

Giverny, 30 June 1891

TO CHARLES DURAND-RUEL

I'll have the six paintings your father bought on his last visit delivered to your address tomorrow. Two of these paintings still need some finishing touches, these being the two pictures of grain stacks; you may keep the four other ones and would you kindly send the two others back in the same crate. I wish I could have sent them off today but delivery to Vernon was impossible. As to what you say in your previous letter, my reply is that I can't cater for those people who visit me at home; I have no wish to sell anything to anyone, American or otherwise. The important thing is not to do you down and you may be assured that I don't, and I generally ask for more than you do from collectors who believe that in coming to see me they can have paintings on the cheap. I sometimes sell sketches at a reduction, but only to artists or friends.

As for dealers' prices, you can be certain I've always given your father preferential treatment and I'm convinced that competition is best not only for me but most of all for you.

My kindest regards,

Your CLAUDE MONET

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[Rouen], Friday 5 o'clock [12 February 1892]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... It really doesn't suit me living in towns and I'm very fed up, particularly since things aren't going as I want. However, today I feel a little more cheerful: I've been able to move into an empty apartment opposite the cathedral, but it's a tough job I'm setting out to do.

There's a big dinner tonight at the coal merchant's, with the friendly solicitor and Mirbeau etc., but I can't wait to be back with you tomorrow. Hugs to you all and my loving thoughts,

Your CLAUDE

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Tuesday evening, Rouen [8 March 1892]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

... I remain in good spirits and have a clear view of what I'm doing; it might turn out well if the sunshine lasts, but I'm very much afraid it won't and I've just seen the moon surrounded by a huge double halo which is a bad sign...

Monsieur Depeaux just dropped in where I work with another invitation; he wanted me to come to dinner again this evening, but I've got out of it. I promised I'd go on Thursday; I'm going to be treated to some particularly good shrimps from Honfleur. As I suspected, he asked if he could be first on the list for two *Cathedrals*, one for himself and another for the Rouen Museum, but while I'll bear his request in mind I told him I could not dispose of a painting before I had first finished with it myself, and had looked over it on more than one occasion back in Giverny.

I'd really love to come to Giverny, but I must stay put all the same as long as the sun continues to shine, since once it goes I'm afraid it will be hidden for some time.

I don't have very much to tell you otherwise, I'm hard at work, I'm taking great pains and think only of my *Cathedrals*...

Your CLAUDE

Rouen, 31 March 1892

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

I am utterly exhausted tonight and it will show in my letter. I've transformed, demolished all my paintings with sunshine; the die is cast, but I confess that there are some I have regrets about. If the fine weather continues, I may come through unscathed, but if there's another break in the weather then I'm done for and I'll have to limit myself to finishing the 2 or 3 grey-weather ones, but who can say what will happen? . . .

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Rouen, 2 April [1892]

TO ALICE HOSCHEDÉ

Thank you for your welcome letter which awaited me on my return from work. I'm knocked out, I've never felt so physically and mentally exhausted, I'm quite stupid with it and long only for bed; but I am happy, very happy and would be happier still if the wonderful weather holds out for a few more days. Anyway, I think I'll have something to bring home with me, but will my luck hold out? The barometer is visibly dropping.

Naturally, I'll stay here tomorrow, unless there's a great change in the weather, since I've had another stroke of bad luck; the souvenir merchant at whose place I'm working has just asked me not to come in the afternoon in future, as it puts off passing customers; I didn't hide my desperation at the news and offered him one and then two thousand francs, which is what he wanted and he's agreed to put up with me for a few more days, but I can see it's disturbing him . . .

Think of me getting up before 6; I'm at work by 7 and I continue until 6.30 in the evening, standing up all the time, nine canvases. It's murderous and to think I drop everything, you, my garden, all for this . . .

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Rouen, 13 April 1892

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I'm writing to acknowledge receipt of your registered letter containing four thousand-franc notes, for which I thank you.

I am utterly discouraged and unhappy with what I'm doing here, I set my sights too high and I've managed to spoil what was good. I haven't been able to work for the last four days and I've decided to drop everything and go home, though I don't even want to unpack my canvases, I have no wish to see them until some time has elapsed; so I'll let you know when I've calmed down a little . . .

*

Giverny, 22 August 1892

TO EUGÈNE BOUDIN

Forgive me for not having replied sooner to your kind letter; I found it only when I got back from my trip and you can imagine what pleasure it gave me. I was above all very touched as well as very flattered by your request. I am not in a position to send you this memento today. I haven't done any work at all this year and I want to give you something worthy of you, but I won't need reminding.

You know how fond I've always been of you as well as grateful. I haven't forgotten that you were the first to teach me to see and understand.

Like you, I've often looked back on those early days, those delightful outings with Jongkind and Courbet. So I was very happy to see that you had also retained similar memories.

I hope very much to be able to come and see you this winter and talk about the good old days.

Your old friend CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 12 December 1892

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

Yes, I have indeed recovered my taste for painting and I am working, but unfortunately it's not yet possible for me to embark on anything new. I've too many paintings which were promised a long time ago and first I must be rid of them, and it's a long and difficult task. Anyway, I'm getting on and I reckon that within a week I'll be able to deliver them all, including three or four that you've been wanting for some time.

After that I'll do something new, I'm feeling full of enthusiasm and I hope that the long rest will have done me some good.

Don't worry, you'll always be first in line.

Hoping to see you soon, yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

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Giverny, 24 January 1893

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

... As you have guessed, I've been labouring all this while, painting outside despite the intense cold, but the thaw has come too soon for me. Not having worked for such a long time, I've done nothing but bad work which I've had to destroy, and it was only towards the end that I began to be my old self again. Result: only four or five paintings, and they're nowhere near complete, but I don't despair of resuming work on them again if the cold weather returns.

Best wishes from yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

P.S. It would be kind of you to let me know how long your Japanese exhibition goes on, as I want very much to see it.

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[*Rouen*], Thursday evening 6 o'clock [16 February 1893]

TO ALICE MONET

I haven't wasted any time since I got here. Once I'd seen to my room and my luggage was installed, I went to the rue Grand-Pont; it's very well situated and the workers have just finished there. That done, I went to Monsieur Louvet to ask for the keys to the big house and then had easels carried to both spots and this morning I was hard at work.

I've started on two paintings and I'm back in the thick of my subject again. Proceeding in this manner, and when I see last year's effects coming, I'll be able to work without hesitation. So here's something to make you happy, and I have hopes of emerging from all this work victorious . . .

After work this morning I was able to make my visit to Monsieur Varenne at the Botanical Gardens. He's a very kind man, Monsieur Varenne, and I hope to obtain quite a lot of things from him; he offered me a cutting of that lovely climbing begonia which I'll bring back on Sunday. We visited all the greenhouses, really superb, what orchids! They're gorgeous. As for plants for the young botanists, he's going to introduce me on my next visit to the head gardener who is only allowed to give plants away on Monsieur Varenne's orders, but he tells me that it would be a good idea if the children were to draw up some kind of list of the species and subspecies they would like; they could work out a list with the priest. He gave me quite a lot of good advice on a lot of things; he's worth knowing in short. He told me I could go anywhere I wanted and feel at home . . .

I hope to hear from you this evening and most of all have some good news. Life here is not much fun and while I boast that I've no time to write, I feel the need to talk and tell you what I'm doing. So write to me at length, nothing could give me more pleasure . . .

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[*Rouen*], Wednesday 22 February 1893

TO ALICE MONET

What terrible unsettled weather! I carry on regardless without a break. I'm feeling better but, dear God, this cursed cathedral is hard to do! Since I've been here, a week tomorrow, I've worked every day on the same two paintings and can't get what I want; well, it will come in the end, with a hard struggle. I'm very glad I decided to come back, it's better like this . . .

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[*Rouen*], Friday 3 March [1893]

TO ALICE MONET

Things went a little better today and I'll finish with this cathedral eventually, but it will take time. It's only with hard work that I can achieve what I want; I wouldn't be surprised if once again nothing definitive comes of it, and I might have to come back next year. I'll certainly do all I can to pull through this time; it depends on the weather, but in any case I don't want to prolong work endlessly or alter my paintings as the sun gets higher. Anyway I'm a little happier today, but I'll have deserved my Sunday off . . .

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[Rouen], Thursday evening [9 March 1893]

TO ALICE MONET

I'm working away like a madman but, alas, all your words are in vain, and I feel empty and good for nothing. It all happens at once, the weather isn't very predictable: wonderful sunshine yesterday, fog this morning, sun this afternoon which disappeared just when I needed it; tomorrow it will be a dark grey day or rainy, and once again, I'm very much afraid I'll leave everything and come home on an impulse . . .

What's the good of working when I don't get to the end of anything? This evening I wanted to compare what I've done now with the old paintings, which I don't like looking at too much in case I fall into the same errors. Well, the result of that was that I was right to be unhappy last year; it's ghastly and what I'm doing now is quite as bad, bad in a different way, that's all. The essential thing is to avoid the urge to do it all too quickly, try, try again, and get it right once and for all . . .

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[Rouen], 28 March 1893

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

. . . My stay here is advancing, which doesn't mean that I'm near to finishing my *Cathedrals*. Regretfully I can only repeat that the further I get, the more difficult it is for me to convey what I feel; and I tell myself that anyone who claims he's finished a painting is terribly arrogant. To finish something means complete, perfect and I'm forcing myself to work, but can't make any progress; looking for something, groping my way forward, but coming up with nothing very special, except to reach the point where I'm exhausted by it all.

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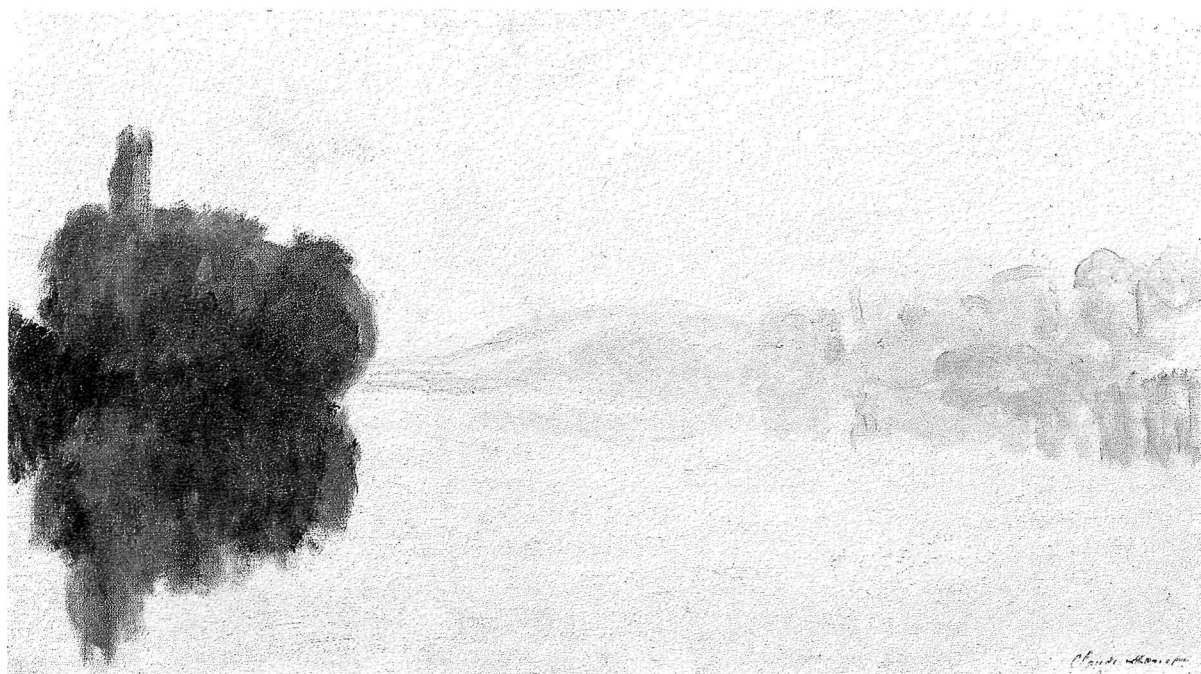
Rouen, 29 March 1893

TO ALICE MONET

Thank you for your kind words and for what you've done. You don't mention your poor leg, I hope that's a good sign and that it's better. You've no idea how much I think of Giverny in this fine weather and envy you being there; but I'm a prisoner here and I must see it through to the end, even though as things are my strength is failing, the pace is killing and I'm working feverishly.

Fourteen paintings today, it's unprecedented. If I lived in Rouen, it's now that I'd be starting to understand my subject. I've taken my time but now I'm nearing the end and I won't be here much longer; firstly because I'm too tired and preoccupied with my return home, and also because it (the lighting) is changing drastically; gone is the oblique light of February, every day it gets whiter and higher up, and from tomorrow I'm going to work on two or three more canvases . . .

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THE SEINE AT PORT-VILLEZ, PINK EFFECT

[*Rouen*], Tuesday night, 10 o'clock [4 April 1893]

TO ALICE MONET

How guilty and unhappy I felt last night when I saw how much I had pained you. I hope you've forgiven me, realizing the trouble I must have been having to get into a state like that. The weather's unchanged but unfortunately I and my nerves fluctuate with every interruption to my work.

This morning I felt quite out of sorts, my things were all over the place in utter disorder and my paintings looked atrocious in the altered light. In short, I won't be able to do anything worthwhile, it's a stubborn encrustation of colours, that's all, but it's not painting. I'll carry on for one more week so I have no regrets, but I'm very much afraid to no purpose. What is it that's taken hold of me, for me to carry on like this in relentless pursuit of something beyond my powers?

I've only myself to blame for it, my impotence most of all and my weakness. If I do any good work now it will be only by chance.

*

Giverny, 17 July 1893

TO THE PRÉFECT OF THE EURE

May I humbly submit a few observations relative to the opposition drawn up by the municipal council and a few inhabitants of Giverny, relating to two inquests concerning the request I had the honour of making to you with the aim of obtaining authorization for a water channel on the River Epte, the purpose of which is to supply a pond where I would like to grow aquatic plants.

I feel I must point out to you that the above-mentioned opponents are using public health as a pretext, their sole intention being to interfere with my plans out of pure ill-will, a common enough attitude in the country where a private individual, a Parisian, is concerned. Moreover the number of people opposing me, which is very small in relation to our population, consists

of people I do not employ or have ceased to employ at my home, such as Madame Serrurier etc., and they are merely wanting to cause vexation in a vengeful spirit. May I thus be so bold as to hope, Monsieur le Préfet, that you will be so kind as to take these considerations into account and give a favourable response to my request.

I would also like you to know that the above-mentioned cultivation of aquatic plants is not as significant as the term suggests and that it is merely intended for leisure and to delight the eye and also to provide motifs to paint. Finally, in this pond I will grow plants such as waterlilies, reeds, different varieties of irises which for the most part grow wild along our river, and there is thus no question of poisoning the water.

Should the locals remain unconvinced, I will nevertheless undertake to renew the water of the pond mentioned during night hours when no one uses the water.

I hope that these explanations will enable you to make a full appraisal of the facts as they are and that it will be possible for you to make a decision in my favour.

I hope, Monsieur le Préfet, that you will excuse the liberty I have taken in writing to you,

I am Sir, your most respectful servant, CLAUDE MONET, painter

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Giverny, 21 May 1894

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I rather fear that you're angry with me for having given up my exhibition and most particularly for having given you so little warning, however I'd like to think otherwise, and hope you don't begrudge me quoting such high prices for the *Cathedrals*. I had counted on giving you the first and most complete choice, without even setting any aside for myself (and I would have chosen the better ones). If we could have talked it over more reasonably when you came, I'm sure we might have come to a better understanding.

I still haven't seen everyone, but when I have, we'll discuss this delicate matter again. Anyway, this is what I intend to do. Set aside a number of *Cathedrals*, the ones to which I attach most importance, which would not be for sale for the time being unless at a very high price. This will enable me to sell the others for less. I think this is a better solution and one I ought to have arrived at earlier. I am very glad I postponed the exhibition until October or November. I'm very involved with my work as it is and, with what I do between now and then, I'll have a much more varied and complete exhibition, and I don't want to stop work now despite the problems the unsettled weather is causing.

I'd be very relieved to have a line from you to tell me you don't bear me any ill feeling.

Kindest regards,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

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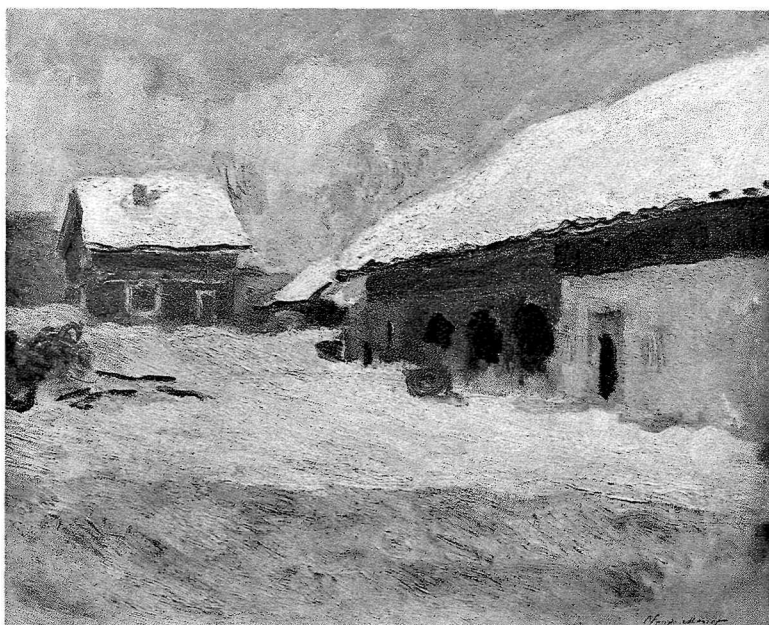
[Giverny], 23 November 1894

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

... It's settled then for Wednesday.

I hope Cézanne will still be here and will join us, but he's so odd, so afraid to see a new face that I'm afraid he'll give us a miss, despite his keen wish to make your acquaintance. How sad that such a man hasn't had more support in his life! He's a true artist and has come to doubt himself overmuch. He needs encouragement, and he was thus very touched by your article!

CLAUDE MONET



NORWAY, THE RED
HOUSES AT BJORNEGAARD

Giverny, 21 January 1895

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

As I told you, I'll be leaving next Monday for Norway.

So if you intend to come to Giverny, you must hurry, if not don't be surprised if some of my recent paintings go elsewhere. Monsieur Montaignac, as I said, has already made his choice and furthermore Monsieur Valadon wrote to me asking if he could come and see my recent work. I replied that he could visit this week, but warned him of my insistence that the subject of the *Cathedrals* was closed. So if you do intend to acquire some (I'm referring to the *Cathedrals*), you'd do well to back out of your agreement, otherwise you risk getting here after everyone else has made their choice . . .

*

Christiania, 3 February 1895

TO ALICE MONET

. . . I arrived utterly exhausted after all the delays, and

generally unenthusiastic. The journey was for the most part monotonous and the endless snow after Paris was a little wearing after a while; however my last day on the train afforded some extraordinary sights, more beautiful even than Christiania, but nightfall prevented me from seeing any more beautiful things; you understand that I can't describe everything I've seen as it would take too long. I'll confine myself to giving you my first impressions of Christiania. My arrival in the evening left me cold and I was even more unimpressed by my first outing yesterday. The place must be infinitely more beautiful without snow, or at least with less than this. The most beautiful feature of the fjords is the water, the sea, and it's nowhere to be seen; there's ice but it's covered with snow and so much so that you can't even see when you're by the sea. A few scattered areas of ice are devoid of snow and there the ice is smooth, a wonderful sight, you can walk across it, go over in a sleigh in the afternoon and today in particular I've seen some very beautiful, even spectacular things, but most delightful of all is the life here: travelling on a sleigh wrapped up in furs is pure delight, then there are the dogs. Everybody, the entire population goes mad and thinks of nothing else, small children and grown-ups alike and all of them in delightful costumes like Lapps. It's a delight for me to watch them: that's all you see, groups heading off with their bags, going up into the mountains, day and night, lit up with torches in the dark . . .

Christiania, Saturday 9 February 1895

TO ALICE MONET

... In short, after the initial disappointment on arrival I have been in a continual state of amazement, and but for one small snag I'd be overjoyed, which is that there's a little too much attention given to my person from newspapers, in restaurants and cafés. There's talk of a banquet which the painters and writers here want to give me. Jacques had concealed this from me, but I hope to get out of it, having already spread the word that I'm used to a simple life on my own and while very flattered I'm not very fond of such things...

*

Christiania, 13 February 1895

TO ALICE MONET

This morning we at last received your two letters of the 8th and 9th, we were beginning to worry, and had we not received your two dear letters this morning I was ready to send you a telegram.

I can see that it's very cold where you are too, but it's nothing compared to here; your night temperatures are our day ones. I can well understand how happy the skaters are, but I dread what's happening to the garden, the bulbs. Is the ice on the pond being watched carefully? It would be very sad if everything planted there were to die. That aside, I now regret that I went away at this time, since apart from my joy in being with Jacques and sending you good news of him, the trip will have served no purpose. Up to now I had thought I'd be able to work. To that end we travelled all day again yesterday and saw more beautiful things, but I can see it will be far too difficult; getting things set up, and the amount of time it takes to go to and from makes work out of the question. And as I can't see the point of covering canvases only to leave them behind, I'm giving up the idea, much to Jacques' disappointment. All this is making me rather gloomy and I very much regret not being in Giverny, where I might have taken advantage of the fine sights to be seen there at this time of year, and since I've now seen quite enough of Norway, it's quite possible that I'll make my way back to France unannounced, having little desire to see a country which I can't paint.

*

[Christiania], 15 February 1895

TO ALICE MONET

It's two days now since I last wrote to you, but although I was very discouraged and all set to board the boat for Le Havre, I wanted to have one last try at finding a spot where I could set myself up, a place of work without the need for a sleigh or train journey. After an excursion which was as wonderful as ever, I have, in short, found what I want at last, so I believe. I've just moved in, it's three-quarters of an hour from Christiania. There are painters around and a writer who speaks French, all of whom are very considerate and obliging. When I went yesterday with Jacques and they recognized me, they were falling over themselves to show me around in their sleighs and finally I joined the wife of a painter on a two-hour tour...

[Sandviken], 12 March, 9 pm [1895]

TO ALICE MONET

... It hasn't stopped snowing here for four days, which is hampering me a good deal; on top of that it's getting noticeably warmer and I'm dreading a thaw. I've already had to give up on several pretty scenes on the fjord; crossing the fjord in vehicles is now prohibited, you can only go on foot, but it's too far away and what's more very hard going. I'm working without a break despite all these changes and the snow, but I won't be able to get anything finished; I have to limit myself to capturing a view in one or two sessions, impossible to find the same effect again, especially at this time of the winter. I also had several paintings of sunlight but it's a good ten days now since the sun appeared, when it does it will only melt everything. But what wonderful things I'm seeing, what lovely effects I was blind to in the beginning. It's only now that I can see what needs to be done and how; I ought to have come here a month earlier and no doubt this place is worth another visit, you couldn't conceive of snow effects like it in France, it's wonderful, but I'm going on and on and I'm in need of rest. Let me kiss you now and finish these lines tomorrow before Jacques leaves.

*

Sandviken, 20 March 1895

TO ALICE MONET

... For the last two days the weather has been superb and the cold has come back with a vengeance, but I can't do very much with it, unfortunately, as everything's changed, the light above all, and the snow has disappeared from the roofs, having been cleared off with the coming of the thaw, to lighten the weight on the rafters; elsewhere the snow which was beginning to thaw is now as hard as ice and it's possible to walk over it almost everywhere, although the sun is hot enough to burn...

I reckon I'll be leaving on the 30th, on the Antwerp boat I think. I'll go to Christiania one morning soon to find out about departure times and look at the boat...

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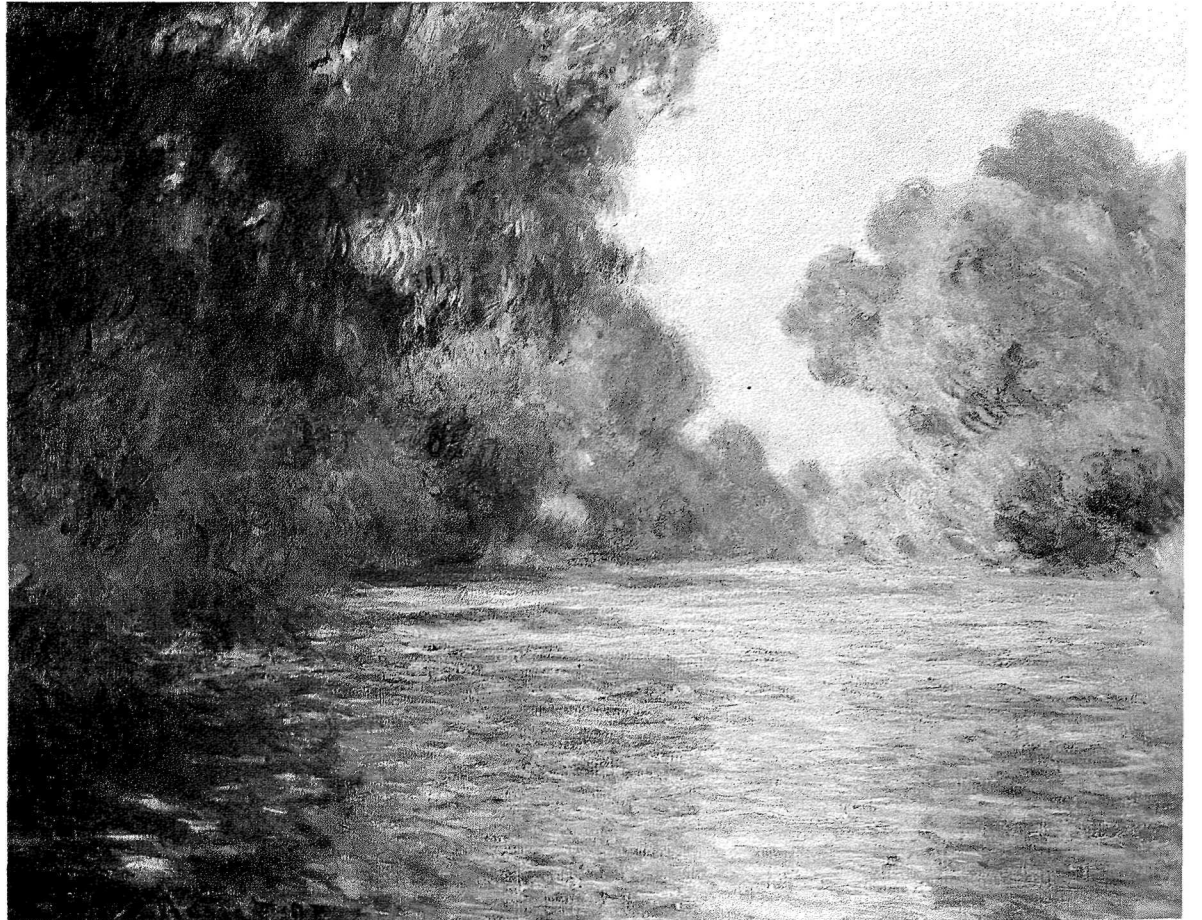
Giverny, 18 May 1896

TO JAMES WHISTLER

I've just learned of the dreadful sorrow that has befallen you and am writing to express my sympathy for you in your distress. I had the good fortune to enjoy the grace and intelligence of Madame Whistler, I know how much she adored you and can imagine how great your affliction must be. But you must be brave and strong in the face of the harsh blow that has been dealt you. May the sympathy of an old friend console you in some small way. I send you my deepest sympathies, and apart from the admiration I have for you, you must know how fond I am of you.

Yours affectionately, CLAUDE MONET

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THE SEINE AT GIVERNY

Giverny, 23 April 1897

TO AUGUSTE RODIN

It was not until today that I received the admission card for the private view and even though I had an unexpected visit yesterday, I would have been delighted to have been present at your triumph. For since my visit the other day I haven't stopped thinking of your *Victor Hugo* and of another fine work I saw at your home. But it's something to look forward to, as I intend to come to Paris soon. Thank you for thinking of me and I'm sorry I was unable to come and shake your hand yesterday. And thank you again for the gorgeous things you've given me and which are a joy to me.

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[Giverny], 3 [December] 1897

TO EMILE ZOLA

Bravo, well done for the two fine articles in the *Figaro*. You are the only one to have said what had to be said, and so well too. I'm delighted to be able to send you my congratulations.

Your old friend, CLAUDE MONET

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[Giverny], 25 February 1898

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

... Zola's admirable courage! It's absolutely heroic! I'm certain that when things have calmed down a bit, everyone in their right minds will come round to seeing things for what they are and recognize what is so fine about Zola's action.

[Giverny], 30 June 1898

TO AUGUSTE RODIN

Can you believe that after various setbacks too numerous to mention, it was only yesterday that I was able to go to the Salon and I couldn't even let you know in time to see you, however briefly.

I finally saw your *Balzac* and although I knew that I would see a fine piece of work, I must tell you in all sincerity that it surpassed my expectations. Let them say what they like, you have excelled yourself; it's absolutely beautiful and magnificent, superb and I can't stop thinking about it.

Cordially yours, your old friend CLAUDE MONET

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[Giverny], 29 January 1899

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

... A week ago poor Sisley called for me to go and see him, and it was then that I saw he wanted to say goodbye. Poor old friend, poor dear children!

*

Giverny, 3 February 1899

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

I received the letter you sent to Sisley's but I didn't have any time to see you, as I had to make several trips to Moret mainly because of the funeral and to spend some time with his poor children. Thank you for offering your services; your help will no doubt prove invaluable. For the time being I'm going to see about holding a sale for the childrens' benefit; that's the most urgent thing, then a good exhibition of Sisley's best work should be arranged.

I'll be seeing you shortly and we'll talk all this over, I hope you're feeling better. I greatly missed you since there was no one at the funeral.

In haste, best wishes and regards to everyone at home.

CLAUDE MONET

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Giverny, 7 February, 1899

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I have some very sad news for you. Madame Butler, our beloved Suzanne, died last night, while her poor mother was ill in bed with acute bronchitis which she caught the other day in Moret.

One sorrow and affliction after another! All the same I must be strong and comfort my family.

Yours in haste, CLAUDE MONET

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Giverny, 17 March, 1899

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

It would be very kind of you, as you promised, to secure Degas's participation in the sale for Sisley's children. The date of the sale is fixed for 1 May, at the Galerie Petit, with a preview on the 29th and 30th; it will consist of the few paintings Sisley left along with gifts from friends and colleagues. I'm sure Degas would be glad to be associated with this act of charity and I'd be very grateful if you could ask him as soon as possible and inform me at once of his reply.

My best regards,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

My wife's condition has improved thank God, but the wound will take a long time to heal. I hope you've good news from Renoir.

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Giverny, 15 January 1900

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

As telegraphed last Saturday, I'm sending two crates over to you today in some haste; one containing six canvases in the series (*Water-lily ponds*), the other containing two, another in the same series, and a picture which you will be kind enough to set aside for Monsieur G. Geffroy who will pick it up. As we agreed on your visit here, the prices of the paintings are as follows: six at 6500 and one at 6000, that is 45,000 all together, for which you were so kind as to advance me 30,000 francs. So all is in order. As for the London paintings, I don't know if I'll be able to deliver any before my return. I'll tell you within the week as I only want to send you work I'm satisfied with. I'd be glad to know what Renoir's response was with regard to the Exposition Universelle; I hope he agrees with me.

Pissarro with whom I'm keeping in touch by post is of the same mind and I for my part have informed Monsieur Roger Marx that I personally have taken a stand against participation in the exhibition. Indeed, if the administrators were to have had the pleasure of our participation in the exhibition, they ought to have consulted us first, and offered us a proper room where we might have been able to exhibit a number of our paintings. Since this was not the case, all we can do, in my view, is to abstain, and I am counting on you to keep me informed of anything you may learn or hear.

I still intend to leave for London in early February and I'd be obliged if you wouldn't send any of the paintings I'm sending you over to America. It would be better for you to keep them for exhibition this summer.

Regards from

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

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MONET'S GARDEN AT GIVERNY

Giverny [*February 1900?*]

TO HIS GARDENER

Sowing: around 300 pots Poppies – 60 Sweet pea – around 60 pots white Agremony – 30 yellow Agremony – Blue sage – Blue Waterlilies in beds (greenhouse) – Dahlias – Iris Kaempferi. – From the 15th to the 25th, lay the dahlias down to root; plant out those with shoots before I get back. – Don't forget the lily bulbs. – Should the Japanese paeonies arrive plant them immediately if weather permits, taking care initially to protect buds from the cold, as much as from the heat of the sun. Get down to pruning: rose trees not too long, except for the thorny varieties. In March sow the grass seeds, plant out the little nasturtiums, keep a close eye on the gloxinia, orchids etc., in the greenhouse, as well as the plants under frames. Trim the borders as arranged; put wires in for the clematis and climbing roses as soon as Picard has done the necessary. If the weather's bad, make some straw matting, but lighter than previously. Plant cuttings from the rose trees at the pond around manure in the hen huts. Don't delay work on tarring the planks and plant the *Helianthus latiflorus* in good clumps right away. If anything's missing such as manure, pots etc., ask Madame if possible on a Friday so as to have it on Saturday. In March force the chrysanthemums along as the buds won't open in damp conditions; and don't forget to put the sulphur sheets back over the greenhouse frames.

London, Wednesday 14 February 1900, 9 p.m.

TO ALICE MONET

... But what weather and how gloomy I was at the prospect of being unable to paint! Fortunately I had a better day than expected, I was able to work before and after lunch from my window and at 5, with the sun setting gloriously in the mist, I started work at the hospital. If only you could have seen how beautiful it was and how I wished you were here on the terrace with me; it seems it was cold and I was oblivious to it in my enthusiasm for the work in hand and for the novelty of it all, but how hard it's going to be!

I had barely settled down to my painting when the hospital treasurer appeared, to invite me downstairs for tea, but he had not imagined that I would be unable to leave my picture; I made it as clear as I could to him, not in good English, but using sign language to express my keenness to get down to work. Ten minutes later, the good man came back in person with a cup of tea, sandwiches and cakes; which did me some good, I must admit...

I get your good letters regularly and they give me a lot of pleasure, but I'd be happier if I knew that the hours passed more easily for both of you, and I'd also be relieved to know that the weather permits a few outings and diversions of some kind. So take comfort in the thought that I'm working.

*

London, Monday morning 10 a.m. [26 February 1900]

TO ALICE MONET

... Rest assured that you have no reason to be jealous and I don't know why you've got the idea that Clemenceau could lead me into bad company. He and Geffroy arrived very promptly, delighted to see me and of course very caught up in what I'm doing. After we changed, we went to the dinner, a very chic affair, not with Madame Asquith but with the lady Clemenceau had introduced to us and whom we saw again at Sargent's; she's a spinster. Clemenceau thought he had introduced us to her sister who is married and her husband, Salisbury's son, who was wounded in the Transvaal. There were a lot of people there, politicians including a current minister and I must say that it was fascinating, with Clemenceau talking as plainly as he does; Mr and Mrs Asquith (Margot) were there, an extraordinary character who is going to send me permission to paint in the Tower of London. Sargent was invited but wasn't able to come or didn't want to because of Clemenceau, it appears, as he once wanted to paint his portrait and he completely failed at the task...

In the early hours of this morning there was an extraordinary completely yellow fog; I did an impression of it which I don't think is bad; otherwise it's still fine, but very variable; so I had to start lots of canvases of Waterloo Bridge and the Houses of Parliament; I also resumed work on several paintings done on the first trip, the least good ones. I'm mostly working here for the time being, and don't go to the hospital until 4 in the afternoon. Unfortunately the fog doesn't seem to want to lift and I fear the morning will be wasted...

*

London, Friday 9 March 1900, 6.30

To ALICE MONET

My darling, no letter from you again this morning and the only news I've had is in a kind letter of Blanche's who says his house seems very empty now you've gone. Here it's been very fine today with sunshine, which is a rarity, and as I had predicted, the sun already sets a long way from the place I'd wanted to paint it in an enormous fireball behind the Houses of Parliament; so there must be no further thought of that; all the same I had a good day and if I had several more like this I'd do my very best work . . .

*

London, Sunday 18 March 1900, 5 p.m.

To ALICE MONET

I don't know if you're having the same weather as we are, but there must have been a severe frost last night; when I awoke everything was white, which doesn't presage good weather; sure enough, since lunch, there's been a terrible wind raging and snow etc. . . . but it didn't stop me from being out in a shower before six this morning, and it was damned beautiful; each morning I get carried away like this until the weather makes things too difficult for me. I had a terrible struggle today, and it will go on like this until the day I leave. The only shortage I have is of canvases, since it's the only way to achieve something, get a picture going for every kind of weather, every colour harmony, it's the only way; in the beginning you always think you'll find an effect again and finish it: hence those unfortunate transformations which get me nowhere.

I'm not lacking for enthusiasm as you can see, given that I have something like 65 canvases covered with paint and I'll be needing more since the place is quite out of the ordinary; so I'm going to order some more canvases . . .

*

London, Monday 19 March 1900, noon

To ALICE MONET

Darling, I am in a state of utter despair and it wouldn't take much for me to drop everything on the spot and go tonight, and leave all my paintings with the artist's colourman until later. I don't know if I'll get over it but I feel enervated and profoundly disgusted. Perhaps I got out of bed on the wrong side? The fact is that I was up at six and was appalled to see the roofs covered in snow; I was hoping that by the time I'd got dressed, it would melt away, but it became terribly foggy, so much so that we were in total darkness, and I had to have the lights on until half-past ten; then I thought I'd be able to work but I've never seen such changeable conditions and I had over 15 canvases under way, going from one to the other and back again, and it was never quite right; a few unfortunate brushstrokes and in the end I lost my nerve and in a temper I packed everything away in crates with no further desire to look out of the window, knowing full well that in this mood I'd only mess things up and all the paintings I'd done were awful, and perhaps they are, more than I suppose. I must confess too that I'm distressed to see you giving in, I can read it between the lines even when you don't say a word, and in the state I'm in, that's enough to finish me off. To have gone to all this trouble to get to this is just too stupid! Outside there's brilliant sunshine but I don't feel up to looking at it . . .

London, Wednesday evening 6.30 [28 March 1900]

TO ALICE MONET

My darling, I can well imagine your joy at the thought of seeing your dear little ones and Marthe again; don't get too anxious or overexcited in the meantime. I'm going to do my very best to come on 5 April as well, a day or two more or less won't get me much further anyway, unless a miracle happens between now and then so that I'd only need one or two more sessions to be able see something through to completion; for you musn't expect to see any finished work; they're only essays, studies, preparatory sketches, in short ridiculous and vain research, and as you say, I must be cut out for such work, both mentally and physically. Just imagine, I'm bringing back eight full crates, that's eighty canvases, isn't it frightening? And if I'd had the right idea in the first place and had started afresh each time the effect changed, I would have made more progress, instead of which I dabbled around and altered paintings that were giving me trouble which as a result are *nothing* more than rough drafts . . .

Your old CLAUDE

*

London, Saturday 2 February 1901

TO ALICE MONET

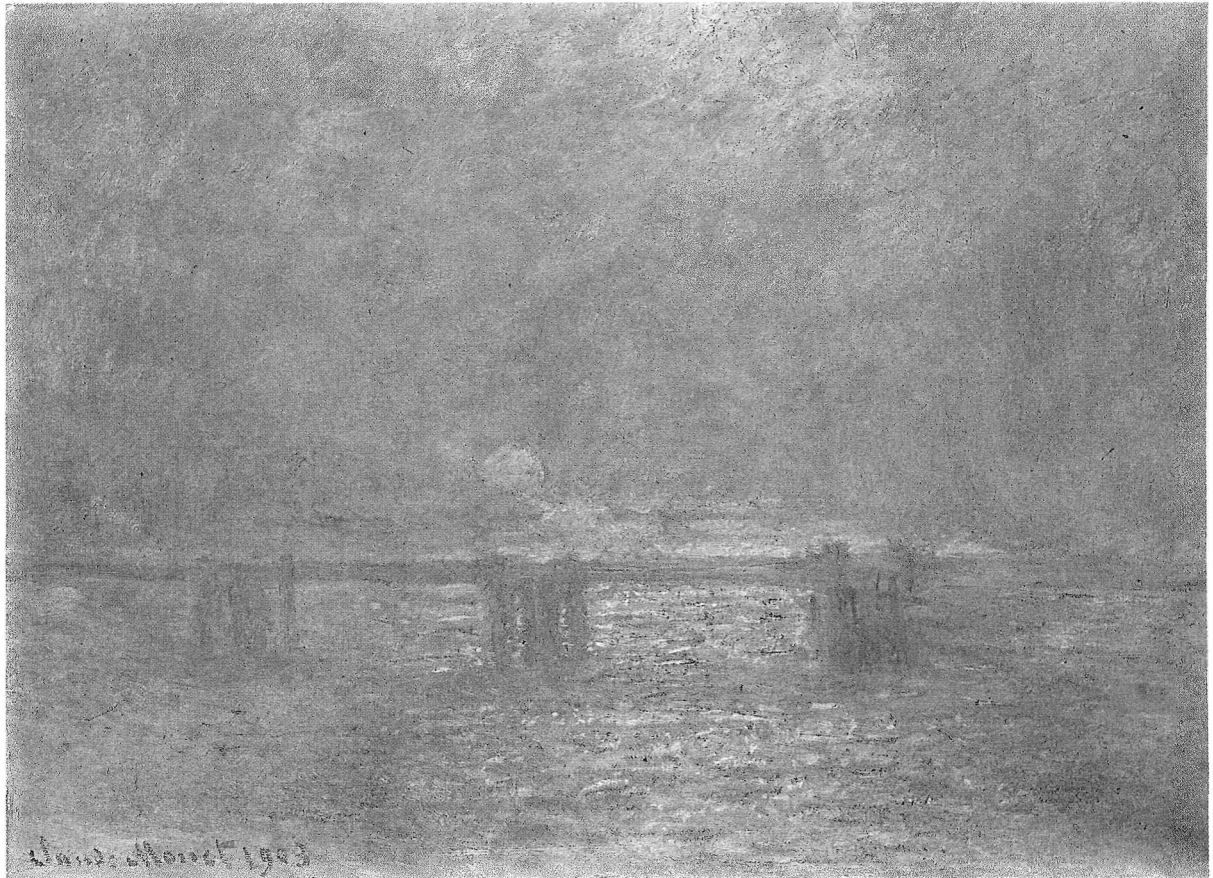
. . . Sargent had me invited along to a house where we could see the funeral procession together, but what we hadn't reckoned on was how hard it would be to meet up and get there, and there wasn't a cab to be had anywhere this morning . . .

We had planned to meet at the door but fortunately Sargent had given me a word of introduction and seeing that by 9 o'clock there were so many people at the windows and balconies, I finally entered alone. Inside, the drawing room was full of ladies; you can picture my face! Anyway the host and hostess, who were charming, introduced me at once to French speakers and found me a good position. I met the sister of Mademoiselle Maxse, Clemenceau's friend, and also a great American writer living in England, who spoke wonderful French and was very kind to me, explaining everything, showing me all the court personages etc. (his name is Henry James). Sargent tells me he is the greatest English writer. Does Butler know him? We waited until it was almost midday, and as it was cold, some soup was handed round.

There were a good hundred people in the house, on every floor, and I was lucky enough to be on the first floor along with Sargent who arrived after 10. Anyway I'm very happy to have seen it, for it was a unique sight, and to add to it the weather was superb, a light mist, with a glimpse of sunshine and St James's Park in the background. But what a crowd! And how wonderful to have been able to do a rapid sketch.

Standing out against the black of the crowd, the cavalry officers had red coats, wonderful helmets, and a mass of uniforms from every country in the world! But aside from everyone paying respects as the hearse went by, how little like a funeral it was! To begin with, no crepe, no black, every house decorated with mauve fabric, the hearse, a field cannon drawn by magnificent bays, covered in gold and coloured drapes. Then at last, the King and William, who looked so slight I was astonished; I had expected a fine figure of a man. As for the King, he looked stunning on a horse and finely turned out. It was superb.

What a feast of gold and colour and the ceremonial carriages, the horses! It almost hurt my eyes . . .



CHARING CROSS BRIDGE

[London, Sunday 3 February] 1901

TO ALICE MONET

... Although by 9 I'd already done some work on four paintings, I was convinced, since I'd got up at 6, that I was going to have a very bad day. As always on Sunday, there wasn't a wisp of fog, it was appallingly clear in fact: then the sun rose and was so dazzling I found it impossible to see. The Thames was all gold. God it was beautiful, so fine that I began work in a frenzy, following the sun and its reflections on the water. Meanwhile, kitchen fires began to be lit. Thanks to the smoke a mist descended, followed by clouds etc. . . .

2.30. I can't begin to describe a day as wonderful as this. One marvel after another, each lasting less than five minutes, it was enough to drive one mad. No country could be more extraordinary for a painter. It's dark now, for a few minutes, and I had to turn on a light so that I could jot down my impressions for you. I was telling you then that it was my worst day for post, although I'd love to know how you are, you and Jean-Pierre, and if there is any news. Also I'm a little worried Michel might have been sent back to Rouen since he didn't come round the other evening. And I have to wait until tomorrow to know all this. Meanwhile for you this is a good day, you're with the children and all the joys and scrapes the little ones get into and you know I won't hear until tomorrow. I musn't complain too much, however. Of course I wish I could be whisked over by magic, to be with you all, but I'm also having some good times. I'm seeing some unique and wonderful sights and splashing about with paint. There are moments when things look up and then once again I plunge into that terrible despair you know. But I'm keeping my courage up, hoping that all these efforts won't be in vain. But here comes the daylight again, so I'll stop.

London, 2 March 1901

TO ALICE MONET

The weather's terrible, just like it was yesterday at Giverny. Torrential rain and it's beating so hard on the windowpanes that I can barely see anything at all. I'm making the best of it by writing to you, very glad to know that at last your minds are at rest, and I hope that you finally have a little peace so you can recover properly.

I'm very disheartened by the weather. Yesterday I was happy and full of energy and was looking forward to a good day; yesterday evening the weather was perfect, but as I've said before, it is not possible to work on the same paintings two days in succession, and I'll have to limit myself to concentrating only on studies and rough sketches so that I make something of them at my leisure in the studio. It's almost impossible to continue work on a painting. I make alterations to paintings and often ones that were passable are worse for the change. No one would ever guess the trouble I'd gone through to end up with so little; besides, it must be said, working in two places is not a good idea; I often have to interrupt work on a painting which I could have finished in another hour because it's time to go to the hospital. I've had that happen to me several times already; still, I'm not giving up hope . . .

*

Giverny, 15 April 1901

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

If I didn't reply to your affectionate letter sooner it was only because I wasn't well when I received it, and then taking advantage of a fine day I at last got going again. Back in my beloved Giverny, I needed several days to recover properly, and then sort out everything I'd brought back. That's done now, I'm feeling fine and can tell you to come as soon as you are able and I'd be delighted to see you. I'd also be glad to show you the numerous studies, sketches and attempts of all kinds that I've brought back with me and to have your impressions. I hope that you'll let me know when you're coming as soon as you receive this.

In haste, my best wishes, and remember me to your family.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 14 February 1902

TO ALICE MONET

My darling, I can't tell you how glad we are to receive your news by telegram. Like you we were very anxious, and we are looking forward to tonight when we'll have more details from J.-P. and Anna since, up to now, we've only had your first letter written the evening you arrived and this morning J.-P.'s, written that same evening but no doubt sent later. So carry on sending us a telegram by post each morning; Fouillard delivers it to me around 11, and send me your news too. And I beg of you, go out a little each day, for a walk or two.

Apart from the great hole you've left with your departure, all's well here and you mustn't worry, Marthe is taking care of everything and last night they asked me and Michel to dine with them, (Michel keeps me company every evening, mainly to have your news). Marthe and

the children were glad to have me to dinner and as the news was better it was a happy evening. I saw the little ones to bed and made my lonely way to our huge bedroom. I don't need to tell you that Blanche immediately offered to come round. But things are fine as they are and Anna and J.-P. will come and add a bit of a sparkle to evenings which are hard to bear alone. And you can tell Inga that she need not worry, her daughter will be looked after and tell Jacques how glad we are to know he's getting better. Write me a long letter, my darling, and above all look after yourself, tell me honestly how you are. And if you need anything whatever telegraph me for it.

I've sent off the *Vétévils* to Valadon at last, I still have to deliver Durand's. It's very fine but cold, every night it drops to between 5 and 9 below zero. Work seems to be advancing, but planting is delayed.

In haste now, love and kisses to you, Jacques and Inga.

Your old CLAUDE

*

Giverny, 23 March 1903

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

No, I'm not in London save in thought, working hard on my paintings which are giving me a lot of trouble, and I'm not acquainted with the person who's asking you for my address, but you may give it to him anyway.

I can't send you a single *London* painting since for this kind of work I need to be able to see them all, and quite honestly none of them are completely finished. I'm working on them all, or on a number of them anyway, and don't yet know how many I'll be able to exhibit, since what I'm doing is very delicate. One day I'm satisfied and the next everything looks bad, but anyway there'll be a few good ones at least . . . In haste, best wishes,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 15 April 1903

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

. . . You ask me when the exhibition of my poor old London pictures is due to begin. I promised it would be ready by early May, but I'm afraid they'll all be ruined by then. You tell me calmly to frame them and exhibit them as they are; that I won't, it would be stupid to invite people to look at sketches which are far too incomplete. Where I went wrong was to insist on adding finishing touches to them; a good impression is lost so quickly; I very much regret it and it sickens me because it shows how powerless I am. If I had left them as they were and had not planned to sell them, people could have done what they liked with them after my death. Then these essays, these preliminary studies, could be shown as they are; now that I've had a go on every single one of them, I have to see them through, for better or worse, to some kind of conclusion, but you have no idea what a state of nerves and despair I'm in! So please excuse me.

Your devoted friend CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, Sunday 10 May 1903

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

My silence might have given you cause for hope that I was feeling more satisfied and that I would eventually turn up with my paintings. Unfortunately this is not the case. My strength has given out and I've never been so sickened by it all even though I'm still working; but it's rest I need more than anything at the moment, until the fine weather comes and I am able to get back to painting from nature, and that will be the last effort I'll make to see if I'm still good for something. But the important thing is to stop slaving away for the time being at the *London* paintings which I want to put out of my mind . . .

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 2 March 1904

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I received your letter with the cheque for 10,000 francs it contained, for which many thanks, but I'd prefer not to deposit it until I have a clearer explanation of the meaning of your letter. I'm very well aware that current problems must be affecting business and this is precisely why I insist that our dealings should be straightforward. I've been working on the *London Views* for almost four years now; all along I've continually rejected offers, many on very good terms, to the point where I wrote to you a short while ago to see if I should continue to reject such offers or if it was still certain that you would take them. You replied that I needn't worry, having always said that I could take my time until I was fully satisfied with them. I hope, as you do, that this decline in business is only temporary, and while you might regret that you weren't able to sell a few *London* pictures before the crisis, there's no reason why I should regret having set them aside for you; that's why I don't wish to be indebted to you before knowing what I'm in for. I must therefore be absolutely sure of your intentions. So I look forward to hearing from you before I deposit your cheque.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

I don't share your opinion and am very glad I didn't send you a few of the paintings, since the overall view of the complete series will have a much greater effect.

*

Giverny, 4 June 1904

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

Here's 100 francs to attend to Fèvre's needs. May they help him in some small way to recover his health and peace of mind! I took my time about sending this to you as I didn't want to write before I'd read your article. There's no doubt this time that the Press has overdone it with the praise they've showered on me, for I know what I'm worth better than anyone, but I'm very touched by your own compliments and thank you for the fine article to add to so many others, and am grateful you remembered your visit to me in London with Clemenceau.

You must come and see us during this fine weather and spend a day enjoying my garden which is quite beautiful at this time of year.

In haste, best wishes, and remember me to your mother and sister. Thank you once again, my dear friend.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

Giverny, 4 October 1904

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I've been having a few day's rest and I was planning to invite you to lunch some time soon but I've just now decided to put a long-cherished plan of mine into practice: to go to Madrid to see the Velasquez. We are leaving by car on Friday morning for about three weeks, and as soon as I get back I'll invite you here if you can manage it. If there is any way you could facilitate access to any of the masterpieces in Madrid, it would be kind of you to write as soon as you can, given our probable departure on Thursday after lunch.

My regards to you and your family, and looking forward to seeing you soon,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

WATER-LILIES, WATER LANDSCAPE, CLOUDS



Giverny, 12 February 1905

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

You are quite wrong to worry about what you tell me, indications of nothing but bad feeling and jealousy which leave me quite cold. I know neither Mr Rothenstein nor Mr Alexander, but only Mr Harrison, whom Sargent commissioned to do a small photo of Parliament for my benefit which I was never able to use. But it is hardly of any significance, and whether my *Cathedrals* and my *London* paintings and other canvases are done from life or not is none of anyone's business and is quite unimportant. I know so many artists who paint from life and produce nothing but terrible work. That's what your son should tell these gentlemen. It's the result that counts. In haste,

Regards from yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 3 [July] 1905

TO GEORGES DURAND-RUEL

I am unable to give you any information about the article you mention for the simple reason that I did not keep it.

As for the paints I use, is it really as interesting as all that? I don't think so, considering that one could do something even more luminous and better with another palette. The point is to know how to use the colours, the choice of which is, when all's said and done, a matter of habit. Anyway, I use flake white, cadmium yellow, vermilion, deep madder, cobalt blue, emerald green and that's all.

Regards to your father and to your family,

Cordially, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 7 May 1906

TO GUSTAV PAULI

Here is the information you required.

The portrait bought for the Bremen Museum was executed in Paris in 1866 and exhibited at the Salon of that year. Madame Monet, my first wife, did indeed model for it and while I hadn't set out specifically to do a portrait, but merely a Parisian lady of the period, the resemblance is striking.

The painting was known generally as the *Woman with a Green Dress*. I sold it in 1868 to Arsène Houssaye, the former director of the Comédie Française who was at that time attached to the Beaux-Arts as an inspector of national museums.

He bought it for himself, intending to bequeath it later on to the Musée du Luxembourg (for at that time everyone or almost everyone was against me). But he died before public opinion changed and his son, Henri Houssaye, a member of the Académie Française, was quick to dispose of the painting for a derisory sum of money. Things changed later on and the same picture was much admired.

That is all I can tell you, but I must also say how glad I am to know it is in your museum and that I am very flattered.

I am, Sir, yours very sincerely, CLAUDE MONET



CAMILLE

Giverny, 8 February 1907

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

Thank you for sending me your book, *La Sculpture au Louvre*, proof that you are still working despite everything; it gave me enormous pleasure. You've seen that Manet's *Olympia* is in the Louvre at last. When in Paris the other day it occurred to me that I should track Clemenceau down and tell him that it was incumbent upon him to arrange it. He got the message and within three days, since I saw him on a Friday, it was done, and how glad I am, for myself and for all those I represent who donated the masterpiece. I remain very grateful to Clemenceau, please tell him so if you see him.

Best wishes, dear Geffroy,

Your CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 27 April 1907

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

Like you I'm sorry not to be able to exhibit the *Water-lilies* series this year, and if I made this decision it's because it was impossible. Perhaps it's true that I'm very hard on myself, but that's better than exhibiting mediocre work. And I'm not delaying the exhibition because I'm keen to show a lot of work, far from it, but too few were satisfactory enough to trouble the public with. At the very most I have five or six that are possible; moreover I've just destroyed thirty at least and this entirely to my satisfaction.

I still have a lot of pleasure doing them, but as time goes by I come to appreciate more clearly which paintings are good and which should be discarded. All the same, this doesn't affect my eagerness and confidence that I can do better.

But I come now to your request and, despite wishing above all to be agreeable to you, I can promise you nothing, at the moment anyway. It would be a very bad idea, moreover, to exhibit even a small number of this new series, as the whole effect can only be achieved from an exhibition of the entire group. On top of that, I need to have finished pictures to look at and compare with what I'm doing . . .

So please don't feel bitter and accept my regrets and most sincere wishes,

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 6 January 1908

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I received the photograph of the picture that was offered to you, a work which is not of my hand although the false signature is a perfect imitation. All you can do in my name is to let this be known, and have it destroyed.

In haste, my regards, CLAUDE MONET

*

[Giverny], 11 August 1908

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

. . . You must know I'm entirely absorbed in my work. These landscapes of water and reflections have become an obsession. It's quite beyond my powers at my age, and yet I want to succeed in expressing what I feel. I've destroyed some . . . I start others . . . and I hope that something will come out of so much effort . . .

*

Grand Hotel Britannia, Venice, 19 October 1908

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I am overcome with admiration for Venice, but unfortunately I can't stay here long so there's no hope of doing any serious work. I am doing a few paintings in any case, to have a record of the place, but I intend to spend a whole season here next year. I don't yet know when we'll be back. It will depend on the weather.

In haste, regards, CLAUDE MONET

GONDOLAS



Venice, 25 October 1908

TO GASTON BERNHEIM-JEUNE

Monsieur Durand-Ruel has preempted you in making the same request. So, much to my regret I can't help you, but don't worry, for while I'm excited by Venice and I've a few paintings of it under way, I'm very much afraid I won't be able to bring back anything more than some beginnings which will serve purely as a record, as the period of good weather seems to be over here. For two days it hasn't stopped raining and if this goes on, we'll pack our bags now and come back next autumn. There's too much to do here not to return. It's wonderful. I received both your letters at the same time. I'm writing to Clemenceau by the same post.

In haste, my regards to you and your brother.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Venice, 7 December 1908

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

Absorbed as I was in my work, I was unable to write to you, and so I handed my wife the task of giving you the news. She no doubt told you of my enthusiasm for Venice. Well, it increases by the day and I'm very sad that I'll soon have to leave this unique light. It's so very beautiful, but we must resign ourselves to the inevitable; we have many pressing obligations at home. I comfort myself with the thought that I'll come back next year, since I've only made some studies, some beginnings. But what a shame I didn't come here when I was a younger man, when I was full of daring! Still . . . I've spent some delightful hours here, almost forgetting that I'm now an old man . . .

Best wishes from my wife and myself.

Your old friend, CLAUDE MONET

Monet's career as an artist covered almost seventy years, from the drawings he made as a teenager at Le Havre in the 1850s to the majestic wall-size canvases completed at Giverny after the First World War. He outlived all his colleagues from the original Impressionist circle, and his letters show his successive attendance at the funerals of Manet, Sisley, Degas and Renoir. His own robust constitution, which had survived decades of exposure to the elements and the seasons, kept him at his easel until his last months, with only occasional lapses in his health. After the death of his wife in 1911, Monet's life was centred almost exclusively on Giverny, where his family and friends relieved his solitude and reassured him in periods of doubt and discouragement. Monet's correspondence records the premature death of his eldest son and his anxiety over the safety of his remaining son, Michel, during active service in the War. The daughters of Alice's first marriage were a continuing comfort in later years; Blanche, said to have been Monet's favourite, accompanied him on local painting excursions and herself became an accomplished artist, while Marthe married the American painter Theodore Butler. A number of photographs exist of their family gatherings, dominated by the patriarchal figure of the heavily bearded Monet and often set against the flowers and shrubs of his magnificent garden.

As the years went by, Monet had turned progressively from the subject matter of distant sea-coasts and rivers to the motifs of his own garden at Giverny. Originally intended as a source of flowers to be painted during bad weather, the garden had been systematically extended and elaborated to include formal flowerbeds, trellises and ornamental pathways. By acquiring another piece of land adjacent to his garden, on the other side of a road and a single railway track, Monet had extended his property to include a small tributary of the River Seine. Here he arranged for a system of sluices to feed into a newly constructed pond, soon to be planted with lilies, irises and other aquatic plants. Contemporary photographs show its modest beginnings, with the flowers barely established and the surrounding bushes and willow trees still half-grown, while later pictures record the dense profusion of foliage in the mature garden. Monet's earliest paintings of the pond, which date from the last years of the nineteenth century, show the view along its length, with trees and shrubs framing the recently built Japanese-style bridge. Subsequent paintings tend to isolate a feature or an effect from the pond, concentrating on a pattern of reflected clouds or a single hue pervading the water surface. In this constantly shifting world of colour and light, at once both natural and knowingly artificial, Monet was able to manipulate his subject matter and pursue what he called his 'researches' with a freedom unmatched at any point in his earlier life.

Writing to Gustave Geffroy in 1908, Monet announced: 'These landscapes of water and reflections have become an obsession. It's quite beyond my powers at my age, and yet I want to succeed in expressing what I feel.' A year later an exhibition of water-lily paintings took place at Durand-Ruel's gallery, revealing to the public for the first time the subject that was to preoccupy the artist for much of his late career. As his 'obsession' deepened, Monet ordered larger canvases and tackled even more audacious confections of colour, tone and texture. Slowly the idea took shape of a unified sequence of paintings, combining the vividness of his perceptions of the lily pond with the ornamental possibilities of its patterns and colours. It appears from the artist's letters that his friend Georges Clemenceau was instrumental in this plan, as it progressed from a modest group of pictures commemorating the end of the War to a large-scale enterprise that required its own building in the centre of Paris. Working in a specially designed new studio at Giverny, Monet gradually surrounded himself with a continuous cycle of enormous canvases, some up to six metres in length, which follow

the lily pond through all its characteristic phases and moods. Many paintings were destroyed by the artist and many plans for their installation rejected, but a little while before his death in 1926 Monet was able to write to Clemenceau and announce that the canvases could be transferred to their final resting place in the Orangerie.

The sheer scale and originality of conception of the Orangerie paintings, or Décorations as the artist called them, are extraordinary tributes to Monet's continuing vitality in the final years of his long life. Their technique also shows a number of bold departures from his earlier work, as he built up crusts of multicoloured pigment and gestured with his brush on a scale unthinkable a decade earlier. Although Monet burnt a considerable quantity of unfinished or unresolved canvases, there is enough evidence in his letters and in the surviving half-completed paintings to reconstruct something of his procedure. Working with a large brush, Monet would introduce the dominant colours of the motif while drawing in the principal forms of the composition. A number of highly simplified sketchbook drawings from this period show the importance the artist attached to these underlying rhythms, using them to animate and unify the different canvases within a sequence. Then brushing or streaking the colours on to the picture, Monet would develop his areas of tone, and intensify and modulate the canvas surface. Dense, pitted areas of overpainted brushwork were set against thinner and more delicate passages of colour, deep shadows contrasting with shimmering, sensuous highlights. Repainting, scraping down and endlessly revising his canvases, Monet brought a lifetime's experience of his craft and of his relationship with nature to this most ambitious creation of his career.

Before Monet's development of his house and garden, Giverny had been a quiet rural village overshadowed by the nearby town of Vernon. As the artist's celebrity grew, an increasing number of visitors and admirers made the journey from Paris to see him, and a virtual colony of younger painters set themselves up in the immediate vicinity. Monet's correspondence records his occasional irritation at these unwelcome intrusions, but his delight in the visits of old and distinguished friends is equally evident from letters and contemporary photographs. By now the subject of historical and critical study, Monet patiently answered the inquiries of writers and biographers like Arsène Alexandre, Gustave Geffroy and Etienne Moreau-Nélaton. The artist who had always been his own harshest critic continued to experience periods of self-doubt and to question his own greatness. Writing to Paul Durand-Ruel in 1912 he claimed: 'Now, more than ever, I realize just how illusory my undeserved success has been', and to Geffroy in the same year he wrote: 'No, I am not a great painter.'

The diagnosis of cataracts had appeared to threaten all Monet's activities as an artist, but the encouragement of Clemenceau and the attentions of Dr Coutela, which led to a successful operation in 1923, enabled him to continue painting until his last months. In spite of old age and sporadic infirmity, the octogenarian artist discovered new motifs and new departures for his art. The last paintings of the Japanese bridge and the house seen from the garden have an intensity of colouring and a dynamism of handling which can hold their own among the younger pioneers of twentieth-century art. To the end, Monet insisted on the vital relationship between his paintings and the direct experience of nature which had sustained him throughout his career, however extravagant or wilful the final result might appear: 'I only know that I do what I can to convey what I experience before nature and that most often, in order to succeed in conveying what I feel, I totally forget the most elementary rules of painting, if they exist that is.'

Giverny, 28 January 1909

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

In reply to your son's query, I am writing to tell you that this time you may go ahead and without apprehension announce the much-delayed exhibition for May this year. But not until the 5th, if that suits you, as it's more convenient for me than the 3rd. In any case you can absolutely count on me, I'll be ready, as my trip to Venice has allowed me to look over my paintings with a fresh eye. All the work which isn't worth showing I've put to one side and what is left will go into an exhibition which won't, I believe, be without interest. Before I forget, rather than calling the series *Reflections*, call it *Water-lilies, series of waterscapes*.

In haste, I send you my best wishes,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 7 December 1909

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

What must you think of me? I found a letter from you dated 3 August, to which I replied hastily from Landemer near Cherbourg, promising you a longer letter as soon as I got back to Giverny; and it's only now that I'm writing to you. Please don't take it too badly, my dear old friend; 1909 has been a disastrous year for me and you'll see why when I tell you that since getting back from Venice, a year ago now, I've done nothing, I haven't touched a paintbrush. What with the upheaval of my exhibition of *Water-lilies*, the bad weather all summer and worst of all, my own health problems, it's a sad state of affairs as you can see, not to mention all the little miseries and problems that accumulate with age; it's hopeless from every point of view.

Had it not been for this, my dear old friend, you'd have had some sign of life from me earlier. You know how fond I am of you and how glad I would have been to have been agreeable, but what can you do if you've got out of step and don't feel up to doing anything? You know how carried away I was by Venice, well I had to give up my idea of going back, I was so out of sorts and beset with health problems. This past year I've been having terrible headaches, quiet spells followed by more violent relapses, and they leave me with no taste for anything. It's beyond a joke, but at least you'll forgive me now. I think of you often and would be happy to hear you're all well. Best wishes from your faithful and devoted friend,

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 10 February 1910

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I am sending you in some haste the authorization that you asked for. I hope it is what you require.

We are getting along, but no more than that, especially my wife, floods have also given us a good deal of trouble and anxiety; I thought for a while that my entire garden would be destroyed and I was very concerned. Finally the water receded little by little, and although I've

lost a lot of plants, it will probably be less calamitous than I'd feared. But what a disaster all the same, troubles never cease!

In haste,

Yours most sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

I authorize Monsieur Durand-Ruel to act as my representative for the sale of all pictures from my studio which I have previously sold to him or which, while remaining my property, are exhibited in his galleries.

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 15 April 1910

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

As you doubtless already know, my wife is seriously ill and I'm still not in my right mind with such great worries. A glimmer of hope remains, but it is a hope. And I recall that I promised a painting for the flood victims. I asked my son-in-law to phone you to find out whether I might be permitted to send the painting unframed, as I have neither the time nor the inclination to deal with it myself. I would be grateful for a word in reply. In haste,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 28 March 1911

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I've just sent to you in some haste a crate containing the eight pictures in the *Water-lilies* series which you selected last Sunday, the total cost of which is 113,000 francs, since I've kept them at their exhibition prices for you, a very fair gesture on my part. Kindly warn Prosper to be careful when unpacking them as two canvases have been freshly retouched. He'll be able to see which they are . . .

Best wishes from yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 18 May 1911

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I have some very sad news for you. My beloved wife is dying. It's only a matter of hours now. I can't tell you what I've been going through, particularly this past fortnight. My strength and courage are giving out.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*



WATER-LILIES

Giverny, 7 September 1911

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

I would certainly be very happy to see you after the long postponement of your visit, but my fear is that if you have to wait for Vaquez you'll postpone it again, although I'd be glad if you could both come; so do what you can but don't put it off. I so need cheering up, and the sight of some friendly faces will help distract me from my sadness. I've had some welcome visits: Clemenceau, as affectionate as ever, Renoir and yesterday Mirbeau, who is certainly better, but very depressed, very downcast, not himself. As for me, I'm in good health. I've had a few very sad months consoling myself with my dear wife's letters, all of which I reread, and going back over most of our life together. Otherwise, I haven't been able to find an interest in anything, overcome as I've been by this terrible heat which really is intolerable, but that's enough about me. Do come, I'd be so glad.

Best wishes from your faithful friend, CLAUDE MONET

Giverny, 16 April 1912

To G. and J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

I'm very sorry to inconvenience you, but I find it impossible to supply you with any more *Venice* pictures. It was useless trying to persuade myself otherwise, the work that's left is too poor for exhibition. Don't insist, my decision is final. I've enough good sense in me to know whether what I'm doing is good or bad, and it's utterly bad, and I can't believe that people of taste, if they have any knowledge at all, could see any value in it. Things have been dragging on like this for far too long and I've had enough; there's one thing I regret, that I sent you the paintings you now have which you don't want to send back. All my apologies and best wishes.

Your very sad and discouraged CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 10 May 1912

To PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I'm very touched by your kind letter and would be glad to see you, although I doubt whether you can persuade me to go back on a decision which I didn't take lightly, and the reason you've found me dissatisfied with what I've been doing for some while is because that's how I've felt. Now, more than ever, I realize just how illusory my undeserved success has been. I still hold out some hope of doing better, but age and unhappiness have sapped my strength. I know well enough in advance that you'll find my paintings perfect. I know that if they are exhibited they'll be a great success, but I couldn't be more indifferent to it since I know they are bad, I'm certain of it.

I thank you for your comforting words, your kindness and for going to all that trouble. Until Sunday, for lunch, I hope, as usual.

All my excuses and best wishes.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 7 June 1912

To GUSTAVE GEFFROY

Heartfelt thanks for your two fine articles which I'm very proud of. No, I'm not a great painter. Neither am I a great poet. I only know that I do what I can to convey what I experience before nature and that most often, in order to succeed in conveying what I feel, I totally forget the most elementary rules of painting, if they exist that is. In short, I let a good many mistakes show through when fixing my sensations. It will always be the same and this is what makes me despair.

Thank you for your great and loyal friendship and trust in the no less loyal friendship of
your old CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 1 July 1912

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

... I am well, but desperate about the weather. I'd begun to work, but I'm having to abandon what I had set out to do. Nature won't be summoned to order and won't be kept waiting. It must be caught, well caught which is not the case today, since I've been indifferent to everything for so long. And then there's my son Jean whose health is a decided worry to me. Please write and tell me how you are.

Best wishes from your old CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 5 August 1912

TO G. OR J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

Thank you for your kind letter. I was just about to write to you, not, sadly, to tell you I'm coming, but to say how sorry I am not to be able to get away at the moment. I've been plagued by an endless succession of troubles and anxieties. My eldest son was seriously ill, but has thankfully recovered now, then I myself became so worried about my sight that I made an urgent appointment to see a specialist. I can only see with one eye. I've got a cataract (I wasn't mistaken when I complained about my eyesight). So I'm following a course of treatment in order to delay and if possible avoid an operation. The operation is nothing, but my sight will be totally altered after it, and that's what matters most to me. Anyway, all this isn't very pleasant, so I set to work, but with this weather I haven't managed to do anything and to add to my miseries an appalling storm has created havoc in my garden. The weeping willows I was so proud of have been torn apart and stripped; the finest entirely broken up. In short, a real disaster and a real worry for me.

More than ever and despite my poor sight, I need to paint and paint unceasingly. All the same I'll try and come for a day or two in September. At the moment, I have the Salerous with me and don't feel up to leaving.

My very best wishes to the ladies and to both of you.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 18 July 1913

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

As it's been a while since I heard from you, I intended to write, but I'm getting so lazy that I continually put things off until tomorrow. With neither the will nor the desire to do anything, I'm ending my days very sadly, despite my good health, which might have meant I could drown my sorrows in work, were it not for the unhappy sight of my son whose condition deteriorates daily.

My eyes were the cause of considerable anxiety for a while as you know, but they seem better. I can't see very well, it's true, but at least it doesn't seem to be getting any worse. But here I am talking of myself and it's you I want to hear about, you and your family, so please send me your news as soon as you possibly can. And if you can manage it, try and arrange a day to come and see me, it would do me so much good...

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

[Vernon, 10 February 1914]

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

My poor son died last night.

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 5 April 1914

To ?

Dear Sir, Please forgive me for being so late in replying, owing to several unexpected journeys.

I find it very difficult to know how to deal with your request, since I never draw except with a brush and paint and I've always refused requests even from friends to employ a technique I know nothing about. It's not easy for me to reply in the negative, but what can I do? I still have a few sketches I did in my youth which are of very little interest and scarcely worth reproducing . . .

Yours faithfully, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 30 April 1914

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

. . . I hope you are well, although you don't mention it in your note. As for myself, I'm in fine fettle and fired with a desire to paint; I've been prevented from doing so by various things during the recent period of good weather, but I planned to begin work yesterday, and then the weather changed; a false start.

I am even planning to embark on some big paintings, for which I found some old attempts in a basement. Clemenceau saw them and was amazed. Anyway, you'll see something of this soon, I hope.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 29 June 1914

TO PAUL DURAND-RUEL

I keep meaning to write and find out how you are, but as you must have heard by now, I've started work again and you know I don't do things by halves; getting up at 4 in the morning, I slave away all day until by the evening I'm exhausted, and I end by forgetting all my responsibilities, thinking only of the work I've set out to do. This is my excuse, but I do think of you and would like to hear from you. So I look forward to a letter from you or one of your sons, who might also give me some news of Renoir and send my best wishes to him if he's in Paris as I think. I'm as well as I can be, my eyesight is good at least. Thanks to my work everything's going well, it's a great consolation. Best wishes to you and your family,

Your old and devoted friend, CLAUDE MONET

Giverny, 1 September 1914

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

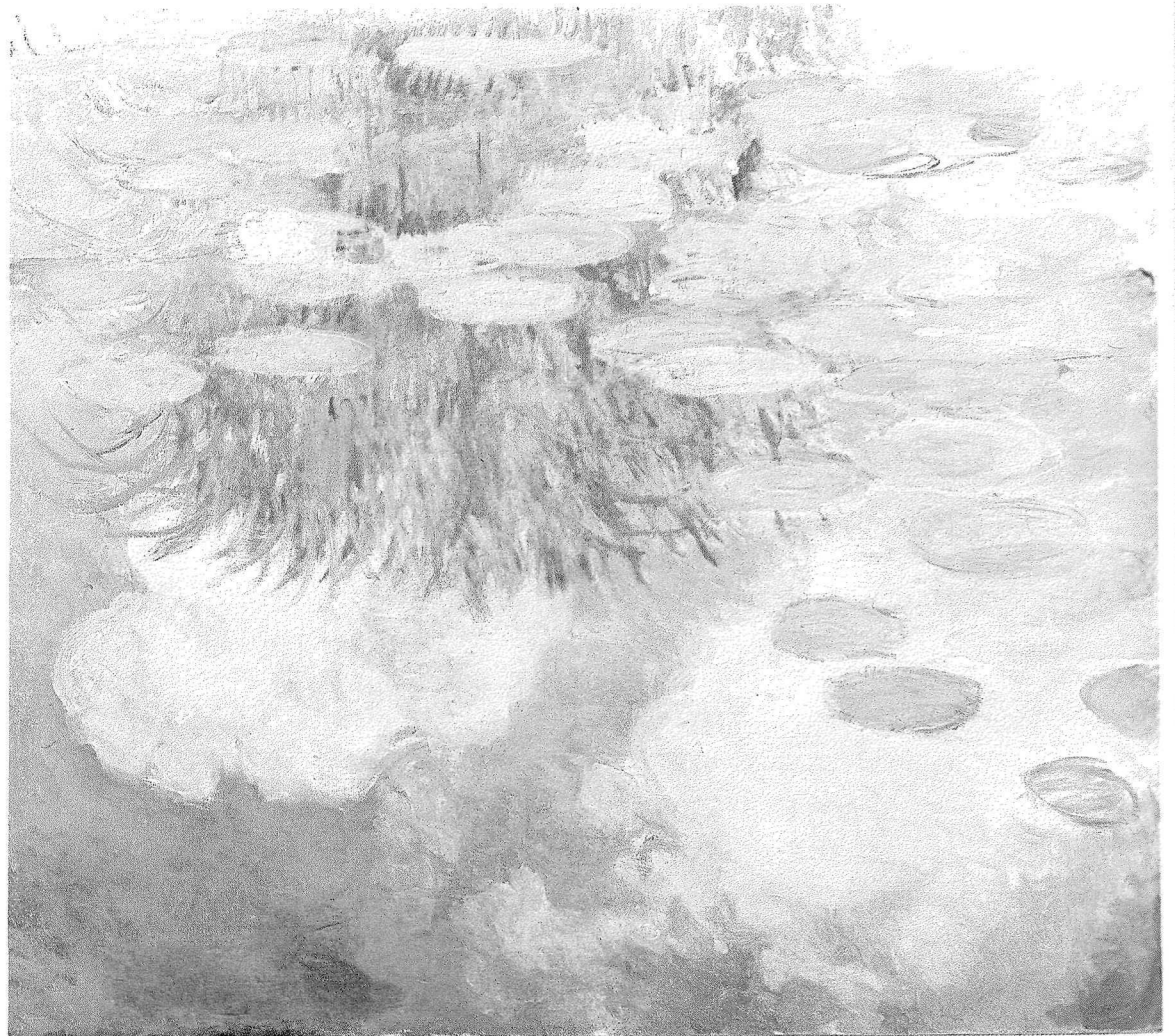
... One thing I know is that in the present state of things and in my isolation, a letter from a good friend like you is a comfort which makes these anxieties easier to bear. Most of my family has left me with no knowledge of their whereabouts; only my son Michel who has been temporarily discharged is with me, along with Blanche. Germaine Salerou, who was here with her children, left yesterday; a mad panic has swept our area, she has gone to Blois to stay with her aunt Rémy. As for myself, I'm staying here regardless and if those savages insist on killing me, they'll have to do it in the midst of my paintings, before my life's work.

Write, dear friend, and tell me your thoughts, what you know of everyone. I'd like to know how Clemenceau's son is, what an admirable man; I sent a telegram for which he thanked me, without telling me whether his son's wound was serious or not. I hope that you and your sister are not too badly off.

With warmest greetings and affection, CLAUDE MONET

*

WATER-LILIES



Giverny, 15 January 1915

TO RAYMOND KOECHLIN

I was very pleased by your recollection. I would have replied earlier, were it not for being indisposed, but happily I'm better now, and yesterday I was able to resume work, which is the only way to avoid thinking of these troubled times. All the same I sometimes feel ashamed that I am devoting myself to artistic pursuits while so many of our people are suffering and dying for us. It's true that fretting never did any good. So I'm pursuing my idea of the *Grande Décoration*. It's a very big undertaking, particularly for someone my age, but I have every hope of succeeding if my health doesn't give out.

As you guessed, it's the project that I've had in mind for some time now: water, water-lilies, plants, spread over a huge surface.

Let's hope that events will take a turn for the better. I'd be glad to see you and show you the beginnings of this work.

Friendly greetings, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 10 February 1915

TO G. OR J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

I'm very much to blame for having taken so long to reply to your last letter with some sign of life; I apologize and hope you won't hold it against me. In reply to your wife's kind letter, Blanche gave you my news: good health and lots of work, which is the only excuse I can come up with.

I'm not performing miracles, I'm using up and wasting a lot of paint, but it's absorbing me sufficiently not to dwell too much on this terrible, unbearable war. Michel is still here, still waiting, which suits me since this means that he'll avoid the worst days of winter. Apart from that, good news from everyone, fortunately; Albert Salerou has just been appointed Captain.

We don't see a living soul here, which isn't very cheerful . . .

Best wishes to the ladies and to your brother.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 8 February 1916

TO G. OR J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

Thank you for your fine letter. Yes, the snow was very beautiful but alas, I'm no longer of an age to paint outside in such weather, and despite its beauty I'd rather it had stayed away and alleviated the suffering of so many miserable people and most of all our poor soldiers.

I'm continuing work on my large paintings, although at this time my thoughts are elsewhere, alas! I'm fine and am lucky enough to have Michel with me for a few days; he's seen some terrible sights, but is brave and well; that's the main thing. I hope you're all well. Best wishes to all four of you and Blanche wishes to be remembered.

Best wishes, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 11 September 1916

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

... Things are all right here, just about; I was extremely worried about my son Michel who had three terrible weeks at Verdun; he came out of it at last and came here on a six-day leave; how long-drawn-out and painful it all is! I'm continuing to work hard, not without periods of discouragement, but my strength comes back again.

Do come over, I'd be glad to know what you think. I hope you're well and that your stay in La Tranche did you good.

Best wishes, CLAUDE MONET

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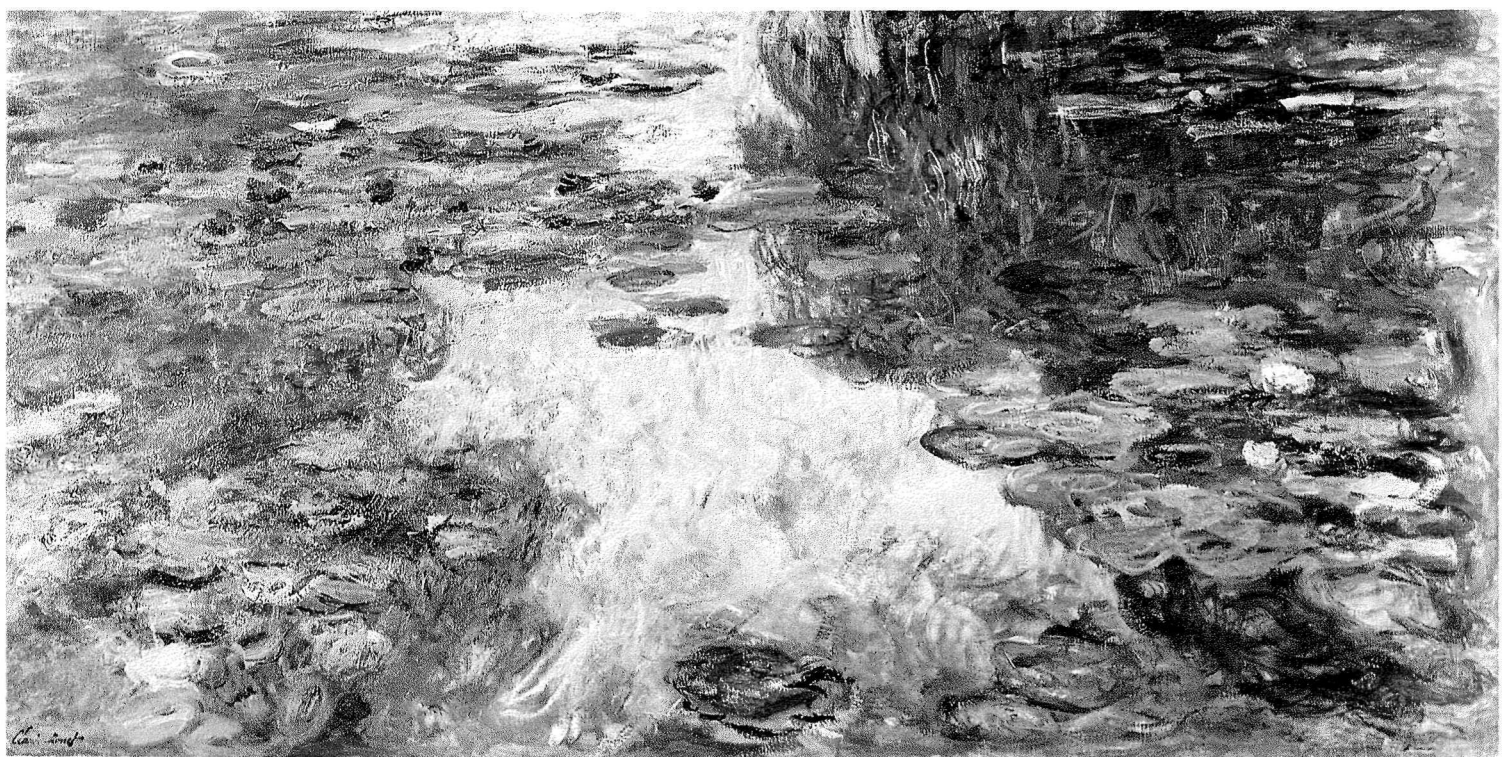
Giverny, 9 October 1917

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

Having come to Paris for Degas's funeral I was hoping to see you. I had also hoped you'd come here with your friend Barbier, but I've been working so hard that I'm exhausted and having just resumed the enormous task in the studio, I feel I won't be able to do without a few weeks' rest, so I'm going off to see the sea. I've just let Monsieur Barbier know, though it's merely a postponement. Could you kindly tell me what happened to the painting sent to Madame Poisson for the benefit of the blind; she did write to me, but absorbed in my work as I was, I don't remember what she said and I've mislaid the letter. If the painting didn't find a buyer for the price that I settled on, I wouldn't want it to go to public auction and be sold off at a low price to some dealer; I'd prefer to have it back and hand over as large a sum of money as I'm able.

*

WATER-LILIES



Giverny, 10 October 1917

TO G. OR J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

Thank you for the fine photo and my congratulations to the photographer; it looks a little as if I've just been released from prison, but it's very well done. With this terrible wind, work outside has come to a standstill; so I'm going to have a little break; we plan to leave today and tour around Honfleur, Le Havre and the coast up to Dieppe: away for 10–15 days. I can't wait to see the sea which I haven't been near in a good long while; I need it as I'm feeling very tired.

I hope you're all well; we send our best wishes to all four of you.

*

[Giverny], 21 October 1917

TO RENÉ DEGAS

You are, of course, aware of my great admiration for the talent of your brother Edgar Degas; I hope you will forgive my indiscretion in offering you a suggestion with regard to the public sale of the work he left behind.

My youthful friendship with him and our common struggle are the reasons for my intervention. I presume that the expertise will, quite rightly, be provided by Messieurs Durand-Ruel, but do you not think it would be a good idea for Messieurs Bernheim-Jeune to join them since they have also done a lot for our group? I believe that the inclusion of these gentlemen could only contribute to the success of the sale on every account.

Forgive me for being so bold, and I remain Sir,

Your obedient servant, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 3 August 1918

TO GASTON BERNHEIM-JEUNE

You wanted my news: good as far as my health is concerned although I'm feeling my age, which isn't surprising with all the trouble and heartbreak my painting is causing me. I'm working more and more, but how hard it all is! I am enslaved to my work, always wanting the impossible, and never, I believe, have I been less favoured by the endlessly changeable weather. I have got a mass of varied things under way but can't bring any of them to account; so there are times when I'm very discouraged and out of sorts.

It's very kind of you to invite us, and it would give Blanche and me a great deal of pleasure, but never have I been less keen to take any time off from my painting; I haven't many years left ahead of me and I must devote all my time to painting, in the hope of achieving something worthwhile in the end, something if possible that will satisfy me.

Thank you for thinking of me, for your kind invitation and please accept my sincerest good wishes for you and your family.

CLAUDE MONET

*

[Giverny], 12 November 1918

TO GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

I am on the verge of finishing two decorative panels which I want to sign on Victory day and am writing to ask you if they could be offered to the State with you acting as intermediary. It's little enough, but it's the only way I have of taking part in the victory. I'd like the panels to be placed in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and would be delighted if you were to select them.

In admiration, I embrace you affectionately . . .

*

Giverny, 24 November 1918

TO G. OR J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

Forgive me for not having written earlier; I was about to, when a slight indisposition prevented me from doing so, some kind of fainting fit brought on no doubt by the cold, and everyone here was somewhat alarmed. It had no sequel, but I'm undoubtedly at an age when you have to watch out for yourself and take precautions, something I'm not good at doing.

All the same I had a fine start to my 79th year, with the glorious victory coming first, along with greetings from old friends and a visit from the great Clemenceau asking me to lunch; it was the first day of his holiday and he chose to come and see me, which makes me feel very proud. But this is no reply to your letter, you'll be thinking. I'm coming to that now and I must admit I'd hoped that you were going to abandon your project entirely, and I was extremely relieved about it, since I'm not very fond of public displays and it's not false modesty on my part which prompts me to say I don't think I deserve it, far from it. I've done what I could as a painter and that seems to me to be sufficient. I don't want to be compared to the great masters of the past, and my painting is open to criticism; that's enough. You know that I am in sympathy with Monsieur Fénéon, which is to say that while I'd be very happy for him to come and talk, I flatly refuse to dictate my memoirs to him, and besides, it's hardly of any great consequence . . .

My very best wishes to the ladies and to both of you.

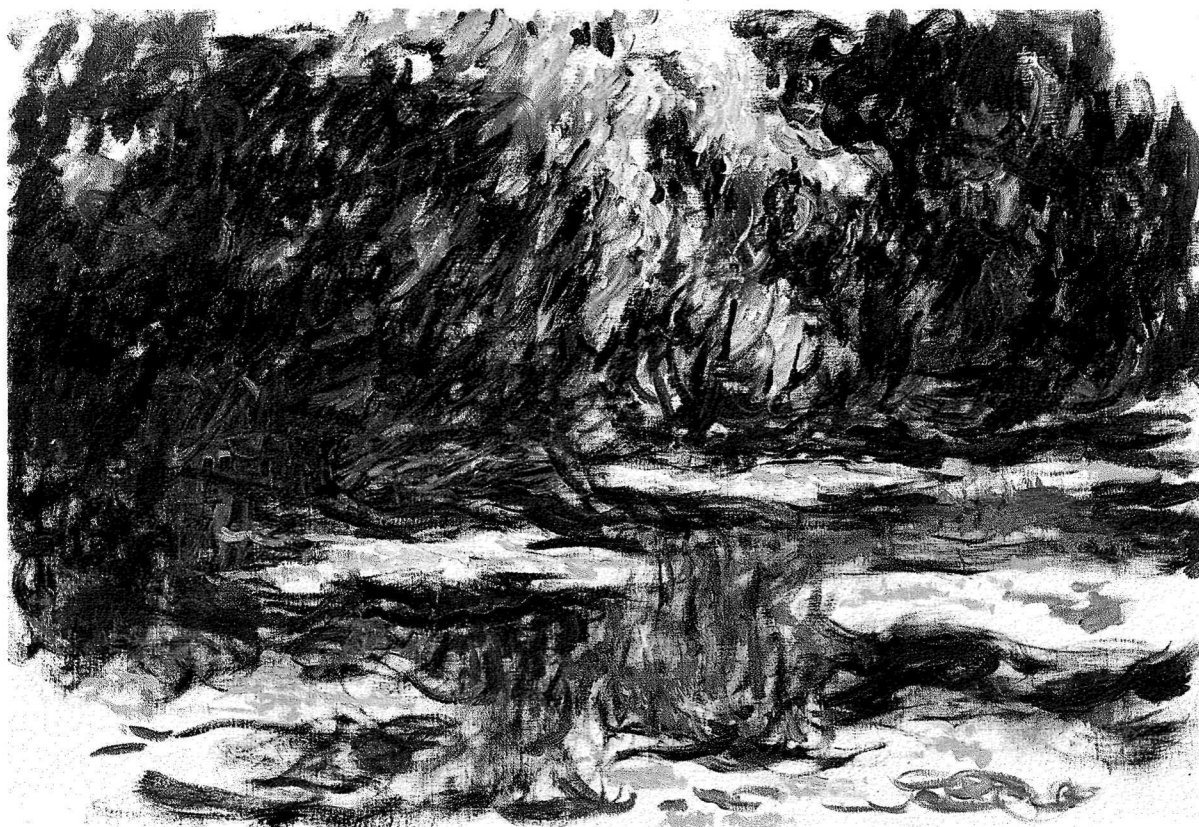
Your CLAUDE MONET

*

[Giverny], 10 November 1919

TO GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

. . . As I said in my telegram to you, I've thought over what you said yesterday very carefully; it's evidence of the depth of your friendship for me, but what can I say? I'm very much afraid that an operation might be fatal, that once the bad eye has been suppressed the other eye will follow. So I prefer to make the best of my bad sight, such as it is, and give up painting if I have to, but at least be able to see something of the things I love, the sky, water and trees, not to mention my nearest and dearest. I've just remembered that a talented actress I know had an operation quite recently; I'll make some discreet enquiries as to her condition after the operation and once I've done that I'll make my decision and ask for your assistance. I hope you'll understand . . .



WATER-LILY POND

[*Giverny, about mid-December 1919*]

TO FÉLIX FÉNÉON

... You can imagine how painful the loss of Renoir has been to me: with him goes a part of my own life. All I've been able to do these last three days has been to go back over our early years of struggle and hope ... It's hard to be alone, though no doubt it won't be for long as I'm feeling my age increasingly as each day goes by, despite what people say ...

CLAUDE MONET

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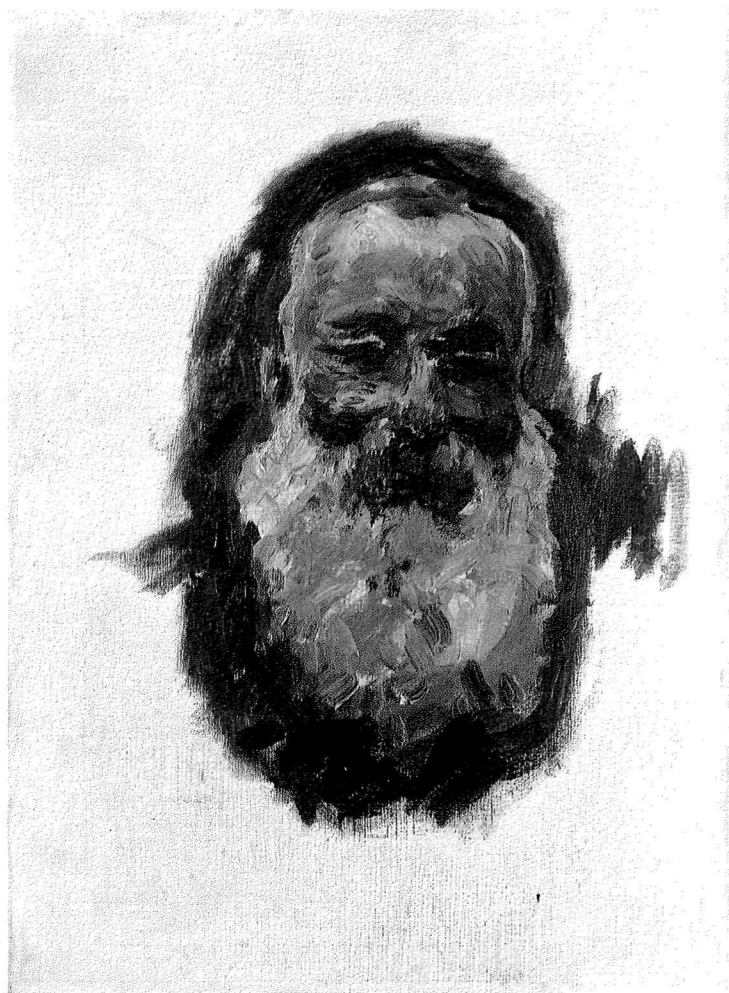
Giverny, 20 January 1920

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

I would have replied myself to the requests you directed to Madame Jean Monet, but for some while I've been in a state of utter despair and I'm disgusted with all I've done. Day by day my sight is going and I can sense only too well that with it comes an end to my long-cherished hopes to do better. It's very sad to have come to this; all this to say that I see little point in answering your questions. My work belongs to the public, and people can say what they like about it; I've done what I could, but to answer questionnaires is something I refuse to do, since I can't see any interest in it ...

In haste, best wishes,

Your loyal friend CLAUDE MONET



SELF-PORTRAIT

Giverny, 19 February 1920

TO SHINTARO YAMASHITA

I hardly need to tell you how flattered I was by your two letters, having as I do a deep admiration for Japanese art and a great sense of fellowship with the Japanese. But I have an apology to make for my delay in giving you the answer you are expecting. I've had no other excuse but work, which is obsessing me so much that my other responsibilities go by the wayside, and also my age, which makes me very lazy when it comes to letter-writing. But I hope you will kindly forgive me.

I was delighted to receive the fine prints and beautiful fabric you were kind enough to send me and please accept my thanks.

I find it more difficult to know how to reply to your request, as I sell my paintings for fairly high prices and have no small paintings in my possession, and it's very hard to know what to do since I might well send you something which wouldn't be to your liking. But it is the price above all which I am embarrassed about and which I fear you will consider too high; I can, however, let nothing go for less than this price. Canvases between 80 centimetres and 1 metre are priced around 25,000 francs. In the past I used to sell them from between 50 to 100 francs at the most. I have to say again that I feel somewhat embarrassed at this admission.

Thank you again,

Respectfully yours, CLAUDE MONET

Giverny, 23 February 1920

TO GASTON BERNHEIM-JEUNE

... You've guessed how I'm doing: I'm working and not without some difficulty, as my sight is getting worse each day and also I'm extremely busy with my garden; it's such a joy to me, and on fine days like those we've had recently, I am in raptures at the wonders of nature; so there's no time to get bored and I'm still in good health, which is saying a lot at my age.

I'm still hoping to send you the four paintings you selected; one of these days you'll get them.

As for the prices reached in the New York sale, I have to admit that I'm not impressed; all it does is show how stupid people are, since even a short while ago you could acquire the same paintings for much less...

Madame Jean Monet joins me in sending best wishes to the ladies and I extend good wishes to all.

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 8 May 1920

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

Really, you never seem to lose interest in me. I am honoured indeed; however, it's Boudin who concerns us here. On this matter, concerning my relationship with the 'King of skies', I think I've already told you that I consider Boudin as my Master.

You are quite right, I did meet Boudin, my senior, I believe, by about fifteen years, in Le Havre, while I was struggling to earn a reputation as a caricaturist. It's true that I was fifteen or so at the time. I was known throughout the town of Le Havre. I charged between 10 and 20 francs for my portraits and signed them Oscar, my second name. I often exhibited them with Boudin, whose painting I didn't appreciate at first, influenced as I was by academic theories. Troyon and Millet also frequented the gallery shop. One day Boudin said to me: 'You're talented, you should drop this kind of work which you'll tire of sooner or later. Your sketches are excellent, you're not going to leave it at that. Do what I do, learn to draw well and appreciate the sea, light, the blue sky.' I took his advice and together we went on long outings during which I painted constantly from nature. That was how I came to understand nature and learnt to love it passionately and how I became interested in the high-keyed painting of Boudin. It should be remembered that he had received some training from a master, Jongkind, whose work (his watercolours in particular) lies with Corot's at the origin of what has been called Impressionism. I've said it before and can only repeat that I owe everything to Boudin and I attribute my success to him. I came to be fascinated by his studies, the products of what I call instantaneity.

As for my stay in Algeria, I was entranced by it. I did my military service there with the Chasseurs d'Afrique in Oran and I met a fellow Norman, Pierre-Benoît Delpech of Granville, who was later to live in that lovely countryside. I kept in touch with him and we used to see each other almost every year. He also bought several paintings of mine and when I saw him in Giverny last year, he showed me numerous drawings and watercolours which I had done in Algeria, dating from 1862. He'll show them to you if you ask, since you know him.

At the time I regarded watercolour as a rapid and excellent means for expressing that ‘instantaneity’ of light. One day Clemenceau went off with one of my Algerian watercolours and in his Vendée house I saw this work of my youth depicting the old Spanish door in the Oran kasbah. I’ll send you two sketches of Algerian landscapes from the same period. Clemenceau also has two watercolours of mine, the *Water-lilies* which you can see at his home and another watercolour showing his house at Saint-Vincent-sur Jard. I like the watercolour technique and regret not having worked in it more often. But I must go back to Boudin to tell you an anecdote. One day we were at Saint-Adresse together and had set up our easels in the shade of a tent out of the sun, when a respectable, and to all appearances very grand, gentleman came up to us. He congratulated us on our bold approach and declared that nature, the open air and high-keyed painting were bound to bring about a renewal in the art of painting. He shook our hands on leaving, with the words ‘I am Théophile Gautier, the poet who almost became a painter.’ You can imagine how astonished we were when we discovered we’d conversed so pleasantly with such a great poet. His book *Emaux et camées* always delighted me.

Cordially, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 11 June 1920

TO GUSTAVE GEFFROY

I’m very late in thanking you for your two books which will be a great pleasure to read on winter evenings; at the moment the only joy I have is in contemplating nature, since my eyesight is preventing me from working outside as I once did, and this is not without its sadness. I save my strength in order to carry on working on my *Décorations* when it’s not too hot in the studio; other than that I’m in excellent form and it was only my eyesight that prevented me from writing earlier . . .

Your friend, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 17 September 1921

TO G. AND J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

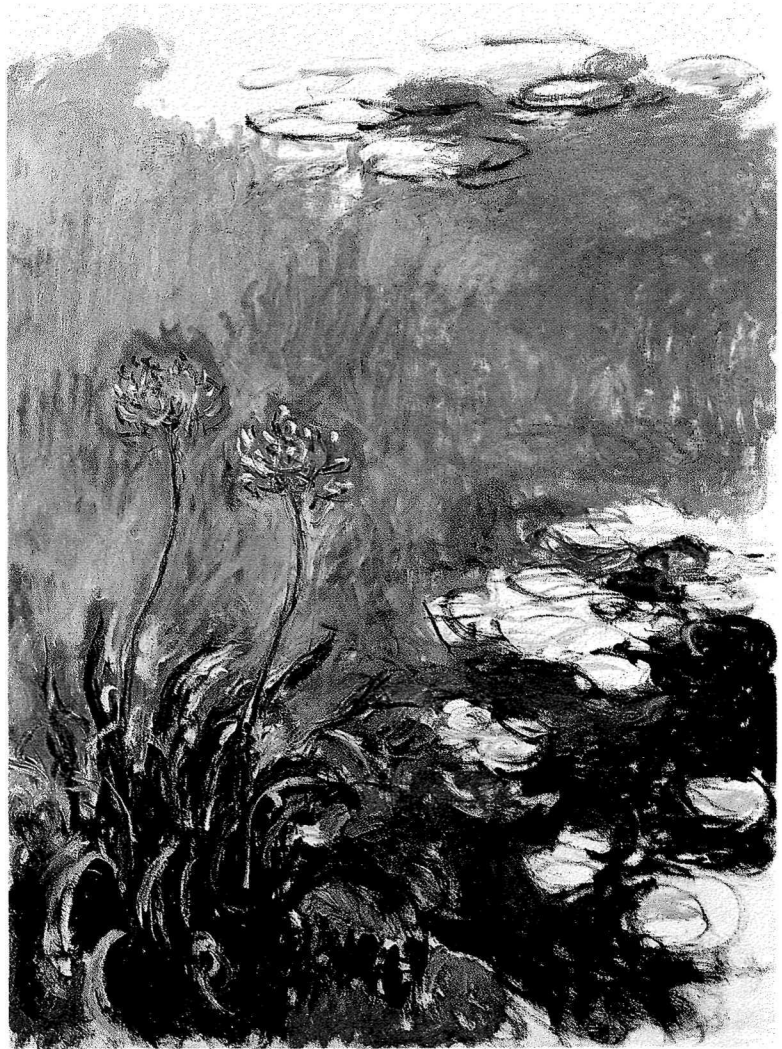
I’m making the best of the bad weather today to let you know how I am and also ask you whether, as I hope, you’ll stop here on your return journey, in which case I’d like some idea of when you’re coming as I’m planning a couple of short breaks and wouldn’t like to miss you.

I’ve been working hard and non-stop during this marvellous weather. I wouldn’t presume to say I was satisfied with what I’ve done, although I believe I’ve made some progress. My health is better and I wish next year was here already so that I could carry on my research in spite of my poor eyesight.

So let me know how you’re getting on and tell me what you plan to do on your way back. We send our very best wishes to the ladies, to both of you and your children and look forward to seeing you.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*



AGAPANTHUS

Giverny, 22 October 1921

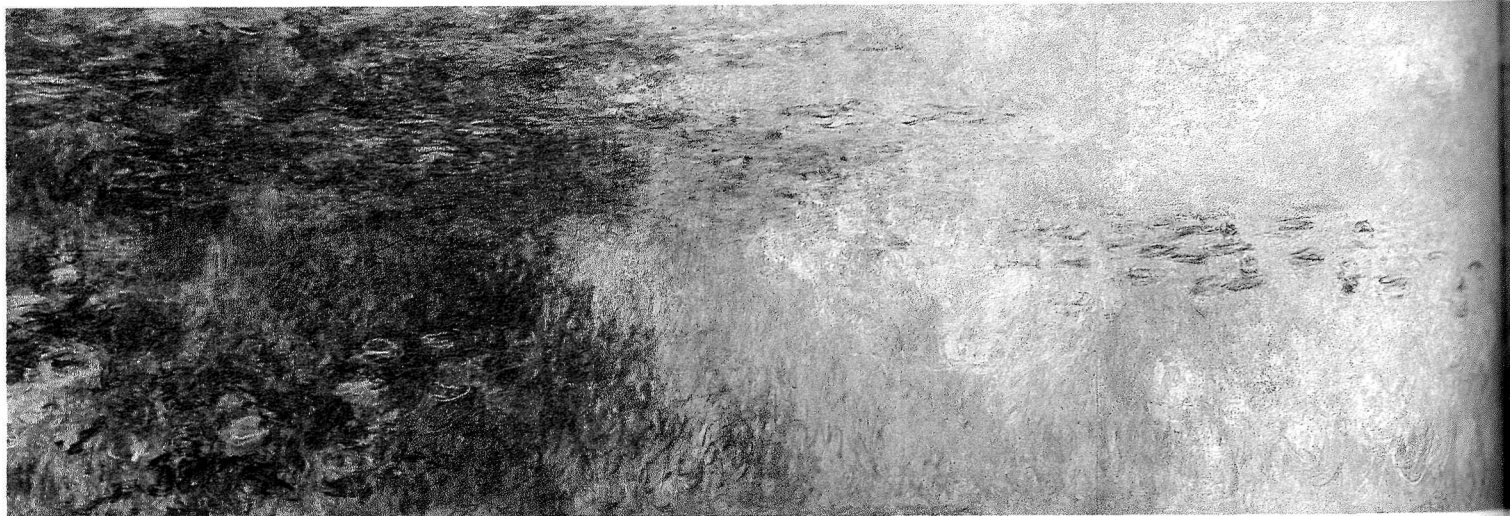
TO ARSÈNE ALEXANDRE

You must have been somewhat surprised that you never received so much as a word of thanks from me, but it's because your book only got to me eight days after it was sent and I didn't want to write until I had read the whole thing. So first I must apologize for this delay; to assure you without false modesty that I'm very touched by everything you're kind enough to credit me with.

Leaving the introductory paragraph aside your study is perfect in that you have managed to arrange all the various phases of my experiments and researches into a coherent chronology, and you have done so without making a single mistake, and without hurting anyone, so please accept my sincerest and profoundest thanks.

I'd like to think I might have the pleasure of seeing you in Giverny again one of these days and we could have another talk about my gift to the State (I'm not getting any younger). It's important, indeed urgent, that this matter should be settled once and for all. Moreover I'm planning to have a frank talk with Monsieur Paul Léon about it.

With all my thanks, in sincerest friendship, CLAUDE MONET



THE CLOUDS

Giverny, 31 October 1911

TO GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

I am sending you the detailed information I promised you on the subject of the donation of my *Décorations* to the State. First of all it must be understood that I refuse the room that was offered in the Jeu de Paume, and that's final. But I will agree to the room in the Orangerie on condition that the Beaux-Arts administration undertakes to do the work there which I judge necessary. With this prospect in mind I have reduced several motifs of the *Décorations* and believe I have come up with a satisfactory arrangement, keeping to the oval form I always wanted. Instead of the 12 panels I gave I'll provide 18. It's true that the number doesn't matter, only the quality, and I myself no longer know what to think of this work. The essential thing is that it should be well displayed and after much deliberation I believe I've come up with a successful solution. I enclose a rough plan of what I'd like: a first room, the effect of which you were able to judge yesterday, and a second with the four panels of the *Three Willows* as a kingpin at the end, with the *Tree Reflections* opposite and on either side a panel of 6 metres.

If the administration accepts this proposal and undertakes to do the necessary work, then the matter is settled. A straightforward discussion with Monsieur Paul Léon and the architect he considers most suitable to carry out the aforementioned work, and then all I'll have to do is to wait till it's done, as I don't intend to deliver my panels until the work is completely finished.

Very glad to have seen you yesterday, and I look forward to your next visit with your friends from Nantes.

Your old friend CLAUDE MONET

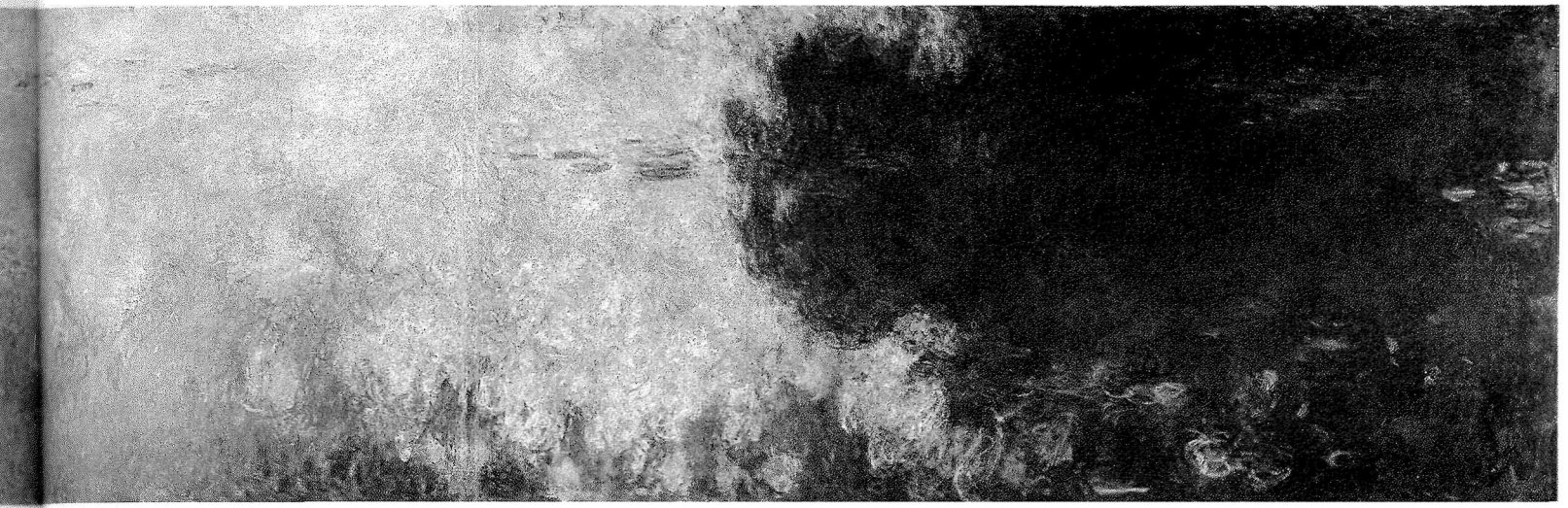
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Giverny, 16 February 1911

TO G. AND J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

A line to let you know how I am and to ask you to forgive me for not inviting you; it would undoubtedly be a great pleasure to see you, but I'm still working despite my sight which is getting worse by the day; that's why I'm feeling very nervous, and don't want to see anyone for the moment, as I can only think of working while I still can, but as soon as it gets warmer and it becomes impossible to work in the studio, I'll be in touch. I hope you're all well and send you my very best wishes.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET



[Giverny], 8 May 1922

TO MARC ELDER

... All winter my door has been closed to everyone. I knew the days were getting shorter and I wanted to use what sight I had left to bring off a number of my *Décorations*. And I made a great mistake. For in the end I was forced to recognize that I was spoiling them, that I was no longer capable of doing anything good. So I destroyed several of my panels. Now I'm almost blind and I'm having to abandon work altogether. It's hard but that's the way it is: a sad end despite my good health!...

*

[Giverny], 22 May 1922

TO GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

... I was hoping to see you yesterday, you didn't come and I'm very upset since the wistaria has never been lovelier and in this heat it won't last any time. Everything looks wonderful at the moment and the light is dazzling...

*

Giverny, 11 August 1922

TO G. OR J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

I've been wanting to write for some while and I'm sorry I didn't, but as you may imagine, this ghastly weather has upset me so much I'm still angry about it. To think I was getting on so well, more absorbed than I've ever been and expecting to achieve something, but I was forced to change my tune and give up a lot of promising beginnings and abandon the rest; and on top of that, my poor eyesight makes me see everything in a complete fog. It's very beautiful all the same and it's this which I'd love to have been able to convey. All in all, I am very unhappy. The season's gone to waste and at my age it may be the last.

Aside from that my health is excellent. All I can do is hope for a fine autumn and I mustn't think of moving from here. My last trip will be to see to the installation of my paintings in the Orangerie or possibly to come and be operated on. We'd be very happy to see you when you get back and hope you have a good end to the season. Madame Jean joins me in sending best wishes to the ladies.

Your old friend, CLAUDE MONET



WATER-LILIES

[Giverny?], 9 September 1922

TO GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

... Went yesterday for a consultation in Paris. Result: one eye absolutely gone, an operation will be essential and even unavoidable in the near future. Meanwhile, there's a course of treatment which might make the other eye better and enable me to paint. That said, I wanted to see how the work at the Orangerie was getting on. Not a worker in sight. Absolute silence... Just a little pile of rubble at the door...

*

Giverny, 13 September 1922

TO DOCTOR CHARLES COUTELA

I have to tell you at once of the effect that the drops you prescribed for my left eye have had. It's quite simply wonderful. I haven't seen as well as I can now for a long while, and I greatly regret not having consulted you sooner! It would have meant that I could have painted some passable work instead of the daubs I persisted in doing when I could see nothing but a fog.

I can now see everything in my garden. I'm overjoyed at my perception of every colour in the spectrum. One thing only: my right eye is still more veiled. May I continue the treatment so that I can do what is most urgent? I would be grateful for a word in reply.

Yours sincerely and gratefully, CLAUDE MONET

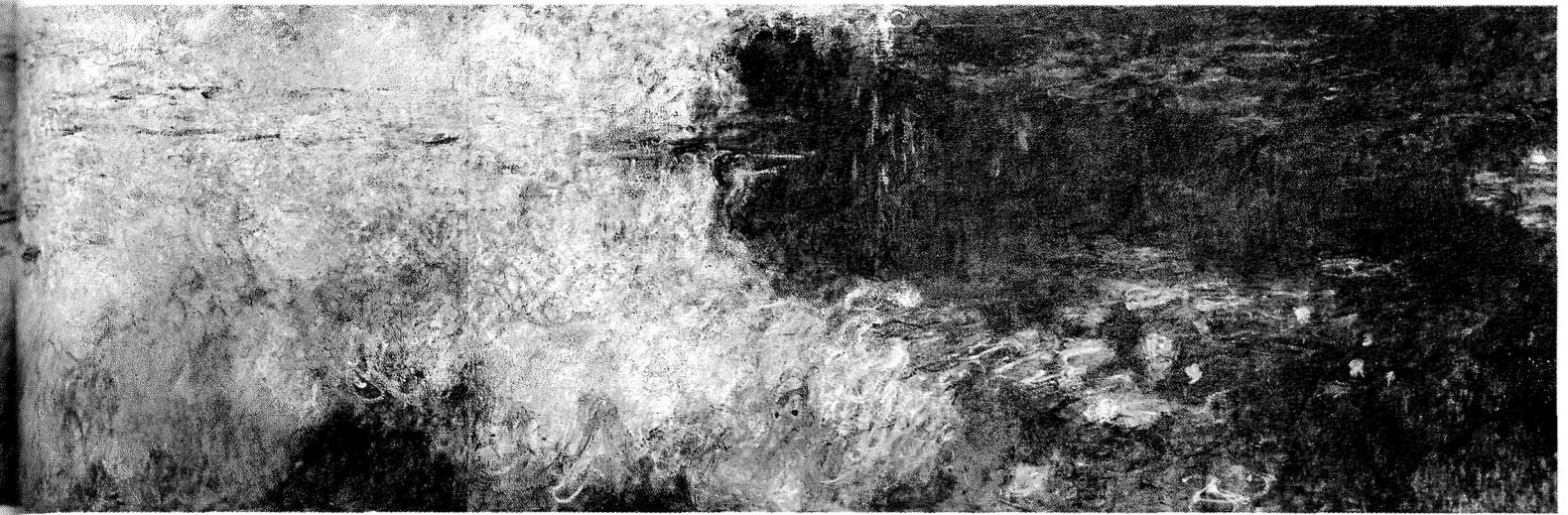
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Giverny, 18 January 1923

TO PAUL LÉON, DIRECTOR OF THE BEAUX-ARTS

A few words to say that I've just undergone a preliminary operation which went very well, I'm due for another definitive operation and then I'll most certainly be able to install the panels which I've given to the State. I'm sure you'll be pleased with this news.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET



Giverny, 22 June 1923

TO DOCTOR CHARLES COUTELA

My apologies for not coming to the appointment. I'm in the depths of despair and though I'm reading some 15 to 20 pages a day, though not without a struggle I might add, I can see nothing outside or in the distance, either with or without my spectacles. And for the last two days I've been plagued by black specks.

To think that it's now six months since the first operation, five since I left the clinic, and soon it will be four since I've worn spectacles, which is nowhere near the four or five weeks to get used to my new vision! I might have put those six months to good use if you had been honest with me. I might have finished the *Décorations* which I have to deliver in April and I'm certain now that I won't be able to finish them as I'd have liked.

That's the greatest blow I could have had and it makes me sorry that I ever decided to go ahead with that fatal operation. Excuse me for being so frank and allow me to say that I think it's criminal to have placed me in such a predicament.

Yours very unhappily, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, Saturday evening [4 August 1923]

TO G. OR J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

Dear friend, I'm somewhat behind in writing to you but the last operation, more painful than the previous ones, has left me with some rather unpleasant twinges of pain. All the same I've been able to set various paintings aside though it's not easy to communicate their prices by letter. The prices vary according to size and quality, from 30, 35, 40 to 50,000 francs. Naturally if I'm to expect a visit from you one of these days could you kindly let me know in advance?

Despite the bouts of pain, my condition seems to be improving, the doctors are very satisfied. I'm the only one who's finding it very slow; not until the end of the month will I be able to use remedial spectacles.

All our best to the ladies and to everyone.

Yours, CLAUDE MONET

Giverny, Thursday 30 August 1923

TO GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

To confirm what I said in my telegram after new trials with the lenses and with small doses, on Coutela's advice; I'm doing exercises and can read easily; that much is certain and it's restoring my confidence, but the distortion and exaggerated colours that I see are quite terrifying. As for going out for a walk in these spectacles, it's out of the question for the moment anyway, and if I was condemned to see nature as I see it now, I'd prefer to be blind and keep my memories of the beauties I've always seen, though this undoubtedly won't be the case. What annoys me the most now, is that since I have to ration my use of the lenses and as Coutela has forbidden the artificial use of eye drops in my left eye, I am quite helpless and can't see at all.

I've just written to see if he'll allow me one drop each morning so I can attend to personal matters.

He'll be back in Paris on the 4th and I won't hesitate to go and see him if I have to; in any case you'll be kept informed every other day by telegram or letter.

I embrace you warmly.

P.S. My need for drops for the left eye is all the more pressing since I've several canvases to touch up and deliver straight away, which I couldn't do with the exaggerated vision the new lenses provide.

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 22 September 1923

TO GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

I can't put off replying to your affectionate letter any further, but I have to say that in all sincerity and after much deliberation, I absolutely refuse (for the moment at least) to have the operation done to my left eye; you are far away and can have no idea of the state I'm in as regards my sight and the alteration of colours, and you cannot do anything to help me.

I can see, read, and write and I fear that this is very probably the only result that can be obtained. So unless I find a painter, of whatever kind, who's had the operation and can tell me that he can see the same colours he did before, I won't allow it.

I'm expecting Coutela tomorrow. I hope he'll change my lenses and we'll see if there's an improvement. I've been patient, and now you must be too.

But what about you, how are you getting on? Morale's good on the whole.

Blanche and I send our love.

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 21 October, 1923

TO DOCTOR CHARLES COUTELA

... I received the spectacles from Germany and much to my surprise the results are very good. I can see green again, red and, at last, an attenuated blue. It would be perfect if the frames were better, the two lenses are too close together ...

Believe me,

Yours in friendship, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 20 November 1923

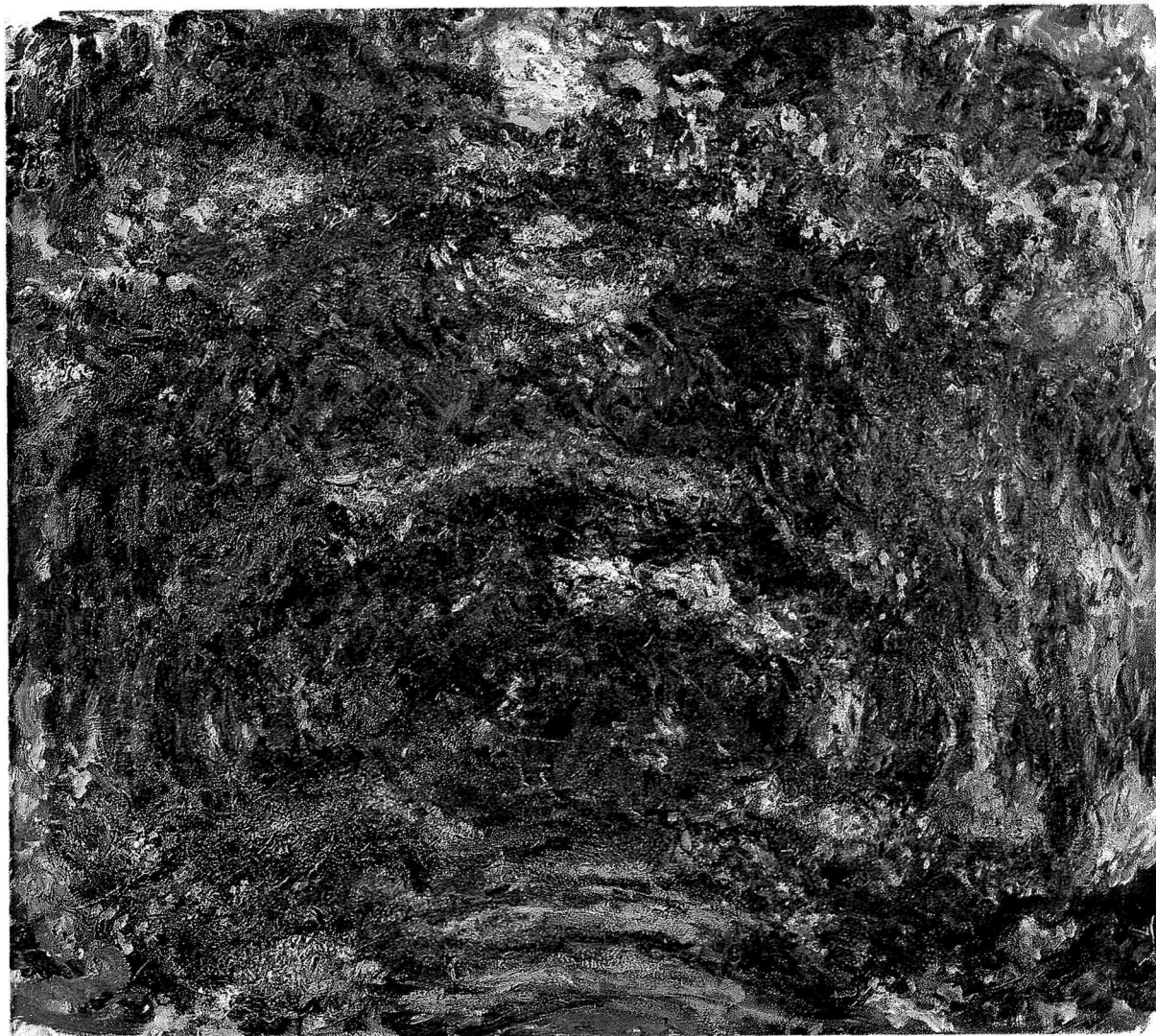
TO JOSEPH DURAND-RUEL

In reply to your letter I have to say that since I've plunged into my work again and am having to make up for so much lost time, I can't receive visitors here for the time being. I'm working hard in order that my *Décorations* will be ready on time ...

Your old friend, CLAUDE MONET

*

THE ROSE-TRELLISES, GIVERNY



Giverny, 9 April 1924

TO DOCTOR CHARLES COUTELA

You haven't heard from me as I promised, and there's a reason for it since I didn't want to tell you how discouraged I've been feeling. For months I've been slaving away and have achieved nothing worthwhile. Is it my age or faulty sight? Both no doubt, but my sight most of all. You have recovered my perception of black and white, for reading and writing in other words, and I'm grateful for that of course, but my vision as a painter has, alas, gone as I'd thought and it's not your fault.

I tell you this in complete confidence. I hide it as much as possible, but I'm feeling terribly saddened and discouraged. Life is a torture to me. I don't know what to say. You know that I'm surrounded by care and affection. Perhaps it's fatigue, but apart from near sight, there's no doubt that I see with increasing difficulty. The first spectacles are the only ones I'm satisfied with in artificial light, and the odd thing is that I accidentally put them on in daylight and no longer noticed those yellows and blues which made you choose tinted lenses. So what's to be done and what hope is there? It's up to you to tell me.

With gratitude and best wishes; my daughter-in-law sends her regards.

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 22 June 1924

TO G. OR J. BERNHEIM-JEUNE

I'm replying to your letter at once, to say that of course I agree with you and you can arrange for the translation you want to be done. While I'm at it, I can give you some good news. The last few days I've been working from nature and, indeed, it looks as if it's going well.

My best wishes to everyone,

CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 14 January 1925

TO ETIENNE MOREAU-NÉLATON

All that you say about Daubigny in connection with me is correct and I have good reason to be grateful to him. I met him in London during the Commune; he saw that I was in some distress, to say the least, and enthused over some of my *Thames* paintings, and through him I met Monsieur Durand-Ruel, without whose help I and several of my friends would have died of starvation. Subsequently, I was particularly touched by Daubigny's purchase from Durand-Ruel of one of my *Views of Holland*. But it was to his greatest credit that he resigned as a member of the jury at the official Salon of the time, because my work and that of several friends was unfairly rejected.

Please forgive this poor writing, but I'm very old and my sight is far from perfect.

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 27 July 1925

TO DOCTOR CHARLES COUTELA

I myself am writing this, since we both were particularly touched by your letter and I want to thank you for your kind thought. Furthermore, I'm delighted to be able to tell you that I've truly recovered my sight at last and did so virtually at a stroke. In short, I can live and breathe again, am overjoyed to see everything once more, and I'm working passionately.

Your grateful and loyal patient, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 21 June 1926

TO EVAN CHARTERIS

Forgive me for not having replied sooner, but as I'm still somewhat indisposed, I can't yet write to you myself. Moreover, all I'm able to do is confirm what I told you in our last discussion. Having reread your letter closely, together with the copy of Sargent's letter, I have to say that if the translation of Sargent's letter is accurate I don't approve of it, firstly because Sargent makes me into something much grander than I am, and I've always had a horror of theories, and finally the only merit I have is to have painted directly from nature with the aim of conveying my impressions in front of the most fugitive effects, and it still upsets me that I was responsible for the name given to a group the majority of whom had nothing of the impressionist about them.

With apologies for not being able to be of any greater help,

Yours sincerely, CLAUDE MONET

*

Giverny, 18 September 1926

TO GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

I am the one to be writing, at last, and I'm glad to say that I'm getting better (although at times I'm in great pain), but I'm being sensible, recovering my taste for food, and sleep quite well thanks to Rebière and Doctor Florand's care, so much so in fact that I was thinking of preparing my palette and brushes to resume work, but relapses and further bouts of pain prevented it. I'm not giving up that hope and am occupying myself with some major alterations in my studios and plans to perfect the garden. All this to show you that, with courage, I'm getting the upper hand.

Can you read this scribble? I hope so and look forward to a visit from you soon, that would really put me right again. You ought to know in any case, that if I don't recover my strength sufficiently to do what I want to my panels, I've decided to offer them as they are, or some of them at least. But how about yourself, how are you? Better than me, I hope. I embrace you warmly. Blanche and Michel also send their love.

Yours ever, CLAUDE MONET

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