

Georges Seurat

(Zhorzh Soo-rah)
(1848 - 1903)

Seurat was born in Paris, France in 1859. His family was very comfortable financially so he was never forced to work for a living and was able to pursue his interest in art at a very young age. He first studied sculpture and then was admitted to the École des Beaux-Art (boh-zar), a prestigious French art school at the age of 17. He spent a great deal of time at the Louvre copying art of famous painters.

He was widely read and interested in scientific theories on the uses and effects of color and light. He began by exploring aspects of light in white and black drawings. Seurat was as much of a scientist as an artist. He tried to establish a system to achieve the vibrant colors that the impressionists used. The method he came up with was to place small touches of unmixed color side by side on the canvas. This meant that the eye mixed the colors as the painting was observed.

Seurat began to paint using this method. This technique became known as “pointillism”. Seurat applied his paint in thousands of tiny dots. His spots of colors might have been squares, triangles, circles or tiny lines. Seurat preferred using the word “divisionism” to describe this technique.

Seurat’s work was very influential. However, his followers never achieved the skill that he had. He planned his pictures with extraordinary care. Seurat died very suddenly at the age of 31 in 1891, apparently from meningitis. He left behind over four hundred drawings, six completed sketchbooks and about sixty canvases, five of them very large. He was survived by his wife and a year-old son.