MONET and the Birth of Impressionism
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AN EXHIBITION WITH THE EXCEPTIONAL SUPPORT FROM THE MUSÉE D'ORSAY
WORDS OF GREETING

The Commerzbank Foundation and the Städel Museum have already cooperated in the organisation of several major exhibitions. This is all the more reason that we at the Commerzbank Foundation, as the main sponsor, are delighted to be able to open officially the exhibition Monet and the Birth of Impressionism together with the Städel.

Two hundred years ago, in 1815, the Frankfurt businessman, private banker and patron of the arts Johann Friedrich Städel bequeathed his collection to a foundation. This was the origin of the oldest museum foundation in existence in Germany today. The Städel is now one of the largest collections in the country. Its holdings include 3,000 paintings, 600 sculptures, around 4,000 photographs and more than 100,000 drawings spanning 700 years of European art history.

The opening exhibition celebrating this 200-year anniversary is devoted to one of the focal points of the house: Impressionism. Starting with early works by the artists Claude Monet, Édouard Manet, Alfred Sisley, Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas from the Städel’s collection, as well as works by other important Impressionists including Camille Pissarro, Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, the exhibition highlights the beginnings of the Impressionist movement from the early years of the 1860s to 1880. The objective is to make the visitor aware of the conditions that prevailed when the Impressionist movement was developing and the stages it went through in reaching its artistic maturity. The exhibition includes 100 paintings demonstrating how the significance of what was represented gradually lost its dominance over the composition itself and how the play of light and shadow became increasingly important for the artists. The extent to which the effect created by this new style of art challenged the viewing habits of the time becomes apparent. The main achievement of the exhibition Monet and the Birth of Impressionism is that it not only presents the singular artistic phenomenon of Impressionism but also makes it possible to understand its entire complexity with all the detours, digressions and ruptures. Aspects such as the relationship between mankind and nature, between work and leisure time, the increase in mobility and the overall acceleration of life as a result of technical progress all play a major role, together with the visual perception of the metropolis. These are all matters that affect us today and create a close connection between this art and our modern life. The works of Monet run like a golden thread through this presentation. The importance afforded to them not only takes into consideration the artist’s pioneering role in the increasing prevalence of plein-air painting. Monet’s works illustrate impressively the development away from large-format figural paintings to smaller landscape scenes. By moving away from concrete motifs, Monet ultimately pursued the interplay of colour and light to the extremes of dissolution in a way achieved by virtually no other artist.

With this comprehensive exhibition about the beginnings of a new artistic movement that turned against the academic style of the time, with its naturalistic tendencies, the Städel not only invites a wide audience to admire unique works from this era; it goes one step further, since the background information provided in the exhibition makes an active analysis of this artistic movement possible. In Monet and the Birth of Impressionism the Frankfurt museum links the access to culture and the transmission of artistic knowledge in an exemplary manner. This is fully in keeping with the interests of the Commerzbank Foundation; through our activities, we intend to make a contribution to the preservation of our cultural heritage and to improve the artistic education of society.

The Board of Trustees and management of the Commerzbank Foundation look forward to many art lovers visiting the exhibition. We wish them all an interesting – and, at the same time, stimulating – encounter with the early works of impressionism.

Klaus-Peter Müller
Chairman of the Board of Trustees
of the Commerzbank Foundation
In the year 1910, Georg Swarzenski, the Director of the Städel Art Institute at that time, wrote to the Lord Mayor of Frankfurt Franz Adickes: “I have been successful in establishing contacts with the last living principal representatives of French art of the nineteenth century and this opened up the possibility, which I no longer dared believe in, of obtaining some works from them. This will enable us to take our place in the forefront of modern galleries and I am really happy about this. I am already able to present one of Monet’s major works whose acquisition represents an event of the greatest magnitude that will also receive a positive welcome from the public.” Swarzenski was referring to the domestic scene The Luncheon that now forms the centrepiece of the major jubilee exhibition Monet and the Birth of Impressionism. Around 100 paintings, including masterpieces of early Impressionism such as Claude Monet’s La Grenouillère, The Boulevard des Capucines and the Musée d’Orsay’s monumental Luncheon, from public and private collections from all over the world have made their way to Frankfurt on this special occasion. With this exhibition, our museum focuses its attention on a central area of its collection: French art from the nineteenth century. The foundation is formed by the house’s own concentrated, high-quality, holdings of early works of French Impressionism that are not only counted among the masterworks of the collection and favourites with the public, but are also closely linked with important events in the history of the institution.

With the exception of the landscape by Cézanne purchased in 1929, the Städel Museum’s history of collecting French Impressionist art covers a period of 13 years. It began in 1899, the year the Städel’scher Museums-Verein was established, when the businessman Victor Mössinger donated the painting Bank of the Seine in Autumn by Alfred Sisley, who had died only a few months previously, as a “founding picture”. This made the Städel one of the first museums to be in possession of an Impressionist painting. The reception of French Impressionism started in Germany in the 1890s. Max Liebermann, who collected works by his French colleagues himself – he possessed 17 works by Édouard Manet alone – played a key role in these activities and also assisted the Director of the Berlin National Gallery, Hugo von Tschudi, in his purchases. The foundation of Bruno and Paul Cassirer’s art gallery in Berlin in 1898 gave French Impressionism a permanent presence in Germany. In 1903, the most important Impressionist exhibition held so far in a German-speaking country opened in the Secession in Vienna. This helped the movement achieve a breakthrough in that contemporary art recognised it as the fundament of its own creative work; the critic Franz Servaes wrote: “Only with Impressionism and never against it, will we be able to make any progress.”

In the following year, the then Director of the Städel Carl Justi purchased Monet’s painting, Houses by the Bank of the River Zaan at the Great Dresden Art Exhibition. The art historian Julius Meier-Graefe – together with Richard Muther, the mastermind of the exhibition in the Vienna Secession – found enthusiastic words for the work in his canon-forming book Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst (History of the Development of Modern Art), which was also published in 1904: “Is there a more intimate view of the nature of Holland than this picture with the two extraordinary Baroque houses on the water! It is much more than a landscape; Monet has almost captured the spirit of those people who love landscapes of this kind. This is no different to the old Dutch masters who, when they painted the simplest things, not only depicted the objects themselves but also a wide range of associations with them.”

All of the other works by French Impressionist painters came into the house under Justi’s successor Swarzenski, who was one of the few German museum directors at the beginning of the twentieth century who admired modern French art. Especially in the years before the First World War, he increased the museum’s acquisitions of French painting from the nineteenth century and, in this way, played a major role in the development of this focal point of today’s Städel holdings. His passionate commitment to French art is especially remarkable seeing that – after an initial period of openness – it soon
fell out of favour with the government. Hugo von Tschudi was criticised by Emperor Wilhelm II and the Director of the Academy, Anton von Werner, and was dismissed from his post as director in 1909. Works by artists of the Barbizon School, as well as Gustave Courbet's *The Wave* and *Village Edge in Winter*, were among the first acquisitions made by Swarzenski soon after assuming office. With the gallery owner Paul Durand-Ruel as an intermediary, Monet's *Luncheon*, as well as Auguste Renoir's *After the Luncheon* and *Reading Girl*, came into the collection in 1910 and Cassirer sent another seven works by Renoir for inspection in the same year. The Städel's Impressionist acquisitions policy reached a peak in 1912 with Édouard Manet's *The Game of Croquet*, Edgar Degas' *Orchestra Musicians* and Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr Gachet*. Numerous other paintings by French artists, such as Camille Corot, Charles-François Daubigny, Edmond Cross, Puvis de Chavannes and Maurice Denis, also came into the possession of our museum in those years.

After the First World War, Swarzenski concentrated increasingly on Expressionism. Most of the artists of the generation of Impressionists born around 1840 were no longer alive at the time and promoting contemporary art, to which the Städel had devoted itself since its beginnings, now became focused on their successors.

The entire holdings of French Impressionist works date from the 1860s and 1870s, the years when the artists became acquainted with each other and presented their works at joint exhibitions for the first time. Their predecessors, including Courbet, Corot, Daubigny and Antoine Chintreuil, are also represented in the collection with important paintings. Starting out from these works, our aim in this exhibition *Monet and the Birth of Impressionism* is to investigate the beginnings and early development of the Impressionist movement.

The comprehensive project received considerable support from many colleagues and private collectors who provided important loans and our most sincere, heartfelt thanks go – first and foremost – to them. The wealth of exhibits was only made possible through their exceptional generosity. We would especially like to draw attention to the assistance provided by the Musée d’Orsay, that made a major contribution to the exhibition with a group of works of the highest quality.

The support of our committed partners and sponsors aided us in the realisation of this exhibition undertaking. Our most sincere thanks go to the major sponsor of this important project – the Commerzbank Foundation – for their generous contribution. And our personal thanks must be extended to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Commerzbank Foundation Klaus-Peter Müller and its Manager Astrid Kießling-Taşkin. Their trust and commitment accompanied us from the very first stages of planning the exhibition.

I would also like to thank Martin Blessing, the Chairman of the Board of Managing Directors of Commerzbank AG, for his advocacy and the support extended to us by the Commerzbank AG.

I am also delighted that we were able to cooperate with Alnatura once again, for which I would like to thank CEO Götz Rehn. The successful partnership with Fraport
Finally, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to the Head of the Modern Art Collection, Felix Krämer. As the curator of this important exhibition of such high calibre, he has not only made a fundamental contribution to the history of exhibitions at the Städel but has also developed in an exceptional manner an outstanding approach to the reception of this artistic movement which has already been investigated in so many different ways.

Max Hollein
Director
“Oh, it was an exhausting day, when, in the company of the landscape artist Joseph Vincent, a student of Bertin and receiver of medals and awards of various governments, I dared to enter the first exhibition at the Boulevard des Capucines. The incautious had gone there, not anticipating anything bad. He expected to find good and bad – rather bad than good – painting, much like anywhere else, but had not been prepared for such trespasses against artist’s manners, against the great masters and form. Yes, form and masters! They are no longer needed, my poor friend! We have changed all that!”

Thus begins Louis Leroy’s text titled L’Exposition des impressionistes, published in the satirical periodical Le Charivari on April 25, 1874. At the time Leroy was also known as a writer of comedies. In his essay he describes a fictitious visit to the Première Exposition of the Société anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc., which had opened ten days earlier and which was to go down in art history as the first Impressionist exhibition. In an annotated dialogue Leroy describes Vincent’s increasing irritation when faced with the exhibits: from Camille Pissarro to Paul Cézanne and from Berthe Morisot to Auguste Renoir his exasperation increases. When Vincent finally spots Claude Monet’s Impression, Sunrise (fig. 2), he scoffs: “Effect – impression, what else! … A wallpaper in the embryonic stage is further advanced than this seascape!”

The satirical character of the text is clearly evident a few lines further down, when Vincent mistakes a guard for a speaking painting and calls out “Huh!” as he starts performing an Indian dance. The article, which by now strikes the reader as completely surreal, closes with a triple “Huh!”! It is hard to believe that one of the most successful founding myths in modern art is based on this satire.

The notion that the first Impressionist exhibition was a failure, that the press and the public ridiculed the young artists and that it was Leroy’s derisory title “Impressionists” which gave the movement its name, went down in the annals of art history. The exhibition opened on April 15, 1874 at 35, Boulevard des Capucines, an elegant commercial street in the capital. Nadar’s former photographic studio, “one of the most renowned art locations of Paris”

In late December, as a measure of preparation for the exhibition, the participating artists had founded a cooperative whose purpose was to organise exhibitions for members without an admissions board. Potential gains from the sales of the art works were to be shared. The exhibition catalogue lists 65 works by 30 artists, among them Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Berthe Morisot, Edgar Degas, Paul Cézanne, Camille Pissarro and Alfred Sisley. Alongside these painters whom we now know as Impressionists other artists, who are practically forgotten, were shown, such as Édouard Béliard, Stanislav...
Lépine or Stanislas-Henri Rouart. Moreover works were on display by painters who did not share contextual parallels with the Impressionists, but whose support was indispensible for financial reasons. Thus the spectrum ranged from Impressionist landscapes to etchings after paintings by the Old Masters as well as portrait busts by the Classicist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (fig. 4).

Monet and his colleagues had opted for an opening date two weeks before that of the Salon – the international event in contemporary art at the time. It was here that any artist who wanted to be anybody in the art world had to succeed. A selection panel of professors and famous artists presided over the participation at the Salon. The Impressionists had chosen the date carefully: on the one hand they sought to benefit from the great public interest in contemporary art generated by the Salon exhibition, but on the other they did not want to be mistaken for a Salon des Refusés, where the paintings rejected by the jury were displayed. As at the Salon, the works in Nadar’s studio were shown closely hung on dark red wallpaper, although the relatively low ceilings prevented the classical Salon-style hanging. Thanks to gas lighting the paintings could be viewed after dark until 10 p.m. The admission fee was one franc, the same as that for the Salon, where the visitor was presented with 3,657 works of art – more than 20 times as many as were on view at the Impressionists’ show. By the end of the Impressionist exhibition on May 15, almost 4,000 visitors had come – some 130 visitors per day. And while the revenues from admission fees and sales did not quite cover the costs of the lavish event, the participants had achieved something important: they were being talked about!

“Our exhibition is doing well. It is a success”, was how Pissarro summarised his impressions on May 5, but he added: “the critics are tearing us apart and accuse us of not learning anything.” The latter was over-exaggerated. Taking a look at the numerous reviews of the exhibition, only very few generally rejected the exhibition. Out of a total of about 50 reviews, only seven are negative, among them Leroy’s satire. Most critics welcomed the attempt to offer an alternative to the almighty Salon: “One cannot encourage this daring undertaking enough, which has been suggested by critics and art lov-
ers for some time”, Émile d’Hervilly remarked two days after the opening. Several authors praised the landscapes in particular: “There is talent, a lot of talent. These young painters understand nature in a way which is neither boring, nor worn out, instead it is lively, succinct, dashing, simply bewitching. What quick capturing of the motif, what delightful manner of painting! Granted, it is summary, but all that is important is there!” was Jules-Antoine Castagnary’s admiring comment, for example. However, the mostly positive appraisal did not prevent the authors from criticising the disparate general impression of the exhibition, nor from voicing disapproving comments on individual artists and their works. They took issue particularly with the artistic merit of the more conservative art works, which have little in common with the works by those known as Impressionists today. Several critics who had looked at the exhibition in great detail were receptive towards the avant-garde and used the term “impressions” quite naturally to describe the sketch-like quality of many paintings. While Armand Silvestre, for example, described an “effect of impression”, Émile Cardon in La Presse spoke of the “School of impression”, and Castagnary titled in Le Siècle: “Exhibition on Boulevard des Capucines: The Impressionists”. In his essay he also debated which name the group should be given – they were operating under the title Société anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc. With reference to Monet, Castagnary suggests: “Were one to characterise their goals with one word, one would have to create the new term Impressionists. They are Impressionists in the sense that they do not represent a landscape, but the sensation it evokes. They even use the term themselves: it is not the landscape, it is the impression, as the catalogue calls the sunrise by Mr. Monet.” Already in 1972 the art historian Ian Dunlop explained that this term was quite neutral at the time: “Leroy plays on the word ‘impressionism’ and as a result he has largely been credited with the distinction of being the first to call the exhibitors ‘impressionists.’ However, the term was in fairly common use and had been applied to other landscape painters, notably Daubigny and Jongkind, before Monet.” Subsequently several artists availed themselves of this term, which was officially used during the preparations for the third Impressionist exhibition in 1877.

BEGINNINGS The Impressionist exhibition in 1874 was the first opportunity to gain an overview over contemporary art in Paris that was not influenced by the Academy or the Salon. Monet’s friend Frédéric Bazille had expressed initial reflections about such an exhibition as early as 1867 in a letter to his mother, when he told her of the fruitless attempts of “a number of young people” to organise independent shows of their works. It is safe to assume that Bazille’s colleagues, whom he does not name, were the core of those artists who later presented their works together at the Boulevard des Capucines. Two years after this initial mention, the undertaking seems to have materialised. In May 1869 Bazille wrote to his mother again “A dozen talented young people […] decided that each year we will rent a large studio where we will exhibit our works in as large a number as we wish. […] With these people, and Monet, the best of them all, we are certain of success. You will see how much attention we will get.” It was thwarted by financial strains and the start of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, which resulted in the deposition of the old regime of Napoleon III and the siege of Paris. Furthermore, the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune in late May 1871 resulted in 30,000 deaths. Bazille died during the war. His early death prevented the fame his colleagues were to attract later on, although he was among the protagonists of the movement. Monet and Bazille had known each other since 1862, when they had met at the studio of the academic painter Charles Gleyre, with whom Renoir and Sisley also studied at the time. At the Académie Suisse – where Monet had taken lessons previously – he was already acquainted with Cézanne and Pissarro. Thus the Impressionists formed a tightly woven network during their training, which they continuously expanded for their mutual benefit. The young artists, mostly from bourgeois families,
were united by their great interest in landscape painting and their rejection of the outmoded standards set by the Academy. Their references were not to the mannered beauties by Ingres or Jean-Léon Gérôme’s vigorous gladiators. They were fascinated by the impulsive painting by Eugène Delacroix, who focused entirely on the effect of colour – not contour; in 1855 at the first Universal Exhibition in Paris a great retrospective show was dedicated to his work. The landscapes of the so-called Barbizon School were of even greater importance to them. From the mid-nineteenth century Camille Corot, teacher of Pissarro and Morisot, was the head of the group and also the most important landscape artist in France: “There is but one here, namely Corot; we are nothing, nothing next to him,” Monet remarked full of admiration.

In 1822 Corot accomplished his first plein-air oil studies in the forest of Fontainebleau, before his palette became brighter during a prolonged sojourn in Italy. Corot’s atmospheric landscapes are not primarily about the realistic representation of the countryside, but about creating a mood, which allows the onlooker to sense nature’s “soul”, as it were. While he sketched en plein air, he later composed his paintings in his studio – and enriched them with figures. The Forest of Fontainebleau, which was accepted by the Salon in 1846 (fig. 5), was also based on numerous sketches.

Corot is considered to be the main representative of the Barbizon School, although unlike his painter friends Théodore Rousseau, Charles Jacque and Jean-François Millet he never lived permanently in the village some 50 kilometres southeast of Paris. His great commercial success resounds in the joke often cited in France, that 1,000 of his 500 paintings are in the United States – an allusion to the countless forgeries which circulated even during Corot’s lifetime.

The term School of Barbizon, which has been in use in art history since the nineteenth century, is ambiguous, as it describes neither a cohesive group nor a teacher-student relationship. From time to time artists such as Gustave Courbet, Constant Troyon, Jules Dupré, Antoine Chintreuil and Charles-François Daubigny came to the forest of Fontainebleau to make studies of nature; with its great variety of trees and large sandstone boulders it offered numerous attractive views. These also drew many photographers, among them Eugène Cuvelier, Constant Alexandre Famin, Gustave Le Gray and Charles Marville. Like the painters, the photographers also showed the forest as a wild natural paradise.

While the works by the Barbizon School are clearly distinct from one another, the artists were united by a longing for an original way of life unspoilt by urban civilisation. They shared “a vivid passion for nature” and the ambition to present their works at the Salon, even if it was against the resistance of their conservative critics. The seriousness of the opposition they faced can be grasped from a remark by the president of the jury and general director of the national museums Count Alfred-Émilien de Nieuwerkerke, who expressed his irritation at Millet’s dreamy representations of farmers: “This is painting by democrats […] painting by men, who do not change their clothes and want to impose on decent society; I dislike this art and find it repulsive.”

Although the paintings by the School of Barbizon impart the notion of seclusion and the landscape appears to be untouched, the tranquillity of the forest of Fontainebleau had been disrupted at the latest when the train connection from Paris opened in 1849 and brought a steadily increasing stream of recreation-seekers. Equipped with a tourist guide, which was also available in English, they trudged around the sights in the former royal hunting grounds.

Already in 1861 a preservation area was erected to protect the forest. A diary entry by the brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt of January 1852 suggests that the artists also were a nuisance, when they reported from a visit to the forest, “where every tree seems to be a model, surrounded with paintboxes.”

No matter how highly the Barbizon artists rated painting in nature, they believed that a painting had to be completed in the studio. Only Daubigny completed his works entirely out of doors; he also refrained from composing his representation from numerous studies of landscape, a method...
which was commonly used. Daubigny’s interest in water characterises his œuvre. In 1857 he built himself a studio boat like the one Monet was to use later on (fig. 6). His eagerness to transfer the immediacy of what he had seen to canvas earned Daubigny great respect from the Impressionists. In 1859 the writer, composer and painter Zacharie Astruc, who also participated in the first Impressionist exhibition, praised Daubigny’s “delicious naivety, – simple before his object like a child, neither adding nor neglecting anything”.

It is hardly surprising that others found fault with this kind of painting. Théophile Gautier, for example, criticised the fact that to Daubigny “a first impression” sufficed and he never concerned himself with “the details”: “In fact his paintings are nothing more than sketches – and not particularly advanced ones.” Therefore Léon Lagrange called him “leader of the School of Impression” as early as 1865. The criticism with which Daubigny was met is reminiscent of the reactions the Impressionists provoked time and again.

A comparison of Daubigny’s View of the Banks of the Seine (cat. 3) and Monet’s The Seine at Vétheuil (cat. 89) makes evident the closeness of their artistic ideas. While Daubigny was interested in the overall atmospheric effect, Monet strove to dissolve the motif by mirroring it in the foreground. When Daubigny was appointed as a member of the selection panel of the Salon in 1870, he used his position to support the Impressionists. However, when he failed to convince his colleagues of Monet’s The Luncheon (cat. 39) and La Grenouillère (p. 83, fig. 5), he resigned from his post under protest.

Following his role models, Monet regularly visited the forest of Fontainebleau to paint there together with his friends Bazille, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley. Sisley’s painting of 1865 The Painter Monet in the Forest of Fontainebleau (cat. 17) shows the painter in front of his easel in the coppice. It would be a mistake to think that this suggests that the Impressionists were interested in enchanting scenes of nature. They mostly depicted landscapes where human interference immediately meets the eye (cat. 20 and 21). Their paintings also differ...
from those of their predecessors in the loose and broad brushstroke. The young artists are focused on a differentiated rendering of the light which transcends in its vividness the works of the Barbizon painters.

The artistic career of Monet and the other Impressionists began when the fame of the Barbizon-painters had reached its zenith and they had even met with the approval of the Salon. From the 1860s landscape painting was prominently represented and was deliberately encouraged through acquisitions by the state. 29 “Landscape imagery became an important component with a broad-ranging campaign to construct a new sense of nation in France”, the art historian Simon Kelly explained. 30 From the mid-nineteenth century the popularity of the genre did not grow due to political efforts to increase the identification of the French with their home country alone; this development was also a result of the growing number of urban buyers who saw these works as counter-images to their lives in the city.

Eugène Boudin was another artist who had a major influence on Monet besides the Barbizon painters. He worked in particular between Trouville and Honfleur on the Normandy coast. Monet had lived in Le Havre from the age of five and became a notorious caricaturist whilst still at school. Boudin was among the first to recognise and support Monet’s talent. 31 The younger artist repeatedly emphasised Boudin’s crucial role for his development: “I began to daub my canvas. And then I watched him paint, him … I was seized by a profound emotion … Even better, I was enlightened. And Boudin really became my first initiator. From this moment on I was on my track, my destination was clear.” 32 “Boudin encouraged the young man to paint with him in the countryside and supported him in his decision to become an artist. Later on, when Monet had gained independence, he maintained the contact to his fatherly friend, who was 15 years his senior. Boudin’s small-scale atmospheric scenes by the seaside were highly popular at the time; the open skies and his fine sense for the nuances of light elicited admiration. Although Boudin reworked his paintings in the studio, they exude the freshness and openness of a sketch. In addition – unlike the paintings by the Barbizon School – they show the present time: modern vessels and holidaymakers in fashionable dress by the sea (cat. 7 and 8) demonstrate that these are not representations of Arcadian ideals. Apart from plein-air painting, Boudin also introduced his protégé to first professional contacts. In 1862 they painted on the coast at Sainte-Adresse near Le Havre together with Johan Barthold Jongkind (cat. 11). At the time the Dutchman was considered to be a leading landscape artist, whose seascapes caused a stir for their liberal brushwork. Boudin also introduced him to Courbet, who was even a witness to Monet’s marriage in 1870 and whose landscapes dedicated entirely to realism were another important impulse for early Impressionism. 33

**MONET AND THE SALON** In the spring of 1859, the 19-year-old Monet travelled to Paris to visit the Salon for the first time. He reported back to Boudin euphorically about the paintings by Daubigny, Troyon, Narcisse Diaz de la Peña and Corot on view and alerted him to the fact that painters of seascapes “are missing entirely” from the exhibition: “This is a path for you, where you would go far.” 34 It does not come as much of a surprise that in 1865 Monet succeeded with two seascapes, clearly influenced by Boudin and Jongkind. However, while they mostly preferred a smaller scale, the self-confident debutant decided on two canvases measuring 90 x 150 cm (figs. 7 and 8). This improved his chances of standing out in the plethora of works on display. “Mr. Monet’s two seascapes are unquestionably the best in the entire exhibition”, observed one critic full of praise. “The palette is fresh and unambiguous, the breeze as strong as at sea and the treatment of the subject is new and original.” 35 The young artist attracted attention with his vivid brushwork, immediacy and close observation of nature, despite the fact that his subject and motif were rather conventional. Monet also attracted attention for conceiving his paintings as pairs; while they show different parts of a landscape, they correspond in terms of the shared horizon line and the identical scale. The idea of producing works in pairs or sequences, thus placing the individual paintings into a larger context, is a particular characteristic of Monet’s oeuvre.

Motivated by his debut at the Salon, the following year Monet attempted to build on his success with an
even larger painting. The canvas of his tripartite *Luncheon on the Grass*, which he painted in his studio in Paris, measures four by six metres (p. 40, fig. 4; see also p. 59, fig. 2). He decided on the monumental format in order to elevate an everyday bourgeois scene to the status of history painting. Édouard Manet’s work of the same title (p. 139, fig. 4) had inspired Monet, who had seen it at the Salon des Refusés two years previously. Manet’s scandalous large-scale painting showing his nude model sitting in a park in the company of two men had been the main attraction. While Manet included many art-historical references to the Renaissance in his representation, Monet was preoccupied with the contemporary feel of the fashionably clad picnicking city dwellers. Émile Zola remarked on the artist: “[…] true Parisian, he brings Paris to the countryside. He cannot paint a landscape without including well-dressed men and women. […] Claude Monet loves with a particular affection nature that man makes modern.” The painter chose his girlfriend and future wife Camille Doncieux and Bazille to model for his *Luncheon;* Courbet can be identified, too. However, Monet failed to complete the painting in time for the Salon; instead he submitted a study from the forest of Fontainebleau together with a large-scale painting of his girl-friend, Camille (p. 79, fig. 1). As for the representation of the picnic, he sought inspiration from illustrations of fashion magazines. At the same time, his role-model Manet, whom avant-garde critics and young artists alike considered to be of exceptional talent, is present to a degree that prompted a caricaturist to ask in jest: “Monet or Manet? – Monet. But it is Monet, to whom we owe this Monet; bravo! Monet; many thanks! Manet.” Camille also received much praise from conservative critics in the Salon reviews; the lifelike rendering of the silk fabric earned particular admiration. To the artist’s great dismay, *Women in the Garden* (p. 60, fig. 3), the other monumental work accomplished en plein air which Monet submitted to the Salon the following year, was rejected. Luckily he was wise enough not to make his fortune depend on the Salon alone. Alongside his large-scale formats, he continued to paint small landscapes – among them snow scenes – and seascapes (cat. 31, 32 and 35). These modest sizes appealed to the increasingly bourgeois clientele from the capital, which underwent radical changes under Napoleon III and Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Paris changed from a city determined by medieval structures to a metropolis with broad boulevards and large squares, as we know it today. The numerous renovations made the capital appear progressive, at the time it was considered to be the most modern capital city in the world. Elaborate universal exhibitions were held to raise the city’s profile. When Manet turned to the subject of the city in his unfinished painting of *The Universal Exhibition of Paris 1867* (cat. 28), he focused neither on the architectural achievements nor on the technical details of the show referred to in the title of the work. Instead he had anonymous protagonists perform before the viewer as though they were on stage, while their actions remain enigmatic. At this time, Monet too, turned to the subject of urban public space. From the east-facing balcony of the Louvre he painted three vistas, among them *The Quai du Louvre* (cat. 30 and p. 101, fig. 5). Unlike Manet’s *Universal Exhibition* these paintings appear at first like representations of real life: Parisian flâneurs, waiting carriages, colourful advertising columns. Although it appears to present a random scene of everyday life, the picture is no less carefully composed than Manet’s artificial arrangement. However, Monet spared no effort to make the delicate weave of colour, visual axes and focal points of the old and the new Paris appear as natural as possible. The main point and with it the particular radicalism of his representation lie in what he omitted: like a museum visitor who is tired of observing the exhibits, Monet is turning his back on the Old Masters displayed in the galleries of the Louvre and instead steps out on to the balcony from where he takes in “real” life. He is not interested in the history of art, but in the here and now.

Even though Monet painted these vistas on site, they do not capture the hustle and bustle of urban life, which he portrayed a few years later in his two versions of the *Boulevard des Capucines* (cat. 61 and p. 34, fig. 4) and which enthralled critics at the first Impressionist exhibition: “The extraordinary animation of the public street, the crowd swarming on the sidewalks, the carriages on the pavement, and the boulevard’s trees waving in the dust and light – never has movement’s elusive, fugitive, instantaneous quality been captured and fixed in all its tremendous fluidity as it has in this extraordinary, marvelous sketch that Monet has listed as Boulevard des Capucines” commented Ernest Chesneau with great conviction and described an effect which was to be decisive for Impressionist painting as a whole: “At a distance, one hails a caricaturist to ask in jest: “Monet or Manet? – Monet. But it is Monet, to whom we owe this Monet; bravo! Monet; many thanks! Manet.” Camille also received much praise from conservative critics in the Salon reviews; the lifelike rendering of the silk fabric earned particular admiration. To the artist’s great dismay, *Women in the Garden* (p. 60, fig. 3), the other monumental work accomplished en plein air which Monet submitted to the Salon the following year, was rejected. Luckily he was wise enough not to make his fortune depend on the Salon alone. Alongside his large-scale formats, he continued to paint small landscapes – among them snow scenes – and seascapes (cat. 31, 32 and 35). These modest sizes appealed to the increasingly bourgeois clientele from the capital, which underwent radical changes under Napoleon III and Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann.

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other works of the exhibition by far, measuring 231.5 × 151.5 cm. Initially the artist had conceived the painting in brown hues for the Salon. However, while all submissions by Bazille, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley in 1870 had been accepted, Monet’s interior and his version of La Grenouillère (p. 83, fig. 5 and cat. 40), which has been lost since the Second World War, were rejected. The Luncheon shows Doncieux, tending to her son Jean in a wood-panelled dining room. She and Monet had become parents out of wedlock in 1867. The lady of the house is not paying any attention to a maidservant at a wardrobe nor a lady dressed in black leaning at the window. The painting seems to capture a moment in life, a spontaneous meeting in the artist’s private home. But this scene, too, has been carefully composed during the process of painting, as is evident from the x-ray and infra-red examinations conducted in preparation for this exhibition (p.261, fig. 1). At first Jean was at the centre of the painting on his mother’s lap, while she looked in the direction of the window, as did the visitor. Furthermore the artist added another figure, the maid, and rearranged numerous items. The bourgeois idyll is deceptive. What looks like a happy family scene did not conform to middle-class conventions at all. The representation of the home of a common-law couple with an illegitimate child was a downright provocation in its matter-of-factness and direct criticism of conventional mores. Moreover, it was the first time that an artist had painted a private interior on such a monumental scale without a moralising subtext.

While the Salon rejected Monet’s paintings in 1870, he was nonetheless present. In Henri Fantin-Latour’s work Studio in the Batignolles (fig. 9) Monet is shown among the writers and artists including Bazille, Renoir and Zola, with Manet at the centre. The painting underscores the pre-eminent role the latter played for numerous artists. Monet had already felt that he wanted to surpass the Luncheon on the Grass; this happened again when he painted The Luncheon, which clearly refers to Manet’s The Balcony (p. 117, fig. 3). The Salon’s rejection of his interior, one of his major works, was bitterly felt and caused him to rethink his work radically. While Manet remained faithful to the Salon throughout his life and never participated in an Impressionist exhibition – although he was perceived to be the leader of this group, especially during the initial years – in Monet’s case the rejection resulted in a break with the Salon on the one hand, and marked on the other the end of his large-scale figure paintings, with the result that he left Manet behind as an artistic point of reference.

The Franco-Prussian War and the conditions in Paris in 1871 prevented the annual Salon from taking place.
Impressionists that their future was not with the Salon, which was sanctioned by the state. They decided to seek an alternative opportunity to present their work. This insight coincided with the speedy regeneration of the French economy, with a private sector that was steadily gaining in importance, as well as with the growing success of individual Impressionists. Monet, who had spent the period of the Franco-Prussian War in London, had met the Parisian gallerist Paul Durand-Ruel there and with his aid became extremely successful at selling his works: in 1872 he earned more than 12,000 francs; the following year he had more than doubled his income — this corresponded to 20 times the annual income of a mineworker at the time. For Monet’s colleagues things were improving, too: “You are right, my dear Duret, we are beginning to assert ourselves”, Pissarro wrote to the art historian in early 1873; however, he added: “there are well-reputed greats, who are against us, but is opposition not to be expected, if one is to plant one’s unassuming little flag on a large heap?”

**BREAKTHROUGH** Since the first Impressionist exhibition had met with great success, it was obvious that it should be followed by another, as had been the initiators’ intention from the outset. However, financial and organisational