This intimate portrait of Claude Monet, depicted reading a newspaper and with smoke coming from his pipe, was painted by his friend, and fellow Impressionist, Pierre-Auguste Renoir in 1873. The two painters had met in 1862 in Paris, at the short-lived studio of the Swiss painter, Charles Gleyre, where the artists Frédéric Bazille (1841-1870) and Alfred Sisley (1839-1899) were also training.

At this time, the art establishment that greatly valued draughtsmanship and carefully finished paintings depicting historical, religious, and mythological subjects still held strong. The official Salon de Paris, a juried exhibition usually held annually, also reflected those ideals. Landscapes and still-lives as well as scenes of contemporary life were still accorded a lower status in the hierarchy of genres.

A group of painters, including Renoir and Monet, as well as writers and art critics struggling to define their new anti-academic artistic principles, used to gather in Paris, at the Café Guerbois in the Grande rue de Batignolles. In 1873 in addition to Monet and Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Morisot and Degas organized the Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors and Engravers. As photography gained popularity as a technological feat that reproduced reality instantaneously and as the conservative art establishment imposed norms on painting, the group of Impressionists tried to push the boundaries of artistic representation. While the group and the individuals went their own way in the mid-1880s, their approaches to art and in particular, their challenge to the principles of academic painting was similar.

The close correspondence between Monet and Renoir from the early 1860s through the 1870s is highlighted by the almost identical treatment of the two artists in their paintings of the popular restaurant and boating establishment, “La Grenouillère” (“The Frog Pond”). The two artists worked side-by-side, painting this tiny island on the Seine. Think
also, for example, of Monet’s 1873 painting *Le Boulevard des Capucines* (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo.), and Renoir’s 1875 *Les Grands Boulevards* (Philadelphia, Private Collection).

Particularly interested in depicting figures, Renoir also painted portraits of his fellow, Monet, as well as his wife, Camille, and the Monet family. In the opening years of the 1870s Renoir painted several portraits of the artist: one depicts *Monet Painting in his Garden at Argenteuil* (The Wadsworth Atheneum, 1957.617), another is a half-length portrait showing the artist wearing his top-hat and holding a brush in one hand and a palette in the other (Musée d’Orsay, RF 3666), and the painting held at the Marmottan Museum (inv. 5013), showing the artist in a more intimate setting, not necessarily as an artist with the typical attributes of his trade, but as a man, who in the 1870s was not yet well-off, who always donned his hat and smoked his pipe.

**Questions for discussion:**

By looking at this work, what can you say about Monet?

What is the relationship between Monet and Renoir?

Who are the Impressionists? What is their artistic approach?
This half-length portrait by Pierre-Auguste Renoir depicts Camille Doncieux seated on a chair, wearing a stylish dress. The model for Woman in a Green Dress (Kunsthalle Bremen, 298.1906/1), the life-size painting that had won Monet a place in the 1866 Paris Salon, Camille was later to become the painter’s wife after several years of cohabitation and the birth of their first illegitimate son, Jean Monet.

Camille was the artist’s muse, model and wife. She posed for Monet in his 1866 painting Women in the Garden (Musée d’Orsay, RF 2773). This painting was rejected by the official Salon. However, years later it was preconditioned that the French State buy this painting in order to get the bequest of the Grandes Décorations (Grand Decorations).

Throughout their affair and marriage, until the very end of her life, the artist had painted several portraits of Camille Doncieux, including a post-mortem portrait, Camille on her Deathbed (Musée d’Orsay, RF 1963 3).

Despite his father’s opposition to their affair, and despite the artist’s several sojourns in the late 1860s and early 1870s to paint, leaving Camille behind in Paris, the two lived together until Camille’s death in 1879. Monet’s letters to his friends show his “deepest concern about Camille” having left the pregnant woman alone in Paris while he was in Le Havre (Monet, The Ultimate Impressionist, 24).

Their first son, Jean, was born on 8 August 1867. Three days later, Jean was registered as a legitimate son. But it would be another three years before Monet could marry Camille. Their second son, Michel, was born in 1878.

In the last few years of her life, Camille and Monet shared their house and life in Vétheuil with the Hoschedé family. Ernest Hoschedé was a patron of Monet and of several other Impressionist painters. When he went bankrupt, he moved in with the Monet family,
along with his wife Alice and their six children. These children were: Blanche (who later married Jean Monet), Germaine, Suzanne, Marthe, Jean-Pierre, and Jacques. Alice was later to marry Monet in 1892.

It is interesting to note that contrary to the number of portraits of Camille, Monet did not paint his second wife, Alice. However, he made sketches of the Hoschedé children as well as his two sons. Suzanne Hoschedé, the eldest daughter of Alice and Ernest, and wife of the American Impressionist painter, Théodore Earl Butler, served as a model for Monet in his 1886 painting, *The Woman with a Parasol Turned to the Right* (Musée d'Orsay, RF 2621).

In this portrait of Camille by Renoir, one sees a counterpart almost to the portrait by the same artist of Monet, exhibited at the Sakip Sabanci Museum. Both are portrayed seated on identical chairs, depicted in an interior, possibly in their own abode. Renoir captures in this painting a brief moment as Camille glances sideways. Notice Camille’s elegance, her poise in this painting, compared to the simplicity of Monet’s attire.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), poet, essayist and art critic, stressed that artists should depict their figures in contemporary garments, and that art be of its time. He envisioned the artist/poet as a *flâneur* observing the fleeting spectacle of life. His 1863 essay *The Painter of Modern Life* became a philosophical counterpart to the work of the Impressionists of the period, in particular in their depiction of modern urban life with its bustle of people. While this particular painting does not depict the bustle of modern life so common to Renoir’s other paintings, the elegance of Camille’s dress, her flaring cuffs and her one hand on her organza-like foulard, show a similar sensitivity to modern life and fashion promulgated by Baudelaire.


**Questions for Discussion:**

Who is Camille?

Who is Alice Hoschedé?

What does Camille’s dress reveal?
An 1877 article in *Le Télégraphe* writes this synopsis of an “Impressionist novel:”

“A white—or black—form, which could be a man unless it be a woman, moves forward (is it forward?). The old sailor shudders—or is it sneezes?—we can’t be sure; he cries, “Let’s go!” and throws himself into a whitish—or blackish—sea (we can’t be sure) which could well be the Ocean” (Quoted in *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, 21).

While overemphasizing the ambiguity of the Impressionist novel, this quotation serves as a good way to view this painting.

In this painting there is a man, a woman and a child. Can the woman and child be Camille and Jean taking a walk in Argenteuil? Most likely. But the details of the figures’ faces are not shown. In fact the faces, the grass, the flowers, the dark foliage of the tree on the right and the sky are all rendered with dabs of wet oil paint without outlines.

Note how Jules Laforgue, a mid-19th century poet, explains Impressionist painting. He writes: “...Where the academic [painter] sees only lines at the edges of things, ... the Impressionist sees real living lines, without geometrical form, built from thousands of irregular touches which, at a distance, give the thing life. Where the academic sees only things set down in regular, separate positions within an armature of purely theoretical lines, the Impressionist sees perspective established by thousands of imperceptible tones and touches, by the variety of atmospheric states, with each plane not immobile but shifting. ... The Impressionist sees and renders nature as she is, which is to say solely by means of colored vibrations” (Quoted in *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* 16). This is precisely the way Monet paints *Taking a Walk Near Argenteuil*.

This painting shows a more or less traditional way of rendering a landscape with the horizon line carefully delineated, and with a sense of distance through the use of receding lines. What we see here is not an ambiguous painting, but it is also not very detailed. Optically, things in the distance appear paler and less detailed and convey depth. In painting, one way the illusion of depth can be conveyed is through the use of atmospheric perspective, whereby things in the distance are depicted as less detailed and paler.

In this painting however, the figures that appear to be somewhere in the middle of the flowering path are as little detailed as the greenery in the background. A dab of pink
stands for the little child’s face, and individual flowers or leaves or details of the figures are not rendered. The figures seem to almost blend into the tufts of grass.

Clark, T.J. *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999)

**Questions for discussion:**

What do you see in this painting?

Who are the three figures?

How does Monet depict the illusion of depth?
In 1879, a year after the death of his wife, Camille, Monet went to Normandy. The coast of Normandy was especially dear to Monet as it was in Le Havre that he had spent his childhood. In the 1880s the artist would make regular visits to the Normandy coast. Monet’s process of painting on the cliffs of Normandy was noted by Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), a 19th century French writer. He wrote: “Last year... I followed Claude Monet when he went out looking for impressions. In fact, he was no longer a painter but a hunter. He went about followed by children who carried his canvases, five or six canvases representing the same subject at different times and with different effects. He took them up and left them one after the other, following the changing sky” (Quoted in Claude Monet, A Museum for Monet, 62). Maupassant’s observation summarizes Monet’s process of painting and his preoccupation with the changing effects of light.

In the 1880s, the coast of Normandy was a favourite locale for Monet, who often frequented Pourville, Varengeville, Étretat, and Dieppe. The picturesque cliffs and the starkness of the relatively less populated areas were appealing to Monet, who purposefully chose the off-seasons to paint the coast.

Monet’s turn from the scenes of the fashionable holidaymakers on the outskirts of Paris, or from the modern urban cityscapes popular among the Impressionists, coincides with the loss of his wife. Some suggest that this emphasis on the landscape or seascape devoid of human presence reflects a certain sense of introspection and contemplation. But perhaps more importantly, the landscapes and seascapes provide him with the means to observe the differing influences of light.

This painting shows hints of what would later become a major concern for him, that is, the relation between reality and reflections of reality, the medium of the sky and the water in facilitating that relation of reflections, and the impact of light.

Here, the sailing boat, a motif that greatly interested the painter, with sketchbooks full of drawings of boats, holds the painting together in a way, marking that what we see is a seascape under the setting sun. The bold colours, the thick layer of paint, the horizontal brushstrokes of the water with the partially oblique brushstrokes of the pink and yellow
sky that almost vibrates as the sun sets, foreshadow Monet’s experiments with light in his series.


**Questions for discussion:**

What do you see in this painting? Enumerate its various elements.

What importance does Normandy have in the artist’s life?

If you were to get rid of the boat in this painting, would you still be able to recognize this scene?
Monet was maybe as passionate a gardener as he was a painter. His famous garden in Giverny, where he moved in 1883, was not the first one he owned. In the years 1871-1878 when he lived in Argenteuil, a village on the outskirts of Paris, he had a rich and well-tended garden although he and his family were living under considerably hard financial circumstances.

Monet's painting was also affected by his passion for plants and nature. In fact, in 1873, Monet's friend and fellow painter, Renoir, depicted Monet painting a corner of his garden in Argenteuil. The garden in Giverny, however, doesn't appear on Monet's canvases until some fifteen years after he moved there. Until then, the close surroundings of Giverny and the landscapes of Normandy counted among his favorite themes.

The story of Monet's famous water lily paintings from his garden, the earliest of them dating back to 1897, actually begins when he visited the 1889 World's Fair in Paris. There, he was inspired by the water lilies he saw across the Eiffel Tower and got the idea of creating a water garden in addition to his already existing flower garden around the house in Giverny. The water lily pond was created on a separate piece of land by diverting water from the Epte River. Monet modified the pond several times. He added a Japanese bridge and enlarged the pond twice until 1910. The water-plants in and around the pond were a combination of local and exotic kinds that were imported from all around the world. Many kinds of water lilies in different colours were planted, as well as other kinds such as water-irises and Japanese peonies.

The meditative ambience of the water garden with its water lilies, weeping willows and Japanese bridge, provided Monet with inspiration for the rest of his life. Some of his depictions of the water lily pond were exhibited twice and sold at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris. The second exhibition in 1909, which brought Monet considerable fame, showed a group of works done in 1903-1909. This painting is a good example of this group of water lily depictions, although it is not sure if it was on display at that exhibition.

In this painting from 1903 of the pond, the depiction is limited to the water surface with its water lilies and the reflection of the trees and the blue sky. The close-up format and the disappearance of all references to the banks of the pond are an important feature of
this painting because it eliminates the viewer's sense of orientation. The only relation to the land is the reflection of the weeping willows. The water lilies in turn are the only elements that are not reflections. This is a confusing effect for the viewer, because without any reference to the land, it is impossible for the viewer to make out where he/she is located. This is not the only confusion Monet creates though. In this view of the pond, the water lilies are seen as horizontally stretching groups. Receding in space, they become tiny stripes and dots of colour at the far end of the water surface. The vertical reflections of the weeping willows on the other hand, remain the same size, thus they don't indicate depth. These two put together on the same canvas, this waterscape now reminds more of a surface, lacking depth.

Questions for discussion:

What do you see in this painting with regard to reality and its reflections?

From where is the painter looking at the pond when he paints this scene?

What inspired Monet to construct his water garden?
His garden in Giverny was Monet’s creation and source of inspiration at the same time. It consisted of two parts separated from each other by a railroad. The first was the flower garden around his house, which Monet adjusted to his liking as soon as he settled. The second was the water garden, which he began working on in 1893, ten years after he settled in Giverny, inspired by the water lilies exhibited at the 1889 World’s Fair in Paris.

From 1897 on, the water lily pond, along with the reflections of the sky and weeping willows around the pond, became a motif, which he would repeat and rework many times for the rest of his life. Monet was fascinated with this subject and relentlessly experimented with its depiction in every possible way, be it the format of the canvas he used, or the time of day he painted at.

The second group of water lily pond depictions that brought him considerable fame, dating 1903-1909, was exhibited and partially sold at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris in 1909. This painting however, is part of the following group of water lily depictions, dated 1914-1919. This group is special in particular, because contrary to the previous group, Monet didn’t intend to sell or exhibit this one. They are considered Monet’s private experimental works, created for his own practice on the water lily motif. In fact, some paintings in this group were probably unknown until some time after Monet’s death in 1926.

This painting features many characteristics of this group, like the free and visible brushstrokes. One can differentiate between the circular brushstrokes that indicate the round leaves of the water lilies, or the vertical ones that are the reflections of the weeping willow’s thick and heavy foliage. The palette comprises strong colours. Here, they vary in different and intensive hues of green and blue, some being the reflections and some being the water itself. Even the water lilies seem to be tinted in blue. Most likely, they were an exotic kind of water lily with blue petals, which Monet had imported and combined with endemic water lilies in his pond. The format is quite large in this group. Here, the canvas measures one and a half by two meters. In this sense, this is a very large close-up of the water lilies, seen almost from top. However, most characteristic is the fact that these paintings seem unfinished and sketchy. Here, as it is often in Monet’s works, it is hard to differentiate between an actual work and a sketch.
Taking into consideration the larger format of the work and the motif, its importance becomes evident. The year when this work was painted coincides with the time when Monet started developing the idea of the *Grandes Décorations*. These are very large depictions of the water lily pond and willows, which Monet bequeathed to the French State, as a celebration and memory of the victory in World War I. After several changes in the plan regarding the location and installation of the panels, it was decided that they would be exhibited at the Orangerie in Paris, where they still are located today.

This painting however, is not directly related to the *Grandes Décorations* panels: It is neither a sketch, nor a preparatory work for them. It is the process of Monet developing the idea of the *Grandes Décorations* and experimenting on the water lily motif on a larger scale. In a sense, it is Monet getting to know his water lilies.

**Questions for discussion:**

How does Monet depict the water lilies here? Look at the brushwork and observe brushstrokes and use of colour.

What is the status of work? In your opinion, is this work a sketch, a finished painting, or an unfinished one?
Monet’s famous water garden he started creating in 1893 on a land across his house and flower garden in Giverny, consisted of the pond with the water lilies, the willow trees around the pond and the Japanese bridge he had built in around 1895. During his lifetime, Monet depicted his water garden many times and created his own motif. Besides the water lilies, there were many other kinds of exotic plants he had imported and planted in and around the pond. Some of them were agapanthus from South Africa, daylilies from Eurasia, Japanese water-irises and wisteria. All these gave Monet’s water garden an Eastern touch and added to its meditative quality.

Around 1905, Monet had planted the wisteria on the Japanese bridge, so that it would cover it along with its trellis in white and mauve blossoms. In the numerous paintings of the Japanese bridge Monet made over the years, the transformation of the bridge becomes visible. While the earliest depictions show the bridge itself, its wooden construction, in the later ones, some of which can be seen in the exhibition, the bridge is depicted together with its trellis and the wisteria, often in vibrant colours, tending towards abstraction.

What is depicted in this large painting, measuring one by three meters, is a branch of wisteria. Disregarding the Western tradition of painting, the composition here is not centred. In this sense, this painting shows similarities to aspects of Japanese art. Indeed, it develops from the upper right of the canvas downwards and to the upper left, making the viewer follow the direction towards which the wisteria has paved its way. The branch seems to be attached to the edges of the canvas like a drapery in front of the empty, blue background of the sky. Monet denied the presence of a Japanese influence, or any influence, on his paintings. Yet, it is known that he was familiar with this art and had a collection of 231 Japanese woodblock prints, including works from masters such as Hiroshige (1797-1858), Utamaro (1753-1806) and Hokusai (1760-1849).

The large format of the painting, however, can be explained in relation to Monet’s Grande Décorations. These are very large, horizontal depictions of his water lily pond and weeping willows, reflecting the atmosphere of his water garden. The idea came to his mind during the First World War; he decided to paint these panels in order to bequeath them to the French State, as a memory of the victory and loss of the war. He was probably at first thinking of the wisteria as complementary parts of the giant panels depicting his pond and weeping willows. According to some accounts, his initial intention was to hang the wisteria above the doors of the room that would contain the decorative panels, which justifies the sky-like background of this preparatory work you see. In the
end, due to several changes of plan, the Grandes Décorations were installed at the Orangerie in Paris without the wisteria. The inauguration in 1927, a year after Monet passed away, was made by his close friend Clemenceau who was France’s Prime Minister during the closing years of the war and the greatest supporter of the Grandes Décorations.

Questions for discussion:

Where in his garden did Monet plant the wisteria? Why?

What are the visual characteristics of this painting with regard to colours, brushwork, format and composition?
Claude Monet  
*Weeping Willow*, 1918-1919  
Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm  
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, Inv. 5081

This is the willow tree on the bank of Monet’s water lily pond, which was used in several of the earlier works of *Water Lilies* as a vertical and secondary motif. There is an emotional link between the tree and the painter himself. The name of the tree, which is *saule pleureur* in French, already suggests sadness and grief. The metaphorical meaning of this tree is hard to ignore during the later years of Monet’s life, full of anguish and challenges.

In the 1910’s when he started painting this motif, he had already lost many of his closest friends. Morisot and Caillebotte were the first ones to depart, followed by Sisley, Pissarro, Cézanne, Degas and Renoir. The most unbearable of all was in 1911, when his second wife, his companion Alice passed away, and left her husband Monet all torn apart. As if it was not enough, he lost his eldest son, Jean, in 1914, the same year the First World War began.

During these years of mourning and solitude, Monet entered a period of isolation, painting alone in his garden. He began with an independent series of ten *Weeping Willows* in 1918, and completed most of them within the same year.

Besides expressing lamentation for the loss of his loved ones, the *Weeping Willows* are also considered to be Monet’s way of paying homage to the French soldiers who died in combat during the First World War. He wanted to donate two paintings to the French State, planning to sign them on the day of the victory. However, by the time of the armistice, this proposal grew into a much greater project that later became the *Grandes Décorations*.

In this square-format piece with heavy brushwork, the thick paint is applied in harmonious shades of yellow and green. The majority of the scene consists of foliage represented in strokes falling to the ground. The rich foliage is charged by flickering light, through which the curved trunk shines in deep shades of red. As the pond, the sky, the
clouds and the flowers are all absent in the dominance of the sole trunk surrounded by its fragile branches, this painting is an eminent portrait of a tree.

**Questions for discussion:**

What importance does the willow tree hold for Monet? How did the willow become the sole and key element of this painting?

What are the visual characteristics of this painting with regard to colours, brushwork, format and composition?
Claude Monet  
*The Japanese Bridge*, 1918  
Oil on canvas, 100 x 200 cm  
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, Inv. 5077

This is a frontal view of the Japanese bridge over the pond, which served as a vantage point for Monet when he was painting some of his *Water Lilies*. While creating his water garden in Giverny, the painter constructed his 55-meter-long wooden Japanese bridge shortly after 1893, and completed it in 1905 by building its trellis that soon became covered with wisteria, white above and mauve below.

This kind of curved bridge was one of the recurrent elements in woodblock prints of Japanese art, which were called *ukiyo-e*, meaning "images of the floating world". Many of the French Impressionists, including Monet as a devout collector, were interested in these prints since their youth, especially those by Hiroshige (1797-1858), Hokusai (1760-1849) and Utamaro (1753-1806). Monet's personal collection consisted of 231 prints, with which he used to decorate his home. Although he often denied a Japanese influence, he surely had some sensibilities towards Japanese culture and art. He was fascinated by how Japanese artists conveyed the nuances of nature, sharing with them the obsession about the fleeting moment and the passage of time.

In this 1918 painting, even though the representation of the bridge lacks much detail, the elements such as the bank on the left, the foliage of the weeping willow on the right, the curved bridge at the centre, the trellis over it, and their slight reflection on the pond are still recognizable, all represented in a wide horizontal format. The colour scheme is in the harmonious dominance of greens and yellows with accents of red. The lighting effects are added with Monet's vibrant brushstrokes, tending towards a textural vegetation growing on the surface of the canvas.

In the later versions of the Japanese bridge, the subjectivity and abstraction arise even further with vigorous brushstrokes and liberated use of contrasting colours, such as red versus green, purple versus yellow, blue versus orange. According to numerous art historians, those more abstract works with gestural brushstrokes and brave colours bring to mind some of the paintings of the later American Abstract Expressionists.

**Questions for discussion:**

What are the pictorial elements of this painting and where are they located on the canvas?
Where in his garden could Monet have situated himself for painting this view?

In what ways were Monet and the other Impressionists interested in Japanese art?
This painting is part of a series of the rose-covered pathway that connects the water garden to Monet's house. When he first moved to this house, the path was bordered by spruce and cypress trees whose shadows he disliked. Despite his wife Alice's attempt to save them, they were cut down and replaced with metal arches.

Monet never wanted the constructions in his gardens to be visible, and he always tried to camouflage them with flowers. Completely removing the vegetable garden and trees left by the former tenant, he replaced them with flowerbeds, yet kept their strict rectangular shapes and divided them with arches. However, he let the plants grow naturally so that they grew beyond the boundaries of the flowerbeds, and vertically along the trellis of the metal arches, thus softening the rigid geometry of the garden. Like the wooden trellis of the Japanese bridge covered with wisteria, he adorned the metal arches with roses.

In this work, the composition carries a deep line of perspective; yet the viewer cannot situate himself on the path into the darkness where the end is in such disarray. It is hard to tell whether it be the house or the walls of the passage onto the pond. The sky is hardly distinguishable among the pictorial dissolution. The thick paint throughout the whole surface of the canvas varies in the directions of the brush strokes, applied in horizontal gestures on the path itself, and in a more free hand on the arches, where they rise, fall, twist and turn. Throughout the canvas, there is a kaleidoscope of contrasting colours across the entire spectrum.

Some art historians attribute Monet's brave use of colours and painterly abstraction in his works following the 1910's to his impaired eyesight and the resulting changes in colour perception. He was diagnosed in 1912 to have a bilateral cataract and went through several operations in 1923 with limited success; yet he was able to mostly overcome the post-operation problems by using special pairs of glasses adjusted to his changing eyesight.

**Questions for discussion:**

Where in his garden could Monet have situated himself for painting this view?
How far along in his illness did Monet paint this work?

Could his cataract have affected his way of painting it? If so, in what ways?