

ArtSlant  
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**GAGOSIAN GALLERY**

**Monet, Anew**  
**by Emily Nathan**

*Late Work*

**Gagosian Gallery- 21st St.**  
**522 West 21st Street, New York, NY 10011**  
**May 1, 2010 - June 26, 2010**

They have built walls for Monet—and I don't mean the temporary sort, the sort you take down after a moment, the hollow sort upon which it would be unwise to hang priceless works of art painted by the father of Impressionism. No—for *Claude Monet: Late Work*, Gagosian's blue prints have been modified such that a knock on the newly constructed partition is met not with the deep, resounding return of vacancy, but rather with the timbre of something permanent, something substantial. The white daytime luster which traditionally filters through the gallery's rectangular skylights has been muted and dispersed by translucent scrims, strung like nets beneath the glass to catch superfluous sunrays. The walls have been painted the sort of serene grey which fades discreetly into itself, and the air feels quiet and still, like held breath. Gagosian gallery has become that modestly magnificent moment just after dawn or just before dusk.



All of this atmospheric adjustment serves to set a tone that is strikingly appropriate for the viewing of Monets in general, and particularly for this arrangement of them. In it, the nuanced development of the artist's relationship to his subject is illuminated by way of strategic chronological juxtapositions. There are no distractions; even the wall—usually a blaring, aggressive white—ceases to exist. What you see as you move throughout the four galleries, each boasting a comfortable selection of approximately six works, is a marked—and surprising—progression. Exhibition curator and world-renowned Monet scholar Paul Hayes Tucker has culled his chosen works from a potpourri of caches, borrowing from previously unknown sources across the globe as well as from the Art Institute of Chicago, the Honolulu Academy of Arts and the Kitaykushu Museum in Kitaykushu, Japan.

The journey as Tucker has orchestrated it begins in a room baring easel-scale paintings of the pond at Monet's home in Giverny, his "Nymphéas," which were executed between the years of 1904 and 1908. The majority of these represent the Monet we see on postcards and book covers, the Monet we know and trust: amidst a sea of cool greens and hazy blues, sunlight melts into water and mingles with reflected trees, lilies dapple their pads with flashes of crimson and violet. They are peaceful, still, grounded; they elicit sighs. But one work stands out from the rest, a lily pond like the others, but this

time oriented vertically, cut down the center by a bold strike of reflected, pale sky; the water here is not temperate but churning, lit by the fire-reds of an angry sunset. Horizon line has disappeared; blossoms are no longer. Echoes of the surrounding landscape swirl about aggressive strokes of cadmium red and yellow, drip branches like lapping flames. This piece, painted in 1907, marks Monet's departure from the investigations he had pursued until that point and his turn towards the remarkable explorations we witness in the galleries that follow.



In the next room, and the next, things change. Scale changes dramatically; Monet's light *plein-air* canvases are replaced by large, heavy ones; he hones in and zooms out; shapes are abstracted, his stroke is varied and unpredictable. We see a deluge of dark, violent marks which smite a lily pond like frenzied rain; we see canvas left untreated and forms unfinished; we see water indistinguishable from sky, billowing clusters of clouds, or blossoms, or smoke, and we know not where we stand. We lose our footing and fall over the edges of his spaces. This is a Monet we perhaps haven't known; this is a Monet we are given the chance to observe as an artist stepping off the garden path of established motifs and familiar territory, an artist seeing, and feeling what he sees, in new ways. It is shocking; it exhilarates.

In the final gallery, marks are at turns explosive and restrained, staccato and legato; we see fire and ice, a hurricane of reds and ochres, traditional compositions and perspectives which have been churned and roiled and set ablaze, such as *L'Allée de Rosiers* (*The Path Under the Rose Arches*). There is one work which has not been

seen before, not by US audiences nor by the Audience at large. Painted sometime between 1918 and 1924, as Monet neared his 1926 death, the painting is small, unassuming, but brazen. As you enter the room, this small canvas summons you, and you approach. It is not covered in glass, it is unprotected. You bring your nose as close to its surface as permitted and your eyes cross; you are lost suddenly in a hurricane of color, a flurry of dynamic strokes, paint applied thickly with brush and knife, smeared and piled, scumbled and dragged. You are disoriented—gone are those still, quiet pools, those silent pink lilies, that humbly mirrored sky, the artist you thought you knew. But you step back, you let your eyes re-focus, and in a moment, the whirlpool of wild marks comes together. Like those hidden images which are unrecognizable and illegible until you allow yourself to see, it emerges, tentatively, but surely: the charming *Pont Japonais*, drenched in falling afternoon light, wisteria arching gracefully along the curve of a Japanese bridge, and that still, quiet pond—undoubtedly, indelibly Monet.



Images: *Nymphéas* (1906). Oil on canvas, 32 x 36 1/4 inches. The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Collection; *Nymphéas* (1907), Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 28 3/4 inches. Musée Marmatton Monet, Paris; *Le Bassin aux nymphéas* (1917-19) Oil on canvas, 39 1/4 x 78 3/4 inches. Honolulu Academy of Arts; *Le pont japonais* (1918-24), Oil on canvas, 35 x 39 1/2 inches. Musée Marmatton Monet, Paris. Photos courtesy Gagosian Gallery