Lecture summary:

This lecture examines the emergence of Neo-Impressionism through the prism of its principal exponent, Georges Seurat (1859-1891), whose short life-span yet significant artistic production mirrors that of his colleague the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890).

It was the art critic Félix Fénéon who first coined the term 'Neo-Impressionism' to describe the paintings of Georges Seurat, Paul Signac, Camille Pissarro, and his son Lucien Pissarro, shown at the eighth and last Impressionist exhibition in Paris in 1886. In Belgium, where French Neo-Impressionism made its debut in 1887 at the exhibition of Les XX, Théo Van Rysselberghe adopted Seurat's idiosyncratic technique, as did other avant-garde artists. Following the early death of Seurat it was Signac who gave Neo-Impressionism its momentum: inheriting the so-called Divisionist banner he worked tirelessly in its support. It was Signac who introduced Seurat's system of color harmony to the vanguard critics and writers who would champion it, and published the influential treatise _D’Éugène Delacroix au Néo-Impressionisme_ (1899): an argument for Neo-Impressionism as the logical and legitimate successor to Impressionism. In Signac's own work, the rigor and restraint of his early paintings gave way to a bold and luxuriant palette in later years. After 1890 Camille Pissarro abandoned the pointillist method as too constraining.

Focusing on Seurat's combination of innovation and tradition in his methods, the lecture outlines his conventional early development first under Julien Lequien at the Ecole Municipale de Sculpture et Dessin in Paris, and then between 1878 and November 1879 at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts under Henri Lehman, a pupil of Ingres. Seurat combined the systematic methods he learned at the Ecole and through his espousal of the traditionalist ideas of art critic Charles Blanc (founder of the French art journal _Gazette des Beaux-Arts_) in his _Grammaire des arts du dessin_ (1867, 1876), with a scientific formalisation of Impressionist colour theory. His career can be divided into three phases: the drawings; the first major paintings up to 1886; the final Neo-Impressionist period. We shall examine his extraordinarily systematic, almost obsessional approach to art through his drawing and painting techniques, looking especially at the play between _plein air_ and studio work. The pristine brilliance of his tonal drawings will be considered a key structural component allied in painting to his Divisionist complementary colour and Pointillist touch. These in turn will be viewed as essential elements in conjunction with his modern, often banal subject matter in producing what he considered a radically democratic modern art.
Slide list:

1. Cover slide
2. Anon., Photo of Seurat, c.1889?
4. Seurat (French, 1859–1891) Portrait of Aman-Jean (Salon 1883) Conté crayon on paper; (31.2 x 24 cm) Metropolitan Museum New York
5. Signac: *Opus 217. Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones, and Tints*, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890, o/c, 29 x 36 1/2" (73.5 x 92.5 cm). MoMA New York
6. Seurat – *Ascetic (Indian Beggar)*, c.1879. graphite on paper, Getty Museum
7. Seurat, *Stonebreakers, Le Raincy*, 1879-81. conté crayon on Ingres paper, 30.8 x 37.5 cm MoMA New York
10. Seurat, *Landscape, lile de France*, 1882, o/c 32.5 x 40.5 cm (Portrait 6) Musée des Beaux Arts, Bordeaux, France
11. Pissarro, *Plein air figure, or Peasant Digging*, 1882. o/c private collection
12. Seurat, *The Gardener*, 1882-3, oil on panel 15.9 x 24.8 cm Metropolitan MoA New York

**Left:** Seurat, *Bathers, Asnières*, 1883-4 (NG London)

**Right:** *Sunday Afternoon on the Ile de la Grande Jatte, 1884*, o/c. 207.5 x 308.1cm 1884-86 (Art Institute of Chicago)
14. *Seurat, Echo study for Bathers, Conté crayon on Michallet paper 31.2 x 24cm 1883-4 Yale University Art Gallery
15. Seurat, *Hat, shoes, and undergarments- study, Bathers Conte crayon, 1883-4 23 x 31 Harvard Art Museum
16. Seurat, *The Seine at Courbevoie*, 1884. O/panel, 15.5 x 24.5cm. Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam
18. *Pissarro, Landscape with Palette, c.1878. o/panel 24.1 x 34.6cm Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamston.
20. Ludovic Piette: *Pissarro on the motif, Pontoise, c.1874 o/c, whereabouts unknown
21. Nineteenth-century portable painting equipment
22. Nineteenth-century French standard canvas formats
23. *Seurat, Le Bec du Hoc, study, Summer 1885.Oil on panel 15.6 x 25.2 cm NG Australia
25. *Seurat, Le Bec du Hoc, Grandchamp*, 1885, o/c, 65 x 82. (Portrait 25, on its side) Tate, London
26. Hokusai, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (first printed 1826/33); “Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji", no.21
27. Nineteenth-century primed canvas samples, Bourgeois Aîné. Collection A Callen. **Left** – Toile demi-fine absorbante; **Right** – Ordinaire 1er qualité gris à grain
28. **Left:** Seurat: *The Couple* (Study for *Le Grande Jatte*), Conté crayon on Michallet paper, 1884-5

**Right:** Seurat – *The Couple* (Study for *Le Grande Jatte*), o/c 81 x 65 – grey ground - (c.1885) Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
34 Seurat, *Sailboat*. Study for *La Grande Jatte*, 1884. Oil on unprimed panel 15.9 x 25 cm. NGA Washington
35 Seurat, *Study – Landscape for the Grand Jatte*, 1884,1885 (border added c.1889), o/c 69.9 x 85.7 cm: non-standard canvas format. *The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Collection*
36 Seurat, *Sunday Afternoon on the Isle de la Grande Jatte*, 1884-86. Oil on canvas, 207.5 x 308.1 cm (81.7 x 121.3 in). Art Institute of Chicago
37 *Seurat, Les Poseuses*, 1886-88: oil/canvas 200 x 249.9 cm. Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia
38 **Left**: Seurat, *Study-models*. conté crayon. 29.7 x 22.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art
**Right**: Seurat *Study-models_oil on panel*, 26 x 15.7 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris
39 *Seurat, Bridge at Courbevoie*, oil/canvas (unprimed, unvarnished), Standard no.10 Portrait canvas: 55 x 46 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art Galleries, London
41 Seurat, *Le Chahut*, 1889-90, oil on canvas, 171.5 x 140.5 cm (non standard canvaz). Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands
42 Seurat, *The Eiffel Tower*, 1889, o/panel. 24 x 15.2 cm. California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco

Reference:

----, *Seurat: Drawings and Paintings* (New Haven, 2001)
Roslak, Robyn, *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-siècle France: Paintings, Politics and Landscape* (Farnham, 2007)
Images:

17 Seurat, *Echo*, study for *Bathers, Asnières*, Conté crayon on Michallet paper 31.2 x 24cm 83-4 Yale University Art Gallery

21 Camille Pissarro, *Palette with Landscape*, c.1878. o/panel 24.1 x 34.6cm Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamston
29 Seurat, *Le Bec du Hoc*, study, Summer 1885. Oil on panel 15.6 x 25.2 cm NG Australia

37 Seurat, *Les Poseuses*, 1886-88. Oil/canvas 200 x 249.9 cm. Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia
39 Seurat, *Bridge at Courbevoie*, 1886-87; oil/canvas (unprimed, unvarnished), standard format no.10 Portrait canvas: 55 x 46 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art Galleries, London