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CLAUDE MONET: MASTERPIECES OF ART

Claude Monet : Evolution of a Master

Giverny and Mediterranean

Monet first saw the village of Giverny from the window of a train in the spring of 1883. There he found a large, rambling farmhouse to rent in two acres of land, with a walled garden and an allee, a broad walk edged with cypress trees and spruce. The garden led down to railway lines on the other side of which ran the small River Ru. On the nearby Seine he moored his four boats, including two skiffs that became the subjects of several paintings such as *The Boat at Giverny* (or *In the Norwegian*) .



The Boat at Giverny, or, In the Norwegian, c. 1887, Oil on canvas, 97.5 x 130.5 cm , Musee d'Orsay, Paris

He turned one of the two barns into a studio and set to work on the creation of one of the world's most famous gardens, planting vegetables and flowers, digging up trees and planting roses that were trained up the metal arches that he installed along the length of the allee.



Cap Martin, Near Menton, 1884, Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm , Musee des Beaux-Arts, Tournai

Despite his attachment to his garden, Monet continued to travel and, in January 1884, he journeyed south to the Mediterranean coast. Amongst the works of this trip that, in some ways, prefigured the anguished painting of Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) was Cap Martin, Near Menton, which announced a new boldness in Monet's painting and a startling brilliance of colour - a deep cobalt sea amidst a panoply of hot, southern hues. On another southern sojourn in 1888, his work was more subtle and elegant. Of paintings such as The Old Fort at Antibes , the poet Stephane Mallarme (1842-98) told the artist, 'This is your finest hour.'



The Old Fort at Antibes, 1888, Oil on canvas, 60 x 81 cm, Private Collection

The contentment that Monet found at Giverny brought a change in his work. Furthermore, 1886 was an important year for the art of the time: Georges Seurat (1859-91)

completed his ground-breaking painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, the work that signalled the beginning of Neo-Impressionism; Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) made his first visit to the artists' colony at Pont-Aven; the short-lived review *Le Symboliste* was founded; and Vincent van Gogh arrived in Paris. For Monet, it also brought a significant change: a relaxation in his work, reflecting the lyricism of his life at Giverny.

Capturing Transient Light

He decided to spend the autumn of 1890 at home, to paint what would become a series of depictions of one motif - the uniquely shaped meules or haystacks in fields near his house. These would perhaps mark the high point of his efforts to capture the transient magnificence of light. He exhibited 15 to great acclaim at Durand-Ruel's gallery in 1891.

Monet now often painted in series, detailing the fleeting effects of light on nature. In 1891, he created 25 paintings of a field of poppies and then began work on poplar trees growing along the Epte River.

In 1891, Ernest Hoschede died and Alice was at last free to marry Monet. With his paintings selling for as much as 15,000 francs each, he was able to buy the Giverny farmhouse. He extended the garden, importing exotic plants, building greenhouses and devising complex planting schemes. Giverny gradually became famous, with painters arriving from all over the world. At one time, more than 40 American artists were working there. Monet, now a celebrity, ignored them all



Rouen Cathedral in the Setting Sun, or, Symphony in Grey and Pink, 1892-94, Oil on canvas, 100 x 65 cm, National Museum and Gallery of Wales, Cardiff

In 1893, he travelled to Rouen where he executed a series of paintings depicting the facade of the city's imposing Gothic cathedral, such as Rouen Cathedral in the Setting Sun (or Symphony in Grey and Pink, see page 51). This would become one of his most renowned painting cycles, documenting the fall of light on the facade of the structure in an astonishing series of 30 canvases.

His career-long fascination with atmosphere and architecture finally ended with two projects. In 1899, 1900 and 1901 he made winter visits to London, painting the panorama of the often fog-shrouded Thames. The second project was undertaken during two visits to Venice, in 1908 and 1909, where Monet was entranced by the light he encountered.