

MONET



MASTERS OF ART

MONET

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Front Cover: Claude Monet, *Water Lilies*, 1906, The Art Institute of Chicago,
Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection
Frontispiece: Sacha Guitry, *Portrait of Claude Monet at Giverny*, 1915 (see page 32)
Pages 8/9: Henri Manuel, *Claude Monet with his palette in front of his work*
'Les Nymphéas', 1920s (see page 36)
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INTRODUCTION

The year 2024 marked the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the designation of Impressionism in France, the art movement with which the painter Claude Monet (1840–1926) is inextricably linked. Like him, by 1874 many artists in Europe were painting outdoors, creating landscapes, streetscapes, river views and seascapes in which they sought to capture, as in a snapshot, their response to the light and colouring of a specific moment in time.

Painting outside the studio was now much simpler. Lightweight collapsible easels were readily portable, pigments now came in resealable metal tubes, and flat brushes allowed one to work with swift, broad strokes.

Monet unwittingly provided a name for this new painting approach when he gave the title *Impression, Sunrise* to a sketchlike oil he had made while watching the sunrise over the harbour of his hometown Le Havre. He happened to include it among the works he showed at a collective exhibition in the spring of 1874. Finding themselves shut out from the best opportunity for French artists to show and possibly sell their work, the highly conservative annual state-sponsored Paris Salon, a loose group of thirty artists calling itself the Société anonyme decided to mount a show of its own. In addition to Claude Monet, the group included such now-famous names as Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Alfred Sisley (1839–99), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), Edgar Degas (1834–1917), Camille Pissarro (1830–1903), Armand Guillaumin (1841–1927) and Berthe Morisot (1841–95). For their exhibition of 165 works they rented the second-floor former atelier of photographer Nadar at 35 boulevard des Capucines.

The show opened on April 15 and ran for a month. One of its reviewers was the art critic Louis Leroy (1812–85), who, after noting the artists' attempt in so many of the works exhibited to communicate their immediate response to the scene before them, hit upon the title of Monet's *Impression* painting as a way to describe this new common style. His review published in the satirical magazine *Le Charivari* on 25 April appeared under the title "The Exhibition of the Impressionists". The show itself was poorly attended and entrance fees failed to cover the group's expenses, but the publicity generated by Leroy's and other dismissive reviews called attention to this new departure in art in the minds of the public, gallery owners and art collectors.