Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Boulevard Saint-Denis, Argenteuil, in winter

1875

oil on canvas

Gift of Richard Saltonstall, 1978 1978.633

The motif is insignificant to me, I am interested in reproducing what is between the motif and me.
– Monet

This snow scene offers an unusually raw (and somewhat unlovely) glimpse of Argenteuil, where Monet lived during the 1870s. At the time, the town was in a process of transformation from a small village to a Parisian commuter suburb. A railway embankment looms at left, separated by an improvised fence from the newly widened boulevard, where pedestrians scurry towards the station, umbrellas tilted against the wind. At right, Monet's own house, with a peaked roof and double balcony, overlooks the snowy street and train tracks. In 1876, Monet described Argenteuil as a place 'where I have been able to live modestly and work so well'.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Seacoast at Trouville

1881

oil on canvas

The John Pickering Lyman Collection–Gift of Miss Theodora Lyman, 1919 19.1314

In this ocean landscape, Monet moved away from established Western conventions of perspective and shading, exploring Japanese compositional techniques to emphasise the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. He blocked the expected vanishing point with an expressively bowed tree and accentuated bands of vibrant colour. The horizon line, effaced in a haze of creamy blue strokes, precludes any sense of recession into the distance. The composition is remarkably similar to a well-known print by *ukiyo-e* master Hiroshige, whose work features heavily in Monet's Japanese print collection, which was later displayed at his home at Giverny.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Road at La Cavée, Pourville

1882

oil on canvas

Bequest of Mrs. Susan Mason Loring, 1924 24.1755

While he sometimes painted distinctive geological formations along the coast, more often Monet's compositions focused on unassuming features, such as this country road turning amid grassy hillocks. In 1883 Monet's friend, the critic Gustave Geffroy, described this work as 'a painting composed of three straight lines, two leafy, grassy slopes whose bases intersect with the sea in the background … these are effects that have never before been attempted. Everywhere one will admire the colour blended with light in the countrysides of Normandy, prairies with dense grasses; in the summits of cliffs dried by the wind and burnt by the sun.'

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Fisherman’s cottage on the cliffs at Varengeville

1882

oil on canvas

Bequest of Anna Perkins Rogers, 1921 21.1331

A native of Normandy, Monet returned to paint the region’s coastline throughout his career. In 1882, he spent six months there, along the English Channel, where this lonely house perched on a cliff caught his fancy. Built as lookout posts for customs agents during the Napoleonic Wars, such structures were commonly used in the late nineteenth century as sheds for fishermen to store their nets. Monet turned out fourteen views of this particular shed during his stay. He later recalled: ‘I felt the need … to undertake excursions for weeks at a time to Normandy, Brittany, and elsewhere. It was a period of relaxation and rejuvenation for me.’

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Antibes seen from the Plateau Notre-Dame

1888

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1939 39.672

‘I joust and fight with the sun. And what sun there is here!’, Monet wrote to the sculptor Auguste Rodin in February 1888. Monet’s pale and delicate paintings from his Mediterranean visit that winter are dominated by pink and light blue and a softened light, which he exploited for its unifying properties. The old fort in the town of Antibes was Monet’s favourite motif during this period, but in this work he reduced the structure and its surrounding building to thick, rhythmic touches of yellow and blue paint, choosing to focus on the drama of sunlight and shadow instead of the architecture of the town.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Cap Martin, near Menton

1884

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1925 25.128

On painting trips, Monet often noted that it took weeks for him to truly see the place and conceive of it on canvas. ‘You need to live in a place for quite a while in order to paint it, you need to have worked laboriously to render it confidently’, Monet wrote during his extended working sojourn on the French Riviera in 1884. To paint this picture, he stood on the eastern side of the cape, looking across the bay towards the Maritime Alps. The contours of cloud and mountain are indicated with a few sketchy strokes, suggesting the sky’s airy expanse.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Cap d'Antibes, mistral

1888

oil on canvas

Bequest of Dr. Arthur Tracy Cabot, 1942 42.542

It is so beautiful here, so bright, so luminous. One swims in blue air, and it is frightening.
– Monet

Rather than highlight the historic fortress so prominently associated with coastal views of Antibes, here Monet turned his attention across the bay to snow-capped peaks rising dramatically from the water. The artist painted this particular view three times while visiting Antibes from January to May of 1888, using loose, swift brushstrokes to suggest the effect of the mistral – a strong northerly wind that sweeps through the south of France in spring. For Monet, there was something magical about the atmosphere in Antibes, which he repeatedly described as *féerique* ('fairylike' or 'otherworldly'), reinforcing the enchanting and magical qualities to be experienced in material and specific surroundings.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Antibes, afternoon effect

1888

oil on canvas

Gift of Samuel Dacre Bush, 1927 27.1324

‘I am painting the town of Antibes’, Monet wrote to his companion, Alice Hoschedé, in January 1888, ‘a little fortified town all golden in the sun that stands out against beautiful blue and pink mountains and the eternally snow-capped range of the Alps’. Monet’s stay at Antibes, between Nice and Cannes on the French Riviera, lasted from January to May, allowing him to avoid the dreariest months of the year in northern France and to satisfy his dealer’s appetite for idyllic, sun-drenched seascapes.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Snow at Argenteuil

c. 1874
oil on canvas

Bequest of Anna Perkins Rogers, 1921 21.1329

Likely inspired by Japanese woodblock prints, this scene of a road near Monet's house in the village of Argenteuil is unusual for its attempt to capture actual snowfall: a screen of drifting flakes, the twilight atmosphere of a snowstorm. Figures clad in black huddle beneath umbrellas to protect themselves from the falling snow. This subject plainly appealed to Monet's desire to capture fleeting effects of light and weather. He likely began the composition outdoors, priming his canvas with pale grey (still visible between the darker strokes in the sky) and then laying down the snowy roofs and bare trees with a more heavily laden brush.

Claude Monet
French 1840–1926

Camille Monet and a child in the artist's garden in Argenteuil
1875
oil on canvas

Anonymous gift in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin S. Webster, 1976 1976.833

I have never had a studio, and I don't understand why people close themselves up in a room.
– Monet

It was while living at Argenteuil that Monet first became interested in gardening and began to integrate his efforts as a gardener and a painter. Here the riotous colours of a rose bed frame a scene of Monet's wife, Camille, sewing, while a small child plays at her feet. Monet used a wide range of lively strokes to depict the stripes of Camille's summer dress, the blades of grass beneath her, and the screen of petals behind her, lavishing equal care on each area, so that the garden becomes not simply a backdrop for the figures but a subject in its own right.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Poppy field in a hollow near Giverny

1885

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1925 25.106

Seeking lower rent and greater rusticity, Monet moved from suburban Argenteuil to Vétheuil, and briefly Poissy, before settling in Giverny, a small town about 70 kilometres north-west of Paris, in 1883, where he would live until his death in 1926. Before he created his famed gardens and waterlily pond, his paintings primarily explored the countryside surrounding his new home. This picture is one of his first depicting the nearby fields of brilliant red poppies, their form and texture suggested by the size, shape and direction of the brushstrokes, while the juxtaposition of complementary reds and greens gives the painting a vibrant intensity.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Meadow with haystacks near Giverny

1885
oil on canvas

Bequest of Dr. Arthur Tracy Cabot, 1942 42.541

By looking hard I've finally entered into the spirit of this countryside, I understand it now and have a clearer idea of what to do with it.
– Monet

Monet started painting haystacks near his Giverny home in 1884 as a means of exploring variations in light and colour. Sun shining through the adjacent trees casts a speckled pattern of vibrant yellows, blues and purples across the field. 'I am in raptures, Giverny is a splendid region for me', Monet wrote in May 1883. He found both unusual features and visual variety in this simple meadow, seemingly unremarkable in its flat topography, verdant vegetation and boundary lined with trees – all common features of rural fields in France.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Meadow at Giverny

1886

oil on canvas

Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 1939 39.670

The indeterminate and the vague are modes of expression that have a reason for existing and have their own characteristics; through them sensations become lasting.
– Monet

This beautiful scene does not have an obvious focal point: no figure, structure or natural feature attracts the viewer's attention. The high-keyed palette and, especially, the insistence on pattern, further contribute to our sense of it as a decorative painting, in the best sense of the term – as a work concerned, above all, with the qualities of colour and pattern. The only element that breaks from the pattern of horizontals is the tree in the background that frees itself from its neighbours. This tree is isolated, mirroring the position of the viewer looking at this deserted, colourful meadow.

For kids

Monet lived for many years on the outskirts of Giverny, a country town north-west of Paris. Over time he planted a magnificent garden, in which he spent a lot of time painting. He also went further away to paint. This scene seems to have been painted in the shady corner of a green field. The trees cast long shadows, while sunlight shining between them creates bright stripes that dazzle our eyes.

Look closely at the painted surface.
What can you see?

Claude Monet
French 1840–1926

Grainstack (snow effect)
1891
oil on canvas

Gift of Miss Aimée and Miss Rosamond Lamb in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Appleton Lamb, 1970 1970.253

No one is an artist unless he carries his picture in his head before painting it, and is sure of his method and composition.
– Monet

From 1890 to 1891, Monet painted the first of his monumental series, a group of pictures representing wheat stacks in the fields near his home under changing conditions of light and weather. Monet exhibited fifteen of these in Paris in 1891 to critical acclaim and commercial success. His friend, the critic Gustave Geffroy, wrote in the exhibition catalogue: 'The grouping together of fifteen canvases of haystacks, each representing the same subject, with a rendition of the same landscape, is an extraordinarily victorious artistic demonstration. For his part, Claude Monet has been able to substantiate the continuous appearance in new aspects, of immutable objects.'

For kids

Claude Monet liked to paint the same subject over and over to capture how its appearance would change at different times of day. Between 1890 and 1891, he often visited the fields near his home in Giverny to paint the haystacks. In this painting, the low sun of a winter's afternoon has cast a long shadow in front of the haystack, which is covered in snow.

Monet would work on different paintings throughout the course of a single day. To keep up with the changing light and weather, sometimes he had someone help pass him fresh canvases so as not to lose time!

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

The water lily pond

1900

oil on canvas

Given in memory of Governor Alvan T. Fuller by the Fuller Foundation, 1961 61.959

All the money I earn goes into my garden.
– Monet

After first settling in Giverny in 1883 and acquiring his house there in 1890, Monet bought a second plot of land across the road, on which he established his famed water garden with a Japanese-style bridge. One of a series of this particular view, this composition is among his first to emphasise the reflections of the densely packed trees on the flat surface of the water. Nearly omitting any reference to the surrounding landscape, Monet fuses the natural and human-made worlds together, creating an all-encompassing vision of the delicately arched bridge and lush foliage.

Claude Monet

French 1840–1926

Water lilies

1905

oil on canvas

Gift of Edward Jackson Holmes, 1939 39.804

The effect changes incessantly, not only from one season to the next, but minute by minute, because the lilies are not the spectacle; they are only the accompaniment.
– Monet

Beginning in 1903, Monet embarked on a series of paintings depicting his water garden at Giverny. Here, lily pads scattered across the canvas mark the water's surface receding into space. The pattern of light and shadow beneath the lilies suggests reflections of an unseen sky and trees, and the spreading water of the surface of the lily pond expands to cover the entire canvas. Monet exhibited forty-eight of these 'water landscapes' in 1909. Fascinated by their subtle fusion of solid forms and diaphanous reflections, critics compared the paintings to poetry and music.