

## Media Release

### **Monet**

**January 22 – May 28, 2017**

In the year of its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Fondation Beyeler is devoting an exhibition to Claude Monet, one of the most important artists in its collection. Selected aspects of Monet's oeuvre will be presented in a distilled overview. By concentrating on his work between 1880 and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a forward gaze to his late paintings, the show will reveal a fresh and sometimes unexpected facet of the pictorial magician, who still influences our visual experiencing of nature and landscape today. The leitmotif of the "Monet" exhibition will be light, shadow, and reflection as well as the constantly evolving way in which Monet treated them. It will be a celebration of light and colors. Monet's famed pictorial worlds - his Mediterranean landscapes, wild Atlantic coastal scenes, various locations places along the course of the River Seine, his flower meadows, haystacks, cathedrals and fog-shrouded bridges - are the exhibition's focal points.

In his paintings, Monet experimented with the changing play of light and colors in the course of the day and the seasons. He conjured up magical moods through reflections and shade. Claude Monet was a great pioneer in the field of art, finding the key to the secret garden of modern painting and opening everyone's eyes to a new way of seeing the world.

The exhibition will show 62 paintings from leading museums in Europe, the USA and Japan, including the Musée d'Orsay, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Art, Boston and the Tate, London. 15 paintings from various private collections that are seen extremely rarely and that have not been shown in the context of a Monet exhibition for many years will be special highlights of the show.

### **Light, shadow, and reflection**

Following the death of his wife in 1879, Monet embarked on a phase of reorientation. His time as a pioneer of Impressionism was over; while by no means generally acknowledged as an artist, he was beginning to become more independent financially thanks to the help of his dealer, as is documented by his frequent journeys. Through them, he was, for example, first able to concern himself with Mediterranean light, which provided new impulses for his paintings. His art became more personal, moving away from a strictly Impressionist style.

Above all, however, Monet seems to have increasingly turned painting itself into the theme of his paintings. His comment, as passed down by his stepson Jean Hoschedé, that, for him, the motif was of secondary importance to what happened between him and the motif, should be seen in this light. Monet's reflections on paintings should be interpreted in two ways. The repetition of his motifs through reflections, which reach their zenith and conclusion in his paintings of the reflections in his water-lily ponds, can also be seen as a continuous reflecting on the potential of painting, which is conveyed through the representation and repetition of a motif on a canvas.

Monet's representations of shade are another way in which he represented the potential of painting. They are both the imitation and the reverse side of the motif, and their abstract form gives the painting a structure that seems to question the mere copying of the motif. This led to the situation in which Wassily Kandinsky, on the occasion of his famous encounter with Monet's painting of a haystack seen

against the light (Kunsthaus Zurich and in the exhibition), did not recognize the subject for what it was: the painting itself had taken on far greater meaning than the representation of a traditional motif.

## Monet's Pictorial Worlds

The exhibition is a journey through Monet's pictorial worlds. It is arranged according to different themes. The large first room in the exhibition is devoted to Monet's numerous and diverse representations of the River Seine. One of the most notable exhibits is his rarely shown portrait of his partner and subsequent wife Alice Hoschedé, sitting in the garden in Vetheuil directly on the Seine.

The next room celebrates Monet's representation of trees: a subtle tribute to Ernst Beyeler, who devoted an entire exhibition to the theme of trees in 1998. Inspired by colored Japanese woodcuts, Monet repeatedly returned to the motif of trees in different lights, their form, and the shade they cast. Trees often give his paintings a geometric structure, as is particularly obvious in his series.

The luminous colors of the Mediterranean are conveyed by a group of canvases Monet painted in the 1880s. In a letter written at that time, he spoke of the "fairytale light" he had discovered in the South.

In 1886 Monet wrote to Alice Hoschedé that he was "crazy about the sea". A large section of the exhibition is devoted to the coasts of Normandy and the island Belle-Île as well as to the ever-changing light by the sea. It includes a fascinating sequence of different views of a customs official's cottage on a cliff that lies in brilliant sunlight at times and in the shade at others. On closer examination, the shade seems to have been created out of myriad colors.

Monet's paintings of early-morning views of the Seine radiate contemplative peace: the painted motif is repeated as a painted reflection in such a way that the distinction between painted reality and its painted reflection seems to disappear in the rising mist. The entire motif is repeated as a reflection. There is no longer any clear-cut differentiation between the top and bottom parts of the painting, which could equally well be hung upside down. In other words, the convention about how paintings ought to be viewed is abandoned and viewers are left to make their own decision. It is as if Monet sought to convey the constant flux (*panta rhei*) that is such a fundamental characteristic of nature, capturing not only the way light changes from night to day but also the constant merging of two water courses.

Monet loved London. He sought refuge in the city during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71. As a successful and already well known painter, he went back there at the turn of the century, painting famous views of Waterloo and Charing Cross Bridge as well as of the Houses of Parliament in different lights, particularly in the fog, which turns all forms into mysterious silhouettes. A tribute not only to Monet's famous hero/forerunner William Turner, but also to the world power of Great Britain with its Parliament and the bridges it built through trade.

Monet's late work consists almost exclusively of paintings of his garden and the reflections in his water-lily ponds, of which the Beyeler Collection owns some outstanding examples. The exhibition's last room contains a selection of paintings of Monet's garden in Giverny.

**The exhibition MONET is generously supported by:**

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**Fondation Beyeler opening hours: 10 am - 6 pm daily, Wednesdays until 8 pm**