

Claude Monet

1840–1926

CLAUDE MONET was a French artist, best known for helping to start what is known as “Impressionism”: a style of painting that uses thick, fast brush strokes and vibrant colors to show outdoor scenes.

Monet grew up in the French province of Normandy. As a young man he moved to Paris, where he began his career as an artist. Like many others at the time, Monet made many artist friends while in Paris and found it an excellent place to develop his skills and ideas. At the time, art schools in Europe were generally teaching very realistic painting. Most of the students would go to famous museums like the Louvre and try to copy the style of the Renaissance paintings there. Monet admired the old painters, but felt he could develop his own style and preferred to paint outdoor scenes of gardens and people. He became friends with the artist Édouard Manet, who liked to paint the same things, and together they would help invent Impressionism.

One of Monet’s favorite ways of painting was to find a scene outside that he liked, then set up his easel and paints and spend the whole day making several paintings of the one scene. Each painting would look different because it was painted at a different time of day, with different light. The term “impressionism” came from one of the paintings Monet did like this, on a river bank in Paris, called “Impression of a Sunrise.” The trees and figures in the painting are only sketched; the colors are what Monet thought were the most important part of the scene.

Monet’s ideas about color and brush strokes, capturing what was happening in front of him at the very moment the picture was painted, caught on with many painters. Many artists used Monet’s ideas to create their own styles, including Vincent Van Gogh. Monet’s influence helped to change the way art was understood in Europe from that point on.



La Grenouillere, 1869



Impression, Sunrise, 1872



Wheatstacks, Snow Effect, Morning, 1891



Water Lilies, 1919

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Impressionist Exercise

Look outside in the afternoon, at sunset, and at night. Notice what color the sky is at these times and color it in each box. Why are the colors different? If you were to create a painting at each of these times of the day, how would they look different?

MORNING	
SUNSET	
NIGHT	