



“I have always loved sky and water, leaves and flowers... I found them in abundance in my little pond.”

Claude Monet

Claude Monet, *The Japanese Footbridge (detail)*, 1899, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Victoria Nebeker Coberly, in memory of her son John W. Mudd, and Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg



1

Painter and Gardener

French artist Claude Monet (1840–1926) combined his love of nature and art by creating gardens wherever he lived. Although Monet spent much time in Paris and traveled extensively in France and abroad, he enjoyed the country most and lived for more than fifty years along the Seine River. His involvement with gardening grew over the years, from flowerbeds that brightened his first home at Argenteuil to his magnificent gardens at Giverny, which became a pleasure for the eye, a soothing place to meditate and contemplate nature, and a source of inspiration.

Monet was especially fond of depicting his own gardens. Painting them over and over again, Monet could show the ways light, weather, season, and time of day visually changed them. Through direct observations of nature, Monet captured the momentary effects of light and atmosphere on canvas.

“My garden is slow work, pursued by love, and I do not deny that I am proud of it.” **Claude Monet**

above: Claude Monet by his waterlily pond at Giverny, summer 1905 (detail), photograph by Jacques-Ernest Bulloz (1858–1942), gelatin silver print, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

In 1903, Monet added a trellis over the bridge and draped it with purple and white wisteria.

right: Claude Monet standing beside the Japanese bridge at Giverny, Roger-Viollet Agency. All rights reserved.

2

At Giverny

In 1883, Monet and his family moved to a former cider farm in Giverny, a small town about thirty-five miles northwest of Paris, and lived there for the rest of his life. There at his new home, he created a spectacular garden that became the main source of inspiration for his later paintings, as well as a living work of art in its own right.

At Giverny, Monet converted part of the farmhouse into a studio and transformed the vegetable garden and neglected two-acre grounds into complex flower gardens. He carefully planned out his garden to be beautiful and different as the seasons changed, planting a wide range of annuals, perennials, bulbs, and vines so that there were blooms from early spring through late fall. With a painter's eye, Monet thoughtfully arranged plants according to color and height. He liked the flower beds to be dense and abundant, overflowing with plants. And he built arbors, trellises, and arches to carry the blossoming color up to the sky.

An enthusiastic and skilled gardener, Monet subscribed to horticultural publications, traded seeds, and collected many books on gardening, always improving and changing things. Eventually, the grounds at Giverny became too much for Monet to manage alone and required a team of gardeners. Strict about upkeep, Monet would write detailed instructions as to when and where to plant seeds and how to prune the shrubs, and he inspected the garden daily.



“My heart is always at Giverny.” **Claude Monet**

4

The Japanese Footbridge



Claude Monet, *The Japanese Footbridge*, 1899, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Victoria Nebeker Coberly, in memory of her son John W. Mudd, and Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg

The water garden at Giverny was inspired in part by Japan. Monet greatly admired Japanese paintings and prints, especially the landscapes of Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige, which he saw in shops in Paris. He amassed a collection of more than two hundred prints and decorated the walls of his home at Giverny with them. Monet planted Japanese peonies and bamboo around the curving banks of the waterlily pond, evoking the feel of a Japanese garden. He built the Japanese-style arched, wooden footbridge based on the bridges he studied in Japanese prints.

Examine *The Japanese Footbridge*. Painted in summertime, it is one of a series of views made in 1899. The pond nearly fills the canvas—sky is indicated only through its reflection in the water. Pink, yellow, and white lilies float on the shimmering surface of pond, and the foliage and grasses at the banks are mirrored in the water. Spanning the width of the painting, the bridge arcs over the water with its curved reflection below.

Imagine yourself standing on the bridge.

Listen: *What sounds might you hear?*

Look up: *Is it a sunny day?*

Look down: *Can you tell how deep the pond is?*

Take a deep breath: *What do you smell in the air?*

3

A Water Garden

In 1892, Monet bought a piece of land across the road from his house for an ambitious project—to create a water garden. Diverting a small stream, he formed a pool and surrounded it with an artful arrangement of flowers, reeds, willow trees, and bushes. The surface of the pond was covered with waterlilies, and a wooden bridge was erected over it.

Monet was fascinated by water and the ever-changing reflections on its surface. He insisted that his gardeners keep the pond scrupulously clean—even dusting the surface—so that reflections of clouds and sky, trees and shrubs would appear clearly on the water. The water garden became the focus of Monet's art for the last twenty-five years of his career. He made more than 250 paintings of the waterlily pond.



A master of the woodblock print, Hiroshige depicted the contemporary life and landscape of Japan, including famous sites like the Tenjin Shrine. In this composition, the steep arch of the famous bridge frames a tea house that borders the pond.

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), *The Drum Bridge from the Wisteria Arbor on the Precincts of the Tenjin Shrine at Kameido*, 1856, from *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio, Mary A. Ainsworth Bequest, 1950

book nook

These books about Claude Monet and his gardens can be found at your local library or bookstore.

A Picnic with Monet

By Julie Merberg and Suzanne Bober | ages 2 and up

A Blue Butterfly: A Story about Claude Monet

By Bijou Le Tord | ages 4 and up

Once Upon a Lily Pad: Froggy Love in Monet's Garden

By Joan Sweeney, illustrated by Kathleen Fain | ages 4 and up

The Magical Garden of Claude Monet

By Laurence Anholt | ages 6 and up

Charlotte in Giverny

By Joan MacPhail Knight, illustrated by Melissa Sweet | ages 6 and up

Linnea in Monet's Garden

By Cristina Bjork, illustrated by Lena Anderson | ages 6 and up

A Walk in Monet's Garden

By Francesca Crespi | ages 8 and up

Claude Monet (Artists in Their Time)

By Susie Hodge | ages 8 and up

Eyewitness Art: Monet

By Jude Welton | ages 8 and up

Monet and the Impressionists for Kids: Their Lives and Ideas, 21 Activities

By Carol Sabbethages | 10 and up

The Essential Claude Monet

By Catherine Morris | ages 12 and up

try this! activity



above: Claude Monet, *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil*, 1880, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection

top: Claude Monet, *The Artist's Garden at Argenteuil (A Corner of the Garden with Dahlias)*, 1873, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Janice H. Levin, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

Monet's Flowers

More than anything, I must have flowers, always, always. – Claude Monet

Before moving to Giverny, Monet had flower gardens at his homes in Argenteuil and Vétheuil, as shown in two paintings at the National Gallery of Art: *The Artist's Garden at Argenteuil (A Corner of the Garden with Dahlias)* and *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil*. Monet's favorite flowers, some pictured in these works, included: peonies, poppies, daffodils, chrysanthemums, irises, tulips, begonias, lilacs, roses, orchids, dahlias, sunflowers, gladioli, rhododendrons, zinnias, azaleas, hydrangeas, wisteria, and waterlilies.

Flowers provided Monet with a full palette of colors from which to paint.



Find all these colors in Monet's garden paintings at the National Gallery, and then find the French words for the colors in the word search below:

ROUGE, ORANGE, JAUNE, VERT, BLEU, VIOLET, ROSE, BLANC

V O M J A U N E
E I D E U Q C K
T S O E S T I R
R A L L N O F O
E B A J E V R U
V Y P U W T I G
B L A N C H L E
I S E G N A R O



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The Impressionists at Argenteuil

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Impressionism



During the late 1860s and 1870s the impressionists developed a style of painting that departed radically from existing traditions of European art. Rejecting the notion that high art should represent elevated subjects from mythology, history, or religious sources, these avant-garde artists turned their attention to the people, sites, and scenes of their own age. One contemporary critic wrote: "To paint what they see, to reproduce nature without interpreting it and without arranging it, seems to be the goal of these artists." The impressionists wished to capture momentary effects, such as the flux and movement of modern life or the fleeting properties of light on forms in nature, and they devised new

techniques of painting to achieve this aim. Their broken brushwork, irregular surfaces, heightened color, and sense of spontaneity gave physical expression to their perceptions of a particular time and place. Contemporaries regarded the paintings as crude and sketchy, and at the first public exhibition of these works, the artists were disparagingly called mere "impressionists" by the conservative art critic Louis Leroy.

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Claude Monet: The Series Paintings

By the 1880s, the diverse artists most closely associated with impressionism moved into other modes of painting. Camille Pissarro experimented with neoimpressionism, whose adherents explored color theory and other scientific bases for their art. Auguste Renoir went to Italy and was inspired by works of the Renaissance to adopt a more classical style. And Monet began to explore the same subject repeatedly in what are known today as his series paintings: grainstacks, poplar trees, Rouen Cathedral, and other subjects, some near his home, others in places where he traveled, such as England, Norway, and Italy. Finally, in the last decades of his life, Monet devoted his entire artistic attention to the lily pond in the garden he created at Giverny.

The series pictures diverged from the spontaneity of earlier impressionist work. Though Monet began them in front of his subject — often working on several canvases simultaneously — he spent many long hours reworking them in his studio, sometimes over a period of years. “The further I go,” he wrote, “the better I see that it takes a great deal of work to succeed in rendering what I want to render: ‘instantaneity,’ above all the *enveloppe*, the same light spread over everything, and I’m more than ever disgusted at things that come easily, at the first attempt.”

By *enveloppe*, Monet was referring to the air itself, the unifying atmosphere that lay between him and his subject. As a younger man, he had sought to capture the visual effects of light and weather by painting quickly and directly out of doors, but now he pursued the most ephemeral effects slowly and with deliberation. Color, texture, and the moods they could produce assumed as great an importance in his work as the paintings’ subject, be it cathedral, river, or his beloved garden. Monet also sought to unify works in his multi-canvas series, bringing them into a whole, a goal most important to him in his late water lily pictures.



Claude Monet
French, 1840 – 1926
Banks of the Seine, Vétheuil, 1880

During the early years of impressionism, one of Monet’s primary intentions was to capture fleeting effects of light and atmosphere. Working quickly, out of doors, he sought to transcribe with directness and spontaneity his sensory experience of the landscape before him. But by about 1880, when this picture was painted, Monet was beginning to show more interest in the painted surface itself. This interest would lead him to explore the same subject repeatedly in his series paintings, seeking to unify individual canvases and harmonize each series as a whole.

Here, brushstrokes vary in response to the different textures they portray — contrast, for example, the quick horizontal skips in the river’s gently rippled surface with the rounder, swirling forms of the sky. But it is the foreground, where thick grasses and flowers are painted with crowded, exuberant strokes, that draws our attention. These heavy layers of paint were probably not completed on the spot, but instead carefully reworked in the studio. The strokes assume an importance in their own right, becoming decorative as well as descriptive. Monet, however, never strays far from the natural forms that were his inspiration.

Oil on canvas, 73.4 x 100.5 cm (28 7/8 x 29 1/16 in.)
Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.177



Claude Monet
French, 1840 – 1926
Rouen Cathedral, West Façade, Sunlight and Rouen Cathedral, West Façade, 1894

In late January or early February 1892, Monet rented rooms across from Rouen cathedral. He remained until spring, painting its looming façade many times, most often as we see it here, close up and cropped to the sides. The next winter he returned to paint the cathedral again, making in all more than thirty views of it. But it was not so much the deeply carved Gothic façade that was Monet’s subject as it was the atmosphere — the *enveloppe* — that surrounded the building. “To me the motif itself is an insignificant factor,” Monet said. “What I want to reproduce is what exists between the motif and me.”

He worked on a number of canvases simultaneously, moving from one to the next as the light and weather changed. From the late 1860s Monet had attempted to transcribe his sensory impression of the landscape, but his intentions were now different. He continued to claim that his works were spontaneous records of his visual experience, but increasingly, he elaborated on them in the studio, seeking qualities not strictly based on observation. With each layer of paint he added, in fact, the further the picture seemed to depart from its subject, becoming pure paint and effect.

Oil on canvas: 100.1 x 65.8 cm (39 3/8 x 25 7/8 in.); 100.1 x 65.9 cm (39 3/8 x 25 15/16 in.). Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.179 and 1963.10.49

He brought the cathedral paintings back to his home in Giverny (about halfway between Paris and Rouen). Heavily painted surfaces reveal him struggling at times to finish these paintings. Monet conceived of them as a single project and did not consider any one complete until all were finished. He finally exhibited twenty of them in Paris in 1895. Monet’s aims were no longer to simply record his sensory experience, but to explore light and color more deliberately as purely artistic concerns and as expressions of mood. He was seeking, he wrote a friend while working on the cathedral series, “more serious qualities, that one might live longer with one of these canvases.”



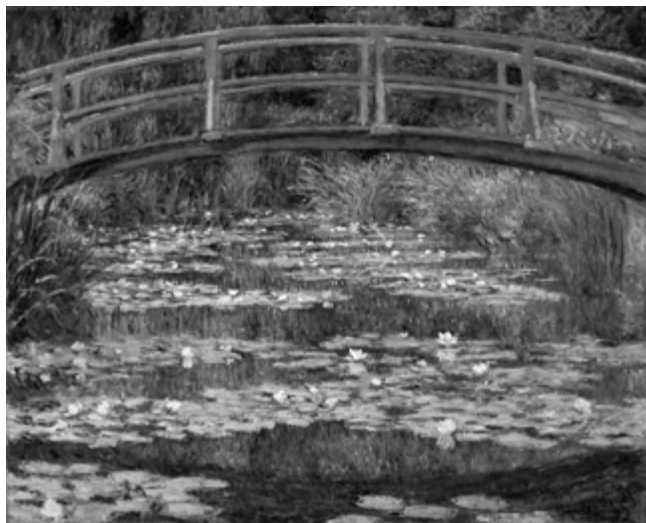
Claude Monet
French, 1840 – 1926

The Seine at Giverny, 1897

From the early 1860s until 1889, not a single year passed that Monet did not paint the Seine. Its flower-strewn banks and watery reflections appear in six of his paintings in the National Gallery of Art. In 1896, though, he began a more systematic study of the river near his home at Giverny, where he moved in 1883. Lured by the lifting haze and quickly changing light of early morning, he often rose before sunrise — at 3:30 a.m. — to be at his easel by dawn. He worked from a flat-bottomed boat tied up near the bank. But, as with his other series paintings, Monet only began the pictures outdoors, elaborating them over a period of months in his studio, taking special pains to adjust their light. These paintings, more precisely than his other series pictures, show the progression of time and the subtle changes in light as hours, even minutes, pass.

This painting is related to the early morning series, but is even less defined. The paint here, although it is often thickly applied on the canvas, gives the impression of transparency, like thin veils of mist. This *enveloppe* of atmosphere unifies the picture with a vaporous luminosity. Rather than focus on the trees, the line of the water, or sky, Monet subsumes these individual shapes to a soft light that is the painting's true subject. The surface of the canvas becomes a decorative pattern of curving arabesques.

Oil on canvas, 81.5 x 100.5 cm (32 1/16 x 39 7/16 in.)
Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.180



Claude Monet
French, 1840 – 1926

The Japanese Footbridge, 1899

In the last decades of Monet's life, his prized water garden at Giverny became a subject the artist explored obsessively, painting it 250 times between 1900 and his death. Eventually, it was his only subject. He began construction of the water garden as soon as he moved to Giverny, petitioning local authorities to divert water from a nearby river. The resulting landscape was Monet's invention entirely, and he used it as his creative focus and inspiration.

The treatment of the water's surface, like the *enveloppe* of light and atmosphere that bathed the cathedrals and other serial subjects, unified the Giverny work. Here, the sky has disappeared from the painting; the lush foliage rises all the way to the horizon, and space is flattened by the decorative arch of the bridge. Our attention is focused onto the painting itself and held there, not drawn into the scene depicted. In later lily pond paintings, even more of the setting evaporates, and the water's surface alone occupies the entire canvas. Floating lily pads and mirrored reflections assume equal stature, blurring distinctions between solid objects and transitory effects of light. Monet had always been interested in reflections, seeing their fragmented forms as a natural equivalent for his own broken brushwork.

Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 101.6 cm (32 x 40 in.). Gift of Victoria Nebeker Coberly, in memory of her son, John W. Mudd, and Walter H. and Lenore Annenberg 1992.9.1



Claude Monet
French, 1840 – 1926

The Houses of Parliament, Sunset, 1903

Monet and his family lived in England briefly, seeking refuge there during the Franco-Prussian war (1870 – 1871), and returned in the late 1880s, staying with his artist friends James McNeill Whistler and John Singer Sargent, expatriate Americans who acted as his guides and translators. He also spent time studying the Thames River.

Between 1899 and 1901, Monet made three trips to London specifically to paint. He went in winter, when the city was clouded with fog and the smoke of coal fires. "Without fog," Monet said, "London would not be a beautiful city. It is the fog that gives it its magnificent breadth." From his rooms on the sixth floor of the Savoy Hotel, Monet's view up and down the Thames provided him subject matter for several series pictures. He could see Waterloo Bridge, Charing Cross Bridge, and the Houses of Parliament. In all he completed more than one hundred Thames paintings. Most, like this one, render the city's famous landmarks as darkened silhouettes cloaked in the misty sky. He worked at prescribed times of day to capture this backlit effect, often complaining about the rapidity with which conditions changed.

In 1904, Monet exhibited thirty-seven London pictures, including this one and *Waterloo Bridge, Gray Day* at the gallery of his Paris dealer.

Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 92.5 cm (32 x 36 7/16 in.)
Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.48



Claude Monet
French, 1840 – 1926

Waterloo Bridge, Gray Day, 1903

With their smokestacks, barge traffic, and busy bridges, Monet's London paintings were emphatically urban — the only urban subjects he painted after the 1870s. After returning to France following the Franco-Prussian War, he moved from Paris, preferring to live nearer the countryside. His interest in London and its light-filtering fog may have been spurred by admiration for the English artist J.M.W. Turner. Turner's luminous views challenged many traditional ideas of landscape painting. By the 1890s, paintings of the London fog were an established and popular subject among artists including American expatriate James McNeill Whistler (whose *Grey and Silver: Chelsea Wharf* is in the National Gallery of Art collection).

Like Whistler, most artists used a subdued palette and a limited range of colors to reproduce the grayness of the city. Monet's London paintings are quite different. Even in these subjects dulled by fog and coal dust, he perceived color in every form. Drifting mists are painted with delicate shades of lilac and pink, and the sky is tinged with pale olive. The shaded arches of the bridge are darkened with blues, not black, and its traffic is highlighted with brilliant flecks of scarlet.

Oil on canvas, 65.1 x 100 cm (25 7/8 x 39 3/8 in.)
Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.183