

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Tracing Monet's Garden as It Evolves Into Pure Color

Stephen West · Wednesday, February 20th, 2019

In 1914, Claude Monet could have put away his paint brushes for good. He was financially secure, and his reputation as a star of French Impressionism was equally solid. His eyesight was failing because of cataracts, and he had virtually quit working after his second wife, Alice, died three years earlier.

Yet Monet didn't retire. Instead he threw himself back into painting, focusing on his beloved home garden in Giverny, about 45 miles northwest of Paris. His output over the next 12 years, including his obsessive series of pictures of his water lily pond, is the subject of a handsome exhibition at the [de Young Museum](#) in San Francisco, "Monet: The Late Years."



As the slaughter of World War I unfolded only Claude Monet, *Water Lily Pond, (Japanese miles from Giverny—the bombs could be heard in Bridge)*, 1899, National Gallery of Art, the distance from Monet's garden—the artist Washington, gift of Victoria Nebeker Coberly, in painted what was right in front of him: rose bushes memory of her son John W. Mudd, and Walter H. towering over a path, hanging wisteria with its and Leonore Annenberg. purple flowers, the water lilies from every conceivable angle.

The exhibition, organized by the [Kimbell Art Museum](#) in Fort Worth, Texas, and the de Young, features about 60 paintings on loan from museums and collections around the world, roughly a third from the Musee Marmottan Monet in Paris. (The Kimbell and de Young collaborated two years ago on a fine show of early Monet.)

The exhibition opens with a gallery of eight works that summarize Monet's views of the garden in the late 1890s and early 1900s. These include the elegant *Water Lily Pond (Japanese Bridge)* of 1899, with a blue footbridge arching over the lily pond and a jungle of greenery in the background. It's a classic Impressionist landscape, though framed so tightly that the sky and horizon aren't visible.

The later galleries present Monet's work from World War I until his death in 1926. As his eyesight failed, his pictures became larger, more blurred and abstract. The colors are paler, the texture of the paint on the canvas is looser and more muscular. In many of the water lily scenes, the perspective is so skewed that it's literally hard to know which way is up.



In *The Japanese Bridge* of 1922-24, the scene is essentially the same as in the 1899 version. Yet

Monet has applied the paint so freely and thickly that the blue bridge almost disappears into the surrounding foliage. The water lilies in the pond below the bridge are essentially unrecognizable.

As the exhibition curators point out in wall labels and the catalog, these late works have moved beyond Impressionism into Modernism. Their free use of color arguably sets the stage for Abstract Expressionism a generation later.

“Monet: The Late Years” runs through May 27 at the [de Young Museum](#), Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. The exhibition will be on view from June 16 to September 26 at the [Kimbell Art Museum](#), Fort Worth, Texas. An extensive catalog by George T.M. Shackelford, deputy director of the Kimbell and principal curator of the exhibition, is published by Yale University Press.

Gorgeous Kimono Fashion



Installation photograph of “Kimono Refashioned,” 2019, (c) Asian Art Museum.

The Japanese kimono and its influence on Western fashion of the past 150 years is on view at the [Asian Art Museum](#) in San Francisco, and in most ways it’s a beautiful show.



After the opening of Japan to the West in the 1850s, kimono-inspired clothing began to appear in fashionable circles in Europe and America and was documented in paintings by, among others, James MacNeill Whistler, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and — yes — Claude Monet. Many of the early Western adaptations of kimono design were casual dressing gowns or outer wraps for women, featuring front openings and contrasting sashes, high necklines, ankle-length hemlines, and a minimal narrowing at the waist.

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The exhibition, “Kimono Refashioned,” displays more than 40 designs drawn from the collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute in Japan, unfolding in two compact galleries. It begins with several examples in which Japanese fabrics were repurposed for Victorian-era Western clothing. These hourglass-shaped dresses, often in floral patterns, are tightly tailored around the bodice, with straight sleeves and huge bustles. They were appropriate to wear in public, perhaps to dinner or the theater, unlike a dress that actually looked like a kimono. Those came later.

A particularly elegant example is the British designer Lucy Duff-Gordon’s silk evening dress in a blue-and-gold wave pattern. Created about 1910, the slim, kimono-style wrap dress features a contrasting sash in green and gold and is worn over a darker full-length slip. Designs from the 1920s include work by Paul Poiret and Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel.



The modern dresses in the show, by big-name designers such as John Galliano, Tom Ford, and Issey Miyake, often designed by Yohji Yamamoto, (c) the Kyoto Costume

seem more like deconstructions of classic kimono designs. AInstitute, photo by Takashi
 1994 ensemble by Galliano, for example, cuts off a jacketHatakeyama.
 that looks like a traditional black kimono just below the hips
 to reveal a naughty pair of black stockings and garter belt.

A 1995 dress by Yohji Yamamoto, on the other hand, features a simple, tight-fitting black top and a spectacular wrap skirt made of a red-and-gold brocade fabric with a chrysanthemum motif. It's an absolute knockout.

The final section of the show displays contemporary men's suits in patchwork fabrics and T-shirts based on scenes from manga comic books. The suits are ridiculous and the T-shirts are amusing, though their connections to kimono designs are hard to see.

"Kimono Refashioned" runs through May 5 at the [Asian Art Museum](#), 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco. The exhibition will be on view at the [Cincinnati Art Museum](#) from June 28 to September 15. A catalog is published by the Asian Art Museum.

(Top image: Claude Monet, *Water Lily Pond*, 1917-22, The Art Institute of Chicago. All Monet images courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.)

This entry was posted on Wednesday, February 20th, 2019 at 4:38 pm and is filed under [Fine Art](#), [Visual Art](#)

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