as an additional opportunity than a full-blown alternative or pure substitute for the Salon exhibitions. In 1877 a rule was implemented by Degas and supported by some others to prevent artists from taking part in further Salon exhibitions while exhibiting at the alternative shows. This had the effect of driving various artists back to the Salon, while others made decisions on a year-by-year basis. It was extremely rare that an artist would exhibit in the Salon and the alternative exhibition during the same year, even when it was allowed.

Table 1 Overview of artists who joined at least two alternative exhibitions and number of works they exhibited at the eight exhibitions

	N alt shows	N Salon '72–'86	'74	'76	'77	'79	'80	'81	'82	'86	Total works	Avg works
Pissarro, Camille	8	–	5	12	22	38	27	28	36	25	193	24.1
Degas, Edgar	7	–	10	24	25	25	12	8	–	15	119	17
Morisot, Berthe	7	2	9	20	12	–	15	7	9	14	86	12.3
Rouart, Henri (Stanislas)	7	1	11	10	5	23	12	15	–	27	103	14.7
Guillaumin, Armand	6	–	3	–	12	–	22	16	26	21	100	16.7
Tillot, Charles	6	–	–	8	14	12	14	10	–	17	75	12.5
Caillebotte, Gustave	5	–	–	8	6	25	11	–	17	–	67	13.4
Monet, Claude	5	1	12	18	30	29	–	–	35	–	124	24.8
Cals, Adolphe Félix*	4	–	6	11	10	14	–	*HC*	–	–	41	10.3
Cassatt, Mary	4	5	–	–	–	11	16	11	–	7	45	11.3
Forain, Jean–Louis	4	3	–	–	–	26	10	10	–	13	59	14.8
Gauguin, Paul*	4	1	–	–	–	*HC*	8	10	13	19	50	12.5
Levert, Jean Baptiste Léopold	4	1	3	9	6	–	8	–	–	–	26	6.5
Renoir, Pierre Auguste	4	6	7	18	21	–	–	–	25	–	71	17.8
Sisley, Alfred	4	–	5	8	17	–	–	–	27	–	57	14.3
Vignon, Victor	4	1	–	–	–	–	9	15	15	18	57	14.3
Zandomeneghi, Federico	4	2	–	–	–	5	8	5	–	12	30	7.5
Bracquemond, Félix	3	6	33	–	–	4	2	–	–	–	39	13
Bracquemond, Marie	3	2	–	–	–	2	3	–	–	6	11	3.7
Béliard, Édouard	2	2	4	8	–	–	–	–	–	–	12	6
Bureau, Pierre Isidore	2	3	4	8	–	–	–	–	–	–	12	6
Cézanne, Paul	2	1	3	–	16	–	–	–	–	–	19	9.5
Lebourg, Albert	2	3	–	–	–	30	20	–	–	–	50	25
Lepic, Ludovic Napoléon	2	15	7	43	–	–	–	–	–	–	50	25

Table 1 (continued)

	N alt shows	N Salon '72–'86	'74	'76	'77	'79	'80	'81	'82	'86	Total works	Avg works
Ottin, Léon Auguste	2	10	7	22	–	–	–	–	–	–	29	14.5
Raffaëlli, Jean–François	2	8	–	–	–	–	41	34	–	–	75	37.5
Rambures, Comtesse Charles–Antoine de la Roche-Fontenilles de*	2	–	–	8	2	–	–	–	–	*HC*	10	5
Vidal, Eugène Vincent	2	8	–	–	–	–	9	1	–	–	10	5

N Salon indicates the amount of times artists exhibited at the Salon between 1872 and 1886

*Artist who participated once hors catalogue (*HC*). Piette's second participation was HC and is therefore not included in this table

Table 2 Number of (new) artists at alternative exhibitions, 1874–1886

	1874	1876	1877	1879	1880	1881	1882	1886
Artists in catalogue	30*	19	18	14**	19	13*	9	17*
Remainers	–	13	12	7	12	13	5	5
New	30	6	6	7	7	0	4	12
First timers	30	6	4	6	5	0	0	5
Leavers	–	18	7	11	4	6	9	4
One-timers	14	3	3	1	1	0	0	5
Total Works	212 (170)	283 (252)	241	247 (246)	253 (232)	170	203	263 (249)
Most works by an artist	33	43	31	38	41	34	36	27
Least works by an artist	2	8	2	2	2	1	9	6
Average works per artist	7.1	14.9	13.4	17.6	13.3	13.1	22.6	15.5

Total works indicate number of works, in brackets are the catalogue entries

* and ** refer to one and two artists participating hors catalogue

The pattern of exhibiting at both the Salon and the alternative shows provides prima facie evidence that artists made strategic choices to build their own reputation. Those with good relations with the Academy such as Renoir, Félix Bracquemond, and Lepic were unwilling to give up their position within the establishment, even if they found it at times constraining. When Sisley decided to return to the Salon in 1879 he wrote to a friend: "It is true that our exhibitions have served to make ourselves known (…) [but] it will take a lot longer before we will be able to do without the prestige attached to the official exhibitions" (Duret, 1919, p. 76).[2]

This pattern is further confirmed in Table 2. Over the course of the eight group exhibitions, an average of 18 artists participated, ranging from 31 participants in the first exhibition to only nine in the penultimate 1882 show. These artists had much more space available than they would have received at the Salon, where they were typically allowed to display two or three works. The alternative exhibitions allowed artists to display on average about fifteen works, which also meant that they could display more variety and smaller works that might go unnoticed in the Salon environment.

The table also shows how many artists stayed part of the group exhibition (remainers), how many left (leavers), and how many new artists joined the ranks (new). These entrants were typically not novices (first timers), as most returned after not having participated for one or more years. Those who joined later were typically well-established artists, who were invited to increase the prestige of the exhibition, as was the case for Raffaëlli and Cassatt. The only exception is the final exhibition, in which Pissarro invited some of the most avant-garde artists of the day, with Seurat, Signac, and Redon.

The exhibitions are characterized by a high turnover of participants, which demonstrates that there was noticeable experimentation by the organizers. The considerable number of leavers is even more telling, as it was hard to make artists commit.

[2] All quotes are translated from the original French by the authors.

This means that it would be hard to argue that there was a core group of 'Impressionists' which emerges from these broad patterns. These data also provide no evidence for an attempt to purify the exhibitions over time, by focusing on those who fitted best to whatever goal was being pursued. Instead, new artists were brought in over time, which is more in line with an alternative exhibition space with no clear collective identity or goal. The one exception, to this pattern, is the exhibition of 1882. It was a dealer exhibition in hands of Durand-Ruel and reflects his choices and extensive inventory rather than the artists' choices or contributions (Isaacson, 1986).

4.2 The alternative exhibitions as seen by contemporaries

We have seen that the alternative exhibitions did not give rise to a well-defined group or core of painters who belonged together and had definitively broken with the Salon. Nonetheless, the exhibitions received extensive attention from the contemporary press as reflected in the nearly 380 reviews collected in Berson (1996) (Table 3).

These reviews give us a perspective on who and what was considered of importance about the exhibitions. In the early press reports mentions of Monet are most prominent, and he indeed contributed most paintings to the first four alternative exhibitions. Monet had already attained some fame prior to the first exhibitions and had functioned as the spokesperson to the press in the early stages of their endeavor (Tucker, 1986, pp. 104–105). Degas and Caillebotte were prominent in both the exhibitions and the reports of the press. More surprising is the relatively low ranking of Pissarro, but the names of some of the most consistent alternative-exhibiters such as Rouart, Guillaumin and Tillot are even less prominent in the press reports. The most surprising name at the top is that of Raffaëlli, who dominated the exhibitions and the press in 1880 and 1881. There are two main explanations for his dominant position: first, he simply had the most works in exhibition—41 in 1880 (closest to him was Pissarro with 27), and 34 in 1881 (six more than Pissarro), and Renoir and Monet were absent. Second, he already had an established status in the Academy, and some of the critics who reviewed the Impressionists within the group contrasted them to Raffaëlli (Fields, 1979).

We have checked whether the results about press prominence would change if we analyze the number of articles, rather than the number of mentions, but this only generates marginal changes to the rankings. The ranking does change when we calculate the number of lines per work of art, as shown in Table 4. This corrects the findings in Table 3, which might be skewed by the relatively high number of works a particular artists contributed to an alternative exhibition. The correction makes Caillebotte more prominent, topping the ranking three out of the five times he exhibited. Degas remains prominent, but only moves to the top of the list when Renoir and Caillebotte did not participate. It is noteworthy that Degas and Monet are less prominent after we corrected for works exhibited.

Overall, it would be hard to claim based on these data that the press consistently singled out a core of painters as most prominent. There is considerable variance in who receives the most attention, although it must be noted that some top artists, by

Table 3 Top 10 artists based on number of reviews mentioning artist, 1874–1886

	1874 ($N=36$)	1876 ($N=54$)	1877 ($N=62$)	1879 ($N=59$)	1880 ($N=43$)	1881 ($N=40$)	1882 ($N=47$)	1886 ($N=37$)
1	Degas (22)	Monet (34)	Caillebotte (41)	Degas (40)	Raffaëlli (36)	Degas (36)	Caillebotte (37)	Degas (33)
2	Monet (22)	Renoir (33)	Degas (41)	Monet (40)	Degas (34)	Raffaëlli (35)	Renoir (37)	Forain (27)
3	Pissarro (20)	Degas (32)	Monet (41)	Caillebotte (38)	Morisot (34)	Pissarro (35)	Monet (36)	Morisot (26)
4	Renoir (20)	Morisot (31)	Renoir (41)	Cassatt (28)	Caillebotte (33)	Cassatt (33)	Pissarro (35)	Zandomeneghi (26)
5	Sisley (20)	Caillebotte (28)	Morisot (34)	Forain (28)	Pissarro (29)	Morisot (29)	Sisley (33)	Pissarro (25)
6	Morisot (19)	Pissarro (28)	Cézanne (30)	Pissarro (28)	Cassatt (26)	Forain (25)	Guillaumin (25)	Seurat (24)
7	Boudin (17)	Lepic (26)	Pissarro (27)	Zandomeneghi (24)	Bracquemond, F. (24)	Rouart (20)	Gauguin (24)	Cassatt (23)
8	Cézanne (16)	Desboutin (25)	Sisley (26)	Lebourg (23)	Vidal (23)	Vidal (20)	Vignon (24)	Guillaumin (20)
9	Lépine (16)	Sisley (24)	Piette (25)	Cals (21)	Forain (22)	Vignon (20)	Morisot (22)	Signac (19)
10	Brandon (15)	Ottin (14)	Tillot (22)	Rouart (19)	Two artists	Guillaumin (19)		Rouart/Tillot (17)

Table 4 Top 10 artists based on number of lines in reviews per work exhibited, 1874–1888

	1874	1876	1877	1879	1880	1881	1882	1886
1	Renoir (40)	Caillebotte (49)	Caillebotte (104)	Bracquemond, M. (43)	Bracquemond, F. (103)	Degas (98)	Caillebotte (29)	Degas (80)
2	Cézanne (28)	Monet (29)	Renoir (41)	Cassatt (26)	Caillebotte (70)	Vidal (96)	Renoir (23)	Seurat (70)
3	Degas (24)	Desboutin (27)	Morisot (27)	Zandomeneghi (23)	Degas (59)	Cassatt (57)	Morisot (18)	Forain (37)
4	Monet (21)	Degas (21)	Degas (23)	Caillebotte (22)	Bracquemond, M. (40)	Morisot (47)	Monet (12)	Cassatt (35)
5	Sisley (15)	Morisot (17)	Monet (20)	Degas (21)	Forain (31)	Gauguin (39)	Pissarro (10)	Zandomeneghi (30)
6	Morisot (15)	Sisley (16)	Cézanne (15)	Bracquemond, F. (14)	Morisot (23)	Raffaëlli (31)	Gauguin (9)	Morisot (27)
7	Lépine (11)	Renoir (14)	Maureau (12)	Monet (13)	Raffaëlli (20)	Forain (25)	Sisley (9)	Pissarro (19)
8	Pissarro (10)	Pissarro (11)	Lamy (11)	Forain (8)	Vidal (19)	Pissarro (18)	Vignon (5)	Signac (16)
9	Guillaumin (7)	Rambures (9)	Cals (7)	Somm (7)	Cassatt (13)	Guillaumin (9)	Guillaumin (4)	Guillaumin (14)
10	Colin (5)	Béliard (6)	Rouart (7)	Lebourg (5)	Zandomeneghi (9)	Zandomeneghi (8)		Redon (13)

Table 5 Use of labels in press coverage, 1874–1886

	Impressionnistes	Intransigeants	Indépendants
1874	4 (11%)	6 (17%)	1 (3%)
1876	45 (83%)	33 (61%)	4 (7%)
1877	62 (100%)	12 (19%)	1 (2%)
1879	45 (76%)	4 (7%)	45 (76%)
1880	33 (77%)	11 (26%)	33 (77%)
1881	17 (43%)	11 (28%)	37 (93%)
1882	27 (58%)	7 (15%	45 (96%)
1886	32 (87%)	5 (14%)	10 (27%)

The number between brackets is the percentage of reviews using the term. 'Intransigents' and 'Indépendants' were only considered when used as group-designation (noun) and not as an adjective, or as a characteristic. For 'Impressionnistes', we also counted 'École (des) impressionniste(s)' and 'Impressionnalistes'

present day standards, only participated a few times, and when they did, they were prominent.

The patterns become clearer when we analyze whether the group was perceived as a collective. The first thing that stands out in the reviews is that the press perceived numerous groups and applied a wide variety of labels to them (Eisenman, 1986). These referenced the group's background, their artistic style, political orientation, as well as the alternative type of exhibition of which they were part. Most of the characterizations were negative ones, such as the "radicals of the pallet," the "brush-in-the-eye society," the "new iconoclasts," the "heretics of the brush," or the "members of the cenacle of high, conceited and rowdy mediocrity" (Berson, 1996). However creative these sobriquets might have been, three labels stood out: Impressionists, Independents, and Intransigents, the use of which we compared in Table 5.

In the press reviews about the first show in 1874 the label of Intransigents—a political *nom de plume* connected to their status as rebels against the establishment and the Academy—was the most used. But comparatively this year stands out for the relative lack of the perception of a collective identity. During the third show it appeared that Impressionists had won the day as the group label, spurned by the fact that organizers semi-formally adopted Impressionists as their name (Brettell, 1986). But after no exhibition took place in 1878, and Degas took up a more central role from 1879 onward, a total of 25 reviews spoke of the ex-Impressionists (8 in 1879, 3 in 1880, 7 in both 1881 and 1882). The perceived identity of the group and their goals remained in flux in the contemporary press, and after 1877, the competing label of Independents quickly grew in prominence and eventually surpassed the reliance on Impressionism as the dominant label in 1881 and 1882.

This is surprising because the 1882 exhibition is frequently considered the 'purest' Impressionist exhibition based on stylistic considerations (Isaacson, 1986). Organized by the dealer Durand-Ruel it brought in no new artists, and presented the work of nine artists, eight of which, who are today still frequently associated with Impressionism: Renoir, Pissarro, Morisot, Guillaumin, Caillebotte, Monet, Gauguin,

and Sisley (Vignon is the outlier). Yet, the dominant label that year was 'Independents' (96%). Finally, for the 1886 exhibition the use of Independents as a label collapsed compared to the 1882 edition. By 1886, there were various alternative group exhibitions organized by several independent associations—the most important one being the *Société des Artistes Indépendants* which formed in 1884 and organized their own regular Salon with support from the city (Angrand, 1965). The label Impressionists returned to prominence, but stylistically that would be quite misleading from today's perspective, because next to Degas's Independents there was an important section of what are now known as Post-Impressionist artists, such as Seurat, and only Morisot featured as 'traditional' Impressionist (Pissarro exhibited more experimental work). To fully understand these differences, we should analyze the factions among the painters.

4.3 The factions

The three different labels used in the press reflected different goals and factions among the painters who participated in the alternative exhibitions. The most obvious and well-defined social group was that of Degas and his circle of more conservative artists, both stylistically as well as socio-politically, and therefore institutionally. The press referred to this group most frequently as the Independents, which aligned with the aspiration of the sub-group to create a respectable alternative path to market, next to the Salon. Degas had wrote to a friend that there must be "a realist Salon" (Degas cited in Reff, 2020, p. 187). Degas was clearly the leader of this group, as all artists were recruited personally by the artist and were also known as such (Rewald, 1973). The Degas circle was numerically the strongest of the three sub-groups, with 28 artists across all exhibitions, of which eleven only joined once. Those in the Degas circle who exhibited at least twice were Félix and Marie Bracquemond, Bureau, Cassatt, Forain, de Rambures, Lebourg, Lepic, Levert, Ottin, Raffaëlli, Rouart, Tillot, Vidal, and Zandomeneghi.

The second circle was that around Pissarro, which was more progressive, and consisted of seventeen artists. Four of the group members—Cézanne, Guillaumin, Vignon, and Gauguin—had before formed the informal 'School of Pontoise' alongside Pissarro, while others, including Morisot, Béliard, and Vignon, had met Pissarro later (Brettell, 2011; Rewald, 1973, pp. 449; 522–523). From Pissarro's circle nine artists exhibited only once with the group (56.3%), and Piette once *hors catalogue*. Among these nine are the most avant-garde artists associated with the group exhibitions: Seurat, Signac, and Redon, who all joined in the final exhibition of 1886. The contrast between the two circles has been aptly characterized by Whiteley and Harrison (2022, p. 27): "For Pissarro, all that mattered was their independence; for Degas, it may have been their respectability."

The final circle is the group which had formed in Gleyre's atelier, where Monet, Renoir, and Sisley had met while studying there in the period 1862–1864. Alongside Pissarro and Morisot, these three men can be considered as the core Impressionists (Duret, 1878, p.31). Although to us such a characterization is anachronistic, they shared the broad brushstroke which is often believed to be characteristic of the

Impressionist style. Monet, Renoir, and Sisley all had an established reputation and had the possibility to exhibit at the Salon. We have added Caillebotte to the Gleyre circle for our quantitative analysis. Originally, Frédéric Bazille was the fourth artist in the Gleyre quartet, but he was killed during the Franco-Prussian War (1870). Caillebotte can be understood as a substitute for their deceased companion, taking "the place of a comrade and a patron" (Rewald, 1973, p. 349; Varnedoe, 1987, pp. 12–19).

Table 6 shows that the Degas circle contributed most paintings to the alternative exhibitions, with the exception of 1877, the year of the most self-conscious presentation of an Impressionist exhibition, and 1882 when Durand-Ruel wanted to include him, but only at the expense of other artists from his circle, which Degas refused.

The press recognized the existence and importance of these factions, and it appears to have favored one faction over the others. Table 7 shows the amount of attention the press paid to the different circles in the reviews. Only in 1974 the percentages do not add up to 100% because there were some artists who participated who did not clearly belong to one of the circles we identified. As Tables 6 and 7 together demonstrate, the press consistently devoted relatively more attention to the Gleyre circle proportional to the number of works and artists this circle contributed. The press thus appears to have had a sense of relative artistic importance of the different circles who contributed to the exhibitions, as well as those artists who were at the core of the collective.

This is, for instance, visible if we examine those who were considered as not belonging to the group in the press, sometimes called the *faux-frères*, or fake brothers. In counting these faux-frères we have marked all artists who the critics felt for stylistic, ideological, or other reasons were outliers. As a reviewer indicated in 1879: "every garden has its caterpillars, especially when it is poorly maintained" (Berson 1996, 248).

Table 8 makes clear that most artists who were considered caterpillars or faux-frères in the press were members of the Degas circle; only Caillebotte, Cals, and Vignon were not. In 1882 none of the participants were 'accused' of not belonging—another indication that it was the Degas circle which was considered the outlier at the alternative exhibitions by the press. The fact that frequent contributors such as Degas (7), Rouart (7) and Tillot (6) are labeled as faux-frères indicates that at least some critics had developed a more stylistically oriented definition of what the group of visual artists was about, since it was impossible to think of these individuals as outsiders based on their prominence in the exhibitions. We have also analyzed the painters who were described as missing from the exhibitions, but this did not generate significant results, it merely replicated what could be observed based on Tables 1 and 3, about who was prominent at the previous exhibition and absent at the next.

5 Personal and collective interests

In the previous section, we have presented the results of our quantitative analysis of the alternative exhibitions and their critical reception. Where necessary we already provided some context about specific actions and motivations, but to arrive at a

Table 6 Contribution of different circles, 1874–1886

	1874	1876	1877	1879	1880	1881	1882	1886
Degas Circle								
Artists	14 (47%)	10 (53%)	6 (33%)	10 (71%)	13 (68%)	8 (62%)	–	7* (41%)
Works	114 (54%)	170 (60%)	56 (23%)	141 (57%)	161 (64%)	94 (55%)	–	97 (37%)
Pissarro Circle								
Artists	8 (27%)	4 (21%)	5 (28%)	1** (7%)	5 (26%)	5 (38%)	5 (56%)	10 (59%)
Works	36 (17%)	50 (18%)	93 (39%)	38 (15%)	81 (32%)	76 (45%)	99 (49%)	166 (63%)
Gleyre Circle + Caillebotte								
Artists	3 (10%)	4 (21%)	4 (22%)	2 (14%)	1 (5%)	–	4 (44%)	–
Works	24 (11%)	52 (18%)	74 (31%)	54 (22%)	11 (4%)	–	104 (51%)	–

Table 7 Press prominence of different circles—number of lines per work and (%) of total lines, 1874–1886

Faction	1874	1876	1877	1879	1880	1881	1882	1886
Degas Circle	29.8 (28%)	122.7 (40%)	128.3 (21%)	153.6 (58%)	217.1 (65%)	367.6 (68%)	–	306.3 (49%)
Pissarro Circle	39.1 (21%)	138.3 (18%)	155.8 (21%)	51.3 (7%)	151.2 (17%)	277.8 (32%)	166.0 (32%)	256.0 (51%)
Gleyre Circle + Caillebotte	207.3 (41%)	320.8 (42%)	548.3 (58%)	460.5 (35%)	769.0 (18%)	–	433.8 (68%)	–

Table 8 Artists identified as 'not belonging' in at least two years, 1876–1886

	1874	1876	1877	1879	1880	1881	1882	1886
Degas Circle								
Bracquemond, F	3			6	10			
Bracquemond, M				7	5			5
Cassatt				1	2			1
Degas		1	2	2	1			1
Forain				2	1	1		4
Lebourg				11	9			
Raffaëlli					23	19		
Rambures		1	1					
Rouart		2	6	8	9	1		4
Tillot		2	9	7	10	5		6
Vidal					14	7		
Zandomeneghi				7	2	1		1
Pissarro Circle								
Vignon					6	4		2
Gleyre Circle								
Caillebotte		1		1	1			
Other								
Cals	2		5	9				

complete picture of why the artists did not promote themselves as Impressionists, we must return to our theoretical framework of individual motivations and collective action. We do so based on the three expected patterns identified at the end of the theoretical framework, regarding the expected individual benefits, the divergent goals of the circles, and the different incentives for certain (third-party) actors.

5.1 Expected benefits

To understand the expected benefits for the artists involved with the alternative exhibitions, we must clearly separate the gains from the exhibitions themselves and the potential gains from a collective identity. The major expected benefit from the alternative exhibitions was that it offered space that the Salon did not reliably offer, as well as more space, and thus more space for variety. The Salon rejected some artists and restricted the number of works which could be displayed. These benefits were recognized by nearly all artists, both the more established ones as well as those who were still building a reputation, and were sufficient to ensure that the alternative exhibitions were organized more or less regularly featuring an interesting group of participants. Important to point out, however, is that after Degas enforced the rule that artists exhibiting in the alternative shows could no longer associate themselves with the Salon, Renoir and Sisley opted for the Salon, followed a year later by Monet (Rewald, 1973, p. 390). This indicates that not all artists believed that the

expected benefits of the alternative exhibitions exceeded those of the Salon. In a letter to Durand-Ruel from March 1881 Renoir explicates his economic motivations in the most direct way possible: "My submission to the Salon is purely based on commercial considerations" (Renoir, March 1881, as cited in Venturi, 1968, p. 115). Many of the artists saw the exhibitions, both at the Salon and outside of it, as opportunities to establish an individual reputation. The alternative exhibitions to them were complementary platforms, not a commitment to a particular collective identity.

The expected benefits of a collective identity differed strongly depending on pre-existing reputations and the willingness to take risks. The more established and/or more risk-averse painters believed they had more to lose by dissociating with the Salon, especially when it meant an association with an ideologically or artistically identifiable collective as Pissarro envisioned. Renoir, for example, was opposed to investing in a collective identity because he was afraid that it gave the illusion that they sought to be a school (Vollard, 1920, p. 66). The same is true for Degas, who managed to reduce the risk of a collective identity as much as possible by keeping the artistic and ideological orientation of the group as vague as possible, and by expanding the number of artists who exhibited there.

Younger artists as well as those who were more risk-seeking, sometimes because they believed they had little chance of being accepted by the Salon, were expected to be most willing to contribute. But even for them there were good reasons why investing in a collective identity was an unattractive proposition. There were no successful or well-known precedents of such efforts, which might explain why there is no good evidence that the less established or second-tier artists did invest in a collective identity. Also relevant was that the disaster of the Salon des Refusés of a decade before was still fresh on their mind. Although this was an institution rather than an identity, the label was used to mock a group of artists associated with it. In the first couple of years the Impressionist designation, which originated with their critics, carried mainly negative connotations. As a result, some of the individuals involved, for instance Degas, sought to prevent a strong agonistic identity of the alternative exhibitions vis-à-vis the Salon.

5.2 Divergent goals

This brings us quite naturally to the divergent goals of the different individuals and in particular the sub-groups we identified in Sect. 3.3. The Degas circle was mostly interested in establishing a respectable independent alternative to the Salon, while the Pissarro circle had a more radical point of view, looking to break with the established system and advocate artistic innovation. Finally, the Gleyre circle considered the alternative exhibitions mostly as a steppingstone to legitimacy and ultimately acceptance in the establishment. Worth pointing out is that the Gleyre circle did not start out with this vision; initially their ideas were in line with those of Degas, but ultimately their attitude evolved toward a pragmatic approach. These alternative visions and the associated motivations to exhibit pulled in different directions as is visible in the evolution of the exhibitions.

Degas, for instance, focused on attracting artists who could bestow legitimation through association—artists who had obtained critical recognition and whose reputation could help signal the respectability of the alternative exhibition. This strategy was particularly prominent in 1874, but as a broader vision it also shaped the exhibitions during the period 1879–1881. This is visible in Table 6 where we can see that during these years the majority of artists and works came from his circle and existed of predominantly established artists. The best illustration is Raffaëlli, who had a pre-existing individual reputation and who received extensive attention in the press. But he was also the artist who was most frequently identified as a faux-frère. Degas' goal of the creation of an exhibition format independent from the Salon meant that he was quite willing to invest in collective endeavors such as catalogues, promotional material, and the acquisition of new artists. But he was not interested at all in a collective identity, such as Impressionism. He aimed for institutional legitimacy and an alternative route to market, not an alternative stylistic direction.

Those who were less indifferent or hostile to the Salon, like the Gleyre group, here minus Caillebotte, treated the alternative exhibitions as a kind of sub-Salon or 'waiting room' for artists to mature before re-entering the Salon. The press confirmed this vision repeatedly, and they would comment regularly that artists had outgrown the alternative exhibition and should join the Salon where they deserved to be. However, there were some reviewers who sided with the radical perspective and accused artists who did transfer to the Salon of abandoning ship or selling out. One reviewer's claim that "from the moments they can be accepted at the Salon, they turn to opportunism and desert" is one of the characteristic examples of this sentiment (Berson, 1996, p.341).

Already in the lead-up to the first exhibition these different aspirations were visible and created tensions. Pissarro had initially wanted to organize the group as a kind of union, yet Degas and Renoir resisted this and, in the end, the only form of formal organization that was agreed upon was a corporation with a more commercial than social goal. Some of Pissarro's key principles prevailed, including equal rights for all associates and the establishment of an administrative council, but it was ensured that the corporation had a general rather than an ideological character (Rewald, 1973, pp. 309–316; Tucker, 1986, pp. 93–106). This was also reflected in the name, which was adopted upon Renoir's suggestion: the 'Société Anonyme des artistes-peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc.' The corporation was only used for the 1874 exhibition, and was liquidated by the end of that year, after which the organization of the seven subsequent exhibitions became an ad-hoc affair (Rewald, 1973, p. 336). These tensions remained present and in 1877 Pissarro briefly flirted with abandoning the group to join the anti-bourgeois society *L'Union.* Ultimately, the higher quality standards of the artists in the alternative exhibitions kept Pissarro from leaving (Brettell, 1986, p. 190), but the inability to establish a formal organization with a clear goal illustrates the problem of collective action well.

In hindsight, the 1877 exhibition, the only one that was semi-formally presented as an Impressionist exhibition, stands out as the most convincing attempt at collective action between all three different factions. This was largely due to the efforts of Caillebotte (Brettell, 1986, pp. 189–192). Caillebotte had a hand in every aspect of

this exhibition, from dealing with the complex internal politics and tensions between the artists, arranging the exhibition space and other practicalities, and ensuring that everything was run professionally. After hefty discussions and a vote in February, the group decided to use the name *Exposition des impressionnistes* on banners, posters, and advertisements spread throughout the city, in the official invitations sent out to the press, and on the sign hung above the entrance. Finally, there was the magazine that was published four times while the exhibition ran, named *L'Impressionniste.* Georges Rivière, their in-house, yet mediocre art critic, was responsible for the content of the articles. The printed catalogue, however, made no reference to Impressionism or the Impressionists; only the names of the exhibiting artists were mentioned. To the extent that there was investment in a collective identity in 1877, it was reluctant.

If the promotional strategy of the 1877 exhibition was an experiment many individuals must have felt it failed, because there was no follow-up: "After the exhibition, the group split apart again, each artist going his own way" (Brettell, 1986, p. 202). Isaacson (1980) has described this period as the 'crisis of Impressionism', a characterization that is anachronistic in its use of Impressionism but his analysis demonstrates well the multi-faceted nature of the conflicts between the factions.

In the subsequent years, when Degas controlled the exhibitions, Caillebotte did not give up his attempts to bring the factions together. But differences and mixed alliances made this difficult. Caillebotte, wrote Pissarro that he believed, that they should continue: "only in an artistic direction, the only one which is interesting for us in the end" (Caillebotte, January 24, 1881, as cited in Berhaut, 1994, p. 275). Even though Caillebotte respected Degas' talent, he was angered by what he considered to be the latter's attempts to dilute the artistic identity of the group's identity by bringing in artists lacking talent and/or without links to the group, naming Raffaëlli in particular. Although his personal aspirations were in an artistic direction, Pissarro was unwilling to break with Degas and his friends who had proven to be strongholds of the exhibitions, unlike Renoir, Sisley, and Monet who had jumped ship.

The tensions illustrate the divergent goals of the different individuals and the circles they were associated with. There was sufficient overlap of interests and goals to organize the alternative exhibitions, but more substantive agreement on where the group could and should head as a collective was not achieved. Even the overlap to organize the exhibitions was not always present as is clear from the years in which no alternative show took place, or when one of the factions did not join.

5.3 Other actors

In the previous section we have seen that no artist, with the exception of Caillebotte, was directly interested in a collective identity. But the collective labels which referred to the group nonetheless circulated widely as we demonstrated in Table 5. The press undoubtedly shaped the way that the alternative exhibitions and the collective of artists associated with them was perceived. It is well recognized that many actors in the art world contribute to the institutionalization of market categories, such as museum curators, auction houses, and art historians (Braden & Teekens,

2020). Some of these actors do so primarily retrospectively, but we can also identify several contemporary actors who had a role and an *interest* in the collective identity of the group.

Théodore Duret wrote his *Les peintres impressionnistes* in 1878, he singled out five artists who formed what he called "*le groupe primordial des Impressionnistes,*" Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley and Morisot (Duret, 1878, p. 31). While the impact of the booklet appears to have been limited at the time, such contemporary interpretive efforts can help establish or solidify a collective identity, even despite efforts of individual artists to avoid such collective notions. It was published in a period when the group was falling apart, and Caillebotte wanted to use it as promotion for the 1878 exhibition, but the exhibition did not materialize (Pickvance, 1986, pp. 243–246). In this context it is also important to note that Duret focused on one faction plus Pissarro in his booklet and thus confirmed one of the ruptures among the artists.

Another group of actors who are likely to have an interest in the promotion of a collective identity are dealers. Most dealers in Paris during the period represented artists with established reputations in the official Academy system. Some have emphasized the role of dealer Paul Durand-Ruel as an entrepreneurial dealer who acted as path-breaker for the modernist avant-gardes (Armstrong, 2013; Patry, 2014), a characterization which is helped by the autobiography of Durand-Ruel (Durand-Ruel, 1939). Part of this mythology is that he was the only dealer willing to work with the Impressionists, while in reality several other dealers were involved in the organization of the different shows in different capacities, including Hector Brame, Père Martin, Victor Poupin, Alphonse Legrand, and Louis Latouche (Distel, 1989, pp. 33–51). In contrast to Durand-Ruel, these dealers represented only one or a handful artists, and not in any consistent way, and thus had no direct incentive to engage in the establishment of a collective identity.

Even a more entrepreneurial dealer like Paul Durand-Ruel, tended to stick to artists who had achieved some recognition in the official system, or who had enjoyed a level of critical success (Chagnon-Burke, 2012). There is some reason to believe that Durand-Ruel contributed to the market category of Impressionism, but that evidence relates mostly to the period when the alternative exhibitions had (almost) come to an end and occurred more in the American market than in Paris. Where in Paris the artists' individual reputations outweighed the collective identity, Durand-Ruel chose to bring them to the USA under the name 'Works in Oil and Pastel by the Impressionists of Paris' (Thompson, 2020). But this, like other efforts, was not followed up. The exhibition of 1882 in Paris, although also relatively late, was the one exception. This was essentially a dealer exhibition: even though Pissarro and Caillebotte tried to mediate, it was Paul Durand-Ruel who organized the show, provided most of the exhibited works, and made final decisions sometimes against the expressed wishes of the artists (see e.g., Rewald, 1973, p. 467–469; Isaacson, 1986, p. 377–378). His motivation to get this involved in the organization, however, does not appear to have been an interest in Impressionism as such. The dire economic circumstances of the time as well as the prospect that the different individuals who once seemed to form a collective had fallen apart motivated him to develop an interest to invest in the reputations of those artists from whom he had assembled an extensive stock of works

Table 9 Exhibition titles featuring 'Impressionist' painters between 1900 and 1974

Elements in title	Percentage	*N*	1900–1924	1925–1949	1950–1974
Impressionism and derivatives	7	334	60	124	150
Name(s) Impressionist artist(s)	19	968	200	386	382
References to Modern	5	260	81	113	66
Name collector	11	570	41	111	418
Name art dealer	1	65	18	17	30
No title	7	352	132	148	72
Other	52	2582	459	837	1286

The titles can include the combination of different elements (Impressionism, artist names, collectors, etc.), meaning that some titles are counted in multiple categories

over the years. Whether his interest in the show was born out of necessity or not, the 1882 exhibition was relatively successful and saw the return of the artists from the Gleyre group, but also the departure of Degas who refused to abandon his circle.

Finally, we must return to Caillebotte once more, but in a different role. He was both painter and patron to the artists, and from the start had his eye on the future. The first version of his will from 1876 included the condition that a sufficient sum of his inheritance had to go the organization of another exhibition of the group known as the 'Intransigents or Impressionists'. Furthermore, upon his death, his entire collection of over sixty works was to be donated to the French State (Berhaut, 1994, p. 281). While the gift was only partially accepted in 1894, the Caillebotte bequest did become the first major contribution to the national collection which ended up in the *Musée des impressionnistes*. This museum opened in the Jeu de Paume in 1947, a year after John Rewald published the first edition of his seminal work *The History of Impressionism* (1946).

Looking at actors who have contributed something to the collective identity of Impressionism, however, risks missing the bigger picture. Table 5 suggests that the great majority of reviews in later years relied on collective labels, but these competed with individual reputations. The relevant question is thus not merely whether the collective label was used, but whether it had anything like the appeal of the traditional individual reputations around which the art market was organized. From related work in progress, we were able to draw some data which shows that the collective label was marginal at best in the period following the alternative exhibitions, as can be seen in Table 9.

This table is based on all exhibitions organized between 1900 and 1974 which are mentioned in the available catalogues raisonnés of the artists in Table 1. These are available for nine artists: Pissarro, Degas, Morisot, Caillebotte, Monet, Gauguin, Renoir, Sisley, and Cézanne. The data demonstrate that the Impressionist label could seemingly not be relied upon to draw an audience. It was more common to refer to individual artists, or even the collector. Mentions of Impressionism in the exhibition title for the entire period do not exceed a meagre 7%. This is a clear indication that subsequent actions by third parties such as curators, dealers, and art historians must have done much to establish Impressionism as a dominant market category.

6 Conclusion

In this paper we have quantitatively confirmed and provided further evidence that there was no clearly defined group of Impressionists. The eight alternative exhibitions organized between 1874 and 1886, which are associated with Impressionism, came about as the result of a minimal overlap of material interests and aspirations between different circles of artists. The involved artists were keen to contribute, for diverging reasons, to alternative exhibitions outside the Salon to develop their individual reputations. The Degas circle was interested in a reputable alternative to break the monopoly of the Salon, the Pissarro circle was mostly motivated by artistic innovation, and the Gleyre circle regarded the exhibitions as a stepping stone to further improve their official status at the Salon. When insufficient overlap of interests was found, which happened regularly, there was no alternative exhibition that year, or one of the circles did not join. But there was no concerted effort among the artists to develop a collective identity.

Retrospectively, we can identify actors who fit the mythology of the Impressionists as a self-conscious avant-garde group relatively well. For instance, Pissarro who regarded the alternative exhibitions as a form of protest against the establishment. Or Caillebotte who attempted to bring the different factions together into a well-curated group of high-quality artists who would collectively be known as the Impressionists. But this is mostly an anachronistic endeavor, which ignores the fact that the great majority of artists were reluctant to market themselves as part of a collective, or, like Renoir, actively resisted it. The greatest danger of this anachronistic perspective is that we continue to conceptualize the alternative exhibitions exclusively as the birthplace of Impressionism. Their function was not that of a platform for Impressionism, but as an alternative route to market for various circles of artists who for whatever reason felt constrained by the Academy-Salon system. It was this model which in Paris was emulated by other independent associations who organized alternative exhibitions.

We have argued that the unwillingness of individual artists to invest in a collective identity or market category could be explained through the lens of the theory of collective action. We identified three conditions which would make it likelier that the collective action problem is overcome. First, when the artists are at similar stages of their career it is more likely that they are equally motivated to invest in a collective identity, rather than individual reputation. Second, when aspirations are aligned artists are more likely to be able to engage in collective action, this was not the case for the different sub-groups who participated in and organized the alternative exhibitions. Third, an entrepreneur who coordinates and aligns actions is of importance. Caillebotte tried to take up this role, but only succeeded in 1877, and the success was short-lived and in the short-run inconsequential.

An additional reason why there were low expected benefits to a collective identity is the fact that there were no positive relevant precedents of this type of collective identity. We have not provided a formal model to explain the lack of contributions to a collective identity but have provided a plausible economic explanation for why this might have happened. Future research should therefore analyze whether and why

this situation was different for other early modernist avant-garde groups, who did more actively market themselves as a collective such as the Futurists or *Die Brücke*. If we are correct that Impressionism did not become a collective identity or market category in the formative period and was not a radical avant-garde as is frequently believed, we might question when this mythology took hold. Jensen's *Marketing Modernism* (1994) suggests that this happened around 1900 when other self-conscious avant-garde groups created an Impressionist founding myth, which presented them as the first avant-garde group. One could add to this contribution, the presentation of Impressionism in the memoirs of Durand-Ruel (Durand-Ruel, 1939), the narrative presented by their contemporary Duret (1878, 1919), and later in Rewald's *History of Impressionism*. But a more precise analysis of this later development of the market category Impressionism should take place in future research, which should address the question who was motivated or interested to establish the market category of Impressionism more prominently.

The study of the establishment of market categories is crucial for the analysis of the art market. If market categories come about later, or change meaning over time, econometric studies of art prices cannot rely on categories like Impressionism over long periods of time, without establishing that the category was both prominent to contemporaries and stable in meaning. Art historians have engaged in (quantitative) reception histories of artists and collectives, which have inspired our research methods here, and which could help inform such econometric studies.

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