

Claude Monet

French (1840-1926)

Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas



Painted in 1919

Signed and dated 'Claude Monet 1919' (lower right)
Oil on canvas, 39 3/4" x 40 7/8", 99.6cm x 103.7 cms

Provenance

Galerie Bernheim-Jeune et Cie., Paris; acquired from the artist, November 1919.

Galerie Bernheim-Jeune et Cie. & Galerie Durand-Ruel et Cie., Paris; acquired from the above, 1921.

Henri Canonne, Paris; acquired from the above, *circa* 1928.

Private Collection, France, *circa* 1946.

Ross Collection.

Galerie Beyeler, Basel.

Galerie Nichido, Tokyo; acquired from the above.

Private Collection; acquired from the above in March 1996.

Sale; Christie's New York, 12 May 2016, Lot 27.

Private Collection; acquired at the above sale.

Literature

F. Thiébaud-Sisson, "Une exposition Claude Monet" in *Le Temps*, 7 January 1928, p. 4.

A. Alexandre, *La Collection Canonne: Une histoire en action de l'Impressionnisme et de ses suites*, Paris, 1930, pp. 47-48.

D. Rouart, J.-D. Rey, and R. Maillard, *Monet Nymphéas ou les miroirs du temps*, Paris, 1972, p. 174. (illustrated as part of a larger canvas).

R. Gordon and C. F. Stuckey, "Blossoms and Blunders: Monet and the State" in *Art in America*, 1979, p. 110.

D. Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et Catalogue Raisonné*, Lausanne, 1985, vol. IV, p. 288, no. 1893b and p. 432, letter no. 2319 (illustrated, p. 289; illustrated as part of a larger canvas, p. 288; dated 1917-1919).

D. Wildenstein, *Monet: Catalogue Raisonné*, Cologne, 1996, vol. IV, p. 900, no. 1893/2 (illustrated, p. 899; illustrated as part of a larger canvas, p. 898).

J.-D. Rey and D. Rouart, *Monet Water Lilies: The Complete Series*, Paris, 2008, p. 140 (illustrated as part of a larger canvas).

Exhibitions

Paris, Galerie Durand-Ruel et Cie., *Tableaux par Claude Monet*, January 1928, no. 84.

Tokyo, National Museum of Western Art and Kyoto, National Museum of Modern Art, *Monet*, December 1982-January 1983, no. 61.

Morioka, Iwate Museum of Art; Sakura, Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art and Nagoya City Art Museum, *Monet, Later Works, Homage to Katia Granoff*, December 2001-June 2002.

This painting will be included in the forthcoming exhibition *Monet's Legacy* at the Nagoya City Art Museum, Japan, 25 April – 1 July 2018, and then Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan, 14 July – 24 September 2018.

Introduction

Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas is one of the great rarities of Impressionist Art: a painting of Monet's beloved waterlilies from his later years, that was signed, dated and sold by the artist along with three other paintings from the same series shortly after their completion. The original painting was cut in two, prior to 1944 when the two parts entered different collections. The present *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* is the right side of the painting, which bears the original signature and date.

In its reduced format, the painting recalls Monet's square compositions of the mid 1900s that were exhibited in the pivotal 1909 exhibition *Nymphéas: Séries de Paysages d'Eau* at Galerie Durand-Ruel to great acclaim. However, the loose, bold brushstrokes and heavy impasto of *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* reveal the painting to be a preeminent example of Monet's later career.

Begun shortly before the end of the First World War, the series of paintings including *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* forms a crucial part of the creative process of the *Grandes Décorations*: a concept envisioned by the artist as early as 1897 in which his paintings of the waterlily pond would form a large scale decorative ensemble. From 1914 to 1923 Monet painted over two-hundred canvases, culminating in twenty-two large monumental works of the waterlily pond now on display in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris.



Nymphéas hung in the Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris

The Waterlily Pond at Giverny

“It took me some time to understand my waterlilies... I cultivated them with no thought of painting them... One does not fully appreciate a landscape in one day... And then, suddenly, I had a revelation of the magic of my pond. I took my palette. From this moment, I have had almost no other model.”¹

- Claude Monet

Monet's earliest paintings of the waterlily pond are dated between 1897 and 1898. The reporter Maurice Guillemot visited Giverny in 1897 and described that he had seen large panels of 'aquatic plants of unusual varieties, with wide, flat leaves and disquieting, strangely exotic, flowers.'² These large scale, close up studies focused on the waterlily pads and their blooms floating on the surface of the pond and were the result of Monet's initial concept of a decorative theme that would surround and immerse the viewer. He described; 'Imagine a circular room in which the area between the dado and the skirting board would be completely covered by an expanse of water dotted with this kind of vegetation...'³ This concept marks an important transformation in Monet's work that was to revolutionise French art and mark a departure towards unmatched and incomparable achievements.



Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)
Nymphéas, c.1897-99
Oil on Canvas, 73 x 100 cms, 28¾" x 39¼"
Musée Marmottan, Paris (No. 5167)

The first major phase of Monet's waterlily paintings spans the years from 1903 to 1908, after the waterlilies had grown back after the final major expansion of the pond in 1902. At this time, Monet was employing six gardeners to work in the grounds of the house at Giverny and was keen for the banks of the enlarged pond to be decorated with aquatic plants and shrubs. The large amount of money that Monet invested in transforming the property illustrates the seriousness with which he approached both his work as an artist and as a horticulturalist. By 1903 the waterlilies that covered surface of the pond now offered a subject in themselves and no longer required a framing device such as the Japanese bridge canvases of 1899 which were exhibited with Durand-Ruel in 1900.⁴ Initially Monet included part of the banks of the pond, as if providing an overview of the different elements of his water garden, but before long the flowered surface which was now available to Monet covered the entire surface of the canvas. The waterlilies rapidly became the main subject of the painting, accompanied by reflections of the sky, clouds and vegetation, devoid of any trace of human presence. The emphasis of these paintings was on the total immersion in nature.

¹ <http://fondation-monet.com/en/claude-monet-2/quotations/>

² M. Guillemot "Cl. Monet", *La Revue Illustrée*, 15 March 1898

³ Monet quoted in D. Wildenstein, *Monet, Catalogue Raisonné*, 1996, Vol. III p. 632

⁴ Wildenstein No.'s 1509-1520 and No.'s 1628-1633 for the Series of the Japanese Bridge, 4 of which were exhibited at Durand-Ruel, *Oeuvres récentes de Claude Monet*, 22 November – 15 December 1900. D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 363



Monet's Nymphéas in the second studio at Giverny
Photo March 1908
Archives Durand-Ruel © Durand-Ruel & Cie.



Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)
Nymphéas, 1905
Oil on canvas, 88.5 x 99.5 cms, 34¾" x 38¾"
Private Collection c/o Gladwell & Patterson

Forty-eight 'water landscapes' from this series were exhibited at Galerie Durand-Ruel in 1909. The exhibition had originally been planned for 1907 however Monet delayed this, not deeming the work finished. Whilst preparing for the exhibition, Monet refused to let a single painting leave his studio, surrounding himself with them so that he could refer to them in subsequent versions of the subject and rework many of the canvases. Monet also admitted with 'great satisfaction' that he had destroyed at least thirty canvases which he did not deem acceptable.⁵ Upon visiting Giverny in March of 1908, Durand-Ruel was not happy with the new direction that Monet's work was taking. He worried that the square format of many of the paintings along with the intense colour, vigorous brushwork and rich impasto would not sell, but nevertheless the exhibition, *Nymphéas: Séries de Paysages d'Eau*, went ahead with great success.⁶ Monet was insistent that only when exhibited as a group would the new works produce the effect he was looking for, recalling the decorative concept first pondered by the artist in 1897.

The following years marked a period of unprecedented unproductivity in Monet's career. His second wife Alice Hoschéde passed away in May 1911 following months of illness and Monet fell into a period of great depression intensified by his diagnosis of a double cataract which needed an imminent operation. Only two works of Monet's oeuvre are dated 1912 depicting the artists' house and three paintings of *Les Arceaux Fleuis*, *Giverny* were completed in 1913.⁷ In February 1914 Monet's son Jean died and many of Monet's inner circle thought that the artist had 'lost the art of painting' completely. By April 1914, the passion had returned. In a letter to Gustave Geffroy dated 30th April 1914, Monet revealed that he had come across his preliminary studies of the waterlilies in his basement.⁸ On the eve of the War in May 1914, nearing his seventy-fifth birthday, Monet decided to exercise his long standing ambition of undertaking a large scale decorative ensemble. Referred to by the artist as the *Grandes Décorations*, the remainder of Monet's life would be occupied with creating a

⁵ Monet would boast in later years that he destroyed over sixty paintings shortly prior to his death in 1926. D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 379

⁶ D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 390

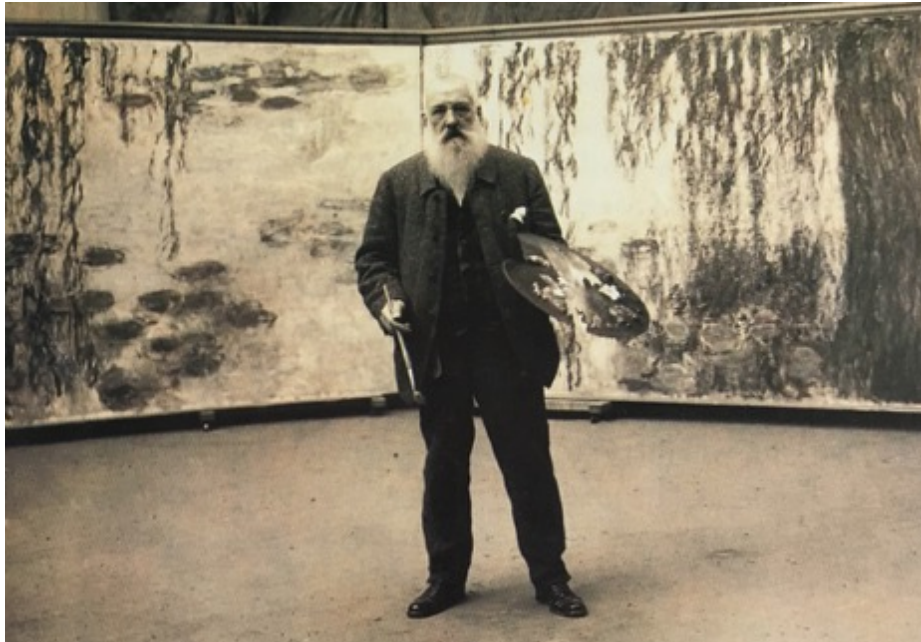
⁷ It is likely that Monet began these works in the preceding years but finished and signed these paintings in 1913. D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 399

⁸ As described in a letter from Monet to Gustave Geffroy dated 30th April 1914, cited in D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 403

body of paintings of the waterlily pond on a scale and ambition that was unprecedented in the history of the Impressionist movement.

Throughout the War, Monet was adamant in remaining at Giverny and he set about building a new studio in the north-eastern part of the property, completed by October 1915, in which to accommodate the larger scale canvases for his *Grand Décorations*.⁹ The work provided him with a distraction from the anxieties of the war that was going on all around him, it also meant that Monet was not disturbed as frequently by reporters, journalists, dealers and friends and he became completely immersed in his work. His life would become entirely given over to the struggle with the work as he swung between hope and despair as he realised that he had embarked upon a task that was beyond the strength of a man of his age.

On 11th November 1918 the Armistice, concluding the War, was signed at Rethondes. A relieved and jubilant Monet immediately wrote to his good friend Georges Clemenceau, the French prime minister, detailing his intentions to donate two '*panneaux décoratifs*' to the state. By the end of the month the idea of a more substantial donation was underway and the full extent of Monet's vision of his *Grandes Décorations*, conceived almost twenty years earlier, had begun to materialise.¹⁰ Initially twelve panels measuring 2 by 4.25 metres were destined for an elliptical pavilion that was to be built in the gardens of the Hôtel Biron which had shortly before become the Musée Rodin.¹¹ By April 1921 it was instead agreed that the donation would be displayed in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. The following year the substantial donation, increased to twenty-two large scale canvases, was finally agreed. Monet's eye problems continued to impede the artist, leading to a cataract operation in January 1923 and a subsequent period of inactivity during his recovery. It was only after Monet's death in December 1926 that the twenty-two canvases left Giverny to be installed at the Musée de l'Orangerie, where Monet's private world of colour and light, blurs into a semi-abstract, timeless composition of unearthly blues and shimmering greens, defined by the pinks and creams of his waterlilies.



⁹ D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 406

¹⁰ D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 410

¹¹ D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 413

Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas



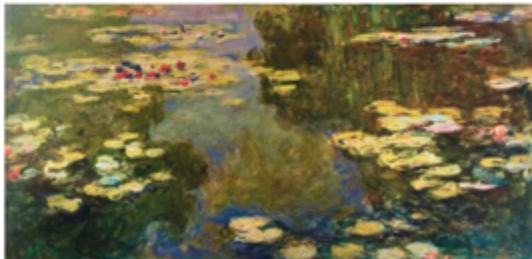
Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)
Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas, 1919
Oil on Canvas, 100 x 200 cms, 39 1/2" x 78 1/2"
Private Collection. Sold at Christie's, London, 24 June 2008 for \$80,379,592



Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)
Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas, 1919
Oil on Canvas, 100 x 200 cms, 39 1/2" x 78 1/2"
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 1998, Bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002



Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)
Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas, 1919
Oil on Canvas, 100 x 200 cms, 39 1/2" x 78 1/2"
Left side: On loan to Tel Aviv Museum of Art
Right side: The present work



Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)
Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas, 1919
Oil on Canvas, 100 x 200 cms, 39 1/2" x 78 1/2"
Private Collection. Sold at Christie's, New York, 11 November 1992 for \$12,100,000

The present work is a section of one of four paintings entitled *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* that, quite exceptionally, Monet finished, signed and sold to the dealer Bernheim-Jeune in November 1919. The four canvases each measured 1 by 2 metres, and were part of a series of twenty elongated canvases of this size that Monet ordered in April 1918 and began to paint *en plein air* during the summer of 1918.¹² The series, of which only fourteen works are known in various stages of completion, depict the surface of the waterlily pond with reflections of foliage on the left and of weeping willows on the right side of the composition. A band of reflected sky connects the elements, merging with the pastel tones of Monet's treasured waterlily pads.

¹² D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 894

The square format of *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas*, although not as the artist intended, creates a carefully balanced composition, recalling the square format of Monet's paintings of the waterlily pond from the 1909 Durand-Ruel exhibition. The original horizontal canvas was cut in two at an unknown date prior to 1944, when the left side of the canvas appeared at auction in Paris. This left side of the canvas is currently on loan to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in Israel. The two parts of the original canvas are equally spectacular in their own right and reveal Monet's skill in capturing the essence of his beloved waterlily pond.

Three clusters of waterlily pads are the compositional focus of *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas*. Conventional spatial recession, indicated by the diminishing scale of the floating blossoms and waterlily pads, is played against the flat surface of the picture, which Monet emphasised through vigorous, textural brushwork. The entangled reflections of the vegetation have an undulating, striated quality, and its deep green tones, mysterious and impenetrable, form a striking backdrop for the lighter hues of the lily pads on the water's surface. The water acts as a vehicle for Monet's exploration of the varied textures of the waterlilies and the reflections of light effects upon its surface. The horizontal islands of waterlilies contrast with the reflections of the weeping willow trees on the surface of the pond painted in strong, gestural, vertical brushstrokes. The blossoms themselves are rendered in vibrant impasto which gives them a sculptural presence atop the surface of the water.

Sunlight enters the canvas at the bottom left, creating a dynamic wedge of reflected blue sky that energizes the composition. Monet had explored this effect in a group of canvases completed in 1907, which were among the most daring and dramatic of the *Nymphéas* that he exhibited in the pivotal 1909 exhibition at Galerie Durand-Ruel. In contrast to the earlier series, in *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* Monet tightly focused his view on a small area of the pond using the water as a form of portal, allowing a complex interplay of the near and the far. The composition is dominated by the presence of the waterlily pads, which take on a larger scale in Monet's later works, both in the greater number and in sheer size in relation to the overall composition which is enforced by the more heavily worked surface.



Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)

Nymphéas, 1907

Oil on Canvas, 92 x 81 cms, 36¼" x 32"

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of Mrs. Harry C. Hanszen

A monumental canvas measuring 2 by 6 metres in the Carnegie Museum of Art depicts an elongated and enlarged version of the compositions of the finished canvases of the *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* series purchased by Berheim-Jeune. The reflection of the weeping willow to the right, the pinkish-blue sky through the centre and the groupings of the waterlily pads with their pink flowers echoes the smaller canvases. The Carnegie *Nymphéas* formed part of a series of six canvases of this heroic size which were originally conceived as part of the *Grandes Décorations* but were replaced for the 4.25 metre wide canvases in the final program. Unsigned and undated, the painting remained in Monet's studio upon his death. The similarities of the Carnegie *Nymphéas* and the four smaller finished canvases demonstrate Monet's reliance upon the *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* series in creating works in such a monumental scale. The smaller 1 by 2 metre canvases were easily transportable and therefore offered the artist the opportunity to study the changing light effects and variations of reflections upon the surface of the water *en plein air*. The *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* series was therefore used as a portable visual memory for the artist whilst working in his studio for the *Grandes Décorations*.



Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)

Nymphéas, 1915-26

Oil on Canvas, 198 x 597 cms, 78" x 235"

The Carnegie Museum of Art, acquired through the generosity of Mrs. Alan M. Scaife

Between 1914 and 1923, Monet painted over two-hundred canvases of the waterlily pond but rarely relinquished any of them, as he viewed his paintings of waterlilies as a large, cumulative work in progress and guarded them all protectively, seldom allowing them to leave his studio. Of these paintings, only sixteen were either sold or donated in his life time; a remarkably small number considering the demand for the artist's work in the latter part of his career. Monet would only sign and date his canvases when they had been sold or were destined for an exhibition, and the vast majority of the many remaining works left in the artist's studio upon his death were undated, unsigned and therefore deemed unfinished.¹³

In a letter to the Bernheim-Jeune brothers inviting them to Giverny in August 1919, Monet wrote; "I have been and am in the middle of working arduously, taking advantage of the splendid weather. I have undertaken a series of landscapes that enthuse me and, I think, will interest you; I don't dare say that I am happy, but I am working with passion and it is a break from my *Décorations* that I have put aside until winter."¹⁴ Monet's encouraging words to the dealer indicate that he was interested in selling

¹³ J. P. Hoschedé, *Claude Monet, ce mal connu*, 1960, vol. I, p. 113

¹⁴ Translation from French of Claude Monet to G. and J. Bernheim-Jeune, 25 august 1919. D. Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, 1985, Vol. IV, letter no. 2319.

a number of the smaller finished paintings from the series, which bore fruition by November 1919 when Bernheim-Jeune purchased four of the finished works.

Throughout the years occupied by the *Grandes Décorations*, Monet declared that he needed each canvas in order to work on the others, and therefore signed and dated works from this period, such as *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas*, are very rare and the purchase of four paintings together from the same series was unprecedented.¹⁵ Tucker has suggested, 'it is reasonable to assume for that for the increasingly solitary Monet, who was locked in a long-running battle with himself, the past, and the pressures of the present, these paintings must have served as sources of solace – a kind of self-created family that reaffirmed his vitality and his purpose.'¹⁶ Evidence of this deep connection and dependence on the canvases is further shown in a letter written by Monet's great friend Clemenceau, who having visited Giverny a few months prior to the artists death in 1926 wrote, "His panels are finished and he will not touch them again. But he does not have the strength to let them go."¹⁷ It is therefore remarkable that Monet was willing to sell a selection of the works of the *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* series to his dealer and in doing so provide a rare example of a finished work from this period.

The rarity of *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* is reflected by the reputations of the three other paintings purchased by Bernheim-Jeune; one is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, another was sold from the estate of Ralph Friedman at Christie's in New York in 1992 for the then impressive price of \$12,100,000, and the fourth was sold from the estate of J. Irwin and Xenia S. Miller at Christie's in London in 2008 for a record breaking \$80,379,592, the highest price ever paid for a painting by Claude Monet at auction, which was only just surpassed by Monet's 1891 *Meule*, sold at Christie's in New York in 2016.

Following their inclusion in an exhibition of Claude Monet's work at Galerie Durand-Ruel after the artists death in 1928, *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* was purchased by Henri Canonne along with the version in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Canonne was a Parisian pharmaceutical tycoon and a major collector of Impressionism, who owned more than forty paintings by Monet, including seventeen *Nymphéas*.

Style and Technique

Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas is an exquisite example of Monet's mature painting technique. In spite of many contemporary accounts of Monet's activities, documented interviews with the artist, correspondence and photographs taken in the studio, there is little that deals directly with the painter's technical practice and in his later career there is frustratingly little on Monet's specific choices of painting materials. Technical analysis of Monet's paintings from the 1860s and 1870s reveal his use of highly mixed paints. Some colours and tints consist of up to seven or eight distinct pigments combined on the palette as well as a good deal of working of the paint wet-into-wet on the canvas. In the later works, in contrast, Monet often employed single pigments, or sometimes just two pigments

¹⁵ D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 411

¹⁶ P. H. Tucker, *Monet in the 20th Century*, 1998, p. 69

¹⁷ D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 443

together, often mixed with lead white.¹⁸ Areas of colour, once applied, were left to dry or to dry partially, before another layer was applied. The loose, dry brushstrokes of pure colour in *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* demonstrates this technique. The lily pads are broadly and loosely painted, outlined with oval strokes, differentiated from the murky blue and green of the sky and foliage reflected on the water by the directional brushstrokes and punctuated by the thick impasto of the pink flowers.

In the later part of the artist's career, despite his old age and failing eyesight, Monet remained an advocate of working *en plein air*. At Giverny in the years prior to the First World War, Monet would paint beside the waterlily pond in the morning recording the blossoming of the flowers before stopping for lunch, frequently joined by visitors with whom Monet would spend the afternoons. Monet would once again take up his paint brushes in the evening light as the sun set, after the flowers had closed, focusing on the charms of the water itself and its shifting reflections.¹⁹ At the outbreak of the War a more solitary life with fewer visitors and distractions enabled the following years to be some of the artist's most productive as he turned to larger scale canvases in order to fulfil his desire to create the *Grandes Décorations*.



Monet painting beside the waterlily pond. Still taken from
Sasha Guitry's film *Ceux de Chez Nous*, filmed at
Giverny in 1915



Monet's third studio at Giverny with paintings from the
Grandes Décorations. Photograph by Joseph Durand-Ruel,
11 November 1917

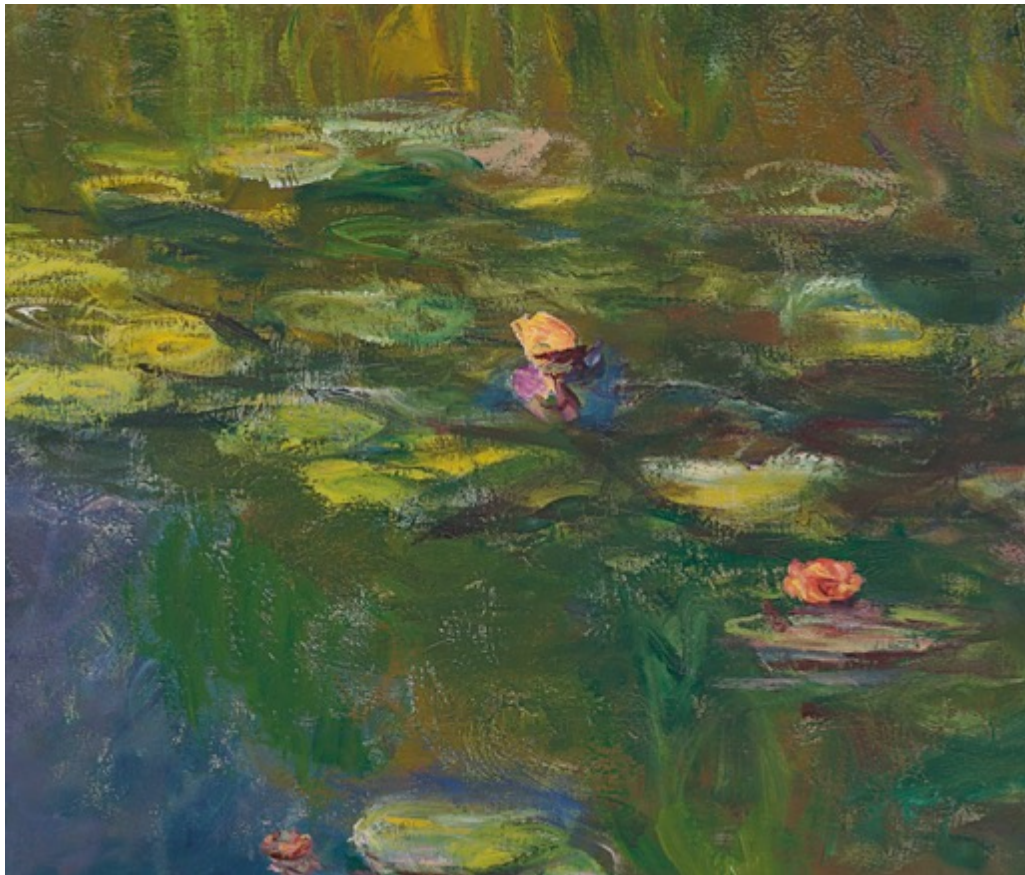
The large canvases that Monet painted for the *Grandes Décorations* measured 2 by 4.25 metres and 2 by 6 metres and were too large for Monet to paint *en plein air*, therefore the artist used smaller paintings such as the *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* series as a visual record of the pond. The large canvases were arranged around Monet's purposely built studio in various semicircular sequences held upright on specially made easels, each supported by at least two low wooden platforms fitted with casters. Some had as many as five wheeled supports. The studio itself consisted of a single large room fifteen metres high, with blind walls and natural light admitted through two rows of windows in the roof. Some control of the light and its diffusion was achieved by unfurling a large translucent white fabric blind which could be drawn horizontally across the glazing. The contemporary photographs give a clear impression of the physical arduousness of painting on this scale as well as the very large quantities of materials involved.²⁰

¹⁸ A. Roy, "Monet's Palette in the Twentieth Century: Water-Lilies and Irises", National Gallery Technical Bulletin, Volume 28, 2007, p.61

¹⁹ D. Wildenstein, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 383

²⁰ A. Roy, *Ibid.*, p. 60

From the original concept of the *Grandes Décorations*, described as early as 1897 by Maurice Guillemot, to the installation of the magnificent canvases in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris in 1927; the concept of a grand decorative program where the viewer would become surrounded by nature, reflections, light and water was at the forefront in Monet's creative process. Upon a visit to Giverny in August 1918, when Monet was working on the series of 1 by 2 metre canvases including the present work in its original form, the dealer René Gimpel recorded his astonishment of Monet's creative technique; '... we were confronted by a strange artistic spectacle: a dozen canvases placed one after another in a circle on the ground, all about six feet wide by four feet high: a panorama of water and waterlilies, of light and sky. In this infinity, the water and the sky had neither beginning nor end. It was as though we were present at one of the first hours of the birth of the world. It was mysterious, poetic, deliciously unreal... "I work all day on these canvases," Monet told us. "One after another, I have them brought to me. A colour will appear again which I'd seen and daubed on one of these canvases the day before. Quickly the picture is brought over to me, and I do my utmost to fix the vision definitively, but it generally disappears as fast as it arose, giving way to a different colour already tried several days before on another study, which at once is set before me-- and so it goes the whole day!"'²¹ The smaller size of the canvases used in the *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* series, as witnessed by René Gimpel, enabled a more flexible artistic processes that enabled Monet to capture the movements of reflections and the effect of changing light and colour with great intensity and in doing so capture the very essence of Giverny in these magnificent paintings.



Detail of *Le Bassin aux Nymphéas*

²¹ René Gimpel, *Journal d'un collectionneur, marchand de tableaux*, 1963, p. 68, translated into English in C. Stuckey, *Monet: A Retrospective*, 1985, p. 307

Conclusion

“I have painted a lot of these waterlilies, modifying my point of view each time, renewing the subject following seasons of the year, and therefore, following different luminous effects created by these changes. The effect varies incessantly. The essence of the motif is the mirror of the water whose appearance alters at every moment, thanks to the patches of the sky that are reflected in it, and give it its light and movement. The passing cloud, the fresh breeze, the threatening and falling rain, the sudden gust of wind, the light failing and shining again, so many factors, undetectable to the uninitiated eye, transform the colouring and distort the planes of the water...”

Claude Monet to François Thiébauld-Sisson²²

The waterlily pond at Giverny offered ceaseless inspiration to the great Impressionist master who personally designed and expanded the pond and selected each individual waterlily from numerous horticultural directories. It inspired almost three-hundred paintings which dominated Monet's creative output for the last twenty-six years of his life, including his depictions of the Japanese bridge and his earlier work leading up to the 1909 exhibition. This extraordinary outpouring of creativity stands as the culminating achievement of Monet's long and visionary career. These iconic canvases affirmed Monet's long-held belief in the primacy of vision and experience in a pictorial language that was utterly novel and transformative even by the standards of the new century. Monet was France's most acclaimed living artist by the turn of the century and was venerated as a founding father of the modern movement. The paintings of the waterlily pond at Giverny re-established Monet's place at the very forefront of the avant-garde, demonstrating that his art had not lost its vital, revolutionary character.

The *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* series plays a crucial part in understanding the artists creative practice of working *en plein air* and recording the changing light effects and reflections on the surface of the pond in smaller scale canvases that enabled the artist to paint on a magnificent scale for the *Grandes Décorations* in his studio.

The rarity of a finished work at this date and the prestige of the three additional paintings purchased by Bernheim-Jeune, attest to the importance of *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas*. Begun in the closing months of the War, the painting became a celebration of freedom and experimentation for Monet. Monet's evident satisfaction with the painting is revealed in his letter to the Bernheim-Jeune brothers inviting them to Giverny to see his work, forming an important junction in the artists late career in his willingness to finish and date a painting. The subtle color harmonies and expressive brushwork reveal the shifting and incalculable world of nature. The tactile surface texture created by the broad and gestural brushstrokes and layering of paint of *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* reveal the definitive mature style which was iconic of Monet's later career.

²² F. Thiébauld-Sisson, “Les Nymphéas de Claude Monet”, *Revue de l'art*, July 1927, p.44