

PAINTING MONET'S WATER LILIES

By Erin Hanson

I JUST RETURNED FROM MY FIRST TRIP to France, a journey that took me to the heart of Monet's artistic legacy, from the bustling museums of Paris to the tranquil gardens of Giverny. Tracing Claude Monet's footsteps, I delved into the origins of his remarkable water lily series, which comprises over 250 oil paintings.

In Paris, I saw Monet's original water lily paintings in three museums, including Musée Marmottan Monet, Musée de l'Orangerie, and Musée d'Orsay. From Paris, I traveled by riverboat to Giverny, where I spent two mesmerizing days exploring Monet's gardens and water lily pond, soaking in the shifting lights and shadows.

When I walked around the bend and saw Monet's lily pond for the first time, it felt like stepping directly into one of his masterpieces. I was immediately inspired by the vibrant range of blues and greens contrasting with the colors of the sky. I realized all at once that the dark squiggles in many of



Monet's water lily paintings were the reflections of weeping willows which grow around his pond, their long, kinky leaves creating interesting patterns in the water. I took hundreds of reference photos, and the experience transformed my appreciation for water reflections. I also visited Latour-Marliac, the historic water lily farm that supplied Monet with his lily plants and inspired him to establish his own water lily garden.

THE STORY GOES LIKE THIS:

Latour-Marliac was a biologist and the first horticulturalist to hybridize white European water lilies with the more delicate (but beautifully multi-colored) tropical species. After perfecting his colorful lilies,

which had never been seen before in Europe, he brought them to the World's Fair in Paris, in 1889.

It happened that Claude Monet was exhibiting his paintings just a few booths away, and there he discovered Latour-Marliac's water lilies. Monet was inspired to bring these rainbow-sherbet-colored water lilies back to his new home in Giverny. He rerouted a nearby stream and dug out the ground to create a large pond. At first, Monet ran into trouble with his water lilies—they kept dying and refusing to bloom, and his solution was to increase the filtration and cleanliness of the pond. However, Latour-Marliac helped Monet and showed him that water lilies thrive in mucky, stagnant water. After turning off his filtration systems, Monet was finally able to get his water lilies to bloom.

Once his water lilies were blooming beautifully, Monet jealously guarded his water lily pond against prying eyes, allowing only close friends and relatives to see his horticultural masterpiece.

Exploring Latour-Marliac's impressive water lily farm in person, it was like stepping into another moment of history. I saw over 200 varieties of water lilies in as many shades of color. Latour-Marliac and Claude Monet are together responsible for the popularization of water lilies as a modern garden flower.

Back in my studio in Oregon, surrounded by the serene landscape of wine country, I began translating my experiences and insights into a new series of water lily reflection paintings, including my largest water lily painting to date, entitled *Monet's Lilies*.

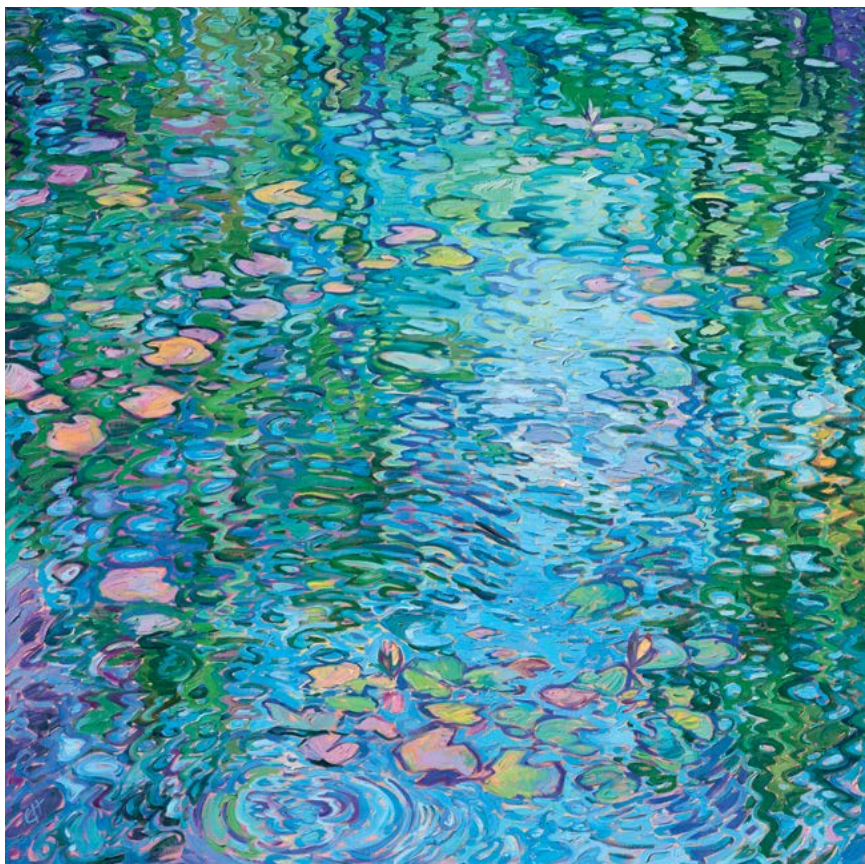
I can wait to start my next piece. I understand now how Monet continued to be inspired and painted 250 different paintings of water lilies. I hope you enjoy my new works inspired by Monet's Garden.



Erin painting reflections from Monet's lily pond.



From the Easel



Monet's Lilies II // Giverny, France
Original oil on canvas, 52 x 52 in

MONET PAINTED OVER TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY OIL PAINTINGS of his water lily garden in Giverny, France. I can understand why! I spent two days exploring his gardens, and I have enough inspiration to last me years of painting. I love how the lily pond changes in different light—in this painting, my goal was to capture the cool greens and blues of the water, reflections, and lily pads.



Valensole Lavender Fields // Provence, France
Original oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in



Parc Monceau // Paris, France
Original oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in



Sunflower Dawn // Provence, France

Original oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in

INSPIRED BY THE FRENCH IMPRESSIONISTS AND POST-IMPRESSIONISTS, I followed in their footsteps and explored the landscapes they painted within France and the Provence countryside. This painting captures a field of sunflowers growing on a high plateau in Provence, near Saint Remy de Provence, where van Gogh lived. Thick brushstrokes of oil paint capture the bright sunflower petals as they catch the first light of dawn.



Fields of Flax // French Countryside
Original oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in

EXPLORING THE FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE ONE MISTY MORNING while our riverboat was docked along the Seine, I saw field after field of pale blue flowers that seemed to glow under the cloudy dawn light. The tour guide explained these were fields of flax, which bloom for only one day. I feel very fortunate to have seen these beautiful flowers during the single day they were in bloom.