

Monet's Rediscovered Masterpiece, Le bassin aux nymphéas, Will Highlight Christie's November Sale

Upcoming Auctions, Art History

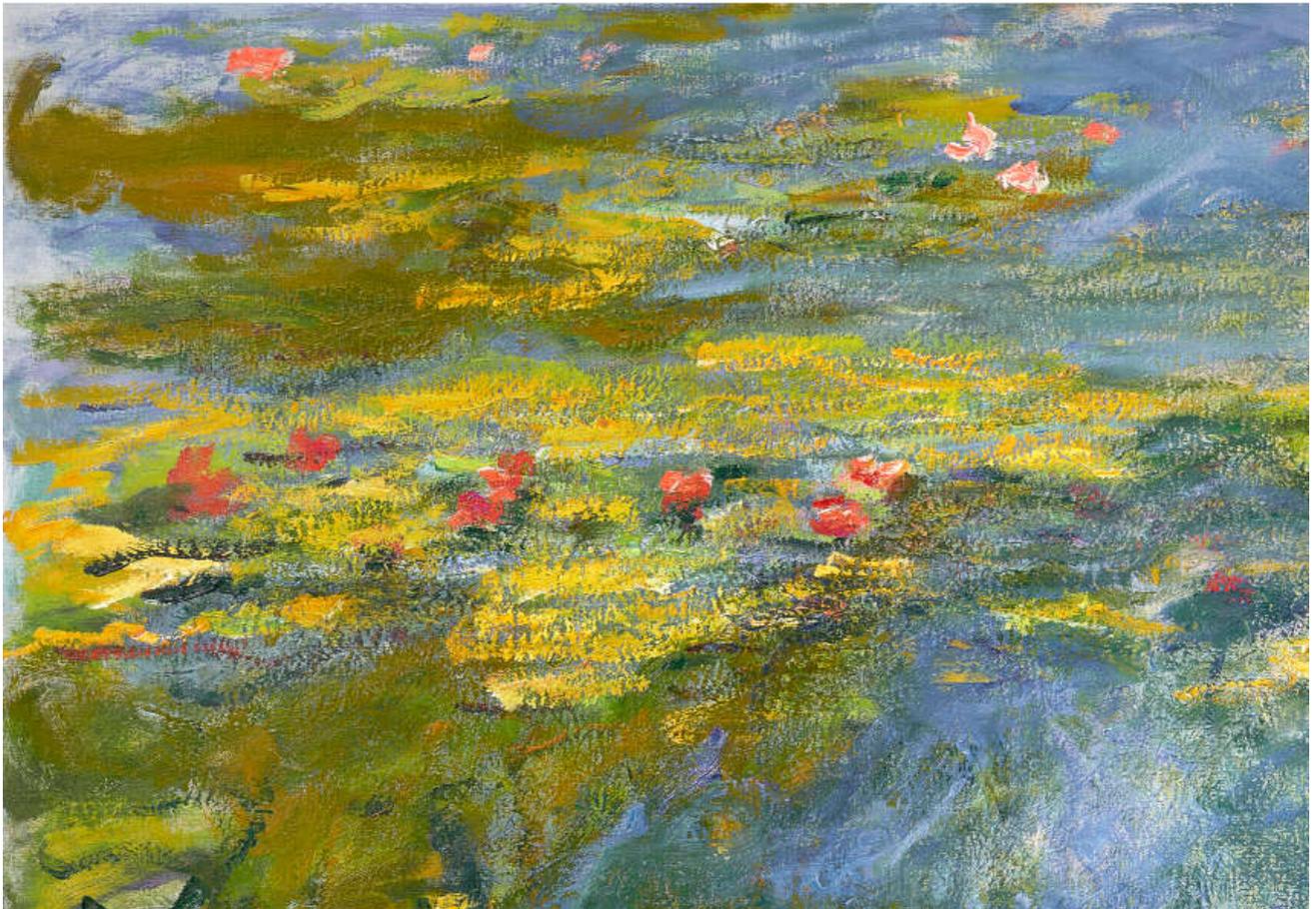
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Among the most beloved series of paintings in the history of art is French artist Claude Monet's water lily series. Painted in the last 25 years of the artist's life, the famous series comprises scenic vistas of Monet's famed lily pond in Giverny, France, painted in his recognizable Impressionist style.

Today dispersed around the world, the paintings are prized possessions of the leading world museums, including MoMA, Metropolitan Museum of Art, National Gallery of Australia, Musée d'Orsay in Paris, and National Gallery in London, among others. From the series of approximately 250 paintings, several are in private collections, and they rarely appear in auctions.

Although rarely auctioned, one of the paintings will headline Christie's 20th Century Evening Sale this November. *Le bassin aux nymphéas*, a monumental canvas from the water lily series, is an excellent example of the dynamism and beauty of Monet's late style and a stupendous testament to nature's transient beauty captured on canvas.



Claude Monet - Le bassin aux nymphéas, 1917-1919, oil on canvas, detail, on view at Christie's © Christie's Images Limited 2023

A Place Where Water Lily Series Was Born

A leading representative of Impressionism, [Claude Monet](#) (1840 – 1926) worked on [the water lily series](#) most intensively in the last two decades of his life. At that time, he had already completed the construction and adaptation of the garden and his atelier at Giverny, providing a space for painting and a natural surrounding that he

tirelessly captured on canvas.

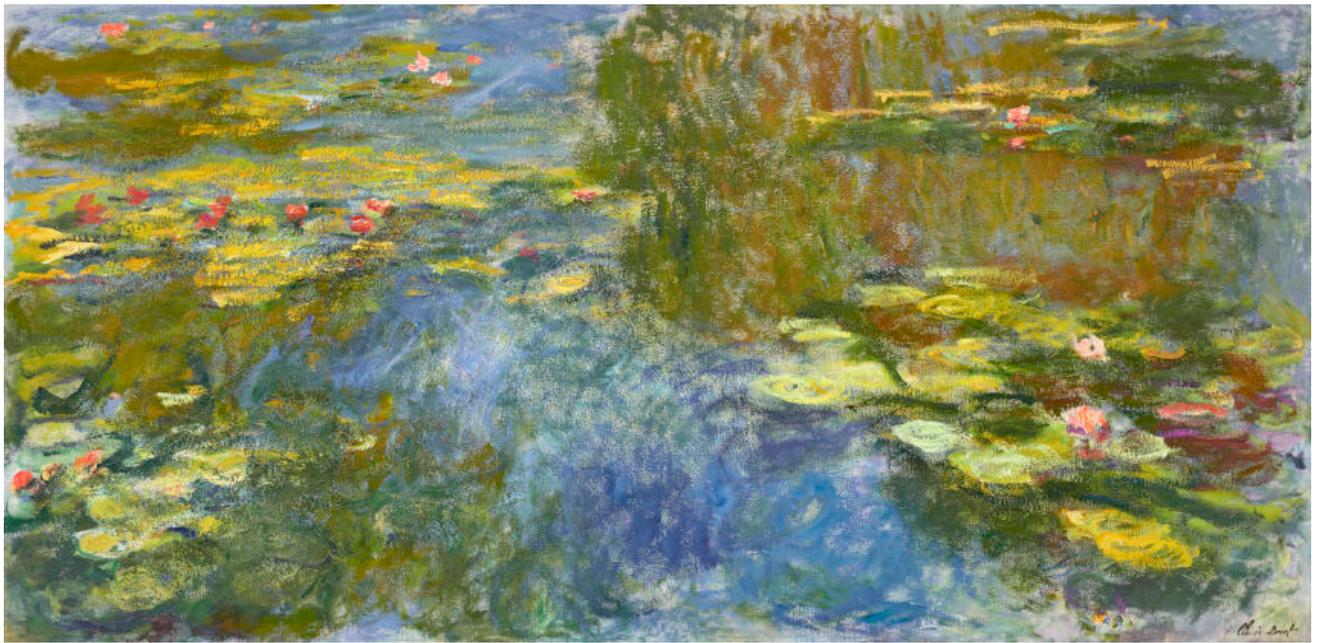
Monet first rented the property in Giverny before he was finally able to purchase it in 1890 after achieving financial success with his work. To accommodate his artistic practice, he built a two-story studio and later expanded the property with another atelier constructed in 1915. The new building, reaching almost 50 feet in height, had large windows and skylights providing a lot of natural light, but Monet also installed custom pulleys to control the amount of light allowed in. Known for his plein-air paintings, Monet finally had a space where he could finish the pieces he started outdoors, and where he could paint during the bad weather.

Writing about Monet's garden and his painterly style in 1907, **Marcel Proust** focused on the artist's carefully arranged flowers with matching colors. *"The garden itself is a real transportation of art, rather than a model for a painting, for its composition is right there in nature itself and comes to life through the eyes of a great painter."*

The work on the garden that will become the dominant subject of Monet's artistic preoccupations started in 1893. An avid gardener, Monet first began constructing a **water garden and lily pond**, which were watered from a nearby river, and then expertly designed its other aspects, turning it into a botanical paradise that corresponded with his painterly and aesthetic concerns.

Constantly tended by the artist and his staff, the garden became Monet's primary inspiration, although this did not come immediately. *"It took me some time to understand my water lilies,"* he explained later. *"I planted them purely for pleasure; I grew them with no thought of painting them. A landscape takes more than a day to get under your skin. And then, all at once, I had the revelation—how*

wonderful my pond was—and reached for my palette. I've hardly had any other subject since that moment."



Claude Monet - Le bassin aux nymphéas, 1917-1919, oil on canvas, detail © Christie's Images Limited 2023

Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas

Le bassin aux nymphéas is the prime example of the artist's painterly style and aesthetics. Held in the same family collection for over 50 years, the painting is among the landmarks of late Impressionism and belongs to the most influential and innovative series in Monet's oeuvre.

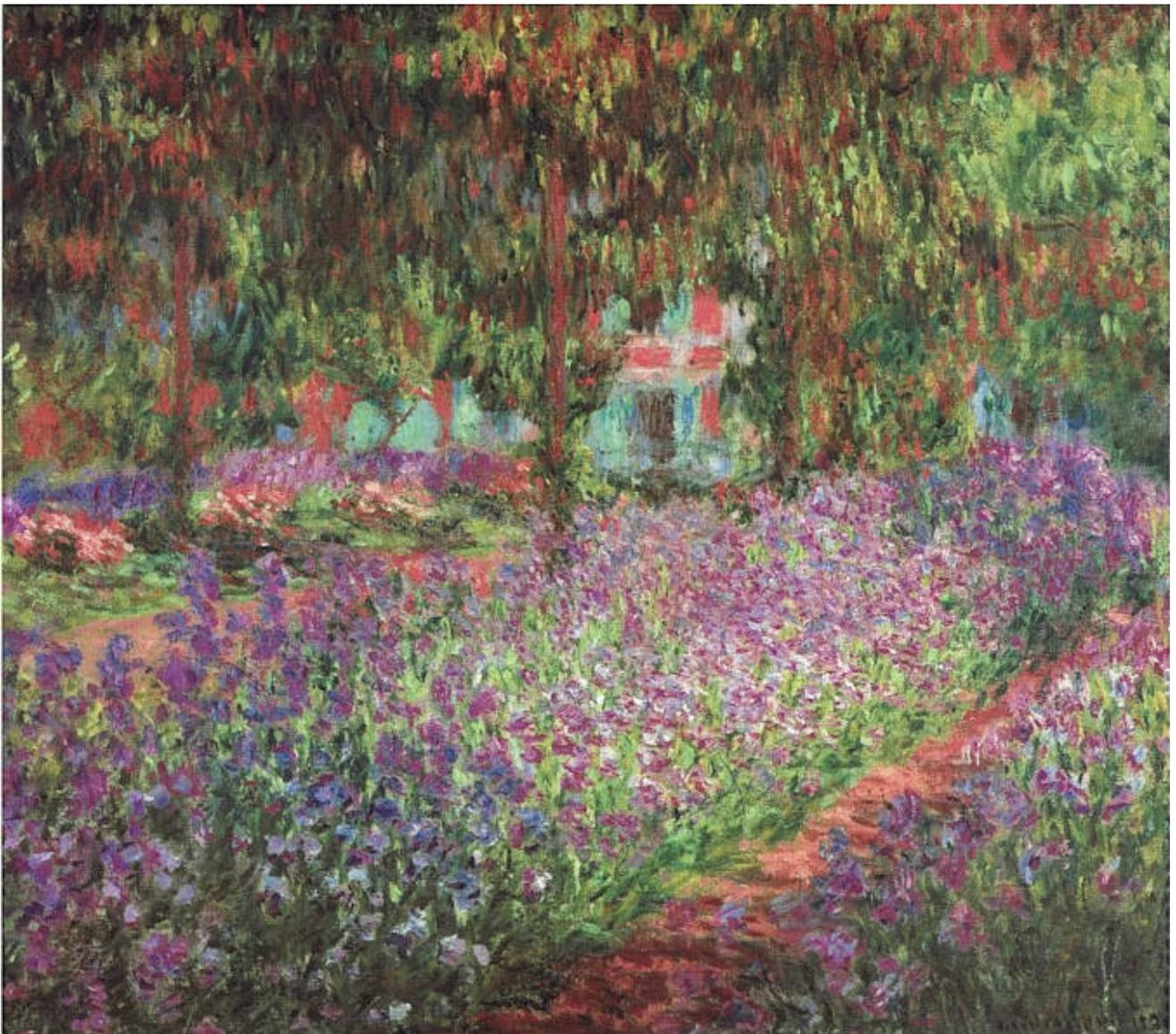
Dedicated to water lilies, the painting measures more than two meters wide, and dates back to a period between 1917-1919, a time of experimentation in Monet's practice, when he aimed to create mural-size paintings instead of smaller landscapes he painted previously.

The grand image shows the artist's gestural style, filled with vigorous bolts of color that coalesce into a watery landscape. The brushwork

and gestural quality reveal the intense energy the artist put into painting, even at the later stage of his life.

The garden seemed to provide him with the fuel to continue, pushing him to explore it further with each new work. Monet's dedication to Giverny and his art was so strong that he once even professed that he wanted to die there, amongst what he created.

"I do not have long to live, and I must dedicate all my time to painting," he wrote in a 1918 letter to the Parisian art dealer, Georges Bernheim. *"I don't want to believe that I would ever be obliged to leave Giverny; I'd rather die here in the middle of what I have done."*



Claude Monet - The Artist's Garden at Giverny, 1900

The Legacy of Monet's Water Lilies

Although initially met with mixed reactions, Monet's water lilies grew over time into cult images of the 20th century, marking a period of artistic experimentation and announcing painting's liberation from the expectations of direct representation.

Although Monet's contemporaries were skeptical about the works, later generations recognized their revolutionary potential, especially artists of **Abstract Expressionism** who strived to achieve similar excellence with abstract forms.

Today, Monet's water lilies are among the most celebrated Impressionist works coveted by collectors and museums worldwide. For many, they mark the summit of the artist's career.



Claude Monet at Christie's

"With Monet, seemingly everything has already been seen or said. Le bassin aux nymphéas, which has never been exhibited or offered at auction, is, however, that rarest thing: A masterpiece rediscovered," explains Max Carter, Christie's Vice Chairman of 20th and 21st Century Art.

Thickly worked, impeccably preserved and hidden away in the same private collection since 1972, Le bassin aux nymphéas remains as astonishing today as it was 100 years ago.

The 20th Century Evening Sale featuring Claude Monet's *Le bassin aux nymphéas* will take place at [Christie's](#) in New York on November 9th, 2023. The work was publicly unveiled in Hong Kong on October 4th, 2023, and is estimated to realize over \$65 million.

Featured image: Claude Monet - *Le bassin aux nymphéas*, 1917-1919, detail © Christie's Images Limited 2023