

Lesson 4 Appreciate Art

Claude Monet:

Capturing Nature with Light and Color

Oscar-Claude Monet, known as a "hunter of light," is widely recognized as one of the pioneers of Impressionism. Although his art was regarded as unfinished during his lifetime, Monet dedicated himself to capturing the effects of light in his paintings. In addition, he never gave up pursuing new heights of artistic excellence. Born in Paris, France in 1840, Monet grew up in Le Havre, a port city. As a teenager, he demonstrated a talent for creating caricatures and was inspired to pursue outdoor painting by landscape painter Eugène Boudin. Under Boudin's guidance, Monet learned to paint outside and observe the changing weather and light, which resulted in the natural emergence of Impressionism in his art. His *The Beach at Honfleur*, painted in 1864, reflects his early inclination towards Impressionism, with sailing boats depicted as dark silhouettes that enhance the afternoon brightness.

Monet moved back to Paris as he followed his passion to become a professional painter. The most distinguished art exhibition, the Salon, did not warmly embrace his works. From the late 1860s to the early 1870s, all his works were rejected by the conservative group for not conforming to their standards. This led to Monet facing financial difficulties. He, however, persisted in exploring new topics and techniques in his artistic creations. In collaboration with fellow artists, Édouard Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and others, Monet established a group that held its first exhibition in April 1874. It was during this exhibition that Monet unveiled his triumph, *Impression, Sunrise* (1872). With *Impression, Sunrise*, he aimed to seize the fleeting details of the morning. The painting's skillful use of blues and oranges properly portrays the breaking sunlight and its rippling reflections, with a strong emphasis on color and light. The work, however, received harsh criticism from art reviewers. A well-known critic made a vicious comment about the work, stating that even wallpaper looked better than Monet's painting.

In such a challenging environment, it was the love of family that supported Monet. When Monet was in Paris, he met his wife Camille Doncieux, and they had their first son. At that time, Monet was constantly struggling with a lack of money, but later he recalled that he was happy to be with his loving wife and son. *Woman with a Parasol (1875)* touchingly expresses Monet's love for his family. He captured the relaxed and cheerful mood of a family day out with bold brush strokes, which conveyed the sense of the passing moment.

Monet remained dedicated to refining and improving the Impressionist style. In 1877, he undertook the challenge of capturing the fast-changing scene created by the steam and smoke of a train engine at the Gare Saint-Lazare station in Paris. However, seizing the exact moment to depict the scene proved difficult as he needed precise timing for the train's departure. Monet cleverly presented himself as a successful painter, even though it was not true at the time. He convinced the station's director to accept his request to adjust the time of the train departures. With everything perfectly set up, he painted a series of twelve pieces over three months, known as the *Gare Saint-Lazare*, portraying subtle and temporal atmospheric changes. This was Monet's first project to create a series of paintings with a single theme. These works earned him considerable popularity and an enviable reputation.

In 1883, Monet moved to Giverny, a charming rural village 80 km northwest of Paris. He chose this place because he was captivated by the area's natural beauty, including the river that flowed through the town and the scenic landscapes. During his stay in Giverny, Monet kept on capturing nature's essence through his art. He observed the changing seasons, natural lighting, and minute details such as the shapes of flowers and reflections on the water. These observations formed the full realization of Monet's matchless approach to portraying nature.

As Monet entered the later stage of his life, his vision began to fail him. From sunrise to sunset, he spent his days staring directly at the light, which made his vision worse. Despite his damaged eyes, he tried to grasp even the most delicate changes in the light. He investigated this concept more deeply in his series of artworks such as Haystacks and Water Lilies. It was especially true for Water Lilies, as he created more than 250 paintings featuring these flowers until his death in 1926.

Some people persist in pursuing their dreams with firm determination. Monet was one such person. He remained committed to improving his expertise, even in the face of challenging situations when he could not see his career path clearly. Monet, the artist who beautifully depicted ever-flowing nature, held on to his dream with extraordinary strength to withstand the waves of criticism. Monet's life was as exceptional as his art, and his heritage lives on, inspiring artists and art lovers alike.

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How Science Solved an Art Mystery

Shin Yun-Bok, who was a highly renowned genre painter during the Joseon Dynasty, left behind a large collection of paintings. Nonetheless, very little is known about the painter himself. Moreover, detailed information regarding the time frame of his paintings is not available. However, one painting entitled *Lovers Under the Moon* offers an insight. This piece portrays a young couple meeting secretly under the moonlight at a street corner wall. The moon's shape provides a clue to the date of its creation.

The clue to the exact drawing date is the unique crescent moon in the painting. In Shin Yun-Bok's paintings, the shapes of the moon featured in his works are distinct, and it can be inferred that he paid special attention to the shape of the moon. The eyebrow-shaped crescent in the painting is uncommon in everyday life, which indicates that the moon in *Lovers Under the Moon* was not randomly depicted. Rather, this suggests there must have been a partial lunar eclipse when it was made.

One scientist was intrigued by the possibility of discovering when the famous painting was produced. His investigation of partial lunar eclipses observed in Seoul during the mid-18th century to the mid-19th century could determine the exact date of the painting's creation. The official records of that time showed that partial lunar eclipses occurred on August 30, 1784 and August 21, 1793. However, it was raining on August 30, 1784. Because the moon was not visible on a rainy day, it was concluded that *Lovers Under the Moon* had been painted on August 21, 1793.