

Edited by Richard Kendall

Translations by Bridget Stevens Romer

Paintings, drawings, pastels, letters

MONET by himself

Macdonald Orbis London

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To my daughter Ruth

A Macdonald Orbis book
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The early decades of Monet's career are the least well documented of all: many of his letters to family and friends have disappeared, and the correspondence that remains tells a story that might have come from the pages of a popular novel; we read of the teenager's determination to become a painter against his parents' wishes, the years of poverty and lack of recognition, the clandestine love affair and the hasty removals from cheap lodgings, and eventually the first taste of success. All is not as it seems, however. From his earliest days Monet had shown great independence of mind, preferring the company of painters like Boudin and Courbet who worked at the periphery of, or even in opposition to, the established art institutions of the day. In his twenties, Monet did go through some of the preliminaries of a conventional career, showing himself willing and able to please potential patrons by tackling a range of subjects, including portraits, still lifes and flower studies. But much of the direction of Monet's early development was self-willed, as he knowingly associated with the most radical artists of the day and resisted the traditional pattern of training and advancement. It has also been shown that he was capable of exaggerating his own plight and that some of his poverty may have been more imagined than real.

Monet's earliest surviving letters show both his youthful self-confidence and his determination to succeed as an artist. As a teenager living in Le Havre, his talent had been noticed by the local landscape painter Eugène Boudin, who may also have arranged the necessary introductions for Monet when he visited Paris. At the age of nineteen Monet wrote to Boudin from the capital, describing the studios he had visited and the advice he had been given. On this occasion and several others, it is instructive to note that Monet was urged to work at his drawing, in recognition perhaps of the fact that his skills with colour and paint were already well advanced. There is also little evidence that Monet followed such advice, either at this period or later in his career, and he became one of the exceptions to the rule that great art is founded on great draughtsmanship. In other respects too, Monet resisted the well-intentioned guidance of his mentors: their recommendation that he study in the studio of an established artist was soon forgotten, and Monet learnt to prefer the company of his new friends Bazille, Renoir and Sisley. Writing to Frédéric Bazille, the wealthy and talented young artist whose career was cut short by his death in 1871, Monet also recorded his growing enthusiasm for the life of a landscape painter. Landscape was still officially regarded as a minor category of painting, and Monet's early adoption of it as his principal subject can be seen as further evidence of his developing single-mindedness.

The paintings that emerged from these apprentice years show Monet's considerable natural talent and also his first encounters with subjects that were to preoccupy him in his maturity. The two studies of the rue de la Bavolle appear to be a precocious demonstration of the artist's delight in shifting light effects, while the pictures of Paris painted in 1867 anticipate the later series of Rouen, London and Venice. Most conspicuously, the numerous paintings of sky and water, showing light effects on the River Seine or the moods of the sea around the Channel ports, announce one of the major themes of Monet's art. Working outdoors and in all weathers, Monet discovered the fascination of atmosphere and extremes of weather, gradually developing a vocabulary of colour and brushwork that would do justice to his perceptions of nature. Along with a number of his fellow artists, Monet learnt to abandon the sombre colours and dull tones of orthodox landscape painting and see his subject afresh, 'as if he had been born blind and had suddenly been granted his sight', as he later phrased it. The technique that these painters evolved, based on small touches of bright colour and a rapid, spontaneous execution, was to become one of the hallmarks of what we know today as Impressionism.

In December 1871 Monet wrote to another of the stalwarts of the emergent Impressionist group, Camille Pissarro, announcing that he and his family had just moved to Argenteuil, a small town on the banks of the Seine near Paris. They were to live there for seven years, through a long and productive phase in the artist's career during which his style, technique and subject matter were defined and consolidated. Subsequent letters from Argenteuil show that Monet maintained contact with a number of his former colleagues, among them Manet, Cézanne and Renoir, and that some of them came to work with him beside the Seine. There is even a painting by Edouard Manet which shows Monet at work on the river, sitting in his studio boat with his wife Camille beside him, a small canvas perched on a portable easel. In such circumstances Monet excelled at the rapid notation of fleeting light effects, and during his years at Argenteuil he refined even further his responsiveness to atmosphere, weather and the passage of the seasons. The subject matter of the busy town and its river traffic also stimulated his art, offering challenging juxtapositions of the rural and the contemporary. Monet's paintings of the recently constructed road and railway bridges emphasize the stark modernity of these structures, a theme he was to take up three years later in his pictures of the Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris.

It is one of the misfortunes of Monet's history that almost all the letters he must have written at the time of the first Impressionist exhibitions, when his career became both public and controversial, have been lost. Equally unfortunate is the absence of any letters between the artist and his first wife Camille, whom we know mainly through Monet's paintings. Camille is referred to briefly in 1867, when their first son was born, but thereafter appears rarely in the surviving correspondence until her untimely death in 1879. Monet recorded his distress at her death in a number of brief notes to his friends and also in a haunting picture of his wife as she lay on her deathbed. Their two sons, Jean and Michel, also feature in his paintings and letters, as do the children of the family he virtually adopted, the Hoschedés. Ernest Hoschedé was one of several picture collectors whose commissions and purchases had provided Monet with a sporadic income (Georges de Bellio, a doctor who bought from a number of the Impressionists, was another), but Monet's letter to Hoschedé of May 1879 shows the complexity of the developing relationship between their two families. Driven by a lack of funds to share the Hoschedés' house at Vétheuil, Monet had succumbed to a characteristic bout of depression, disheartened by the weather, the progress of his painting and his inability to support his family by his work. A number of sombre pictures of the frozen River Seine and still-life groups of fruit and dead game birds probably reflect this painful phase in the artist's life.

[Paris], 19 May 1859

TO EUGÈNE BOUDIN

Having a moment to spare I thought I'd write and tell you of all the fine things I'm seeing in Paris.

So far I've made only one visit to the Exhibition, which has just closed for a week: however, in the little time I had, I was able to see that most of the landscape painters were represented. As for quality, the Troyons are superb and the Daubignys are, to my eyes at least, really beautiful. In particular there is one of Honfleur which is sublime.

There are some nice Corots and, strange to say, some awful Diaz. Monsieur Gautier's picture is very pretty: it's subdued and in a range of greys expressing deep sadness. He has been overwhelmed by critical acclaim. Monsieur Lhuillier's picture is way off the mark.

I've paid visits to several painters. I began with Monsieur Gautier who sends you his best wishes and looks forward to seeing you in Paris in the near future. Everyone is of the same mind. Don't stay put in that backwater until you've lost all hope. As for myself, he made me very welcome. He has a lot of small pictures under way. He's due to start work on a big lithograph any day now. You asked me to make a few enquiries as to the state of the art market. Things are cooling off a bit at the moment because of the war.

Afterwards I visited M. Lhuillier. He is lodging with M. Becq (of Fouquières) who is lending him his studio. He's very happy. His picture sold for six hundred francs. He's doing another one and has a lot of small portraits to do at a hundred francs a time.

There are some pretty things to be seen at the moment in the galleries.

How's this for a good bit of news? Before I left Le Havre I was given a letter to see Troyon. I duly went. I could not begin to describe all the lovely things I saw there; wonderful cattle and dogs. He talked of you a lot and is surprised not to see you in town.

He told me to tell you to send him ten or so of your most finished pictures, grey seascapes, still lifes and landscapes. He will undertake to find homes for them as long as they are more finished than the ones you've given him in the past. He strongly advises you to come here. He seems a really good man and he doesn't mince words.

This is the advice he gave me: I showed him two of my still lifes; his comment was 'Well, my dear chap, your colour will be all right; the effect is correct. However, you must get down to some serious study, for this is all very fine but it comes very easily to you: that's something you'll never lose. If you want my advice and want to go in for art seriously, begin by joining a studio which specializes in figure painting, *académies*: learn to draw: that's where most of you are falling down today. Take heed and you'll see I'm not wrong, but draw with all your might; you can never learn too much. However, don't neglect painting: go to the country from time to time and make studies and above all develop them. Do some copying at the Louvre. Come and see me often: show me what you're doing and with enough courage you'll make it.'

As a consequence my parents have decided to give me a month or two to follow Troyon's advice, who says I must stay here and draw hard. 'In this way', he told me, 'you'll have more means at your disposal: you'll go to Le Havre and you'll be able to do some good studies in the country, and when winter comes you'll come back and settle here permanently.'

This has been approved by my parents.

Then I had to ask Troyon where he wished me to go and his reply was, 'If you want my advice I'd go to Couture if I had my time round again: I can recommend you personally. There's always Picot or Cognier: but I've always hated their way of doing things.'



YOUNG DANDY WITH MONOCLE



CARICATURE OF A MAN WITH A LARGE NOSE

Write soon and tell me what you think about all this. Here's my address: Place Du Havre, Hôtel du Nouveau-Monde.

Write back soon, because in two days I'll be moving. I'll give you my new address in my next letter.

Yours, C. MONET

*

Chailly near Fontainebleau, 23 May 1863

TO AMAND GAUTIER

Please forgive me for leaving as I did without paying you a visit, but my intention when I arrived was to stay for only a week or so, but it's so beautiful in spring, everything turned green, the fine weather came and I couldn't resist the temptation of staying on longer . . .

I've just received a letter from Madame Lecadre of Le Havre, the doctor's wife, who has seen Toulmouche who asked her to tell me that on no account should I stay any longer in the country, and above all that it was a grave mistake to have left the studio so soon: but I hope you will understand: I have certainly not abandoned the studio but I found a thousand things to charm me here which I just could not resist. I've worked a great deal and you will see, I think, that I have looked harder than usual, and now I'm going to get down to drawing once again. I'm not giving it up in any way.

Honfleur, 15 July [1864]

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

I wonder what you could be doing in Paris in such beautiful weather, for I imagine it must be as lovely down there. It's simply adorable here, my friend, and each day I find something even more beautiful than the day before. It's enough to drive one crazy, I so want to do it all my head is bursting. Damn it man, come on the 16th, get packing and come here for a fortnight, you'd be far better off; it can't be that easy to work in Paris.

Today I have exactly a month left in Honfleur; and what is more, my studies are almost done, I've even got some others back on the go. On the whole, I'm quite content with my stay here, although my studies are very far from being as I should like. It really is appallingly difficult to do something which is complete in every respect, and I think most people are content with mere approximations. Well, my dear friend, I intend to battle on, scrape off and start again, since one can do something if one can see and understand it, and when I look at nature I feel as if I'll be able to paint it all, note it all down, and then you might as well forget it once you're working . . .

All this proves that you must think of nothing else. It's on the strength of observation and reflection that one finds a way. So we must dig and delve unceasingly. Are you making any progress? I'm sure you are, but I'm also sure you don't work enough and in the right way. You can't hope to work with playboys like your friend Villa and the others. One's better off alone, and yet there are so many things that are impossible to fathom on one's own. In fact it's a terrible business and the task is a hard one.

Have you done your lifesize figure? I've some wonderful things lined up for myself. It's quite awesome what I've got in mind for this coming winter in Sainte-Adresse and Paris.

I must tell you that I received a charming letter from little Eugénie: it pleased me enormously and if I'd had the money I would have jumped for joy all the way to Paris. It is so sweet of her to remember me.

My flower painting is at last framed and varnished and on show and looks a darned sight better for it. It's undoubtedly the best thing I have done to date. It appears that it was remarked upon in Le Havre . . .

I'd be very happy to hear from you. Tell me what you're doing and what's going on in Paris. Do you go to the country sometimes? And above all, come and see us, if you don't come now, then I'll be expecting you on 1 August at the very least. By that time almost all my paintings will be finished.

In the meantime warm greetings from your good friend, CLAUDE MONET

*

Honfleur, 26 August 1864

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

I received your kind letter. I had just spent a day at Sainte-Adresse when your letter arrived. It gave me a great deal of pleasure, please write nice long ones like that more often. I hope you're working hard, it is important that you devote yourself to it wholeheartedly and seriously now that your family is giving up on your medicine. I'm still at Saint-Siméon, it's such a pleasant place and I'm working hard. I'm quite content: although what I'm doing is far from being as I should like, I am complimented often enough all the same . . . We are now quite a crowd here in Honfleur, several painters I did not know, and very



THE COAST OF NORMANDY VIEWED FROM SAINTE-ADRESSE

bad ones at that. Rozias and Charpentier are a bunch of jokers, but we form a very pleasant little group of our own. Jongkind and Boudin are here and we get on extremely well and stick together. Ribot is probably coming too; he's due to be painting a fishing boat with figures *en plein air*. I'd be interested to see him do it. I'm very sorry that you're not here, since there's a good deal to learn from such company and the landscape is growing more beautiful. It's turning yellow and becoming more varied, really lovely in fact, and I think I'm going to be in Honfleur for some while yet. I wouldn't have the heart to leave. Sometimes we go to Trouville which is superb and I really hope to go back there next year, as well as to Etretat.

I must tell you that I'm sending my flower picture to the Rouen exhibition: there are some really beautiful flowers about at this time; sadly I've got so much to do on my outdoor studies that I dare not start on any, though I'd love to paint those gorgeous daisies. Why don't you do some yourself, since they are, I think, an excellent thing to paint. Let me know what you're doing and when you think you'll be coming. Come and join me now with the country at its best. It's windy, and there are some beautiful clouds and storms; it's the best time to see the country, in fact, there are many more effects, and believe me I'm putting my time to good use . . .

Well, my dear friend, I must end here, lunch is served and I'm ravenous. Madame and Mademoiselle Toutain send best wishes and so does Monsieur Vivien.

Your good friend, CLAUDE MONET

Write to me at Saint-Siméon.



LE PAVÉ DE CHAILLY

Sainte-Adresse, 14 October 1864

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

I received your fine letter which gave me a great deal of pleasure; I never doubted that you would be ready to do anything to help me out and I'm very grateful to you.

Next Monday I'm going to put a box on the express train containing three pictures with frames which I've just had made, since you know well enough how a picture gains a hundred per cent in a fine frame. One of these is a simple study which you didn't see at the outset, it's done entirely from nature. You might find it bears a certain relationship to Corot, but if this is so, it is not because of any attempt to imitate him on my part. It is due entirely to the motif and above all to the calm and misty effect. I did it as conscientiously as possible and did not think of any painting whatsoever. Besides, you know that's not the way I do things. The two other canvases are the shipyard for small boats below Saint-Siméon and the road in front of the farm. These are two of my best studies, though it's not the studies I'm sending you but the two paintings I'm finishing here based on my studies . . . I'm going to get down to a still life on a size 50 canvas of rayfish and dogfish with old fishermen's baskets. Then I'm going to turn out a few pictures to send wherever possible, given that now, first and foremost (unfortunately), I have to earn some money.

Yours affectionately, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Chailly, July or early August 1865]

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

I'm writing to you again, as you didn't let me know whether my pictures were ready in time to be sent. I'd also like to know if my tickets have been paid for. I'm angry with you in fact, for not having written; you appear to have forgotten me completely. You promised to help me with my picture, you were supposed to come and pose for some figures and my picture depends on it: so I hope you will keep your promise, but time is passing all the same and no sign of you. Please, my dear fellow, don't hold me up like this. All my studies are progressing admirably, it's only the men that are missing now. So come right away, there can't be anything serious keeping you in Paris. Here it's as agreeable as ever, we are quite a pleasant little group of artists. So come, but above all write and tell me at once; I'm very worried, I know how fickle you are, my dear fellow, I think only of my painting, and if I were to drop it, I think I'd go crazy. Everyone knows what I'm doing and I'm getting a lot of encouragement, so it must be done, and well, I'm counting on the kindness that you've shown in the past to come quickly and help me out.

Yours affectionately, MONET

*

Place Pigalle [early April 1866]

TO AMAND GAUTIER

I've just had bad news from Le Havre. My aunt has finally decided to put an end to the allowance she sends me this very month. I'm utterly shaken. It does seem as though a certain person wishes to destroy my reputation in her eyes. As you have seen yourself how I live and how I work, I beg of you to help me placate my aunt for a little while longer . . . I don't know quite how I could manage otherwise . . .

*

Sèvres, Tuesday 22 May 1866

TO AMAND GAUTIER

I am writing to thank you for all the interest and kindness you have shown towards me: a few days ago I received a letter from my aunt informing me that she received news from you addressed from Lille, and that you compliment her on my Salon success; I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

My aunt appears to be delighted. She is congratulated at every turn; no less than three people sent her the *Événement* which you also sent. My aunt tells me that you must be in Paris by now: the first day I come to Paris, my first errand will be to come and see you, and that will probably be Thursday.

I am increasingly happy; having decided to get away to the country, I'm working hard with more determination than ever. My success at the Salon led to my selling several paintings and since your absence I have made 800 francs; I hope, when I have contracts with more dealers, it will be better still.

In haste, with warm greetings.

See you soon, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Paris, 20 May 1867]

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

I was very happy to receive your letter; I'm very touched by your compliments, and all the more relieved because I dreaded the contrary, and it's the hardest thing to be alone in being satisfied with what one's done. Do try and show it to M. Bruyas, to see if it appeals to him; don't forget me will you?

... Manet's opening is in two days and he is in a frightful state. Courbet opens a week today, next Monday that is. That's quite another story. Can you imagine, he's inviting every artist in Paris to the opening: he's sending three thousand invitations, and on top of that, every artist also gets a copy of his catalogue. Rest assured he's doing well; his intention is to hold on to the building where he's already had a studio built on the first floor: and next year he'll rent the room out whenever anyone wants to hold an exhibition there. So let's work hard, and end up there with some pictures that are beyond criticism. Nothing else for now. Renoir and I are still working on our views of Paris. I saw Camille yesterday: I don't know what to do; she is ill, bedridden and penniless, or almost, and as I count on leaving on the 2nd or 3rd at the latest, I have to remind you of your promise to send me fifty francs at least, for the first of the month...

*

Sainte-Adresse, 25 June [1867]

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

I've been staying with my family for two weeks now and am as happy and as well as could be. Everyone is good to me and every brushstroke I do is admired.

I've set myself a lot of work, I've twenty or so canvases well under way, stunning seascapes, figures and gardens, something of everything in fact. Among my seascapes I'm painting the regattas at Le Havre with lots of people on the beach and the ship lane covered with small sails. For the Salon I'm doing an enormous steamboat. It's very curious. Did you know that before I left Paris I sold a small seascape to Cadart, and one of my Paris views to Latouche? It was a great relief and a joy to me as I was able to be of some help to poor Camille. But my dear friend, what a painful situation it is, all the same; she is so kind, a really good lass and she has seen sense and in so doing has made me even sadder. In this context, I'm writing to ask you to send whatever you can, the more the better, send it to me by the 1st, since although I'm getting along well with my parents, they warned me that I could stay here as long as I liked but if I needed money I had to earn it. So don't let me down, will you? But I have a favour to ask of you. On 25 July Camille's baby is due. I'm going to Paris where I'll be for ten or fifteen days and I'll need money for a lot of things. Do try and send me a little more then, if only 100 or 150 francs. Please bear it in mind; without it I'll be in a very awkward position.

... You didn't know about the Courbet and Manet exhibitions. That's very odd. God, what horrors Courbet came up with. He did himself a lot of harm, since he had enough good pictures not to have to show everything. When I left, Manet's takings were becoming more substantial, which must have done him a lot of good, and there are some good things which I didn't know about. The *Femme Rose* is bad, he's done better in the past. God knows it's terrible to be swayed by praise the way he is, because he really ought to be doing some very fine things...

Best wishes, CLAUDE MONET

THE ARTIST'S SON ASLEEP



Sainte-Adresse, 12 August [1867]

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

I really don't know what to say to you, you've shown such pig-headedness in not replying, I've written letter after letter, a telegram and nothing has got through to you; yet you know me better than anyone, and my situation too. Once again I had to borrow and received snubs from people I don't know, and I'm really angry with you; I didn't think you would abandon me like this, it really is too bad. It's now almost a month since I asked you first: since then, in Paris as here, I've waited for the postman and every day it's the same. For the *last* time I am asking you for this *favour*, I'm going through the most terrible torments, I had to come back here not to upset the family and also because I didn't have enough money to stay in Paris while Camille was in labour. She has given birth to a big and beautiful boy and despite everything I feel that I love him, and it pains me to think of his mother having nothing to eat. I was able to borrow the strict minimum for the birth and my return here, but neither she nor I have a penny of our own.

It's all your fault, so hurry up and make amends and send me the money right away to Sainte-Adresse: as soon as you get my letter, send a word by telegraph as I am terribly worried.

Really, Bazille, there are things that cannot be put off until tomorrow. This is one of them and I'm waiting.

In hope, and with warm greetings, CLAUDE MONET

Paris, 29 June [1868]

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

A hasty note to ask you to come speedily to my rescue if you can. I must have been born under an unlucky star. I've just been turned out, without a shirt to my back, from the inn where I was staying. I have found somewhere safe in the country for Camille and my poor little Jean to stay for a few days. As for myself, I arrived here this morning and I leave this evening, very shortly, for Le Havre, to try and see if my patron can help me.

Don't fail to write as soon as you receive this if you can do something for me; in any case, I expect a word from you.

Write to me at Le Havre, poste restante, as my family refuses to do anything more for me, so I don't even know yet where I'll be sleeping tomorrow.

Your loyal and tormented friend, C. M.

I was so upset yesterday that I was stupid enough to hurl myself into the water. Fortunately no harm was done.

*

[Etretat, December 1868]

TO FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

As I told you in my little scribble, I'm very happy, very delighted. I'm setting to like a fighting cockerel, for I'm surrounded here by all that I love. I spend my time out-of-doors on the shingle when the weather's stormy or when the boats go out fishing; otherwise I go into the country which is so lovely here that I perhaps find it even more agreeable in winter than in summer; and naturally I'm working all the time, and I think this year I'm going to do some serious things. And then in the evening, dear fellow, I come home to my little cottage to find a good fire and a dear little family. If only you could see how sweet your godson is now.

Dear friend, it's a delight to watch this person grow, and I'm glad to have him to be sure. I'm going to paint him for the Salon with other people around of course. This year I'm going to do two figure paintings, an interior with a baby and two women and some sailors in the open, and I want to do them in a striking way. Thanks to the gentleman from Le Havre who is coming to my aid, I'm enjoying the most perfect tranquillity, free from all worries, and in consequence would like to stay this way forever, in a peaceful corner of the countryside like this. I assure you that I don't envy you being in Paris, and scarcely miss the gatherings, even though I'd be glad to see some of the *habitues*, but frankly I don't think one can do anything good in such surroundings: don't you think that face to face with nature and alone, one can do better? I'm sure of it, myself. Moreover I've always thought so, and what I've completed in such conditions has always been better.

One is too taken up with all that one sees and hears in Paris, however strong one is, and what I do here will at least have the merit of being unlike anyone else, at least I believe so, because it will simply be the expression of what I, and only I, have felt.

The further I get, the more I regret how little I know, that's what hinders me the most. The further I get the more I notice that one never dares give frank expression to what one feels. It's strange. That's why I'm doubly happy to be here and I don't think I will spend much time in Paris now, a month at the very most, each year . . .

With warm greetings and best wishes, CLAUDE MONET



THE DINNER

Paris, 2 June 1869

TO ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE

When I had the honour of visiting you to request support for a permit to work in the Salon, you advised me to settle in Paris where it would evidently be easier to turn my small talent to best account. My rejection at the Salon brought an end to my hesitation since after this failure I can no longer claim to cope. In Le Havre, Gaudibert was once again kind enough to provide me with means to move here and bring my small family back with me. We are now settled, working conditions are very good and I have a lot of courage for the task but alas, that fatal rejection has virtually taken the bread out of my mouth, and despite my extremely modest prices, dealers and art lovers are turning their backs on me. It is, above all, very depressing to see the lack of interest shown in an art object which has no market value.

I thought, and I hope you will excuse me for this, that since you have already found a painting of mine to your taste, you might perhaps like to see the few canvases I was able to save from the bailiffs and the rest, since I thought you might be so good as to help me a little, as I am in quite a desperate state, and the worst is that I can no longer even work.

It goes without saying that I will do anything at any price to pull myself out of a situation like this so that I can start work immediately on my next Salon picture and ensure that such a thing should not happen again.

I hope you will forgive my boldness in writing to you and that you will be so kind as to give my request due consideration.

In this hope, I remain, Sir, your most obedient servant. CLAUDE MONET



MADAME GAUDIBERT

Argenteuil, 7 May 1873

TO PAUL ALEXIS

A group of painters assembled in my home read with pleasure the article you published in the *Avenir National*. We are all happy to see you defend ideas which are ours also, and we hope that, as you say, the *Avenir National* will kindly lend us its support when the Society we are in the process of setting up is fully established.

My colleagues join me in sending you kind regards, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Argenteuil], Monday morning, 28 June [1875]

TO EDOUARD MANET

It's getting more and more difficult. Not a penny left since the day before yesterday and no more credit at the butcher's or the baker's. Even though I believe in the future, you can see that the present is very hard indeed.

So could you send something then, on whatever terms, to a broker? Only be careful as to whom you choose to deal with, in case some harm comes of it.

You couldn't possibly send me a twenty franc note by return of post, could you? It would help me out for the time being.

Best wishes, CLAUDE MONET

Argenteuil, 4 February 1876

TO VICTOR CHOCQUET

I made Cézanne promise he would come with you tomorrow, Saturday, and expect lunch.

If you are not put off by the prospect of a very frugal meal, it would give me great pleasure, since I would be delighted to make your acquaintance. I will expect you both tomorrow morning,

Yours most sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

2 Boulevard St Denis, opposite the station, pink house with green shutters.

*

[Argenteuil], 25 July 1876

TO GEORGES DE BELLIO

I am writing to you with a heavy heart to ask you, if you have the time, to come and choose the two sketches that you were kind enough to buy and pay for in advance. I can find no way out of it, the creditors are proving impossible to deal with and short of a sudden appearance on the scene of wealthy art patrons, we are going to be turned out of this dear little house where I led a simple life and was able to work so well. I do not know what will become of us . . . and yet I had so much fire in me and so many plans . . .

*

[Late March 1877]

TO EMILE ZOLA

Although Renoir has seen you, I'm writing to tell you that we all hope you will be at our meeting on Thursday. Cézanne should be with us and will be delighted to see you. So we'll count on you for Thursday then, meeting at 7 in the Café Riche.

Aside from that, we'll see each other on Wednesday, I hope, at our private opening.

Best wishes, CLAUDE MONET

*

10 March 1879

TO GEORGES DE BELLIO

. . . I am absolutely sickened with and demoralized by this life I've been leading for so long. When you reach my age, there is nothing more to look forward to. Unhappy we are, unhappy we will continue to be.

Each day brings its tribulations and each day difficulties arise from which we can never free ourselves. So I am giving up the struggle once and for all, abandoning all hope of success, and I no longer have the strength to work in such conditions. I hear that my friends are preparing another exhibition this year but I must discount the possibility of participating in it since I have nothing worth showing.

*



THE STUDIO BOAT

Vétheuil, 14 May 1879

TO ERNEST HOSCHEDÉ

I don't know if the weather in Paris is the same as here, though it's quite likely it is, so you can imagine how dispirited I am. My heart is heavy and I have to share the burden of my disappointments with you. For almost two months now I've been struggling away with no result. You may have some reason to doubt this, perhaps, but it's a fact. I didn't waste an hour and would have reproached myself for taking even one day off to go and see our exhibition, for fear of nothing more than the loss of one good working session, an hour's sunshine. No one but myself knows the anxiety I go through and the trouble I give myself to finish paintings which do not satisfy me and seem to please so very few others. I am utterly discouraged and can no longer see or hope for a way ahead. I have just been jolted into this realization; I have to come to terms with the fact that I cannot hope to earn enough with my paintings to live in Vétheuil. That is the sad fact of the matter. Moreover, I can't imagine that we are very good company for Madame Hoschedé and yourself, with me becoming

increasingly bitter and my wife ill most of the time. We must be and we are, I'm sure, a hindrance to all your plans, and I regret now that we once again started living in arrears. I am only too aware of the wall that has grown up around me and of the impossibility of coping with our share of expenses if we continue to live together; if we left it any later, we would be unable to extricate ourselves. It is far better that we should face up to things as they are. Personally speaking, we will not be any better off as a result, but at least we'll be living the life laid out for us.

I am heartbroken to have to talk to you in this way, please believe me. I am utterly without hope, and see everything at its blackest and worst, and I don't think I'm wrong in saying that our departure will be a relief to everyone in the house. I actually believe it would be doing you a service in a place where, in the eyes of tradesmen and servants, we look like your dependants. That is what bothers me, and as it will become a reality I would rather ask you to settle our accounts, it's wiser I think, much as I might have believed in an idyll of work and happiness.

You must believe how much it pains me to upset you like this.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*

Vétheuil, 17 August 1879

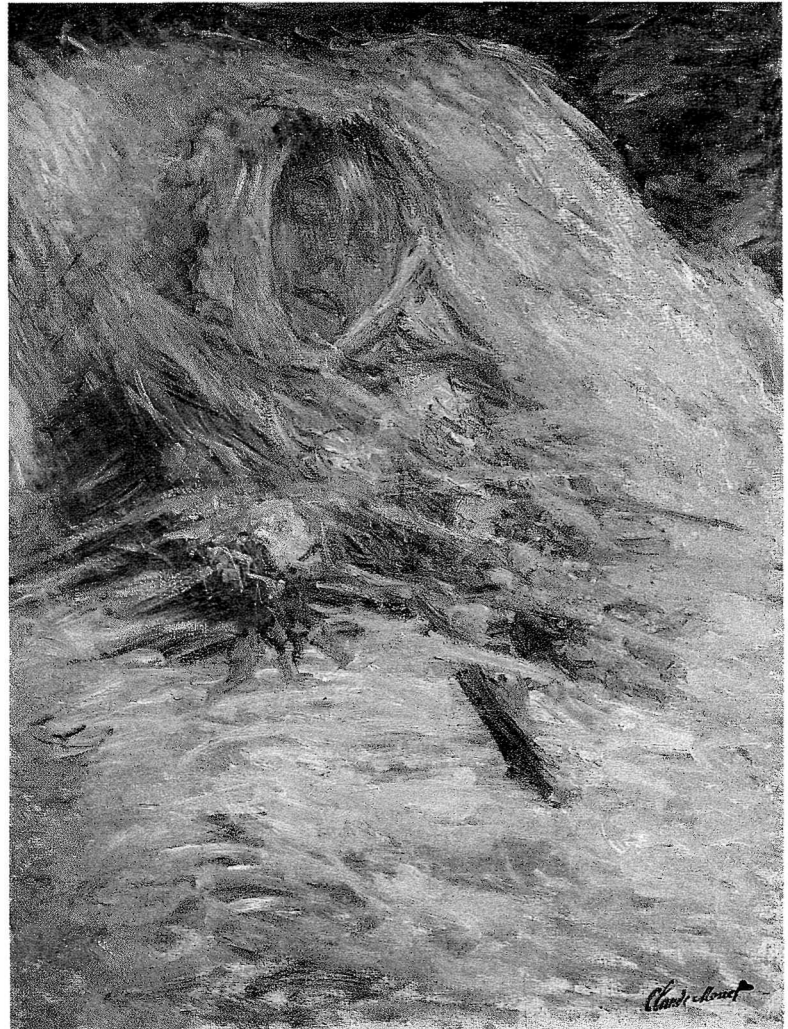
TO GEORGES DE BELLIO

For a long time I have been hoping for better days ahead, but alas, I believe the time has come for me to abandon all hope. My poor wife is in increasing pain and I cannot imagine that she could be any weaker than she is now. Not only does she not have the strength to stand up or walk one step, but she cannot hold down the slightest bit of nourishment, although she has an appetite. One has to be at her bedside continually attending to her smallest wish, in the hope of relieving her suffering, and the saddest thing is that we cannot always satisfy these immediate needs for lack of money. For a month now I have not been able to paint because I lack the colours; but that is not important. Right now it is the sight of my wife's life in jeopardy that terrifies me, and it is unbearable to see her suffering so much and not be able to provide relief. . . . But I would ask another favour of you, dear M. de Bellio, which is to help us out from your own pocket. We have no resources whatsoever. I have a few canvases in the rue Vintimille; take them for whatever price you like: but please respond to my call for help and send us what you can. Two or three hundred francs now would save us from hardship and anxiety: with a hundred francs more I could procure the canvas and paints I need to work. Do what you can, in short; I told our landlady to let you in: so look at my paintings and buy them for whatever you like.

Awaiting your reply, I send you my best wishes.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*



CAMILLE ON HER DEATHBED

Vétheuil, 5 September 1879

TO GEORGES DE BELLIO

My poor wife gave up the struggle this morning at half past ten after the most ghastly suffering. I am in a state of distress, finding myself alone with my poor children.

I am writing to ask another favour of you; could you retrieve from the *Mont de Piété* the locket for which I am sending you the ticket. It is the only keepsake my wife had managed to hold on to and I would like to be able to place it around her neck before she goes.

Could you do me this favour and send it tomorrow, on receipt of my letter, to the main office in the rue des Blancs-Manteaux before 2 o'clock? You could send it by post; in this way I would get it before she is placed in her bier.

I hope to have word from you tomorrow in response to my previous letter.

Your very unhappy and very pitiable friend, CLAUDE MONET

*

Vétheuil, 26 September 1879

TO CAMILLE PISSARRO

Thank you for your letter and its expression of sympathy; you, more than anyone, must know something of my affliction.

I am devastated, and have no idea where to turn or how to organize my life with two children. I am much to be pitied, for I am very pitiable.

Thank you again, dear friend, and your wife, for all your kindness, and trust in my sincere friendship.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

Fécamp, 23 March 1881

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

As I informed you, I came here for a brief spell by the sea and I am in such good form that I am very keen to stay for a little while longer. I have worked hard and put my time to good use, but I would like to take some of the studies I have begun somewhat further. To do this I fear I might be somewhat short of money, particularly since I have a lot to pay out elsewhere before the end of the month.

I am thus writing to ask whether you could kindly make a note for 6 or 700 francs available to me. It would be a great help and would enable me to stay here a little while longer. Please be so kind as to forward your answer as soon as possible.

With my best wishes,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Fécamp, 26 March 1881

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I received your letter. Thank you for your generosity. I have to settle various expenses here and there before the end of the month: it would therefore be extremely kind of you if you could send me the sum in question before Wednesday. Send it to me at the home of M. Lemarrois in Fécamp.

I'm working hard. I'm putting a lot of effort into it and I hope to bring you back some good things.

I thank you in advance and send my best regards,

CLAUDE MONET

*

Vétheuil, 13 September 1881

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

Here I am, back in Vétheuil. The continuing bad weather having prevented me from doing any kind of work, I have been forced to come back and I return empty-handed. I am as a result very discouraged, for your sake, having wanted to provide you with some fine things, and for my own, having counted so much on a period by the sea to get over my discouragement.

It is all the more heartbreaking because I have to leave Vétheuil within the month. I have to look for somewhere else and this is going to be a great upheaval for me. I'll need quite a lot of money when the time comes to move house and I won't dare to ask you for any if I can't give you the masterpieces you expect of me.

I will, however, come and see you in Paris when I've found somewhere. I'll bring along all that I have which is presentable. Please don't be too angry with me for my temporary disability and accept my very best wishes.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

PS If only the weather would improve, there'd be hope of some work, but every day brings rain.

*The character of Monet's correspondence in the 1880s differs markedly from that of his earlier career, reflecting a number of profound changes in his domestic and professional circumstances. Many of his letters took on a businesslike manner, as he negotiated with picture-dealers over the price of his paintings or with exhibition organizers over the availability of new work. Throughout this decade, Monet became even more active in the promotion of his own interests, developing exceptionally close links with dealers like Paul Durand-Ruel and attempting to open up new markets for his work. After his early involvement with the Impressionist group, Monet chose to participate in only one of their last four exhibitions, preferring to exhibit by himself or in the company of carefully selected colleagues. In 1880 he had a small show of his pictures on the premises of the periodical *La Vie Moderne*, and three years later Durand-Ruel arranged the first retrospective of Monet's work in his Paris gallery. It is clear from his letters that Monet actively pursued a number of picture-dealers at the same time, and was probably able to benefit from the rivalry that existed between them. At the end of the decade, at the gallery of Georges Petit, the artist shared an exhibition with the most distinguished and controversial sculptor of the day, Auguste Rodin. The success of this exhibition and Monet's increased ability to dictate terms to dealers and collectors both point to a new era of financial independence after almost thirty years of struggle.*

Among the reasons for Monet's energetic intervention in the picture market was the need to finance his long painting expeditions and to support his newly extended household. In 1883 Monet and his two sons moved with Alice Hoschedé and her six children into a rented house at Giverny, a village on the banks of the Seine. Here their combined families were to live for many years. Ernest Hoschedé, Alice's husband, had effectively abandoned his family, but it was not until after his death in 1891 that Monet was able to regularize the situation by marrying Alice. The new domestic relationship brought a measure of stability into the artist's life, but Alice seems never to have reconciled herself to Monet's regular painting trips. Fortunately for posterity, Alice preserved all the letters the artist wrote while he was away, providing an unusually rich source of information about their relationship and his own travels. Monet's great affection for his new companion comes through in most of this correspondence, as does their mutual need for reassurance and the artist's occasional bursts of irascibility. Above all, it is Monet's preoccupation with the activity of painting that dominates the letters, as he describes an exhilarating encounter with a new stretch of landscape or the discovery of a new subject for a picture. Often this initial optimism became tempered and then bitterly regretted when the weather conditions changed or a particular quality of light failed to reappear, reminding us that Monet's most tranquil pictures frequently arose out of failure and frustration.

Almost every year between 1880 and 1890 Monet spent several months away from home, usually resident in a single location and typically painting a series of variants on a few local motifs or subjects. His travel took him to Normandy and Brittany, to the Mediterranean coast and to the River Creuse in central France, a wide variety of terrain that has in common only one element, that of water. After two decades of painting the tones and textures of the River Seine, Monet was now drawn obsessively to the sea, delighting in the variety of its colouring and the intensity of its moods. At the beginning of the decade he favoured the haunts of his childhood, visiting Fécamp, Pourville, Varengeville and Etretat on the Channel coast. Writing home to Alice almost daily, Monet described the problems of painting on a windswept beach or an exposed cliff-top, reflecting his new fascination with the wilder aspects of nature. As the years went by, he travelled to less familiar territory, luxuriating in the brilliant colours of the French Riviera and braving the jagged rocks of Belle-

Île, an island off the coast of Brittany. Each site offered new challenges, both practical and artistic. At Belle-Île he complained that his lodgings were over a pigsty and that he lived on nothing but fish and lobster, and one letter to Alice recounts his 'efforts to work in a dark register and express the sinister and tragic quality of the place'. Other letters show how ambitious and demanding Monet's landscape painting had now become, as he insisted on familiarizing himself with the subject, painting it in all weathers and conveying something of his own feelings in the presence of nature.

Monet's painting expeditions allowed him to work intensively and uninterruptedly on a limited number of motifs, concentrating his attention on the qualities of the subject and the challenges it created for his art. His correspondence shows him increasingly obsessed by subtle shifts in daylight and weather, learning to carry with him more than a dozen canvases so that he could work on them in rapid succession as the light changed. The paintings themselves show the effects of this demanding process, often having densely worked surfaces and jewel-like encrustations of colour. Even their compositions suggest a visual confrontation, as the viewer is made to peer down from a cliff-top or into the depths of a river or rock-pool. The intensity of Monet's visual experience becomes an insistent theme in the paintings of the 1880s, placing new demands on his technique and on his working procedures. The first-hand perception of nature was still his starting point, but there are signs that the unrefined canvases he brought back from his journeys were 'tidied up' or 'finished' (as the artist described it in his letters) in his Giverny studio.

In a short letter written to Durand-Ruel in June 1883, soon after his family had moved to Giverny, Monet unwittingly summarized a number of the preoccupations of his middle years. The letter opens and closes with a plea for money, reminding the dealer that 'peace of mind is a prerequisite for good work'; almost prophetically, Monet announces that he has been spending time on his new garden, 'as I want to have some flowers to paint when the weather's bad'; and in explaining his failure to send Durand-Ruel any recent paintings, Monet notes that he has been making arrangements for his boats on the banks of the Seine. During the rest of the decade Monet continued to develop his garden, and he earned enough money from Durand-Ruel and others to buy the house he had been renting. In his walks and boat trips around Giverny, the artist accustomed himself to the landscape that was to occupy him for so many years, producing the first of the sun-filled canvases of local pastures and meadows. Nearer home, Monet applied himself to one of his less well-known ambitions, that of producing a series of large, outdoor figure compositions, using the numerous children of the household as his models and, in some cases, his own boats on the Seine as the setting.

Dieppe, 6 February 1883

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... Much to my joy I've arrived to superb sunshine and you may rest assured that I'll sleep soundly after the walk I've just had. There are some fine things to do. The sea is superb, but the cliffs don't match up to those at Fécamp. Here I'll be certain to do more boats.

I'm staying at the Hotel Victoria. Hug all the children for me, best wishes to Marthe, and my best and most loving thoughts to you. Don't fail whatever happens to keep me in touch with all the news, good and bad.

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

[Dieppe], Tuesday 7 February 1883

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I've had a very tiring day, I've been all over the countryside, along all the paths below and above the cliffs. I've seen some lovely things and I was helped by superb sunshine, but even so I'm afraid that I might not be able to work as well as I did at Fécamp. It has a lot to do with my set up, and it's too close to the centre of town. Anyway, tomorrow I'll do some more exploring and the day after I'll set to work and depending on how I do, I'll see whether I should stay here, or go back to Fécamp or Yport. The truth is, I don't feel at ease and I am bored. Don't fail to send me your news regularly and make sure you tell Jean to write. You didn't tell me whether the children, big and small, are better. Hug them all warmly for me, best wishes to Marthe. For you my warmest thoughts,

Your devoted CLAUDE MONET

*

Pourville, 15 February 1883

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

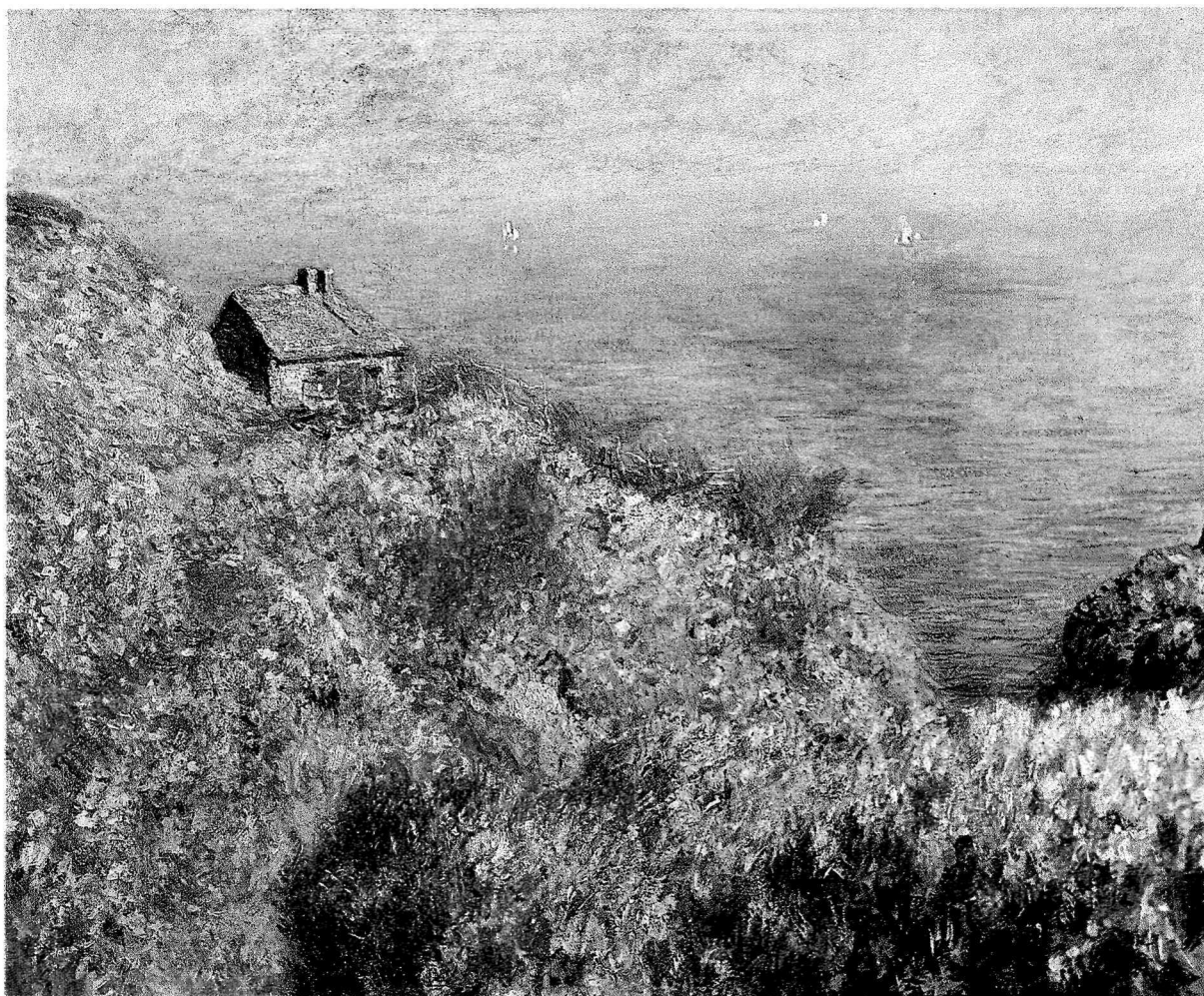
If you only knew how much it pains me to see you suffer like this. Your letter this morning upset me so much. It arrived just as I was about to leave Dieppe and for a moment, with all my cases packed, I wondered whether I shouldn't come back to you, but I feel that above all I must bring back a lot of paintings, so I came and settled in here but had an appalling day. I wanted to go and work regardless and I've just come back soaked to the skin, and had to change out of all my clothes. I am with some good people who are delighted to have a lodger and can't do enough for me. The countryside is very beautiful and I am very sorry I did not come here earlier instead of wasting my time in Dieppe. One could not be any closer to the sea than I am, on the shingle itself, and the waves beat at the foot of the house. There is cause for concern on Sunday, since as you might know from the newspapers, the highest tide of the year is due then...

Hug everyone for me. Best wishes to Marthe.

My warmest thoughts for you; take courage,

Your CLAUDE MONET

*



THE FISHERMAN'S HOUSE, VARENGEVILLE

[*Pourville*], 23 February 1882

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I found your letter on my return from work, too late for me to send a telegram (there is no post office here). In any case I could not be more at a loss to know how to reply. I want above all to be agreeable to you, especially after all you have done for us, the least we can do is to help you sell our paintings. Like you, I am convinced that a well-planned exhibition at this moment would do us a lot of good, but the list of exhibitors is the most difficult matter. I have nothing personal against the three painters whom I see as having only a detrimental effect on the exhibition; but you must admit that if I accept their participation and exclude Caillebotte's, who while he may have caused an outcry, has also done a lot for the success of our exhibitions, I would deserve his severest reprimand particularly since I recently reassured him that on no account would I take part in an exhibition which would include outsiders. You must admit my position is not an easy one. One possibility, I think, if Caillebotte were to be dropped, would be to leave out one or two of the three painters you mention. If I am obliged to break with Caillebotte who is a friend of mine, then Pissarro should break with one of his. Under these conditions I would accept. Only if Renoir takes part, however, and even so, I'd want your help to sort things out with Caillebotte, and ask him on my behalf to lend a painting he has of mine which is very fine (red chrysanthemums) . . .

In friendship, CLAUDE MONET

[Pourville], 25 March 1882

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

... As for myself, if you could spare me a thousand francs for the 29th I would be very grateful, having the usual obligations at the end of the month in addition to spending a lot here. I will be in Paris for Easter; between now and then I will, I hope, have finished all my paintings. I have finished a few already, but if you don't mind I would prefer to show you the whole series of studies at once, keen as I am to see them all together at home...

I'm relying on you for the 29th and send you my kindest regards.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Pourville], Tuesday morning [4 April 1882]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

It was too late when I got back last night to write to you; I am writing these few lines in some haste, hoping that you will have them this evening. If I have several more days in a row like yesterday, I'll be ready by Sunday. But as it turns out the sun is hidden this morning; I am on tenterhooks as I've a lot to do. I've spent so long on some paintings that I no longer know what to think of them, and I am definitely getting harder to please; nothing satisfies me and in addition to that nature is changing so much at the moment. How lovely the countryside is becoming, and what a joy it would be for me to show you the delightful places there are to see here! In any case, we will be able to go for some good walks together along the Seine and your dear baby must accept all the good care proffered. I can see that Mimi is going from strength to strength, and I hope he will be fully fit to look around our exhibition, but I think you are being unfair when you say you find talent only in my own work, unless it's because you are blinded by the feelings you have towards me.

I received another letter from Durand-Ruel informing me that M. Gonse from the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* wants a painting from me, but he finds those at Durand's too highly priced and he's going to write and try and twist my arm to get one for nothing.

Durand is advising me not to sell anything to him.

See you soon and be sure to hug all the children for me and tell them that the real Monet is coming back at last and everyone must be on their best form.

All my best to Marthe, my warmest thoughts for you.

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

[Pourville], 18 September 1882

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

You will think I am wanting in courage, but I can't hold out any longer and am in a state of utter despair. After a few days of good weather, it's raining again and once again I have had to put the studies I started to one side. It's driving me to distraction and the unfortunate thing is that I take it out on my poor paintings. I destroyed a large picture of flowers which I'd just done along with three or four paintings which I not only scraped down but slashed. This is absurd, I know, but I feel the hour of my departure drawing

near and I am witnessing a complete transformation taking place in Nature, and my courage is failing as a result, in the awareness that I have spent money in advance and have nothing to show for it. I have, in short, decided to drop everything and go back now. Please be kind enough to have some more money forwarded to me so that we can set off straight away; I'd like to be able to leave today so I wouldn't have to set eyes again on all the places I was unable to paint . . .

Your sincere but unhappy CLAUDE MONET

*

[*Poissy*], 10 November 1882

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

. . . Following the conversation we had at your place the other day with Sisley, he sent me a letter which I found on my return, informing me of what he must also have told you, and asking me to think it over and give him my answer.

I have just written to tell him what I think, and I am not entirely of his opinion. My belief is that with the collective exhibitions we have always held and too often repeated, we will finish up with public curiosity satiated and the Press still against us. I do, however, agree with him about one-man shows: if each of us were to do our own show in turn it would go on for ever; we will have to come to a decision, and it is above all up to you to decide what you think best for your own interests which are also our own. I will, for my part, do whatever you suggest, even though I really dread exhibitions when not sufficiently prepared for them, as is my case. In short, what I've suggested to Sisley is this: to hold two exhibitions this winter, one of landscapes and the other of Renoir or Degas. Should he not want to be the first in line, I am willing to begin if that's your wish, or if on the other hand he would prefer to be first, so be it. The main thing is that we all agree first and foremost as to the nature of the exhibition, weighing up the pros and cons of each system; and without wishing to impose my own view of the matter, I believe that a one-man show would be far more beneficial for everyone concerned than a joint exhibition, particularly in the venue available which is small and intimate and where some rooms would have to be set aside . . .

A word in reply, and believe me

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

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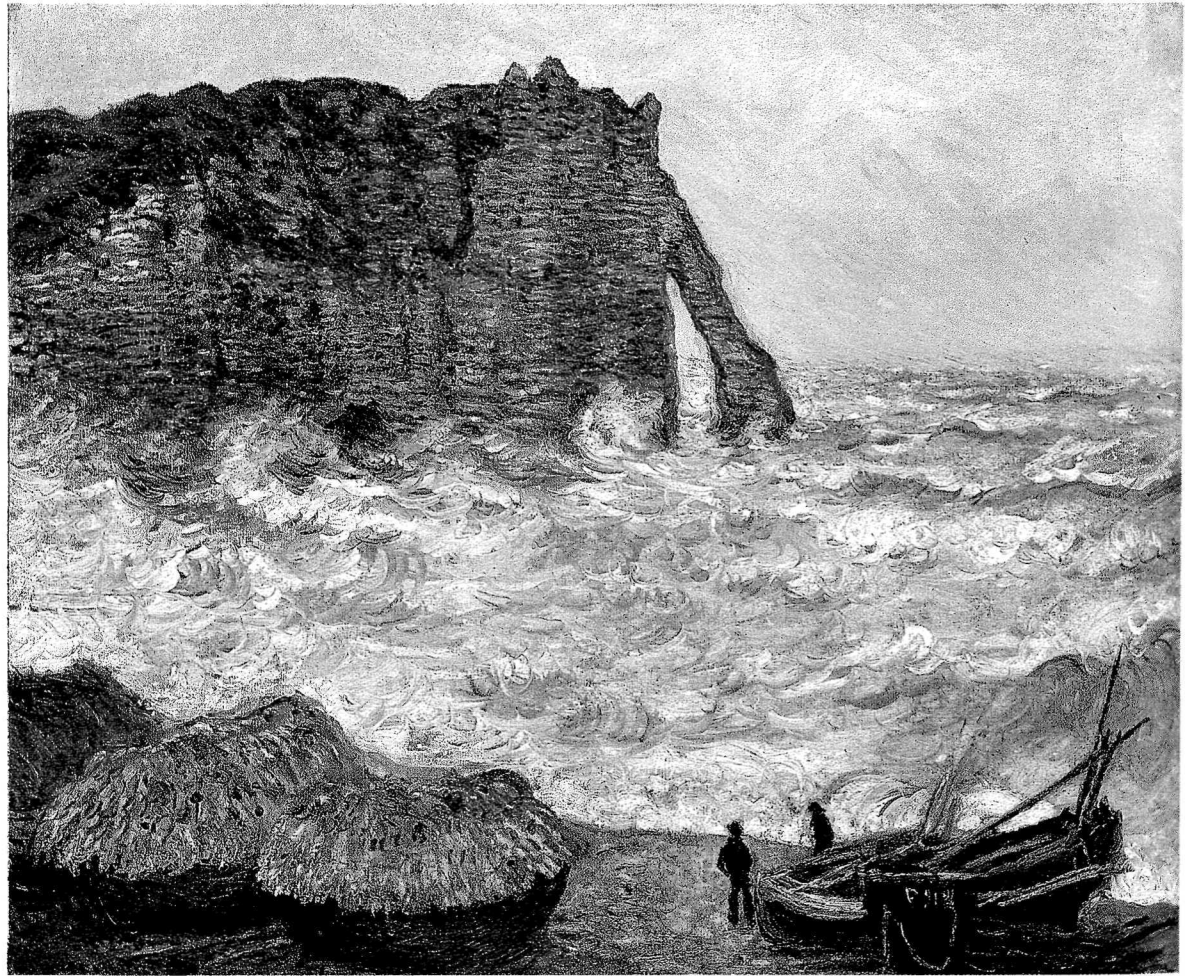
[*Poissy*] 7 December 1882

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I promised to bring you a few paintings this week, but I had not reckoned with the Seine flooding. For the moment I'm no painter but a life saver, rower, removal man etc. We are literally in the water, surrounded by water on all sides, and the house can only be reached by boat; we had to take refuge on the first floor but the water is still rising and where will all this end? It's quite frightening. And if we were forced to move I don't know how we would manage. Painting is out of the question, yet there would be some very curious things to do, but my presence is a continual help in the house, our terrified servants having left us in the lurch. I must admit our situation is a curious one; you'd have to see it to understand.

Regards,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET



ETRETAT, ROUGH SEA

Etretat, 1 February [1883]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I've done an excellent day's work today, I'm very happy and what's more the weather is superb even though a little cold. I intend to do a large painting of the cliff at Etretat, although it is terribly bold of me to do so after Courbet has painted it so admirably, but I will try to do it in a different way ...

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

Etretat, 2 February 1883

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... It makes me miserable to know that you are unhappy and while I understand your anxiety I'd like to see you less downcast. It is absolutely essential that you see Hoschedé whatever you do, the longer it drags on the harder it will be for you to confront it, unless you prefer to leave it to chance, since there is no doubt that April will come round and he'll probably be at Vétheuil, perhaps without having visited you yet, but I'm sure that there must be a way of drawing him out of there to have a serious and reasonable discussion.

As for myself, you need have no fears, I think of you constantly, you can be sure of my love, be brave, I won't be long, I am working as hard as I can, as I told you yesterday, I am very happy to be here and I hope to come up with something good, in any case I will bring lots of studies back with me so I can work on some big things at home. Today it looks like the weather's going to be very bad, a gale possibly, but luckily I have a shelter to go to ...

Your CLAUDE MONET

Etretat, 19 February [1883]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

Forgive me for having tormented you with my telegram, but for several days now I've been in such a state that I'm quite overwhelmed by it and feel I'm going mad. I feel very strongly that I love you more than you imagine, more than I thought possible. You have no idea what I've been through since Sunday morning, the degree of anxiety I was in to have some news; so you can imagine how I felt when I received your four lines this morning which no doubt tell me more than four detailed pages would have done. I have read and reread each line twenty times over; my eyes are swimming with tears; can it really be so? Must I get used to the idea of living without you? I know well enough that I can do nothing and must say nothing to come in the way of the decision you made yesterday, I'll have to resign myself to it, having no right whatsoever to do otherwise, but I am so very, very sad. Nothing means anything to me anymore. I couldn't care less if my paintings are good or bad. The exhibition is the least of my concerns, those four lines were a terrible blow to me and I am struck down. In your telegram you tell me to come right away; do you mean you want to leave me right away? What in heaven's name have people been saying to you, for you to be so resolved? . . .

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

[Poissy], 7 March 1883

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

If you can manage it I'd be very grateful if you could send me a little money *straight away* as I am in a very embarrassing financial position and cannot wait. I am not particularly keen to go to Paris for the moment as I would only be confronted by my failure and hear it being talked about, either with delight or with concern. I prefer to stay put and keep my worries to myself, and it's no use your trying to raise my spirits, I don't see things the way you do, and I have no doubt that this fatal exhibition was a step in the wrong direction. You must realize that if we have to rely only on people of taste, it would take an eternity, and one might as well give up; you only have to see what little progress we have made since we first took a stand. I don't doubt that subsequent exhibitions will be more profitable for you; my friends will have the advantage of having learnt from the experiment made at my expense, anyway I hope so, for your sake and for theirs. As for myself, this new and unfamiliar indifference has affected me deeply. When we were attacked and even vilified in the newspapers we could always comfort ourselves with the thought that it was all a measure of our worth since no one would have bothered about us if that weren't the case. So how should this silence be interpreted?

You musn't imagine that I want to see my name in the newspapers. I really am above all that and I couldn't care in the least about what the Press and so-called art critics think, since they rival each other in their stupidity. Indeed, it doesn't affect the artistic side of things at all, I know my worth, and am harder on myself than anyone else could be. But things have to be looked at from the commercial angle. And we'd be blind not to see the truth staring us in the face, not to recognize that the exhibition was ill-prepared and poorly advertised . . .

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

Villa Saint-Louis, Poissy, 21 March [1883]

TO A JOURNALIST

It is only now that I have read the kind article you wrote on my exhibition, published in the *Journal de Paris*.

Allow me to express my rather belated thanks. I am doubly grateful since very few of the critics have the courage to defend me, or at least to write what they think. But as you say so rightly, people must first of all learn to look at nature, and only then may they see and understand what we are trying to do.

Very many thanks and my compliments to you.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Poissy], Sunday morning, 29 April [1883]

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

We are still in the throes of moving house. In the past week I've experienced every kind of difficulty imaginable. Anyway, I'm setting off for Giverny this morning with some of my children. We are so short of money, however, that Madame Hoschedé must remain here though she has to leave the house by ten o'clock tomorrow at the latest. So I am writing to ask if you could provide the carrier with one or two hundred francs, whatever you can manage, and if you could send the same amount directly to me at *Giverny, near Vernon, Eure*, as we won't have a sou when we get there. I am counting on you...

My thanks in advance,

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 1 May [1883]

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I have just learnt the terrible news that our poor Manet is dead. His brother is counting on me to be a pall-bearer. I must be in Paris by tomorrow evening and be fitted for a suit of mourning. If my letter does not cross with one from you containing some money, I depend on your being so kind as to send me a postal order to Giverny, payable at Vernon. I am counting on you.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

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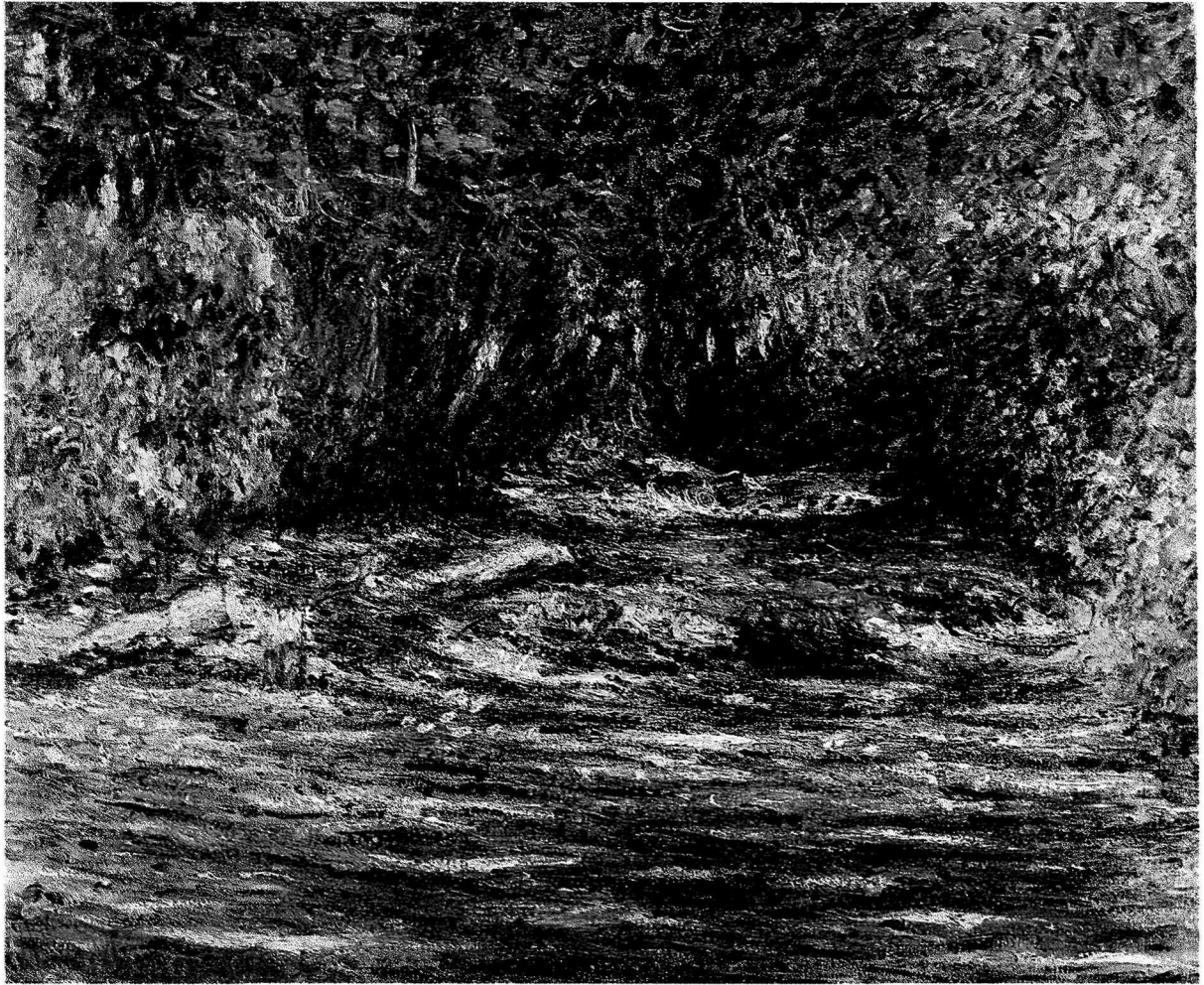
[Giverny], 5 June 1883

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your remittance for 200 francs. Please, I beg of you, send me a bigger sum tomorrow without fail. I do not know where to begin with sums as small as this.

I had to have a shed made on the bank of the Seine to shelter my boats and store my easels and canvases. The work is done and I must settle up so I am counting on your promise...

As soon as I have something worthy I'll send it to you. Now at last I'll be able to



THE RIVER EPTE,
AT GIVERNY

concentrate on my painting, as I was very put out with organizing my boats: as the Seine is not very close to the house they had to be made secure, then the garden took up some of my time as I want to have some flowers to paint when the weather's bad.

Now all this is done, I won't lay aside my brushes any more and I'll provide you with some things to please you.

Meanwhile, I must ask you not to forget me, for peace of mind is a prerequisite for good work.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 27 July 1883

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I am sending a crate to Vernon this evening for delivery to you tomorrow containing seven pictures, details of which I enclose. You have had to wait a little, but all I can say is that while adding the finishing touches to a painting might appear insignificant it is much harder to do than one might suppose, and I had a lot of problems. Anyway I hope you'll be satisfied with what I send. I took your advice and managed to make some quite good things out of paintings I considered irredeemable. I'd have liked to have sent you something from here but the weather hasn't been fine enough. In a week or ten days' time I'll send you some more paintings. I'm instructing my art supplier to deliver some fresh canvases; would you be so kind as to put them into my crate and return it to me as soon as possible, addressing it to me via the station at Vernon . . . I am counting on having some money from you by Saturday, tomorrow, that is.

Regards from yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

Giverny [12 January 1884]

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

... I would also ask you to set aside 500 francs for *Wednesday* which I will pick up when in Paris, since I've decided to leave for Italy straight away. I want to spend a month in Bordighera, one of the most beautiful places we saw on our trip. From there I have great hopes of bringing you a whole new series of things.

But I would ask you not to mention this trip to *anyone*, not because I want to make a secret of it, but because I insist upon *doing it alone*. Much as I enjoyed making the trip there with Renoir as a tourist, I'd find it hard to work there together. I have always worked better alone and from my own impressions. So keep the secret until otherwise instructed. If he knew I was about to go, Renoir would doubtless want to join me and that would be equally disastrous for both of us. You will agree with me I'm sure. So till Wednesday or Thursday morning then, at the latest, and in the meantime, send me 300 [francs]. Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Bordighera, 24 January 1884

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

At lunchtime today I received your letter dated Tuesday the 22nd, from the day before yesterday that is. It is some consolation to know that by now you must have received several letters from me, and since I never let a day go by without writing to you, you will thus have one every day.

I'm hard at work with four paintings under way; it's now a matter of finishing them and doing four more and so on. The weather is still magnificent, although today there were a few clouds about and tonight the sea is raging despite a clear, star-studded sky.

The locals would be glad of some rain; it hasn't rained at all since September; let's hope that their prayers won't be answered until I leave.

I'm not at all surprised at what you say about your tiredness, since it's easy to get used to not going for walks, but you must get back to it all the same and make a habit of what really is the best thing about living in the country. Mine is a dog's life and I never stop walking; I walk here, there and everywhere. As a break between studies, I go on explorations down every path I find, always on the look-out for something new; so by dusk I've had it. I dine well (and am actually thankful I came to an English *pension*), I have my little chat with you as usual, I climb into bed and, crossing my hands, I ruminate on Giverny, and my eyes dwell on the paintings on the wall, then after a little reading I'm off, sound asleep for the night.

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

Bordighera, 26 January 1884

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... Today I worked even harder: five canvases and tomorrow I intend to begin on a sixth. So things are progressing quite well, although it's hard-going: those palm trees make me curse and swear; and the motifs are terribly hard to get hold of and put down on canvas; everywhere is so luxuriant; it's gorgeous to behold. You could walk on for ever under palms, orange and lemon trees and also under the splendid olive trees, but things are not so easy when you're looking for motifs. I'd like to paint some orange and lemon trees standing out against the blue sea, but can't manage to find any the way I want them.

As for the blue of the sea and the sky, it's beyond me. I am hoping for good news tomorrow, a nice letter with no reproaches.

Till tomorrow then; I send my most loving thoughts to you and kisses to share out among everyone; to Marthe, best wishes.

Your, I say 'your' because it's the truth, CLAUDE MONET

*

Bordighera, 29 January [1884]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... We're having marvellous weather and I wish I could send you a little of the sunshine. I am slaving away on six paintings a day. I'm giving myself a hard time over it as I haven't yet managed to capture the colour of this landscape; there are moments when I'm appalled at the colours I'm having to use, I'm afraid what I'm doing is just dreadful and yet I really am understating it; the light is simply terrifying. I have already spent six sessions on some studies, but it's all so new to me that I can't quite bring them off; however the joy of it here is that each day I can return to the same effect, so it's possible to track down and do battle with an effect. That's why I'm working so feverishly and I always look forward to the morrow to see if I can't do better next time.

*

Bordighera, 3 February 1884

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I'm still slaving away, very absorbed in what I'm doing and very content with myself; I've made some progress and my early paintings look pretty poor alongside my latest efforts. Now I really feel the landscape, I can be bold and include every tone of pink and blue: it's enchanting, it's delicious, and I hope it will please you. Today was incomparably calm and hot. I do hope you have some good weather at Giverny so you can go for walks and have a bit of fun with the children. How I yearn to see and hug them! And how I long for you! What a joy it would be after a good day's work like today, to have the chance to talk properly and not have to rely on the post which takes four or five days to bring you the replies you long for! Still we must be patient, we'll make up for it eventually.

Lots of kisses to everyone, best wishes to Marthe and my very best to you.

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

Bordighera, 3 March 1884

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

Your letter does a little to restore my hope: I wish you'd love me as I love you, while being a little more reasonable about it. Yesterday I was quite overcome as you will have seen from my letter which I now regret having sent, but I really did not know what to think; I'll be reduced to weighing up every word I say. Your letter today is reassuring, despite your unhappiness; all the same you can be unhappy and not look on the black side of things; the idea that we should no longer see each other, no longer love each other, doesn't bear thinking about, but you musn't hide such notions from me either; I want to know everything, but I do wish you could be a little more reasonable.

The weather is marvellous and I'm working well. You know I'm increasingly hard on myself, but I don't think I'll be too discontented when I look at all these paintings at home. I've put a lot of effort into them and this must bear fruit. If I said I was wrong to come here it was because things didn't come easily to start with, and if there's one thing that I find hard to come to terms with, it's that all but two or three of my paintings have no sea in them and the sea is very much my element. That is why I want to do two or three motifs in Menton along the seashore. Here, it wouldn't fit in with the landscape which has other charms: but all my studies are making good progress and I might not be as long as you suppose . . .

Now my dearest, we must say goodbye until tomorrow; loving kisses to you and the children, best wishes to Marthe; till tomorrow.

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

Bordighera, 5 March 1884

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

That's better, I am glad to see that you're being a little braver now, it gives me heart; and the weather has been so marvellous these past few days that my work is beginning to show it: I'm having more success in capturing that wonderful pink light, as I see it every day morning and evening; it's glorious, just perfect and more beautiful by the day. My studies are going well, they are all progressing and looking better these last few days. I'm glad to know that you were able to get out a little, but it's upsetting to think of you being so cold, while here it is so hot that the flowers are charmed out of the ground. You saw the anemones I sent you on your birthday, the roses and red carnations; they are everywhere to be found, growing wild; my little Italian boy who carries my baggage makes enormous bunches of them and masses of other flowers while I work. How happy we'd be here and what a pretty garden we would have . . .

A most extraordinary pink tone predominates here, which is impossible to convey, the mornings are peerless. I'm painting now with the Italian paints I had to order from Turin. Apart from that I've run out of canvases, shoes, socks, and even decent clothes and I'll look in a sorry state when I get home; my clothes have faded in the sun, so the only gallant thing will be yours truly, though there are times when I'm exhausted by the work, the never-ending battle. What a delight it will be to rest by your side.

Your CLAUDE MONET

*



VALLÉE DE SASSO,
SUNSHINE

Bordighera, Monday evening [10 March 1884]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I've been working non-stop today right up to 6 o'clock this evening, and took only an hour off for lunch, but I worked well and am very satisfied with what I've done today; what a lot of daubs I did in the beginning, but now I've caught this magical landscape and it's the enchantment of it that I'm so keen to render. Of course lots of people will protest that it's quite unreal and that I'm out of my mind, but that's just too bad, anyway that's what they say when I paint our part of the world...

YOUR CLAUDE MONET

*

[Bordighera], 21 March 1884

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... You have no idea how keen I am to leave. I am exhausted and you know how hard I work once I've got going. A task like this is possible for a month but for more than two it's murderous, and I can't go on like this, but all the same things are moving. It was very fine today and I finished another painting; I must finish one each day as things stand, besides I'm longing to be with you. You can't imagine how much I am looking forward to coming back; to share things with you again, talk and see you all, this will be reward enough for my labours, and with our troubles behind us, my paintings will seem very much better away from the pitiless light here and there's no question that there are some good ones among the group...

YOUR CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, Sunday [27 April 1884]

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I will come as you wish tomorrow morning but with a very few paintings and only because I don't want to offend you, since every single one of my paintings is in need of some kind of revision and the finishing touches must be done with care, and this will mean much more than a day's work. I need to look over it all in peace and quiet, in the right conditions. For three months I've been at work and have spared no efforts and as I'm never satisfied when working from nature, it's only since I've been here these last few days that I've seen what can be done with a certain number of the paintings I did. You have to understand that out of the large number of studies I executed, not all are ready for sale, a few, I think, could be very good, and others, even if a little vague, may turn out well if the finishing touches are done with care, but I must emphasize that this cannot be done overnight and it would not be in your interest or in mine to go ahead and exhibit them regardless; my aim is to give you only the things with which I am completely satisfied, even if it means asking you a little more for them. I hope you'll understand that, for if I were to do otherwise I'd turn into a mere painting machine and you would be landed with a pile of incomplete work which would put off the most enthusiastic of art collectors . . .

So until tomorrow then,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Paris], Wednesday morning [7 May 1884]

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I must confess that this situation is making me desperate, and I'm writing to ask you to give me a frank reply, since I cannot hold out any longer in this state of uncertainty.

I have done everything I possibly could do to obtain money in order not to have to call upon you at such a time, all to no avail, despite my need being pressing. I can't go back home without money. This morning I had some very bad news from Giverny, so I'm expected there urgently, but I don't want to go back with empty pockets. So here I remain, without a sou, wasting valuable time, and obliged to avoid people's awkward questions which are scarcely reassuring . . .

You mustn't think that I have no faith in you. On the contrary, I know what courage and energy you have, but I don't trust anyone else an inch. So tell me plainly what the situation is, are you certain to be able to provide me with money today? If you absolutely can't manage it I will go back to my old job of chasing up collectors, if they now want my paintings that is, and I have my doubts about that . . .

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*

Etretat, 15 [October 1885]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I'm still working in spite of the persistent bad weather. This morning, for the first time since you left, the sun appeared in all its radiance and the sea was calm; it was magnificent and everyone thought the weather would take a turn for the better, but the wind changed without warning and it started raining again, but I carry on working regardless, making use of my various windows. Yesterday I spent the evening with Maupassant, a very likeable and interesting man: he's going to be doing the next Salon in the *République française*...

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

[Etretat], 20 October, 6 pm [1885]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... Etretat is becoming more and more amazing; it's at its best now, the beach with all these fine boats, it's superb and I rage at my inability to express it all better. You'd need to use both hands and cover hundreds of canvases...

*

Etretat, 27 October 1885

TO CAMILLE PISSARRO

For some while now I've been meaning to write to ask for your news and give you mine, but you know what it's like when you're working outside all the time, by nightfall you're tired and feel too indolent to write.

I had no idea I'd stay here for such a length of time, but I've been so poorly favoured with the weather and it's damned hard to bring anything off.

It was not much use getting something down on canvas for every kind of weather, I can't get to the end of it all now. Added to this, there are the changes in the tides and the boats which never stay put, in short I can see I'll be here for some while yet if I want this visit to be worthwhile; so I won't be able to join you all at the next dinner. Would you kindly apologize for my absence to all our friends and send my best wishes? What are you up to yourself, and what about Renoir, Cézanne, Sisley, Durand, business and so on? It would be kind of you to let me know a little of what's going on...

Kindest regards to your wife and to Lucien.

Best wishes from your old friend, CLAUDE MONET

*



WOMAN WITH A PARASOL

Etretat, 5 November 1885

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

Your silence is worrying, and it's causing me a good deal of hardship as I have no money to speak of, especially since neither Madame Hoschedé nor I received the 200 francs due to each of us last Saturday.

I'm quite sure that your silence is not a good sign, for although I scarcely look at the papers here, I did learn that you were mixed up in some business of fakes and that people were using that as an added excuse to come down on you. All this is a great torment to me, and I fret all the more as I am so cut off. On top of that my work is not advancing at all well; the weather is appalling and others might have given up long ago, but I am reluctant to lose what I've started. A few days of fine weather would, I know, enable me to turn at least one group of paintings to account. I'm staying on in that hope...

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

[*Etretat*], Monday evening [9 November 1885]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

How odd it is that while I think of you with such affection and try and show it to you as well as I am able, your thoughts are always at their blackest. I expect you any day and then you tell me that I'd rather come home than have a visit from you; it's too bad. I'd like both, and that's the truth. As things stand you can trust in no one but me; well, stop worrying your head about the rest then! It's a hard lesson, but that's how it is and you know it.

You say that making savings is all you think about, but you can't seem to manage to. You have to manage though, and you musn't count on having anything other than what we've got already, nothing more for the time being. Now take it from me that if your children are brought up simply with not too many frills, they'll be the better for it, and more appreciated and that goes for you too, and it's quite possible to be happy in such circumstances . . .

Now take courage and cheer up or I'll get upset; many kisses to the children and all my love.

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

[*Etretat*], Friday evening [27 November 1885]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

After another rainy morning I was glad to find the weather slightly improved: despite a high wind blowing and a rough sea, or rather, because of it, I hoped for a fruitful session at the Manneporte; however an accident befell me. Don't alarm yourself now, I am safe and sound since I'm writing to you, although you nearly had no news and I would never have seen you again. I was hard at work beneath the cliff, well sheltered from the wind, in the spot which you visited with me; convinced that the tide was drawing out I took no notice of the waves which came and fell a few feet away from me. In short, absorbed as I was, I didn't see a huge wave coming; it threw me against the cliff and I was tossed about in its wake along with all my materials! My immediate thought was that I was done for, as the water dragged me down, but in the end I managed to clamber out on all fours, but Lord, what a state I was in! My boots, my thick stockings and my coat were soaked through; the palette which I had kept a grip on had been knocked over my face and my beard was covered in blue, yellow etc. But anyway, now the excitement is passed and no harm's done, the worst of it was that I lost my painting which was very soon broken up, along with my easel, bag etc. Impossible to fish anything out. Besides, everything was torn to shreds by the sea, that 'old hag' as your sister calls her. Anyway, I was lucky to escape, but how I raged when I found once I'd changed that I couldn't work, and when it dawned on me that the painting which I had been counting on was done for, I was furious. Immediately I set about telegraphing Troisgros to send me what's missing and an easel will be ready for tomorrow . . .

I send you all my love and hug all the children for me, remember me to Marthe.

To think I might never have seen you again.

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 22 January 1886

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

... I have looked at all my paintings and it's no use, there aren't any, as far as I can see, which could be said to be finished and good as they are: no doubt there are some interesting ones but they're too unfinished for the average collector. But do you really need quite so many paintings for America? Surely you already have a fair number? You do, it's true, keep them cleverly hidden, since they're never on display, which in my opinion is a mistake: what's the point of us painting pictures if the public never gets to see them?

It's not that I don't want to give you any – there would be some I could give you, and I wouldn't be angry if you actually displayed them. You think only of America, while here we are forgotten, since every new painting you get you hide away. Look at my paintings of Italy which have a special place among all I've done; who has seen them and what has become of them? If you take them away to America it will be I who lose out over here.

Anyway, you doubtless have your reasons, but I deplore the disappearance of all my paintings like this.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Etretat], Monday evening [22 February 1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

You ask me to think things over and come to a decision: but that is, alas, just why I am in the state I am in. It's no use me weighing things up for and against since, unlike you, I find it impossible to get used to the idea of a separation: I think of the children whom you love and who love you, but I can also see everything that is coming between us and this will increasingly divide our life together, which I thought was to be so enjoyable. Anyway, enough of that, I'm very unhappy, really miserable and I haven't the heart to do anything; the painter in me is dead, a sick mind is all that remains of me and if you think that once I've made up my mind to go it alone I'll feel better, you are very much mistaken! I had a terrible night, thinking of you constantly and seeing you so clearly, and I hadn't the courage to get out of bed until 10 o'clock...

Your unfortunate MONET

*

Giverny, 5 April 1886

TO EMILE ZOLA

How kind of you to send me *L'Oeuvre*. Thank you very much. I always find it a great pleasure to read your books and this interested me all the more since it raises questions to do with art for which we have struggled for so many years. I have just finished reading it and I have to confess that it left me perplexed and somewhat anxious.

You took great care to avoid any resemblance between us and your characters; all the same I am very much afraid that enemies in the Press and among the general public will bandy about the name of Manet, or at least our names, and equate them with failure, which I'm sure was not



HAYSTACK AT GIVERNY

your intention. Forgive me for mentioning it. I don't intend it as a criticism; I read *L'Oeuvre* with a great deal of pleasure, and every page recalled some fond memory. You must know, moreover, what a fan I am of yours and how much I admire you. It is not that. My battle has been a long one, and my worry is that, just as we reach our goal, this book will be used by our enemies to deal us a final blow. Forgive me for rambling on, remember me to Madame Zola and thank you again,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 26 April 1886

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

It has now been a month since you left and I've had no word from you, or any money from your son. I have no idea how you imagine I survive, and your indifference continues to amaze me and is more than worrying, for assuming that you are successful over there, what would happen if, back in Paris, I were forced to revert to the practice of selling my work for next to nothing? What a waste of all the time and effort! I don't know what to think, but you are very well aware how keen I am to know how business is doing. To cap it all, it has come to my knowledge (and it was reported to me with much relish) that before you left, you sold some pictures of mine at the lowest possible prices, notably to a M. Blanche.

Anyway all this is very upsetting and, given the situation, don't be surprised if I accept any offers that come my way, since I can't live on nothing and go further into debt...

Yours sincerely, but very unhappily, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny [*Late July-early August 1886*]

TO BERTHE MORISOT

It was so kind of you to think of me and I hope you'll forgive me for not having written sooner, but I've had to make several trips to Paris which has been a great nuisance. You are right, I am pleased with the exhibition, and I was very sorry you weren't able to come as I'd have liked to have had your opinion of it.

I'm not sure if I should call it a success, but it has all the appearances of one if sales are anything to go by; everything on display was sold for a good price to decent people. It has been a long time since I believed that you could educate public taste and it would be asking too much to want to sell only to connoisseurs – that way starvation lies.

... I've done no work here as yet because of all the bother of the exhibition and I'm not sure for the moment whether I'll go off on a trip somewhere or not, although I'm very keen to go to Brittany.

Madame Hoschedé asks me to send you her best wishes, her daughter's health is not much improved.

Thank you again for your kind words, my best wishes to M. Manet.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

[*Le Palais*], Tuesday evening [*14 September 1886*]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I was so pleased to find your two excellent and kind letters waiting for me after a day spent travelling, but I am upset at the thought that you might not yet have mine: anyway you're all in good health and the children have been enjoying themselves, and I'm glad about that; it's also a relief to hear that the little ones are going to work a little more seriously now.

As for myself, I'm happier than I was, I've seen some wonderful sights and I'm going to stay on the island; I leave town tomorrow morning and will be moving into a little hamlet of eight or ten houses, near the area known as *la Mer Terrible* which is aptly named: there isn't a tree within miles, and the rocks and caves are fantastic; it's as sinister as hell, but quite superb and since I don't believe I could ever find anything like this anywhere else, I want to try and do a few paintings here; so tomorrow I set to work. I'm not quite sure how I'm going to fare, I've found a clean and sufficiently large room belonging to a fisherman who owns a small inn and he has agreed to cook for me, and all this for a charge of 4 francs a day; I imagine I'll be living on nothing much but fish, particularly lobster, since the butcher and even the baker only come once a week, anyway I can't expect the cooking to match up to that of the *Café Riche*...

Don't fail to write and tell me as much as you can, just remember how cut off I am, and tell Jean to write; hug them all warmly for me, best wishes to Marthe, my warmest thoughts and all my love to you.

Your CLAUDE

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[*Kervilahouen, Belle Île, Morbihan*], Saturday 18 September [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... Fortunately I'm spending very little here, so I've taken the plunge and I'm working; it's quite superb, but so different from the Channel coast that I'm having to familiarize myself with the scenery here; the sea is very beautiful, as for the rocks, they are an extraordinary combination of grottoes, outcrops and needles but as I've said, it will take time to find out how to capture all this; anyway I am having a go and putting a lot of effort into it; added to this I'm having to carry my own things, which is tiring me out. The weather is superb, but increasingly hot...

I was sure I'd be alone in such a remote corner of the world, but an American painter and his wife are living in a neighbouring hamlet; yesterday he came and wandered around me while I was working and ended up by asking me whether I wasn't Claude Monet ('the Prince of the Impressionists'); it was a great joy to him. He's a kind man, and in the evening we went for a walk together and tonight I'm dining at his house; so I look forward to a proper meal, since he's really quite well set up here and they have their own cook with them. It will help to make my isolation a little more bearable anyway. Evenings are deadly and despite my exhaustion I have a devil of a time getting to sleep because of the rats above my bed and a pig who lives beneath my room; you can see it and smell it from here...

Your CLAUDE

*

[*Kervilahouen*], Tuesday 21 September [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I am right in the thick of work here and I want to finish three or four paintings at least; I've seven under way, but the early ones were very bad and I've abandoned them. Unfortunately the weather has now changed; there was a terrific storm last night and it's very squally, and as I still haven't got a porter, I can't carry all the canvases I need with me which means I can't work as much as I'd like...

Till tomorrow then, lots of hugs and kisses to all the children, I send you all my love.

Your CLAUDE

*

Kervilahouen, 27 September [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... The weather is still fine, but there's a devil of a wind which is hampering me in my task; I'm having to tie everything down, canvases and parasol. I didn't have such a good day today, I messed up a study and only realized it once I'd got back and I'm furious since the painting's ruined. Added to which, the strongest tides of the year are due now, and the sea draws out a lot and this is hindering progress on many of the studies. I will actually have to do something else for two or three days; anyway I can't complain, I've got good weather and I'm hard at it...

*



ROCKS AT BELLE ÎLE

[*Kervilahouen*], Friday 1 October [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I have just looked over all my paintings, they're all spread out before me here (and I wish you were with me, to have your reaction); well I think I can say that I am content and if this damned weather doesn't take a turn for the worse, I'll have some good things to bring back home with me. There, I hope this will cheer you up as your letter yesterday was very depressing. I hope that my earlier letters will by now have reassured you a little ...

*

Kervilahouen, Monday 4 October [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... Monsieur Geffroy, the critic, arrived here today with a friend of his, an engraver and his wife, and I had to show them my studies which met with considerable approval, but admirers like these are not as hard to please as I am: anyway I was glad, even though I haven't yet got as far as I would like: the sea is giving me a terrible time of it, it's so unlike the sea I'm used to painting, but I have hopes of achieving what I want ...

Kervilahouen, Saturday 23 October [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

You tell me in the kind and excellent letter you sent yesterday, to keep up my morale; that is indeed what I am doing, only I'll need a goodly dose of it with the weather being so changeable and each day ending in rain. This morning I was content; though there was no rain the sky was dark and threatening the way it can be sometimes, just right for several of my studies and I worked well. Two of my paintings need only one more session on them. In the afternoon the rain didn't let up, but, after waiting around for an hour I braved the elements and carried on working in the rain; wet rocks look that much darker, but perhaps it adds to the beauty of it.

I have to make tremendous efforts to work in a darker register and express the sinister and tragic quality of the place, given my natural tendency to work in light and pale tones; this is why I am very curious to know what you'll think of it. No doubt you've seen darkly painted pictures of Brittany; but the reality is quite different, it's all that is most beautiful in tone, and the sea here today set against a leaden sky was so green that I was quite unable to express its intensity . . .

Just imagine, I've covered thirty-eight canvases; seven or eight are simple sketches, it has to be said, and about the same number are pretty poor, but there are a good twenty-five to finish all together. So you see I'm not wasting my time and must persevere . . .

My love and kisses to you and the children, best wishes to Marthe.

Your old CLAUDE

*

[Kervilahouen], 26 October [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I've now got your two letters of yesterday and the day before and am glad to know you are all on such good form, but it is upsetting to hear your endless laments over household or money worries, or over *loving me too much*; come now, if we forget our temporary separation for the moment, you really have no cause for complaint. The new servants are fine, you haven't wanted for money since I left, which is quite something, and when all's said and done you're all in good form despite the children's occasional upsets.

I'm always happy when I know you're safe from money worries, and what's more I do all I can to guarantee it, but this is the best I can do for the moment; even so it upsets me to know that the little ones are in need of new clothes since they might catch something; I'm very glad to know they're being civil to each other, and I can't wait to see them; it feels like a lifetime since I left.

As to my worries over Mimi, you know very well that I have every confidence in you, but when you're far away you can't help worrying more than ever; you mustn't ever hide anything from me, though. The big lads are a devil of a problem for us; it's terribly important to keep things moving and not give them any chance of acquiring lazy habits . . .

. . . What I would like is to be near you, that is my real wish, but we must be patient for a little while longer. It is of utmost importance that I bring off all these paintings with which I am generally very pleased, and in this I don't believe I'm deluding myself; for this very reason I mustn't lose hope. I must struggle on despite the showers. Once I've left Belle-Île, I won't be long away from you since I've already given up plans of touring Brittany . . .

Your CLAUDE

Kervilahouen, Saturday 30 October [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I'm sure that Giverny will look quite lovely with its yellow trees, once my eyes have tired of the sight of these rocks; but you know how passionate I am for the sea, and here it's particularly beautiful. With my experience and my unceasing observation I have no doubt that if I carried on for another few months I could do some excellent work here. Each day I feel I know the 'old hag' a little better, and there's no doubt it's a perfect name for the sea here, terrifying as it is; just one look at those bluey-green depths and its terrifying ways (I'm repeating myself) and you're hooked. I'm absolutely mad about it in other words: but I do know that to paint the sea really well, you need to look at it every hour of every day in the same place so that you can understand its ways in that particular spot; and this is why I am working on the same motifs over and over again, four or six times even; but I'll be able to explain all this to you much better when I see you with my paintings laid out in front of you...

*

Kervilahouen, Belle-Île, Morbihan, 9 November [1886]

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

... You ask me to send you what I have finished; nothing is finished and you know very well that I can't really judge what I've done until I look over it again at home and I always need a short break before I can put in the final touches to my paintings. I'm still working a lot, unfortunately with the constant bad weather I'm having some difficulty in finding the effects again in many of my motifs, so I'll have a lot to do once I get back to Giverny.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Kervilahouen], Wednesday 10 November [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... It was quite fine today and I worked hard, if not well. It's getting harder and harder as I want to get things finished, and to do that you need to find exactly the right effect again, which is often impossible, since each day the sun shortens its course and things aren't lit up in the same way; added to this the weather is so variable that I'd need a cart to carry all my paintings along with me; I often have to choose which ones I think I'll be working on judging from the weather, and very often, like today, for example, the weather changes on my way to the location; you can imagine my mood after that, but since I know there has to be an end to it, I am well-nigh forced to change certain paintings completely...

Until tomorrow then, I send you my most tender thoughts, and kisses to you and the children, best wishes to Marthe.

Your old Monet who loves you and looks forward to seeing you.

*



PORTRAIT OF POLY

Kervilahouen, Sunday evening, 14 November [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... The weather's still as bad, it's really disheartening; what's more I'm in a foul mood as I'm making stupid mistakes, I'm working desperately on my paintings, knowing full well that they are incomplete, despite my energy for the task. What weather! What can I do? I can't achieve anything. This morning I lost beyond repair a painting with which I had been happy, having done about twenty sessions on it; it had to be thoroughly scraped away; what a rage I was in! And I'm still working in the rain...

*

[Kervilahouen], Wednesday 17 November [1886]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... Today was one of the worst days so far and I resolved not to go and work outside; it's the second time this has happened since I've been here. But to prevent myself falling into a bad mood I got *le père* Poly to pose for me and I did a sketch of him which is an extremely good likeness; the whole village had to come and see it, and the funny thing is everyone's congratulating him on his good fortune as they're under the impression that I did it for him, and I don't quite know how to get out of it...

Giverny, 23 April 1887

TO GEORGES PETIT

You will be aware that business with Boussod is going very well and I only regret that you never managed to get to Giverny. We might have worked out what you could have had from my exhibition, but as it is, several have already gone elsewhere.

Yesterday Monsieur van Gogh came to tell me that he's already sold one of the *Mer de Belle-Île* pictures, and asked me for something more, so he has six now, four of which are for the exhibition.

Anyway you musn't worry, there are still some left for you and good ones at that. Moreover I'm working non-stop and all will be well if I succeed as I'd like in finishing several things that are under way.

In any case, I'll aim to come on the 30th and draw up the catalogue, but I can't be sure as to its contents until the very last minute.

I count on you to remind the picture framer to be ready on time.

My kindest regards,

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 13 May 1887

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I too am a little late with my reply but these past few days I've been caught up with my work, and the opening of the exhibition at Petit's has also taken up a lot of my time. Thank you for your letter, though what you tell me is upsetting and while I've never been particularly in favour of the American venture, I had hoped that after all you succeeded in doing last year you might at least have reaped the benefits of all the effort and money you put into it this time.

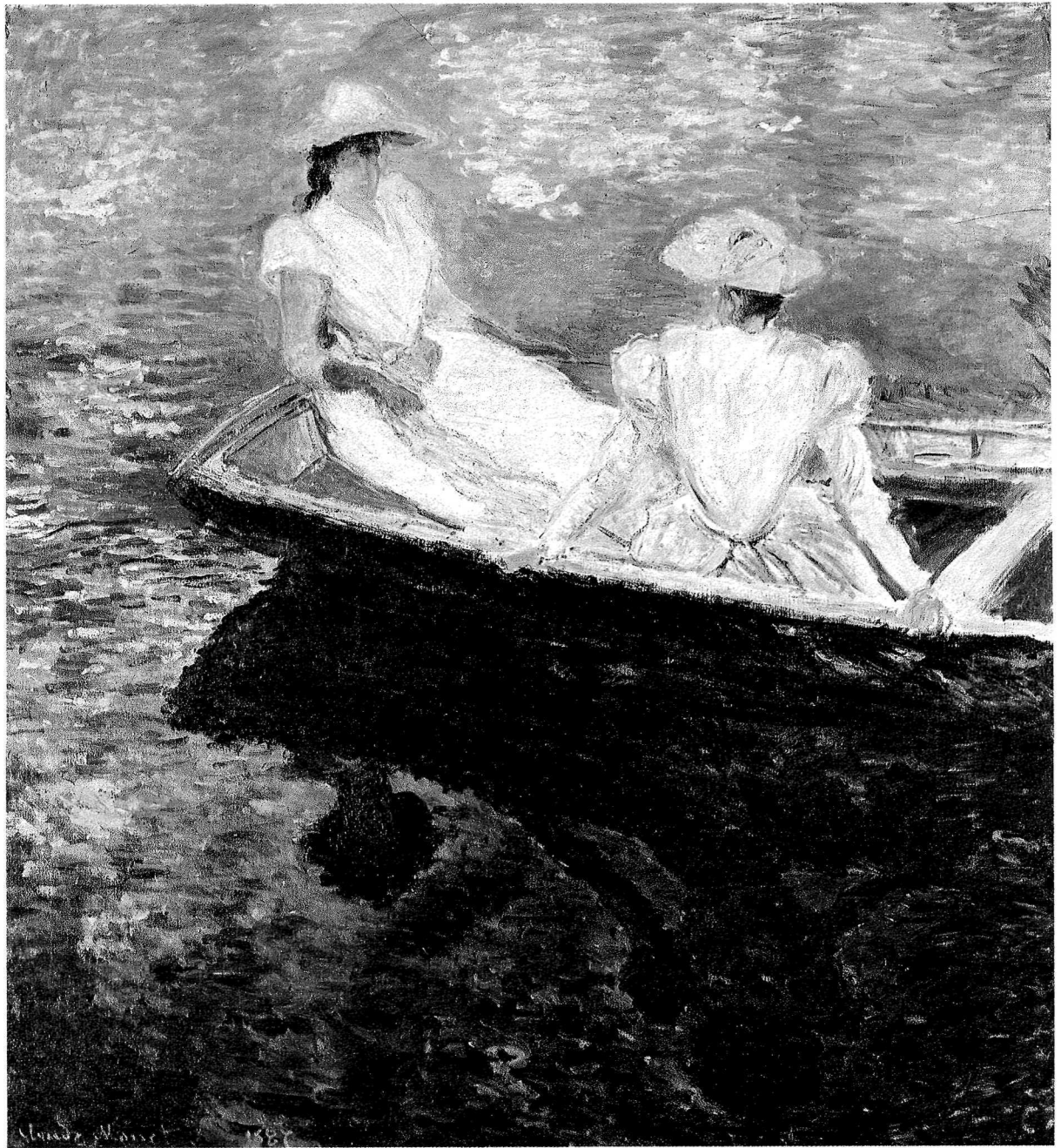
I'm convinced that you would have done better to stay here where you deserve to be successful. As it happens there's a growing movement in our favour and it's more pronounced this year. Almost all of us are represented in the International Exhibition and there's no doubt we're getting a better reception from the people who buy pictures. But you'll have a better idea of what's going on if I tell you that Boussod now have some Degas and some Monets and soon they'll have some Sisleys and Renoirs too. I'm quite in favour of it, since the first pictures they bought from me were sold immediately. In other words, business is going pretty well, and this is precisely why I deplore your absence, particularly if you're not succeeding in doing what you'd hoped in America.

I have to say that I was surprised and somewhat hurt by your silence and if Boussod hadn't come forward and if it hadn't been for the Petit exhibition, there's no doubt I would have been in real trouble; anyway you don't have to worry about me now. Try your best to come back to us soon with everything as you'd wish it. Above all let me know what happens, I'd be so glad to hear of your success.

Regards to your son,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

Renoir has done a superb picture of his bathers, not understood by all, but by many. Sisley's having a lot of success with old pictures; for my part I've sold almost all of my paintings. Whistler has joined us with some very beautiful work.



[*Cap d'Antibes*], Monday evening [23 *January* 1888]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I received both your letters this morning, yours and Jean's, and I'm glad to see that life at Giverny isn't too dull; I have to admit that I wasn't too worried on that score; with me away, all those little parties can go on uninterrupted. So make the best of the good weather, but watch the little ones: things happen so fast. I must say I was surprised at your news and I'd love to be able to watch the skating for a while (without being seen); it's not hard to imagine how delighted the children must be.

As I wrote this morning, the weather's marvellous and I'm working hard if slowly, not wanting to embark on too many paintings for fear of being detained here too long...

Enclosed are five hundred-franc notes; that's all I can manage for the moment.

Still haven't written to Petit, but I'll try again tomorrow, though I don't hold out much hope; if I succeed all well and good and I'll forward it to you at once. In any case be very economical and careful, won't you; let's hope the results of my labours won't be squandered on my return. Please excuse this little sermon but it's for your own good. I love you and am faithful.

Your CLAUDE

[*Cap d'Antibes*], Wednesday evening [1 February 1888]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I am weary, having worked without a break all day; how beautiful it is here, to be sure, but how difficult to paint! I can see what I want to do quite clearly but I'm not there yet. It's so clear and pure in its pinks and blues that the slightest misjudged stroke looks like a smear of dirt. Anyhow, I'm hard at it and when I'm working away like this I'm bound to come up with something. I've fourteen canvases under way, so you see how carried away I've become, but I won't be able to see them all through to the end; I'm too preoccupied with my dreams of Agay and also of Cassis on the way back . . .

*

[*Cap d'Antibes*], Friday evening [24 February 1888]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

The weather's absolutely superb again but, alas, my motifs have changed utterly and I'm having a lot of trouble resuming work on them; in some the lighting's changed, in others there is so much snow on the mountains that it's something else entirely; so I've had to start some all over again. Everything's against me, it's unbearable and I'm so feverish and bad-tempered I feel quite ill; though I've slept so soundly all the time I've been here, I couldn't get a wink of sleep last night.

So I hope that you'll understand the comments and fears I expressed in yesterday's letter in the light of my present condition. I assure you that it's a miracle that I can work at all with all these worries, but I'm beginning to earn a reputation here as a ferocious and terrible person.

It would be so nice if I could give you some good news. But what do you want? Everything seems to be turning against me. So it's better to write less than to bother you with a lot of complaints.

You have the children with you and their gaiety must comfort you in some small way. Hug them all for me, send my best to Marthe and accept my loving thoughts, my sad heart,

Your CLAUDE

*

Château de la Pinède near Antibes [10 March 1888]

TO PAUL HELLEU

I've been wanting to write to you for a long time, but you know I work to my limit and by the time evening's upon me I haven't the strength to pick up a pen. What's more, I didn't think I'd be here for such a long time, I'm never finished with my paintings; the further I get, the more I seek the impossible and the more powerless I feel. I've no idea whether what I'm bringing back with me is good or bad, struggling as I am with the wonderful sunshine, I don't know where I am any more. What about you, have you been working hard? I hope you have and that this time you'll have some good things for our exhibition . . .

CLAUDE MONET

*

Château de la Pinède near Antibes [*just before 11 April 1888*]

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I've just received your letter and am writing to you in some haste so that you have my news before you leave . . .

You ask me to set aside some of my new work for you; rest assured that I will always be glad to do further business with you, even though it's upsetting to see everything go off to America, but in any case I'm at your service and I'll let your son know when I get back, though we didn't decide on anything when he expressed his desire, before I left, to come and buy a few paintings from me in Giverny.

That apart, I have to say that I've already promised to show some other people my work. So I'll let everyone know at once and the choice will fall to the first comer. I can't do better than that and I would be glad if it were to be Monsieur Charles . . .

I'm working hard and would be home already were it not for the weather, which has been something of a problem, besides which the further I get the harder I am to please. Nevertheless, I think I'll have some good work at the end of it. I'll be back in Giverny some time between the 15th and the 20th and hope to stay put all summer. I've been away for three months now and I can't wait to see my nearest and dearest, my family and home again. The news from everyone is good . . .

Thank you for your letter and I wish you every success in Paris and over there.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

[*Cap d'Antibes*], Thursday [19 April 1888]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I'm continuing the good work, but I felt so uncomfortable this morning that I had to lay down my brushes; I had a headache, and was so dazed I couldn't see straight. I had to stop work at 10 a.m., and I'm limiting myself now to working mornings and evenings only; the heat is very great and I've been overdoing it, although I'm well under way.

As it turns out, I needn't have worried unduly about this enforced rest, since the sky has suddenly clouded over and it's starting to rain. But if it lasts I'll be desperate: I've so many paintings that need very little work for them to turn out well! It would be an annoyance, if it does, a real blow, and in any case I feel very strongly that I can't leave you like this any longer. Finally, let's pray that after this day of rest I'll wake up to fine sunshine tomorrow!

I plan to be with you a week from today, next Thursday; I'll leave on Wednesday at 1 o'clock from here and get into Paris the following day at 9 a.m.; from there I'll go straight off to see Petit, van Gogh and Durand and will catch the 1 o'clock train to Vernon. If between now and then I'm blessed with good weather, I'll be overjoyed, otherwise I'll be very miserable (only on account of my poor pictures, that is).

Until then, my darling, all my love and affection; kisses to all, big and small, best wishes to Marthe.

Your CLAUDE

*

Giverny, 15 May 1888

TO AUGUSTE RODIN

Has Geffroy told you that I've abandoned plans for an exhibition at Durand-Ruel's? I presume he has by now.

You may also know that since getting back I've had nothing but trouble. After working myself so hard, it really is beyond a joke. I don't know where to turn and don't want to do anything this spring. I'll see if I can arrange for a more complete show at the beginning of winter. I telegraphed you because I know my name is being used to hold an exhibition at Durand's but I'm not actually exhibiting and I'm within my rights to stop pictures of mine being shown if the exhibition is a paying one. If it's free, then there's not much I can do, dealers can do what they like on their own ground, but it's always a failure in such circumstances.

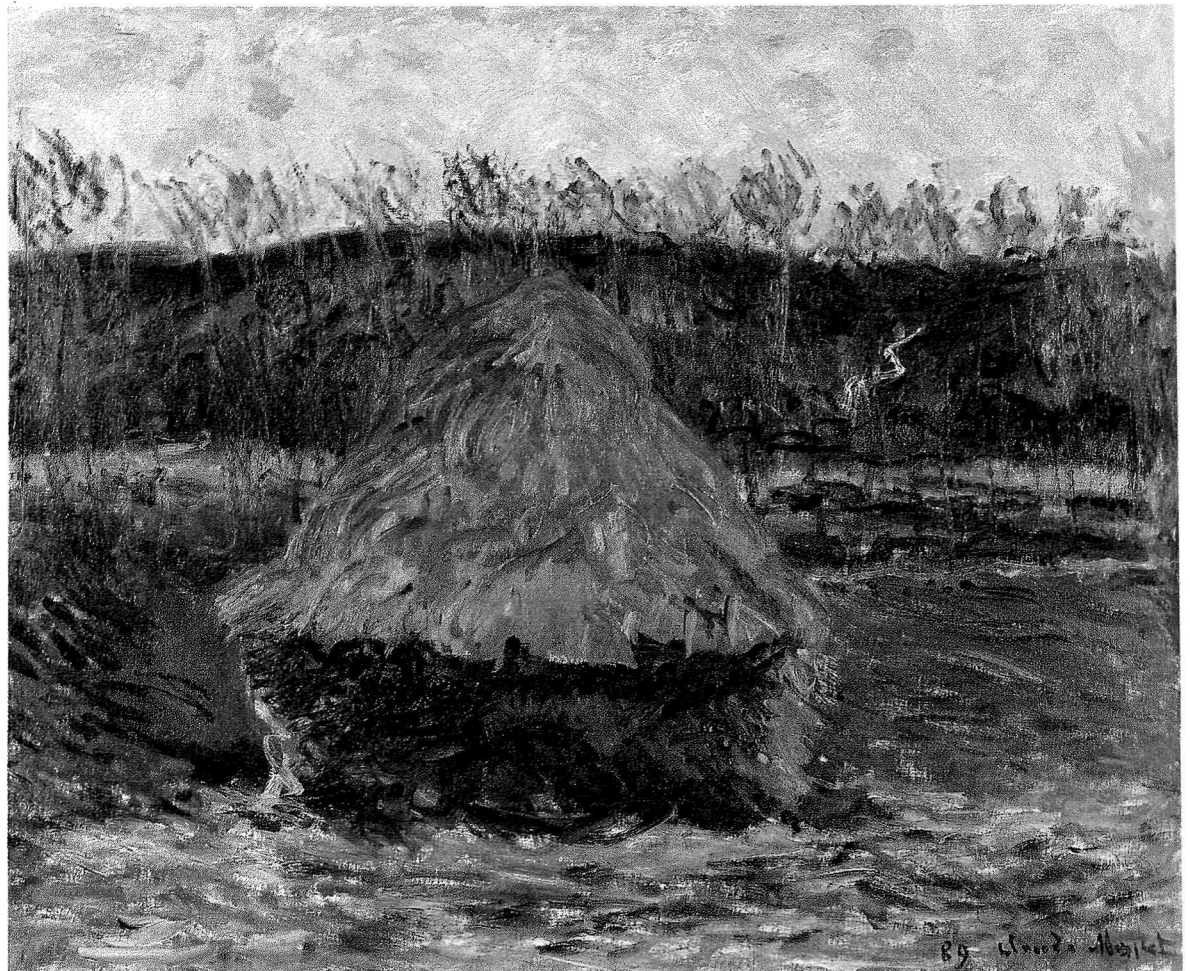
I thought it best to warn you, imagining you'd prefer to exhibit with me a little later on, rather than go ahead without me. However, if that was in fact your intention, I wouldn't want to do anything to prevent you.

Best wishes and hoping to see you soon,

Your friend, CLAUDE MONET

*

GRAINSTACK AT GIVERNY



[*Giverny*], 19 June 1888

TO STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

Thank you for your very kind letter.

I'm very glad you like my pictures, praise from an artist like yourself is always a pleasure to receive.

Yes indeed, poor Manet was a very good friend to me, and we return his affection and I'm appalled at the silence and injustice surrounding his name and great talent.

My very best wishes to you, my dear Mallarmé.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

Have you heard from Whistler and is he coming back soon?

*

[*Giverny*], 15 February 1889

TO STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

I must tell you with what pleasure and delight I read

your book.

I was quite unaware of Poe's poetry; it's wonderful, true poetry, the stuff of dreams, and how well you seem to have captured its soul!

I'm only an uneducated ignoramus, but I'm no less moved by it. All I knew of Poe was his prose, which I had read and admired in my youth before I had heard him talked about, but your poems complete the picture and reveal the character of the man.

Many, many thanks for the pleasure you've given me and it will be a delight to read it again often.

My very best wishes to you, CLAUDE MONET

I haven't forgotten your drawing, but haven't yet had the time to do it.

*

[*Fresselines, Creuse*], Saturday [9 March 1889]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I'm back from work, a bad session, and I wiped out everything I did this morning; it wasn't well realized or understood. It's always like this to start with. I worked better yesterday. On top of this the weather's very changeable today, grey skies and sunshine.

I'm very comfortably installed and not at all disturbed by Rollinat who leaves me to myself to do what I like; I only see them at mealtimes, but I'm finding it hard to get to bed early; they dine late at half-past seven or eight and I can hardly leave straight after the meal.

Forgive me for not writing to you at greater length today. It will soon be midday and I must see about sending your letter off. Till tomorrow, kisses to the children, best wishes to Marthe, all my love and tenderness to you.

Your CLAUDE

*

Fresselines, Creuse [22 March 1889]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I'm utterly desolate, snow came this morning accompanied by a wind and glacial cold, what a curse.

I was a little more content with myself last night, having managed to get two studies just right despite the rain, or perhaps because of it, since both paintings had a gloomy look about them which I couldn't quite get as I wanted.

Anyway, they were coming along well and I held out the highest hopes for today, but what am I to do with this snow, which is settling sufficiently to be a nuisance but not enough to paint it. Still, if it persists after lunch I'll have a go at something.

But troubles never cease, the struggle is endless.

*

Fresselines, 31 March [1889]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... As I said last night, work's been going much better these last few days and I'm beginning to think that I might have some good and interesting work to bring back with me. By looking hard I've finally entered into the spirit of this countryside, I understand it now and have a clearer idea of what to do with it.

The most recent work I had to start on when the weather changed is much better than the early paintings and less hesitant, in the end it's the result of a great deal of effort ...

Your old Claude who loves you tenderly.

*

Fresselines, 4 April 1889

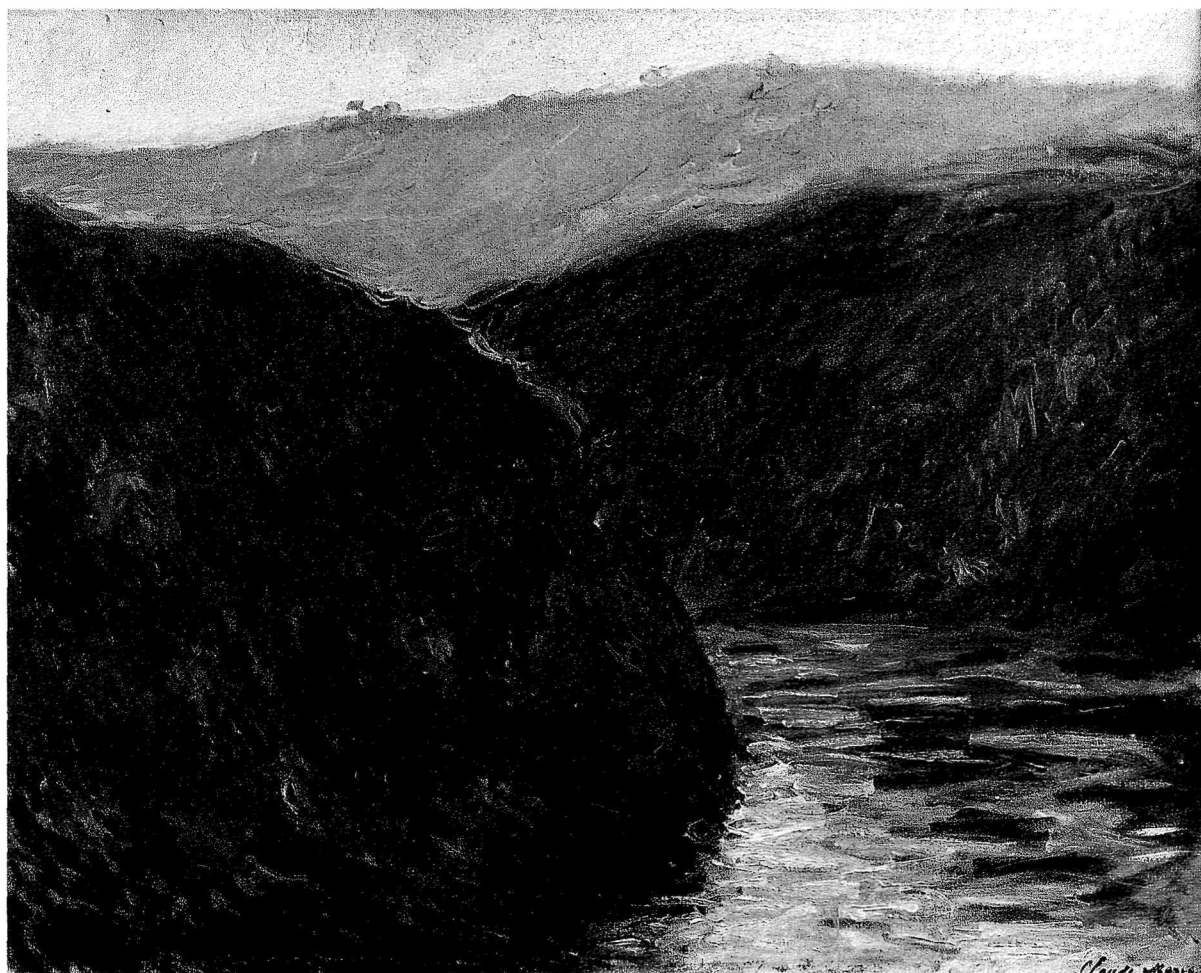
TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... So with this damnable weather, which is too sinister for words, progress is slow and the sight of my paintings terrifies me, they're so dark: what's more, several are skyless. It will be a gloomy series. A few have some sunlight in them but they were started so long ago that I'm very much afraid that when the sun finally re-emerges I shall find my effects considerably altered. Apart from this, the Creuse is bound to rise with all the rain we're having now and it will change colour, so I live in a state of continual suspense, and I'll have to consider myself fortunate if I can manage to bring off a quarter of the canvases I've begun, having given up all hope of Crozant, much to my regret; it will have to wait for another time ...

I send you my loving thoughts. Best wishes to Marthe, kisses to the children.

Your CLAUDE

*



Fresselines, 17 April 1889

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

What a lot of trouble you've had, but at least you're back and it's all over; I, however, am in a state of utter despair and feel like throwing everything into the river; I'm so miserable I didn't feel like writing, but now my mind's made up, you'll cheer me up and it's consoling to talk about one's hardships.

Briefly, yesterday was a very bad day and this morning was worse still; a painting which might have been very good is utterly spoilt and I fear for the others. What's more, the weather's wearing me down, a terrible cold wind which wouldn't have bothered me in the slightest if I'd captured my effect, but the endless succession of clouds and sunny intervals couldn't be worse, especially when I'm getting to the end; but the thing that is upsetting me the most is that with the drought the Creuse is shrinking visibly and its colour is altering so radically that everything around it is transformed. In places where the water once fell in green torrents all you see now is a brown bed. I'm desperate and don't know what to do, as this arid weather is here to stay. None of my paintings are right as they are, and I was counting on these last few days to rescue a good number of them; to give up now would mean that all my efforts have been wasted, but the struggle terrifies me, and I am worn out and longing to come home . . .

Advise me, comfort me.

All my loving thoughts, kisses to all.

Your CLAUDE

*

Fresselines, Wednesday 8 May [1889]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I'm going to offer fifty francs to my landlord to see if I can have the oak tree's leaves removed, if I can't I'm done for since it appears in five paintings and plays a leading part in three, but I fear it won't do any good as he's an unfriendly old moneybags who's already tried to prevent access to one of his fields, and it was only because the priest intervened that I was able to carry on going there. Anyway, therein lies the only hope of salvation for these pictures.

*

[Fresselines], Thursday 9 May [1889]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I'm overjoyed, having unexpectedly been granted permission to remove the leaves from my fine oak tree! It was quite a business bringing sufficiently long ladders into the ravine. Anyway it's done now, two men having worked on it since yesterday. Isn't it the final straw to be finishing a winter landscape at this time of year...

*

Giverny, 12 October 1889

TO STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

I really am ashamed at my conduct and I deserve to be reprimanded by you. It's not, however, due to any lack of desire on my part, as you might think; perhaps I am too proud, but the truth is that all the attempts I've made with the pencil look quite absurd and uninteresting, and consequently unworthy of a position alongside your exquisite poems (I was enchanted by *La Gloire* and fear I don't have the necessary talent to do something worthy of you). Please don't think of it as a vulgar defeat; unfortunately it's the plain and simple truth. So please forgive me, most of all for having taken so long to make this confession.

You must be aware of my sympathy and admiration for you – allow me then to express it by offering you a small painting (a sketch) as a token of our friendship, which I'll bring when I next come to Paris; I'd be very pleased if you were to accept it in the spirit in which it was offered, as a simple gesture.

This said, my dear Mallarmé, let us talk of our friend Manet. Perhaps you know that I am organizing a subscription from friends and admirers of the great artist to acquire his *Olympia* for the Louvre. It is one way to pay our respects and do justice to the memory of our friend and it's also a discreet way of coming to the aid of Madame Edouard Manet. I am sending you the list of subscribers I've obtained. I know you'd like to support it in whatever way you can and I thought you might give me names of other people who would be glad to participate in our venture. I've already obtained over fifteen thousand francs, and the figure of 20,000 must be reached.

If you could suggest some more subscribers to me I would be very grateful.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*

Paris, 7 February 1890

TO THE MINISTER OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION,
ARMAND FALLIÈRES

In the name of a group of subscribers, I have the honour of offering the *Olympia* by Edouard Manet to the State.

We are quite certain that in doing this we are acting on behalf of, and representing the wishes of, a great number of artists, writers and art lovers who have long since recognized the important role in this century's history of a painter whose early death was an untimely loss to his art and country.

The controversy which Manet's paintings provoked, the attacks to which they were subjected, have now subsided. Had the war against such individuality continued we would have been no less convinced of the importance of Manet's *oeuvre* and of his ultimate triumph. One need only recall what happened to artists such as Delacroix, Corot, Courbet and Millet, to cite only a few famous names that were once decried, their isolated beginnings preceding certain glory after their death. However, according to the great majority of those interested in French painting, the part that Edouard Manet played was beneficial and decisive. Not only did he play a great individual role, but he also stood for a great and fruitful evolution.

It seems to us, therefore, unacceptable that such a work should not have its place in our national collections, that a master should not be represented where his disciples are already admitted. We were also concerned by the ceaseless activity of the art market, the competition created by America, the all-too predictable departure to another continent of countless works of art that are the joy and glory of France. We wanted to hold on to one of Edouard Manet's most characteristic paintings, one in which he is seen at the height of his glorious struggle, master of his vision and of his craft.

We are placing the *Olympia* in your care, Minister. Our wish is for it to take its proper place in the Louvre, among contemporary works of the French school. Should the regulations make immediate entry impossible, if, despite the precedent set by Courbet, it is objected that a period of ten years has not yet elapsed since Manet's death, we consider that the Musée du Luxembourg is the appropriate place to keep *Olympia* until the date in question. We hope you will kindly give your support to the work to which we have linked ourselves, in the satisfaction of accomplishing what is quite simply an act of justice.

I am, Sir, yours most respectfully, CLAUDE MONET

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Among the most persistent themes in Monet's letters are his complaints about the contrariness of the weather and the unpredictability of the light. From long experience working in the open air, in all weathers and throughout the seasons, Monet had developed an exceptional sensitivity to atmosphere and to the moods of the landscape. In his maturity, this responsiveness to the most subtle 'effects', as he called them, drove Monet to modify his working procedures and even to rethink the basis of his art. During the painting expeditions of the 1880s, Monet had come to accept that a single canvas could never do justice to his chosen motif and that every shift in the sunlight or the quality of the atmosphere presented him, in effect, with a new subject. In order to be true to his subject, therefore, it had to be painted only while the light conditions remained stable, which might be a matter of an hour or just a few minutes. When he set out for a day's work, Monet was obliged to take with him a selection of canvases which corresponded to the conditions he would encounter, making it necessary to hire a porter to help carry all the necessary equipment. Any dramatic change in the weather could be disastrous, denying him the possibility of finishing his paintings in the right circumstances and leaving him with a series of half-completed canvases.

In both 1892 and 1893 Monet spent several months in the city of Rouen painting its famous cathedral, and almost every one of the letters he sent to his wife Alice contains some reference to the vagaries of the weather. His subject was the cathedral façade, which he painted from a shop overlooking the church, hardly changing his vantage point or composition from picture to picture. According to the artist himself, he would sometimes work on ten or a dozen canvases in a single day, moving from one to another as light conditions altered. Monet's letters show how obsessive he became in such circumstances, alternately exhilarated by a burst of sunshine or suddenly demoralized by the progress of his pictures. At the beginning of the decade, Monet had produced two earlier sequences of paintings, one based on stacks of grain and the other on rows of poplar trees beside the Seine at Giverny. Monet had learnt to minimize the inconvenience of working on a number of canvases at the same time, while allowing himself to pursue even further his studies of light and colour, by painting subjects near his house or within sight of a studio. In the Rouen paintings this encounter between artist and subject takes on a new and particular intensity, as both composition and viewpoint remain virtually unchanged and each canvas becomes, in effect, a subtle variant of the artist's own experience. This extension of Monet's art towards his perceptions and personal responses is also indicated in his letters, where he describes 'how difficult it is to paint what I feel'.

The increased complexity and subtlety of Monet's art in the 1890s was widely admired by his friends and by the growing circle of enthusiasts who competed for his paintings. Successful exhibitions of the Series pictures in 1891, 1892 and 1895 confirmed Monet's position at the centre of contemporary artistic life and carried his fame to collectors and institutions in other countries. His continuing correspondence with Paul Durand-Ruel emphasizes the shift in initiative from dealer to artist, as Monet declined to exhibit new work, almost casually asked for the dispatch of '3000 or 4000 francs', and distanced himself from Durand-Ruel's picture-dealing activities in America. Other letters record Monet's illustrious circle of acquaintances: we read of the mutual admiration of Monet and the American painter James McNeill Whistler, of the artist's support for Emile Zola in his stand against anti-Semitism at the time of the Dreyfus affair, and of Monet's intimacy with the writers Stéphane Mallarmé and Octave Mirbeau. The Impressionist artists had long since gone their own ways, but Monet maintained sporadic contact with some of his former colleagues, among them Boudin, Renoir and Sisley. A brief note to Gustave Geffroy in 1894 announced the arrival at Giverny of Paul Cézanne, and

we know from other sources that the visitor, who revered Monet above all other living artists, was deeply moved by his host's attentions to him on this occasion. Geffroy himself had become a much-valued friend, inspiring some of Monet's most informative and revealing letters. Monet had met the young critic by chance while at Belle-Île, and a relationship of affection and mutual respect had grown up between them. Writing to Whistler in 1891, Monet was able to help in advancing Geffroy's career, and in later years he cooperated with Geffroy in the production of his book *Claude Monet, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*.

Much of Monet's activity in his later life was centred on the house and gardens at Giverny. Here he was able to work on the canvases brought back from his painting excursions and to turn his attention to motifs in the garden itself. Monet's interest in gardening, like so many of his preoccupations, became obsessive, and his letters describe the acquisition of plants from the Botanical Garden at Rouen, detailed instructions for one of the gardeners employed at Giverny, and his efforts to establish and enlarge his water-lily pond. At Giverny, the children of his own and Alice's previous marriages were able to grow up and enjoy their rural surroundings, posing occasionally for the artist's brush. Monet's tenderness towards his extended family is evident in his letters, as he offers sympathy for the children's ailments and maintains an interest in their games and parties. His expedition to Norway in 1895 was partly prompted by the fact that Alice's son Jacques lived there, and the two families moved even closer in 1897 with the marriage of Jean, the painter's eldest son, to Alice's daughter, Blanche Hoschedé. Alice herself, whom Monet had finally been able to marry in 1892, continued to occupy the centre of his affections, and the decreasing frequency in his journeys away from home has been seen as evidence of her influence over him.

The last important painting expeditions of Monet's career were to London and Venice in the early years of the twentieth century. In both cities Monet became fascinated by the unfamiliar and even exotic effects of their light and atmosphere; his paintings of Venice are among the most brilliantly coloured canvases of his career, while the dense fogs that were so typical of industrialized London offered a new challenge to his eye and to his technique. During his stays in London, Monet installed himself beside the Thames at the Savoy Hotel, painting from the balcony of his room or from the nearby Charing Cross Hospital. Writing home to Alice, he described the extraordinary coloured mists and sudden transformations of the weather that alternately delighted and infuriated him, reminding us how vital this first-hand contact with the motif still was to his art. Monet's letters from his three visits to London are the most detailed account of his working methods to have survived, recording the roomful of canvases he needed in order to respond to changes in the light, his long hours of working in freezing conditions and the exhilaration and despair of the painting process. The pictures he produced were some of the most radical images of his career, dramatic rectangles of luminous colour with bold, geometric compositions of the utmost simplicity. At this time few artists had approached, or could even have comprehended, Monet's audacity with colours and pictorial organization, and it is surprising to note the approving responses of some of Monet's London visitors. During his stays at the Savoy, Monet was fêted by prominent London artists and writers, among them John Singer Sargent and George Moore, and invited into high society in the company of the visiting statesman Georges Clemenceau. Thirty years earlier Monet had visited London as a penniless and unknown exile; now he found that he had become a celebrity.

[Giverny], 21 July 1890

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

... I'm in a very black mood and am profoundly disgusted with painting. It really is a continual torture! Don't expect to see anything new, the little I did manage to do has been destroyed, scraped off or torn up. You've no idea what appalling weather we've had continuously these past two months. When you're trying to convey the weather, the atmosphere and the general mood, it's enough to make you mad with rage.

On top of all this, I've stupidly succumbed to rheumatism. I'm paying for my sessions in rain and snow and it's distressing to think that I'll have to stop braving all weathers and not work outside except when it's fine. What a stupid business life is!...

Yours in friendship, CLAUDE MONET

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[Giverny], 7 October 1890

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

... I'm hard at it, working stubbornly on a series of different effects (grain stacks), but at this time of the year the sun sets so fast that it's impossible to keep up with it... I'm getting so slow at my work it makes me despair, but the further I get, the more I see that a lot of work has to be done in order to render what I'm looking for: 'instantaneity', the 'envelope' above all, the same light spread over everything, and more than ever I'm disgusted by easy things that come in one go. Anyway, I'm increasingly obsessed by the need to render what I experience, and I'm praying that I'll have a few more good years left to me because I think I may make some progress in that direction...

Yours in friendship, CLAUDE MONET

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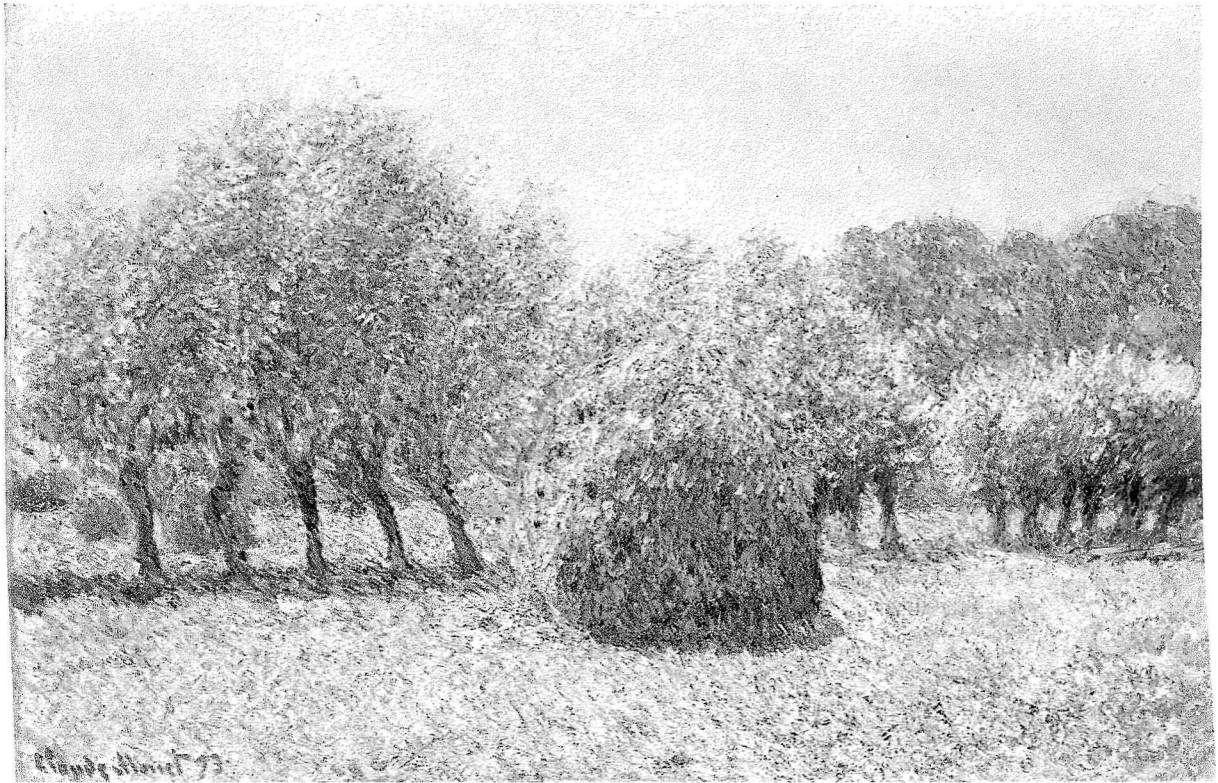
Giverny, 14 December 1890

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

Please forgive me for not having thanked you earlier for sending the photographs along with the journal, but I'm working hard outside all day and I'm thus neglecting all my correspondence. I thought I told you that I had finally finished with the landlord and the house is mine at last.

Mirbeau paid me a visit two days ago and told me he'd written to you, anyway you can count on him and he's going to do the article on me. So write and tell him when you require it. I'll take care of the drawings, but could I ask you to be a little patient as I've got a lot to do outside? It's such beautiful weather that I want to make the best possible use of it. As for your exhibition plans, we'll talk about it when we next get a chance but I for one am against reverting to exhibitions of the old group. You have pictures by every one of us at your gallery, and they're a form of permanent exhibition; I think this is enough and holding the occasional small exhibition of a selection of recent work by any one of us would, I think, be much more worthwhile, whereas it seems to me to be useless to revive our old exhibitions, and perhaps even harmful. That's my opinion at any rate, and we must talk about it at greater length...

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET



HAYSTACK

Giverny, 2 April 1891

TO JAMES WHISTLER

You must, by now, have received a letter from someone who is a friend of Mirbeau and also one of my own best friends. He wants to write an article on you for the new review (*L'Art dans les deux mondes*) and would like to look over some of your drawings to appear with the article in the above-mentioned review. Our friend Geffroy, who I believe paid you a visit in London this past winter, is a highly talented young man who, quite naturally, admires you and he'd do an excellent article on you. So you need have no fear of compromising yourself if you send him the drawings he'd like. The journal is in its infancy but I think its future looks promising. I'll have a few issues forwarded on to you so you can judge for yourself. My dear old friend, how long it's been since we last set eyes on each other! I had hoped to come to London this winter, but circumstances willed it otherwise. So I look forward to your next visit to Paris so that we can have a good long chat together.

I feel very guilty that I didn't write to thank you for the two lovely lithographs Mallarmé gave me on your behalf; you can't imagine how much pleasure you've given me. Could I ask you to remember me when any others appear?

Kindly remember me to Madame Whistler, all my very best wishes to you, and please don't forget my friend Geffroy.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET