

Claude Monet

FRENCH PAINTER

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Claude Monet, in full **Oscar-Claude Monet**, (born November 14, 1840, [Paris](#), France—died December 5, 1926, Giverny), French painter who was the initiator, leader, and unswerving advocate of the [Impressionist](#) style. In his mature works, Monet developed his method of producing repeated studies of the same motif in series, changing canvases with the light or as his interest shifted. These series were frequently exhibited in groups—for example, his images of haystacks (1890/91) and the Rouen cathedral (1894). At his home in Giverny, Monet created the water-lily pond that served as inspiration for his last series of paintings. His popularity soared in the second half of the 20th century, when his works traveled the world in museum exhibitions that attracted record-breaking crowds and marketed popular commercial items featuring imagery from his art.

TOP QUESTIONS

[What was Claude Monet's early life like?](#)

[Where was Claude Monet educated?](#)

[Why is Claude Monet famous?](#)

[How did Claude Monet influence others?](#)

Childhood And Early Works

When Claude, the eldest son of Adolphe Monet, a grocer, was five years old, the family moved to the Normandy coast, near [Le Havre](#), where his father took over the management of his family's thriving ship-chandlery and grocery business. This event has more than biographical significance, for it was Monet's childhood, spent along the beaches, and the intimate knowledge he gained of the sea and the rapidly shifting Norman weather, that would one day give rise to his fresh vision of nature. Monet's first success as an artist came when he was 15, with the sale of caricatures that were carefully observed and well drawn. In these early years he also executed pencil sketches of sailing ships, which were almost technical in their clear descriptiveness. His aunt, Marie-Jeanne Lecadre, was an amateur painter, and, perhaps at her suggestion, Claude went to study drawing with a local artist. But his life as a painter did not begin until he was befriended by [Eugène Boudin](#),

who introduced the somewhat arrogant student to the practice—then uncommon—of painting in the open air. The experience set the direction for Monet, who for more than 60 years would concentrate on visible phenomena and on the innovation of effective methods to transform perception into pigment. Although oil landscapes had been painted at least since the 16th century, they usually were produced in the studio—recollections, rather than direct impressions, of observations of nature. The English painters John Constable and J.M.W. Turner made small oil sketches out-of-doors before 1810, but it is unlikely that Monet knew these studies. He first visited Paris in 1859–60, where he was impressed by the work of the Barbizon-school painters Charles Daubigny and Constant Troyon. To his family’s annoyance, he refused to enroll in the École des Beaux-Arts. Instead, he frequented the haunts of advanced artists and worked at the Académie Suisse, where he met Camille Pissarro. This informal training was interrupted by a call to military service; he served from 1861 to 1862 in Algeria, where he was excited by the African light and colour. Monet’s choice of Algeria for service was perhaps a result of his admiration for the Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix, whose colouristic work had been influenced by a visit to Morocco in 1832.

In 1862 Monet returned to Le Havre, perhaps because of illness, and again painted the sea with Boudin, while also meeting the Dutch marine painter Johan Barthold Jongkind. Later that year he continued to study in Paris, this time with the academician Charles Gleyre, in whose atelier he met the artists Frédéric Bazille, Alfred Sisley, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. After disagreements with their master, the group departed for the village of Chailly-en-Bière, near Barbizon in the forest of Fontainebleau. It was also during this period—or at least before 1872—that Monet discovered Japanese prints, the decorativeness and flatness of which were to have a strong influence on the development of modern painting in France. The exceptional achievements of Monet’s prolific youthful period can be measured in works completed between 1865 and 1870, before he had begun to fragment his brushstrokes into the characteristic broken touches that were to become the hallmark of Impressionist style. One of the most ambitious of these early works (which was never finished, supposedly because of negative comments by Gustave Courbet) was *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* (1865–66; “Luncheon on the Grass”), named after Édouard Manet’s notorious painting shown in the Salon des Refusés in 1863. In contrast to Manet’s masterpiece, which was a shocking adaptation of a Renaissance visual idea to a contemporary setting, Monet’s painting was an utterly contemporary yet unprovocative representation of a group of fashionably dressed picnickers in the forest of Fontainebleau. Monet did share with Manet, however, a concern for representing actual scenes of modern life rather than contrived historical, romantic, or fanciful subjects. Thus, Monet’s *Déjeuner* was an extension, by virtue of a more immediate empiricism, of the Realism of Courbet.



• **Monet, Claude: *Madame Louis Joachim Gaudibert*** *Madame Louis Joachim Gaudibert*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1868; in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris. *Giraudon/Art Resource, New York*

• **Monet, Claude: *Still Life with Flowers and Fruit*** *Still Life with Flowers and Fruit*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1869; in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. *J. Paul Getty Museum (object no. 83.PA.215); digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program*

[Impressionism](#), broadly viewed, was a celebration of the pleasures of middle-class life; indeed, Monet's subject matter from this period often involved domestic

scenes featuring his wife, son, and [garden](#). Yet, painting *la vie moderne* (“modern life”) was not to be the primary aim of Monet’s art. Of more significance in his case was his ceaseless search for painterly means to implement his radical view of nature. More so than his ambitious figure paintings, such works as *On the Bank of the Seine, Bennecourt* (1868) or [The Beach at Sainte-Adresse](#) (1867) give a clear accounting of Monet’s advance toward the Impressionist style. In the beach and sea pictures of 1865–67 Monet was plainly not trying to reproduce faithfully the scene before him as examined in detail but rather attempting to record on the spot the impression that relaxed, momentary vision might receive—what is seen rather than what is known, with all its vitality and movement. Boats, buildings, incidental figures, and the pebble beach are swiftly brushed in as flat colour patterns, with little attention paid to their weight or solidity.



The Beach at Sainte-Adresse, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1867; in the Art Institute of Chicago. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection, 1933.439/Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago

First Impressionist Paintings

Monet’s life during the 1860s was precarious and itinerant, and he sold almost nothing; but several works were accepted for exhibition in the yearly [Salons](#), most notably, and with great success, a fine but not yet Impressionist portrait of his future wife, Camille. Having already painted in Paris, Le Havre, Chailly, Honfleur, Trouville, and Fécamp and at other stations between Paris and the sea, Monet

ended the 1860s at the [Seine River](#) resort known as La Grenouillère, at Bougival, where he and [Renoir](#) worked together for the first time. In canvases almost identical in style, they made rapid notations of pleasure-seekers and bathers, rowboats bobbing in the foreground, and the scintillating reflections in the lapping water. Regarded by Monet as “bad sketches,” they were precursors of the Impressionist style. Both artists’ Bougival studies interpret the light and movement of outdoor life in strong, abbreviating strokes, improvised at the moment of perception, that serve as equivalents for visual experiences never before committed to canvas in such a direct manner. In 1870 at Trouville, in broad, assured gestures, Monet painted a study of Camille on the beach. It is as animated an example of visual realism as had ever been painted: grains of sand remain embedded in the pigment.



Monet, Claude: *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* Camille Monet on a Garden Bench, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1873; in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. 60.6 × 80.3 cm. Photograph by Katie Chao. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 2002, bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002 (2002.62.1)

As the 1870s began, Monet continued his pursuit of natural phenomena. In order to avoid the [Franco-German War](#), he left his son and Camille, whom he had just married, and traveled to London. There, with [Pissarro](#), he was introduced by Daubigny to [Paul Durand-Ruel](#), who was to become his dealer. In 1871 and 1872 he painted canals, boats, and windmills in the Netherlands and worked again at Le Havre. On his return, Monet rented a house at [Argenteuil](#), on the Seine near Paris. The years he lived there mark the height of the Impressionist movement. He helped organize an independent exhibition, apart from the official Salon, of the

Impressionists' work in 1874. *Impression: Sunrise* (1872), one of Monet's works at the exhibition, inspired the journalist Louis Leroy to give the group their name.



Monet, Claude: *Poppies* (also called *Poppy Field*), oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1873; in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris. *Giraudon/Art Resource, New York*

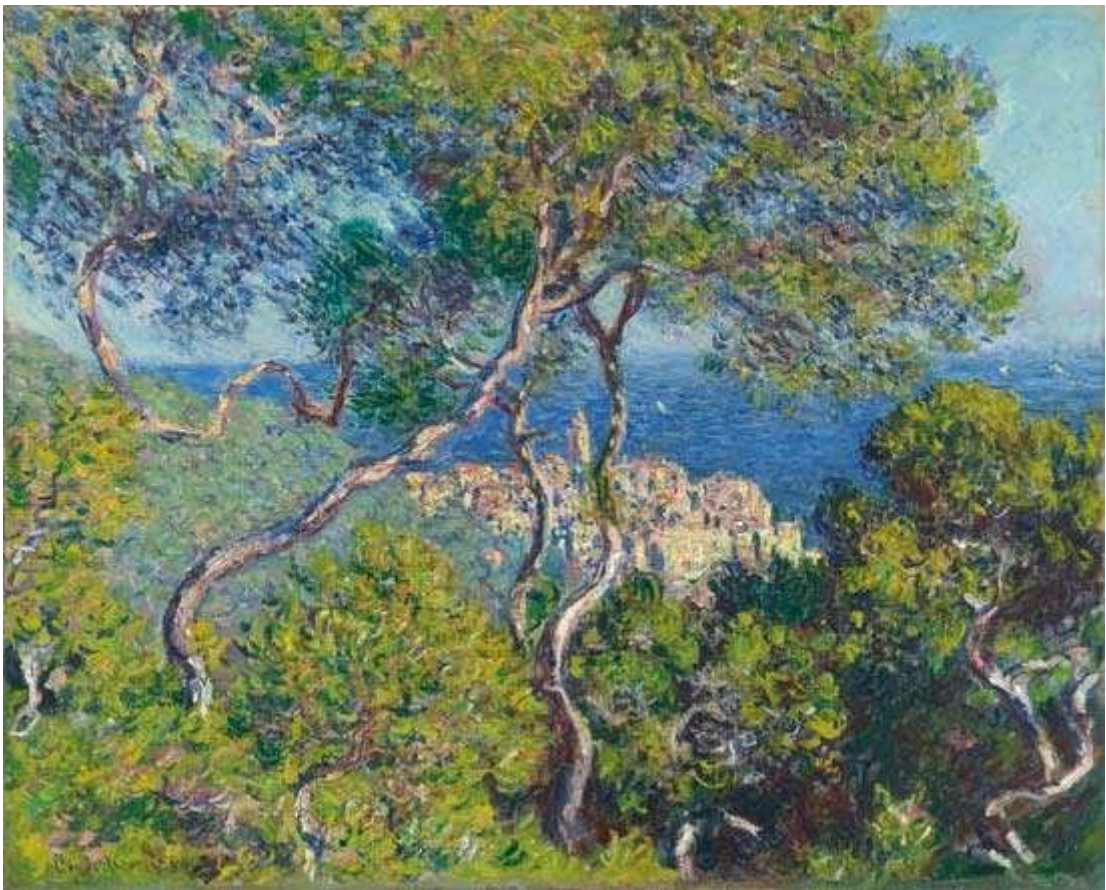
Later Impressionism

Monet's celebrated method of producing works in series, each representing the same motif under different light and weather conditions, was not fully implemented until the 1890s, but what is usually regarded as the first series was executed in or around the Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris during the winter of 1876–77. A total break with the customary Impressionist subjects, these works portray the train engines belching smoke and steam in the great shed, recalling J.M.W. Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway* of 1844 and prefiguring the mechanical subjects painted by Italian Futurists after 1909. Monet's life was less happy after he moved to Vétheuil, farther from Paris. In 1876 a liaison began between Monet and Alice Hoschedé, the wife of a department-store owner and collector. Monet had incurred a burden of debts in Argenteuil, and Camille was pregnant and ill. At Vétheuil the Monets were joined by Hoschedé, who had left her husband, and six of her children. Using funds from her dowry she assumed Monet's debts and cared for Camille, who died in September 1879.



Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1877; in the Art Institute of Chicago. Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection, 1933.1158/Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago

By 1881 the original Impressionist group had begun to disintegrate, although it was still to hold two more exhibitions—the eighth and last (in which Monet did not show) in 1886, after the advent of [Neo-Impressionism](#). Only Monet continued with the same fervour to carry on the scrutiny of nature. Among the sites he chose during the 1880s were Pourville, Étretat, [Fécamp](#), and Varangéville in [Normandy](#); the rugged and isolated Breton island of Belle-Île; the wild Creuse River valley; [Menton](#) and [Antibes](#) in the Midi; and [Bordighera](#) in Italy. In 1886 he made a second visit to the Netherlands, to paint the tulip fields, before important sojourns at Étretat and Belle-Île.



Monet, Claude: *Cliff Walk at Pourville* *Cliff Walk at Pourville*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1882; in the Art Institute of Chicago. *Getty Images—Photos.com/Thinkstock*
Bordighera, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1884; in the Art Institute of Chicago. *Potter Palmer Collection*, 1922.426/Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago



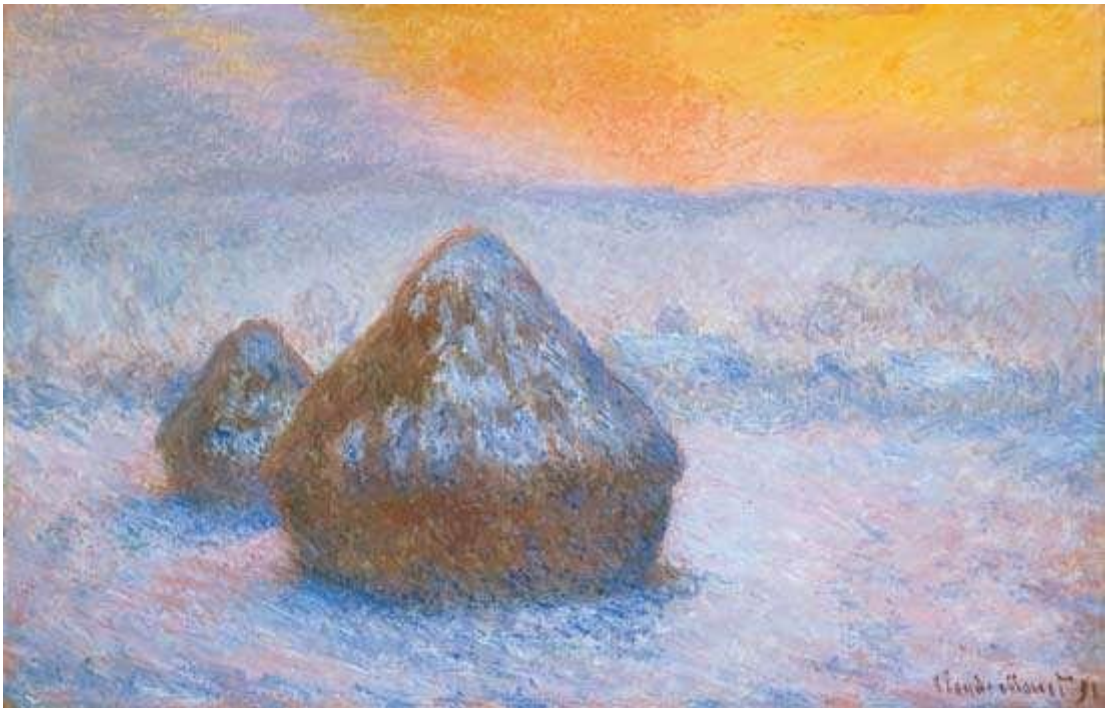
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This or That? Manet vs. Monet

Which of the two artists was considered a true Impressionist?

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In 1883 Monet, Hoschedé, her children, and Monet's sons, Jean and Michel, settled at [Giverny](#), a hamlet near Vernon, 52 miles (84 km) from Paris, on the tiny Epte River. There Monet purchased a farmhouse surrounded by an orchard, which was to be his home until his death and is now a French [national monument](#). After the travels of the 1880s, Monet spent the '90s at or near Giverny, concentrating on one series after another.



• Claude Monet's home in Giverny, France. © Adam & Chelsey Parrott-Sheffer
• **Monet, Claude:** *Stacks of Wheat (Sunset, Snow Effect)* *Stacks of Wheat (Sunset, Snow Effect)*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1890/91; in the Art Institute of Chicago. Potter Palmer Collection, 1922.431/Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago

Last Years

After 1900, two ambitious projects, both far from Giverny, concluded Monet's search for new motifs. The first (for which he made at least three trips to London between 1899 and 1904) was the extensive multiple series representing the [River Thames](#), the [Waterloo](#) and [Charing Cross](#) bridges, and the [Houses of Parliament](#). The works—exotic coloration and mysterious romantic mood—recall the Thames paintings of Turner and [James McNeill Whistler](#). In these paintings it is atmosphere, more than the particularities of these structures, that is Monet's subject; buildings and bridges are less tangible than the pulsating brushstrokes that give volume to the light-filled fog and mist. The second and last of the architectural motifs Monet pursued was the canals and palaces of [Venice](#). Monet began this series in 1908 and continued in 1909, although he worked on these subjects at Giverny until 1912. Venice was a perfect Impressionist subject, but the light, water, movement, architecture, and reflections in the water are more generalized in these works than the specific weather effects of the [haystack](#) and cathedral series.





Waterloo Bridge, Sunlight Effect, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1903; in the Art Institute of Chicago. 65.7 × 101 cm. © Photos.com/Thinkstock

Monet, Claude: *Houses of Parliament, London**Houses of Parliament, London*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1900/01; in the Art Institute of Chicago. 81 × 92 cm. © Photos.com/Thinkstock

In 1893 Monet had bought a strip of marshland across the road from his house and flower garden, through which flowed a tributary of the Epte. By diverting this stream, he began to construct a [water-lily](#) garden. Soon weeping willows, iris, and bamboo grew around a free-form pool, clusters of lily pads and blossoms floated on the quiet water, and a Japanese bridge closed the composition at one end. By 1900 this unique product of Monet's imagination (for his Impressionism had become more subjective) was in itself a major work of environmental art—an exotic lotusland within which he was to meditate and paint for almost 30 years. The first canvases he created depicting lilies, water, and the Japanese bridge were only about one square yard, but their unprecedented open composition, with the large blossoms and pads suspended as if in space, and the azure water in which clouds were reflected, implied an encompassing environment beyond the frame.



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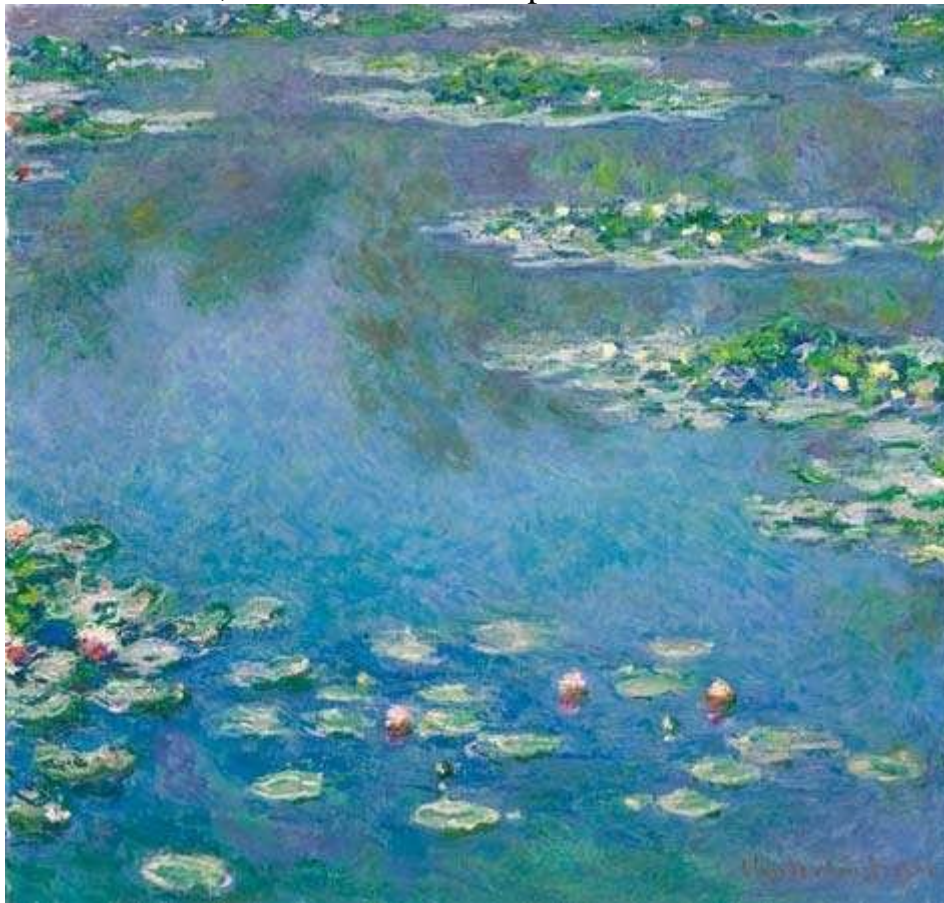


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Monet, Claude: *Water Lily Pond* *Water Lily Pond*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1900; in the Art Institute of Chicago. *Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection, 1933.441/Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago*

Monet, Claude: *The Japanese Footbridge**The Japanese Footbridge*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, c. 1920–22; in the Museum of Modern Art, New York City. 89.5 × 116.3 cm. *Photograph by Stephen Sandoval. Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Grace Rainey Rogers Fund. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris*

This concept of embracing spatiality, new to the history of painting and only implicit in the first water-lily paintings, unfolded during the years from 1915 until the artist's death into a cycle of huge murals to be installed in Paris in two 80-foot oval rooms in the Orangerie of the Tuileries. These were described in 1952 by the painter André Masson as “the Sistine Chapel of Impressionism.” This crowning achievement of Monet's long, probing study of nature—his striving to render his impressions, as he said, “in the face of the most fugitive effects”—was not dedicated until after his death. The many large studies for the Orangerie murals, as well as other unprecedented and unique works painted in the water garden between 1916 and 1925, were almost unknown until the 1950s but are now distributed throughout the major private collections and museums of the world. Despite failing eyesight due to cataracts, Monet continued to paint almost until his death in 1926.





• *Water Lilies*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1906; in the Art Institute of Chicago. *Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection*, 1933.1157/Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago

Monet, Claude: *Water Lilies*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet 1919; in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. *Photograph by Katie Chao. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 1998, bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002 (1998.325.2)*

Legacy

Although critical acclaim was slow in coming, Monet attracted the dedicated support of collectors throughout his career, most notably from Americans who discovered his work in the 1880s. His influence on other artists was wide-ranging, from his near contemporaries such as [Vincent van Gogh](#) to a diverse new generation of artists such as [Émile Bernard](#), [Pierre Bonnard](#), [Henri Matisse](#), and [Maurice de Vlaminck](#). During the years 1886 to 1914, a predominantly American colony of artists gathered around him in Giverny and regarded him as an exemplar of modern French painting. They adopted his fresh palette, subject matter, and spontaneous style and eventually introduced these elements to American art.



Monet, Claude: *Chrysanthemums* *Chrysanthemums*, oil on canvas by Claude Monet, 1882; in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Photograph by AlkaliSoaps. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.106)

After his death, Monet's influence on contemporary art ebbed among the avant-garde, who favoured the more radical examples of artists such as van Gogh, [Paul Cézanne](#), [Matisse](#), and [Marcel Duchamp](#). A revival of interest in his work occurred in the early 1950s. Monet's epic scale and formal innovations influenced [Abstract Expressionist](#) painters such as [Mark Rothko](#) and [Jackson Pollock](#), and a general scholarly reassessment of his importance began to develop. Wildly popular retrospective exhibitions of his work toured the world during the last decades of the 20th century and established his unparalleled public appeal, sustaining his reputation as one of the most significant and popular figures in the modern [Western painting](#) tradition.

William C. Seitz *The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*