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Trumpet Vine

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Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse

Karen and Greg Cada, '06

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This mind-blowing exhibition runs through Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2016, at the Cleveland Museum of Art. The exhibition, assembled by the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Royal Academy of Arts in London, features 107 paintings from before the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 to the beginnings of World War II in 1940.

Paintings by Claude Monet are the centerpiece, with others by noted impressionists Edouard Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Vincent Willem van Gogh, Paul Cezanne, and Camille Pissarro, as well as other artists, including Gustave Caillebotte, Max Liebermann and Joaquin Sorolla. More modern artists include Paul Klee, Gabriele Muntz, Edvard Munch, Emil Nolde, Raoul Dufy, and Henri Matisse. The exhibition reunites the three panels, of which the our museum owns one, which constitute Monet's famed 41foot-long Water Lilies triptych.

Monet was an avid gardener and landscaped a large, lush garden, with a pond which he used for his extensive waterlily studies. He also liked irises, dahlias and chrysanthemums. Many of the other artists were also avid gardeners. Pissarro liked to paint kitchen and vegetable gardens, while Renoir favored more wild garden and forest scenes.

From an artistic perspective, Impressionism is the artist recording what was physically seen, without interpretation, scripted meaning or feeling. Black lines that were once used to define were now absent, allowing colors and shapes to speak for themselves. As a result, the artists were recording their gardens. Painting had changed from fine brush strokes that made their paintings look like photographs to thicker uses of paint, leaving their canvases with textured brush strokes which allows the observer to view the texture of the flower petals, stems and leaves.

The impressionistic works could be viewed from various distances and angles to gain better perspective of the paintings. Monet's painting of the water garden with the Chinese bridge was a recording of the development of that garden and how it matured. To many observers, though, his progression became garish with extraordinarily thick use of paint, most likely applied with a pallet knife, and the strong use of green. However, with Monet and many of his peers, his eyesight was deteriorating. So Monet's recording of his water garden was also a recording of his failing vision.

By the end of a tour through this exhibition, one's senses are numb from the overstimulation and saturation of beauty and color.

Special photographs of the show follow.





The Monet Family in Their Garden at Argenteuil, 1874. Edouard Manet (French, 1832–1883). Oil on canvas; 61 x 99.7 cm. Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Joan Whitney Payson, 1975, 1976.201.14. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: Art Resource, NY.



Water Lilies (Agapanthus), c. 1915-26. Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926). Oil on canvas; 201.3 x 425.6 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art. John L. Severance Fund and an anonymous gift 1960.81.



Chrysanthemums, 1897. Claude Monet (French, 1840–1926). Oil on canvas; 130 x 89 cm. Private collection.



Monet Painting in His Garden at Argenteuil, 1873. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919). Oil on canvas; 46.7 x 59.7 cm. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, Bequest of Anne Parrish Titzell 1957.614. Photo: Allen Phillips/Wadsworth Atheneum.



Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse Barry Wolf, WKYC-TV