



Impressionism

The Art of Landscape

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Impressionism

The Art of Landscape

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Ortrud Westheider

Impressionism

The Art of Landscape

In Paris in 1874, Claude Monet's painting *Impression, Sunrise* caused a sensation (ill. 1). At the first group exhibition of the artists' association that shortly thereafter became known as the impressionists, the work's compositional freedom spurned the first scandal to ever emerge around an image depicting a landscape. Critics regarded it as unfinished. They perceived the artist's individualism and his search for a radically renewed form of painterly realism. Also seen as provocative was the programmatic orientation of this group of painters, which included, alongside Monet, Alfred Sisley, Auguste Renoir, and Camille Pissarro, who also presented themselves through landscapes.¹

This essay addresses the role of landscape for the self-understanding of the impressionist painters, and asks how this genre could have developed such a revolutionary and explosive force so late in the nineteenth century.² During the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States, landscape painting became the leading genre within the visual arts, and came to serve as the touchstone of artistic strivings for emancipation. This was, however, a phenomenon of romanticism, and in the following will be demarcated from impressionism.

The development of *plein air* painting in France was an equally decisive component for the impressionist landscape. Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley saw themselves as belonging to this tradition. The art they presented to the public was not entirely novel. They had no intention of breaking with precedent, planned no radical new beginning. This is why a boundary is introduced in the second part of this essay as well, because the novelty contemporaries regarded as subversive is inherent in precisely that difference.

From a contemporary perspective, the association between impressionism and landscape seems self-evident. But the impressionist artists no longer regarded themselves as landscape painters. Many of them occasionally painted figures, by preference under open skies, or alternated between various subjects; this was a heterogeneous group. More important was the circumstance that the dispute concerning the genres involved a rejection of a discourse that had for centuries been dominated by the powerful Académie des Beaux-Arts. This essay concludes by asking: What does it mean to paint landscapes without regarding oneself as a landscape painter? The localization of landscape within impressionism is then primarily a positioning within an artistic development. For this reason, the works analyzed here are those chosen by the artists themselves for their group exhibitions, since that selection conveyed a personal statement.³

A New Understanding of Mood: Delimitation from European Romanticism

In the course of the nineteenth century, under the new conditions of industrialization, the natural sciences, and tourism, painters throughout Europe sought out the natural world; individual observation became increasingly important. Because individual perception came to the fore now alongside a preoccupation with traditional themes, studies executed en plein air were seen as an attack on the royal academies, and therefore as politically volatile. The growth of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by the emergence of a market for small-format paintings depicting French landscapes.

In England, the field of landscape benefited from the aristocratic tradition of the Grand Tour and the accompanying popularization of watercolor painting. During the late eighteenth century, tourism in the Rhineland, the Alps, and Italy created a demand for illustrated travel literature, providing artists such as William Turner the opportunity to specialize in one subject, through which he would position himself against the academic tradition of history painting as a professor of perspective at the Royal Academy. With the painting entitled *The Fighting Temeraire Tugged to Her Last Berth To Be Broken Up* (ill. 2), which depicts the celebrated warship,



1) Claude Monet
Impression, Sunrise, 1872
 Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris



2) William Turner
*The Fighting Temeraire
 Tugged to Her Last Berth
 To Be Broken Up*, 1838
 The National Gallery, London



3) Claude-Joseph Vernet
The Shipwreck, 1772
 National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.,
 Patrons' Permanent Fund
 and Chester Dale Fund

on its final journey, as it is maneuvered into the harbor by a tugboat, he created a symbol of the transition to a new age. Displayed on the right-hand side of the scene, as prominently as the maritime scene itself, is the setting sun, which makes an equal claim to modernity through its use of color. In creating this scene, Turner employed the elementary tones red, yellow, and blue. In his view, colored light should fill the space, and every surface should reflect it. According to him, a painter ought to be capable of transposing this reflective atmospheric space into painting.

In contrast to Turner's image, Monet's painting *Impression, Sunrise* renounces narrative elements. His painting of the harbor of Le Havre was executed in connection with a stay in London, where he sought refuge from the Franco-Prussian War in 1870–71. With the smokestacks visible on the horizon on the left-hand side of the picture, Monet—like Turner—presents an insignia of modernity (cf. Stefan Koldehoff's contribution in the present volume, pp. 62–73), juxtaposing it with a natural spectacle—the sunrise—on the right-hand side. Monet's adopted Turner's reduction of the palette to the elementary colors red, yellow, and blue. The horizon, however, is set approximately one third higher. For Turner, modernity involved the registration of atmosphere, for Monet, the depiction of the reflective water. While for Turner the emphasis is on space, Monet emphasizes surface.

John Ruskin coined the slogan "the innocent eye" for Turner's painting.⁴ According to him, a painting should be as truthful as possible. A generation later, Monet thematized the gaze and the perceptions of the viewer. The rough execution of the image, regarded by contemporaries as unfinished, makes no attempt to conceal the fact that the image consists of paint. In examining the image, the picture, the viewer is always conscious of the fact that she is confronted by a work of art. Monet's painting is no longer in the service of a message, it describes nothing, and instead simply offers itself to the gaze. Nevertheless, through the plausibility of the luminous reflections on the water's surface, the momentary shifting shapes of the clouds, and the persuasive power of the registration of space present the eye with reality—or at least with the experience of reality.

Despite the degree to which Monet regarded himself as allied with Turner's open manner of painting, and to his scientifically-inspired analyses of light and color, the romantic principle of worldliness no longer played a role for him, any more than it did for impressionism as an artistic movement. This becomes evident when we compare *Impression, Sunrise* with the paintings—so alien to Monet—of Caspar David Friedrich. Friedrich comprehended the romantic landscape as a universal genre that stood above paintings depicting religious narratives.⁵ A painting such as *The Monk By the Sea* (Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin) portrays the protagonist as a solitary observer at the water's edge.⁶ Nature and the therein suspended time are sublime, the human an insignificant part of the whole.⁷ In contrast, Monet's shadowy figure in the boat is deprived of any symbolic quality, and is an inescapable element of the landscape: nature is no longer staged as an unattainable counterpart.

In France beginning in the late eighteenth century, it was regarded as the task of philosophy, literature, and painting to provide a nature conceived as sublime, monumental, and wild—inclusive of a human point of reference. The landscape was not to be represented in a way that was devoid of emotion, but instead as a mirror of human tragedy. Claude-Joseph Vernet took the viewer into account (ill. 3). Figures that served to present the terrifying drama of a natural catastrophe became surrogates within the space of a stage. As early as the Salon exhibitions of the eighteenth century, landscape painting exploited this strategy of participation to compete with history painting, whose mythological or biblical themes had meanwhile begun to encounter an indifferent public.⁸

As early as the seventeen-seventies, Vernet had championed visual study beneath the open sky, convinced that the observation and rendering of shifting light conditions was the only path capable of leading painting away from the formulaic conventions for which history painting was reproached.⁹ He wished to convey an impression to the viewer that was adequate to his or her own experience. As a contemporary of the Enlightenment, Vernet incorporated the public's powers of judgment so that already in the eighteenth century, the viewer's relationship to the depicted scene had beforehand become a criterion of a successful work of art. With this commission to the painters of the Academy, issued in October of 1774, to produce "an interesting view of the vicinity of Paris," Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre, court painter to Louis XVI, set the stage for a development whose impact was felt into the nineteenth century, and which prepared for both the Barbizon school and impressionism.¹⁰

A comparison between Vernet's dramatically staged shipwrecks and Monet's view of the harbor of Le Havre in morning light demonstrates just how remote impressionism was from the sentimental painting of the eighteenth century. For the impressionists, mood was no longer linked with emotion, but was instead aligned exclusively with the luminous atmosphere and visual registration of momentary phenomena.

An Impressionistic Subgenre: Delimitation from Plein Air Painting in France

Despite the fact that landscape occupied the lowest ranking in the hierarchical system of the French academic tradition alongside still life painting, and although painting outdoors was never an aspect of the academic curriculum, plein air painting must be regarded as a French invention. In Rome, Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes initiated a fashion for cloud studies that dissuaded artists on the Grand Tour from studying antique statues and sensitized them to fleeting atmospheric phenomena and shifting light effects.

In 1800, Valenciennes published his treatise *Éléments de perspective pratique*, which devotes considerable space to the novel practice of painting oil studies outdoors. The painting is to be executed quickly, "for the depicted object is illuminated by the sun, hence light and shadow are transformed continuously by the movement of the earth, so that it is impossible to linger very long with the recording of nature, without the chosen light effect changing so quickly that before long, the original state is no longer recognizable."¹¹ Through this text, Valenciennes would also transform the gaze of the artist who was sent to Italy, namely to Rome, on scholarship by the Paris Academy in order to accumulate a repertoire of sketches of antique statues and architecture upon which he could draw throughout his artistic career. Against this practice of copying and reproducing the eternally valid, Valenciennes proposed a fleeting landscape as the decisive criterion.¹²

Camille Corot relayed a knowledge of the interplay between light effects and the landscape and the value of sober observation to the impressionists. They revered the teacher of Camille Pissarro and Berthe Morisot, who they knew as le père Corot.¹³ In 1825, Corot had traveled to Italy, where he had spent three years painting in the Roman Campagna. For the first group exhibition of the impressionists, Pissarro submitted a painting that amounted to an homage to Corot (ills. 4, 5).¹⁴ He extended the panoramic format Corot had adopted from Valenciennes, transferring it to the French landscape.

Visitors to the first impressionist exhibition were able to compare this work with Monet's *Poppy Field (Argenteuil)* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). In these paintings, Pissarro and Monet presented a new genre of landscape painting, one that went beyond Corot—fields: vastness, clouds, and luminous atmosphere and almost geometrically organized interplay of colored surfaces.



4) Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot
Dardagny, Morning, 1853
The National Gallery, London,
Presented by William Edward Brandt,
Henry Augustus Brandt, Walter Augustus
Brandt and Alice Mary Bleecker
in memory of Rudolph Ernst Brandt



5) Camille Pissarro
June Morning at Pontoise, 1873
Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe



6) Pierre-Auguste Renoir
The Reapers, 1873
Private collection



8) Camille Pissarro
Hoarfrost at Ennery, 1873
 Musée d'Orsay, Paris



7) Gustave Courbet
Winter Landscape Near Ornans, 1865–1870
 Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal



9) Claude Monet
Seascape Near Fécamp, 1881
 Private collection

Renoir too modified Corot's schema (ill. 6). The critics regard these paintings as a travesty of the conception of landscape held by their predecessors.¹⁵ It was already clear to contemporaries how closely the impressionists were oriented toward the Barbizon school, and they found the differences disturbing.¹⁶ Eight years later, Monet exhibited *Wheatfield* (cat. 50), and Sisley *Meadows at Veneux-Nadon* (cat. 49) at the seventh impressionist exhibition. These contributions testified to their continuous work on the themes that would lead to an impressionist pictorial formula that was destined to remain decisive for subsequent generations as well—Van Gogh, for example.¹⁷

Alongside Corot, it was Eugène Boudin, Gustave Courbet, and other Barbizon school painters who provided a point of departure for the impressionist landscape.¹⁸ With their forest paths and riverine landscapes, Théodore Rousseau, Charles François Daubigny, Constant Troyen, and Narcisse Díaz de la Peña had made plein air painting respectable in France (cat. 21–23). During the eighteen-fifties, landscape paintings represented one third of the works displayed at the annual state exhibition,¹⁹ and even the emperor acquired them.²⁰ Renoir, Monet, and Pissarro had worked together with the Barbizon painters in the forest of Fontainebleau where they had further developed the theme of the wooded landscape.

Monet submitted three paintings to the 1877 group exhibition, all variations on the path through a forest (cat. 24). The same motif was also developed further by Renoir (cat. 25), and in the same year by Pissarro.²¹ In their works based on this motif, they aimed to endow color with greater intrinsic value. While in the mid-nineteenth century, the forest path motif had still been a test of light-dark and chromatic values, the impressionists strove to give light and shadow chromatic equivalents. The continuity of the choice of motif was opposed to a new conception of color. As their theme, the impressionists chose the leaf canopy of the forest and the light that penetrated it, rendering its detailed structure by means of the flecks and dabs of their brushwork. During the eighteen-sixties, Renoir,²² who had taken Courbet's practice—involving the use of deep black bitumen—as his point of departure, was influenced by Narcisse Díaz de la Peña to lighten his color palette. But Renoir was not concerned exclusively with brightening. In *Shaded Path* (cat. 25), he renounces black almost entirely, replacing it with blue. In this way, even the darkest areas of the undergrowth are rendered in chromatic hues.

The preoccupation with Courbet's snowy landscapes on the part of the impressionist painters signals this shift in interest (cf. Nancy Ireson's contribution in the present volume, pp. 38–47). Beginning in the eighteen-sixties, Courbet had begun painting winter scenes by applying layers of white paint with the palette knife in a way that emphasized its dense materiality (ill. 7). This manner of painting was consistent with his understanding of realism in art, which he conceived as simple and honest. The impressionists adhered to this demand for an intimate connection to reality, but employed atmosphere, reflected light, and ephemeral impressions in order to gain a different mode of access to the experience of nature. They chose a winter landscape theme, that of the hoarfrost, that displays the greatest possible sense of lightness in contrast to the compact character of the mantle of snow. Already in the first group exhibition, Pissarro called attention to this phenomenon. With the painting *Hoarfrost at Ennery* (ill. 8), he explored the potential of reflected sunlight falling onto a landscape covered in ice crystals—a motif that was important to Monet and Sisley alongside the snowy landscape (cat. 72, 73, and 75). Unlike Courbet, the impressionists exploited the winter landscape in order to thematize light phenomena. Their observations of hoarfrost sensitized them to the fact that a snow-covered landscape too consisted of colored shadows.

The impressionists sought out the locations along the coast of Normandy where Courbet had worked during the eighteen-sixties, adopting his artistic practice of subjecting themselves to

Stefan Koldehoff

Evolution Instead of Revolution

**The Early Impressionist Landscape
As a Witness to Industrialization**

That the impressionist painters were not just progressive artists, but also highly alert observers of the continuously changing world in which they lived, is hardly new knowledge.¹ For some time now, their relationship to the transformation of their surroundings, essentially the result of industrialization, has been the object of art historical research, including the question of how these artists responded to the new ideas, technologies, and aesthetics theories that were present in contemporary society.² Such investigations have turned our attention towards the depiction of the newly constructed bridges that served as major traffic arteries in conjunction with the railways that made possible, for the first time, the transport of raw materials and workers,³ in addition to the massive transformation of the cities and their suburbs and the new options for leisure activities these afforded their inhabitants.⁴

For some time the long-standing image of innocuous, postromantic, apolitical artists who founded a new individualistic and emancipatory *style*, and who subordinated their pictorial contents and motifs to this new formal perspective, has simply been passé. Today, it is no longer necessary to defend or demonstrate the view that the impressionist revolution was hardly restricted to stylistic and aesthetic concerns, and instead represented a radical renewal of pictorial worlds along the path toward modernism.

This essay investigates a specific aspect of this altered perception of impressionism in the early landscape paintings created by the members of the movement: the depiction of manufacturing sites and factory buildings that arose throughout France during these years as a visible sign of a changing society. More so, the impressionists, who observed their environment with great attentiveness, were obliged to come to terms with this new subject.⁵ They did so in a variety of ways: technically in the paintings, in terms of content in their landscapes.⁶ The new buildings found their way into the landscape compositions of the impressionists as a matter of course, but also with a certain sense of insecurity as regards execution—initially undogmatically, and almost without exception, uncritically as well. From the eighteen-sixties to the eighteen-eighties, however, this painterly embedding of industrial buildings evolved.

Early Reactions to a Late Development

In comparison to other European countries, industrialization began belatedly in France. The French Revolution and its consequences, and subsequently the Napoleonic Wars, interfered with a more rapid development: domestic problems constituted the central preoccupation. And in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was no political will to implement the new technical developments profitably, or to transform France's primarily agrarian economy into an at least preindustrial one.⁷ High tariffs and protectionism impeded the exchange of commodities with other countries. Only the coup d'état led by Napoleon III in December of 1851 led to an expansion of the domestic market—nine years after the adoption of the “Loi relative à l'établissement des grandes lignes de chemin de fer,” namely, the 1842 law concerning the construction of the railway lines, whose implementation however took decades to implement.

Only much later would the optimistic faith in progress prevailing at the time be reflected in other artistic media: for example in the collected edition of Julien Turgan's *Les Grandes Usines* (The grand factories), which appeared between 1860 and 1882 in three hundred and sixty-five individual installments, and bound in eighteen volumes.⁸ In this publication, the new industrial buildings were not simply illustrated inside and out by means of wood engravings; these and other publications also contained illustrations that heightened the new possibilities symbolically—for example *L'industrie* by Jules Férat, which dates from 1873, and which reflects—two years after the wartime defeat, losing to Germany—a national pride in technological

this recognition proceeded—although the impressionist movement is widely perceived as having a very different reputation—not in a revolutionary, but instead in an evolutionary way. They explored this altered world in small, cautious steps. And it was to begin with relatively small factory buildings that found their way onto their canvases: almost exclusively small-scale manufacturers where working procedures were facilitated with the assistance of smaller machines. The sole possibility for rendering this transformation visually was to depict an altered topography, and this meant the incorporation of the new building type, namely that of the factory.

The hesitant way in which this initially proceeded is shown by a number of the early representations of factories that are impressionistic at least in an incipient way. Among the earliest works that include this type of building and which can be assigned to impressionism—even if the painter doesn't readily count as belonging to this group of artists—are two small landscapes by Paul Cézanne. The first, which dates from 1866, depicts the small village of Bonnières-sur-Seine, approximately 60 kilometers northwest of Paris, in the vicinity of Giverny (ill. 3). Dominating this painting alongside the mast, to which a rope is attached, and by means of which the ferry is pulled across the river, is the church tower, and directly alongside it, a small chimney; both are reflected in the water. This chimney, which belongs to a factory building, and thus represents a contrast to the traditional church building, is positioned prominently by Cézanne: it looms up conspicuously against the bright sky. The viewer, meanwhile, remains unaware of the fact that Bonnières also has a train station, so that the archaic ferry is by no means the most modern available form of transport.

There exists a second, similarly awkward painting by Cézanne that also emphasizes industrial architecture, his *Factories near Mont de Cengle*, which dates from 1869–70 (private collection). Visible in the background, on the right-hand side, is Mont Saint-Victoire. Just as the earlier painting, this attempt to integrate new architectural forms into a traditional landscape does not seem especially successful: proportions and perspective do not necessarily correspond. The fore, middle, and backgrounds fail to flow into one another. Both paintings must be regarded as intriguing attempts to approach a novel pictorial theme rather than as representing successful results.

During these years, Cézanne frequently worked alongside Armand Guillaumin, the son of a laborer, freethinker, and socialist. Unlike Cézanne, but also in 1869, Guillaumin represented factory buildings in the background of his views of the bend in the Seine near Ivry, north of Paris, in a more decisive way, that is, as elements of urban space rather than as new and as objects of fascination within traditional surroundings. In the works of Monet and Alfred Sisley as well, long plumes of smoke stand out against the sky almost like banners—visible emblems of a landscape (cat. 28 and 45 as well as ill. pp. 50, 53, and 81) into which humanity has intervened, and of which it has made practical use.

During this period, one of the first paintings to include a factory building appears in the oeuvre of Camille Pissarro as well—a composition that, however, makes a somewhat clumsy impression. Pissarro's initial paintings with factories are not genuine landscapes—they are rather portraits of buildings. In 1865, he approached the motif of *The Little Factory* (ill. 4) almost naively, tentatively. Set in a green landscape, the factory resembles a small church, its tower too small. The figural accessories too resemble a family attending a religious service rather than the protagonists of a proto-industrial society. Two years later, in his *Banks of the Oise at Pontoise* (Denver Art Museum), Pissarro handled the same subject very differently—this time, the factory is genuinely integrated into the typography, and its chimney sends dense smoke straight upward into the seemingly windless sky. The building itself, however, is barely visible: it is concealed by a dense group of dark trees.



4) Camille Pissarro
The Little Factory, 1865
Musée d'Art Moderne et
Contemporain de Strasbourg



5) Camille Pissarro
Factory on the Banks of the Oise, 1873
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute,
Williamstown, Massachusetts



6) Camille Pissarro
Factory Near Pontoise, 1873
Michele and Donald D'Amour Museum
of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts

are visible instead on *The Coal-Dockers* of 1873—where incidentally, they suggest that the depiction of figures was not among Monet’s unequivocal strengths (ill. 8).

Like many of his colleagues, Monet found it necessary to approach the theme of the factory gradually. In 1872, his depiction of the little Robec River, which flows past a factory in Rouen, shows no evidence of an individual approach, one that would be distinguishable from Monet’s previous attempts. Perhaps it was also the feeling implied by the others, the almost demonstrative paintings, of contributing, using whatever means available, to the rebuilding of a nation. In 1876, Stéphane Mallarmé wrote in the *Art Monthly Review*: “At a time when the romantic tradition of the first half of the century only lingers among a few surviving masters of that time, the transition from the old imaginative artist and dreamer to the energetic modern worker is found in impressionism.”¹⁷

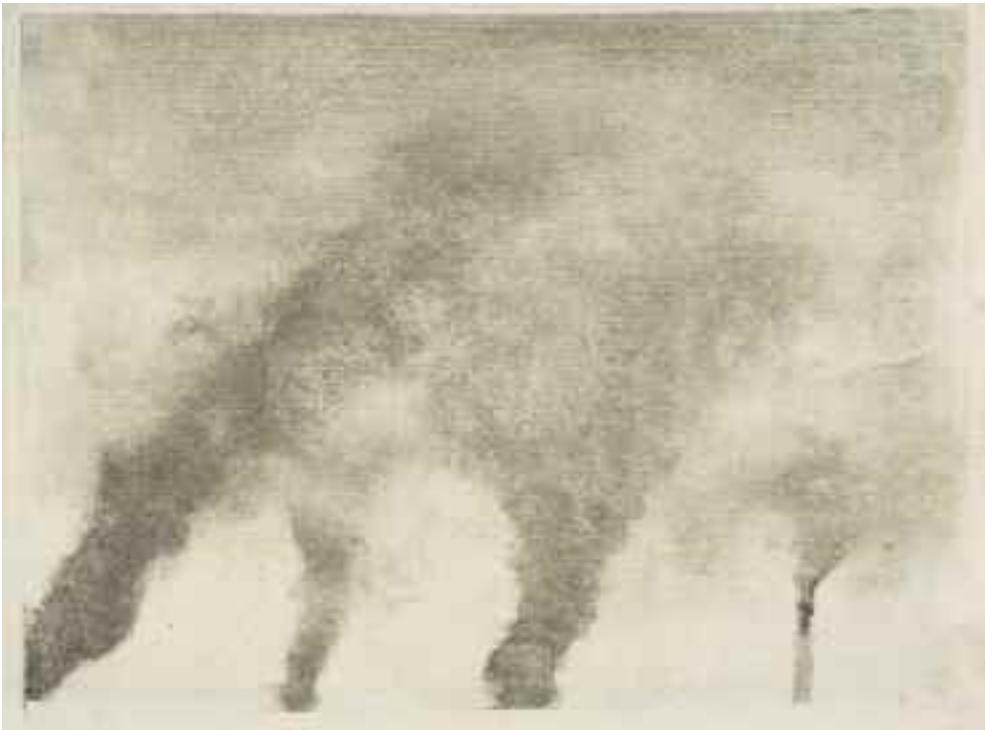
Before long, Monet succeeded in integrating the evidence of industrialization into his landscapes in an apparent manner. And at some point, he even created paintings that link the amenities of life in the suburbs in an equally manifest way and on equal terms: nature, spacious houses, recreational pleasures, and—in the background—the benefits and the security of progress in the form of plumes of smoke, positioned discreetly against the horizon.

From Object of Fascination to Self-Evident Reality

Representations of factories had come to assume a different character. They were no longer positioned in the foreground, nor decorously in the background, but were now integral element of the landscape. The theme of the factory was no longer a novelty. It had become so normal that around 1875, Edgar Degas could include one quite naturally as an attribute in his portrait of his friend, the painter and art collector Henri Rouart, who had inherited a factory (ill. 9). Nor, in 1874, did Édouard Manet experience any difficulty in depicting the industrial silhouette of the locale in his paintings of boats in Argenteuil.¹⁸ Georges Seurat’s monumental painting of bathing laborers, children, and young people in Asnières also dates from 1874, and depicts the industrialization of the locale as if ordinary phenomenon: no criticism, no trace of unease, no questions concerning the purity of the water, no melancholy concerning the possibility that this idyll might be vanishing; only comprehensible parallelism and juxtaposition.

After this process of familiarization with these new landscape elements, after approaching them and trying them out, after achieving a certain sovereignty as concerns their depiction, it became possible for other aspects to once again emerge into the foreground in the impressionist landscape. The new motif had settled in, had genuinely arrived: painters could once again attend to formal and aesthetic questions, that is, those concerning composition and the arrangement of colors. To some extent, this also led to peculiar combinations, for example in a view of Argenteuil painted by Claude Monet that same year (ill. 10). Meanwhile, the message was one of harmony.

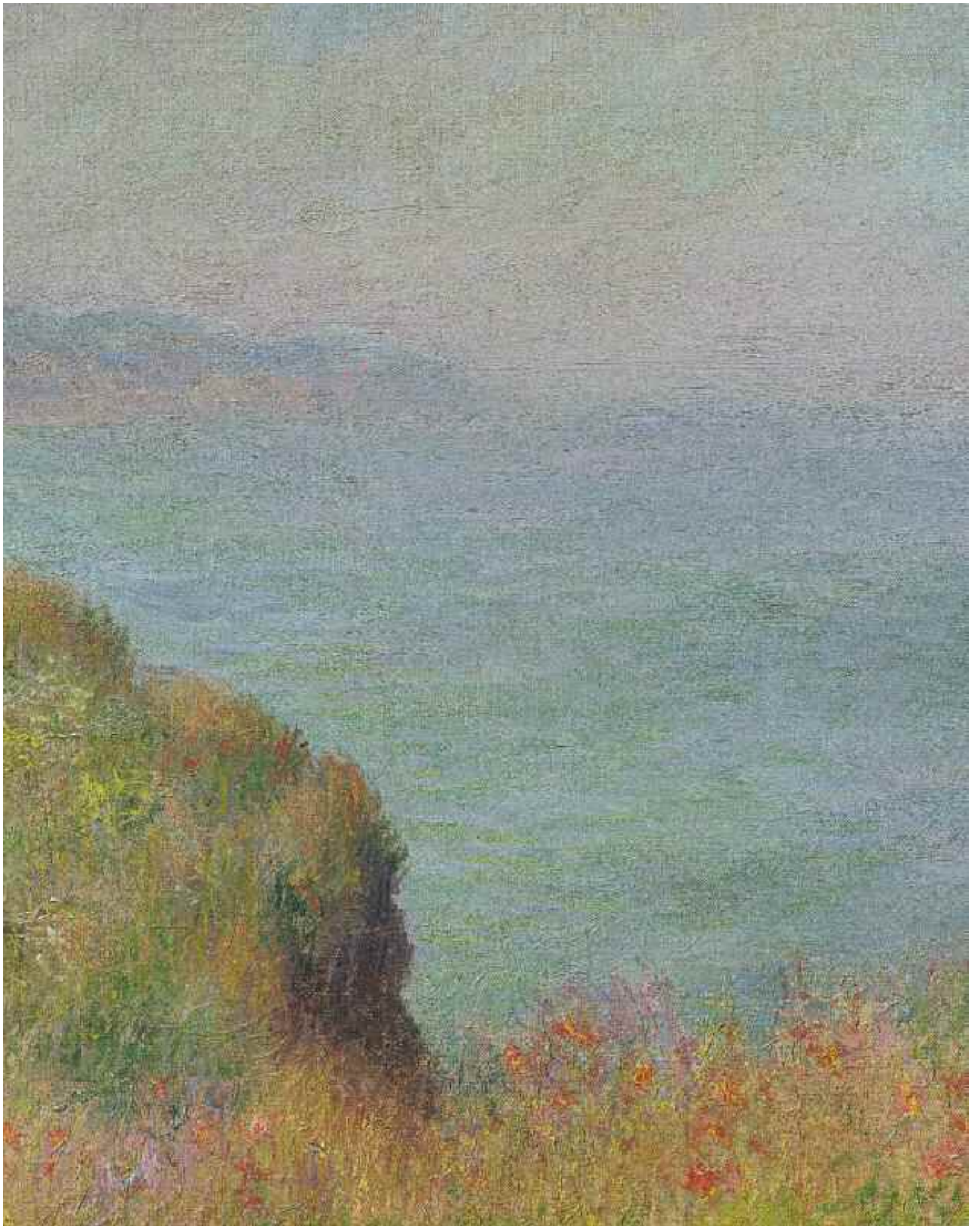
But this altered aesthetic treatment coincided—for Monet and Renoir at any rate—with a regression to a romantic and idealistic notion of the landscape as a place of refuge. Industrialization had led to a new appreciation of nature. In many instances, therefore, the worlds of labor and leisure were once again segregated pictorially—in a way that resembles the imaginary and often melancholic depictions of nature produced by the forerunners of impressionism. Beginning around 1880, in the works of Monet and Renoir in particular, nature—as opposed to the city—again became a place of leisure. Around this period, this symbol of industry vanished again from many of Monet’s pictures. In the wake of a successful exhibition with



7) Edgar Degas
Factory Smoke, 1877–79
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York



8) Claude Monet
The Coal-Dockers, 1873
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



The genre of seascape involves the virtuoso handling of space. Ever since the seventeenth century, marine compositions have expressed commercial or military power. In the nineteenth century, *plein air* painting allowed for contrasting perspectives. The surfaces of sea and sky became backdrops for variable weather phenomena. Their successful depiction demonstrated a mastery of painterly resources. Claude Monet took up this challenge from Eugène Boudin, pioneer of the *plein air* seascape, adopting the genre as the basis for his experimentation with the sea and its vast horizon.

The Vastness of the Sea

Eugène Boudin and Impressionism

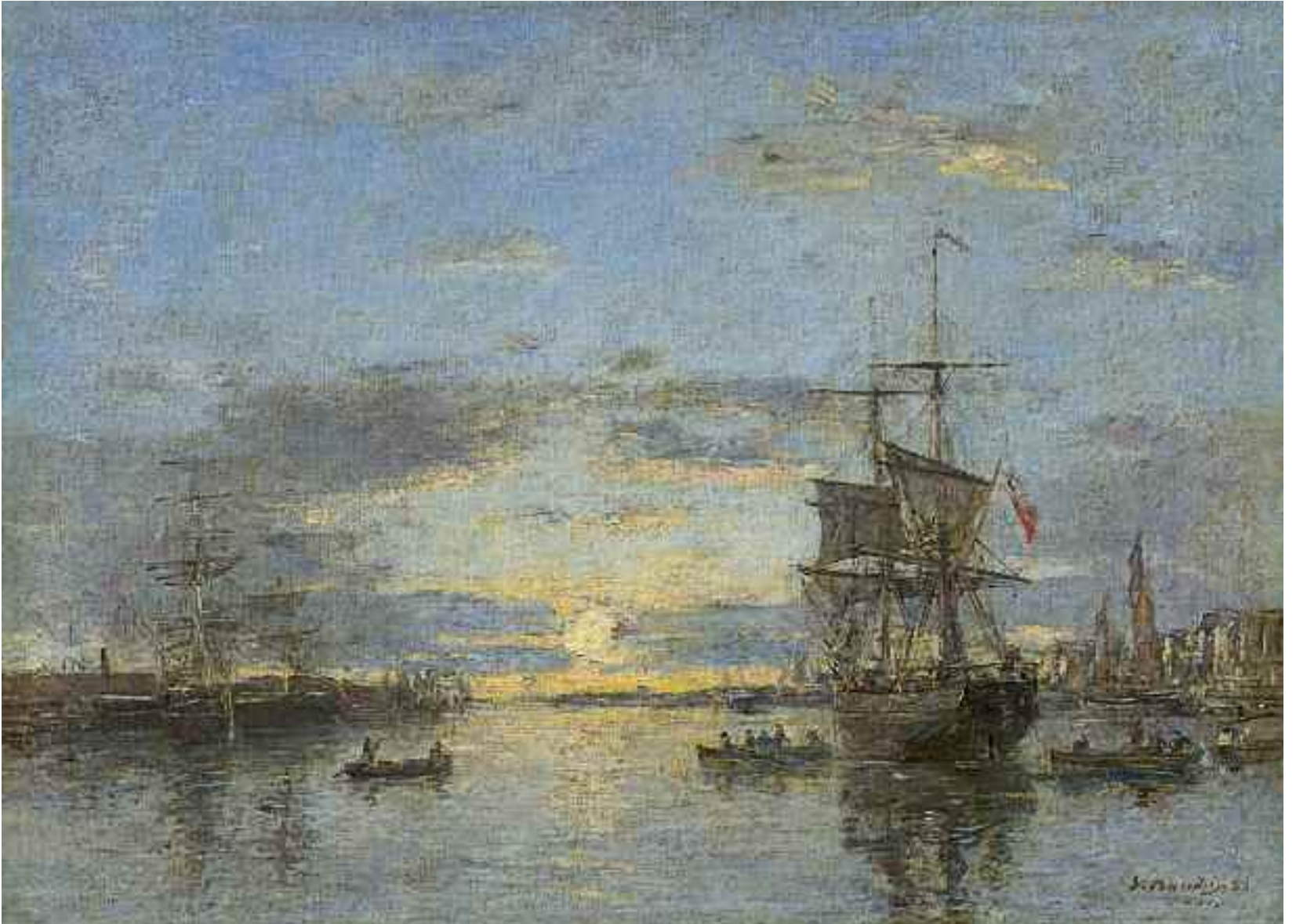
Jenns E. Howoldt



2 Eugène Boudin

Camaret: The Harbor During a Thunderstorm
(*Le Port de Camaret par ciel d'orage*), 1873

Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



3 **Eugène Boudin**

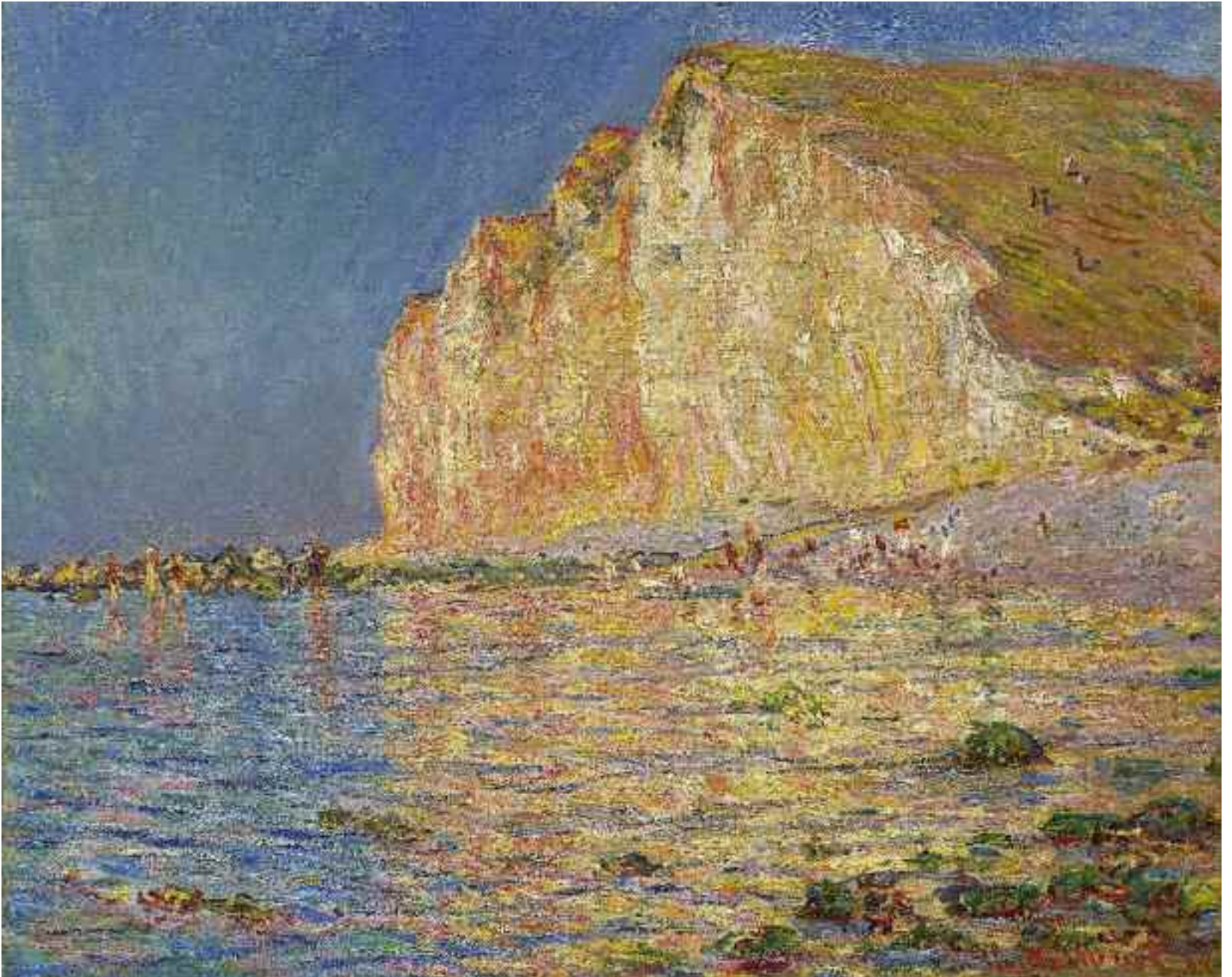
Le Havre: The Outer Harbor at Sunset

(Le Havre: L'Avant-Port au soleil couchant), 1882

Private collection



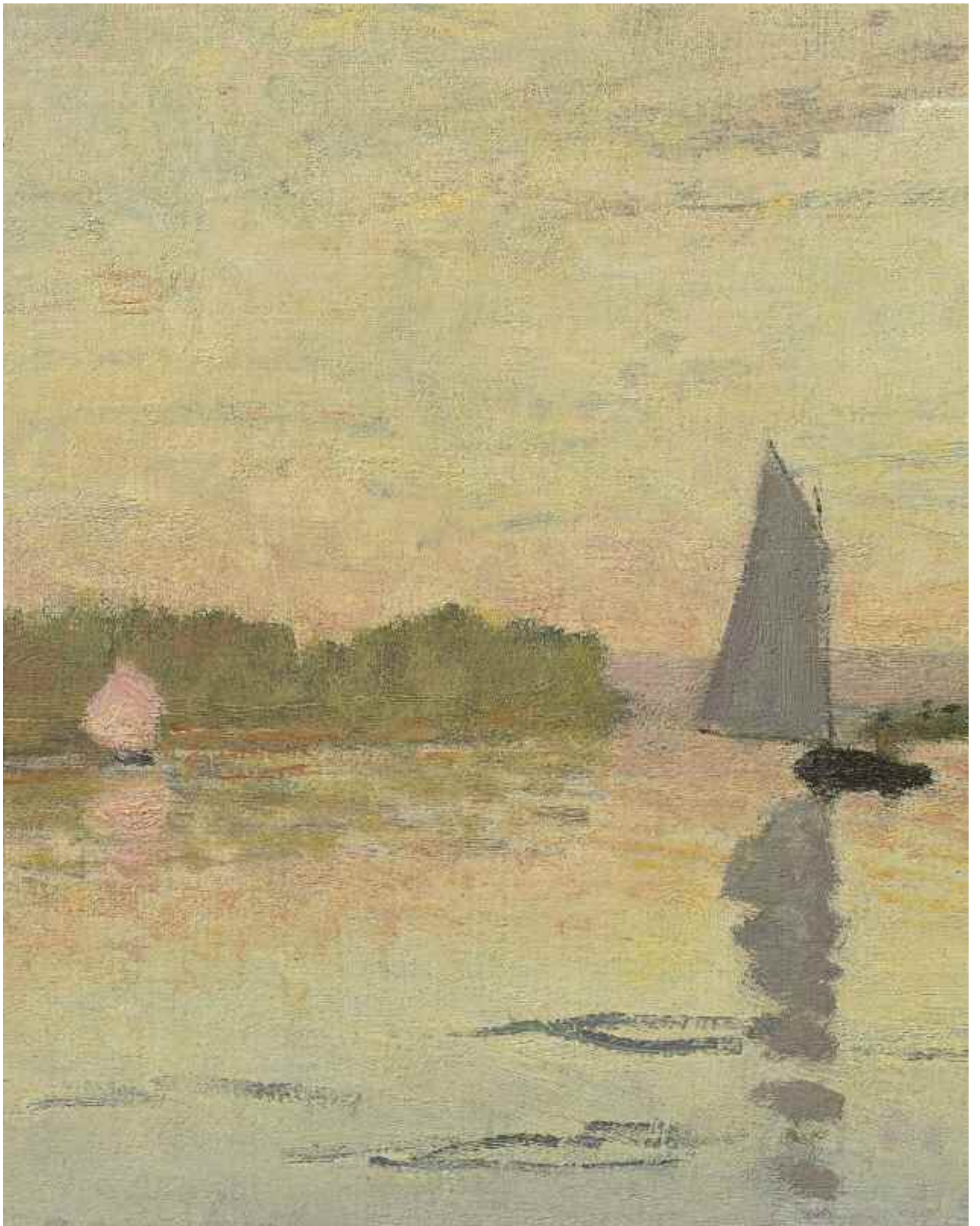
12 **Claude Monet**
Port-Coton, the Lion
(*Port-Coton, le Lion*), 1886
Bert Kreuk Collection



13 **Claude Monet**
Low Tide at Les Petites-Dalles
(*Marée basse aux Petites-Dalles*), 1884
Private collection







The *plein air* painters came to realize that a landscape could be wholly transformed by the luminous conditions caused by the sun and clouds. These effects are heightened when light is mirrored by the water's surface. Reflections of the sky generate an animated, richly nuanced play of colors that is further enlivened by the movement of the water itself. In such pictures, the comprehensive impression goes far beyond a mere doubling of visual phenomena. These ephemeral, perpetually varying reflections allowed the impressionists to pursue their primary artistic objective: the optical dissolution of the depicted object.

The Sky in the River

Reflections and Mirror Effects

Jenns E. Howoldt



32 **Claude Monet**

The Bridge at Argenteuil

(Le Pont routier, Argenteuil), 1874

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon



33 **Gustave Caillebotte**
The Argenteuil Bridge and the Seine
(*Le Pont d'Argenteuil et la Seine*), ca. 1883
Private collection



40 **Alfred Sisley**
The Loing at Moret
(*Le Loing à Moret*), 1883
Private collection



41 **Albert Dubois-Pillet**
Morning on the Marne at Meaux
(*Matin sur la Marne à Meaux*), 1886
Private collection

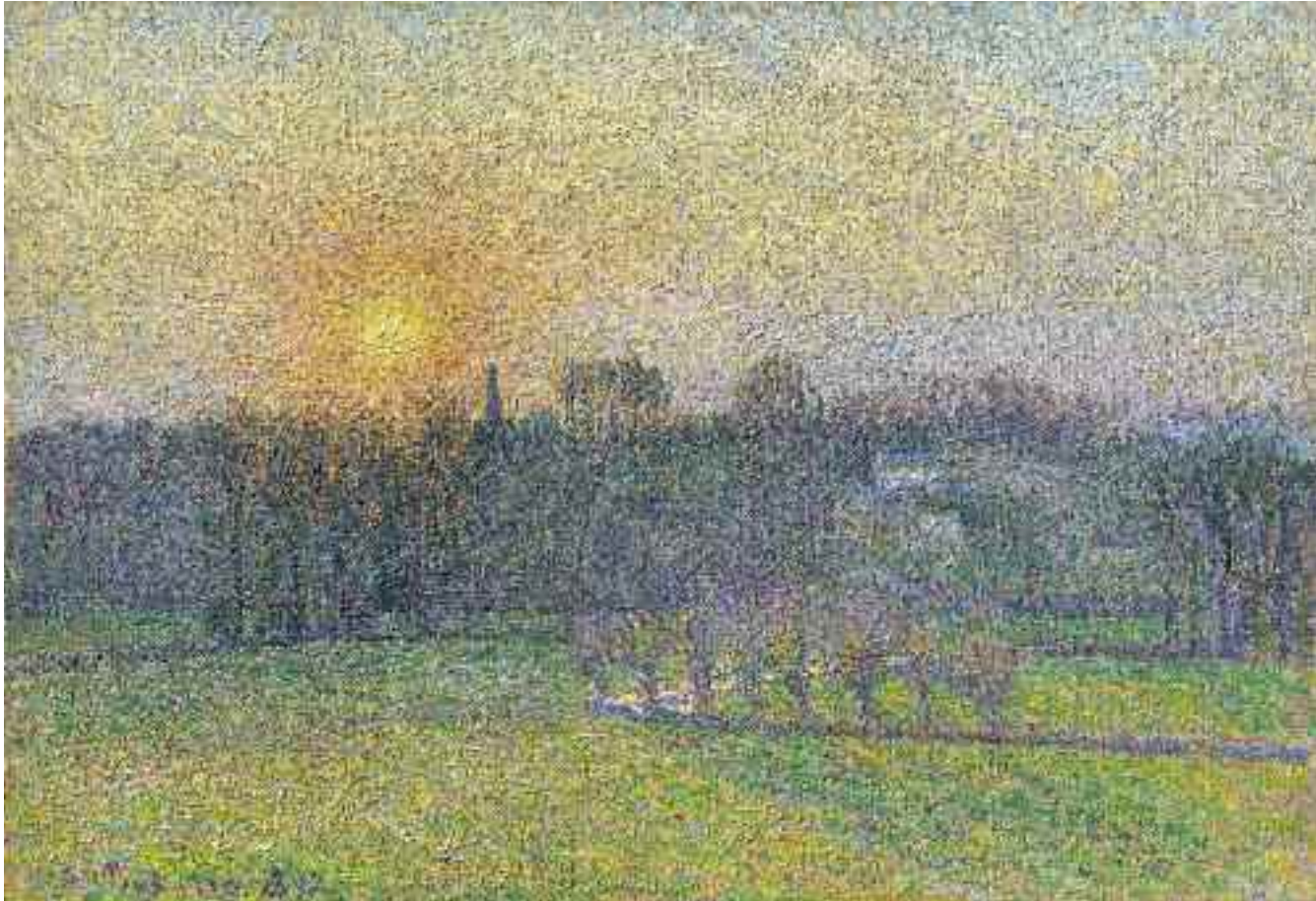


With meadows and fields of grain, the impressionists chose familiar cultural landscapes devoid of spectacular or picturesque points of interest. In the natural features of such flat terrain, they perceived the foundational elements of pictorial architecture: the horizontals of meadows and fields, the verticals of the numerous poplars. This insight led to an articulation of the picture surface into planes and swathes of color. The exuberant brushstrokes of the impressionists endow it with a structure that not only registers the animated quality of the landscape itself, but also dynamically activates the viewer's gaze.

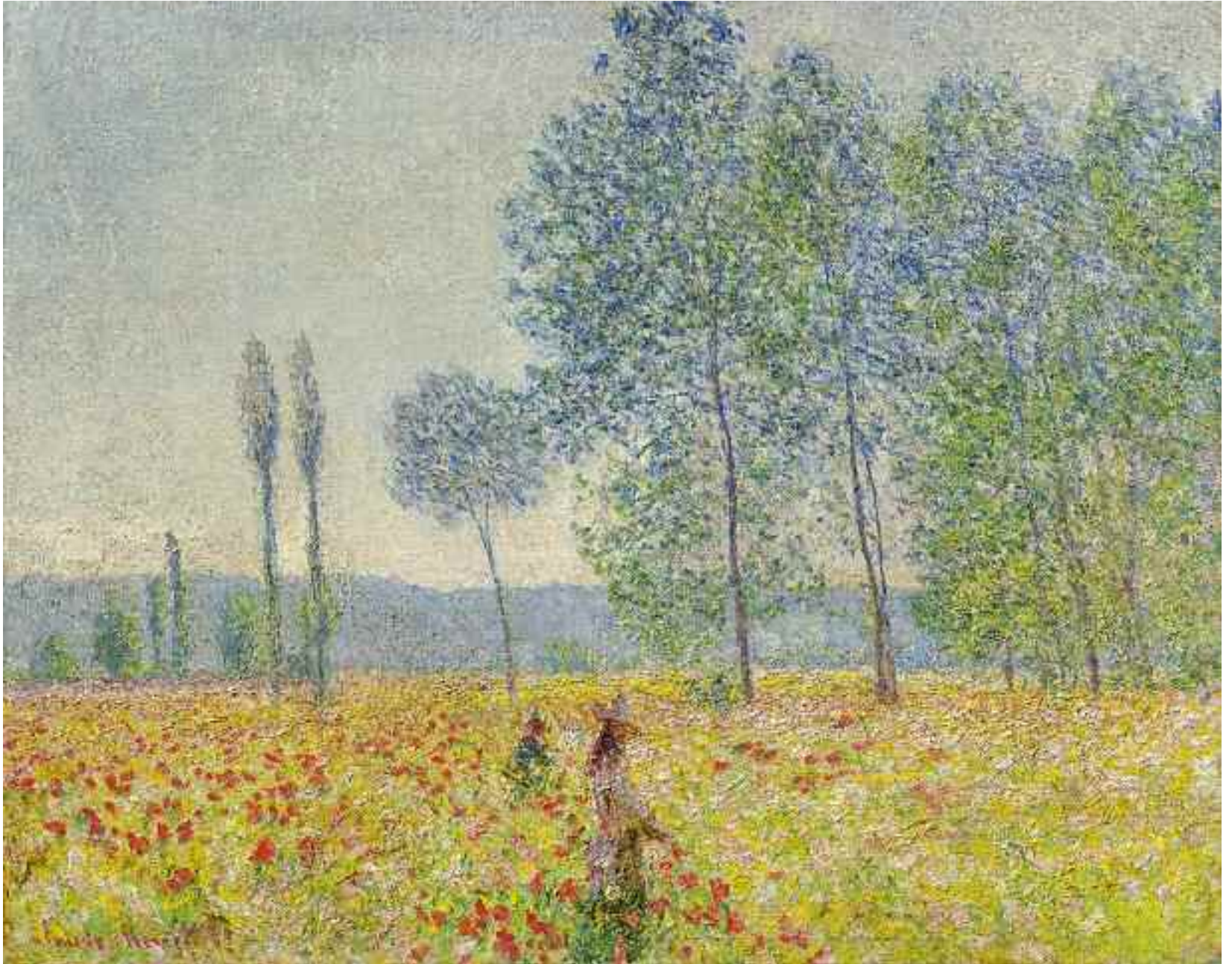
Against the Horizon

Poplars and Fields

Julia Knöschke



47 **Camille Pissarro**
View of Bazincourt, Snow Effect, Sunset
(*Vue de Bazincourt, coucher de soleil*), 1892
Private collection



48 **Claude Monet**
Under the Poplars
(*Sous les peupliers*), 1887
Private collection



51 **Camille Pissarro**

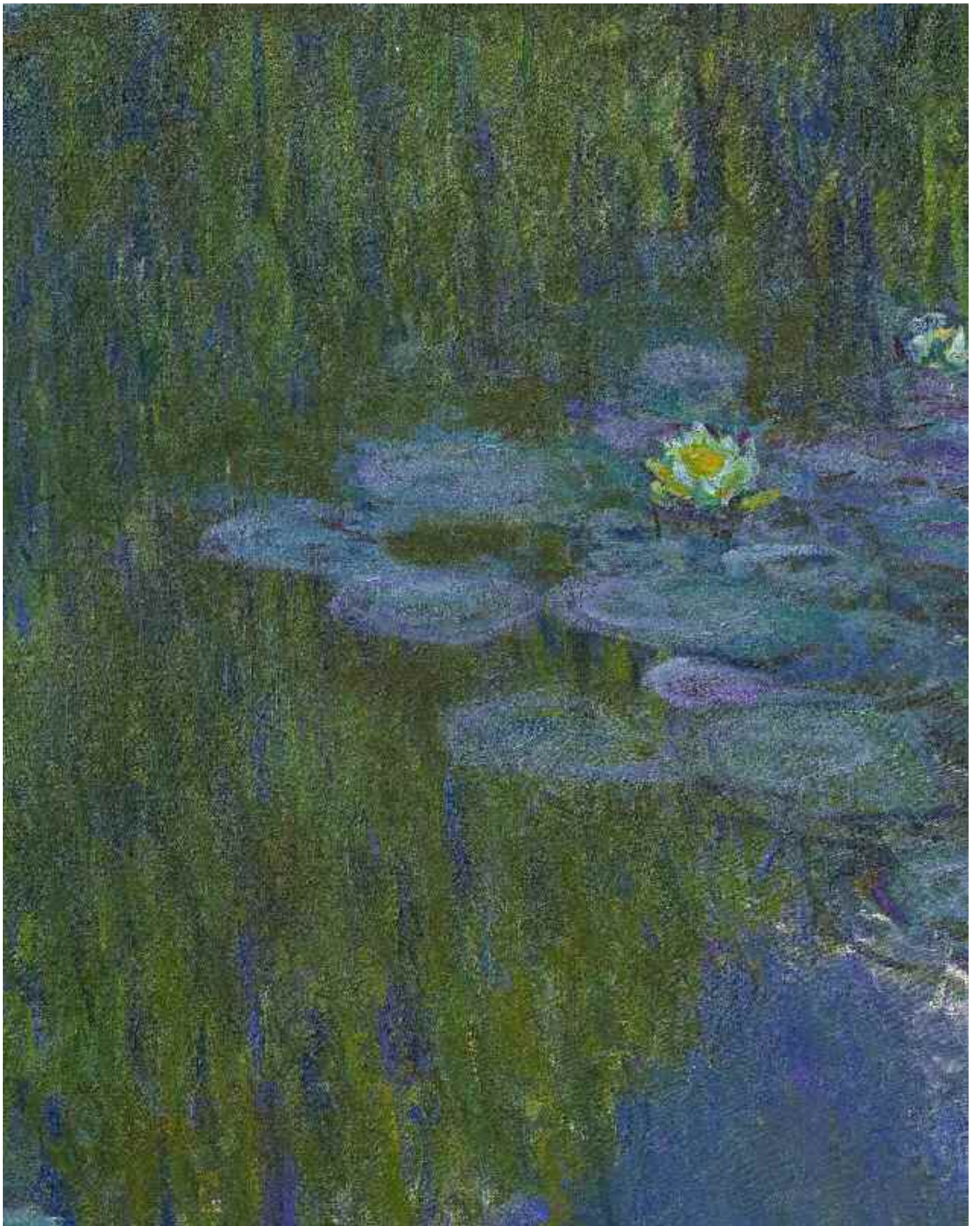
Morning, Sunlight Effect, Éragny

(Matin, effet de soleil, Éragny), 1899

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Estate of Mrs. Neville Blond, OBE, London,
through the British Friends of the Art Museums of Israel



52 **Claude Monet**
Poplars at Giverny
(*Les Peupliers à Giverny*), 1887
Private collection



The impressionistic dissolution of the physical object reaches its apogee in Claude Monet's series of water lily paintings. These works effect a decisive shift of perspective: instead of viewing the scene from the side, we observe it now from above. Here, Monet creates landscapes devoid of center or horizon, where the sky appears only as a reflection. He used square formats to create compositions devoid of hierarchical order. Close-up views and unconventional compositional framing strengthen an impression of spatial ambiguity, of unboundedness, that would characterize the later water lily panoramas as well.

Interplay with Nature

Water Lilies

Ortrud Westheider

rough, matte surface resembling chalk, against the illusionism of photography. Through this manually executed imprint, the artist inscribes himself into his work (cf. the contribution by Richard Shiff, pp. 26–37). The same can hardly be claimed for photography, the result of mechanical processes.⁸ In the competition between media in nineteenth-century France, the *touche* was valued as a material expression of spirit. It was said to transfigure the pigmented material, and was held to be as unmistakable as the artist's signature.⁹ The artist, thus, was present in his work. Subsequently *impasto* painting was regarded as genuine art—a distinction that photography, with its documental quality, sought to appropriate for itself, a notion that had belonged to the self-understanding of artists since the inception of *plein air* painting.

In his choice of compositional framing as well, Monet competed with photography. He focused the gaze, isolating the truly significant element within the landscape image. He informed the critic François Thiébauld-Sisson that the aquatic flowers were merely an accompaniment to the phenomena appearing on the water's surface.¹⁰ What interested him was the way in which the forces of nature were registered on the water, how light, wind, and rain shaped its surface appearance. In its movements, he saw life itself. And he spoke about it as though he were speaking about one of his canvases: “Just then, it was smooth, now it is rippled, broken, divided into barely perceptible waifs, or becomes folded into sluggish or wide, shimmering patterns.”¹¹ These lines suggest a counterprogram to photography, with its static, smooth surface, so remote from life.

Monet characterized the creative process as a physical challenge, since he interacted with his paint on the canvas just like nature interacted with the surface of the water. In order to “maintain a sense of orientation within these constant changes,” he explains, it was necessary to work on “five or six canvases at the same time, turning from one to the next, returning quickly to the first as soon as the effect, just interrupted, reasserts itself.” He worked all day long, and was utterly exhausted by evening. Between 1907 in 1909, he was compelled to cancel a number of exhibitions with his dealer because he had destroyed paintings, declaring that, “the others must be examined by nature.” He also found it necessary to have “the finished pictures before him in order to compare them with the ones he wanted to paint.”¹² By 1907, he had already signed thirty pictures. In 1909, finally, forty-eight pictures were exhibited at Durand-Ruel. Slightly later, Monet referred to a canvas from his water lily series as a “large surface.”¹³ Once again, we find him comparing his canvases with the surface of his water lily pond, which he had found himself obliged to enlarge yet again.

Even during the First World War, Monet continued working on his series. During these years, the mirrored cloud formations in his work dissolved. But they did not disappear. In the paintings of the later years, they instead form enigmatic bright areas that are no longer legible in representational terms without an awareness that they are intended to depict cloud reflections (cat. 67 and 68). In Monet's later water lily series, new aspects are contributed by willow branches that hang down vertically toward the water and by vertically climbing rose espaliers, together with their reflections (cat. 66).¹⁴ Monet received support for his plan for his *Grandes Décorations* from the statesmen Georges Clemenceau. At the end of the war, he signed two large-scale works he wished to donate to the French state. When this concept developed into a project for an even larger donation intended for a specially constructed museum building, Monet specified the conditions under which they would be installed *in situ*, but resolved to retain them in his studio for as long as possible. Finally, the architect Camille Lefèvre installed a pair of oval salons in the Orangerie, an existing building within the Tuileries, for four of Monet's compositions, consisting of twenty-two canvases. After Monet's death, they were transported to Paris at the turn of the year from 1926 to 1927.

⁷ Cited from *ibid.*, 249.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 256ff.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 266ff.

¹⁰ Cf. Geelhaar 1986 (see note 2), 42.

¹¹ Cited from *ibid.*

¹² Cited from *ibid.*, 40–45.

¹³ Cited from *ibid.*, 60.

¹⁴ Cf. Paris 2002, 92ff., 98ff., 101.



65 **Claude Monet**
Water Lilies or The Water Lily Pond
(*Nymphéas ou Le Bassin aux nymphéas*), 1904
Denver Art Museum



66 **Claude Monet**
The Water Lily Pond
(*Coin du bassin aux nymphéas*), 1918/19
Private collection



67 **Claude Monet**
The Water Lily Pond
(*Le Bassin aux nymphéas*), ca. 1918
Private collection



80 **Claude Monet**
Frost at Giverny
(*Le Givre à Giverny*), 1885
Private collection



81 **Claude Monet**
Floes at Bennecourt
(*Glaçons à Bennecourt*), 1893
Private collection



84 **Claude Monet**
Grainstack in Winter, Misty Weather
 (Meule, hiver, temps brumeux), 1888–89
 Private collection

85 **Claude Monet**
Grainstack
 (La Meule), 1890–91
 Private collection



86 **Claude Monet**
Grainstack, Sunlight, Snow Effect
(*Meule, effet de neige, soleil*), 1891
Private collection