



The Influence of Impressionism on The Wild Robot (2025)

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ABSTRACT

DreamWorks Animation, an American studio founded in 1994, has produced many beloved franchises such as Shrek (2001), Madagascar (2005), Kung Fu Panda (2008), and How to Train Your Dragon (2010), consistently maintaining its strength in storytelling (Lewis, 2025). The studio continued this charm with The Wild Robot (2024), a film about Roz, a robot who adopts a gosling named Brightbill after accidentally killing its parents. Unlike DreamWorks' previous films, The Wild Robot departs from its usual stylized realism and embraces the visual influence of Impressionism. This study examines how Impressionist techniques shape the film's visual and emotional language, particularly through its painterly aesthetic, lighting, and color treatment. Drawing from the ideas of T. J. Clark and John Rewald on Impressionism, this research identifies and analyzes the Impressionist elements present in The Wild Robot and evaluates their effectiveness in creating the film's mood and atmosphere. Findings reveal that while the film successfully captures the conceptual essence of Impressionism, much of its textured brushwork and expressive lighting are lost during the 3D rendering process. This study contributes to bridging art history and animation studies, supporting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education by fostering deeper appreciation of artistic principles within digital animation.

Keywords: Influence, Animation, Impressionism, Visual

INTRODUCTION

DreamWorks Animation, an American studio founded in 1994, has produced many beloved franchises like Shrek (2001), Madagascar (2005), Kung Fu Panda (2008) and How to Train Your Dragon (2010) and they never loses touch in crafting an engaging story (Lewis, 2025). The Council on Competitiveness (2009) stated that the secrets for this consistency lie on the artist at DreamWorks themselves. In Shrek, the artist at DreamWorks realizes that for the magic to work, Shrek and his animated cohorts must have much of the rich detail that exists in real life. Every single visual detail is designed with intention and is brought to life by the studio's creative team.

The charm continued with The Wild Robot, released in September 2024. It tells the story of Roz, a robot who adopts a gosling named Brightbill after killing its parents in a freak accident. the film stay true to their heartwarming and touching style. What sets it apart is how director Chris Sanders brings in qualities of an impressionistic painting, unlike their usual stylized realism. Myers (2024) stated that Sanders and DreamWorks aimed to revive the traditional, handcrafted feel of old school animation. They wanted it to feel like a moving painting, not just another CG film. The impressionist-like atmosphere fits the tone of the book and stands out in today's 3-D animation world.

Dreamworks' approach when it comes to stylizing The Wild Robot took a different turn compared to their previous 3D film which focuses more on stylized realism and detailed texture. Taking notes from Puss in Boots The Last Wish, The Wild Robot took on a painterly look of the film and build upon it, particularly resembling an Impressionist art. Its use of soft lighting, visible brush-like textures and vibrant color pallet creates a visual atmosphere akin to an oil painting in motion. However, despite it being a significant artistic shift, there is still yet limited research in regards to how historical art style affect modern computer animation. Studying The Wild

robot through this lens will undoubtedly allow a deeper understanding on how traditional visual art influence modern storytelling and mood in contemporary animation.

Since 19th century, Impressionism has been recognized as groundbreaking art movement. Often cited as one of the first modern art movement, the movement marked a radical break from academic tradition mark a modern change in its style. Scholars have extensively analyzed its technique in painting such as broken color, visible brushstrokes, and natural lighting, emphasizing artist own experience and sensory of seeing something, hence the term Impression born out of artist experience. However, when Impressionism transitioned into digital and animated media, research became fragmented and limited. Early effort to reproduce the effect of Impressionist in digital screen prove to be significant challenge. Rose (2012) explored the development of non-traditional rendering technique, that of classic Impressionist techniques to create an animated three-dimensional painting. However, to reproduce the wanted result is not a small task as there are very few resources found combining Impressionism with 3D animation. Li and Li (2021) also emphasize that painting serve as the essence of animation and has a close relationship with each other to support the development of animation industry. Although the research emphasizes the relationship between painting and animation, it is not specific regarding artistic style influence over animation . This showed that while the ambition to create a merge between traditional and computer art has already exist, the means to do it is not always available.

This extend to the creative process itself. While The Wild Robot drew inspiration from Impressionism in its concept art, much of its aesthetic are loss during translation. Hedge et al. (2012) reviewed several techniques propose to create digital paintings, focusing on rendering method mimicking traditional look with tools that are not traditionally available. They observed that while some methods allow the user to crease it to a certain effect, there are still some challenges. The authors noted that automation cannot fully replace artist role in defining the final style as painterly style are meant to invoke one individual imagination. Basset et al. (2013) also expanded on this topic by developing a system that incorporates much of the expressive freedom of 2D concept painting into the 3D animation pipeline. Their work incorporates the role of concept design and texturing into expressive depiction that impacts the entire pipeline. However, they acknowledge that the work is laborious as there are limited resources and automated technique will risk losing the artist expressive control. This lead to the less perception from audience. Buchan (2004), argued that animation lacks a language specific to the medium and rely on film theory, making it hard for audience to perceive and respond to animated images differently from live-action film. This underdeveloped visual literacy makes it difficult for audience to interpret stylistic choice and emotional qualities that was used in animation.

Julina and Xin'ge (2023) also adds to the fact in their research that animation plays an active role in audience perception and preserving cultural heritage. The authors emphasizes that the success of cultural heritage animation depends on the balance between technology and content, as well as a clear understanding of audience perception, interest, and behavioural influence. This align with the previous research in which an animation will be more appreciated and be more perceive if the audience have the necessary knowledge and context regarding the perceive content. Together, these concerns highlight the need for further examination and perception of impressionist influence in the Wild Robot, particularly how historical art shape contemporary style in animation.

This research holds significance to contribute to the gap in education by bridging Impressionist art principles with contemporary animation. Previous discussions on Impressionism focuses primarily on animation aspect while animation studies often neglect these same technique that were used with digital art. This study however emphasizes explicitly regarding the technique of Impressionism and how the technique influences the film. This study's align with 4th objective of United Nation, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which is quality education. With this research, it will help broaden the horizon of visual art appreciation in film and animations, It will also help promote accessibility for art education for others.

For this study, the scope will encompass The Wild Robot 2024 emphasizing scenes in the film containing elements of impressionism. The study is limited to qualitative analysis of selected scenes that highlight light, color, mood, and atmosphere that reflect impressionist aesthetic. The scope does not cover a complete analysis of the entire film or its narrative structure, nor does it compare with other Dreamworks production or Impressionist inspired film. It is also only limited to visual element of Impressionist and does not asses other

element of the film. The study is interpretive in nature, focusing on visual and stylistic analysis compared to empirical data. The data that are included may have limitations due to the lack of extensive academic literature on *The Wild Robot* due to its recent release, as well as the topic of impressionism in animation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impressionism In Animation

The term animation derives from the Latin word *animare* which translates to bestowing of life. It is the art of making inanimate visual appears to move which long predates movies. Wells (1998) noted that animation is the act of giving life and its essence doesn't lie in the art of individual drawings but rather the art of movement that is drawn.

The inspiration for animation can be traced from numerous classical art movement. Khandelwal (2024) stated that Impressionism with its emphasis on light and color has certainly become an influenced to visual elements in animation. This can be seen with the fluidity and the expressiveness of early animation styles which can be seen in early Disney's animation films like "*Fantasia*" (1940). The use of vibrant colors and dynamic brush strokes in these films mirrors the techniques of Impressionist painters to capture the transient effect of light. . Animators uses techniques that allowed characters and background to blend seamlessly, creating a sense of motion and life. The blending of characters and backgrounds not only created visual harmony, but also conveyed the same sense of spontaneity in Impressionism.

The influence of Impressionism can also be observed in how early animation conveyed atmosphere and mood. Similar to how the artist works aimed at capturing the fleeting moment of time, backgrounds and landscape in animation are often designed to evoke specific feelings appropriate to the scene. In *Bambi* (1942), the animation uses soft, diffused lighting and rich natural colors to create an emotional and immersive environment for the viewers. Ren (2021) also noted that color is a key element in animation works to express the artistic atmosphere and tone of the films. For example, an animated film with a rich expression and flavor of subjective color can strengthen the narrative of the film. The color of green is often associated with nature and gives tranquility, red can be strength and hope, and yellow symbolizes harvest and hope. This aspect mirrors the philosophy of impressionist in choosing color that serves the narrative of their paintings.

In recent times, this approach to color continues to influence modern animation styles that uses painterly aesthetic, such as *The Girl Without Hands* (2016), *Loving Vincent* (2017) and more where color and brushstroke plays an integral parts. However, the style has slowly been adopted in 3D styles which can also been seen in *The Wild Robot* where Impressionist style are reinterpreted in modern technology.

Elements of Impressionism

Expressive use of Colors and Light

Having established the essential components of this research, it is important to explore the fundamental elements that make up Impressionism. One of the core elements of Impressionism is its expressive use of color and light. While Impressionist prefers color that are bright, intense and brilliant, they treated color as a central form visual expression rather than just a tool of representation. The traits of Impressionist can be seen with how they employs variations of color and contrasts to reveal form and space. (House, 1986).

Building on this expressive use of color, another significant part of Impressionism technique can be seen in how they painted shadows. Impressionist learnt that shadows were not just black and dark but rather full of color. The parts that were exposed to the sun are rich in color and were complimented by a shade of blue and cool tones. Instead of using thick and dark colors to show depth, they used color itself to create the feeling of space which also resulting in brighter and vibrant work (Rewald, 1973, p. 210). Clark (1985) also added that Impressionist saw light bathing everywhere, beaming with thousands of conflicting vibrations and prismatic decomposition of color. This contrast with academic painter's even white light. Artist like Monet captured fleeting effect of sunlight through thousands of small brushstroke that merge into cohesive impression of natural

light, making the illumination itself appear tangible. Kalba (2017) also argues that Impressionist also engaged deeply with bright, unstable, and varied color. The colors were highly visible due to the brightness and intensity which reflect the energy of the time and its constant changes. They observed the interplay of light and color rather than relying on traditional mixing and blending. This technique allows contrasting color into another area while keeping its own hue. It plays an important part in expressing and suggesting a vibrating quality of light. This way, they preserve the colorfulness of a scene.

This expressive use of color and light continues to shape modern film and animation. Wissesing et. al (2016) noted that lighting plays a central role in establishing mood, drama, and emotional tone, with audience perception closely tied to lighting design. Similarly, Ren (2021) argued that color in animation serves as an emotional and narrative device, conveying atmosphere and psychological depth. The Wild Robot reflects this Impressionist principles through the uses of its vibrant color palette, painterly surface textures and soft environmental lighting. Like Monet's brushwork, The Wild Robot recreates this approach in a Miyazaki-inspired forest, simulating soft environmental light using volumetric fog and subtle bloom to emulate atmosphere (Sanders, 2023). This digital approach mirrors the Impressionist use of pure hues to separate the visual sensation and using light itself as the subject.

Bold Brushwork

Another major element of Impressionism is the use of visible brushstroke. Impressionist artists favor decisive brushstroke to shape forms through color rather than outline them (Rewald, 1973, p. 86). Similarly, Hendriks (2004) noted that visible facture was crucial to this style. It symbolized modern truth and gave their work a striking and energetic feeling. In The Wild Robot, this appears in the brush textured surface on Roz and the environment. The film uses textured variation to model form, reflecting the belief that visual and image emerge through color itself.

Furthermore, Freund (2008) also added that Impressionist preferred bold brushwork. In Manet's work Nana (1877), the red paint of Nana's lipstick stands out on the canvas, emphasizing the paint's material presence rather than disguising it. This brushwork was part of a movement away from illusion, where the goal is to highlight each stroke. Bold brushwork shows the artist's presence and focus on the act of painting. The Wild Robot mirrors this by showing Roz's metallic skin gradually becoming stretched as she assimilates with the textured nature around her.

While digital animated films do not use physical paint, The Wild Robot simulates the painterly qualities. Yao et. Al (2024) highlighted the core element of ink painting, specifically the brushstroke in three-dimensional space. The author stated that many digital techniques lack visual brush stroke detail. The study suggests that the transformation of ink painting brush strokes in three-dimensional space can help bridge the gap between two-dimensional and three-dimensional art. Similarly, it also shows how Impressionism concepts are adapted to digital form, especially in The Wild Robot. These textures replicate the uneven and spontaneous nature of Impressionist stroke to create a painterly environment.

Open Composition

Following this, the next core element in Impressionism is the composition. Impressionist composition is often characterized by its openness and spontaneity. Samu (2004) highlights that Impressionist employed radically cropped, Japanese-inspired composition. The Japanese influenced impressionist through compositional techniques such as asymmetrical balance, unusual viewpoints, and dramatic cropping. This approach created an open and dynamic sense of movement within their paintings, allowing the depiction of modern leisure activities with looser framing. By moving away from rigid, traditional layout, these works conveyed the immediacy and reflecting the fluidity of modern life.

Callen (2000) supported this fact by noting that impressionist compose their layout and compositions to convey a natural sense of space and depth without rigid perspective, allowing the scene to appear spontaneous and immediate. The example can be seen in Monet's work where the distance between subjects in the work are divided by using lighter and softer color for the further subject. She also emphasized that artists focuses on

capturing essential character of the subjects rather than the fine detail, highlighting the essence of the scene. Furthermore, the researcher also noted that Impressionists use contrasting shapes and tones to give a flat unity to the composition, creating a rhythm and flow that guides the viewer's eye across the painting. This approach, along with capturing essence over fine detail emphasizes on immediacy in time and overall essence of the scene.

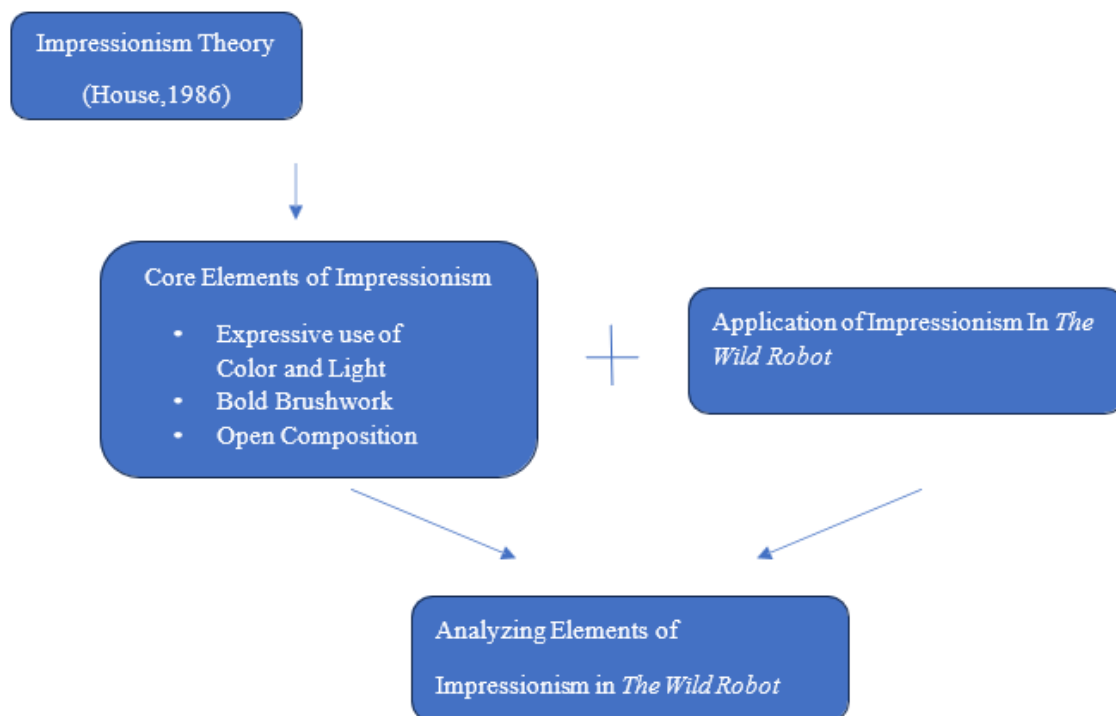


Figure: Conceptual Framework

This section covers not only the history and definition of Impressionism and animation but also how Impressionism operates in animation. The elements presented are not only central to 19th-century painting but have also transitioned into digital space as expressive tools in modern animation. Across House (1968), Rewald (1973), Kalba (2017), and Clark (1985), color and light emerge as the main means to convey perception and emotion over realism. In *The Wild Robot*, these same principles appear through digital color palettes, surface textures, and lighting that evoke the energy and transience of natural scenes. However, despite this parallel, there remains limited academic research exploring how Impressionist aesthetic functions within modern animations. This gap highlights the need for a deeper analysis on how these techniques are reinterpreted through digital means.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts qualitative content analysis to examine how classical Impressionist techniques are adapted into animation like *The Wild Robot*. It follows Creswell (2017) approach in research design by using qualitative method. Creswell emphasized that qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars or general themes, and the researcher making interpretation of the meaning of the data. In this study, the "participant's setting" refers to the visual scenes that will be selected from the film, and the analysis focuses on key impressionist that were discussed previously which are the expressive use of colors and light, bold brushwork and open composition. Data will be collected through academic research papers, media studies and film analysis focusing on scholarly discussions regarding elements of Impressionism and animation. This allows the researcher to identify the recurring visual features and interpret the meaning behind these aesthetic choices.

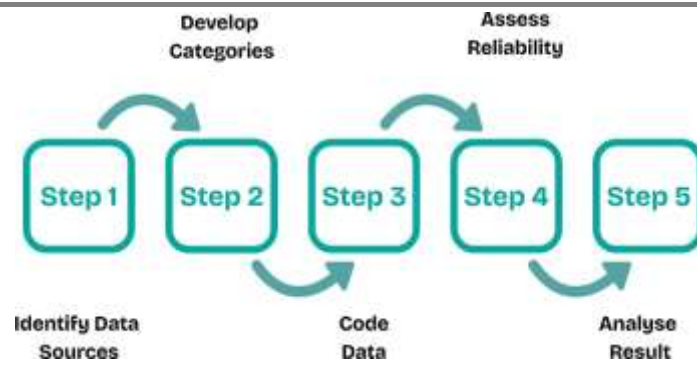


Figure 1 : Content analysis process by the United States Government Accountability Office Participant Manual Content Analysis: Principles and Practices, 2013)

The analysis will examine how the selected Impressionist elements shape the film’s visual storytelling and contribute to its emotional and environmental themes. This approach enables a systematic interpretation of *The Wild Robot* in incorporating Impressionist influences to create mood and shape visual experience. The study also considers how these aesthetic choices influence audience perception, drawing on animation and art historical perspective for interpretive depth. The film was selected due to its nature-centered narrative and painterly visual style, which aligns with the aims of Impressionist art. However, this approach may present limitations due to its interpretive nature of visual analysis and the limited tools in academic research currently available on this topic.

Research Objective	Research Question	Phase	Research Methodology
1. to identify the elements of impressionism in <i>The Wild Robot</i> (2024).	1. This study investigates what elements of Impressionism are present in <i>The Wild Robot</i> ?	Literature Review	Qualitative :Content analysis through reviewing literature regarding Impressionism, focusing on elements discussed by Housde (1986) which include expressive use of color and light, bold brushwork, and open composition
2. to analyze the elements of impressionism in <i>The Wild Robot</i> (2024)	2. Does the film truly adapt impressionist element and reveal their influence on its visual style?	Case study	Qualitative: Examine selected scenes from <i>The Wild Robot</i> that visually demonstrate Impressionist characteristics. The analysis will be done frame by frame by using digital analysis tools to identify painterly qualities
3. to evaluate the effectiveness of Impressionism in <i>The Wild Robot</i> (2024)	3. How effective are the impressionist aesthetic in shaping the overall look of the film’s mood and atmosphere?	Visual Interpretation and evaluation	Qualitive: Interpret and evaluate selected scenes to determine how Impressionist visual elements influence the film’s emotional tone, atmosphere and viewer perception.

Figure: Research Design

The study begins with an extensive review of contemporary literature on Impressionism which focuses on key elements that were identified by leading and renown Impressionism scholar John House (1986) from the book *Monet: Nature Into Art*. The elements that were identified are expressive use of color and light, bold brushstrokes and the open composition and these elements form the theoretical framework to analyze the style and aesthetic qualities. These elements serve to guide the visual examination of the film’s aesthetic. Qualitative methodology approach allows for interpretive flexibility when evaluating how Impressionist principles operates within animated film.



The data collection is sampled by selecting specific scenes directly from the film *The Wild Robot* (2024) that visibly showcase key impressionistic elements such as expressive color and light, brushwork and open composition. The scene selection is based on both theoretical elements drawn from selected scholar and literature as well as direct visual observation of the film. These scenes also serve as primary data for analysis without the inclusion of any external visual material and the scenes will be reviewed frame by frame using external software. This selection process will ensure that only scenes that showcase clear application of impressionist visual elements are included as data. This method is cost effective, accessible, and supports comprehensive data gathering. Furthermore, qualitative secondary data aligns with the study's goals, which focus on textual and visual analysis rather than statistical measurement, enabling meaningful comparison between Impressionist theory and its application on *The Wild Robot*.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research aims to underscore the importance of recognizing *The Wild Robot* 2024 as more than just a family animated film., it is a film that is visually rich with text that engages deeply with the aesthetics of Impressionism. By addressing the gap in academic literature on *The Wild Robot* and its artistic influence, this study brings attention to the underexplored relationship between 3D animation and Impressionism thus elevating the perception of children's animation as serious subject for historical art analysis. The research establishes a framework to identify the Impressionist techniques in the film, particularly in the use of color, visible brushstroke and light treatment. The findings aim to encourage a deeper look for the way animated films use traditional art movements like Impressionism and how it continues to influence the look and emotion of contemporary animation. In the end, this research proposes *The Wild Robot* as a valuable case study to understand the evolving relationship between classical art movement and modern art medium.

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