

**CLAUDE MONET**

French, 1840–1926

Water Lilies, 1917/19

Oil on canvas: 3 ft. 3¼ in. × 6 ft. 7 in. (1 × 2 m.)

Purchased in memory of Robert Allerton, 1966 (3385.1)

In 1883 Claude Monet rented a simple country house in Giverny, a small village in the rich valley of the Seine River about forty miles west of Paris. The artist spent over half of his creative life at the Giverny house, which he bought in 1890 and around which he planted a garden that eventually covered four acres. Monet had a passion for water, and in 1893 he acquired a meadow across from his garden in which lay a pond with wild water lilies. He redesigned the pond, enlarged it several times, and diverted a branch of the Epte River to replenish its waters. It became a source of artistic inspiration to him for over thirty years.

As with other impressionists, Claude Monet pursued the fleeting moment for its own sake, trying to capture in paint the ever-changing moods of nature. Monet used the word "instantaneity" to describe what he was trying to achieve, and, more than any other subject, his lily pond provided him with a motif at once fixed and in flux, specific and universal.

The Academy's *Water Lilies* belongs to the last of three series of paintings depicting the fugitive, fleeting play of

light on the artist's beloved pond. Disregarding the restrictions and limitations of the picture frame, Monet painted the illusion of a shimmering horizontal surface on a vertical one, creating visual tension. The viewer stands as if at the edge of the pond and sees the lily pads and water recede at the top of the painting. The next moment the entire painting snaps up and becomes a decorative frieze of closely keyed colors and flickering light. The brushwork adds to the feeling of ambiguity, as loose scrawls are placed next to tightly knit strokes; lily pads dissolve into strokes of pure green, which coalesce into pads. The canvas ground can be seen through the thin brushwork of the water and the waving grasses beneath. In some areas there is a layering effect as the paint is scumbled; in others, the surface, because of the thick impasto, is extremely granular.

Although inspired by nature and careful observation of it, Monet's late monumental canvases were the result of formal considerations and long hours of work in his specially constructed, large studio (in a 1954 photograph of Monet's smaller studio in the house at Giverny the Academy's *Water Lilies* hangs on a wall above a couch). Monet's last "Water Lilies" series is a precursor of mid-twentieth-century painting, as well as a final evocative statement of impressionism. RAD

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Oil on canvas

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Claude Monet rented and then bought a country house in Giverny, a small village in the rich valley of the Seine River, about forty miles west of Paris. Monet had a passion for water, and in 1893 he acquired a meadow across from his property in which lay a pond with wild water lilies. Over the years he redesigned the pond and enlarged it several times. It became a source of artistic inspiration to him for over three decades. As with other impressionists, Monet pursued the fleeting moment for its own sake, trying to capture in paint the ever-changing moods of nature. This painting belongs to the last of three series of works depicting the fugitive, fleeting play of light on the artist's beloved pond. Monet painted the illusion of a reflective body of water with loose scrawls of multi-colored pigment and tightly knit strokes. Suspended between reality and illusion, the lily pads dissolve into the mysterious murk that is both shimmering, transparent water and opalescent sky.

Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926)

Water Lilies, 1917/1919

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Claude Monet rented and then bought a country house in Giverny, a small village on the Seine River about forty miles west of Paris. In 1893, he acquired a lily pond adjacent to his property, which he redesigned, enlarged, and painted time and again. This painting belongs to the last of three series of works depicting the fugitive, fleeting play of light on the artist's beloved pond. In loose, curving lines and tightly knit strokes of multi-colored pigment, Monet captured the illusion of the reflective body of water. Suspended between reality and its shifting appearance, the lily pads dissolve equally into the shimmering water and the opalescent sky. Like his fellow Impressionists, Monet pursued the transient moment for its own sake and sought to capture nature in perpetual flux.

Honolulu Academy of Arts
Landscapes
Selected Works from the Galleries



Claude Monet (1840-1926)

Gallery #1

WATERLILIES, 1917-19

Oil on canvas

Purchased in memory of Robert Allerton, 1966 (3385.1)

“When you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you, a tree, a house, a field or whatever. Merely think, here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape, until it gives you your own naive impression of the scene before you.”

Claude Monet showed an early talent for art and particularly came to love painting out of doors. Born in Paris, Monet at age four moved with his family to LeHavre. Growing up on the coast, he had plenty of opportunity to observe light on water, a subject that intrigued him throughout his life. As a young man, Monet went to Paris to study; he was drafted into the French army in 1860 and sent to Algiers, afterwards returning to LeHavre. With his wife, Camille, he fled to London in 1870 to avoid serving in the Franco-Prussian war, after which they settled in Argenteuil on the River Seine. In 1874, with the help of art dealer Durand-Ruel, Monet, with Renoir, Sisely, Pissarro, Cézanne, Degas and Morisot, presented the exhibition in which Monet's *Impression—Sunrise* gave a name to a whole new art movement.

The nineteenth century was a world of change. Everything one confronted was momentary; emphasis was on the transitory nature of life itself. Impressionism deals with principle of momentary vision. Color and form in a painting is not the property of the object itself, but the moment of the perception of light. As light conditions change, artists record those changes. Artists would use any color that responded to the sensation of light, often juxtaposing colors that cause a vibration, like leaves flickering in sunlight. Blacks and browns were abandoned. Brushstrokes are generally visible and have no uniformity. Paint was thick. In the technique called *tache*, paint was applied in thick spots which would catch the light and literally reflect it from the surface. Paintings consisted not of buildings, trees or people, but patches of color.

Monet's financial situation improved partly due to his second wife's dowry and his growing success as a painter. He traveled around France and finally settled in a country house in the village of Giverny. The garden at Giverny, with its famous lily pond, was a source of inspiration to him for over thirty years. The Academy's *Water Lilies* is one of many Monet painted of his beloved lily pond, and apparently a favorite of the artist; a 1954 photo shows it hanging over the couch in his studio.

Water Lilies by Monet

Returns

The Academy is pleased to welcome back from Switzerland the painting *Water Lilies by Claude Monet* which has been on loan to the Kunstmuseum in Basel as a part of its major exhibition of Monet's water lily paintings.

In 1883 Claude Monet rented a country house in Giverny, a small village west of Paris in the rich valley of the Seine River. The artist spent over half of his creative life at the Giverny house, which he bought in 1890 and around which he created a garden that eventually covered four acres. Monet had a passion for water, and in 1893 he acquired a nearby meadow with a pond in which grew wild water lilies. He redesigned the pond, enlarged it several times, and diverted a branch of the Epte River to replenish its waters. It became a source of artistic inspiration to him for nearly thirty years.

As did other impressionists, Monet pursued the fleeting moment for its own sake, and he tried to capture in paint the ever-changing moods of nature. Monet used the term "instantaneity" to describe what he was trying to achieve. More than any other subject, the lily pond provided him with a motif at once fixed and fluctuating, specific and universal.

This painting belongs to the last

of three series of paintings depicting the fugitive, fleeting play of light on Monet's beloved ponds. The viewer stands as if at the edge of a pond and sees the lily pads and the water recede at the top of the painting. The next moment the entire painting seems to snap up into an upright plane and it becomes a decorative frieze of closely keyed colors and flickering

light. The brushwork adds to the feeling of ambiguity as loose, gestural strokes are placed next to small, meticulous strokes: lily pads dissolve into passages of pure green, which coalesce again into pads. The texture of the canvas itself can be seen between the thin brushwork of the water and the waving grasses. In some areas there is a layering effect as the paint is



scumbled, yet in others, the surface — because of the thick impasto — is extremely granulous. Though inspired by nature and careful observation of it, Monet's late monumental canvases were the result of formal considerations and long work in his specially constructed, over-sized studio. (Monet's smaller studio in the house at Giverny is seen in a 1954 photograph which shows the Academy's *Water Lilies* hanging on a wall above a couch.) Claude Monet's last series of water lilies is one of the precursors of mid-20th-century abstract painting as well as a final evocative statement of Impressionism. — Roger Dell

10 November: "The American Impressionists" by James Jensen, curator of Western art, Honolulu Academy of Arts. Impressionism spread to almost every nation of the world, and America was especially receptive to it. During the late-19th century, American artists Childe Hassam, J. Alden Weir, Theodore Robinson and John Twachtman were instrumental in bringing the style and theories of impressionism to America. All of them had studied in France, absorbing the ideas of the leading French impressionists, in particular Claude Monet. Although they learned much about the portrayal of light, color, and atmosphere in France, the American impressionists, once they returned home, imparted a distinct flavor and spirit to their work. SEP 88

Claude Monet
3385.1



Water Lilies by Claude Monet returns to
Academy from Gifted 1900 11 1982