

## The Art Institute of Chicago

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Monets in the Art Institute

Author(s): M. C.

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PORTRAIT OF MONET. ALBERT ANDRÉ

### MONETS IN THE ART INSTITUTE

**P**AINTING in the open air was fundamental to the theories of realism which were maintained by the young Claude Monet (1840- ). Tradition had painted landscapes in the studio, and the corollary to this practice was the blackening of shadows to suggest the contrast between light and shade. Monet saw light and color within the shadow, and attempted to give to it the proper value. Flooding his whole canvas with high color, he immersed even silhouettes against the sky in reflected light. In an added effort to realize outdoor brilliancy, he tried to increase the vibration of his colors; by laying on only the colors of the spectrum (to which he added white and black), hatched across or laid close to one another, he formed a composite of more brilliancy than can be secured by a mixture of pigment. The investigations of Chevreul, Helmholtz and, in America, of Rood, gave him scientific confirmation for this practice; but as he forced the observer away from the canvas to get

the proper blending of the colors by distance, he met instant opposition and ridicule.

With due regard to the fact that Monet and his followers were greatly influenced by Manet, it is granted that it was Monet who first attempted to record by broken color momentary phases of light and atmosphere. Light he considered the prime factor in every painting, since it originated the impression made on the eye. The title "Impression" was given by Monet to one of his early works, exhibited in 1874. Critics fell upon the word. It became the current jest. But in 1876 Monet and an uncompromising group of radicals held an exhibition under the name which had been forced upon them, "Les Impressionistes."

Monet's disclosures have become the commonplace of painting. He has lived to see his apostles form new sects with strange creeds, but their point of departure is Impressionism, which he may fairly be said to have founded.

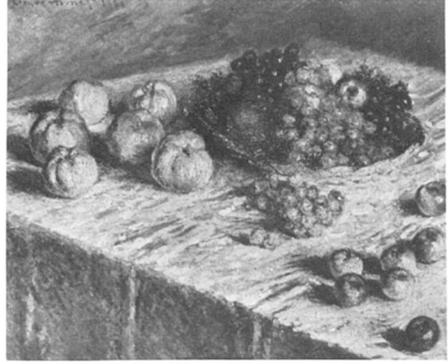
He has remained an independent, exhibiting everywhere except at the Salons, and living apart from Paris. From his successive homes on the Seine, Argenteuil, Vétheuil, and Giverny, he has gone occasionally to the sea-board and to London and Venice. An important group of five paintings in the Art Institute dates from the residence at Argenteuil (1868-78), and we have four from the Vétheuil period (1878-86). None of these, however, were painted at that spot. The "Vétheuil" in our gal-



ARGENTEUIL. MONET. PALMER COLLECTION

eries was painted later, in 1901. Soon after Monet settled in Giverny (1886), he began his paintings in series; successively Hayricks, Poplars, Lily-ponds, Mornings on the Seine, Rouen Cathedral, the Thames, and in 1908, Venice. Of these series, nine paintings are here, and the remainder of our group were painted after the artist had begun to develop his garden at Giverny, of which we have a glimpse in the painting of 1900, "Garden at Giverny." Nine paintings belonging to the Art Institute are notably supplemented by sixteen representative canvases lent by Martin A. Ryerson.

The earliest work shows Monet grounding himself in composition and form but already using color powerfully. "Argenteuil" (1868) belongs to the school of Courbet, but Courbet never reached this clarity. In the "Garden at Argenteuil," in the Ryerson loan collection, a child plays with a hoop on a shaded gravel path, the sunlit garden in the background. Neither composition nor aerial perspective is sacrificed, but more interest has gone into giving the exact values of color, particularly where it shines through the shadow of the gravel path. Atmosphere and palpitation, rather than exact form, characterize the "St. Lazare Station, Paris" of 1877. The arrival of a train smothered in steam is seen in silhouette from within the shed; the contrasts are accomplished by the forceful execution of the light-saturated steam rather than by the use of black. The



FRUITS. MONET. RYERSON LOAN COLLECTION

"Fruits" of 1880 is a remarkable study of form, but the painter more feelingly records the intricate reflections of each object on its neighbor and in the hundred mirrors of the crumpled cloth; the color, in short, of light, on these objects, in this interior, on this day.

After 1880 Monet rarely combined figures with his landscapes, wishing not to be retarded by details of drawing. "Étretat," dated 1883, shows his emancipation. The greatest marine painter of his half century begins to show his full power. In the earlier landscapes brush strokes had followed the contours; in the "Fruits" vigorous dabs of divided color were rained on the canvas; here the strokes are blended in the smooth beach, but they are thick, virile, catching the light in the beating waves.

The paintings that follow, revealing the emotion aroused in Monet by vivid color, are masterfully executed, and brilliant in tone: "Antibes," "Bordighera" on the Mediterranean, and "View from Cap Martin" (Ryerson Loan Collection), all of 1884; "Boats in Winter Quarters, Étretat" (1885), "Figures in Sunshine" (1887), "Field of Flowers in France" and "Mountain Torrent, Dauphine," undated. The "Torrent" runs between transparent blue and lavender. The "Boats in Winter Quarters" is conspicuous for striking design and for the cold green of the water, emphasized by sails of reddish-violet, and the shore and covered boats, in a descending scale of purple. The cone-shaped sheds projected against a light



ST. LAZARE STATION, PARIS. MONET. RYERSON LOAN COLLECTION



WESTMINSTER. MONET. RYERSON LOAN COLLECTION

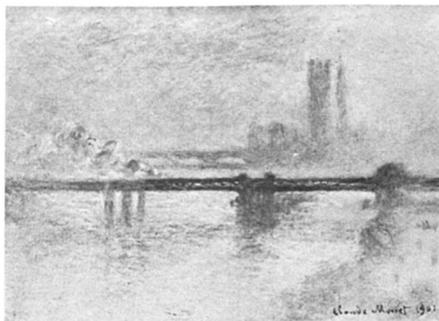
ground form a motif that appears later in the "Hayricks" and the "Coast-Guard's Shack."

For the paintings in series Monet kept several easels in daily use, working on the same subjects at all of them, but at each registering a different play of light, and running from one to another as the light changed. By these severe exercises in variations he practically overcame limitations to his ability to express the most fugitive aspects of light. As designs they are rhythmical, if unconventional, and selected with exquisite care. They are purely objective but touched with the poignancy of beauty captured, wild and restless, and as objective transcriptions form a convincing argument for the methods of Impressionism.

Two of the Hayricks series are in the Palmer collection and the Ryerson Loan collection. Both belong to the late winter of 1891. At this time Monet began also to paint his "Paysages d'Eau" in the water-garden which he had made near Giverny. The series was continued for years. In 1907 he hung a whole room at Durand-Ruel's galleries with Lily-ponds. Our examples of 1906 and 1907 hang in the Ryerson Loans and the Kimball Collection respectively.

Painted with casual, leaping strokes, they unveil the very heart of reflection and atmosphere. The release from convention is complete. Vision and craftsmanship have been perfected since the paintings in series were begun.

Other paintings, intervening, disclose the steps of this slow sturdy growth in artistry and power. The "Field of Flowers in France" is akin to the work before 1890. The "Poplars at Giverny; Threatening Weather," belongs to another series. In successive summers, 1896 and 1897, the artist sat at the same point on the beach to paint the cliffs at Pourville in different light effects. The paintings are in the Art Institute and the Ryerson collections. Monet painted also repeatedly the coast-guard's hut at Varengeville, looking down on its red roof against shining water. One of these sea views, of 1897, is in the Ryerson collection. It is in high coloring, dabbed on with a brush fat with pigment. Another series is represented in this collection by the "Morning on the Seine," of the same year. Misty branches droop over misty reflections, a marvel in high key. One clear color is hatched over another, but smoothed over with the knife. It is a dream, a reverie soon to pass. The "Garden at Giverny" of 1900 reaches Monet's extreme of daring color. In 1901 we have the "Vétheuil," in the Ryerson collection, very different in its free



CHARING CROSS. MONET. RYERSON LOAN COLLECTION

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brushwork and high key from the early work done at that spot. By this group we are prepared for the Thames series, in which Monet's work may be said to culminate.

In Mr. Ryerson's collections are three works of poetic vision, "Charing Cross" (1901), "Westminster," undated, and "Waterloo" (1903), which represent the three subjects of the Thames series of 1901-1904. The first is a diffused harmony based on yellow, the second is green and violet, and the third the intangible colors of the opal. The great emotional power of "Charing Cross" may be partly accounted for by its suspension in prismatic fog, partly by its rhythm and mystery and the pulsation of the atmosphere. In the twilight of "Westminster" and the late afternoon of "Waterloo Bridge" are given other phases of the battle of lights in a confusion of fog and smoke, in which the decomposed rays pierce colored depths of infinite shades.

The excursions to London were followed a few years later by a winter in the humid, colorful atmosphere of the Adriatic shore. One prismatic painting of the Venetian series, "San Giorgio" (1908), in the Ryerson collection leaves us at the end of our survey. The portrait of the artist painted by André a few years ago brings us back to the garden at Giverny, one of the Master Impressionist's great creations, where of late his years have been spent. He is still painting.

M. C.



GARDEN AT GIVERNY. MONET. RYERSON LOAN COLLECTION

#### ACHIEVEMENT IN THE ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF MODERN DECORATIVE ART

RECENTLY there has been placed on exhibition in Gunsaulus Hall a permanent collection of modern decorative art, composed of gifts and purchases made from the annual exhibition, which was described in the last number of the BULLETIN. The collection at present includes foreign and American ceramics, glass, metal-work, textiles, and furniture. This year further acquisitions have been made and prizes awarded by a committee of seven during the exhibition current in January.

Highest honors, among foreign works, went to the Scandinavian countries, not because their achievement is more notable than that of other countries but because of the paucity of foreign material available. The Thomas J. Dee prize of fifty dollars for best work in silver went to Georg Jensen, of Copenhagen, the distinguished and internationally known Danish silversmith, three examples of whose work were purchased through the generosity of the Renaissance Club. Jensen has obviously based his art on past traditions of his country, but historic ornament has been reorganized into an original interpretation. Sturdiness of form, enlivened by an imagi-



BOATS IN WINTER QUARTERS. MONET. PALMER COLLECTION