

*Garden at Sainte Adresse* by Claude Monet (19th century French artist) - Claude Monet was 27 years old when he spent the summer of 1867 with his relatives at a French beach resort. This sunlit scene showing his father (seated in a panama hat) and three stylishly-dressed relatives as models. The artist perspective is higher than the scene as if he is painting from the balcony of a tall building. You see three bands of color: the light blue sky dotted with clouds, the marine blue sea dotted with sailboats, and the garden dotted with bright flowers and people. At this time in history, European artists marveled at Japanese colored wood-block prints. To capture that look, Monet tried to make his painting seem flat. He also had spots of pure color and rapid brushstrokes, breaking from the art tradition of his time. Twelve years later, Monet exhibited the picture at exhibition in 1879.

You might think this is a peaceful family scene. Sadly it is not. Although he was born in Paris, Claude grew up in Normandy, the part of France originally settled by Vikings from Norway. His father was in the grocery business which also supplied ships heading out to sea. He wanted his son to go into the family business but Claude pursued his art career. The son went to art school and dropped out at age sixteen after his mother died. He moved to Paris where French artists learned their craft. War broke out in the French colony of Algeria which is in Africa. Claude was drafted into the army and his father could have paid to get him released but he did not. Claude served in the army for seven years and got very sick with typhoid fever. His aunt paid for his release from the army for the sake of his health. His father did not approve of Claude's girlfriend and future wife, Camille, for she was his model for paintings. They threatened to stop giving him monthly checks if he did not leave her.

*Jean Monet on His Hobby Horse* by Claude Monet (19th century French artist) - Many artists used their own family as models for their art. In this case, Claude Monet met his wife Camille when she modeled for him. In 1867, the couple had their first child, a son whom they named Jean (pronounced John). They were extremely poor during their early marriage. Claude's father did not want him to be an artist and his family did not approve of his wife Camille. He successfully exhibited his paintings of the seaside and he won a silver medal at one competition. When the people to whom he owed money found out, they seized his paintings which was legal since he was in debt. He began to build a successful career and could finally rent an apartment in a suburb of France. Monet painted this painting of his young son around this time. He never exhibited this painting at art shows.

The setting of this painting is the garden of the house they were renting near Paris. The little boy sits proudly on his hobby horse which has the pale fur and white mane of a palomino horse. The bridle and harness are the colors of the French flag (red, white, and blue). The jumping horse is the seat of the tricycle which the boy pedals on a sandy road matching the coloring of the horse and his boy. Jean's pale coloring matches that of his horse: a white blouse and a buff jumper. His black shoes and striped socks blend with the coloring of the tricycle. The colors of the rider seem to mirror the color of the ridden. His hat with its feather and his clothing show us that children wore fancier clothing than children do today. The dark, green garden causes his lighter colors to pop.

*La Grenouillère* by Claude Monet (19th century French artist) - Once upon a time, the French artist Claude Monet wrote to a fellow artist, “I do have a dream, a painting, the baths of La Grenouillère, for which I have made some bad sketches, but it is only a dream.” Earlier that year, two of his paintings had been rejected by the French salon — nobody would purchase art that lacked their stamp of approval. He and his friends were poor artists, trying to launch a new style of painting, and had no money to take vacations at the baths. The final painting of this scene has been lost and what remains is a rough exploration of his dream with more spotty, loose brushstrokes than his finished work. He and his friend worked side by side for both artists have paintings of nearly identical compositions of the same subject and the name of the resort means the frog pool in English. They painted until they ran out of paint and begged money from friends for more paint. Luckily, the owner of the restaurant fed them in exchange for paintings.

What made this setting so special? The French resort on the Seine River had a spa, boating, and a floating café. With a little bit of money, one could take the train from Paris and enjoy a day of relaxation. What captured Monet’s imagination in this scene are the repetitive elements: the trees in the background, the boats and ripples in the foreground, and the people experiencing the resort in different ways. The sunlight reflecting off rippling waves was the source of light that Monet craved. The leaves of the weeping willow shimmered. The light and atmosphere changed as the day progressed, giving him the chance to see the scene in a new way. Moreover, artists in this new movement preferred working outdoors in the fresh air. He lived nearby and, even though he could not afford to play there, at least he could paint and sell a momento to those who had the means that he lacked.

*Arrival of the Normandy Train, Gare Saint-Lazare* by Claude Monet (19th century French artist) - Claude Monet was born in 1840 — a time of change and revolution in France. The French salon had very strict ideas about painting — they aimed for traditional art. Photography caused people to question the need for realism since cameras could capture it best. Young artists began to experiment with light and color to give an impression of things. Monet was one of those artists — he is the father of this way of painting. After war broke out between France and Prussia in 1870, Monet and his wife Camille moved to London where he explored the play between light and fog on the Thames River. When they returned to France after the war ended, his family moved to an apartment near the train station in Paris. The smoke of the trains reminded him of his painting in London. He painted twelve views of the train station — all at the same time!

Monet built-up thick, round puffs of pigments and up close you see blobs, ridges, and splotches of paint. Breaking from tradition, he did not blend colors. You can see the picture most clearly by stepping back far enough away. This picture focuses the eye on a train shed where rising steam is trapped within the structure and daylight pierces the glass roof. Smoke billows like clouds in the sky and fills the shed. This train station was one of the busiest in Paris busiest but the light glimmering off the black train engine takes the focus off the crowd and, like the lone man in blue in the foreground, we stare at the source of the smoke in awe of the mighty symbol of the Industrial Revolution.

Over half of the paintings were ready for an exhibition in Paris in 1877, The subject of trains was a break from tradition. His critics gnashed their teeth and complained of smoke covering up his painting and whistles giving them headaches.

*The Manneporte (Étretat)* by Claude Monet (19th century French artist) - Claude had been happily married to his wife Camille, a former model for him, for nine years. Jean, their first son (the boy on the hobby horse), was born before they were married. Claude painted many paintings of his beautiful wife — with and without their son. Six years into their marriage, she became ill and was diagnosed with a lung disease called tuberculosis. Two years later, she gave birth to their second son, Michel, which weakened her so much that a year later she came down with cancer and quickly wasted away. Claude sat by her deathbed every day. He painted a picture of his beloved Camille moments after she died.

He moved to Normandy three years later because he could never find himself happy in their old home. Not far from his new home, where he planted a luscious garden of water lilies, he strolled along the white pebble beach with its white chalky cliffs of a place called *Étretat* which is a fishing village and resort on the French side of the English Channel. People come from all over the world to visit its three large natural archways. This one is called the Manneporte and it looks like a large elephant dipping its trunk into the sea. ” — but what on earth is that? is a striking natural archway that juts out into the sea on the French side of the English Channel. The sunlight striking the cliffs breaks down the light in such a way that the artist could explore what he loved most — light and color shimmering in different ways depending up on the time of day. He painted twenty views of this beach. He painted this one in 1883 — in the winter with its choppy waters and low illumination of the setting sun. Imagine him turning his easel west and painting with a frozen pallet of colors, enduring the bite of the wind on his fingers.

*Haystacks (Effect of Snow and Sun)* by Claude Monet (19th century French artist) - In 1883 Monet was still grieving the loss of his beloved wife Camille. Everywhere he looked he saw reminders of Camille so he decided to move to the countryside. The property had a barn, orchards, and a small garden. The home was not far from a school for the boys to attend. He turned the barn into a painting studio. He, his children, and another family built up the garden and eventually built a greenhouse, a second studio, and a spacious building with skylights.

Monet moved out of the city of Paris to the countryside. One day, he saw the most ordinary thing in the field — a haystack. The streaming sunlight generated an array of colors that enchanted him. He was fascinated with how the haystack looked completely different, depending upon the time of day. As time went on, he realized that the haystacks looked different at different times of the year. The effect of snow and sun was particularly dazzling. He wrote to an art critic, “I am working very hard, struggling with a series of different effects (haystacks), but at this season the sun sets so fast I cannot follow it. . . . The more I continue, the more I see that a great deal of work is necessary in order to succeed in rendering what I see.” Between 1890 and 1891, Monet painted thirty different versions of the haystack!

He adored the idea of exploring the same scene many times to capture different lighting so much. It became one of the things for which he was best known.

*Woman and a Parasol (Madame Monet and Her Son)* by Claude Monet (19th century French artist) - In the mid 1870s, Claude, his wife Camille, and their little boy Jean lived in a small town just outside of Paris. Monet was a starving artist when they married and the couple stayed poor until the day Camille died. Not only did she model for Monet, she modeled for other French artists, many of whom lived in Paris. Because they had so little money, they could not enjoy everything Paris had to offer.

Fortunately, Monet and his family enjoyed being outdoors whether they were at the beach, in the garden, or in the countryside. He was so enchanted with the effect of sunlight that he brought his paints with him to paint “*en plein air*” which is French for outdoors. He was not the first to paint outside but he did make it an important element of a new style of art.

In this painting, Camille and Jean are taking a stroll in an unspoiled meadow on a blustery, spring day. The wind sweeps up the fluffy clouds and Camille’s white veil and dress which are all contrasted against the blue sky. The various shades of gray and white in the clouds and dress capture the light. The waving green grass parallels the green wavy parasol. He creates depth by putting her large shadow in the foreground. Placing Jean, seen from the waist up only, in the background heightens the sense of depth. Both Jean and his mother are looking at the painter but, because, Monet used quick brush strokes, it is hard to read their facial expressions. Mother and son, silhouetted against the sky, look like the monarchs of spring strolling through their dominion.

*Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge* by Claude Monet (19th century French artist) - Monet consider his water lily pond his greatest work of art. One of the improvements Monet made to his country house was a vast landscaping project. He purchased some swampy land near the railroad tracks. He was the architect of his garden, consulting his botany books and writing daily instructions for his seven gardeners. He designed and built a Japanese footbridge over the pond. He imported water lilies from all over the world — they came from as far away as Egypt and South America. His colorful flowers bloomed yellow, blue and white lilies that turned pink with age.

Monet once said, “Beyond painting and gardening, I’m good for nothing.” Six years after beginning the water lily project, he started painting it. It became a bit of an obsession for he painted almost 250 paintings of his beloved water lilies. Because he was an excellent observer of nature, he saw something new every time he came to his garden. At first, he made vertical paintings like this bridge. Eventually he filled gigantic decorative panels that can cover the entire wall of a museum with his lilies — six feet tall and fourteen feet long.

This 1899 painting illustrates what captured Monet’s attention: the eye is drawn to the footbridge arching elegantly over the pond. The color of the bridge changes depending upon the lighting, and, on this day, it matches the soft greenery hanging over the pond. Light reflects off the mirror-like surface of the pond in the spaces not covered by the colorful lilies. Some golden and red flowers grow along the water’s edge.