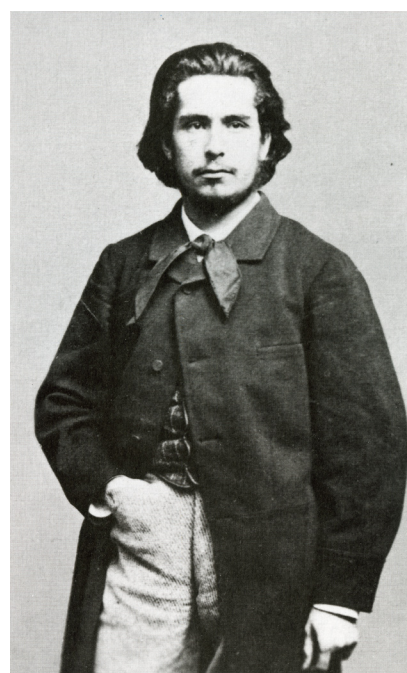


Claude Monet

a biography

Impressionism and the Late 19th Century at Joslyn Art Museum



Carijat, photograph of Monet at the age of twenty-four or twenty-five, 1864-65. Private collection.

Claude Monet was born on November 14, 1840 in Paris, France. Five years later, his father moved their family to the French seacoast city of Le Havre. In 1900, Monet described his childhood as “essentially one of freedom. I was born undisciplinable. No one was ever able to make me stick to the rules, not even in my youngest days.”

During his teenage years, Monet decorated his textbooks’ margins with sketches, and by the time he reached 15 he received commissions for his caricatures. Also at this time he met Eugène Boudin who invited and encouraged him to paint landscapes outdoors. Monet resisted, but in time he said, “my eyes began to open and I really started to understand nature. I also learned to love it. I would analyze its forms with my pencil. I would study its colourations.”

In 1859 Monet moved to Paris and enrolled in the Académie Suisse. During this time he visited the Louvre, however rather than paint the Old Masters as his fellow artists did,

he painted what he saw out the window. Monet was drafted into the French army and eventually returned to Le Havre after contracting typhoid fever. He resumed painting with Boudin, who introduced him to Johan Jongkind. He taught Monet how to select the



Detail. Monet, *Poplars*, 1891. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Private collection.

significant features of the scene, and Monet considered Jongkind his true master.

Eventually Monet returned to Paris and enrolled in Charles Gleyre’s studio. During this time, Monet lead excursions to the Fontainebleau Forest to paint outdoors.

He focused on painting with rapid brush strokes while concentrating on the effects of light. Monet married Camille Doncieux in 1870 and they, along with their son Jean, relocated to London when the Prussian army moved on Paris.

When the war ended, Monet moved his family to Argenteuil in France using the money earned from selling his artworks through Paul Durand-Ruel’s gallery in London. His final home was in Giverny where he planted many of the flowers as well as built the Japanese bridge that is featured in numerous paintings.

Despite his failing eyesight, Monet started the water-lily project which he agreed to give to the French government. They occupy large oval rooms at the Orangerie Museum in Paris. He underwent operations for cataracts while completing this project. Monet died of lung cancer at Giverny on December 5, 1926.



Claude Monet, 1840-1926
Caricature of Léon Manchon, 1855-6
Charcoal, with stumping, heightened on blue laid paper, 612 x 452 mm.
Art Institute of Chicago.



Pierre Auguste Renoir, French, 1841-1919
Young Girls at the Piano (La Leçon de piano), ca. 1889
oil on canvas, 22 x 18 1/4 inches.
Joslyn Art Museum.

boulevards, laundresses and barmaids at work, cafés, train stations, vacation resorts. These themes, and the new painting style of unmixed colors and patchy, spontaneous-looking brushstrokes, were soon adopted by legions of painters who flocked to Paris from all over the

While Academic Art, with its classically proportioned figures, anecdotal subjects, precise details, and flawless surfaces, continued to be popular well into the twentieth century, Impressionism emerged in the last third of the nineteenth century as the dominant style of the avant-garde.

Fascinated with sense perception, Impressionists such as Claude Monet sought to convey motion and to capture the changing effects of light and atmosphere. Free of the Academic studio, they worked en plein-air (out-of-doors), and painted distinctly modern subjects: fashionable strollers on the

world, including America.

Soon, however, a new wave of artists became dissatisfied with Impressionism’s lack of emotional depth and visual coherence



Mary Cassatt, American, 1844-1926
Woman Reading (Portrait of Lydia Cassatt, the Artist's Sister), 1878-79
oil on canvas, 32 x 23 1/2 inches.
Joslyn Art Museum.

and, like Camille Pissarro, developed stylistic variations which are collectively called Post-Impressionism. At the same time, a wider circle of painters adopted Impressionism’s vibrant colors and spirited brushwork to update otherwise traditional imagery. The sparkling society portraits of the Aesthetic Movement in England and America, like those by John Singer Sargent, are a case in point.

Supporters of the Aesthetic Movement and similar trends, which pursued beauty for its own sake, looked beyond the “high arts” of painting and sculpture and proposed to suffuse all of life with the beauty of good design and high-quality craftsmanship. Among the decorative arts, glassmaking assumed an important role: new techniques joined traditional ones to enlarge the repertoire of modern shapes and colors, as designers most often turned to nature for inspiration, transforming sinuous plant and flower forms into the elegant style as Art Nouveau.



Claude Monet, French, 1840-1926
Small Country Farm at Bordighera, (Un coin de ferme à Bordighera), 1884
oil on canvas, 29 1/8 x 36 1/8 inches.
Joslyn Art Museum



The Meadow



Claude Monet

The Meadow (La Prairie, or La Prairie à Vétheuil), 1879,
oil on canvas, 32 x 39 1/4 inches
Gift of Mr. William Averell Harriman, Joslyn Art Museum

Plen-air painting, that is, painting out of doors and directly from nature, was a leading principle of Impressionism. Proposing an “art of modernity,” its adherents painted city scenes as well as the countryside, like this meadow on the outskirts of Paris. In typical Impressionist manner, Monet captures the feel of a summer day with loose brushstrokes of unmixed color that simulate sunlight playing over flowers and leaves and suggest the movement of clouds across the sky. The seeming naturalness and spontaneity, however, are the calculated result of a deliberate process, as many Impressionist paintings were finished in the studio.

Discussion Questions:

- Who are the people in the painting?
- What do you notice first about this artwork? Foreground? Trees? Sky?
- What time of the day and time of the year did Monet capture?

From the Museum to the Classroom

Activities

Capturing a Moment

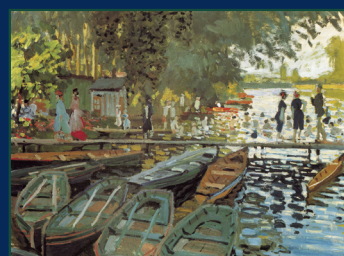
Much like a camera, Impressionist artists wanted to capture a spontaneous moment in time.

- Discuss the Impressionistic style. Focus on the Impressionist artists desire to capture a moment in time.
- Do not show them *The Meadow*, yet. Have the students gather with a journal and a pencil.
- Tell them once you reveal the painting that they will have 45 seconds to study it.
- Next, have them write for 5-10 minutes describing their first impression of the art work.
- Then, reveal the painting and have them study it for a longer amount of time.
- Finally, have them write for 20-30 minutes.

Slice of Life

Impressionist artists sought out modern-life scenes to paint. Typical themes were crowded cafes and restaurants as well as weekends in the countryside. They not only painted these subjects, they participated in this lifestyle.

- Discuss the types of subjects the Impressionist artists depicted in their paintings.
- Talk about what is happening in *The Meadow*.
- Have students talk about activities their families do on weekends. Create a list.
- Next, discuss what types of activities families would do on the weekends in the 19th C.
- Finally, compare 19th C. activities with the 21st C. ones.



Monet, *Bathing at La Grenouillère (or The Frog Pond)*, 1869.
Trustees of the National Gallery, London.

Impressionism 101

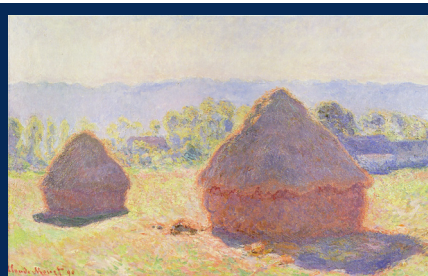
- Focus on **color** and **light**.
- **Limited color palette**, rarely used black.
- **Primed canvases** with white or cream.
- Artists understood that colors were changed when other colors were placed next to each other. Based on **Eugène Chevreul’s findings**.
- **Layered partial brushstrokes** caused a finished image to appear unfinished.
- Painted **en plein-air** (out-of-doors).
- Their subjects reflected **everyday modern scenes** both in the city and countryside.
- Influenced by innovations of the time: **camera, trains** and **metal paint tubes**.

Season's Change

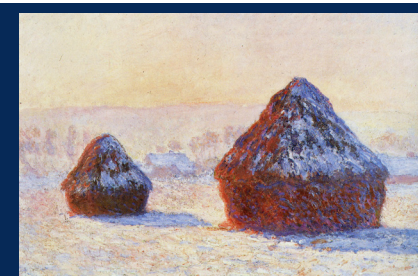
Monet often painted images out of doors so he could capture the light in his paintings as bright or as shady as it really was while he was working.

Monet wanted to show these changes in a series of paintings some featuring wheatstacks, poplars and cathedrals.

He developed a method of bringing a number of canvases with him. If a sunny day should suddenly turn dreary, he would start working on another version of the haystacks. When the sun came back out, he would then return to the previous canvas.



Monet, *Wheatstacks. (Full Sunlight)*, 1890.
Hillstead, Museum, Farmington.



Monet, *Wheatstacks. (Effects of Snow, Morning)* 1890-91. Private Collection.

- Study *The Meadow* and wheatstacks paintings, and discuss what season or time of day Monet is capturing.
- Discuss how the colors would change for a different season or time of day.
- Have students create a series of paintings representing different seasons and/or time of day.

Monet's Palette

Claude Monet
Water Lilies, 1914-17
200.5 x 201 cm
The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, Matsukata Collection.

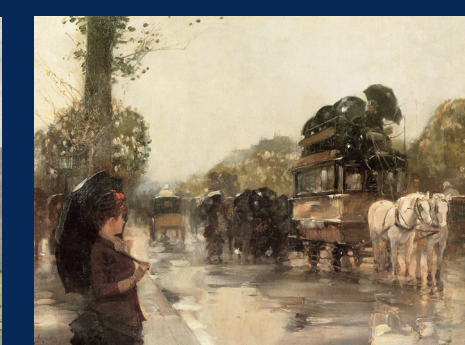
Per Monet, *As for the colors I use, what's so interesting about that? I don't think one could paint better or more brightly with another palette. The most important thing is to know how to use the colors. Their choice is a matter of habit. In short, I use white lead, cadmium yellow, vermilion, madder, cobalt blue, chrome green. That's all.*

Side by Side

Monet & Hassam



Claude Monet, French, 1840-1926
Le Pont Neuf, d. 1872
20 7/8 x 28 1/2 inches.
Dallas Museum of Art
The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection.



Frederick Childe Hassam, American, 1859-1935
April Showers, Champs Elysées, Paris, 1888
oil on canvas, 12 1/2 x 16 3/4 inches.
Joslyn Art Museum.

Impressionist artists are known for their asymmetrical compositions as well as slice of life images.

Take note of the quick brush strokes and blurred edges in both artworks.

Discussion Questions:

- How do you feel when looking at these artworks? What is the painting’s mood?
- What colors do you see?
- Imagine you are there, what sounds would you hear?