

Time travel back to 1874, Paris , France

Dr. Law Chi Lim

Time travelling, anyone?

Do you realised that ,whenever we go traveling and visit historical places , we are in fact travelling in time with our imagination ? While actual time travelling has so far remained in the realm of science -fiction and unlikely to become a reality anytime soon, it has at least now become a *virtual reality*. In 2024 , the Musee d'Orsay (Paris) in cooperation with Excurio-Gedeon Experiences , has produced a stunning VR (virtual reality) experience called “ ***Tonight with the Impressionists – Paris 1874***” which is now on offer at the Design Institute in Tseung Kwan O in Hong Kong (from 24 January to 11 May 2025) .



What so special about 1874, Paris ?

Well, that’s the year when a group of painters in Paris, who were dissatisfied with the hierarchy in the art circle in Paris, decided to hold their own ***Exposition*** (painting exhibition) instead of trying to have their works vetted before they can be exhibited in the ***Salon*** (the biggest annual or biennial art event at the time). This group of artists were subsequently named ***Impressionists*** and the ***Impressionism Movement*** officially began .

What exactly happens in the VR experience?

By donning on a VR headset, the viewer is instantaneously transported back to Paris in 1874. You will be guided by an avatar named Rose, who will take you through the streets of Paris of 1874. Yes, you actually get to *physically walk* in contrast to all other virtual experiences you have had in the past where you would normally be just sitting still. You will cross some streets and even be startled by a horse-drawn carriage coming in suddenly from your left side. Rose will take you to various buildings, go through corridors, ride elevators, and introduce you to the various pioneers of the ***Impressionist Movement*** —- Pissarro, Monet, Renoir, Degas , Morisot , and Cezanne ,etc. You



will see their works and visit the places that marked the beginnings of the **Impressionist Movement**. You will even be able to attend that important meeting on April 15, 1874 at eight o'clock when the renegade artists met to discuss how to revolt against the establishment. This was a major event in the history of art. You will even be able to watch..... Well, perhaps one should not reveal too much of the plot so as not to spoil the fun for readers. Suffice to say that the experience is so absorbing that the 42 minutes duration feels like only 15 minutes. Yes, Einstein was right -----time /space are all messed up when you are time traveling! Ha!



What do I need to know?

1. The show is open from 10 am to 8 pm (except Tuesdays). You need to book your ticket online through one of the online ticket-booking platforms (just search for the title of this event). Tickets cost HK \$80 (the same show in Paris last year set one back over HK\$300).



2. While they only allow a maximum of 25 people in any one session, the place, although really large, can get somewhat crowded at times. Try to book on a weekday first thing in the morning and you will probably end up doing it with only a handful of people.

3. Try not to go alone. When the show is over, you probably would be so excited that you really need to talk to someone about it. That actually is part of the fun.

4. After the show, do not forget to go upstairs to the second floor, where you will be able to see some background material related to the show, and don't miss the behind-the scene video.

5. In order to enjoy the show more, you really need to know a little bit about the background of **Impressionism** and the artists involved. For example, perhaps you need to know that it was **Monet** 's painting called "**Impression, Soleil Levant** " (Impression, Sunrise) that was shown at the 1874 exposition that led to the movement being labelled as **Impressionism**. It would also be useful if you familiarize yourself with some other artists' names like Pizarro, Manet, Renoir, Cezanne, etc. In this regard, it would also be particularly relevant to check out the current (until 7 May 2025) exhibition being held at the HK Museum of Art (in TST) featuring paintings (from the Musee de l'Orangerie and Musee



d'Orsay from Paris) of two of the most important artists in the **Impressionism Movement** ---- Cezanne and Renoir. The curation of the exhibition is excellent with good explanation of the styles of the artists, comparing their paintings side by side and investigating how they influence later artists like Picasso. You will learn how train travelling (yes, they actually re-created a 19th century train station and a “moving train” in the exhibition!) and the invention of brilliant chemical pigments that came in tubes allowing artists to go out to the country to paint “ *en plein air*” (in the open air) instead of being confined to studios. In order to capture the fleeting moments of colours and lights of the outdoor, they had to utilise short ‘broken’ brush strokes ----- the hall-mark of impressionist paintings .