ART Club MONTHLY

DECEMBER 2026 • TEENS & ADULTS 13+

Georges Seurat

A Sunday on La Grande Jatte (1884 to 1886)



THIS MONTH'S PROMPT

"Summer in winter. Paint a warm, lively summer gathering, built from dots."

"Art is harmony."

Georges Seurat, in a letter written in 1890

☀️ A Sunday on La Grande Jatte



A Sunday on La Grande Jatte, 1884

Painted 1884 to 1886, border added 1888 to 1889 · Oil on canvas · 207.5 × 308.1 cm (about 7 × 10 feet) · Art Institute of Chicago

It is a summer Sunday on La Grande Jatte, an island in the Seine River just outside Paris. Couples stroll under parasols, a woman fishes at the water's edge, a man plays a trumpet, children wander and sailboats drift past. Almost everyone is perfectly still, and almost no one talks to anyone else. Step close and the whole afternoon breaks apart into small dots and dashes of unmixed color. Step back and your eye puts it all together again.

💛 The Story Behind the Painting

Seurat was 24 when he began. He made trip after trip to the island, filling sketchbooks and small wooden panels with studies of the light, the trees and the people. He worked on the giant canvas from 1884 into 1885, then returned to it and reworked the surface with the small strokes of pure color that made it famous. It debuted in May 1886 at the eighth and final Impressionist exhibition. The critic Félix Fénéon championed it, and the new style soon had a name: Neo-Impressionism.

🔍 Look Closer



The pet monkey
On a leash at the right edge



The trumpet player
Playing by the water



The girl in white
At the very center



The butterfly
Floating over the grass

Color, not outlines: The "green" grass is really a field of yellow, orange, green and blue strokes. Seurat placed colors side by side instead of blending them on the palette, so the mixing happens in your eye.

The stillness: Most figures appear in strict profile or face straight out, like a procession carved on an ancient frieze. Seurat gave ordinary Parisians on a day off a calm, almost timeless dignity.

The painted border: In 1888 to 1889 he restretched the canvas and added a painted border of dots that shifts color to suit the scene beside it.

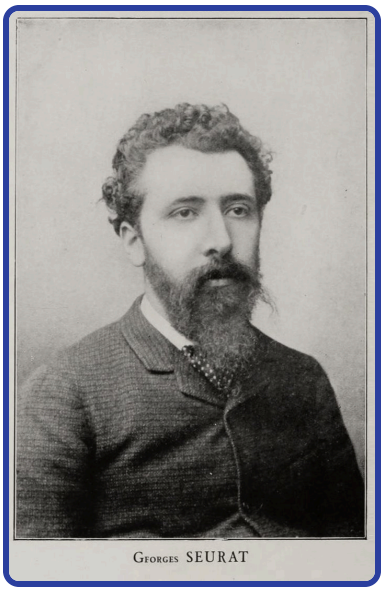
A faded glow: Some of the bright yellow paint Seurat used was zinc yellow, which has darkened toward brown over time. The grass once glowed even more than it does today.

👨‍🎨 Meet Georges Seurat

Georges Seurat

🇫🇷 French Painter • Neo-Impressionism
Born: December 2, 1859, Paris • Died: March 29, 1891, Paris (age 31)

Seurat studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris under Henri Lehmann, then spent years drawing in black conté crayon on rough paper, building images out of light and shadow instead of lines. When he turned to color, he approached it like a scientist.



Georges Seurat in 1888 (unidentified photographer, public domain)

🧪 A Method With a Name

Seurat called his approach chromoluminarism. Today most people call it pointillism, from the French word *point*, meaning dot. His friend Paul Signac carried the method forward after Seurat's death.

🚫 Rejected, Then Independent

The official Paris Salon rejected his first huge canvas, *Bathers at Asnières*. In 1884 Seurat helped found the Société des Artistes Indépendants, an exhibition with no jury and no prizes, where any artist could show.

🎪 Gone Too Soon

Seurat died suddenly in 1891 at just 31, after a short illness whose cause is still uncertain. He kept his personal life private, including his partner Madeleine Knobloch and their baby son. His last painting, *The Circus*, was left unfinished.

🔬 Color as Science

Seurat studied the color theories of the chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul and the physicist Ogden Rood, who showed that colors placed side by side change how we see each other. Complements such as orange and blue make each other look more intense.

🐒 The Monkey on a Leash

The elegant woman at the right walks a pet monkey, an exotic and fashionable pet in 1880s Paris. Historians still debate what Seurat meant by it, which is part of the fun of looking.

🎭 A Painting That Became a Musical

Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine imagined Seurat at work on this canvas in the musical *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), which won the 1985 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Two years later, the painting starred in a famous museum scene in the film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, where a character stares deeper and deeper into the little girl in white.

🏛️ Where Is It Today?

The Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, USA



The Art Institute of Chicago on Michigan Avenue, vintage postcard. Tichnor Brothers, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Chicago collectors Frederic Clay Bartlett and Helen Birch Bartlett bought the painting in 1924, and it entered the Art Institute's collection in 1926. In 1958 it was on loan to the Museum of Modern Art in New York when a fire broke out there, and it was carried to safety next door. In 2022 the museum gave it a new white frame, in the style of the light, plain frames Seurat preferred.

🎁 What's In Your Art Box

- Green oil paint
- Blue oil paint
- Yellow oil paint
- Red oil paint
- White oil paint
- Black oil paint

✨ **Stippling tool for building dots and texture**

- ✓ Impasto medium for body and faster drying
- ✓ 3 brushes
- ✓ 8×10" stretched canvas
- ✓ Mixing palette
- ✓ This art history pamphlet

YOUR CREATIVE PROMPT

"Summer in winter. Paint a warm, lively summer gathering, built from dots."

A picnic, a beach day, a backyard barbecue, a crowded pool, a street festival at dusk. Who is there, and where does the light fall? What does warmth look like when it is built one touch of color at a time? There is no right answer and no tutorial here. The interpretation is yours.

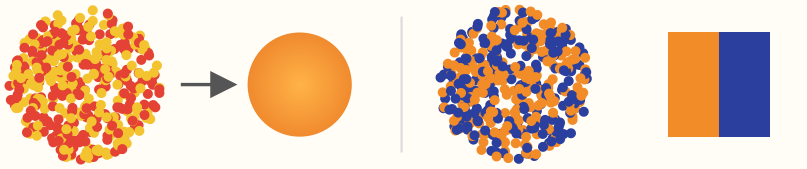
Start here. Go anywhere.

Everything in your box is ready to go, so you can create start to finish with just what's inside. But think of it as your starting point, not your limit. Mix in your own paints, try a bigger canvas, or use our canvas as your practice run before your final piece. Many of our members do exactly that. There's no wrong way to do it. The goal is simply to get you inspired.

Paint colors are chosen for each month's painting. Exact shades may vary from box to box.

🎨 Studio Notes: Working With Your Materials

Not instructions, just how these materials behave, so you can spend your energy on ideas.



Up close: red + yellow

Step back: your eye sees orange

Up close: orange + blue

Complements: each look brighter

Let the eye do the mixing. Small touches of unmixed color placed side by side blend into new, livelier colors from a few steps away. Step back often.

Tints carry the sunshine. Mixing a color with white before you dot gives you the pale, glowing values of a bright afternoon.

Build in layers. Oil stays wet for days, so dots pressed into wet paint will smear. Block in large areas thinly, let them set, then dot over the top. A little impasto medium helps each dot hold its shape and dry faster. Use it in a ventilated space.

Vary your marks. The stippling tool lays down fields of texture quickly, while the tip of a small brush gives tiny, precise dots for faces and edges. Seurat mixed dots with short dashes.

Clean up without solvents. Wipe brushes and your stippling tool on a paper towel, work a little baby oil or vegetable oil into the bristles, then wash with dish soap and warm water.

💡 Seurat Palette Mixing Notes

- Blue + yellow = **soft natural green** for sunlit grass.
- Red + yellow = **warm orange** for late sunlight and parasols.
- Blue + a touch of red = **cool violet** for shadows on the grass.
- Green + a touch of red = **olive brown** for tree trunks and earth.

Any color + white = **a sunlit tint** for glowing highlights.

📸 Share Your Work

We love seeing how every artist interprets the same masterpiece. Tag us for a chance to be featured on our site and socials!

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