

Claude Monet

(1840 - 1926)

Claude Monet is considered one of the fathers of Impressionism. His work is instantly recognizable and well-loved by the general public and art critics alike.

Born in 1840, Monet spent his childhood in Le Havre. He took early painting lessons from Eugene Boudin, who inspired the young artist to paint outdoor sketches. Monet felt that his destiny was to paint outside and to capture the constantly changing effects of light on water.

In 1859, Monet traveled to Paris, where he befriended artists Pissaro and Manet. In 1862, his parents sent him to study at the studio of Salon painter Charles Gleyre. At this studio, he met other artists who would form the core group of Impressionists: Renoir, Sisley and Bazille. At Gleyre's studio, these artists learned the traditional techniques and styles against which they would eventually rebel.

Monet married in 1870, he settled in Argenteuil the following year. In Argenteuil, he set up an easel on a boat and painted his way up and down the Seine in order to capture the outdoor atmosphere. At a time when traditional technique and indoor painting were the norm, Monet's methods were new and unusual. Other artists, including Renoir, joined and painted with Monet on his boat.

In 1874, the 'Societe anonyme des artistes peintres, sculptures, graveurs' held a public exhibition before the annual Paris Salon. Monet showed a painting called Impression: Sunrise, and it is this title which gave the group of exhibitors the name 'The Impressionists'. The work demonstrates Monet's method, which exemplifies Impressionism. The artist used a limited palette of colors and brushstrokes. He focused on the essentials and not the details of the scene, but still managed to capture a complicated reality. He created an impression of a fleeting moment by recording the atmosphere of a particular time and place. Throughout his career, Monet was determined to record the flux of nature, and was well known for painting outside in all types of weather.

The 1874 exhibit was a financial failure, but the group continued to exhibit together until 1886. In the late 1870s, Monet began to experiment with a series of pictures that allowed him to demonstrate the changes which occur in one outdoor location at different times of day. His Water Lilies is probably the most famous of such series and could be considered

the culmination of his life's work. After settling in Giverny in 1883, Monet began painting the lilies in his backyard pond. From 1900 until his death in 1926, he painted these flowers hundreds of times. He experimented with layering of paint and the relationships between colors. In a sense, the paint itself became the primary subject of his work.

Like all the Impressionists, Monet dedicated himself to his medium first. His technique dictated the form of his paintings. This style existed in opposition to the intellectual and methodical technique of the academic tradition. Monet, along with the other Impressionists, broke the established rules and guided the development of art. Although originally disregarded, the work of Monet and the Impressionists is beloved and admired today.

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