



National Gallery of Art, Washington

The 1899 painting of a bridge over the lily pond at Monet's home in Giverny, France, represents his early interpretations.

Monet's late works on glorious display

Exhibition focuses on many studies of Giverny scenery

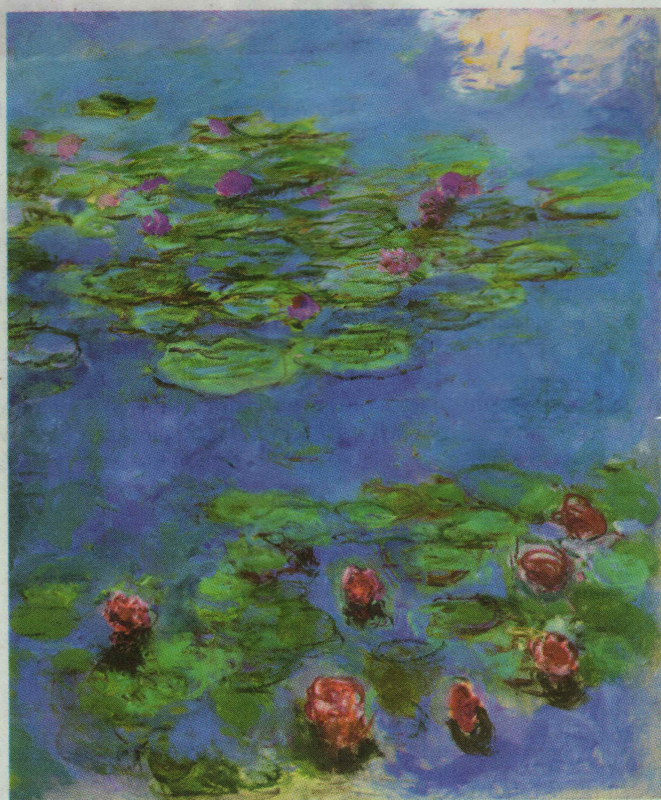
By Charles Desmarais

Oscar-Claude Monet lived 86 long years, from 1840 to 1926, producing well over 2,000 paintings and other works.

Already a talented artist at 16, he stood in woods and fields beside the great Eugène Boudin, learning to use oil paints "en plein-air" and to love landscape. He was in Paris in 1863 at the "Salon des Refusés," when his work was included among the avant-garde rejects now credited with the founding of Impressionism — a movement that derived its very name from the title of an 1872 Monet painting. He painted dozens of pictures in series, to study the changing effects of light and weather, of haystacks, the facade of a cathedral, poplars and the buildings of the British Parliament.

But Monet is most beloved for the pictures that he made at the end of his life, all within the confines of his own 4- or 5-acre property, as he

Monet continues on E2



Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

This "Water Lilies" painting of the pond was produced by the Impressionist painter between 1914 and 1917.

"Monet: The Late Years":

9:30 a.m.-5:15 p.m., Tuesday-Sunday, Feb. 16, through May 27. \$20-\$35. De Young Museum, Golden Gate Park, 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive, S.F. 415-750-3600. <https://deyoung.famsf.org>

An anonymous 1921 color photograph shows Monet in his garden at Giverny, where he spent his time in later life painting his surroundings.

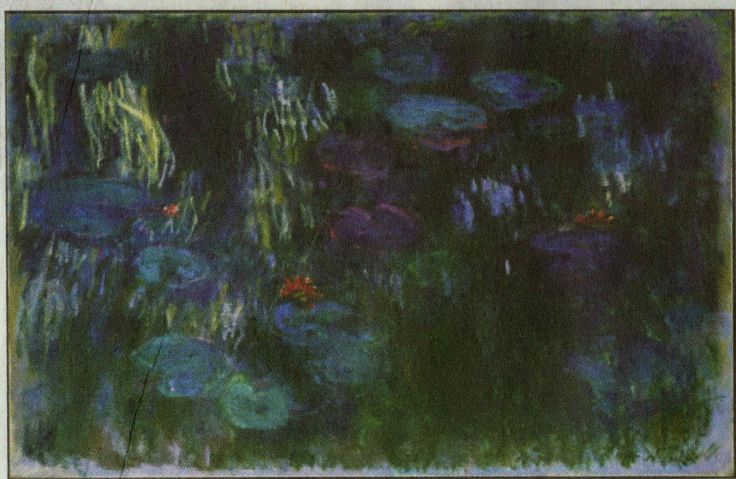


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St. Louis Art Museum

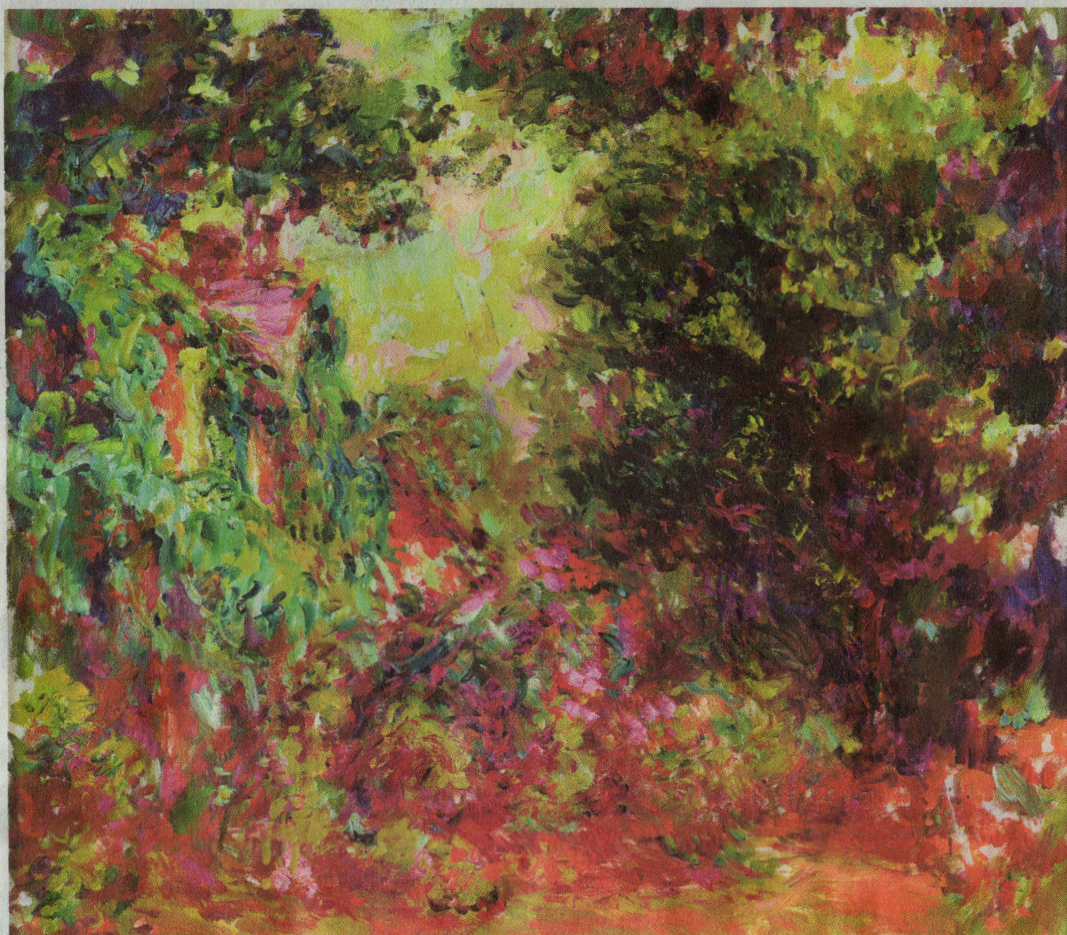
“Water Lilies (Agapanthus)” was done by Monet between 1915 and 1926 and makes up the right panel of the Agapanthus Triptych.



Metropolitan Museum of Art

The deep-blue interpretation of “Water Lilies” is from 1916-19.

Monet’s later works create superb show at de Young



Musée Marmottan Monet

“The Artist’s House Seen From the Rose Garden” is one of four paintings of the scene.

Monet from page E1

struggled with the deaths of his wife and son, failing vision and other trials of old age. In gardens he designed and tended as part of an expansive artistic practice, he continued to experiment and innovate, landing upon a body of work as radical in form as it was romantic in emotion.

This is the art that is the topic of curator George T. M. Shackelford’s superb exhibition “Monet: The Late Years,” organized for the Kimbell Art Museum and opening in San Francisco at the de Young Museum on Saturday, Feb. 16.

The apparent subject of this late work was, of course, the famous water lilies and the other flowers and plants Monet cultivated on property he first rented and later bought in the tiny village of Giverny, France (population 277 around the time he arrived). But the real content of these works was understood even in the early days of the 20th century to be more magical, even spiritual, than natural.

An excellent essay in the exhibition catalog by Emma Cauvin describes the ecstatic critical response given to Monet’s 1909 exhibition “Water Lilies, Landscapes of Water,” the first public showing of the series.

The 48 paintings were revolutionary — even bewildering, critic Claude Roger-Marx said. There were, seemingly, duplications of the same picture, and they often appeared to be broken into fragments of color and form. One could hardly even make out the subject at times. But the most startling thing about the paintings was their lack of a horizon line and their vertiginous point of view, down into the pool. Off into another realm. “No more earth, no more sky, no limits now,” he rhapsodized.

Another writer, novelist Marie de Régner, wrote of “paintings so luminous, so limpid, so transparent that after a quarter of an hour you have the sensation of being in the water, of being an inhabitant of

ponds, of lakes and of pools, of being a siren with blue-green hair, a naiad with fluid arms, a nymph with cool legs.”

“The Late Years” includes some of the paintings from the period of that “Water Lilies” exhibition, and some even as early as 1896. One 1906 picture, now in the collection of the Art

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Institute of Chicago, suggests mists rising from the pond, the brushstrokes of blue and violet disturbing green to create a palpable sense of movement. In a work from the following year, the fog gathers to form what can only be read as an apparition gliding across the water’s surface.

Monet was an extraordinarily prolific artist, who made large

works that are difficult to move around. The vast “Grandes Décorations” in Paris at the Musée de l’Orangerie was, of course, not shipped to San Francisco — the room where it resides was specifically built to contain it. Nor was the Museum of Modern Art’s 42-foot-long “Water Lilies” triptych (1914-26) available for loan.

But if all Monet’s works could never have been assembled in the same place, what we do get here is something quite rare. Some people may think the exhibition repetitious at points. I find the moments that allow close comparison to be intellectually stimulating in the same way the current San Francisco Museum of Modern Art retrospective of art by Vija Celmins is. It’s as if the artists are thinking pictorially “aloud,” and we get to listen in.

A corner of one gallery is devoted to four versions of Monet’s “The Artist’s House Seen from the Rose Garden,” said to be painted between 1922

and 1924, all, apparently, from precisely the same spot. Three canvases are on one wall, vying to prove that atomized blasts of pinks and reds can be believed as house and blossoms. The fourth is all in blues, an alternative world in a different light.

The curator’s focus on paintings made between 1913 and Monet’s passing in 1926 is a big reason the show is so satisfying. It’s one of the occasional instances where an artist’s biography is a major part of our appreciation of the work, as we wander with him through the garden in search of new perspectives, new metaphors for feeling.

It is a frantic quest, spurred by the knowledge of approaching death, but it is hopeful as well, proof of the artist’s conviction that it is worthwhile to continue, never to give up.

Charles Desmarais is The San Francisco Chronicle’s art critic. Email: cdesmarais@sfgchronicle.com Free weekly newsletter: <http://bit.ly/ArtguyReviews>