

## ***Gardens Have Inspired the Masters***

*By Nancy Abra*

*London Middlesex Master Gardeners*

Gardens have often been a source of inspiration in the fine arts, such as music, dance, poetry, and paintings. Palettes of flower hues as well as nature itself are reproduced on canvas. One of the many artists that were inspired by nature was Claude Monet, an early 20th century French Impressionist. His talented works of art span from 1860s to his death in 1926. Seascapes of beaches and coastlines as well as rivers in Europe dominated the majority of Monet's paintings with his natural unique style of distant textures and colours.

Monet strongly believed of abandoning the studio and painting on the spot. He wanted to paint what he saw rather than what he intellectually knew. He was brilliantly successful in achieving the impression of a fresh view of nature depicting the fleeting light and the colour of the moment.

In dozens of his works of flowers and garden scenes, Monet captures his subject's intense beauty. One example of this was 'Women in the Garden' painted in 1866-67. The true effect of the outdoor light on figures and trees along with the colourful flowers creates a garden scene frozen in time.

Monet was passionate about his family and adored flowers. From 1872 until his wife's, Camille, illness became serious, the home and garden were recurrent themes in his art. Monet painted in 1875 'Madame Monet and Child' which has a vibrant wall of roses in the background and in the foreground, a tender portrait of his wife and child. Monet also painted still life, mainly during the years from 1880 to 1882. The subjects for these works of art were pheasants and other small game, fruits and flowers ~ of which 'Sunflowers' is his finest. His heavy strokes of rich colour bring realism and almost movement to this still life. Monet's emotion and process of painting these masterful patterns of golden ovals of the flowers and green flowing strokes of the leaves are intensification of nature. The effect is as decorative as it is expressive. It had such qualities that were carried further by Van Gogh, seven years later, in his celebrated series of Sunflowers.

In 1890 Monet bought a strip of marshland, which was across the road from his flower garden at his home in Giverny, France. He had a shallow pond put in along with weeping willows, iris and bamboo, which were planted near the pool. Along the fence which enclosed it, he had roses planted and on the water several varieties of water lilies. He also had a Japanese footbridge installed in 1892. Each morning and afternoon he visited this water garden to watch the lily blossoms open and close. Against the shimmering images that were mirrored by the water, Monet found sufficient subjects for his meditation as well as for his canvas. In 1904, Monet painted 'Water Garden at Giverny' in which the world of reflections in the water presented him with a different experience of reality of the subjects' position, relationship and space. By 1909 there were forty-eight water garden landscapes where in this series Monet captures a peaceful realism. There were approximately a dozen paintings of just water lilies. In these works, Monet uses vibrant hues of cool blues encompassing the delicate passive beauty of the water lilies.

Monet is known for his many impressionist paintings but to a gardener, he mastered the natural colour and beauty of his floral motifs on canvas. ~ Nancy Abra  
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Source: 'Monet' by William C. Seitz; Harry N. Abrams, Inc., publisher, New York