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Homage to Claude Monet

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HOMAGE TO CLAUDE MONET

When we consider the amount of gallery space and the number of paintings in the permanent collection by the other French Impressionists who must be represented on those walls, it is an extraordinary event when all of the museum's Monets are on exhibition for a whole month. This lavish allotment is not only justified by the great renewal in interest in the work of Monet; it is also the occasion for hanging the painting from Monet's late period which the museum has recently acquired, *Iris by the Pond*. This astonishing canvas, one in the style which has excited the most interest during this new appraisal of Monet, is seen properly in its place as the end of a development that began on the windy, sunny beaches of the Channel and ended in the quiet lily ponds of the garden at Giverny.

It is not strange that the taste of today, educated to accept and possibly understand an abstract paint surface concealing or revealing an interior vision, should feel a particular affinity for examples of Monet's work such as this. Very large, a bit over six feet square, its

surface at first glance might seem an example of pure painting entirely divorced from reality. It is rather the heightened reality of nature that the painter has isolated so intuitively in this great sonorous composition of light and color. The earliest paintings from the career that led to this accomplishment are not represented in the museum's collection. It lacks a painting done when Monet was under the influence of Courbet, when his colors were heavier and darker and his figures modeled with light and dark. It is the period of his first triumph with the *Woman in a Green Dress*, when he might have gone on to become a successful figure painter, if his passionate ideas about painting had not been strong enough for him to ignore easy success. When the museum acquires one of these early paintings, it will then have a complete picture of the development of the artist who, alone of the group, carried the subjects and technical discoveries of the Impressionists to their ultimate conclusions in his late paintings.

The appearance of the subject under the

Boats in Winter Quarters. The singer Jean-Baptiste Faure invited Monet to stay with him at Étretat in October of 1885. Because of bad weather, Monet remained until December in order to finish the paintings he had planned. It was during these months that he painted two versions of Boats in Winter Quarters, both of which the Art Institute owns. The pictures are characteristic of Monet's development after his stay on the Riviera in 1884. This strongly designed canvas may recall both Manet and Japanese prints in its spotted arrangement and immediacy of treatment. The color is rich and intense: the water a cold green, the sails a reddish violet and the shore and covered boats in different values of purple.



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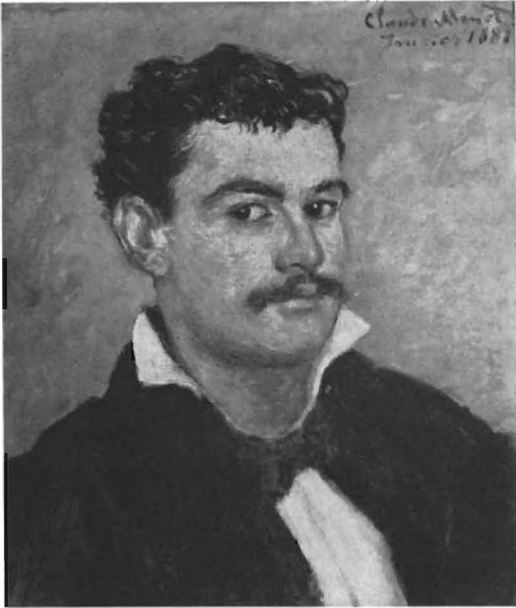


The Beach at Sainte Adresse. The effects of sky and water in this serene composition still recall the influence of Boudin and Jongkind. In a letter to Boudin, the painter Dubourg in 1867 writes that Monet passed the winter in Honfleur, near Le Havre, where he painted a large marine composition, There is little doubt that The Beach at Sainte Adresse is the picture described. Its successful combination of pearly light, mass and pattern, its unity of design and color combine to make this one of the finest paintings of Monet's early period. It was first exhibited at the second Impressionist group show of 1876, where it received favorable attention. It then entered the collection of the singer Jean-Baptiste Faure.

Cover:

Old St. Lazare Station, Paris. The atmosphere of this huge, light-filled station, with all its ephemeral effects of light shining through smoke and steam fascinated Monet. He painted six versions of this scene; all six were first exhibited at the third Impressionist group exhibition in 1877. The Art Institute's painting may be the one of St. Lazare shown at the first Impressionist exhibition held in New York in 1886.

This issue, devoted largely to the paintings by Claude Monet in the permanent collection of the Art Institute, was compiled with the assistance of Mrs. Katharine Kuh and Miss W. Van der Rohe of the Department of Painting.



Portrait of M. Coqueret, fils. M. Coqueret, possibly an artist himself, was the son of the French portrait painter, Achille Coqueret, who exhibited at the salon during the years 1835 to 1849. This, the only portrait in the Institute's collection of Monets, is an example of the broad handling of paint that reflects the influence of Manet.

dominance of light, the palette of light colors, and the division of tones that blended in the eye of the spectator with a greater brilliance than mixed colors, were discoveries that had been used in part by earlier painters. But it was the group effort of the Impressionists that formulated these discoveries with such emphasis and conviction that they were able to bring about the revelation of a new visual beauty. By the 1880's, the main struggle for acceptance

was over, and the individual members of the group like Renoir, Pissarro, and Cézanne, who were disturbed by the imprecision in the method, went on to new explorations of form. Only Monet stubbornly continued to attempt the complete objective mastery of light.

We can follow him in this quest, beginning with the early *Beach at Sainte Adresse*, painted in 1867. Its quiet harmonies are still touched with the pearly light of Boudin. Argenteuil-sur-Seine, the painting where the subject and the impression seem to tremble in an exquisite balance, has still touches of light and dark in the foliage and the water. The paintings continue in a higher key: the *Cliff Walk and Bordighera*, where he met the challenge of the blazing sun, then follow the experiments he pursued with such patience, fixing on the canvas the same subject seen under different effects of lights and seasons. His growing powers seem to demand the challenge of more difficult and more fugitive effects. The *Haystacks*, *Vétheuil*, the *Morning on the Seine*, and the *Water Lilies* are the results of his patience. There are the pictures from his travels where he found new impressions: the scenes of London with their fitful colors, and Venice, seen as a web of reflections on water and marble. The final climax is the *Wagnerian explosion of Iris by the Pond*, hallucinatory in its penetration of light and reflections of color on water, foliage, and flowers.

In the end, the struggle and the theory and the technique have left an enchanted vision. The Impressionists, in conquering light opened another window on the world, and Monet, in his fugitive effects of light on water, in the transparency of his skies, and the reflections of light on foliage and flowers left a testimony to the beauty of nature and the poetry of the world.

A. C.



Iris by the Pond. Monet worked on his water lily pictures for more than a quarter of a century. The fusion of reflected and real light, of luminous colors on the surface of his little water lily pond was a central theme in most of his late work. In his first water lily series, exhibited in 1900, the flowers still formed part of the surrounding landscape. Pictures from the second series, exhibited in 1909, omitted the horizon and gave only a section of the water surface in which the surrounding areas were reflected. Iris by the Pond has gone beyond Impressionism; here color and form explode with Expressionist impetuosity. Magnified details dissolve and swim in pulsating atmosphere. The roots of American Abstract Expressionism can be found in Monet's late paintings.



The Artist's Garden at Argenteuil. The charm of this scene, done in 1872 when Monet's style had become almost completely impressionist, may obscure the mastery with which the painting has been handled. The strong brushstrokes and the exact values of color catch the sunny light shining through the shadows. It is a luminous accomplishment that communicates the pleasure of the painter in the beauty of the scene.



Argenteuil-sur-Seine. There is no clue in this limpid picture, painted in 1868, of the desperate situation Monet was in: entirely destitute and forced to beg for support from his friends. Monet's palette is still darker than it was to become; contrasts of dark and light are still used to define the sparkle of the water. Nature is becoming the direct source of impression; the interest centers on the light shining through the foliage and reflecting on the water. This painting was first exhibited in 1876 and shortly afterward became the property of Jean-Baptiste Faure.