



Claude MONET

Paintings in Soviet Museums

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Aurora Art Publishers
Leningrad

Introduction by NINA KALITINA

Notes on the plates by ANNA BARSKAYA
and EUGENIA GEORGIEVSKAYA

Translated from the Russian by
HUGH APLIN and RUSLAN SMIRNOV

Designed by SVETLANA GUBANOVA

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Printed and bound in the Federal Republic of Germany

М 4903020000-034 без объявления
023(01)-86

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AUGUSTE RENOIR
Portrait of Claude Monet

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*I always am and I want always to be an Impressionist.
I alone know my troubles and how I struggle to finish
my paintings.*

Claude Monet

Gustave Geffroy, friend and biographer of Claude Monet, reproduced in his monograph two portraits of the artist. In the first, the work of an insignificant painter, Monet is eighteen years of age. A dark-haired young man in a striped shirt, he is perched astride a chair with his folded arms lying across its back. His pose suggests an impulsive and lively character; his face, framed by shoulder-length hair, betrays both alarm shown in the eyes and will indicated by the line of the mouth and the chin. Geffroy begins the second part of his book with a photographic portrait of Monet at the age of eighty-two. A stocky old man with an abundant, thick white beard stands confidently, his feet set wide apart; calm and wise, Monet knows the value of things and believes only in the undying power of art. Not by chance did he choose to pose with a palette in his hand in front of a panel from the *Water-lilies* series.

Numerous portraits of Monet have survived—self-portraits, the works of his friends (Manet and Renoir among others), photographs by Carjat and Nadar—all of which reproduce his features at various stages in life. Many verbal descriptions of Monet's physical appearance have come down to us as well, particularly from the period when he was already well-known and much sought-after by art critics and journalists.

How then does Monet appear to us? Take a photograph from the 1870s; Monet is no longer a young man, but a mature individual with a dense black beard and moustache, only the top of his forehead hidden by closely-cut hair. The expression of his brown eyes is markedly lively, and his face as a whole exudes confidence and energy. This is Monet at the time of his intense and uncompromising struggle for new aesthetic ideals. Now take his self-portrait in a beret dating from 1886, the year that Geffroy met him on the island of Belle-Ile off the south coast of Brittany. "At first glance," the writer recalls, "I could have taken him for a sailor, because he was dressed in a jacket, boots and hat very similar to the sort that they wear. He would put them on as protection against the sea-breeze and the rain." A few lines later Geffroy writes: "He was a sturdy man in a sweater and beret with a tangled beard and brilliant eyes which immediately pierced into me."¹

In 1919, when Monet was living almost as a recluse at Giverny, not far from Vernon-sur-Seine, Fernand Léger was his guest, who saw him as "a shortish gentleman in a panama hat and elegant light-grey suit of English cut. . . . He had a large white beard, a pink face, and little eyes that were bright and cheerful but with perhaps a slight hint of mistrust. . . ."²

Both the visual and the verbal portraits of Monet depict him as an unstable, restless figure. He was capable of producing an impression of boldness and audacity or he could seem, especially in the latter years of his life, confident and placid. But those who remarked on Monet's calm and restraint were guided only by his external appearance. Both the friends of his youth, Bazille, Renoir, Cézanne, Manet, and the visitors to Giverny who were close to him—first and foremost Gustave Geffroy, Octave Mirbeau and Georges Clemenceau—were well aware of the attacks of tormenting dissatisfaction and nagging doubt to which he was prone. His gradually mounting annoyance and discontent with himself would frequently find an outlet in

acts of unbridled and elemental fury, when Monet would destroy dozens of canvases, scraping off the paint, cutting them up into pieces, and sometimes even burning them. The art-dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, to whom Monet was bound by contract, received a whole host of letters from him requesting that the date for a showing of paintings be deferred. Monet would write that he had “not only scraped off, but simply torn up” the studies he had begun, that for his own satisfaction it was essential to make alterations, that the results he had achieved were “incommensurate with the amount of effort expended,” that he was in “a bad mood” and “no good for anything.”³

The artist was capable of admirable deeds of high civic import, but at the same time was occasionally guilty of faint-heartedness and inconsistency. Thus in 1872, together with the painter Eugène Boudin, Monet visited the idol of his youth, Gustave Courbet, in the prison—an event itself perhaps insignificant, but in the circumstances of general hounding to which the Commune Courbet was subjected at that time it was an act both brave and noble. With regard to the memory of Edouard Manet, Monet alone from the circle around the former leader of the Batignolle group acted when hearing, in 1889, from the American artist Sargent that Manet’s masterpiece *Olympia* might be sold to the USA. It was Monet who called upon the French public to collect the money to buy the painting for the Louvre. Again, at the time of the Dreyfus affair in the 1890s, Monet took the side of Dreyfus’ supporters and expressed his admiration for the courage of Emile Zola. A more personal episode also testifies to the warmth of Monet’s nature: after becoming a widower he remarried, in the 1880s, Alice Hoschedé, who had five children from her first marriage. He received them all with open arms and invariably referred to them as “my children.”

There was, however, another side to him. Thus in the late 1860s, suffering acute poverty and lack of recognition, on several occasions Monet abandoned his first wife Camille, and their young son Jean, practically leaving them to their own fate. Giving in to fits of despair, he would simply rush off somewhere, anywhere, just to change his surroundings and escape from the environment in which he had suffered personal and professional failures. On one occasion he even resolved to take his own life. Similarly hard to justify is Monet’s behaviour with regard to the other Impressionists when, following Renoir’s example, he broke their “sacred union” and refused to take part in the group’s fifth, sixth and eighth exhibitions. Not without cause did Degas, upon learning of Monet’s refusal to exhibit with the Impressionists in 1880, accuse him of thoughtless self-advertising. Finally, Monet was quite indefensible in his hostile attitude to Paul Gauguin. These examples make the contradictions of Monet’s character quite clear.

The reader might justifiably pose the question: why write about personal features in an essay on an artist, particularly as certain of these features show Monet in a not especially attractive light? But it seems that the division of a single, integral personality into two halves—on the one hand, the ordinary man with all the complexities and upheavals of his individual lot; on the other, the brilliant painter who recorded his name in the history of world art—is always dangerous. Great works of art are not created by ideal people, and if knowledge of those people’s characters does not actually assist us in understanding their masterpieces, then at least it can explain a great deal about the circumstances in which the masterpieces were created. Monet’s abrupt changes of mood, his constant dissatisfaction with himself, his spontaneous decisions, stormy emotions and cold methodicalness, his consciousness of himself as a personality formed by the preoccupations of his age, set against his extreme individualism—when taken into account these features elucidate much in the artist’s creative processes and attitudes towards his own work.

Claude-Oscar Monet was born in Paris on November 14, 1840, but all his impressions as a child and adolescent were linked with Le Havre, the town to which his family moved about 1845. The surroundings in which the boy grew up were not conducive to artistic studies; Monet’s father ran a grocery business and turned a deaf ear to his son’s desire to become an artist. Le Havre boasted no museum collections of significance, no exhibitions, no school of art. The gifted

boy had to be content with the advice of his aunt, who painted merely for personal pleasure, and the directions of his school-teacher.

The most powerful impression made upon young Monet in Normandy was his acquaintance with the artist Eugène Boudin. It was Boudin who discouraged Monet from spending his time on the caricatures that brought him his initial success as an artist, and urged him to turn to landscape painting. Boudin recommended that Monet observe the sea and the sky and study people, animals, buildings and trees in the light, in the air. He said: "Everything that is painted directly on the spot has always a strength, a power, a vividness of touch that one doesn't find again in the studio." And added: "It is not one part which should strike one in a picture but indeed the whole."⁴ These words could serve as an epigraph to Monet's work.

Monet's further development took place in Paris, and then again in Normandy, but this time in the company of artists. His formation was in many ways identical to that of other painters of his generation, and yet at the same time his development as an artist was marked out by profoundly individual features.

Almost every young artist to arrive in the capital from the provinces was dazzled by the magnificence of the Louvre's collection of paintings. It was the Louvre that had subdued Jean-François Millet's desire to flee back to Normandy from the city that was so alien to him. Courbet, arriving in Paris from Franche-Comté, demonstratively rejected the idea of being influenced by museums, but was himself strongly affected by the Louvre collection of Spanish painting. And although Manet and Degas, both born in Paris, knew the Louvre from an early age, they were never tired of making studies of the Old Masters and always maintained a pious reverence towards the classics; indeed, during their travels abroad, their first priority was always to visit the museums, not as tourists, but as attentive students eager to meet the creations of great teachers. But Monet preferred current exhibitions and meetings with contemporary artists to visiting museums. A study of his letters provides convincing evidence that contact with the Old Masters excited him far less than the life around him and the beauties of Nature.

What then particularly struck Monet during his first trip to Paris in 1859? An exhaustive reply is given by his letters from Paris to Boudin after his visit to the Salon. The young provincial passes indifferently by the historical and religious paintings of Boulanger, Gérôme, Baudry and Gigoux; the battle-scenes depicting the Crimean campaign attract him not at all; even Delacroix, represented by such works as *The Ascent to Calvary*, *St. Sebastian*, *Ovid*, *The Abduction of Rebecca* and other similar subject paintings, seems to him unworthy of interest. But on the other hand Corot is "nice," Théodore Rousseau is "very good," Daubigny is "truly beautiful," and Troyon is "superb." Monet called on Troyon, an animal and landscape painter whose advice Boudin earlier had found valuable. Troyon made recommendations which Monet relayed in those same letters to Boudin—he should learn to draw figures, make copies in the Louvre, and should enter a reputable workshop, for instance that of Thomas Couture.⁵

The Salon of 1859 included no paintings by the leading Realist Courbet, and the jury did not accept Millet's *The Woodcutter and Death*. Monet saw this latter work in 1860 and estimated it as "fine," at the same time viewing several canvases by Courbet which he considered "brilliant." In this same year he discovered the seascapes of the Frenchified Dutchman Johan Barthold Jongkind and declared him to be "the only good painter of marines."⁶

Thus Monet at once defined the figures who would provide his artistic guidelines. These were the landscapists of the Barbizon school, who had directed French landscape painting towards its own native countryside; Millet and Courbet, who had turned to the depiction of the work and way of life of simple people; and, finally, Boudin and Jongkind, who had brought to landscape a freshness and immediacy lacking in works by the older generation of Barbizon painters. Monet was to paint alongside several of these masters—Boudin, Jongkind, Courbet (and Whistler, too)—and by watching them at work would receive many practical lessons.

Although Monet did not regard with great favour his immediate teacher Charles Gleyre, whose studio he joined in 1862, his stay there was by no means wasted, for he acquired valuable



Claude Monet. Photograph. 1870s

professional skills during this time. Moreover Gleyre, although an advocate of the academic system of teaching, nonetheless allowed his pupils a certain amount of freedom and did not attempt to dampen any enthusiasm for landscape painting. But most important to Monet in Gleyre's studio were his incipient friendships with Bazille, Renoir and Sisley. We know that he had already been acquainted with Pissarro, and thus it can be said that from the earliest stages of his career Fate brought Monet together with the men who were to be his colleagues and allies over a period of many years.

During the early and mid-1860s these young painters were still searching for an identity and were still rather uncertain as to where their rejection of academic clichés and Salon painting would lead them. But they were fully prepared to follow boldly in the steps of those who, before their own involvement in art, had already begun the struggle for new ideals. At the outset they were particularly attracted by, in Monet's words, the "naive giant" Courbet, but by the late 1860s they were beginning to show a preference for Manet, whose pupil, Berthe Morisot, joined their circle. The complete antithesis of the noisy provincial Courbet, Manet, an elegant member of Parisian society, was during these years one of the central figures in the French art world. He struggled consistently for the cause of art true to life and attracted an ever-increasing number of followers from the ranks of young painters seeking novel means of expression, while provoking open hostility on the part of official critical circles and the Salon jury. The main stages of this struggle are well-known: *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* at the exhibition of the Salon des Refusés in 1863, *Olympia* in the 1865 Salon, and his one-man show at the time of the World Fair in 1867. By the end of the 1860s Manet was the recognized leader of the Batignolle group of artists and critics, who met in the Café Guerbois and included Degas, Fantin-Latour, Guillaumin, Duranty, Zola and Pissarro, as well as the friends from Gleyre's studio.

Manet and Monet knew one another's work long before they were introduced, and although at first very guarded in his attitude to Monet's artistic searchings, the Batignolle group's leader soon became interested in him and began to follow the development of his work most attentively. As far as Monet was concerned, he did not so much imitate Manet as imbibed that spirit of quest which surrounded the elder artist, gaining the impetus to release the powers latent within him.

Monet's development, however, was also influenced by his active contacts with Bazille, Renoir, Sisley and Pissarro. Discussions, arguments and, what was most important, their work together served to sharpen the individual skill of each and facilitated the development of certain general principles.

During the 1860s Monet had not yet determined his personal subject-matter, but he had no wish to turn to historical, literary or exotic subjects. He made it his programme to serve the truth and to keep pace with the times, and only experienced a slight uncertainty in defining the genre central to his work—either the landscape or scenes with figures.

Like most artists of his generation, Monet evinced no interest either in exploring various aspects of life, or in tackling acute social problems. By the time that Monet's generation began appearing on the artistic scene, the hopes inspired by the 1848 revolution had been shattered. Monet and his friends lived in the apparently unshakeable Second Empire headed by Napoleon III and supported by the bourgeoisie thirsting for wealth and luxury. The progressive-minded artists longed merely to dissociate themselves, at least spiritually and morally, from all that was linked with the Empire. The movement of opposition, which included various social forces preparing for the Paris Commune and the ensuing Third Republic, held little interest for Monet, totally immersed as he was in questions of art. His democratic sentiments, in contrast to those of, say, Pissarro, did not presuppose a personal involvement in the struggles of the nation.

Thus Monet's genre paintings, which played a notable role in the first stage of his career, did not, unlike those of Honoré Daumier or Gustave Courbet, touch upon any vital problems in the life of society. His figure painting was invariably confined to the representation of his intimate circle of friends and relations. Indeed, he portrayed Camille in a green striped dress and fur-trimmed jacket—*Woman in a Green Dress* (1866, Kunsthalle, Bremen; W., I, 65), Camille again with her son Jean at their morning meal—*The Luncheon* (1868, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt on the Main; W., I, 132), and the artist Bazille's sisters in the garden at Ville-d'Avray—*Women in the Garden* (1866, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; W., I, 67). Two of Monet's canvases from the 1860s in Soviet museums are similar in character—*Luncheon on the Grass* (1866, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow; W., I, 62) and *Lady in the Garden* (1867, Hermitage, Leningrad; W., I, 68). The first shows a group of friends having a picnic, among them Camille and the artists Frédéric Bazille and Albert Lambron. The second depicts Monet's cousin, Jeanne-Marguerite Lecadre, in the garden at Sainte-Adresse.

In these paintings Monet seems to imply that the essence of his creation lies in the praise of the intimate and the everyday, in the ability to recognize their beauty and poetry. But Monet conveys these feelings with still greater depth, subtlety and variation when he turns to landscape. Acquaintance with his figure compositions is sufficient to show that the artist is not attracted by man's inner world or the complexity of human relations; he tends to accentuate the interaction between the figure and the surrounding natural world—in case the scene is set in the open air—the play of patches of light on clothing, or even the clothing itself, as in the portrait of Madame Gaudibert (1868, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; W., I, 121), rather than on a person's face. Similarly, the individuality of a model's external appearance, his spiritual world, does not inspire the painter; thus in his *Luncheon on the Grass*, which is now in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Monet has repeated the figure of Bazille four times—it interested him as one of the elements of the overall composition, but in itself held little significance for him.

Clearly, by the early 1870s, Monet had fully recognized this feature of his talent and figure compositions became less frequent in his work as all his powers were devoted to landscape.



Claude Monet. Self-portrait in a Beret.
Private collection, France (W., II, 1078)

Nonetheless these early attempts at figure painting would benefit Monet in the future, for people appear in most of his landscapes—in fields, on roads, in gardens and in boats. True, man is by that stage not the main, nor even a secondary subject in a picture, but simply one of the indispensable elements of the changing world, without which its harmony would be disrupted. Monet almost seems to be reverting to the conception of Man and Nature reflected in Poussin's heroic landscapes. But in the great classicist's works Man and Nature were equally subject to the laws of higher Reason, whereas in Monet's they are equally subject to natural laws.

Another feature of Monet's landscapes in the 1860s and 1870s is that they are often more human than his figure paintings. This tendency can be explained not only by the fact that he was painting the facets of Nature that were lived-in and close to Man, but also by his perception of Nature through the eyes, as it were, of an ordinary man, revealing the world of his feelings. Each one of Monet's landscapes is a revelation, a miracle of painting; but surely every man—so long as he is not totally blind to the beauty of his environment—experiences at least once in his life that astounding sensation when suddenly, in some moment of illumination, the familiar world he is accustomed to appears transformed before him. For this sensation to arise so little is actually needed—a ray of sunshine, a gust of wind, a sunset haze; and Monet, as a genuine creator, experienced such sensations constantly.

The subject-matter of Monet's early landscapes is characteristic of his work as a whole. He liked to paint water, particularly the sea-coast near Le Havre, Trouville and Honfleur, and the Seine. He was also drawn to views of Paris, the motifs of the garden and the forest road; while his groups of massive trees with clearings and buildings in the foreground were a tribute to the past, a link with the Barbizon group and Courbet—in the choice of motif at least. Indeed, in terms of Monet's painting technique, the influence of Courbet and the Barbizon painters had not

yet been fully overcome. He still applied his paints thickly to the canvas, clearly defining the outlines of every form, although the forms themselves were already being given a rather flattened treatment. The artist's heightened interest in the reproduction of light is undeniable, but in this respect too he did not at first go much beyond his predecessors, particularly Boudin and Jongkind. Although small, individual patches of colour, used to convey the vibration of light are encountered, they tend to be exceptions to the general pattern. And yet while in some ways following a well-trodden path, Monet was still able to display his individuality. The early appearance of a creative personality is by no means characteristic of all young artists. Some can spend years in finding themselves as tradition holds them in its clutches, inducing a continual sense of dissatisfaction, and Monet did not completely avoid such feelings. Thus on one occasion he took advice from Gustave Courbet and made certain alterations in a painting, but still not pleased with the picture, he abandoned it and eventually cut the canvas into pieces. But if Monet's painting was similar to that of some of his older contemporaries in certain features, it was nonetheless similar to no one's in every respect. The sense of the materiality of natural forms, present in his early landscapes and reminiscent of Rousseau or Courbet, is at the same time somewhat lessened, their mass being represented with less use of contrast. Compared with Jongkind's seascapes, which are not entirely free from Romantic exaggeration, Monet's marine views are simple and calm. In short, the young artist was more inclined to develop his own means of expression relying on Nature rather than to imitate the works of other painters.

As for every artist at the beginning of his career, the problem of his public, "his" viewer, was a very acute one for Monet. From the very outset painting was his sole source of income and consequently he had to be able to sell his works. And no matter how creatively independent the artist was, no matter what bold ideas he advanced, the only way for him to attract attention was to exhibit at the official Salon. The Salon of Refusés held in opposition to the official one in 1863 had no successor in French artistic life during the Second Empire. And of course, no painter who was just starting out could possibly arrange a personal exhibition as Courbet did in 1855 and 1867, and as Manet did, also in 1867. A one-man show at that time was an event requiring great courage and as such was a rarity. Moreover, organizing one was only possible on the basis of a good number of significant works and sufficient financial means. Since Monet could boast neither the one nor the other in the 1860s, there remained only the official Salon.

His first attempt to exhibit at the Salon was made in 1865 when he submitted two landscapes for the jury's consideration, *The Mouth of the Seine at Honfleur* (Norton Simon Foundation, Los Angeles; W., I, 51) and *Pointe de la Hève* (Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas; W., I, 39). Both paintings were accepted and several of the critics, including the authoritative Paul Mantz, reacted positively towards them. This situation was repeated in 1866, although it was not the landscape, *The Road to Chailly in Fontainebleau* (W., I, 19), that attracted the attention of the critics this time, but the portrait given a genre painting treatment—*Woman in a Green Dress (Camille)*. The defenders of Realism, Thoré-Bürger and Castagnary, along with Zola, who had entered the field of art criticism shortly before, unanimously acknowledged the painting's merit. Thus Monet could consider himself lucky; Fortune was clearly smiling upon him. In the following year, however, this position was altered—the jury admitted only one of his landscapes. Such turn of events was familiar to many young innovators in nineteenth-century art. At first their paintings were accepted, for no particularly daring features were discerned in them and the jury was demonstrating its liberalism. But then, to the extent that the painter's creative individuality and non-traditional, fresh view of the world were revealed, the jury became more guarded and put up barriers before him. This was the case with Rousseau, Courbet, Manet and many others. But the impulsive Monet felt his failures acutely and painfully. The fact that his fate was shared by his friends as well afforded small consolation.

The late 1860s and early 1870s were an extremely important phase in Monet's career, for it is in his works from this period that an independent, innovative master rather than a bold

beginner began to be felt. True, very few were aware of his achievements, for all Monet's attempts to exhibit officially, be it in the British Royal Academy in 1871 or at the Paris Salons of 1872 and 1873, met with failure.

Many art scholars commenting on Monet's work attach great significance to the painter's visits to England and Holland in 1871, and his first-hand acquaintance with the works of Constable and Turner. There is no denying that English landscape painting, as represented by its two finest exponents, to a great extent outstripped the artistic strivings of Continental landscapists. With a boldness not found in his contemporaries Constable addressed himself to the direct observation of natural phenomena and the study of light. The freedom and freshness of his sketches, features often preserved in his finished paintings as well, are to this day astounding. As for Turner, Monet himself would later speak of the distinct influence that the Englishman's canvases had on him, while at the same time invariably stressing that Turner's Romantic hyperbole and fantasy were deeply foreign to him.

Yet without rejecting the influence of the English school of painting on Monet, its strength should certainly not be overestimated. No less important, and perhaps more important, was the very fact that the artist visited London, Zaandam and Amsterdam. For the English and Dutch countryside, the particular character of the light there, and the damp atmosphere typical of these maritime countries, necessarily left their impression on the receptive young artist. Working *en plein air*, he wanted to be an explorer who would be taught a new way of seeing by Nature herself. And Nature did, indeed, teach him. One needs to have been to England to realize how sensitively and faithfully Monet conveyed the misty atmosphere of London in his landscape *The Thames and the Houses of Parliament* (1871, National Gallery, London; W., I, 166), with the towers of Parliament and Westminster Bridge fading into the bluish-grey haze, to appreciate the picturesque effects he derived from the contrasting sharp outlines of the structures on the riverside and the hazy background, dull sky and grey water.

Returning to France, Monet felt with unusual acuteness the wealth and beauty of his own native countryside—separation almost always sharpens one's perceptions and, quite naturally, the countryside of Normandy and the Ile-de-France with which his whole life was associated became for him not merely an object of study, but also of worship. It was with a kind of rapture that he immersed himself in it, giving himself up totally to the creative impulse, and the canvases he produced in this state ring out like a hymn to the Nature of his native land.

The year 1874 was an important date in the history of French art, for it was then that the country's rejected artists began their struggle for recognition, for the right to mount their own exhibitions and make contact with a viewer whom they would seek to draw towards their ideals and principles, rather than being at the mercy of his tastes and demands. This struggle was unparalleled, for in the entire history of French art up to the appearance of the Impressionists there had actually been no group exhibitions outside the Salon. The Romantics in the 1820s and '30s, and the Realists in the mid-century, for all their shared ideological and aesthetic aims, had never formed new organizations to oppose the existing art establishment. Even the Impressionists' immediate predecessors in the sphere of landscape painting, the Barbizon school painters, although so close to one another both in their lives and in their work, never arranged joint exhibitions.

The Impressionists were pioneers breaking down established traditions, and Monet, as always, was in the forefront. To be fair, we should note that the decision to hold an independent exhibition was not a sudden one. Both on the eve of the 1848 revolution and shortly thereafter artists were considering various projects for exhibitions outside the Salon, and during the Second Empire such ideas became increasingly popular. But projects, discussions and dreams are a different matter from the realization of them.

The First Impressionist Exhibition opened on April 15, 1874, at 35 Boulevard des Capucines. Thirty participants contributed 160 works, Monet providing nine, Renoir seven, Pissarro and Sisley five each, Degas ten, and Berthe Morisot nine.⁷ The artists exhibited oils, pastels and

watercolours—of Monet's works, four were pastels. In the future his contributions would increase in number; for the second (1876) he provided eighteen works, for the third (1877) thirty, and for the fourth (1879) twenty-nine. He took no part in the fifth (1880) and sixth (1881) shows, but sent thirty-five pictures to the seventh in 1882, and was absent again at the eighth.

The importance of any given artist's contribution lay, of course, not only in the number of works exhibited. Their artistic merits, programmatic qualities and correspondence to the aesthetic principles of the new movement were vital. In these respects Monet was invariably among the leading figures. At the group's first exhibition viewers saw *The Luncheon*, rejected by the Salon jury in 1868; *Boulevard des Capucines* (1873, W., I, 292), which now hangs in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow; and the landscape painted at Le Havre in 1872, *Impression. Sunrise* (*Impression, soleil levant*, Musée Marmottan, Paris; W., I, 263). It was this latter painting that gave Louis Leroy, a critic from the magazine *Charivari*, occasion in his parodic review to dub the participants in the exhibition "Impressionists." Fate decided that a word thrown at the group in mockery should stick, and the artists themselves, although at first interpreting the name "Impressionist" as an insult, soon accepted it and grew to love it.

Monet's Le Havre landscape corresponded precisely with the essentials of the movement which would be termed "Impressionism" in the 1880s and 1890s by French critics, and eventually by the critics and art historians of all other countries too. With the knowledge of the works by Monet and his friends that were to appear later in the 1870s, this fact can be asserted with certainty. Two elements are dominant in the landscape: that of water, and that of the sky. In fact they all but merge with one another, forming an elusive blue-grey mirage. The outlines of buildings, smoking chimneys and boats all fade away so that only the vessels in the foreground, represented by sweeping strokes of dark-blue paint, stand out from the morning haze. The pink and yellow tones interact with the dominant cold ones, colouring the sky towards the top of the painting, and they touch lightly on the water's surface, announcing the rising of the sun, a red disc suspended in the grey-blue haze. Only the reflections of the sun on the water, suggested by bright, reddish tints, foretell its imminent victory over the early morning twilight.

The picture *Boulevard des Capucines* is no less programmatic, this time demonstrating the Impressionist interpretation of the motif of the city. The artist is looking at the Boulevard from an elevated viewpoint, the balcony of Nadar's studio on the corner of the Boulevard des Capucines and Rue Daunou. He even brings into the composition the figures of men on the balcony, seeming to invite the viewer to stand alongside them and admire the unfolding spectacle. The Boulevard stretches into the distance towards the Opera, pedestrians hurry along, carriages pass by, shadows move across the walls of buildings, and rays of sunlight, breaking through the storm-clouds, flash out, colouring all in warm, golden tones. . . . Monet gives no attention whatsoever to individual buildings, even those of note (as he did in an early cityscape showing the church of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois in Paris): the city interests him as a unified, mobile organism in which every detail is linked with another.

The French capital had been depicted by many artists, including, in not too distant years, Georges Michel and Théodore Rousseau, who both painted the hill of Montmartre (although Montmartre at that time presented almost a rural scene). Just prior to and contemporaneously with Monet, Paris was painted by Jongkind and Stanislas Lepine. The former's Paris was a bustling and frequently sad city, while the latter could not suppress a rather dry, matter-of-fact approach. But Monet, both in the *Boulevard des Capucines* and in his other cityscapes, affirms the lyrical essence of contemporary urban life and vividly demonstrates the totally unique light effects that the city provides. Along this same path, or one close to it, in the sphere of cityscape would go Manet, Pissarro, Utrillo, Marquet and other artists of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements.

Both the *Boulevard des Capucines* and *Impression. Sunrise* revealed fundamental changes in Monet's manner. His style had become noticeably livelier, his brushstrokes already quite varied and mobile, and his colours had acquired transparency. By now he was representing not only

objects, but also the atmosphere surrounding them and influencing both colour and the boundaries of form. Henceforth Monet was convinced that forms could not look as definite as they were painted by, say, Courbet, and that local colour was totally conditional—an object's colour is never perceived in all its purity since it is affected both by light and the air enveloping it. At first hesitantly, and then with increasing freedom and confidence, Monet developed his manner of painting to correspond with his altered artistic perception. In this sense, in the 1870s he achieved perfect balance and harmony.

At the Second Impressionist Exhibition Monet displayed landscapes—for the most part of Argenteuil—and the figure composition *La Japonaise* (1875, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; W., I, 387). If *La Japonaise*, which depicted the artist's wife, Camille, in a kimono, still tended towards Monet's "old" style, the paint being laid on thickly in broad strokes, the landscapes on the contrary continued the trend indicated by the views of Le Havre in the early 1870s, the *Boulevard des Capucines* and other works in similar vein.

From 1872 onwards Monet lived mainly at Argenteuil, a small town on the Seine not far from Paris. Other artists came to visit him there, as though to underline his outstanding role in the establishment of Impressionism. Among them was Manet, who in 1874 painted such well-known pictures as *Argenteuil, Boating*, *On the Bank of the Seine*, *Claude Monet in his Studio Boat* and some other works.

Edouard Manet consistently singled Monet out from the other Impressionists, and in his reminiscences Antonin Proust recalls the elder artist's words about his younger colleague: "In the entire school of the '30s there is no one who could paint landscape like that. And his water! He is the Raphael of water. He feels its every movement, all its depth, all its variations at different times of the day."⁸

The foremost theme in Monet's work of the 1870s was Argenteuil. He painted the Seine with boats and without them, reflecting the resonant blue of the sky or leaden grey under wintry clouds. He enjoyed painting the town as well, now powdered with snow, now sunny and green. In fine weather he would go for walks in the environs of Argenteuil, sometimes with his wife and son, and these strolls gave rise to canvases filled with the intoxicating joy of being. One of these is *The Poppies (A Promenade)* (1873, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; W., I, 274). Across a living carpet of meadow grass strewn with the red heads of poppies wander ladies with their children; above them stretches a broad sky with light white clouds. In Monet's interpretation Nature is kind and bright, hospitably drawing to her breast all those who come to her with an open heart and soul.

In his Argenteuil period Monet shows a preference for landscapes that convey wide expanses of space with an uncluttered foreground. This sort of composition lends paintings a panoramic quality, space being developed in breadth rather than in depth, with horizontals expressed by rivers, riverbanks, lines of houses, groups of trees, the sails of yachts turned parallel to the surface of the canvas and so on. Monet's prevailing tendency at this period may be illustrated, for example, by such works as *Barges on the Seine* (1874, private collection, Paris; W., I, 337), *Resting Boats at Petit-Gennevilliers* (California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco; W., I, 227), and *Impression. Sunrise* (1872).

The dynamics of the life of Nature are captured by Monet in the Argenteuil cycle both in minor, everyday phenomena and in turning-points: the spring blossoming is followed by the time of ripening, in turn followed by the fading of autumn, and then by winter. Yet even Monet's winter does not signify death, for life still carries on—vehicles move along the roads, people are up and about, a magpie sits on a snow-covered fence, and, most important of all, the changing light and the atmosphere itself live on in his paintings, proclaiming now a thaw, now a fresh snowfall, now another cold spell.

The words of Camille Pissarro, written to Théodore Duret in 1873, can be applied to all the Argenteuil landscapes: "I consider his talent very serious, very pure; he is truthful, only he feels somehow differently; but his art is thoroughly thought through; it is based on observation and on a completely new feeling; it is poetry created by the harmony of true colours."⁹