

Claude Monet 1840-1926

Claude Monet (CLOAD, MOW-NAY) always said that he painted “directly from nature” and he tried to show his impressions even when the effects were constantly changing. He painted constantly and in his lifetime produced over 3,000 paintings. He spent his whole life trying to capture the freshness of light outdoors.

Monet was born in Paris in November 1840 but moved with his parents to LeHavre on the coast where his father went into the grocery business. Monet did not like school. He liked to roam outdoors and spent his time in the classroom drawing **CARICATURES** of his teachers (drawing cartoons of them).

In 1859, Monet moved to Paris, taking with him his special love of painting outdoors. He met artists, poets, and writers who often got together to exchange ideas and discuss the many new discoveries of the time.

When he was 25 years old, Monet had two paintings accepted in the Salon, the traditional art show in Paris that all artists wished to enter. Several years later, he was rejected and his life became very difficult. He was poor, had a wife and a child to support and sometimes cut his canvases to pieces so his creditors wouldn't get them.

In 1874, Monet and some of his friends who had also been rejected by the Salon, organized their own show which the critics called the “Salon des Refuses.” One critic made fun of Monet's painting. He wrote, “You can't see anything. It is only an impression” when talking about Monet's painting, “Impression-Sunrise.” Many of the people who came to see these paintings made fun of them because they were so unclear, hazy, and looked rushed. People began to call the painters who painted the outdoors like Monet, **IMPRESSIONISTS**.

Before Monet, landscape painters generally made their sketches outside but they always painted their pictures in the dull studio light. Therefore, their paintings did not sparkle like Monet's. Monet painted in a very different manner. He felt that he had to set up his easel and paint outside to capture the shifting spots of light and shadows this was called “plein air” (French for open air). He did not use browns, greys, or blacks for shadows. Instead, he used blues and purples. He put bright spots of color next to each other, and he let the eye of the viewer mix the colors. Monet made his eyes act as a **PRISM** to break light up into different bands of colors. Using different colors to describe an object that is a solid color is called **BROKEN COLOR**.

Monet discovered that **COMPLEMENTARY COLORS** placed next to each other seemed brighter and more intense.

Monet tried to paint nature in all of its moods-sunlight, rain, snow, fog, sunrise, sunset, and cloudy days. He did many paintings of one thing (a cathedral, a haystack, a bridge) at different times of day because the light changed so quickly. He had special boxes

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built with dividers to hold as many as one hundred paintings at one time. He painted very quickly, covering the whole canvas with spots of paint. Applying paint so that the brush strokes can be seen is called **IMPASTO**. Every time the light changed, Monet would change canvases. He could paint on 20 canvases in one day. For many days he would work on the same canvas at the same time of day until the painting was finished.

Monet was especially fascinated with the effects of light on water. He built a floating studio; a boat where he could sit and paint. It was like a large raft with a canopy where Monet could sit under it and paint so he would not get sunburned.

In 1883, Monet moved to the town of Giverny 50 miles northwest of Paris. This would become his studio for the remainder of his life. He bought the house and the land around it little by little and created gardens all around it. Monet spent the second half of his life nurturing the garden and painting light as it fell on all that grew there. In his continuing fascination with water, Monet built a pond on his land and filled it with water lilies. He also built a bridge over this pond that was inspired the Japanese style bridges. Monet carefully planned his gardens so that flowers bloomed during every season and imported rare plants from all over the world. Monet had six gardeners that would help him and every morning they would go around and wipe drops off of the lily pads so the water would not distort the light.

When Monet was an old man, he got cataracts on his eyes that almost made him blind. He continued to paint but most of his pictures during this time were full of red. Finally, he allowed a doctor to operate to remove the cataracts. Luckily, when his eyes healed, he could again see clearly.

Monet died in the winter of 1926 when the garden was at rest and there were no flower to delight his eyes and his heart.

His influence on future painters has been tremendous. He changed the way we look at the world. Monet inspired a whole group of artists to paint with bright colors and expressive brush strokes. Eventually, subject matter disappeared from their paintings. Light, color, and swirling paint became the subject matter of the paintings.

The gardens, the house, three studios at Giverny have all been fully restored and was opened in 1980 for the public visit.

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