In 1855, the Italian artists Domenico Morelli, Saverio Altamura, and Serafino De Tivoli visited Paris to see the World’s Fair. They returned to Italy with descriptions of the “violent chiaroscuro” that they had seen and admired in the paintings of Decamps, Troyon, and Rosa Bonheur, and it was upon the basis of their reports that a number of their friends—the artists who gathered at the Caffè Michelangiolo in Florence—began to experiment and to evolve for themselves the aesthetic idea which they called the *macchia*.

The word *macchia*, a word with a time-honored tradition in the literature of Italian art history and criticism, lends itself to a variety of constructions, among them “sketch” and “patch,” and it was precisely because of these multiple meanings that the name derived from the word was seized upon in the literature of Italian art history and criticism, applied in derision to this progressive group of artists. Though originally popularized by a hostile critic, the name was to gain wide acceptance, even among the artists themselves. Today, it is commonly understood as a description of the group’s program and style, and the “Macchiaioli” are known, accordingly, as artists “whose procedure, as their name implies, was to paint in ‘patches’ or ‘blobs’ of color.”

In view of the circumstances surrounding the group’s formation, this prevailing characterization seems puzzling and inappropriate. For if the Macchiaioli are to be approached as artists who were committed to a procedure of painting in “patches,” it becomes impossible to explain what might have attracted them in 1855 to the relatively conservative French painters cited above or, indeed, to isolate any corresponding tendency in the contemporary art of France that could have provided their inspiration. There is considerable reason to believe, in fact, that the current conception of the *macchia* is incorrect and unfounded, and that to recover its original meaning we must turn to the sources of the aesthetic in French Romanticism.

The idea that the word *macchia*, for the Macchiaioli, referred originally to a mode of sketchlike execution has been fostered in our century by the increasing popularity of a certain group of these artists’ works—their plein air studies—and by the stylistic qualities which these studies display. These striking works, upon which the reputation of the Macchiaioli today largely rests, are small, broadly conceived, and freshly executed in terms of vivid and emphatic tonal oppositions. Illustrated here are two well-known examples of the type: Giovanni Fattori’s *French Soldiers* (Fig. 1), a record of the artist’s observations of the soldiers quartered on the outskirts of Florence in 1859, and Giuseppe Abbati’s *Cloister* (Fig. 2), painted in Florence, in the cloister of Santa Croce, around 1862. Executed on small panels, the first, typically, of wood, the second of cardboard, both were inspired by the artists’ immediate visual experiences of the natural world and display a concern for the effects of strong sunlight upon form and color. In both, the mode of execution employed is clearly re-

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2 Vasari uses it in connection with the late work of Titian (*Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori . . .*, ed. Milanesi, Florence, 1878-85, vii, 452).

3 According to a dictionary published in 1852, the word *macchia* could be interpreted variously as spot or stain, sketch (abbozzo) or bushland (boscaiolo). The meaning of the word in relation to painting is explained as follows: “I pittori usano questa voce per esprimere la qualità d’aluni disegni, ed alcuna volta anche l’ultue fatte con straordinario facilità e con un tale accordamento e freschezza senza molta matita o colore, e in tal modo che quasi pare che ella non da mano d’arte, ma da per se stessa sia apparita sul foglio o sulla tela e dicono: ‘Questa è una bella macchia’.” The same dictionary defines the word *Macchiaiuolo* as “one who removes stains” or “one who frequents the brushes-land” (“Colui che esercita l’arte di cavar le macchie.—Che frequenta le macchie, cioè le boscaglie.”—*Vocabolario universale della lingua italiana*, Mantua, v, 1852, 63).


5 The centenary exhibition of the Macchiaioli, held in 1956 at the Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, was purposely limited to the exhibition of only such works, in order, so the catalogue stated, that the public might be presented with the best and most characteristic examples of Macchiaioli painting (P. Bucarelli, *I Macchiaioli*, Rome, 1956, 22-23).
ductive, with firm, "patch"-like strokes defining the forms and creating a flatness of design that characterizes the plein air studies of all the artists associated with this group.

The seemingly patchlike mode of execution which has been observed in the plein air studies of the Macchiaioli, however, does not account for the name that was applied to the group nor really serve to explain its aesthetic. A crucial fact, too often overlooked in modern scholarship, is that during the nineteenth century these studies were entirely unknown outside the artists' immediate circle and were not themselves responsible for the controversies which the macchia initially provoked. As the catalogues of the exhibitions in which the Macchiaioli participated make clear, these were not the works which the Macchiaioli chose to send to public exhibitions, there to be discussed and attacked as the characteristic product of their aesthetic. Instead, the works which nineteenth-century critics angrily condemned as "sketch"-like and "unfinished" were, in fact, according to the testimony of the catalogues, fairly elaborate studio pieces which in most cases offer to the modern eye little that might distinguish them from the more orthodox and acceptable academic productions of their day. Presenting a striking contrast to the richly stroked, flattened surfaces of the studies, these lesser-known works of the Macchiaioli (of which, nevertheless, a sizable body is extant) are relatively large, dryly executed paintings, tightly descriptive or anecdotal in character. As examples we may cite still other works of Fattori andAbbati, Fattori's Cavalry Charge at Montebello of 1862 (Fig. 3) and Abbati's Cloister of Santa Croce, also of 1862 (Fig. 4). We are hard put to reconcile the popular notion of the macchia as a proto-impressionistic, patchlike mode of execution with the stylistic qualities displayed by these paintings or by a work like Vincenzo Cabianca's Florentine Storytellers of the Fourteenth Century (Fig. 5), which was exhibited in Florence at the Esposizione Nazionale in 1861. Nor can we easily explain the kind of criticism that was leveled at this painting by Cabianca's contemporaries, who recognized the artist as a leading exponent of the new movement in painting and who criticized him for daring to display to the public, "in an embryonic state," a work which "might be described as no more than a simple sketch."

When we understand, however, which paintings caused the controversy and criticism that originally surrounded the Macchiaioli, the substance of these contemporary criticisms becomes meaningful despite apparent contradictions, and the real basis upon which they were made becomes easier to detect. The most interesting and fruitful of our documentary sources in this respect is an article which appeared on November 3, 1862, in the Florentine journal Gazzetta del Popolo, by a journalist who signed himself "Luigi." A caustic attack upon the tendencies of certain of the artists whose works were currently on exhibit at the annual Promotrice, the article was conceived in response to a review of the exhibition published anonymously some two weeks earlier by one of the artists, Telemaco Signorini. About these young artists, the most radical of whom he identified as Vincenzo Cabianca and the abovenamed Signorini, the critic of the Gazzetta del Popolo wrote:

For some time, there has been talk among artists of a new school which has grown up and which has been called the school of the Macchiaioli. The painting of this school has made its appearance frequently in the exhibitions of the Society for the Promotion of the Arts, and this year, too, it is well represented. But, the reader will say, if he himself is not an artist, what are these Macchiaioli? Permit me to explain. They are young artists, some of whom are undeniably gifted, but who have taken it into their heads to reform art, starting from the principle that effect is everything. Have you ever met someone who shows you his snuff-box and insists that in the grain and various stainings [macchie] of the wood he can recognize a small head, a little man, or a tiny horse? And the small head, the little man, and the tiny horse are all there in those stainings of the wood! All you need do is imagine them! So it is with the details in the paintings of the Macchiaioli. In the heads of their figures, you look for the nose, mouth, eyes, and other features: what you see are shapeless patches [macchie senza forma]; the nose, mouth, and eyes are there all right—all you have to do is

6 The exhibitions referred to are those of the Florentine Promotrice, an annual event which, on a local level, was somewhat analogous in its social and economic significance to the Paris Salon and was looked upon by Florentine artists of the younger as well as the older generation as an important outlet for their serious artistic efforts. The conclusions stated are based upon the catalogues of these exhibits covering the forty-year period from 1850 to 1890, a substantial number of which are preserved as part of the Diego Martelli legacy in the Biblioteca Marucelliana in Florence.

9 P. Selvatico, "La pittura storica e sacra d'Italia all'Esposizione Nazionale di Firenze nel 1861," Arte ed artisti, Padua, 1862, 51. In a similar vein, the author of a guidebook to the exposition wrote: "I novellieri italiani, 'quadro del sig. Cabianca, potrebbe essere un bel quadro, se l'autore si fosse dato la pena di finirlo." ("Yorick" [Pier-Coccoluto Ferrigni], Viaggio attraverso l'Esposizione Italiana del 1861, Florence, 1861, 129.)

8 "Luigi," "Ciarle fiorentine," Gazzetta del Popolo, anno II, No. 301, Nov. 3, 1862. Reprinted in M. Borgiotti and E. Cecchi, Macchiaioli Toscani d'Europa, Florence, 1963, 23-25. The identity of the author is not known. Recently, Giardelli has offered the convincing hypothesis that "Luigi" was the pseudonym of Giuseppe Rigutini (1829-1903), a noted linguist and philologist with a talent for the concise and biting epigram. Rigutini, active in the contemporary art world, was one of the three editors of the Gazzetta del Popolo. (M. Giardelli, Silvestro Lega, Milan, 1965, 38 n. 1.)

9 "X" [Telemaco Signorini], "Alcune parole sulla Esposizione Artistica nelle sale della Societa Promotrice," La Nuova Europa, anno II, No. 162, Ott. 19, 1862. Reprinted in Borgiotti and Cecchi, Macchiaioli Toscani d'Europa, 21-23. On the question of the authorship of this article and the one cited below, note 17, see Signorini's autobiographical letter of 1892 (Lettere dei Macchiaioli, ed. L. Vitali, Turin, 1953, 114, 118 n. 14); also, Somaré, Signorini, 32.

10 "Luigi," "Ciarle fiorentine," Macchiaioli Toscani d'Europa, 24. This and all subsequent translations, unless otherwise indicated,
imagine them! When we pray for rain, we don’t expect a flood: that effect is necessary, no one would deny; but when the effect destroys the drawing and even the form, this is too much. If things continue at this rate, the Macchiaioli will end by painting with a brush on the end of a pole and will scribble upon their canvases from a respectable distance of five or six meters. In this way, they will be certain of obtaining nothing but effect.\textsuperscript{10}

The earliest surviving application of the name Macchiaioli to the artists whose identities have since become so inextricably connected with it is to be found here in Luigi’s article. The name makes its formal appearance quite late in the history of what we now think of as the macchia movement, for, according to a later statement by Signorini, the aesthetic principle from which the movement derives its name was, by 1862, a dead or dying issue in Florence for the progressive artists whose allegiance to the aesthetic dated from the middle of the preceding decade.\textsuperscript{11} Although Luigi, it would appear, was the first to use the name in print, it is unlikely that he deserves the credit usually accorded him for coining the term;\textsuperscript{12} the name, as the wording of his introductory remark makes clear, had been circulating in artistic circles for some time (“Già da tempo si parla fra gli artisti di una nuova scuola che si è formata, e che è stata chiamata dei Macchiajoli”). Instead of inventing the name, Luigi much more likely was simply the first to popularize it by recognizing and exploiting its humorous and derogatory implications. The facile wit with which he plays upon the multiple meanings of the root word macchia lends rhetorical effectiveness to his disparaging characterization of the Macchiaioli as artists who merely “sketch” out their pictures, substituting shapeless “patches” for descriptive detail.

Yet, to assume that these were the constructions which the Macchiaioli themselves had had in mind when they used the word macchia would be, as we shall demonstrate, to take Luigi’s joke far too literally.

The word which is used most often in Luigi’s article to characterize the aesthetic of the Macchiaioli is not macchia but effetto. The significance of this observation becomes apparent if we consider that previously, upon the few occasions when these artists had been referred to in print, the name applied to them was not “Macchiaioli” but “Effettisti.”\textsuperscript{13} Prior to 1862, it would appear, both of these terms had been current among Florentine artists and critics as a means of descriptively labeling the new school and its tendencies. In launching his own attack against the group, the critic of the Gazzetta del Popolo chooses, understandably, to make use of the less publicized and familiar but verbally more effective of the two names. When he puts aside the weapons of sarcasm and wit, however, and attempts a meaningful analysis of the group and its work, it is not to the word macchia that he turns. Instead, he resorts repeatedly to the juxtaposition of two words: form and effect. The Macchiaioli, he tells us, are characterized by their adherence to “the principle that effect is everything.” Effect, in itself, he hastens to make clear, is not an undesirable quality in painting. Nor is it a radical innovation introduced by the Macchiaioli and unknown to previous generations of artists. Rather, it is a familiar concept with a venerable tradition, and he reminds us that the Venetian and Bolognese schools, as well as such recent Italian masters as Bezzuoli and Morelli, all sought for “effect” in their art long before the advent of the Macchiaioli. The error of the latter group, Luigi indicates, lies not simply in the use but in the exaggeration of a principle which is in itself perfectly acceptable. There must, he maintains, be a middle path between extremes, between “forms without effect and effect without forms,” and he points to the work of several contemporary artists to support his contention that it is possible “to obtain effect without abandoning form . . . to achieve effect and light without neglecting drawing and finish.”\textsuperscript{14}

By “form,” it seems, Luigi means the concept of “drawing and finish”: he accuses the Macchiaioli of having sacrificed drawing and finish for the sake of effect.

For the term “effect,” however, which was indeed something
of a commonplace in the aesthetic vocabulary of the period, the writer offers no explicit definition. Conceived of as the broad ordering or unity of the chiaroscuro in a composition, effect was a concept that appeared frequently in nineteenth-century handbooks of painting. As a quality that stands out above detail in the finished work, it was understood as that element of the whole which contributed order and harmony to the composition and was thought to be most readily perceived from a distance (hence the basis of Luigi’s sarcastic prediction that the Macchiaioli would take to painting “with a brush on the end of a pole” in order “to obtain nothing but effect”). Though generally acknowledged to be a necessary ingredient of good painting, effect was nevertheless regarded as an element which the artist should handle with considerable caution. For while it was expected that effect would make its presence felt in a work by standing out over detail, it was widely felt at the same time that the artist should never allow the effect to swallow detail in the work or to diminish significantly the representational clarity of the drawing. The necessity, then, of striking just the right balance between effect and detail created a serious problem for painters of the period. Though an especially vital issue for the Romantic painter, it was a matter of professional concern for artists throughout the century, for the conservative practitioner as well as for the progressive, in France as well as in Italy.

That the concept of “effect” and, in particular, the problem of reconciling within a work the conflicting demands of “effect” and “form” were among the major issues at stake in the controversy between the Macchiaioli and their critics is substantiated by Telemaco Signorini in an article which he published in response to Luigi’s attack. In this article, which appeared in La Nuova Europa on November 19, 1862, Signorini, as spokesman for the so-called Macchiaioli, explained that the macchia “was only an excessively sharp mode of chiaroscuro, the result of the need which artists then felt to free themselves from the major defect of the old school, which had sacrificed solidity and relief in its paintings in favor of an excessive transparency.” In confirmation, moreover, of the date which, in a later statement, he would assign to the death of the macchia movement, we find that in 1862 Signorini is already speaking of the macchia as a concern of the past. It is a mode of research which artists had begun to talk about in 1855, the original and perhaps exaggerated lessons of which have all, by now, been fully learned, modified, and incorporated into the process of creating a serious work of modern art. While members of the group, he acknowledges, may at one time have placed excessive emphasis upon chiaroscuro in their paintings, this fault, he argues, is one for which they can no longer reasonably be brought to task. At this late stage in the movement’s history, the substance of Luigi’s attack is in Signorini’s view grossly exaggerated if not wholly unjustified.

And when we stop, indeed, to consider the kind of painting around which the macchia controversy originated—the paintings on view at the annual exhibitions of the local Promotrice—we are prompted to share to some extent Signorini’s attitude and to wonder if the differences between the Macchiaioli and their critics might not have been far more subtle in reality than the forceful language of Luigi’s attack would at first seem to indicate. That a standard of “drawing and finish” was indeed operative in the macchia aesthetic and was used by the Macchiaioli as a measure of artistic achievement is in fact indicated by the terms in which Signorini was himself wont to discuss and evaluate the work of his contemporaries. In the Promotrice review which had initially provoked the debate, for example, Signorini had complimented one of the participating artists upon a painting in which certain of the figures were “extremely well drawn,” while at the same time he condemned the painting for color that was “too hard” and chiaroscuro that was “too sharp.” Still another artist, clearly labeled by Signorini as a “progressive,” was commended, on the other hand, for his ability to render convincingly “the extremely difficult effects of various kinds of illumination within an interior” and for creating a picture which, regrettably, “would have been quite perfect, if some of the charming figures had been more carefully finished.”

It is from a close reading of this crucial debate between Signorini and the critic of the Gazzetta del Popolo that we derive some understanding of the real nature of the challenge which the Macchiaioli presented to traditional values in the Florentine art world of the late 1850’s and early 1860’s. The macchia, the aesthetic to which the so-called Macchiaioli were committed, was not founded, it is clear, upon a conscious pro-

15 See, e.g., one of the standard reference works of the period: J. N. Pallot de Montabert, Traité complet de la peinture, Paris, 1839–51, i, 153.
16 On this problem, see, e.g., the statements by Delacroix, The Journal of Eugène Delacroix, tr. W. Fach, New York, 1961, 151 (March 1, 1847), 292 (April 13, 1853), 313 (May 21, 1853).
18 In future years, Signorini maintained this attitude in the face of the fairly harsh criticism to which the group was subjected. As he later complained, in retrospect and not without bitterness: “... questi artisti... nulla di nuovo inventavano da suscitar tante arrabbiate polemiche per farsi chiamare innovatori, sovvertitori, facinorosi, e
20 Ibid., 22 (italics mine).
21 For Luigi’s very similar evaluation of this painting (F. Buonamici’s Una caserma di Modena nella campagna del cinquantanove, present whereabouts unknown), see “Ciarle fiorentine,” Macchiaioli Toscani d’Europa, 24–25.
24 Recognition of the efficacy of chiaroscuro as a vehicle for expression.
gram of sketchy, "patch"-like execution, but upon the concept of a chiaroscuro "effect," a manner of achieving compositional vigor and harmony in a work through the arrangement of emphatic masses of light and shadow. It was upon the basis of what was considered to be their exaggerated handling of this element that the Macchiaioli were severely criticized by their contemporaries, who looked upon effect as a necessary and desirable ingredient of a painting only if it did not threaten to obscure the form—i.e., the drawing, finish, and detail—of the painting. The Macchiaioli, it would appear, held much the same view and were governed by similar values, differing essentially in their conception of the point at which in a given work effect will encroach upon or destroy form. Thin though the line which separated a revolutionary macchia work from more conservative and acceptable pictures may now seem (compare, for example, Figure 5, Cabianca's Storytellers, with Figure 6, the picture which was the critical and popular success of the 1861 Exposition), the emphasis which the Macchiaioli chose to place upon effect in their works constituted, from the conservative point of view, a serious challenge to the ultimate ascendancy of "form" as a standard of value. It was this emphasis which was responsible for making the pictures that the Macchiaioli produced and exhibited—finished works by their standards as well as our own—appear to their contemporaries as "simple sketches," to be ridiculed and condemned as intolerable deviations from the accepted norm.

With the macchia understood as effect created by chiaroscuro, the real significance of the events of 1855 becomes apparent, for effect was a major factor in the art of the French painters whose work the Macchiaioli admired and whose influence they openly acknowledged. Decamps, for example, well known among his contemporaries as "un clair-obscuriste de premier ordre,"21 was noted in his day for the technical facility with which he could manage the most violent chiaroscuro contrasts. It was not for technical skill alone, however, that the intense and striking tonal effects of Decamps's pictures were admired, but also, and more important, for the artist's ability to infuse the light and shadow of his paintings with poetic and imaginative qualities. For Baudelaire, accordingly, Decamps's pictures, despite their excessive finish and detail, were nevertheless "pleins de poésie, et souvent de rêverie."22 And of Decamps, the master of orientalizing genre, Eugène Fromentin wrote: "Dans l'Orient, il a vu l'effet: l'opposition nette, aiguë, tranchant des ombres et de la lumière... Il a beaucoup imaginé, beaucoup rêvé... sa supériorité la plus incontestable lui vient de ce qu'il a comme tous les visionnaires, l'esprit rempli de metamorphoses."23

The other French artists whose work had attracted the Italian visitors at the World's Fair in 1855 were the landscape painters of Barbizon. Serafino De Tivoli, himself primarily a landscape painter, was particularly impressed by the art of Rousseau and Troyon, and the impact their work had upon him is apparent in the paintings he himself began to produce shortly after his return to Florence (e.g., Fig. 7). In the work of these older, Romantic painters, the power of chiaroscuro effect not only to convey poetic mood, but even to evoke a controlled range of emotional response, played an essential role and, as we shall demonstrate, was a central feature in the already established aesthetic which the Florentines now attempted to assimilate.24

One of the earliest writers to explain and defend the approach to landscape developed by the Barbizon School in the 1830's was the critic Théoré-Bürger, in whose writings we find set forth the established Romantic view of the relationship between art and nature.25 According to Théoré-Bürger and the critics who would later join him in recognizing and extolling Théodore Rousseau as the leader of the Barbizon School, great landscape painting is born of the artist's love of nature and of his ability to respond in a creative and poetic manner to the variety of experience that nature offers him.26 For Théoré-Bürger, accordingly, Rousseau was a poet, a sensitive soul, capable of penetrating and sharing "toutes les passions de la nature," and his skill as an artist lay in his ability to communicate these deeply felt subjective experiences.27 Art, Théoré Bürger pointed out, is not and cannot be the mere laborious imitation of visual reality, for the transitory character of nature and her constantly changing effects have themselves taught the artist that faithful imitation of visual phenomena is a physical impossibility.28 While the painting, then, cannot be a precise visual recording of what the artist has seen at any given moment, it can be a recording of what the artist has felt at a given moment as the result of what he has seen. It can

25 This view in its more transcendental form derives ultimately from the


26 For an introduction to the source material in this area, I am indebted to the following unpublished work: C. Duncan, Théodore Rousseau: His Critics and His Late Technique, Columbia University, May, 1965.

27 T. Thore, Salon de 1844, précédé d'une lettre à Théodore Rousseau, Paris, 1844, 106.

28 Ibid., 107–08.
be an expression of his personal experience of nature, an experience in which he himself has played a poetic role by projecting into external reality his own, specifically human moods and emotions. The principle of all the arts, Thoré-Bürger proclaims, is poetry, and "la poésie n'est pas la nature, mais le sentiment que la nature inspire à l'artiste. C'est la nature reflétée dans l'esprit humain." 29 Rousseau's words echo the same thought: "La composition existe du moment que les objets représentés ne le sont pas seulement pour eux-mêmes mais en vue de contenir, sous une apparence naturelle, les échos qu'ils ont placés dans notre âme."30

The artists of the Barbizon School, then, set themselves the task of creating an artificial, painted image, which could reproduce in the spectator the same emotional response that the actual view of a landscape had, at a given moment in time, produced in them.31 They could not hope to convey this emotion by providing the spectator with an exact recording of the way the landscape had looked at the moment in question, for nature does not stand still to pose for her portrait. They could, however, reasonably expect to capture, in a quick, on-the-spot sketch, the broad tonal harmony of their visual impressions, the characteristic luminary effect through which nature, at any given moment, reveals her mood and weaves her poetic spell for the sensitive observer. A tendency to characterize the various states of nature in terms of luminary effects and a search for an equivalent technique with which to translate these effects into painting are in fact indicated by the frequent appearance of the word effect in the subtitles given by certain of the Barbizon painters to their works—e.g., Rousseau's Effect of Late Afternoon, Autumn in the Landes, or Effect of Noontime, Stormy Sky.32 It would seem to follow, then, given the prevalent Romantic belief in the poetic and expressive qualities of light and shadow, that the artist, having once captured the fugitive tonal patterns of nature's light at a given time and in a given place, might then consider himself in control of the element upon which, during the original visual experience, his own emotional responses had largely depended. He could then return to the studio to build a poetic reconstruction of the landscape upon the basic scaffolding of this immediately captured tonal effect, confident of producing a painting which would provide for the viewer an emotional experience analogous to the one he himself had undergone in his own direct communion with nature.

Such, at least, is the picture of Barbizon School method and intent that emerges from the important memorial article on the life and work of Théodore Rousseau written by Philippe Burty and published in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts in 1868.33 Unlike the popular, academic painters of landscape, Burty tells us, Rousseau had aimed to communicate the appeal of the elements of nature—a bush, a stream, a group of trees reflected in water—"plutôt par les impressions de lumière, de fraîcheur, de sérénité qu'ils dégagent, que par le rendu minitieux des brindelles, des cailloux, des flots, des branches qui les constituent."34 Burty stresses the importance of light and shadow for Rousseau and tells of how the artist, in conversation, repeatedly discussed his idea of the compositional sub-ordination of color to monochromatic tonal harmony. "A la rigueur," Rousseau advised a student, "vous pouvez vous passer de couleur, mais vous ne pouvez rien faire sans l'harmonie."35 From Burty, we learn, too, that nature reveals her different moments and moods to the sensitive observer through a series of characteristic luminary effects. These are experienced and identified by each artist according to his own poetic sensibility and mastered by means of an extensive program of plein air sketching. As the result of this self-imposed training of hand and eye, we are told, Rousseau had attained such a high degree of "facilité" that he could set to work in his studio and choose from his palette, without hesitation, "le ton le plus juste et le plus séduisant" for the translation of his feelings onto canvas: "His long absorption in the study of daylight, of storms, of fog, of the state of the sky at different moments of the year, had so to speak catalogued in his brain the entire range of luminary effects. Hardly had he touched a canvas than he had disengaged from it a painting."36

A belief in the expressive analogy between the luminary "effects" observed in nature by the artist and the harmonious arrangement of chiaroscuro, or "effect," of his finished picture appears to be the basis for a procedure evolved by Rousseau of building up his painting from a skeletal foundation of tonal masses through a series of refinements and clarifications, a

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29 Ibid., 3.
31 In 1866, Charles Blanc explained the problem that certain artists had set themselves in the following way: "Faire que la chose peinte vous procure la même impression que vous aurait procurée la chose vue: voilà dans quels termes certains artistes se posent le problème, et ces artistes ne sont pas les moins distingués par l'intelligence." Significantly, these artists, whom Blanc identifies vaguely as naturalists and followers of the Barbizon School, are criticized in terms very similar to those which Italian critics during these years were applying to the Macchiaioli. Blanc continues: "Mais avec une telle manière de comprendre l'art, on risque fort d'en rester aux à peu près, de sous-entendre l'exécution et d'altérer la monnaie du peintre, car enfin l'esprit n'est pas tout, non plus; le métier a ses rigueurs. A supposer qu'un ensemble de taches heureuses produise un effet délicieux, encore faut-il que l'œil ait son compte, que le spectacle ne soit pas chargé de supprimer au vague des indications pittoresques, en achevant, par l'imagination, ce qu'on aura négligé de lui dire." ("Salon de 1866," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 21, 1866, 41 [italics mine].)
32See R. Herbert, Barbizon Revisited, Boston, 1962, 29.
34 Ibid., 305.
35 Ibid., 317.
36 Ibid., 313.
37 Ibid., 317-18. Since Rousseau was the acknowledged leader of the Barbizon School, his work and ideas have been emphasized here as typical of the methods and goals of the school as a whole. Similar
procedure which, Burty tells us, he one day explained by means of a visual demonstration. Declaring that "le tableau doit être préalablement fait dans notre cerveau," and that the painter's activity consists, consequently, not of creating a picture upon his canvas, but of gradually lifting off the veils under which the picture is hidden, Rousseau took one of his finished works and covered it with a sheet of silken paper, with the result that the small details of the picture were no longer discernible. He added a second sheet, and Burty observed that "les silhouettes se massaient plus confusément." With the third sheet of paper, only the most rudimentary values of light and shadow could still be perceived. As Burty put it: "Le squelette du tableau était là, dans sa robuste ossature." Rousseau then explained: "If I wanted to complete my sketch [mon ébauche], I would follow in reverse the procedure which we have just demonstrated. I would successively affirm the light in much the way that an object detaches itself from the nothingness which is darkness, when one climbs the steps of a cave. Coloring is simply a matter of visual observation and organization. It should always be left for the end." 37

Rousseau's method of first capturing, through an immediate sketch, the luminary "effect" of a scene in nature and then working up his finished picture through a process of gradual elaboration in the studio is similar in conception to the working method employed by the Macchiaioli, a method which began, similarly, with plein air sketching and ended in the studio. Among the works which permit a careful description of this procedure is a series of studies by Telemaco Signorini, produced during the summer of 1860 when Signorini was working side by side with his friends Cabianca and Banti at La Spezia. Seeking to capture the immediate totality of his visual experiences—the broad tonal structure of single objects or entire scenes—Signorini produced sketches during these months in which detail and local color are sacrificed to astonishingly simplified tonal patterns and to the vibrancy and sparkle of abrupt tonal transitions. Typical of these sketches is a small cardboard panel, about five by five inches, entitled Study at La Spezia (Fig. 8), a study which at first seems almost nonfigurative until it is compared side by side with yet another work, similar in tonal arrangement though somewhat larger in scale, entitled A Sunny Day in La Spezia (Fig. 9). 38

Here, out of the painterly impasto that defines the tonal areas of the two-dimensional plane, there begins to emerge an awareness of figures and architectonic structures within a three-dimensional space. That this panel, too, however, was for Signorini just a sketch, an intermediate step in the process of turning an immediately recorded tonal impression into a completed work of art, is suggested by the existence of still another version of the same theme, a much larger canvas (Fig. 10) in which the artist retained the same tonal structure that had been worked out in the two earlier panels. But instead of the clearly marked impasto treatment and almost abstract tonal masses of the smaller studies, the finished work presents a relatively smooth, flatly painted surface and a wealth of descriptive detail. The "veils" which concealed the completed work are now removed.

The multiple stage method which we can follow in the development of Signorini's Sunny Day in La Spezia from a "skeleton" of tonal masses to a finished representation of a clearly readable scene is plainly analogous in conception to the procedure described by Rousseau in his conversation with Burty. Whether, as an extension of this analogy, the desire of the Macchiaioli to capture directly the luminary effects of nature and to preserve these in the pictorial effects of their finished works was, like the similar desire of the Barbizon painters whom they emulated, connected with a belief in the power of these natural and pictorial arrangements of light, the one to evoke feeling and emotion in the artist, the other to communicate these feelings and emotions to the spectator, is the question to which we must now turn.

By the 1840's, Italian artists of the Northern and Neapolitan schools appear to have been familiar with the Romantic conception of the poetic and expressive powers of chiaroscuro. 39 In Naples, furthermore, the Romantic attitude toward landscape can be seen as early as the 1840's in the work of the Palizzi brothers, one of whom, Giuseppe, emigrated to France in 1844 and settled at Fontainebleau. 40 Naples, we should note, moreover, was an important source for certain of the impulses which later contributed to the development of the macchia in Florence. Altamura and Morelli, two of the Paris pil-

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37 Both these works were in Signorini's studio at the time of his death.

38 See the catalogue of the studio sale: U. Ojetti, Telemaco Signorini (Esposizione e vendita delle opere di Telemaco Signorini e delle opere a lui donate da altri artisti dell'Ottocento), Milan, Galleria Pesaro, Jan., 1930, pls. civ., xxii.

39 Interesting in this respect is the appearance of the following quotation from C. Robert's Essai d'une philosophie de l'art (Paris, 1836) in a book published in 1842 by the Venetian academicians Pietro Selvatico: "Le clair-obscur est dans le peinture l'élément poétique par excellence, le fruit d'un regard enthousiaste et de la vue inspirée des objets" (Sull'educazione del pitto re storico odierno italiano, Padua, 1842, 269).

grims of 1855, were both Neapolitan in origin, and in Naples during the 1840’s, as friends and disciples of the important Neapolitan landscape and animal painter Filippo Palizzi, they developed, quite early, the Romantic attitude toward art and nature, an attitude which, later, in the 1850’s, they were undoubtedly instrumental in introducing to their Florentine friends. About the influence Palizzi had had upon his career, Morelli later wrote: “L’analisi che egli faceva sulla proprietà di un colore sull’altro, mi educava ad osservare e comprendere l’effetto e l’espressione.”

In Florence itself, however, the tenets of French Romanticism did not make their influence felt among artists until the late 1850’s, and it is not, in fact, until 1862 that we have any documentary indication of a widespread acceptance in progressive circles of some of the methods, aims, and concerns of the older French movement. In his 1862 review of the current Promotrice, Telemaco Signorini singled out, among Vincenzo Cabianca’s six entries in the exhibit, one work, the Bridge on the Road to Poggio a Caiano (present whereabouts unknown), as the most successful, extolling it as “an ingenious expression of that state of repose and tranquility in which the artist most loved to contemplate and reproduce nature,” and praising the artist for his ability “to find a source of emotion where the majority see only dead and inanimate objects.” Turning to his own entries in the exhibit, Signorini, writing anonymously, freely described and evaluated his personal aims and achievements. He wrote:

In the works of Signorini, while we must praise his intent, which is to study nature and to find in her those moments which express a character and inspire a particular emotion, we cannot, at the same time, refrain from criticizing a certain tendency he has to exaggerate this aim by inserting into his work something too subjective and individual, especially if we consider how difficult it is to render these ideas through the means at the disposal of art and to insure that the public, as well as the artist, can understand their significance.

In these passages, Signorini is voicing a typically Romantic conception of the artist’s relationship to nature and to his own work, a conception which had been formulated by the Barbizon painters in the 1830’s and 1840’s and disseminated by their critical supporters with ever-increasing vigor during the 1850’s and 1860’s. For Signorini, as for Rousseau and the French critics who considered Rousseau the originator and leader of the Barbizon school, the artist is a man who is distinguished from other men by his emotional responsiveness and his poetic sensibility, by his ability first to respond to nature in a deep and genuinely personal manner, and then to communicate through the means of painting the emotional range of his experiences. Cabianca is, for Signorini, such an artist, for, we are told, he truly loves to contemplate nature. His role, moreover, is not simply a passive one, for, during these experiences shared with nature, he transforms her according to his own temperament: he projects into his interpretation of nature “that state of repose and tranquility” which is most characteristic of his own mood and sensibility. In his own works, too, Signorini’s avowed intention has been the study of nature in her most expressive attitudes—i.e., at those particular moments which inspire the artist to attribute his own emotional responses to the visual facts of external reality. Fully aware of the artist’s dependence upon purely formal means for the communication of the emotions which have been inspired in him by his communion with the natural world, Signorini tells us, furthermore, that these “ideas,” these emotional responses, must be rendered “through the means at the disposal of art.” And, as we have seen, effect derived from chiaroscuro was the formal quality in painting upon which the Macchiaioli, like the Barbizon painters, laid the greatest stress.

In 1862, Signorini speaks separately of strong chiaroscuro effect on the one hand and the communication of poetic mood and emotion on the other as major features or components of “macchiaiolo,” or progressive art. Though a relationship between the two, similar to the relationship which we have observed in Barbizon painting, is implied, Signorini himself at no time makes explicit the connection between these formal and expressive problems with which, he tells us, the Macchiaioli were preoccupied. To find an explicit statement of such a connection, we must turn to a discussion of the macchia written some six years later by a man outside the immediate circle of the Florentine Macchiaioli—the Neapolitan aesthetician Vittorio Imbriani.

Vittorio Imbriani, a trained philosopher and aesthetician as well as a critic of art, studied at Zurich with De Sanctis and was the close friend of a number of the most progressive young Neapolitan artists, among them Filippo Palizzi. In 1868, Imbriani wrote and published a small book entitled La Quinta Promotrice, in which he reviewed the exhibition of herently Romantic aspects of the aesthetic had begun to lose their validity for him, and, in the years that followed, he turned more and more toward the “objectivity” of a doctrinaire realism.

43 Ibid., 22. The dissatisfaction with certain qualities in his pictures and in his attitude toward nature that are “troppo soggettivo e individuale” which Signorini expresses here is significant, for it heralds an imminent change in his style. By 1862, the date which Signorini would later assign to the death of the macchia movement, the inner Romantic aspects of the aesthetic had begun to lose their validity for him, and, in the years that followed, he turned more and more toward the “objectivity” of a doctrinaire realism.
44 These included, among others, Thoré-Bürger, Burty, Mantz, Blanc, Gautier, About, Castagnary, and Astruc (Duncan, Théodore Rousseau, 4).
45 On Imbriani, his background, training, and philosophical orientation, see B. Croce, “Intorno all’unità delle arti: II. Una teoria della ‘Macchia,’” Problemi di estetica, Bari, 1910, 236f.
1. Giovanni Fattori, *French Soldiers*, oil on wood, 32 x 15.5 cm. Formerly Crema, Stramezzi Collection

2. Giuseppe Abbati, *Cloister*, oil on cardboard, 25.2 x 19.3 cm. Florence, Galleria d'Arte Moderna (photo: Soprintendenza alle Gallerie, Florence)
3. Giovanni Fattori, *Cavalry Charge at Montebello*, oil on canvas, 290 x 204 cm. Livorno, Museo Civico (photo: Betti)

4. Giuseppe Abbati, *Cloister of Santa Croce*, oil on canvas, 72 x 46 cm. Milan, Giacomo and Ida Jucker Collection (photo: Ancillotti)
5. Vincenzo Cabianca, Florentine Storytellers of the 14th Century, oil on canvas, 147 x 100 cm. Formerly Florence, Saletta Gonnelli


7. Serafino De Tivoli, Landscape, oil on canvas, 66 x 50 cm. Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (photo: Soprintendenza alle Gallerie, Rome)
8. Telemaco Signorini, *Study at La Spezia*, oil on cardboard, 13 x 13 cm. Whereabouts unknown

10. Telemaco Signorini, *A Sunny Day in La Spezia*, oil on canvas, 57 x 64 cm. Formerly Milan, Galleria Sacerdoti (photo: Perotti)


11. Vincenzo Cabianca, *Young Dante*, oil on canvas, 69 x 90 cm. Whereabouts unknown