

# MONET

Karin Sagner



TASCHEN



CLAUDE MONET







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1840–1926

A Feast for the Eyes

**TASCHEN**

HONG KONG KÖLN LONDON LOS ANGELES MADRID PARIS TOKYO

ILLUSTRATION PAGE 2:

Appartement Interior

*Un Coin d'appartement*, 1875

Oil on canvas, 80 x 60 cm

Wildenstein I. 365

Paris, Musée d'Orsay

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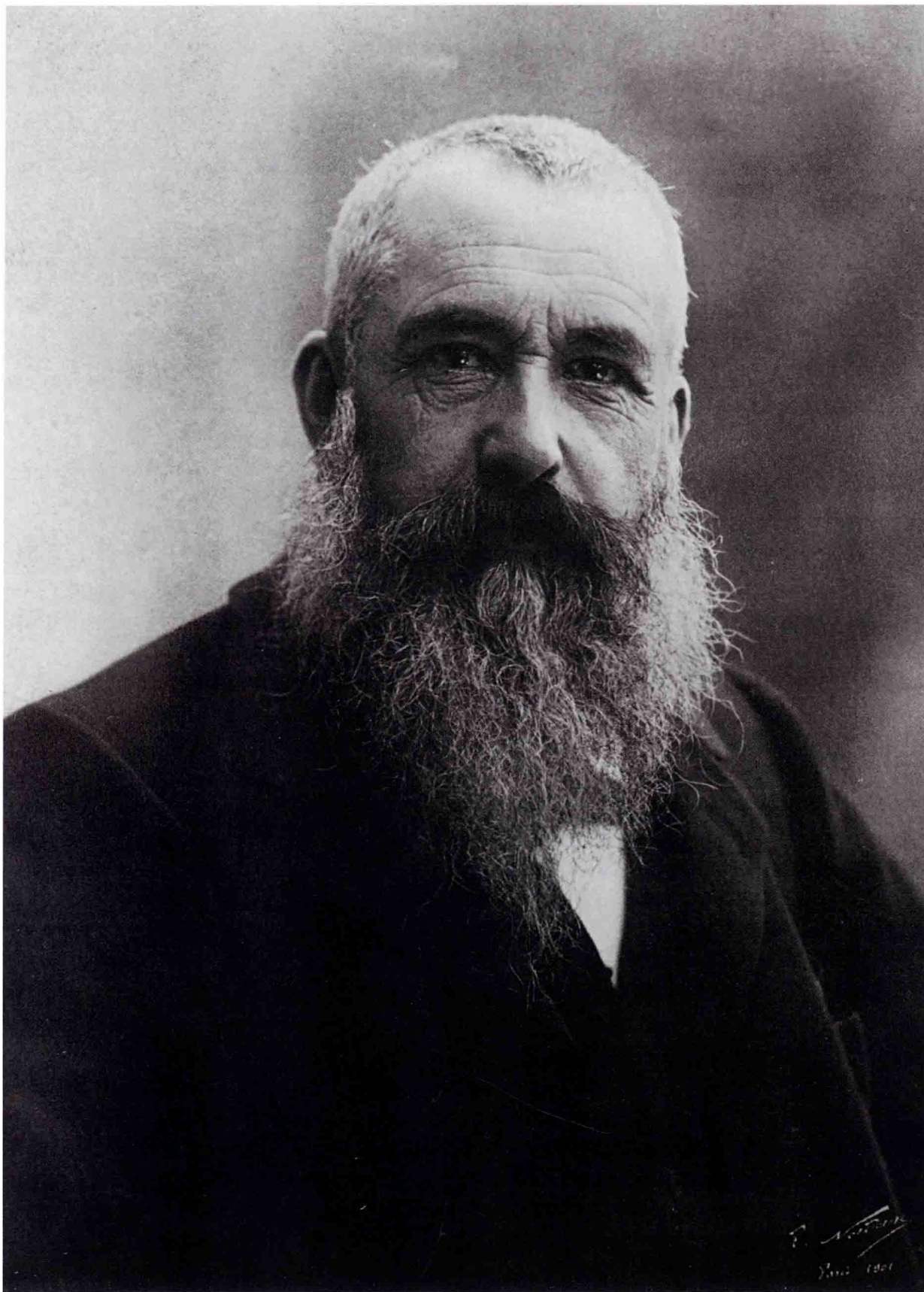
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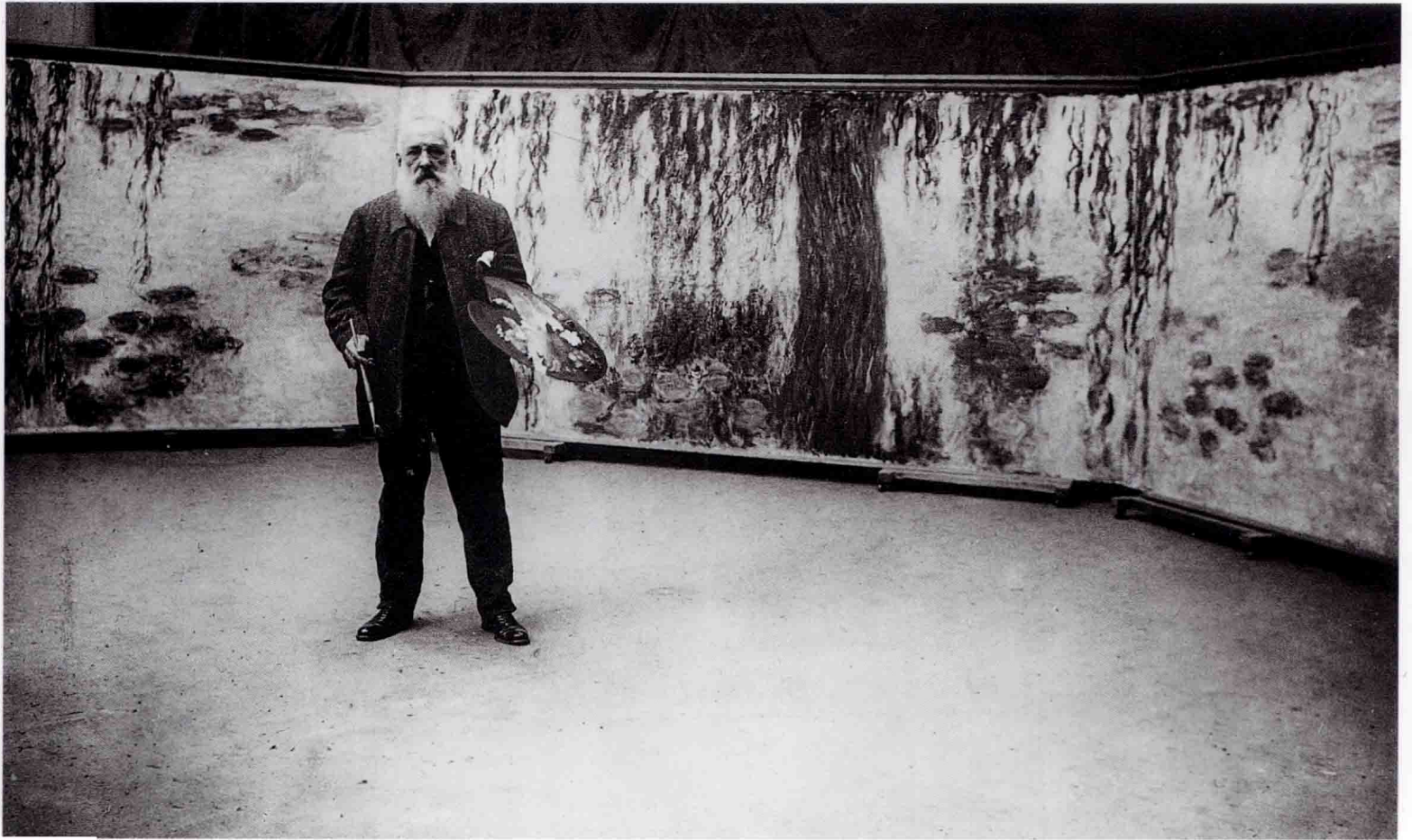
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Claude Monet, 1901  
Photograph by Gaspar Félix Nadar





Claude Monet in his 'Water Lily-Studio'  
at Giverny, c. 1921  
© Photo: Document Archives Durand-Ruel, Paris







# Childhood and artistic beginnings

Oscar Claude Monet, second son of grocer Claude Adolphe Monet and his wife Louise Justine Aubrée, was born on 14 November 1840 at 45, Rue Lafitte, Paris. France at that time was enjoying a period of relative economic and political stability under its Citizen King, Louis Philippe (1773-1850). His July Monarchy, as it was known, lasted from 1830 to 1848 and produced – in its first decade in particular – outstanding achievements in French art which reflected the liberal spirit of the times. Famous authors included Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo. In line with the growing influence of the middle classes, artistic trends were increasingly being set by bourgeois taste, a factor which precipitated the landscape painting of the Barbizon School.

But this same decade was also to see the birth of almost every member of the future group of Impressionists. Camille Pissarro was born in 1830, Edouard Manet in 1832, Edgar Degas in 1834, Paul Cézanne and Alfred Sisley in 1839 and Pierre-Auguste Renoir in 1841. The mid-forties brought a serious economic crisis and apparently a fall in trade for Monet's father, Adolphe, for the family decided to move to Le Havre on the coast of Normandy, where Monet's father joined his brother-in-law Jacques Lecadre in his successful wholesale business. The prospects for the future looked healthy. The Lecadres were locally respected and prosperous. In addition to a large house in the town they also owned a summer residence not far from the seaside resort of Sainte-Adresse. Monet later recalled that his childhood in Le Havre, where the Seine flows into the Atlantic, set a pattern for the rest of his life: 'The Seine. I have painted it all my life, at all hours of the day, at all times of the year, from Paris to the sea . . . Argenteuil, Poissy, Vétheuil, Giverny, Rouen, Le Havre . . .'

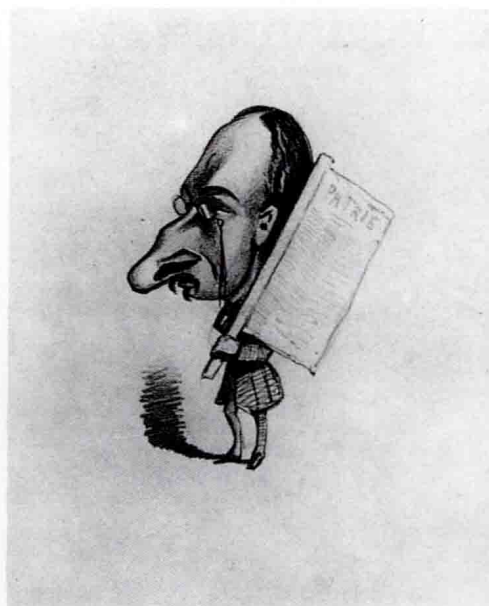
Monet grew up in a commercially-oriented household. Only his mother showed an interest in the arts. Her early death in 1857 was a severe blow to the 17-year-old Monet. He found sympathy for his artistic leanings with his aunt, Marie-Jeanne Lecadre, who now took up his cause with a solicitude which was to increase after the death of her husband in 1858. Monet remained in lively correspondence with her even in later years and consulted



*Banks of the River*, 1856  
Bord de Rivière  
Pencil drawing, 39 x 29 cm  
Paris, Musée Marmottan

*Village Street in Normandy,*  
*near Honfleur*, 1864  
La Route de la Bavoile à Honfleur  
Oil on canvas, 58 x 63 cm  
Wildenstein I. 34  
Mannheim, Städtische Kunsthalle  
Mannheim





her on artistic matters. Madame Lecadre was not only in contact with the Parisian painter Armand Gautier, but had her own studio where she painted for pleasure and in which Monet was a welcome visitor.

Monet's relationship with his father deteriorated appreciably and was not improved by his decision in 1857 to leave school shortly before his final exams. At school he received his first drawing lessons from François-Charles Ochart, a former pupil of Jacques-Louis David, the paragon of contemporary artistic taste. These lessons appear to have had no profound influence on Monet, however. His recollections of the period refer exclusively to the witty drawings and caricatures of – among others – his teachers, with which he filled his exercise books: 'I decorated the blue covers of my books with fantastic ornaments, and drew on them, in the most irreverent fashion, the caricatured faces and profiles of my teachers . . . I quickly developed quite a skill for it. At the age of fifteen, I was known all over Le Havre as a caricaturist . . . I started charging for my portraits, asking 10 or 20 Francs per head . . . Had I carried on, I would have been a millionaire by now.'

Monet's caricatures of the citizens of Le Havre, which rapidly earned him 2000 Francs, brought him a relative degree of local celebrity. Of over one hundred such drawings, only a handful survive today (p. 10). Gravier, a retailer of artist's materials, exhibited Monet's caricatures in his shop window. Even though a large part of Monet's output was based on models in contemporary magazines, such as the *Journal amusant* (which he even copied for a while), his drawings nevertheless attracted attention. They struck Eugène Boudin, an unconventional painter of landscapes and seascapes who was living in Le Havre at the beginning of 1858. Boudin's simple and calm studies of nature, painted in the open air in front of the motif, bore no relation to contemporary

Author Jules François Félix Husson, Called Champfleury, after Nadar, c.1858  
L'Ecrivain Jules François Félix Husson, dit Champfleury, d'après Nadar  
Pencil and gouache, 32 x 24 cm  
Paris, Musée Marmottan

Jules de Prémaray (Editor-in-Chief of "La Patrie"), after Nadar, c.1858  
Jules de Prémaray (Rédacteur en chef de "La Patrie"), d'après Nadar  
Pencil, 32 x 24 cm  
Paris, Musée Marmottan

Dramatist Louis François Nicolaie, Called Clairville, after Nadar, c.1858  
L'Auteur dramatique Louis François Nicolaie, dit Clairville, d'après Nadar  
Pencil, 32 x 24 cm  
Paris, Musée Marmottan



Eugène Boudin  
*The Beach at Trouville*, 1864  
La plage de Trouville  
Oil on panel, 26 x 48 cm  
Paris, Musée d'Orsay



taste. Monet himself initially reacted with aversion to the Boudin seascapes also on display at Gravier's. The two were nevertheless eventually introduced. Boudin praised Monet's drawings: he had talent and shouldn't just stop at these. It was a turning-point. Boudin now took the young man with him on painting excursions into the surrounding countryside. He convinced Monet that objects painted directly in front of the motif possessed a greater vitality that those created in the studio.

Painting in oils outdoors was still a relatively new technique; it had first been made possible in the forties by the introduction of portable tubes of oil paint. According to Boudin, it was the only way of capturing a first impression, because 'everything that is painted on the spot has a strength, an intensity and a vividness which cannot be recreated in the studio'. The exploration of these ideas and of landscape as a subject were fundamental to Monet's work from this time on. In the course of the summer of 1858 he produced two landscapes at Boudin's side; these were subsequently exhibited in Le Havre but have today sadly disappeared. Monet also accompanied Boudin to Honfleur, where Boudin taught him the handling and observation of tonal values, perspective and light. Monet later ascribed his decision to become a painter to this encounter with Boudin, with whom he remained in close contact throughout his life. 'The fact that I've become a painter I owe to Boudin. In his infinite kindness, Boudin undertook my instruction. My eyes were slowly opened and I finally understood nature. I learned at the same time to love it. I analyzed its forms, I studied its colours. Six months later . . . I announced to my father that I wanted to become a painter and went off to Paris to study art.'

So Monet wanted to become a painter. It was an idea which his father accepted only with difficulty and after much persuasion from Aunt Lecadre. He nevertheless submitted two applications



*Hunting Trophies*, 1862  
 Trophées de chasse  
 Oil on canvas, 104 x 75 cm  
 Wildenstein I. 10  
 Paris, Musée d'Orsay

to the Le Havre municipal authorities in the hope of obtaining an art scholarship for his son in Paris. Monet did not wait for the second to be refused; at the beginning of April 1859, he set off for Paris despite his father's opposition. His savings now proved very welcome, since they made him – at least for a short while – financially independent. He visited the recently-opened Salon, that institution of an exhibition which so emphatically represented official taste and which at that time took place every two years. Monet's letters to Boudin reveal his lively reactions to the progressive paintings of the Barbizon School which were also among the exhibits.

At the recommendation of both Boudin and Madame Lecadre, and with two still lifes under his arm, he visited Boudin's former teacher, the painter Constant Troyon whose works he had seen beforehand in the Salon and whom he had praised highly to Boudin. Troyon recognized the talent in Monet's work, but advised him as a first step to learn to draw and to copy works in the





Louvre. This suggestion fell in line with conventional paths of academic training, whereby students were required to start with drawing from inanimate models and antique busts. The idea must have sounded ridiculous to Monet even then, since – as Troyon had recognized – his own starting-point was essentially colour. Troyon recommended he should join the *atelier libre* run by academic painter Thomas Couture, where Manet was also enrolled.

The training which Troyon proposed met with the approval of Monet's father, so that nothing appeared to stand in the way of his remaining in Paris. To his father's dismay, however, Monet refused to follow the 'academic' path. He attended instead the Académie Suisse, an atelier which had been founded by Charles Suisse, a former pupil of David, during the liberal-minded July Monarchy. Suisse offered his pupils the opportunity to work from living models in complete freedom, without being subjected to constant corrections by a professor. This independent atelier

*Farmyard in Normandy*, c.1863  
 Cour de ferme en Normandie  
 Oil on canvas, 65 x 80 cm  
 Wildenstein I. 16  
 Paris, Musée d'Orsay





Gustave Courbet  
*The Artist's Studio*, 1855  
 L'Atelier du peintre  
 Oil on canvas, 361 x 598 cm  
 Paris, Musée d'Orsay

remained highly popular among avant-garde artists until its closure in 1911. Honoré Daumier, Gustave Courbet and Eugène Delacroix had all worked here; Pissarro joined in 1855 and Cézanne in 1862. Monet's friendship with Pissarro began here. 'I am surrounded by a small group of landscape painters,' he wrote to Boudin, 'who would love to meet you. They are real painters . . .' Another letter to Boudin indicates Monet's growing enthusiasm, as from 1860, for the works of Delacroix and Charles-François Daubigny. His aunt, who owned a painting by Daubigny, subsequently gave it to Monet as a present.

It was now that Monet established his first contacts with the so-called Realist painters and writers, although he was not to meet the head of the Realist movement, Gustave Courbet, until several years later. These acquaintances were made at the Brasserie des Martyrs, an artist's café where Monet financed his studies by drawing caricatures of the guests. In addition to Jules Champfleury, author of the keynote book *Le Réalisme*, the poet Charles Baudelaire, art critic Edmond Duranty and doctor and art-lover Paul Gachet could all be found here. Monet later felt he had wasted much time in such company. Monet was at no stage attracted by the life-style of the Bohemian artist, as evidenced in his thoroughly bourgeois homes in Argenteuil and, later, Giverny. 'I used to go sometimes to the famous Brasserie in the Rue des Martyrs', he wrote, 'which cost me a great deal of time and was extremely bad for me. It was there that I got to know almost everyone mentioned in Firmin Maillard's book, *The Last Bohemians*, and in particular Firmin Maillard himself, Albert Glatigny, Théodore Pelloquet, Alphonse Duchesne, Castagnary, Delvau, Daudet and other bad sorts like myself in those days. I also saw Courbet there, but made his acquaintance only after my return from regimental duty.'





*Tree-trunks*, 1857  
 Troncs d'arbre  
 Pencil drawing, 28 x 20 cm  
 Paris, Musée Marmottan

Courbet's art, which marked a break between official painting and that of the future, played a decisive role in the development of Impressionism. Three of Courbet's most important paintings, *The Artist's Studio* (p. 14), *The Burial at Ornans* (1849/50; Paris, Musée d'Orsay) and *The Bathers* (1853; Montpellier, Musée Fabre) were rejected by the Salon Jury on the occasion of the World Fair of 1855. Courbet therefore decided to set up, at the gates of the official exhibition building, his own pavilion of Realism in which to show his work. This independent exhibition was enthusiastically received by the younger generation of artists and was to set an important precedent. Courbet turned against the idealizing, prettified reproduction of nature then characterizing official Academy art. His demands included truth, contemporaneity, social comment and the rejection of idealism: 'Realist means being a friend of real truth.' Correspondingly, he held even themes as unsophisticated as a bunch of vegetables to be worthy subjects of painting. Monet's early still lifes, dating from the beginning of the sixties, similarly take pieces of meat, fruit and vegetables as their unassuming subjects. Courbet's ideas also reflected the democratic tendencies which had emerged during the February Revolution of 1848 with the abdication of Louis Philippe, the proclamation of the Second Republic and the call for general and equal voting rights. In 1852, however, the start of the Second Empire under Napoleon III spelled an abrupt end to such sympathies. Courbet's democratic views on art and life were now monitored and recorded.

In spring 1861 Monet drew an unlucky number in the military service lottery made law since 1855. He was drafted to Algeria for seven years with the African Legion. Initially no more than a thoroughly undesirable interruption to his newly-begun career, Monet later judged this period abroad to have benefitted his painting. In his later recollections, Monet constantly sought to cast his artistic life in the right light: 'I spent two fascinating years in Algeria. I was constantly seeing something new, which I attempted to render in my free time . . . The impressions of light and colour I received there only sorted themselves out later, but the germ of my future researches lay here.' The African climate did not suit him, however. By spring 1862 Monet had fallen seriously ill with typhoid fever and was sent home to Le Havre for six months' convalescence.

In the summer of 1862, Monet zealously devoted himself to painting in and around Le Havre. Boudin was working not far away in Honfleur and Trouville on the Normandy coast. If one of Monet's anecdotes is to be believed, an Englishman now introduced him to the Dutch painter Johan Barthold Jongkind, who was also staying in Le Havre at the time. Monet had already admired his work at the Salon of 1860. Jongkind's paintings focussed above all on the sea and the coast, and sought to render subtle atmospheric effects through a sensitive use of colour. His



luminous and airy landscapes built of brief strokes of paint made him a forerunner of Impressionist painting; Monet later acknowledged that Jongkind 'was my true teacher, and I owe to him the final education of my eye.'

Jongkind was indeed the model for one of Monet's first seascapes from the year 1864, painted while the two were working together on the coast. Monet's family disapproved of his friendship with the antisocial Jongkind, who lived with a common-law wife and was already ravaged by alcohol. It was with one eye on Jongkind that Monet's aunt bought her nephew out of military service for 3000 Francs on the condition that he continued his studies in Paris with a recognized teacher. The family was agreed that the genre painter and Salon medallist Auguste Toulmouche, who was married to a cousin of the Lecadre family, was the right man to supervise the rest of Monet's education. Monet therefore returned to Paris in autumn 1862 in order to show Toulmouche some of the works he had produced in Le Havre. Toulmouche praised his talent, but recommended that he join the atelier run by the academic painter Charles Gleyre. Monet, the stubborn Norman, acquiesced. He worked there – from what he says, with relatively little enthusiasm – probably until spring 1864, when Gleyre was forced to close his atelier on the grounds of eye trouble.

Gleyre was republican-minded and, following the overthrow of the Second Republic by Napoleon III, stopped exhibiting at the Salon. Shy and quiet as he was, he allowed his pupils relatively large freedom in order to avoid overly hurting or inhibiting them. Being himself an advocate of an idealized, beautiful style of painting, he was pained by the interest shown by many of his young students in the theories of Realism. He nevertheless encouraged his pupils to develop their own style and recommended open-air studies from nature, a testament to his own interest in landscape painting. Monet was later to cast an ironical eye over this period. On the occasion of a study from a living model, Gleyre offered Monet the following criticism: "'That's not bad, but it's too like the model. You have an ugly man before you and you paint him ugly. He has enormous feet and you reproduce them as such. The whole thing is ugly. Always remember, young man, that when executing a figure you must always think of antiquity. Nature, my dear friend, is all very well for study purposes, but is otherwise of no interest. What really matters is style.'" I was outraged. Truthfulness, life, nature, everything that moved me, everything I prized most highly . . . simply didn't exist for this man.'

Gleyre shared the official Academy view that reality in painting should be sacrificed to a beautiful ideal. In the atelier, however, Monet found friends who felt the same as he did: 'Renoir and Sisley were there, who became life-long friends. And there was Bazille, who also became a close friend of mine.'