



GRAMERCY GREAT MASTERS

Acknowledgments

The publishers would like to thank the museums for reproduction permission and in particular the BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY and SCALA Istituto Fotografico Editoriale for their help in supplying the illustrations for the book.

Art Institute of Chigago: The Beach at Sainte-Adresse.

Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts: Madame Monet in Japanese Costume ("La Japonaise"); Poppy Field near Giverny.

Cleveland Museum of Art: Bazille and Camille: Study for Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe.

Christie's, London: The Seine at Chatou near Argenteuil; The Banks of the River Epte at Giverny; Springtime at Giverny; Rouen Cathedral, Early Morning; Water Lilies.

Galerie Bayeler: Water Lilies.

Glasgow Art Gallery & Museum: View Towards Ventimiglia.

Kunsthalle, Bremen: Woman in a Green Dress (Camille).

Louvre: The Luncheon; The Railway Bridge at Argenteuil; The Bridge of Argenteuil.

Mellon Bruce, Washington: Spring Flowers.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: The Terrace at Sainte-Adresse.

Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts: The Japanese Footbridge, Giverny.

Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil: Boating on the River Epte.

Musée de Grenoble: The Garden at Giverny.

Musée de L'Orangerie, Paris: Red Boats, Argenteuil.

Musée des Beaux Arts, Rouen: Rue Saint-Denis, Celebration of June 30, 1878.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris: The Tulip Field; Women in the Garden; The Hotel Roches Noires, Trouville; Meditation: Madame Monet on a Sofa; The Magpie; A Field of Poppies; Chrysanthemums; The Gare St. Lazare; Lady with a Parasol; Storm at Belle-Isle; Grain Stacks at the End of Summer; Rouen Cathedral: Harmony in Blue and Gold, Full Sunlight; The Water Lily Pond: Harmony in Rose; The Houses of Parliament, London: the Sun Breaking through Fog.

Musée Marmottan, Paris: Impression: Sunrise; Train in the Snow.

National Gallery, London: Bathers at La Grenouillère; Lavacourt under Snow.

National Gallery of Art, Washington: The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil.

National Museum of Wales, Cardiff: View of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice.

Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco: The Grand Canal, Venice.

Pushkin Museum, Moscow: The Picnic ("Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe"); The Boulevard des Capucines; Rouen Cathedral, Evening.

Private Collection: The Bridge at Bougival.

Copyright © 1995 by Random House Value Publishing, Inc. Copyright © 1993 I Dioscuri, Genova Copyright © 1993 Craig Hill Italia, Genova All rights reserved.

Published by Gramercy Books distributed by Random House Value Publishing, Inc. 40 Engelhard Avenue Avenel, New Jersey 07001

Printed and bound in Italy

ISBN: 0-517-12402-5

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Claude Monet

GRAMERCY BOOKS

New York • Avenel

Claude Monet His Life and Works

Born in Paris in November 1840, Monet lived for more than eightyfive years, his life spanning a period that saw momentous social and political events on the European scene. These events, necessarily, had an effect on the life and work of this sensitive and attentive artist. One need only think of the difficult relations between the Impressionists and the art market in the period between the Second Empire and the Third Republic to understand that Monet — like Manet, Pissarro and all the others who formed part of that circle of uncompromising rebels against the established canons of art — had to fight on various fronts. Indeed, as his artistic career unfolded, from his early caricatures to the discovery of outdoor painting, and then on to the final extraordinary achievement of Water Lilies, this reserved and solitary man was forced to spend most of his life fighting. He fought against lack of interest on the part of the critics, faced hostility from the official painters of the Salon des Beaux-Arts and suffered ridicule from a public that preferred obsessively precise portraits of prominent personalities to a new vision of reality.

Ironically enough, this new trend was, however, finally accepted. Indeed, Monet became the symbol in art of that same bourgeois class that had previously so opposed it. The bourgeoisie was the obvious target audience of the Impressionists, for they saw it as embodying the new and free society that had risen out of the ashes of the *ancien régime*. As it turned out, this "radical renovation," the goal sought by many intellectuals of the time, failed to take place. As Émile Zola coldly observed, when society began to accept these new works, it was only under the guidance and with the reassurance of the academic juries and official criticism.

None of this, however, detracts from the greatness of the Impressionists — nor in particular from Monet, who was considered



Windmills near Zaandam (detail)

the movement's leading exponent. Scandal as a means of awakening people to new consciousness was less important to him than painting landscapes in the fullest possible light, thereby creating something precious to offer to the world. With a study of Claude Monet, we approach the very heart of the Impressionist enterprise. This humble painter, who grew up in Le Havre and was taught by Jongkind and Boudin to contemplate vast natural landscapes and to observe the variations in light between expanses of water and clear, blue skies, was the man who produced the most mature, and the most exciting and innovative, outdoor paintings.

EARLY CAREER

Born in Rue Lafitte in Paris on November 14, 1840, Claude Oscar Monet spent his early childhood in the port of Le Havre, where his father, a grocer by trade, had been forced to move to improve his business prospects. Here, at the mouth of the Seine, Monet made his first excursions into the figurative arts under the guidance of François Charles Ochard, a disciple of David. His landscapes and numerous caricatures from around 1856 showed evidence of great technical skill in the use of pencil and charcoals. His precocious ability brought him to the notice of Eugène Boudin, a painter who owned a framemaker's shop in Le Havre.

Boudin gave the young painter the chance to display his paintings in his shop window, thus helping Monet to gain a certain degree of local fame. Boudin was himself a genuine landscape artist and he initiated Monet into the technique of outdoor painting. At first, Monet was not totally convinced by Boudin's conception of painting; but later he began to appreciate that this marine painter was probably right to suggest, as he often did, that Monet give up drawing caricatures and devote himself entirely to painting. Thus, in May 1854, armed with a letter of introduction to Troyon, a long-standing member of the school of Barbizon, and with his father's permission, he set off for Paris.

Once there, Monet, who was already hostile to academic authority, ignored Troyon's advice, deciding instead to attend lessons at the Académie Suisse. This was an unofficial academy where the fees were reasonable and where Monet knew he could also work with live models. It was while attending this "free academy" that he became friends with Camille Pissarro, who was ten years his elder. Together,

they started to frequent the Brasserie des Martyrs, a meeting place for the group of realist painters headed by Courbet. Again, accompanied by Pissarro but this time with an easel on his back, Monet began to explore the countryside around Paris, complementing his studio education with the experience of the open air that he had already started to enjoy under Boudin's guidance.

In 1861 military service took him to Algeria, and like Delacroix before him in 1832, he was deeply impressed by the vivid colors and intensity of light of the North African landscape. A year later, on sick leave in Le Havre, he once again took up painting with his old friend Boudin. Together with an accomplished Dutch painter named Jongkind, the three of them spent much of the summer painting in the open air. It was an experience that, as Monet himself was to observe, went a long way in helping him perfect his technique. He had an eye that observed lovingly and joyfully the thousands of small marvels that make up the diversity of nature. He was a visual poet, able to translate his impressions onto the canvas while at the same time keeping their freshness of feeling intact.

THE STUDIO OF GLEYRE

At the end of 1862, Monet's father, concerned about his son's delicate health, decided to free him from his military obligations, and Monet returned to Paris, where he began to pay regular visits to the studio of Gleyre. Gleyre was a capable Swiss painter who, more for his generosity than for his ideological convictions, had gained a liberal reputation, and his school attracted young talents who had no time for the official procedures of the École des Beaux-Arts. Other pupils of Gleyre's at that time included Renoir, Sisley and Bazille. It was his friendship with these artists that proved more useful to Monet than Gleyre's teaching.

With these new companions, Monet was able to satisfy his taste for outdoor painting, taking his easel out into the beautiful forest of Fontainebleau. These excursions, with the first group of painters who were to become the Impressionists, confirmed Monet's technical supremacy over most of his younger colleagues, a supremacy acquired through his work with Boudin and Jongkind.

In this period, the artist began to realize that it was time to throw off the role of disciple that he had assumed in relation to other painters in his circle. It was perhaps for this reason that Monet abandoned work on *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. The title of the painting marked it as a clear homage to Manet, while in style it reflected in many ways the influence of Courbet. He began instead to devote himself to the portrait *Camille*. This painting was accepted by the official Salon in 1866 and secured him a certain degree of success. The figure in green in the portrait was Camille Doncieux, his companion and model, a lovely young lady who was to give birth to his two sons, Jean and Michel, before dying of illness at the early age of thirty-two. On that same occasion the Salon accepted another of Monet's works which at the time aroused less interest but was later to prove crucial in any study of his artistic development: *St.-Germain l'Auxerrois*, painted from a balcony of the Louvre. The painting focuses upon the way the dazzling light falls on the leaves of the trees, blending with the green of the lawns and the gray of the houses in a manner that is decidedly impressionistic.

OFFICIAL INCOMPREHENSION

At this point in his career Monet began to have doubts about his artistic progress thus far. The controversy surrounding the Salon des Refusés showed him the limitations of the debate that was taking place between an intolerant tradition on the one hand and romantic aspirations on the other. The Salon des Refusés had been set up by Napoleon III in 1863; this was the year the academic Salon refused to accept almost four thousand of the works submitted, provoking a veritable uprising among the artists. The Emperor reacted by ordering that the rejected works be housed in premises next door to the official Salon. The parallel exhibition was, however, to prove a fiasco and a scandal. The days when conventional painters would adopt the bright palette of the Impressionists were still a long way off.

Although Monet himself did not participate in the Salon des Refusés, he could certainly not be accused of fawning over the Academy. Despite the acceptance of *Camille* and (in subsequent years) of other works, his relations with the official market remained difficult for quite some time. This had negative consequences on the spread of his art as well as on his financial state.

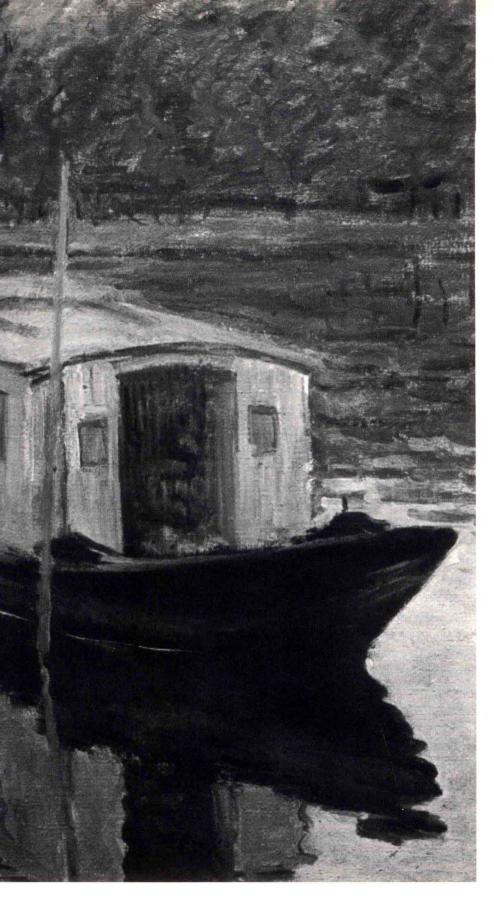
Monet's landscapes are undoubtedly among his highest artistic achievements, but his human figures are also seen in a limpid atmospheric relationship, as demonstrated by the fragment and sketch that are all that remain of his lost masterpiece *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Even in its fragmentary form, it preserves all the enchantment of extraordinary freshness with its stark contrast between grays and vivid reds.

The 1866 work Women in the Garden marks another stage in Monet's development. Although it follows a precise pattern, with its well-defined but stylized profiles and planes, this large-scale painting, executed completely outdoors, already shows signs of remarkable artistic boldness — which was probably the reason for its rejection by the Salon the following year. The scene shows some female figures in a bourgeois garden on the outskirts of Paris. Camille Doncieux herself posed for three of these figures, all intent on picking and smelling flowers. The chances of such an everyday scene interesting the Salon were in themselves remote, but the jury's decision to reject the painting was probably due less to the subject than to the presence of extreme contrasts in light and the use of vivid colors. The painting was purchased by Bazille, another member of the group, whose financial position — he was the son of a senator — allowed him to help out those of his colleagues who were in difficulty. Like many other Impressionists, Monet certainly did not lead a life of ease. This was especially true after his father, who disapproved not so much of his son's passion for painting as his rebellious attitude, cut off all assistance in 1864.

In 1867, Monet's activity became truly large-scale: he was working on a total of twenty paintings in which figures, gardens, views of Le Havre and scenes of regattas flowed freely on the canvas, reflecting his continuing interest in the tonality of light and the question of how to capture the play of changing light. In the autumn of the same year, immediately after the birth of his first son, Jean, he moved to Paris together with Bazille and Renoir. His friendship with Renoir was almost that of artistic brotherhood, and the two continued to work side by side as they had during their first exercises in outdoor painting at Fontainebleau.

LA GRENOUILLERE

The following year, the painter started to paint his "views from the riverside," a theme that was to take on such great importance in the formation of the Impressionist style. This was not so much because of the motif itself, as because of the opportunity it offered



The Floating Studio (detail)

to the painter to make color the constructive element of the painting. This concept was developed in the works dedicated to the Grenouillère, the picturesque landing stage often painted by both Renoir and Monet during the period when they worked together, sharing not only artistic experiences but also a house near Bougival on the Seine.

The work entitled *La Grenouillère* can, in many respects, be considered the first distinctly Impressionist painting. It is a work of great technical audacity, using free play of color and smooth brushstrokes in an attempt to capture the momentary thrill of life itself. There is a sudden burst of green in the leaves as they are struck by the rays of the sun, and dazzling reflections glance off the surface of the water where light and shade weave an intricate pattern.

In 1870, Monet officially married his companion Camille and the couple moved to Normandy. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Monet, true to his republican ideas, refused to fight for the Emperor, taking refuge in London. Here he again met his old friend Pissarro and became acquainted with Durand-Ruel, the first art dealer who had sufficient faith in the Impressionists to risk capital in their works. In London, the painter came to know the works of Turner and Constable and was fascinated by their interest in the "colors of nature."

Before returning to France, Monet spent some time in Holland and thus remained largely untouched by political and social events of this period, such as the famous "Paris Commune." In Holland he was fascinated by the serene Dutch landscape with its windmills reflected in the calm waters of the canals. He returned to France with several studies and canvases as well as a large number of Japanese prints that he had bought in Amsterdam. These prints — by Hokusai, Hiroshige and Korin — were to have an influence on his art in the years to come, contributing to the boldness of certain artistic choices, especially in the juxtaposition of colors. By this time, there had been an improvement in Monet's financial position. Camille's dowry and the legacy he received on his father's death enabled him to lead a comfortable life, allowing him also to move with his family to Argenteuil on the Seine, to a house surrounded by a lovely garden where he began to cultivate his passion for flowers.