

IMPRESSIONIST PAINTING  
FOR BEGINNERS

*CLAUDE MONET – PART THREE  
BEYOND IMPRESSIONISM*

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## CLAUDE MONET 1840-1926

### Recap of PART ONE

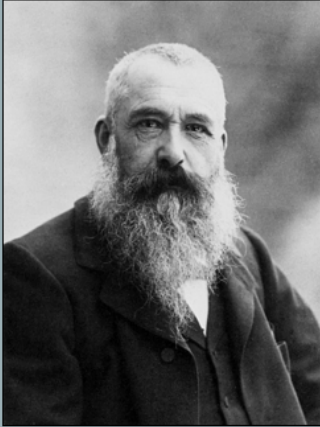


47-years-old 1887

- Monet was the stereotypical starving artist, always broke, borrowing money, and skipping out on the rent.
- When she came into an inheritance, he married his mistress, Camille Doncieux, the mother of their son Jean.
- By 1874, sales had improved, he painted with friends, and became the face of Impressionism
- Later, they had a second son, Michel; Camille became ill, and the Hoschedé family moved in.
- After Camille died, the mixed family stayed together with marriage between Monet and Alice 12 years later:
- In 1883, they moved to Giverny—he was 43 years old, the midpoint of his life, and he never moved again.

## CLAUDE MONET 1840-1926

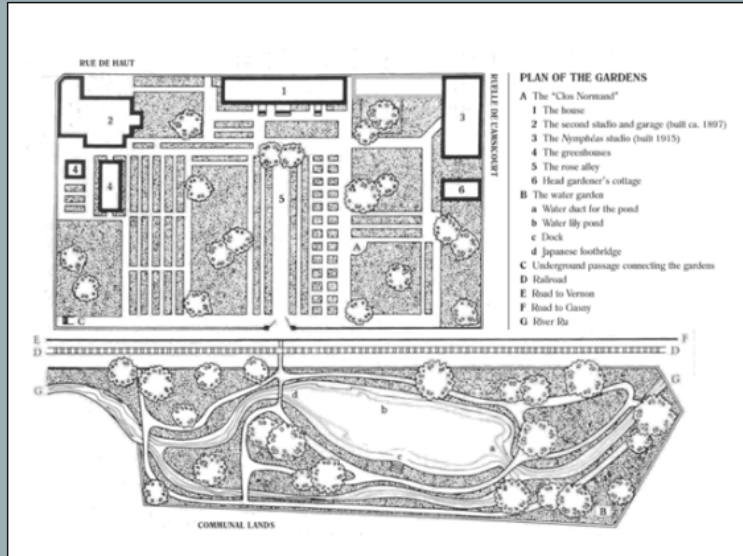
### Recap of PART TWO



58-years-old 1898

- Alice managed the mixed family and Monet
- He traveled in search of more subject matter
- His paintings became popular and more expensive, especially compared to other Impressionists
- He created numerous series of haystacks, poplar trees, the Rouen Cathedral, and the Seine near Giverny—all commercially successful.
- He battled with the municipality to preserve scenes he wanted to paint
- By the end of the century, the art world was changing

## MONET'S HOME IN GIVERNY



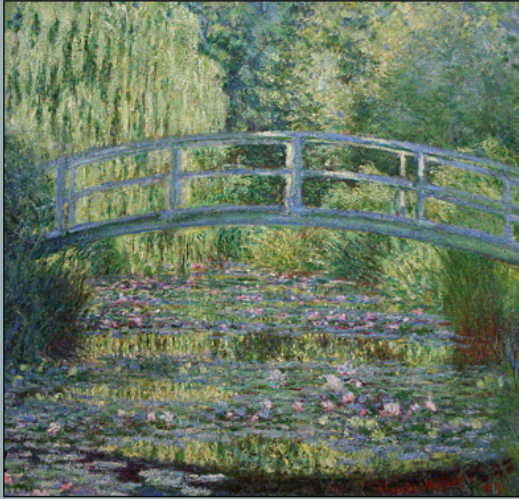
2012

The train from Paris to Giverny takes less than an hour. I went there in 2012. Monet loved gardening as much as painting. Having purchased the house and gardens in 1890, he was the landscape designer. He spent a fortune on the 2.5 acres planting flowers and trees, built greenhouses, service buildings, and a cottage for the head gardener, who led a staff of up to eight workers.

In 1893, Monet bought a parcel of marshland across the train tracks, and it was bordered by the Ru, a stream coming off the Epte river. Despite protests by local villagers downstream, he was given permission to divert the stream to create a pond, about the length of a football field.



## TURN OF THE CENTURY



*Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge* 1899



*Parliament, Setting Sun* 1900-03

Sadly, 1899 began with tragedy. Fellow Impressionist, Alfred Sisley, who didn't have financial success, summoned Monet to his deathbed entrusting the welfare of his children to his friend. He died later that day. Then, a few days later, his stepdaughter, Suzanne Hoschède Butler—who modelled for so many of his paintings—died at the age of 30, leaving a heartbroken family and two young children. A year later, her oldest sister, Marthe married Theodore Butler to care for the kids.

After the deaths, Monet wrote, "So much pain and heartache—and yet I must be strong and console my loved ones."

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Monet's paintings were the highlight of many exhibitions; and, he sought inspiration abroad, in London, and at home, in Giverny. Incidentally, he finished the London canvases at home in his studio using photographs for reference. Despite the myths: he didn't only paint plein air, he didn't finish his canvases in one sitting, and he did use photographs.

## GARDENS



1900



1900



1902

In 1904, Monet's total income was 271,000 francs; and, he spent much of that on maintenance, design changes, the gardening staff, maids, cooks, and a chauffeur.

He was quite proud of his grounds, saying, "My garden is my most beautiful masterpiece." From time to time, Monet allowed art buyers and journalists to tour the estate and his studio. He told one writer who visited, "Gardening and painting apart, I'm no good at anything!"

## JAPANESE BRIDGE AND LILY POND



1896



1897-99

The first water lilies arrived the next year, obtained from a botanist near Bordeaux who bred the first viable colored water lilies in Europe, and in 1895 Monet added a wooden Japanese-style bridge based on his love for Japanese art prints.

## EARLY WATER LILIES



1897-98



1906

At first, he painted the water lilies like still life flowers; but, when he zoomed out and eliminated the bridge, he created compositions without a horizon. This new way of conceiving a landscape changed the art world, and Monet devoted most of the next twenty years to the singular theme of his water lilies pond and gardens.

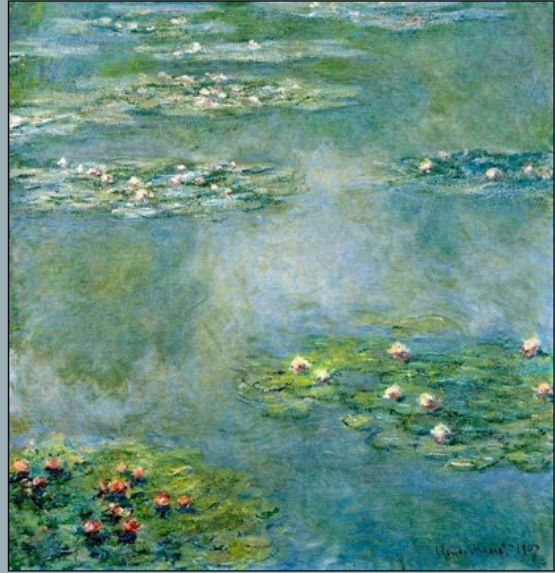




1906



1907



1907

## WHAT WAS HE LIKE?



Monet could be: violently self-critical about his artwork, prone to fits of depression, demanding about getting his needs met, and brutally shrewd in business dealings with art dealers and buyers.

But he loved family, friends, and country; could be altruistic, entertaining, and gracious; and had high ideals for his artwork. The daughter of another painter wrote a long description of him, that I'll excerpt, "He had a clear, ringing voice, and a natural, direct way of speaking (that) inspired confidence. Although he gave the impression at first sight of being rather peasant like, this vanished as soon as he began to speak. One quickly realized just how refined his mind was."

Monet liked "good" living, a morning drink of chocolate, only small doses of water, and good wine. He smoked about 40 cigarettes a day, mostly in the open air, and he threw them away half smoked. He also collected cars and by 1905 had a fleet worth 40,000 francs. When he received his first speeding ticket, the village published a notice that autos may not go any faster than "the speed of a horse at a regular trot."



## VENICE 1908



With all of their children now adults and the house and garden being tended to, Monet and Alice took a rare trip together, when they spent 2 ½ months in Venice. She attended to his needs and her friends, and he searched for locations to paint. Alice also saw how the changing light from day to day drove Monet from “spirit and enthusiasm” to “grumbling.” She wrote to their son Jean-Pierre that she better understood what he’d been complaining about on all those painting trips he’d taken. The trip took a lot out of her, and when they returned to Giverny, she was ill and bedridden.







At the age of 68, Monet finished 38 Venice paintings, and that inspired me. I was the same age when I completed my “Year of Monet” study project and started my own Venice series. I finished 20 pictures plus a 6-canvas composition, some of which were modeled after his subjects.

To see all of my Venice paintings and video and blog, “Painting Venice in a Pandemic,” go to [LeighPaintings.com](http://LeighPaintings.com)

## WATER LILIES EXHIBITION OF 1909



Before the Venice trip, Monet was terribly dissatisfied with his new innovative approach and destroyed at least 30 of his water lilies canvases. Alice had written, “He punctures canvases everyday.” An American newspaper reported that he ruined \$100,000 of artwork in a single day—and that was in 1908 currency!

Anyway, after returning to his studio, he saw at the water lilies compositions with fresh eyes and invited Durand-Ruel to come look. They had planned exhibits for the water lilies several times only to have Monet cancel, and finally he was ready. When Durand-Ruel came to the studio and saw the Venice paintings, Monet told him he had already made a deal with Bernheim’s gallery, and his longtime dealer was obviously miffed. But, that’s how Monet operated in business, pitting competitors against each other.

Nonetheless, Durand-Ruel gave him a 30,000 franc down payment and agreed to collaborate with Bernheim for a bigger water lilies exhibition, and it turned out to be a huge success. There were 48 large, untitled paintings filling three rooms. The new generation of critics who had loved Impressionism were ecstatic, and one wrote, “It’s too pretty, nature is not like that!”

### ALICE HOSCHÉDE MONET (1844-1911)



Alice Butler (granddaughter), Monet and Alice 1911

The next year an historic flood pummeled Paris and Giverny, as well. Monet fretted about his gardens, which were swamped. He wrote to Durand-Ruel, "I thought my whole garden was lost, which was a great sorrow to me. Now the water level is falling, and although I am losing many plants, perhaps it will not be the great disaster that I feared. But what a calamity! What misery!"

However, a far greater misery followed a few months later, when Alice died from leukemia. Ever since Suzanne's death a decade earlier, Alice had been seriously depressed and had anxiety about two of her other children. She was 65 years old and had lost the vitality that held the family together and her ability to calm down Monet, as he dealt with his own mood swings. Monet was devastated, and even a year later wrote, "The painter is dead and what remains is an inconsolable husband." He wrote to one of his stepdaughters that his paintings were a terrible joke and told another that he was going to stop painting altogether. Indeed no paintings from this period exist, though he did sporadically work on the Venice series.



## PAINTING WITH CATARACTS



1913



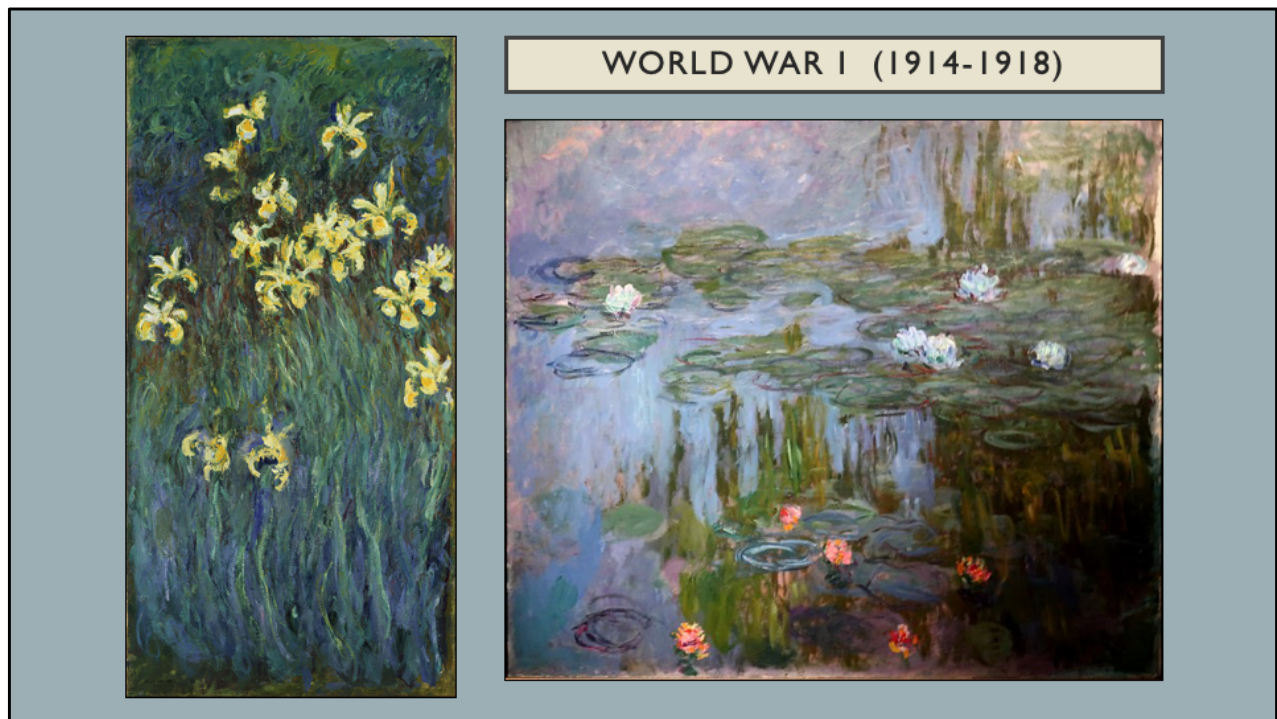
1913

After a short trip in early 1913 to St. Moritz in Switzerland with the Butler children and his son Michel, Monet came back to Giverny energized. Unfortunately, Monet was diagnosed with cataracts, and though he whined about his vision, his paintings from that time are lovely.



However, all was not gloom and he had a steady stream of visitors: family, a famed horticulturist, Durand-Ruel and his forced collaborator dealer Bernheim, and, among others, an American singer who came with the early filmmaker, Sasha Guitry.

The longer version is easy to find on YouTube and can be found at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnOCi8MUmbw>



During World War I, Monet could hear shelling near the front lines, about 60 miles away. More than 30 men from Giverny enlisted—including Jean-Pierre and a son-in-law. A hospital was setup close by in a converted 17<sup>th</sup> Century monastery. The artists colony dissolved and all the foreigners went home, including Theodore Butler, taking Marthe and their daughters to New York.

Monet contributed vegetables to the wounded and shell-shocked soldiers. He also joined with other artists, writers, and intellectuals to create their own publication in support of France's war effort. As perhaps the world's most famous artist at that time, he told the publisher, "If you think that my name can be of some help in the work you're doing feel free to make use of it."

He also continued painting his water lilies and gardens, although they were distressed with many of the gardeners leaving to fight. He wrote to Durand-Ruel's son Joseph, "We are well and continue to receive good news about our loved ones. But we live in constant anguish and worry."

## WEeping WILLOWS

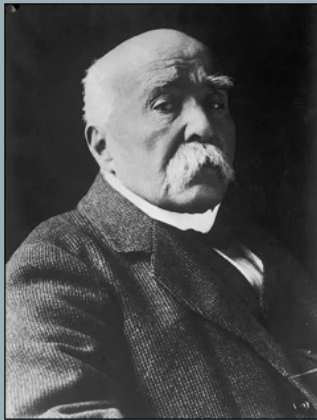


Monet was also preoccupied with charities for the wounded soldiers and their families. He donated many paintings to various auctions, and did a series of Weeping Willows to symbolize the war widows and raise funds for their cause.



## GEORGES CLEMENCEAU (1841-1929)

Prime Minister of France  
1906-1909 & 1917-1920



Georges Clemenceau was a doctor, journalist, and French politician. He was also Monet's best friend. They met when they were both 20, but their relationship grew in their 50s. Clemenceau was an art lover—his portrait was painted by Manet years earlier—and when he saw the Rouen Cathedral exhibition, he asked a mutual friend to arrange for an introduction at Giverny. At this point he was a well-known journalist, publisher, and political activist—Monet was already a national treasure. They shared the same ideas on education, politics, art, and wine; and, their friendship grew.

During World War I, Clemenceau pulled strings to get shipments of paints and canvases to Monet on military trains, as well as luxury items—like good wine—that the general public did not have access to during those hard times. Clemenceau was Prime Minister when the war ended and the day after signing the armistice agreement, he went to Giverny to be with Monet rather than attend the celebrations in Paris.



*Wisteria* 1919-20

Over the next couple of years, both Degas and Monet's close friend Renoir died and Monet wrote, "It's very hard. There's only me left, the sole survivor of the group."

Most of his water lilies and other garden pictures were quite large, roughly 6-7 feet wide, and they all employ both large and small brushstrokes. The effect is much different than the scenes he'd been doing during the earlier decades of his career, like those from Argenteuil, Rouen, or Venice. At this point, he was no longer painting traditional landscapes, but rather decorations that made a dramatic impact.



Close up taken at  
"Monet: The Late  
Years" 2019  
exhibition at the  
De Young Museum,  
San Francisco

## LES GRANDES DÉCORATIONS



Monet explored the idea of painting large decorative murals as early as 1876, and had it discussed it with visitors to Giverny ever since the pond got its first lilies in 1894. In 1914, he built an immense third studio on the property. It had huge skylights with shades and pulleys to adjust the light, and space for some panels that would be more than 6-feet high and 20-feet wide. The paintings rested on casters and would be moved around per his needs.





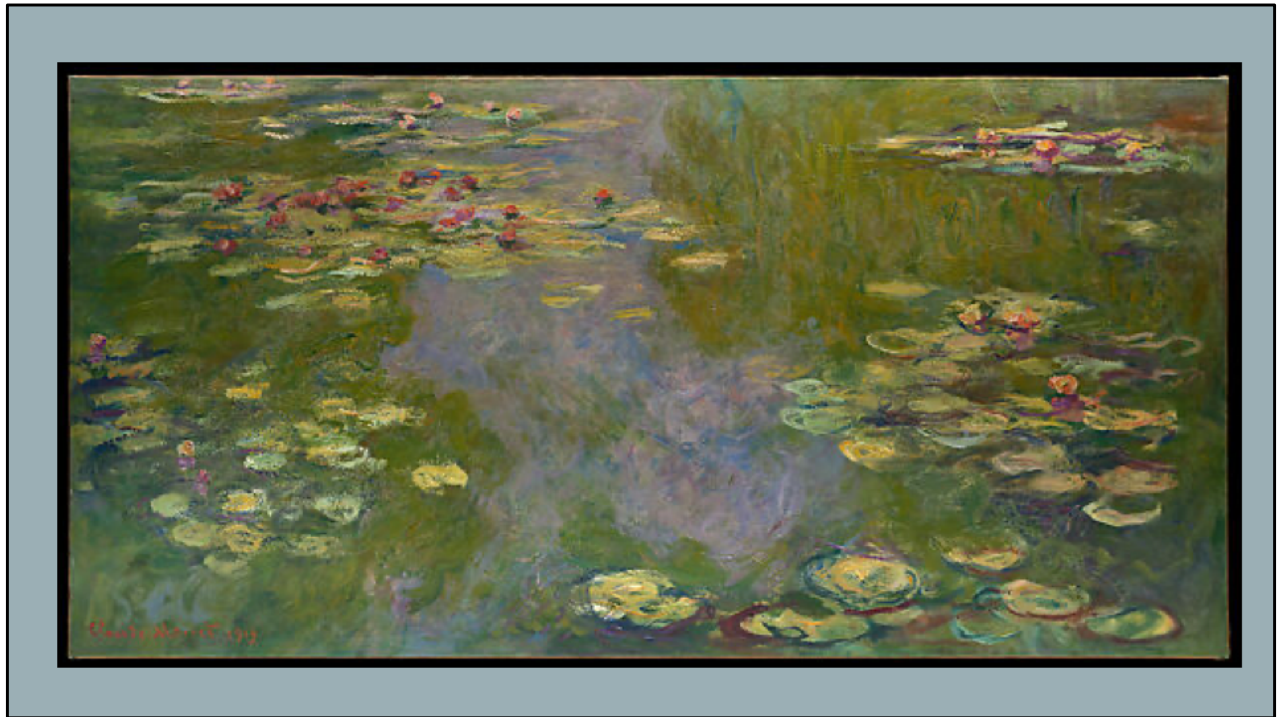
All of his attention was paid to these immersive interpretations of the water lily pond and willow trees. After the war, Clemenceau was a regular visitor to the new studio and Monet told him he wanted to make a donation of the *Décorations* to the French state. When his vision faltered, the subject was dropped, but Clemenceau didn't forget. When the topic did come up, Monet angrily resisted, because he was so unhappy with how his poor sight was effecting his work.

The two men bickered and were sarcastic, as friends will do, but their love for one another ran deep. On election day in 1920 when he was would be pushed out of office, Clemenceau went to Giverny to hang out with Monet.

### DONATION AGREEMENT REACHED 1920



In 1920, Monet turned 80, and he used every ounce of energy on what he called “The Work.” He was like a man possessed. After meetings with various people, the negotiations were concluded and on October 14<sup>th</sup>, the *Le Petit Parisien* newspaper announced on the front page, “The painter Claude Monet donates twelve of his finest canvases to the state.”



Plans for a gallery to permanently display the paintings were debated, and a round building was proposed by a renowned architect. However, these were rejected because the panels wouldn't properly fit. Other locations were considered but were unacceptable, and Monet was fed up, thinking about withdrawing his offer.

In 1921, Clemenceau and a work group toured two more facilities that were zoned to be repurposed as museums. L'Orangerie was built in 1852 to be a greenhouse in the west corner of the Tuileries Garden in Paris. It included large, oval-shaped rooms, and was near the Louvre, among other important sites. They proposed it to Monet, and he surprisingly agreed.



### VISION PROBLEMS (1920-24)



*The Japanese Bridge*



*The Artist's House View from the Rose Garden*

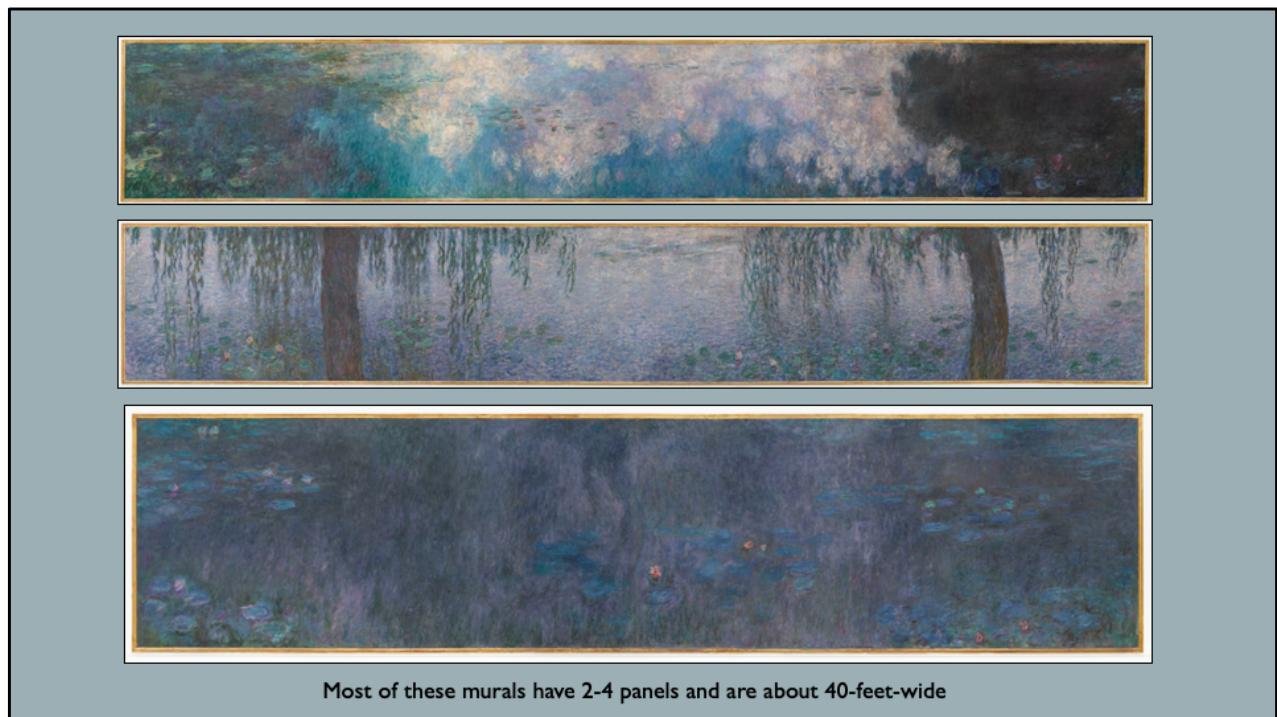
Already bothered by cataracts, Monet's vision continued to worsen. He tried different colored lenses, but with no lasting improvement. It got so severe that he couldn't tell the difference between colors on his palette and relied on their usual placement to know which ones they were. After much nagging from Clemenceau, such as "Your work gives poor results, and therefore you can whine about that instead (of getting surgery), because complaining gives you the greatest joy of your life...." Monet finally relented in 1923 and had cataract surgery, which along with different glasses, helped.





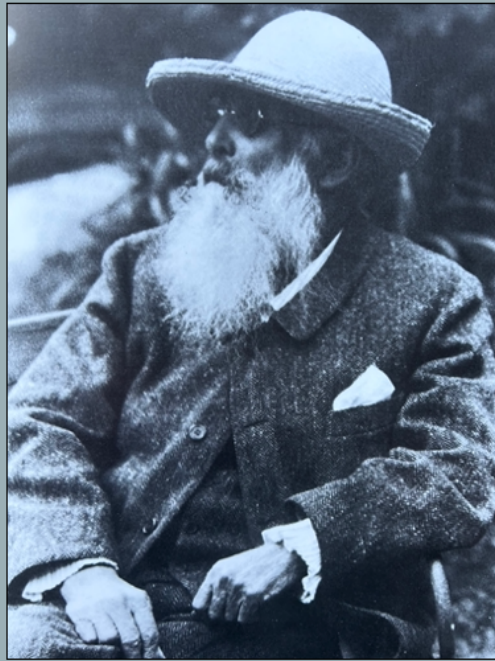
Predictably, Monet had second thoughts and in one of his periods of dark doubts, he rejected the location and withdrew the donation. Of course, Clemenceau was livid, and negotiations were fragile. With assurances that renovations on l'Orangerie would be completed within two years, Monet relented. However, he again refused, back and forth in weekly arguments with Clemenceau.

Finally, even as he had nagged Monet into eye surgery, Clemenceau was infuriated about the painting donation. He could no longer take the "insult to my friendship" and decided that "I will have nothing more to do with this unhappy affair."



For more than 40 years, Monet's stepdaughter, Blanche Hoschéde, was his most faithful companion. She had been his art assistant as a girl growing up until she left to marry Jean Monet, who was ill for many years. When he died, Blanche returned to Giverny to care for Monet. In 1925, she was the intermediary between the angry painter and his disgusted ex-friend. Through her efforts Clemenceau returned to Giverny, the friendship rekindled, and the encouragement resumed.

Monet wasn't easy, and he insisted that he had to continue improving the paintings, but in some places they are probably over-worked. But, I think the project was keeping Monet alive.



Claude Monet  
1926

By the start of 1926, both Monet and Clemenceau had bouts of illness, and more of their friends and family died. At some point, Monet insisted that he would make the donation after all, but that it might have to be done posthumously. He told Clemenceau, "When I am dead, I shall find their imperfections more bearable."

And that is, indeed, what happened. Although he was not told, a radiological exam revealed lung cancer. On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1926, Monet was surrounded by Impressionist paintings of "his admired companions," as well as his son Michel, Blanche, and Clemenceau, who took his friends hand and asked, "Are you in pain?" "No" Monet faintly replied, and then passed away.

## L'ORANGERIE



Two weeks after Monet's funeral, 22 of the enormous canvases were transported to Paris. On May 17<sup>th</sup> 1927, the museum at l'Orangerie was opened as the Musée Claude Monet.

As I've said, Monet art and life have had a profound influence on me. However, I'm not alone. Nearly 150 years since the first Impressionist Exhibition have passed, and he still one of the most popular painters in the history of art.